



So Send I You, Inc.

Our Mission:

We exist to engage and involve African-American and Latino-American congregations in global mission(s) work and activity around the world by bringing together congregations and individuals for specific mission projects, resulting in a greater mission impact.

Our Vision:

We envision a covenant community of local congregations committed to educating, nurturing, and cultivating missional leaders and congregations from within the African-American and Latino-American communities, resulting in a deeper level of congregational and personal involvement and participation in missional projects around the world. **SO SEND I YOU, Inc.** sees this community of local congregations more actively engaged in sharing the Good News, in word and deed, of what God has done for the world in and through the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our Specialties:

- Building and sustaining missional partnerships among local congregations, individuals, organizations, and the mission fields.
- Organizing, promoting, and leading short-term mission trips to give both clergy and lay-persons firsthand exposure to and experience on the mission field.
- Organizing, promoting, and leading missional projects especially designed to deliver a stronger missional impact. We do this by gathering local congregations, individuals, and organizations around specific missional projects.



WELCOME TO THE 2021 LENTEN JOURNEY

Dr. William B. Sutton, III., and the Board of Directors of *SO SEND I YOU, Inc.*, join me in inviting and welcoming you to the 40-day journey through the 2021 Season of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021 and runs through Easter Sunday, April 4th, 2021. It is a journey millions of followers of Christ around the world look forward to with eager anticipation.

This 40-day journey is not an easy one, to say the least. But, as serious disciples of Jesus Christ, it is important that we test and reclaim our call to discipleship. The 40-day-long journey through Lent provides us with a wonderful opportunity to embrace this challenge along with many other believers worldwide.

This devotional is designed with the disciple in mind, and is intended to be used as a tool to lead the disciple to experience spiritual renewal and revitalization by engaging in four important but very often neglected biblical disciplines: Daily engagement with Scripture; Daily Fasting (abstaining from certain foods for a specified period of time for spiritual benefits); Daily Intercessory Prayer; and Daily Sacrificial Giving.

We sincerely hope that at the end of this six-week journey with us, you will have been drawn closer to the Lord of our faith, Jesus Christ, and as a result, you will be inspired to follow Him more closely, love Him more deeply, and serve Him more diligently.



We thank God for the contributing writers, most of whom are pastors and have distinguished themselves as faithful servants of Jesus Christ in the communities where they are called to serve, and beyond. Without their involvement and participation, a project of this nature would be impossible to pull off.

We encourage you to read this devotional with your Bible in hand, and take care to read the entire recommended daily passage. Try to step inside the passage and walk around in it, which will help you better appreciate the context in which the passage is set. Each daily reading is followed by a very brief prayer built around the theme. Try to make this prayer your very own, reflecting on it throughout the day.

You will notice a few pictures here and there in the devotional; some of children, and some of adults. These pictures reflect the current work of **SO SEND I YOU, Inc.**, in Africa, India, Asia, Eastern Europe, and in North America. Many of the persons in these pics are in desperate need of food, clean drinking water, and medication. Many yearn for an education to enable them to live fruitful and productive lives. But despite their station in life, these people are very receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In your daily prayers during this 40-day journey, please be careful to pray for all such persons worldwide.

Also, as we move through the 40 days of Lent, we challenge you to set aside one dollar (\$1.00) for each of the 40 days of Lent. Your personal sacrifice of \$40 is so critical to what we do at **SO SEND I YOU, Inc.**, as it goes a long way toward helping us ease the pain and suffering of needy people as we seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them, in both word and deed.

The envelop provided in the back of this devotional is designed to encourage and remind you to surrender your \$1.00 per day offering for each of the 40 days of Lent. We encourage you to make all checks and money orders (No Cash, in the mail, please) payable to **SO SEND I YOU, Inc.**, and return to your local church or mail to our office at:

SO SEND I YOU, Inc.
P.O. Box 1699
Lincolnton Station
New York, NY 10037

To learn more about **SO SEND I YOU, Inc.**, please visit us on the web at **www.evensosendiyouworld.org**

This is done,

Because of Calvary

Dr. J. Albert Bush, Sr.

Founder and CEO, SO SEND I YOU, Inc.

THE MEANING OF LENT

The forty-day season of Lent (which does not include Sundays) always begins on Ash Wednesday of each year, which marked for early Christians the beginning of the final preparation for new converts to be baptized into the faith at the great Easter vigil. Thus, the season of Lent is marked by its baptismal character.

During the forty days of the Lenten Season (excluding Sundays) the dominant theme is the personal call to repentance and spiritual renewal. This call to repentance and renewal is echoed by way of the prophet Joel in a passage that is often read at Ash Wednesday services: “Yet even now, says the LORD, return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing” (Joel 2:12).

Lent is that annual season when the people of God and the body of Christ are called to search and examine ourselves, to see if we really belong to the faith. It is a call to test and reclaim our personal call to discipleship. It is a call for serious introspection. During Lent, we are challenged to go deeper in our relationship with Christ, and be drawn into a closer daily walk with God, resulting in a greater commitment to the kingdom building enterprise.

Alongside the call to personal introspection and examination (which is interior), there is the challenge to exterior work and activity. The primary Gospel passage often read at Ash Wednesday services is Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 where our Lord Jesus calls and challenges His disciples to engage in certain exterior acts of charity, which includes the spiritual disciplines of alms giving (sacrificial giving), fasting, and



praying. In the passage, Jesus is not only suggesting the practice of these disciplines, but He is carefully teaching His followers on how the disciplines of giving, fasting, and praying are to be put to use. “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you... but when you give alms... And whenever you pray, do not look like the hypocrites... but whenever you pray... And whenever you fast, do not look dismal... But when you fast...” For Jesus, it was not a matter of *if* His disciples would give, fast, and pray; but, it was a matter of *when* they would practice these spiritual disciplines.

During the season of Lent, we are challenged to take self-inventory as we look at the humanity of Jesus alongside our own. We are called to self-examination of ourselves and our commitment to Christ and His kingdom agenda. It is a time when we stop to ask ourselves a few serious questions: “Am I really a disciple of Christ?” – “Am I following Christ as closely as I can?” – “Is God satisfied with me?” – “Am I as committed to the cause Christ as I profess to be?” – “Is God calling me to a deeper level of involvement and participation in the kingdom building enterprise?”

Let’s face it, just as Jesus was tempted to abandon the path which the Father had planned for Him – we, too, face temptation to ignore or completely abandon the calling of God on our lives. Whereas Jesus triumphed over the devil in His temptation, too often we fall victim to the temptation, leaving us spiritually defeated and even more vulnerable. During the forty days of Lent, God often lovingly shows us our personal weakness and vulnerabilities, and then tenderly and graciously invites us to experience the spiritual renewal which He so readily provides through the disciplines of fasting, praying and alms giving.



SUGGESTIONS FOR THE LENTEN FAST

Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare holy a fast... Joel 2:15

“Whenever you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”
Matthew 6:16-18

What is a Fast?

The Hebrew word for “fasting” means “to cover the mouth.” The Greek word for “fasting” means “not to eat.” Fasting means to abstain from or go without food. When one does a fast, he/she turns away from “things the body craves” so that the inner spirit may better focus on the things of God. Fasting is an often neglected spiritual discipline. Fasting does not change God’s will, nor does it impress God in any way. But true fasting can indeed change the individual, as it allows us to focus more on our spiritual needs rather than the physical. Fasting, when done correctly, helps align our heart, mind and will with the heart, mind and will of God.

The Spiritual Benefits of Fasting

- It strengthens our prayer life.
- Provides opportunity to spend more time in the presence of the Lord.
- Helps us become more sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.
- Enhances our ability to discern and understand spiritual matters.
- Helps us focus more on God as the source, supplier and sustainer of our lives.
- Fasting cleanses and detoxes the body.

The Techniques of Fasting

There are different ways in which observers of Lent fast. Some fast, in some way, each day of the Lenten season, while others fast just one day of the week during the season. Some will eliminate one meal a day, while others will eliminate two meals a day, and still others will give up all three meals for one day a week. Some will give up all meats during the season, while others will give up all meats 3 or 4 days a week. Whatever fast regimen you choose, it should be based on your physical health, your physician’s permission if you have serious health issues, and your personal covenant with God.

Preparations for Fasting

- Seek God’s will for you regarding the fasting regimen you should choose.

- The week prior the beginning of your fast, begin eliminating snacks and eating after 7:00 PM.
- Increase your intake of fruits, vegetable, fish and water.
- Cut back on or eliminate sweets, breads, meats, sugary drinks and other “pleasurable” food and drinks.
- Begin to pray for daily strength, discipline to be focused and faithful adherence to your Lenten fast.
- If you are pregnant, diabetic, taking prescribed medications, under a doctor’s care, or have experienced illness on a previous fast, be careful to consult your physician before starting the fast.

Additional Fasting Hints

- Avoid starches, such as bread, white rice, potatoes; sweets, red meats, and caffeine.
- Drink plenty of water, herbal teas, or seltzer. If you feel light headed, drink a glass of unsweetened apple or grape juice (be sure it has no added sugar) or tea with honey.
- If you only eat one meal for the day, you should be sure that it includes fresh fruits, steam vegetables, salad and steamed or broiled fish. One of the benefits of fasting is cleansing or detoxing the body, resulting in a healthier body.
- If you are eating only one meal a day, it is highly recommended that you do not exercise during your fast.
- Avoid nibbling, drink water.
- Remember to be in prayer daily during your fast. Start each day of your fast with prayer, asking God to give you the strength to keep your fast for that day. When you feel hungry, or when you are tempted to give up remember, in your weakness you can tap into His strength. Remember, *...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.* (Ephesians 6:10)
- If you should “fall out” of the fast, do not condemn yourself, but get back on it right away. Be thankful that in Christ there is always forgiveness and restoration.
- When the 40-day fast is complete, it is best to break the fast by eating fruit, drinking broth, eating steamed vegetables, or a light salad.

Lenten FASTER’S Prayer:

“Jehovah, by the power of Your Spirit, make me ready for the coming time of fasting, prayer and sacrificial giving. I know that with you I can do all things. My desire is to be drawn closer to you during this season of Lent. Thank you in advance for the strength and power you provide for me during this fast. Be glorified by my fasting, praying, and sacrificial giving.” In Jesus’ name. Amen.

SIX-WEEK PRAYER GUIDE

During the six weeks of the Lenten Season, we encourage our fellow pilgrims on the journey to join us in praying specifically for missionaries, missionary projects and concerns around the world. In particular, we pray for a greater level of awareness and a more enthusiastic involvement in Christian missional activity on the part of African-American and Latino-American congregations.

Each week during Lent, we invite you to join us in prayer for six of the seven continents of the world where there is active missionary work. **Each Thursday evening at 8:00 PM Eastern Standard Time** you are invited to join us on the prayer call by **dialing in on the Call-in Number: 712-770-5505**, with the access code: **512125**. Please, **do not announce yourself**. Just wait quietly for a few minutes to allow others to join the call, and the prayer leader will give the call to prayer.

First Week: Thursday evening, February 18, 2021: North America

Missionaries and missional projects and opportunities in North America, the fastest growing mission field in the world is the focus of our prayer concerns this week. This would include the United States, Canada, Jamaica, Haiti, the US Virgin Islands and all Caribbean nations.

- For missionaries who currently serve in Native American and Latin American communities and the unique challenges they face in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ
- For an increase in the number of full-time African-American and Latino missionaries to serve in the above two communities

Second Week: Thursday evening, February 25, 2021: South America

We pray for missionaries and missional projects and opportunities in South America, including Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Trinidad and Tobago, French Guiana, Guyana and Venezuela.

Third Week: Thursday evening, March 4, 2021: Europe

We pray for missionaries, missional projects and opportunities in Europe.

- Missionaries who work with refugees fleeing from violence and bloodshed in Syria and the horn of Africa
- Missionaries who work among the poor and marginalized in Eastern European countries

Fourth Week: Thursday evening, March 11, 2021: Australia

We pray for missionaries and missional projects and opportunities in Australia, but especially for those who work with and among the Aboriginal Indians.

Fifth Week: Thursday evening, March 18, 2021: Asia

We pray especially for missionaries, missional projects and opportunities in Asia, but especially in:

- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Palestine, Indonesia, and the Philippines

Sixth Week: Thursday evening, March 25, 2021: Africa

We pray for missionaries, missional projects and opportunities in Africa, and especially for missionaries who work and witness in Muslim communities. Pray for these concerns:

- Lott Carey Mission work in Liberia and Ghana
- The Providence Industrial Mission (PIM) and those churches associated with PIM in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia
- The W.W. Brown Mission in SOWETO, the Day Care Center and for the churches in South Africa and their struggle to witness in a post-Apartheid era
- For the Kitchen in Swaziland and for the children who are provided a daily hot meal
- In addition, please pray for the following current ***SO SEND I YOU, Inc.*** projects:
- The Michael Lee Graves Memorial Library to be built in, Durban, South Africa
- The building and dedication of the United Missionary Baptist Church in Lesotho
- The complete rebuilding of the W.W. Brown Day Care Center in SOWETO, South Africa
- The training of ministers to serve as Pastors in Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Zambia

Day 1

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

SEEING THE LORD'S MESSIAH

Rev. Douglas Simmons

Luke 2:25-30

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation..."

As believers in Christ, we are confronted with the burden of waiting to see the Lord's Messiah. Luke records in our stated text that Simeon, a devout and righteous man, was waiting to see the consolation of Israel. He was promised by God that he would not see death until he had seen The Lord's Messiah. The word Messiah means anointed one and refers to an act of consecration where one is set apart to serve God. The word consolation means comfort and deliverance. In other words, Simeon's death was placed on hold as he waited to see how God would bring comfort and deliverance to Israel.

Have you, like Simeon, ever waited in expectation for comfort and deliverance? While no one I know is waiting for death like Simeon, there are many waiting to see the Lord's Messiah. They are eagerly waiting to see how God is going to bring comfort and deliverance to His children.

Luke does not state the length of time that Simeon waited to see the consolation of Israel; however, we can assume that because God put his death on hold, he could have been an elderly man. We can also glean from Simeon's life that God honored his waiting and promised him that he would live to see the thing he was praying for to come to past.

I encourage you to remain faithful to God in this season of Lent, and like Simeon, God will overshadow you with the Holy Spirit, keep you divinely informed, and keep your heart and mind attentive in order that you may recognize and lift the Messiah up when He arrives.

Prayer: Lord as many of your children are waiting and needing deliverance and comfort continue to lead us through your Spirit. Give us the strength to remain faithful and the longevity to see what we have been praying and waiting for. In Jesus name, Amen.

Day 2

Thursday, February 18, 2021

ENGAGING MY FOREORDAINED VOCATION

Rev. Brandle C. Morrow, Sr.

Luke 2:49-51

49 “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them. 51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Luke’s portrayal of Jesus as a young boy affords the reader a snapshot into His maturation, and trajectory in His predetermined vocation. The boy Jesus is isolated (by his own doing), from his earthly parents in the temple engaging God, and individuals who shared the same theological perspective. Jesus, the expressed image of the invisible God, is sitting amongst the teachers, both listening, and asking questions. At the formative age of twelve, Jesus appears to be astute beyond his years. Any accountable teacher knows a good student has not necessarily procured all the right answers, however, he or she is intelligent enough to ask the right questions.

Fasting, secluded time with God away from others, is an opportunity to hear the voice of God afresh, and to ask good probing questions anticipating practical divine answers. This narrative conveys a Jesus who is keenly aware of the necessity for uncompromised, uninterrupted time with God. Why? I should like to propose two reasons: to reaffirm His foreordained purpose with God, and to reinvigorate His spirit. When we endeavor to fulfill our mission, the mundane and the rigors of life can precede our need for concentrated time with God, even, perhaps especially, with good intentions. Family can deter us from hearing God’s voice regarding our vocations principally because they are exposed to our weaknesses and limitations habitually. When we spend time with God, He has the prudence, despite our present insufficiencies, to reveal to us where we are headed.

Prayer: Father, reaffirm my foreordained vocation, and stimulate my spirit to do your will. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 3

Friday, February 19, 2021

THE ENFLESHMENT OF GOD

Rev. Dr. Demetrius K. Williams

John 1:1-14

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The phrase, “the enfleshment of God,” is an acknowledgment and celebration of the miracle of the *incarnation* – that is, the manifestation of God’s self in human flesh. This is the essential theme and topic of John’s prologue (John 1:1-14) – “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” To some philosophically minded persons in the ancient world, this very thought was nonsense – Why would God, immortal and eternal become flesh? Flesh is subject to sickness, disease, pain and ultimately, death. What is to be gained by it? We who have been “born of the Spirit,” however, know that it was an act of unconditional love– “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but, have eternal life.” But, are we aware of how amazing this act of love really is?

Somewhere in my memory, I recall a sermon preached by the late Samuel D. Proctor on the Word becoming flesh in Christ Jesus. He invoked the idea of someone having great and enormous wealth, like perhaps, Oprah Winfrey (OWN Network) and Tyler Perry (Tyler Perry Studios). These persons enjoy a life unimaginable by at least ninety-nine percent of the world’s population. Now, imagine that they one day decided to give it all up to become poor, in order to liberate and identify with the poor and outcast? This would be amazing enough, but the analogy still lacks something essential. The Word that became flesh “was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (1:2-3). This indicates that the Word was eternal and in becoming flesh, had to change form and the essence of its existence. It became something radically different. Hence, Proctor suggest that the unimaginably wealthy person does not become just another poor human being among others, but they become something radically different – a dog! And not just any dog, but a neglected and rejected dog with no home. Why would this person of wealth leave his or her comfortable existence to change form and become a homeless and rejected dog? Because of their unconditional love for dogs.

This moving homiletic analogy is what comes to mind when I remember the Word becoming flesh. This act of incarnation is an extraordinary act of love! God did not have to do it, but, God did it for our good, so that we might participate more fully in the being of God and to become *children of God* “who were born, not of blood or the will of the flesh or the will or man, but of God” (vv. 12-13). So, during this season of Lent, let us be reminded of the things of the Spirit by reflecting upon the miracle of God’s coming in the flesh.

Prayer: Eternal and Everlasting God, as we celebrate and remember the miracle of your “enfleshment” on account of your love for us, help us to become a light to the world that “shines in darkness, and the darkness [cannot] overcome it.” In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 4

Saturday, February 20, 2021

REPENTANCE: THE FORGOTTEN WORD

Rev. Dr. Darryl Drumright

Matthew 3:1-2

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea 2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

John the Baptist comes preaching that the kingdom of heaven is here. The challenge to those who hear his message in that moment, and the millions upon millions of people who have read his message throughout the centuries is to, “Repent.” Repentance involves turning away from behaviors and directions that are destructive and displeasing to God — while redirecting and getting on a path that not only pleases God, but also aids us in realizing our full God-invested potential. Sadly though, we oftentimes speak of repentance in certain contexts but completely overlook the communal call to repentance.

While personal repentance is a must, there is also the challenge to repent of communal racial discrimination, prejudice, apathy, insensitivity, overlooking and ignoring the needs of the least, lost, left-out and forgotten about along with many other areas. Repentance is absolutely necessary. There is also a major blessing that accompanies repentance. Acts 3:19 declares, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” Repent individually and repent communally! Refreshing seasons are knocking at our door.

PRAYER: Eternal God our creator, we come to you with a commitment to repent of our personal sins, but also just as committed to call our communities on every level to repentance. Help us, O Lord to be faithful on this journey, so that your supernatural refreshing becomes our daily reality. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Day 5

Monday, February 22, 2021

IN GOOD COMPANY

Sherman Roosevelt Tribble, PhD

Luke 9:29-30

29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.

Those who were close to Jesus had the extraordinary fortune to witness miracles. They saw him change the chemical composition of water to wine on one occasion and then to a sidewalk on another. They observed him inform families that the undertaker needed to issue them a refund check. They watched this formally untutored man confound the learned. Most of all, it was clear to them that while they did not understand every word of His life and teaching, His relationship to His Father was unshakable. He was perpetually in the presence of Providence and thus, when with Him, they were always in good company.

The story of the Transfiguration is shared by all of the Synoptic writers. Jesus' countenance was changed into a shining figure as he was in the presence of two luminary figures, Moses and Elijah while on the summit of a mountain. Peter, James, and John were awestruck! Humanity and divinity were face to face; time and eternity were intertwined; the natural and the supernatural occupied the same space; and Jesus was in the middle of it all! These disciples would have never had such an encounter had they not been with Jesus. Perhaps, they thought that this would be just an ordinary day, but, this was a meeting for the ages. Just as suddenly, it was over and all they could see was Jesus.

Sometimes, life may seem drab. However, when one sees God, one could discover that which could alter their destiny, like Moses did at the Burning Bush. One could get a new direction like Elijah received when he left Israel for Cherith. Or, one could grasp that which will transfigure them or of what God is capable of performing. That is what the celebration of Lenten provides: Good Transformative Company.

Prayer: O Thou who changes us or our view of life, give us that which we need to more clearly see You. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.

Day 6

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

WHO IS THIS?

Dr. J. C. Perkins

Isaiah 63:1

1 “Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained? Who is this robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? ‘It is I, proclaiming victory, mighty to save!’

The Lenten season is always a challenging time in the life of every believer. It is a time when we are challenged to pull apart from the busy rush of life to become introspective for the purpose of examining our relationship with God.

Through the course of the year, we may have a perfunctory relationship with God. We may attend church, study the Sunday School quarterly, even read our Bibles from time to time.

But, when it comes to developing, cultivating and maintaining a close personal intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ, that is a different matter.

Lent represents the last forty days of our Lord’s earthly life. The shadow of the Cross fell across His path. He felt the sting of rejection and the hurt of being misunderstood. All of this culminated with the brutality of His crucifixion. And yet, the sad fact is that too few believers ever take the time to meditate upon the awful price our Lord paid to certify us a right and proper relationship with God.

Because we don’t take the time to reflect upon the sufferings of our Lord, we really don’t know Him. Though he wrote in the sixth century B.C., the author (s) of the book of Isaiah presents to us a portrait of our Christ. In chapter nine, he announces His birth, “for unto us a child is born. . .” (Isaiah 9:6) In chapter fifty-three, he shows us the image of Christ as the suffering servant, “He was bruised for our iniquities. . .” (Isaiah 53:5) And here in chapter sixty-three, he shows us the image of the battle scarred, but victorious Christ! His garments are stained in blood because He has fought and defeated our enemies. He has conquered the devil, sin, death and the grave. It wasn’t an easy battle. He shed His blood. But He strides in strength because He is victorious!

During this Lenten season, let us purpose in our hearts to draw closer to Him, to get to know Him in all the dimensions of His resplendent glory. Let us get to know the price He paid for our salvation. And most of all, because He died for us, let us purpose to live for Him.

Prayer: Oh God, our conquering King, forgive us for under-valuing your sacrifice for us. Help us to draw nearer to you that we might know you more intimately and serve you more faithfully. In the strong name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Day 7

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

SECRET FAULTS AND PRESUMPTUOUS SINS

Rev. Dr. Clarke L. McGriff

Psalms 19:12-13

12 Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. 13 Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

It is the ultimate, “*Man-In-The-Mirror*” moment! David, the noted, ‘*Man after God’s own heart,*’ peers into the mirror of his soul, illumined by the backdrop of God’s pure majesty, prays... *Cleanse me from secret faults and keep me back from my presumptuous sins!*

David, the giant killer, and lion slayer. David, the revered decorated war veteran. David, the King; chosen before his brothers, now privately praying, *cleanse me and keep me back!*

What could inspire a man of such distinction to pray as such? It was the *Backdrop!* It was the backdrop of the Lord’s *perfect law* that converts the soul. It was the backdrop of the Lord’s *sure testimony* that makes the simple wise. It was the backdrop of the Lord’s *right statutes* that rejoice the heart and the Lord’s *pure commandments* that enlighten the eyes. It was the backdrop of the Lord’s *clean fear* that endures forever and the Lord’s *true judgments* that are righteous altogether. The backdrop of the Lord’s virtues crescendo in David’s presence and prove to be more desirable than much fine gold and even sweeter than honey in the honeycomb.

David prays and is drawn close to God and the closer he is drawn, the brighter the encounter becomes and, in that brightness, something about David is exposed and revealed: his *secret faults* and *presumptuous sins*.

Who can approach God’s light without uncovering the darkness within ourselves? This Lenten Season is another opportunity to examine the *hidden* and *presumptuous*. None dare be overconfident or relaxed regarding the evils of sin. The *heart is deceitful above all things* (Jer.17:9). We must cry out like David, “*Keep me back,* less I run quickly and headlong into sin.” None can boast, for we can so easily trip over our *secret faults* and look away from “*Him who is able to keep you from falling...* (Jude 24).

Charles Spurgeon declares, “There is enough kindling in the best of hearts to light a fire that will burn to the lowest hell if God does not extinguish the sparks as they fall.”

Let’s not take the human condition for granted this year. May we approach God’s majestic light, and sincerely pray,

Prayer: Cleanse me from my secret faults and keep me back from my presumptuous sins. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Day 8

Thursday, February 25, 2021

THE MINISTRY OF CONFESSION

Dr. Breonus Mitchell

Proverbs 28:13

13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

We see it repeatedly and regularly. We hear it in the news or read it on Facebook. It is the story of the actor, politician, or religious leader whose sins or struggles have finally come to light. We each know that sins have a way of increasing and destroying our life when left unattended. James reminds us to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed (James 5:16).” Augustine said, “In failing to confess, Lord, I would only hide You from myself, not myself from You.” Trying to cover our sin, only leads to a life filled with guilt.

Confession is ceasing to deceive ourselves. It is owning up to something you know or believe and telling it forthrightly to all who would hear it. You see, to conceal is to allow the cancers of deception and dishonesty to breed. However, to confess is to let the healing begin. There, my friends, is the ministry of confession. David said, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity (Psalms 32:1-2).”

Today, spend time in silent reflection and confess to God your sins and evil deeds. Then, allow the ministry of confession to be at work within you.

Prayer: Father, help us to understand that we can never hide our deeds from you. Teach us, therefore to appreciate the importance of confession so that we can find mercy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 9

Friday, February 26, 2021

NO NIGHT NO JOY

Dr. Derick Brennan

Psalms 30:5

5 For His anger last only a moment, but His favor lasts for a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

The context of this Psalm may be David succumbing to Satan's temptation to mistrust God and conduct a census (read 1 Chronicles 21). Consequently, a just God, corrects the "man after his own heart" by sending a 3-day plague killing 70,000 plus Israelites. However, at the threshold of Jerusalem, God's anger abates, His mercy intervenes, and the angel of Lord stays his hand. In response, David repents, purchases the land, builds an altar, and worships God.

David's life can be studied as a metaphor of why night precedes joy. First, in David's dusky past, he rescued sheep from bears and lions resulting in Godly reliance. Experiencing the dark times of being on the run from Saul equipped David with Godly resilience. In this Psalm, David experiences the night and it brings him to Godly repentance. Finally, at dawn, David marks a new day with Godly reverence.

Similar to David, many believers may feel like we're living through a perpetual night. Our daily lives are repeatedly roiled by pandemics, wars, famine, natural disasters, violence, injustice, economic inequality, political unrest, and personal issues, etc. If we aren't careful, we can be deceived into believing that God is undependable. This lapse of trust, may result in us repeatedly taking a census of our health, fitness, financial assets, personal security, and loved one's well-being, etc. This could result in a longer night with more stress and frustration, while slowing the dawn of God's joy and favor. It behooves every believer to submit to God's timetable, knowing that there can be no joy, if there is no night.

Prayer: Spirit of God, I pray that you will lead me to be even more dependent on you and to mature during the dark season. Thank you for the night and the new joy that comes every morning. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 10

Saturday, February 27, 2021

HONEST CONFESSION

Dr. Johnny Turner

2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13 (2. Sam. 12:7-13)

7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. 9 Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.' 13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

When life challenges one to rethink his or her actions, it will direct one to be honest and confess wrongdoing. Wrongdoing will not leave a person's psyche no matter whether one is saved or not. What happens is that many people ignore their wrong. However, the memory of wrongdoing will not leave until confession takes place. The words and expression of the prophet Nathan to David was sincere and he reminded David of his wrongdoing in the sight of the Lord God. He was a prophet who lived during David's time and he went to him to remind him of adultery with Bathsheba. David no doubt had never thought about what he had done until it was pointed out to him by Nathan. Through this interaction, David confessed what he had done to Uriah in the past and confessed honestly regarding his actions with his wife. Those were horrible acts in God's sight. Honest confession compelled David to take a serious look at life. His conscience compelled him to change.

In these times in which we live, we should review our past actions, focus on our present circumstances and be willing to confess our wrongdoing to Jehovah God. We all have committed sins against God and may need to be reminded of our actions. We will never be free until we are honest and confess our unresolved issues and conflict to God. Confession is good for the soul because it speaks to the heart of God and God moves with compassion and forgives our sinful behavior. God does not want any of us to continue living with unresolved issues. Therefore, this passage is a prime example of how and why God directed and moved upon Nathan's heart to tell David of his wrongdoing and encourage him to come clean with God.

Eventually we will be confronted by our ignored past actions committed to satisfy our own feelings and desires. God can use others to help us to rethink and refocus lives in order to please God. Therefore, God is waiting for us to make the right choice.

Prayer: Eternal God, please accept our honest confession for the wrong that we have done and that we may find favor and forgiveness. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 11

Monday, March 1, 2021

PRAYING FROM STRANGE PLACES

Dr. John W. McVicker

Jonah 2:1

1 “From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.”

Prayer. Man talking to God and God talking to man. A simple, but, accurate definition of prayer that oft-times escapes the psyche of many Christians. Too many believe that prayer is a Christian discipline that is effectual only when carried out in a particular posture or place. Many believe, knee bent and body bowed in the solitude of the sanctuary, or alongside one’s bed, are the places that God bends His ear to hear the petitions of His children.

This belief may be more superstition than it is faith because, by definition, prayer can happen anywhere one chooses to talk to God, our Father, regardless of the location. In the bible, there are many instances of prayer occurring in what one may describe as a “strange place.”

Jonah prayed inside the fish. Samson prayed in the temple of his enemies, and Moses prayed on the shore of the Red Sea. Peter prayed on the waves of a storm-tossed sea, and Paul and Silas sent up their prayers while in a Philippi prison. Also, let us not forget Jesus’ prayer at the graveside of his friend Lazarus.

Our God is universal and not relegated to any particular space or location. Whenever we choose to call upon Him in our hour of need, rest assured that our words and not our whereabouts matter. So, the next time you need to utter a prayer, do not concern yourself with your location as much as your sincere devotion. And if you are sincere, God will hear and answer your prayer.

Prayer: “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.” In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 12

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

THE DANGER OF SMOOTH SERMONS

Rev. Dr. John H. Grant

Isaiah 30:10

10 They say to the seers, "See no more visions!" and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant (smooth) things, prophesy illusions.

We live in an age where even church people prefer and prioritize material prosperity, pleasure, entertainment, comfort and convenience, in a word, smooth things. We don't like preaching on things like suffering, sacrifice or a cross. Members often pressure pastors to preach smooth sermons which cuddle and comfort rather than challenge and convict. This 30th chapter of Isaiah is about the coming wrath of God upon the rebellion of those who prefer deceitful smooth things over right things.

Facing the terrible threat of an Assyrian invasion, God's people turned to Egypt as an ally instead of to God, something that God had expressly forbidden (Deut. 17:16). They chose a human alliance over a God alliance and failed to recognize that real security is in God. Since they were unwilling to listen to God's instruction, God's judgment would come (vv. 13-14) unless they repent (v. 15).

It's not enough to smoothly confess our sins and continue in them while at the same time asking God to forgive us and heal our land. God also calls us to repent or His wrath abides (John 3:36). Rebellion and unrepentance within a nation, a community, a home or a church, bring tragic consequences: injury, bloodshed, street violence, looting, rioting, and sometimes pandemics (II Chronicles 7:13). It was true in Isaiah's day, and it's still true in our day!

Prayer: Oh God, may we heed Your call to be a repenting people and not a rebellious people that Your wrath may be turned away. In Christ's name, Amen.

Day 13

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

OUR UNSEEN PRAYER PARTNER

Dr. Naomi-Tyler Lloyd

Romans 8:26

26 Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes, with sighs too deep for words.

This year is probably the most difficult Lenten Season many of us have ever experienced. This is a time when most believers are being intentional to assess and engage their discipleship, and when spiritual disciplines are employed to look deeper within and draw closer to God. It is a time when we offer ourselves to the One who searches our hearts and has power to purify and make brand new. The season in general can be difficult, for when we open our hearts and minds to the perfecting work of Christ, we are likely to find strongholds, shortcomings, flaws and failures that need God's divine attention and intervention.

Yet, in this present Lenten journey, while that process on its own is demanding, we are also besieged by a pandemic that has changed much of the normalcy in our lives. We have experienced death, violence, sorrow, grief, economic struggles, vocational insecurity, shutdowns of businesses and houses of worship, among other things that have contributed to the difficulty of our journey. So many things have happened and are happening for which we have no words. Life as we knew it has been forever altered and many are overwhelmed and fearful of an uncertain future.

However, as dismal as these realities may seem, all the negative and difficult experiences we have provide us with a great opportunity to recognize the hand of God in unexpected places. Our emotional overload and speechlessness give the Holy Spirit opportunity to speak for us. Our being overwhelmed and often clueless opens the door for the Spirit's wisdom and revelation to stand in the gap and plead on our behalf. Our all-sufficient God had already designed our frames with the capacity to access God's strength in our weakness. And our Savior, Jesus, models for us how to yield and surrender to God working in and through us.

Prayer: Father, we are weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care. Thank You for providing Your Spirit's strength and intercession for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 14

Thursday, March 4, 2021

HOLD ON UNWAVERINGLY

Dr. J. Albert Bush, Sr.
Hebrews 10:23

23 “Let us hold unwavering to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.”

The call to follow Christ in discipleship brings with it no guarantee that there will be no trials, hardships, disappointments, or unwanted challenges along the way. Wouldn't life in Christ be so much more comfortable if He would offer us some measure of exemption from the bitter struggles of life? Truth is, the closer we walk with God in obedience the greater our vulnerability to certain difficulties of life. Doubt, fear, anxiety, and depression are just a few.

The past 11 or 12 months have been exceptionally challenging for many of us, forcing us to make major shifts just in order to survive. Covid-19 has robbed us of relatives and friends. Some of us lost jobs; others have lost homes and automobiles. And, believe it or not, multitudes have lost or are close to losing faith, hope, and confidence in the love of God.

We must remember that the call to follow Christ in discipleship does not come with a guarantee that life will be free from sorrow, pain, distress, or even suffering. The promise of God in Isaiah 42:2 is, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.” What a mighty promise!

Beloved, notice that the text does not say, “If” you pass through the waters.” It does not say “Should you pass through the rivers.” It does not say “In the event you pass through the fire.” It says “When.” If we live long enough life will bring us all to some point of pain, loss, disappointment, etc. But the promise is, “I will be with you.” What a promise!

Whoever wrote the epistle to the Hebrew believers urges us to “hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess.” Whatever we must let go of — whatever we lose, God forbid that we should lose our faith and hope. God's word for us today is “Hold On.” I beg you remember Proverbs 9:1 which reads, ‘...The race is not given to the swift, or the battle to the strong...’

Prayer: O Faithful God, who faithfully promised, help us to hold unwaveringly to our hope which is in Christ Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 15

Friday, March 5, 2021

GOD'S SOLUTION FOR OUR LIKE FILTHY RAGS-CONDITION

Dr. Riggins Earl
Isaiah 64:6

6 “For we all have become like one who is [ceremonially] unclean [like a leper], and all our deeds of righteousness are like filthy rags; . . .”

What makes a People Ceremonially Unclean?

Here the people of Israel confessed that they were ritualistically unclean before God. Israel's condition disqualified their participation in God's sacred place and time. Under the Levitical codes ceremonial disqualification of the person might be caused by either an illness such as leprosy, or a forbidden social behavior, e.g., “having sex before worship on a sacred day.” Or, a woman was forbidden to visit the holy place when on her menstrual period. Even the priest had to follow the ceremonial rules of cleanliness. Leviticus chapter 15 outlines what the rules were for ceremonial cleanliness, for being right before God. This is what makes the *filthy rags* example so powerful. It meant that the people of Israel were unable to make themselves right before God. Their self-righteous deeds were denounced as *filthy rags*. This meant that only God's solution for making them right could help.

God's Solution!

This chapter of Isaiah outlines what the people whose righteousness like *filthy rags* must do. First, they must see and confess their condition before God, i.e., their “good deeds” are like *filthy rags*. Second, they must recognize God as Supreme creator and redeemer. Third, they must see their “*filthy rags-condition*” as being the problem of God's creation. Fourth, they must ask God the salvation question “. . . shall we be saved?” This is the question that qualifies all whose righteousness is like *filthy rags* for salvation in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for Jesus who cleansed and saved us with His sacrificial life. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 16

Saturday, March 6, 2021

A TREE OF HEALING

Pastor D. Benoit

Exodus 15:1-25

25 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood (tree). He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

I hope your devotional – meditation *with* GOD today begins early, between 12:01am and 6:00am. Because yesterday’s problem(s) and today’s problem(s) must be dealt with, so prayerfully, tomorrow, can be sweeter than the day before.

Please read as suggested, verses 1-25 of Exodus, Chapter 15. Two notable experiences are given: 1. GOD *leads* the Israelites across the Red Sea and *singing* by the waters follows.

2. GOD *leads* the Israelites for three days into the wilderness by bitter waters.

The Old Testament story of the Red Sea teaches us, that GOD can make a path through our day-to-day Red Sea experiences. GOD *can* separate Red Sea – problem(s) and enable us to walk through on dry ground. GOD *can* bring us out of Egypt, free us from slavery and remind us, of what a privilege we have, to be son’s/daughters/servants of HIS!

But soon after, problem(s) arise. There is water, but they can’t drink it. It is only three days after *singing* about crossing, but now, *choking* because of bitterness. They were following The LORD’S lead—obeying HIS instructions, rejoicing as they went, only to find water when needed, too bitter/defiled to drink. The Israelites *murmured, griped, grumbled* against Moses. In reality, such was against The LORD. What did Moses do?

“Then Moses *cried out* to The LORD.” “If this world from you withhold of its silver and its gold, and you have to get along with meager fare – just remember, in HIS WORD, how HE feeds the little bird. Take your burden to The LORD and leave it there.”

“The LORD *showed* him a tree.” When you *Listen* to The LORD – seek HIM for what to do; *Trust*, The LORD – knowing HIS WORD will never fail; *Obey*, The LORD – that others would be blessed; The LORD will reward by divine revelation. “Which when he had cast into the water, the waters were made sweet.” GOD *showed* Moses the tree and revealed to him what the tree would do, but Moses had to pitch the tree into the water to heal the waters. Don’t just pray but *practice* – do!

“The waters were made sweet.” Like this tree, we may appear to be nothing special, but when GOD enables us by HIS POWER, we can do great things with HIM. “There HE *proved* them.” Problems, trials, troubles, all come to *prove* HIM. To test us, but to prove HIM!

“If your body suffers pain and your health you can’t regain; and your soul is almost sinking in despair, JESUS knows the pain you feel, HE can save and HE can heal – Take your burden to The LORD and leave it there.”

Prayer: Thank YOU GOD our FATHER; JESUS our LORD. By YOUR HOLY SPIRIT today, divide impassable waters and quench our thirsts; that we may answer the question, “Why are you singing?” In Jesus’ name! Amen. Amen. Amen.

Day 17

Monday, March 8, 2021

THE OTHER SIDE OF JESUS

Dr. Derrick L. Miles

John 2:13-14

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business.

It is amazing to me the dualistic nature that we have. Often when we meet people, we meet them while they are on their best behavior, but, when you do something to offend them, they can do a 180 degree turn immediately.

Jesus' ministry begins and concludes with a Temple cleansing. Jesus is upset because it is the Passover and every male Jew was required to go to Jerusalem three times a year – for the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Because of the journey and the possibility of blemishing the sacrifice, the men who traveled afar would wait until they got to Jerusalem to buy the animal for the sacrifice. Because of this tax collectors and inspectors were present at the temple.

However, as Jesus entered the temple, He noticed that there were some shenanigans taking place. He noticed that the animals that were in the place were blemished and they were charging astronomical prices for the animals. He noticed that as they changed the money to use the coinage of Jerusalem, the money changers were literally cheating these men who were in town for the celebration of The Passover. This made Jesus' other side come out.

When our nature changes, there is a catalyst that caused it to change. Jesus takes a whip and goes ballistic. This is the Jesus we don't like to see, because this Jesus will go, "Oops, upside your head." Whenever we give Him less than our best, we cause Him to show us the other side. When we mistreat the people of God, we cause Him to show us the other side.

I challenge you to keep the Jesus we love proud of your efforts.

Prayer: Lord Jesus it is my desire, in this Lent Season and days ahead, to keep your whip off of me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 18

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

WE ARE A WORK IN PROGRESS

Dr. J. Albert Bush, Sr.

I John 3:2

2 Dear friends, now we are the Children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

In New York City, you can go on a \$10 tour of the Steinway and Sons factory where one of the world's finest pianos are built by hand. You would be escorted by a tour guide into a large room where you would find people cutting wood and shaping steel. You would see no evidence that a piano is under construction. In another room, you would find workers busy fitting parts into frames, but still no evidence of strings or keys. And yet, in another room, you would find more pieces being assembled, but you are not likely to hear the sound of music.

Soon, you would come to the factory's show-room, where you may find a skilled musician sitting at one of the finished products and playing the music of one of the great masters, like J. Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Mozart, or Ludwig Beethoven, just to name a few. You, having just been enlightened on all the careful steps involved in the tedious process of making this marvelous musical instrument, should now better appreciate its beauty.

Beloved, John the apostle reminds us that "... What we will be has not yet been made known." By the blood of the cross, God has redeemed us, and is in the process of molding us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). Hallelujah to Jesus! Some sweet day, the work will be completed, because we have been "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:28). But for now, we are all in an ongoing process.

My dear Brother/Sister in Christ Jesus, if, for some strange reason, your spiritual growth and development seems slow, don't be discouraged. God is not yet finished with you. Someday He will surely put the finishing touches on you, and the glory of the showroom will prove to be worth all the time spent in the workroom.

Prayer: Lord God, by the power of Your indwelling Spirit, keep working on us until we reflect the very image of Your Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 19

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

THE UNBURDENED LIFE

Dr. Keith A. Russell

Matthew 11:30

30 “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus invites the crowd who had gathered to come to Him. **It is a compelling invitation.** Jesus says, “Come unto me, all that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). If you come, the promise is that you will find rest. Jesus promises that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

Please hear this invitation in the midst of our current reality. We are burdened by the Covid-19 pandemic. We are burdened by unemployment, climate catastrophe, racial iniquity, a fragile future. Yes, we are weary and are carrying heavy burdens. Hear the invitation of Jesus in the midst of our current situation.

Jesus does not promise that we will not have worries or burdens. No, we are acquainted with grief and accustomed to sorrow. Jesus makes a more radical invitation. This invitation promises to lighten the weight of the burdens we carry and to walk with us amidst the weariness of our lives. It matters who is walking with you! It matters who you are walking with in these troubled times!

Hear Jesus calling. The promise is that our Lord will walk with us in our time of need and will lighten our burden through His love and strength. In this Lenten Season, we can turn to Jesus, not to escape our troubles, but, to find a new power to live in this world with assurance and hope.

Do you need a hope? Do you need assurance that you will not be overwhelmed by the burdens of our time? Do you need relief from the anxiety and inequity of our time? Turn to Jesus – His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Prayer: Dear God, please hear our prayer and move us closer to the liberating power of our Lord and Savior. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Day 20

Thursday, March 11, 2021

ONE MAN'S DISOBEDIENCE AND ANOTHER MAN'S OBEDIENCE

Rev. Dr. Allen Paul Weaver, Jr.

Romans 5:19

19 "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." (Romans 5:19).

We must agree on this one fact, Adam, the first man, is the federal head of the human race. Adam is the federal head of the human race, because whatever Adam does affects the entire human race. When Adam disobeyed God, he infected the whole race of men and women with the sin virus. Therefore, all the sons and daughters of Adam are born into sin and are, therefore, sinners. One man is responsible for our fate, for our rebellious state against God, and that is Adam, the federal head of the human race.

Without hope, without a bridge to span, the gap between God and humankind, every person born of Adam is condemned to die. But the good news is that we have another federal head, Jesus Christ. Just as Adam infected us with the sin virus, Jesus provides the antidote, and everyone who receives the cure is exempt from sin and death.

One man, Adam, brought death to us; One man, Jesus, brought life and life forever. Christ opens the door for changing our sinful condition; He comes along and changes us forever. One man is responsible for that! He asks that we believe that His atoning death is changing our destiny forever. One man!

Why? Scriptures teach us that God loves us so much that He did not want to see the human race destroyed because of one man's disobedience. And so, He sends His Son to die for the entire human race. He sent His Son to pay the debt that humanity owed. *"The wages of sin is death, and the gift of God is eternal life."* I thank God for the obedience of One man, who is responsible for me and countless thousands of others, to experience eternal life. This message never grows old!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, make us all thankful for Your Son, Jesus Christ, through whom You have made us righteous. May we in turn prove to be obedient to His call on us and follow in His ways. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 21

Friday, March 12, 2021

PUTTING AFFLICTION IN PROPER PERSPECTIVE

Dr. J. Lawrence Turner
Psalm 119:71

71 It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

It is a peculiar revelation the psalmist teaches us that our afflictions are to our advantage. As peculiar as this verse sounds it is a truth that is woven throughout the pages of Scripture. It is through our experiences with affliction and tragedy that lessons are taught that would not be taught in moments of prosperity or smooth sailing.

In and through our afflictions we learn to be more attentive to God's word to understand the providence of God and His plan for our lives. Enduring seasons of suffering causes us to still ourselves, tune our ears to Heaven and peruse the Holy Writ so that we may know that our suffering is not for naught. On the contrary, God who does not cause the affliction is able to work all things together for our good.

It seems that a close Hebrew reading of this passage would show us that some of the good that God is working is within our own character. The Hebrew text is rendered, "It was good for me that I was humbled, so that I might learn your laws." The refining quality of afflictions is that we can see them as humbling moments that draw us closer to God and God's word to trust Him even more.

So, we must not see our afflictions as inconveniences, rather we must see that as lessons under the tutelage of our Lord. This is precisely the sentiment that Robert Browning Hamilton captures poetically:

"I walked a mile with Pleasure; She chatted all the way;
But left me none the wiser; For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow; And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh! The things I learned from her, when Sorrow walked with me."

Prayer: Gracious God, help us to see our trials as you do. Opportunities to grow closer to you; as windows into your divine purpose; and for their refining possibilities. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day 22

Saturday, March 13, 2021

HOPE AGAINST ENEMIES OF JUSTICE

Dr. Ankoma D. Anderson, Sr.

Psalms 25:1-3

1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; 2 in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. 3 No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse.

On March 13, 2020, Breonna Taylor was shot and killed by white plainclothes officers, Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison, and Myles Cosgrove, of the Louisville Metro Police Department after forced entry into her apartment. More than three months later, on June 23, 2020, the LMPD fired Hankison for blindly firing his weapon through the covered patio door and window of Taylor’s apartment. Finally, after more than six months, on September 23, 2020, a state grand jury indicted Hankison on three counts of “wanton (careless) endangerment,” not for Taylor’s life, but, for endangering Taylor’s unharmed neighbors. As of today, none of the officers involved have been charged in Taylor’s death.

This text wasn’t implicit bias; it wasn’t systemic injustice, nor was it police brutality, but, it was another enemy of justice, King Saul. King Saul was the hell-hound on David’s tracks, but, David still trusted God to protect him from an enemy who was “wantonly treacherous” and seeking to harm him. David cries to God for help and implores God to come quickly to his rescue.

David’s cry is the cry of black folk! David’s cry is the cry of the marginalized and the oppressed suffering at the hands of enemies of justice. The text begs the question, “who are the enemies of justice today?”

I’m not sure who your enemies of justice are, but no matter who those enemies are, the Lenten Season is a time of radical trust and radical hope! David’s trust is our trust. David’s hope is our hope.

Prayer: Oh, Lord, you are our blessed hope in times of trouble. When enemies of justice oppress us; deliver, and liberate us! In Jesus’ name. Amen!

Day 23

Monday, March 15, 2021

FORGETTING THE PAST: EMBRACING THE FUTURE

Dr. Ivory Thigpen
Philippians 3:13-14

*13 Beloved, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But this one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,
14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Too much of anything is harmful! Even over-consumption of water can be toxic. Yes, water, the most life sustaining liquid on earth. Common to every form of life, even water in excess can be dangerous.

Such are the common cases of success and sin. Who has not known success or is unfamiliar with sin? None can answer that they are strangers to either. It is no secret that an excess of sin in one's life is toxic and dangerous, but, who would have thought that too much success is equally toxic? Toxic Success is when our previous successes inhibit our future progress!

In many dying churches, more emphasis is placed on what we "used to do." What's seemingly romantic nostalgia quickly turns into a rogue nightmare! As the church becomes prisoner to its past, it is unable to imagine or embrace its future.

What is true for the church is indeed true for the churchgoer. Held hostage by their past, many believers are shackled by the shame of a previous sin! Shame, that unstable emotion, is the toxic result when our past sins prevent our future progress.

Paul is clear that whether success or sin, we (the church and the churchgoer) must let go of anything or any event that prevents us from imagining and embracing the future. A clinched fist can never receive anything, therefore, let go of your past that you might receive the future blessings that God has prepared for you.

Prayer: Gracious God and Benevolent Benefactor, we thank you for your grace and mercy which free us from our sins and bless us beyond our belief. Help us to press forward and forget those things that have previously entangled us. Let us not be distracted or delayed from our future. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 24

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

OPEN WINDOWS

Rev. Elmer Porter Hardy, Jr.

Daniel 6:10

6 “Now When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”

Kneeling during televised sports events as a symbol of protest against injustice—especially police brutality against black men—has become one of America’s most controversial issues in recent years. And although kneeling may be a phenomena-gone-viral on social media in the 21st century, it is by no means a new gesture of civil disobedience in our nation. For we vividly remember bloody Sunday on Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama as the late civil rights leader John Lewis and thousands of revolutionaries got into ‘good trouble’ on the bridge named after the racist Alabama Senator and Grand Dragon in the Ku Klux Klan.

But, long before either of these instances of non-violent resistance, the biblical precedent for kneeling in the face of injustice is recorded in today’s text. An 80-year-old Hebrew prophet named Daniel, broke a custom-tailored unjust law enacted by Darius the king of Persia, by repeatedly kneeling at home by open windows which were prophetically positioned towards the Holy City.

During this Lenten Season of sacrificial living in the this paganistic slave land which is systematically consumed by monetary greed and military misdeed; global virus and perpetual violence; one of the most holy and helpful things we can do is like Daniel. And this is exactly what we have done before: relentlessly kneel in our secret closet, with spiritual windows opened towards our eternal home – the New Jerusalem and offer up prayers of thanksgiving for the coming new heaven and new earth. This is when the tabernacle of God will be with men, when He dwells with us, wipes away all tears from our eyes, where there is no more death, sorrow, crying, pain and when God will make all things new!

Prayer: Thank you Lord for revolutionary revelation. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Day 25

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

AS IS

Mrs. Bridgett Bush Turner, Esq.

Romans 3:23

23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Many of us are such expert consumers until we can spot a bargain a mile away. Ask any serious shopper how wonderful it is to stumble upon a valuable item with a just slight scratch or a minor tear, such as a floor-model.” When this happens, we become professional hostage negotiators as we hold store-managers hostage in an attempt to negotiate for a much-reduced price for that slightly damaged item. Of course, we could choose to walk away from the item since it has some minor impairment; but, because we see some good potential and value in the damaged item, we employ our negotiating skills to convince the manager to reduce the price so that we can acquire the damaged, but yet, useful treasure.

We are all imperfect people, living in an imperfect world, but we were created by a perfect God who meets our imperfections without judgment. Like any damaged item, we all have our battle scars, our dents and bruises from the past. But God does not count us out because of our visible scars and scratches. Rather, He sees each of us as valued treasures, even with our scratches and tears, some of which are major rather than minor. God sees beauty in our brokenness.

St. Paul reminds the Romans (and us) that “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” But, God does not write us off; nor does He have to negotiate our redemption. But, He does make a serious move to lay claim to us, “*As Is*.” That’s what Jesus Christ did for us all at Calvary; He brought us as “*As Is*.” In our “*As Is*” condition, He knows that we are visibly bruised and scarred, even chipped and damaged here and there. But, notice the valued that God puts on each of us, with our scars and bruises. He is willing to take us, not at a reduced price – mind you, but, at the cost of the blood of His Only Son, Jesus Christ. What a price tag for a scarred, torn, bruised, and damaged soul like ours. But, that’s the way He works.

He took a damaged prostitute like Rahab, a scared murderer like Moses, and blemished drunk like Noah and just as He accepted and made good use of all of them – He will do the same for each of us.

Prayer: Father, thank you for seeing value in each of us; and thank you for being willing to use us, in spite of the scars, blemishes, and bruises of our past. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 26

Thursday, March 18, 2021

THE INCONVENIENT WALK DOWN THE JERICHO ROAD

Dr. George Lee

Luke 10:27-28 (*Luke 10:25-36*)

27 He answered: “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 love you neighbor as yourself.” 28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

The road to Jericho from Jerusalem was a descent of at least 18 miles, going through the rocky, rough, rugged terrain of jagged, jugged, and juxtaposed paths, crisscrossing through the draining, debilitating and deserted desert. Many a religious person traversed these paths going visiting the religious hub of Jerusalem, practicing the rigorous responsibilities of one’s faith. It is quite interesting to note that as these religious pundits are now on their way home having fulfilled the lawful activity of their faith. They’ve practiced and fulfilled letter of the law, however unwilling to practice the spirit of the law. Sensing what they saw, they purposefully passed someone who had been beaten, bruised, bloody and broken.

What benefit would be derived from dealing with someone who is a few breaths from becoming a corpse. Why should someone place themselves in a situation that could defile them and even cause them to return to Jerusalem to “repeat” their religious obligation? The answer is quite simple, inconvenience. Our spiritual walk is a walk of inconvenience. Helping someone who may require extra attention or intentional compassion is inconvenient. Loving someone through the addictions of life is inconvenient. Serving others who may not be able to serve us is inconvenient. How many neighbors do we pass on our way “home,” that space and place we have conveniently chosen with those who are easy to love, help, and serve effortlessly. How often do we leave neighborhoods of worship to navigate, circumvent, and avoid the mere thought of being inconvenienced with the least, left-out, lost and last of our society? Those who were robbed of their dignity by systems designed to keep them as the tail and not the head; vandalized of their possessions by those who have more than can be used in one lifetime; and burglarized by society’s successful attempts to launder their knowledge and talents to advance the exploits of unrighteous mammon.

During this season, let us return to those who have been beaten and robbed by the ills of society. Let us return to those who were dejected and despised who are now being restored, replenished, revived and renewed. Let us return to ensure not only that they are recovering but they are truly restored.

Prayer: Merciful Creator, grant each of us the spirit that was placed upon the Samaritan. As we walk with Christ on the Lenten road, lead us to moral and physical regions that shall prove inconvenient and uncomfortable as we love, learn, and live a life that honors You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 27

Friday, March 19, 2021

THE ART OF COMING TO YOURSELF

Rev. Dr. Donaldson Jones

Luke 15:17-18

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him; Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.”

Jesus in the story of the lost son, takes the brush of Divine wisdom, dips it in the bucket of ultimate truth and paints on the canvas of our human hearts a portrait of God’s unfathomable and unfailing love. The significance of this short story is that it is the spiritual autobiography of us all.

When the young man leaves the father who represents God; he leaves as we do the source and spiritual compass of selfhood. When we leave God out of our lives we abandon our *raison d’etre*, our reason for being.

Thanks be to God as verse 17 explicates; that one who may be indulging in the insanity of iniquity can come to one’s senses. As we follow the son’s ideological itinerary, we should be able to assimilate and articulate the art of coming to one’s self.

First, one must come to the **rational realization** of where he or she is in their state of mind. One should ask oneself, am I on the trajectorial path of finding my purpose and fulfilling my potential or just feeding my piggish tendencies?

A second corollary of coming to one’s self is **resolute resilience**. The downward spiral of this Jewish lad led from the Father’s house through the far country to the hog pen trail. He resolves in the hog pen, “I will arise and go to my father.” In order to get up, the mind must be made up. May we so cognitively restructure our thinking ethically, educationally, economically and ecclesiastically, that we would live by the mantra of my spiritual grandfather, Dr. Jesse Bottoms, Sr., “Don’t give up till you go up.”

Thirdly, the art of coming to one’s self requires **real repentance**. Real repentance is seeing sin as one act that is triangular in substance. Sin is always against God, others and ourselves. Therefore, repentance is coming to an earnest empathetic experiencing of the excruciation we have caused the Heart of the Heavenly Father, others and ourselves. The prodigal in verse 18 illustrates repentance as an articulated apology accompanied and authenticated by affirmative actions.

Prayer: May we rationally, resiliently, and repentantly come to our senses. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Day 28

Saturday, March 20, 2021

THE INESCAPABLE ONE

Dr. Brandon Whitehurst

Psalm 139:7

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out our hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me.

Psalm 139 captures a picture of a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent; simply stated God knows everything is everywhere and all powerful.

As believers we should be comforted to realize that even when life presents circumstances that cause us to become guarded, secretive, perhaps even ashamed around others, with God we can be honest and transparent by facing the facts.

Some would ask what are the facts? The facts are plainly, that without God there would not be any comfort, provision, peace, or protection just to name a few. Especially, for those of us who have needed those things more now than in times past.

May we be strengthened during this Lenten season by knowing that even in our darkest days and nights God is the inescapable one.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for being inescapable. May we continue to grow in love and understanding. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Day 29

Monday, March 22, 2021

THE OTHER SHEEPFOLD

Dr. Bruce N. Alick

John 10:14-18

14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father —and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life —only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. This is how in this text, Jesus described himself. As such, Jesus watches over His flock. He protects and provides for His flock. He comforts and corrects, His flock. He is willing to lay down His life, for His flock. But, praise be to His holy name, dear reader, that does not allow us, who claim to be of His flock, to be limited in our outlook or our outreach. Notice what verse 16 states: *“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”*

Jesus informs us that He has “other sheep”. They are not in the immediate “sheep pen” or “sheepfold” that He has called into being. Yet, they know His voice, they will listen to His voice, and when they respond to His voice, we will be one flock, with one Shepherd.

The questions that ought disturb us out of spiritual complacency, in this Lenten Season, are: (1) who are the other sheep? (2) where do we find them? and, (3) do they hear the voice of Jesus through our ministries and our lives? Time and “word limitations,” will not allow me to give an exposition on all three questions.

Therefore, let’s consider, for a moment, the last question: do they hear the voice of Jesus, through us, wherever they are and irrespective of who they are? Whether we are clergy or laity, can the voice of Jesus be heard through our ministries and the lives we live? Will the work we do, speak for us? What exactly do people hear from you or through you, as they listen for the Shepherd’s voice? Do they hear hellfire without the hope of heaven, condemnation without compassion, and self-righteousness without self-sacrifice?

What do you say and how far are you willing to go, in this Lenten Season and beyond, for those who are not of this sheepfold? The fear of being hurt, must not deter you. The late Bob Marley once said, “The truth is, everyone is going to hurt you...you just got to find the ones worth suffering for.” Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep found them. So must you and I.

Prayer: Gracious Shepherd, make us more like you, and allow those who are not of this sheepfold, to hear your voice through all that we say and do. In the name of Jesus, Amen!

Day 30

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

HEADED FOR TROUBLE

Dr. Amos Jones, Jr.

John 11:14-15 (*John 11:11-16*)

14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.

In his book, *THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the sobering statement that "the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning... When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Bonhoeffer lived to experience the dire meaning of his own words. He was martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ as Lord – he died at the hands of Adolph Hitler.

The text that claims our interest enshrouds the story of the death of Lazarus, Jesus' friend. The word came to Jesus that his friend was dead. There is some discussion as to Lazarus' condition, whether he is "asleep" or actually is "dead." Jesus affirms that Lazarus is "dead". In response to Jesus' intention to go see about his friend, Thomas, the one who is called Didymus, emphatically enjoins "Let us go that we might die with him." For Thomas and the rest of the disciples, they are willing to die with Jesus. This is their commitment as followers of the Christ.

As followers of Jesus, we too of this modern era, must be willing to die for Christ. Christianity is not some happy life where God's in His heaven and all's right with the world. Our forebears learned the poignant lesson that to stand for Christ meant to lose your life. They sang with sanguine sadness that "Before I'd be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., knew the price he was destined to pay for standing for Christ was to give his life.

We are living in a dangerous age. Donald Trump has set himself out as a god. Unashamedly, he proclaims to have done more for Christianity than Jesus. Government officials and employees have discovered that to differ with him is to lose their job or position. God is merciful in that He brought about an election that brought down Trump from his seat of power. Had he the chance, Trump could have done to Black people, the same as Hitler did to 6 million Jews. But, like Thomas, it would be ours to say, in our devotion to Jesus as our Lord, "Let us go that we might die with him."

Prayer: Father, the call is to follow Your Son, Jesus Christ, and to follow Him even when it is clear that He is headed into trouble. May we be willing to suffer with Him that we may reign with Him also. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 31

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

THE TEARS OF JESUS

Dr. Schmitt Moore

John 11:35

35 Jesus wept.

The Tears of Jesus are very **“Telling Tears.”** In His tears, we see an expression of the Trinitarian Godhead. Jesus’ tears tell of the richness and depths of His compassion for mankind. In John 14:9 when Phillip had asked Jesus to show us the Father, Jesus said to Phillip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” In Jesus’ tears, we also see the passion and concern of the Holy Spirit who grieves over our disobedience and delayed spiritual development. (Ephesian 4:30)

For the saved Christ-like born-again redeemed believers who are called and chosen to be like Him, it is expected of us to have hearts that will shed Christ-like tears when looking at the woes of the world. The death of Lazarus did not bother Jesus as much as the lack of faith of Mary, Martha and the Jews. He groaned in the Spirit and was troubled and then “He wept!” Jesus was weeping and groaning because they did not know the power of believing in Him. They did not know affirmatively that God had sent Him. They had not fully believed that the Father was in Him and He was in the Father. Simply, they did not know who nor what they had in His Person and Presence. Therefore, “Jesus wept!” Jesus desired for them to know Him and the power of His resurrection for them and for their family’s salvation. This moved Him to weeping tears of sorrow.

That same Jesus who represents the heart of God and pressing passion of the Holy Spirit is yet walking around in the crowd among us looking at the ills and hurts of the world that are born out of people not knowing Him. I believe Jesus is weeping when He looks at preachers who are consumed with believing they have to be players, pimps and hustles in order to prosper. I believe He is weeping when He sees prostitutes who have more faith in their craft than they do their Christ. I believe Jesus is weeping when He looks and sees so many churches that are stationary and not missionary. He is weeping while so many around our world are crying and dying in need of water, food, and shelter while the church is too consumed with building competitive buildings and budgets to boast about. In too many cases, addicts and people from the lower rim of life are almost written off by many of us when the purpose of His coming was to seek and to save that which was lost.

My brothers and sisters, can we rededicate ourselves and substance to trying to help dry up the tears of Jesus? Can we earmark a better portion of our time, treasure and talent to reach the less fortunate? Can we dig deep in our resolve and resources to reach the lost for Christ so that He would not have to weep and cry so much?

Prayer: Lord, help us to share in your passion and power to let your will be done in your church that you have privileged us to be a part of. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Day 32

Thursday, March 25, 2021

THE CALL TO FRIENDSHIP

Rev. McFord B. Chipuliko

John: 15:15

15 "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his masters' business, instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my father I have made known to you.

Jesus Christ is Lord and Master; and He should call us servants. A servant receives commands of the master without knowing the reasons why. It is one of the conditions of a servant, not knowing the plan of the Master. Jesus now calls us friends, making us to be acquainted with reasons of His coming, His going and all His secrets. Jesus has chosen us to be His friend and He treats us as friends. A friend is the one who is not an enemy, but a companion, a partner. Friends are committed to each other. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is based on His love and commitment to us, that leads to a personal relationship with us as friends. Yes, we are servants, for whom Christ laid down His life so that we might become friends. One-sided friendship is not true friendship, true friendship involves sharing information and responsibilities.

Now that we are friends of Jesus Christ, He has opened our minds and revealed His plans about His Coming, His death, His resurrection and His ascension; we need not disappoint Him. He has called us to fit together our relationship with Him and with each other. Jesus came to soften our hearts to help us yield to the relationship that can shape our lives into the pattern He designed for us. As friends, Jesus Christ wants us to love Him and He asks us to obey Him, not just as servants, but as His friend, as He has revealed us to us His Father's will. The Lord, Jesus, who is eternal and everlasting has picked us up and we have entered His inner circle of friends. We are now elevated into a state of heavenly friendship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for raising me up and calling me your friend. You laid down your life to be in relationship with me. Help me to always understand and do your will. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 33

Friday, March 26, 2021

UNNOTICED OPPORTUNITIES

Min. James G. Graves

Matthew 25: 40, 45 (*Matt. 25:31-46*)

40 “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’... 45 ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

Many in today’s fast-pace society have become technocrats, with our heads buried in computers, cellphones, iPads, etc. We are listening to audio books, reading and writing emails, playing games, etc., so much so until we often fail to take note of and respond appropriately to the pressing needs of others right around us.

Helping the needy is one of the major themes in the Bible. The Levitical Law institutionalized giving to help the needy, and Jesus made the subject a major focus of His teaching, and He taught His disciples to do likewise.

Here in Jesus’s lesson on the Sheep and the Goats, He provides an example of how important it is to be thoughtful and responsive towards the needy. Jesus reminds us of the evil

of ignoring human pain and suffering. He encourages us to seize every opportunity to do something good for those who are clearly in need.

Americans are among the wealthiest people in the world, but so many of us live hard-headed, self-centered and self-satisfied lives. It is so easy to claim to know Jesus Christ who came to serve and help others, and yet fail to seize every opportunity to aid and assist others who are in desperate need, as Jesus did. Just think about the way the richest nation in the world has addressed the current COVID-19 crisis. Our government could have done so much more to protect the most vulnerable among us, but, the greater interest seems to be stroking the ego of our outgoing President at the expense of the most vulnerable in our society. Could we have missed the opportunity to save thousands of weak and vulnerable lives?

Let’s face it, we all have something to share, be it our wealth, our talents, or our time; and we all see the many opportunities to do something. Jesus says, in essence, “When you see them, you see Me. And when you fail to see them, you fail to see Me.” May we be very careful not to ignore the cries of others in need, because to do so may mean we have failed to render service to our Lord and Master.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us to open our eyes, ears and hearts to notice and respond to the needs of others—strangers and believers alike. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Day 34

Saturday, March 27, 2021

RELEASING IT FOR HIS SERVICE

Dr. Frank Kennedy

Mark 11:2-3

2 ...saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, “Why are you doing this?” say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’ “

Nathaniel Jenkins Jr, the grandson of William Anderson, shares his grandfather’s incredible military feat as an American War Hero. As a child, he remembers visiting his grandfather, and often his grandfather would show him his service medal for his courageous service in World War I. He recalls, “My grandfather would beam with pride every time he displayed the medal.” His grandfather’s military service earned him a distinguish medal, the Croix de Guerre or Cross of War. Nathaniel Jenkins Jr, admits that he did not comprehend the significance of his grandfather’s service.

The triumphal entry on Palm Sunday was the beginning of Holy Week for Jesus. Holy Week, the final week of Lent was the celebration of the Jewish feast of Passover; ultimately, Jesus would embody and enact the sacrificial offering for the sins of humanity. As the Lord prepares to enter Jerusalem, He sends two disciples on a faith mission to go and bring a colt, which no one has ever ridden, for the sacred purpose of fulfilling prophesy (Zechariah 9:9-10) and perfecting His salvific assignment (Mark 10:45). He instructs His disciples, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. And if anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it’; and immediately He will send it back here.”

Jesus says specifically to the disciples, untie him, release him for my service. The colt was tied for the distinct purpose, and timely privilege of serving Jesus. The service of the two disciples reflects adherence to visionary leadership. Our unique call to Christian service demands our openness to the vision and voice of Jesus Christ. In submissive obedience, we must always serve the agenda of the kingdom as directed by the Spirit of Christ. Always remembering: “The Lord has need of you.”

Prayer: Precious Lord, I thank you for my salvation, and the privilege of serving you in the Spirit of Christ. Grant unto me wisdom to discern your vision and voice for my life and labor. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 35

Monday, March 29, 2021

THE PARADE OF ALL PARADES

Dr. Calvin J. McFadden, Sr.

Matthew 21:8-9

8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Hosanna in the highest!"

When the President of the United States travels, it is no small undertaking. Months, weeks and days before his departure, secret service and other authorities are on site preparing for the President's arrival. No stone is left unturned and no detail escapes their scrutiny. Once when Jesus was going somewhere, He sent two of His disciples ahead saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of me and at once you will find a donkey tied there with her colt. Untie them and bring them to me." And the disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They placed their cloaks on the donkeys and Jesus sat on them. And that's how our King landed in Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday.

It was the time of year when the Jewish people celebrated the Passover and Jesus' plan was to go from Bethany, over the Mt. of Olives and down into the city of Jerusalem where He would celebrate the Passover, but more importantly, begin what we call Holy Week. But, things are not always as they seem on the surface. The followers of Christ and the crowds were thinking about *crowns and thrones*; Jesus was thinking of *thorns and a cross*. This triumphal entry was His last major public appearance before His crucifixion. It was an extremely important event in His divine ministry on earth, an event that is seldom studied carefully or understood for its true significance.

During this Lenten season, we may find ourselves among the crowds who follow the Jesus parade. But, let us be reminded of just what it is that has drawn us to Jesus. The inhabitants of Jerusalem heard Jesus' message, they attested to His miracles, and they even acknowledged His divinity, but they rejected His saviorhood and His lordship. They were totally earthbound, materialistic and self-satisfied. They were interested only in the kingdoms of this world, not the kingdom of heaven. They would have accepted Jesus as an earthly king, but they would not have Him as their heavenly King. May we not make the same mistake, but have our praise of Jesus connected in a life of genuine worship of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord God, as long ago, so many join the parade with the wrong understanding of who You really are and what You are all about. Help us to be sure that our praise of Christ is connected to genuine worship of You and Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 36

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

BLOOD MONEY

Dr. Marcus Davidson

Matthew 27:3-5 (*Matt. 27:1-10*)

3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4 “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.” What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.” 5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Judas agreed to betray Jesus and take the angry mob to where Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane in exchange for thirty pieces of silver. In today’s currency, that is about \$600.00.

After Jesus is arrested, Judas realized the gravity of his mistake. However, his change of mind is too late at this point. The chief priests refuse and reject the return.

How many times has Satan used our weakness to work out his will! This narrative in the passion of our Christ is a reminder that we are guilty of being like Judas all too often. We are not strangers to using money to get rid of problems. We use money to pay the lawn-man to rid our lawn of weeds – a problem. We use money at the cleaners to rid our clothes of wrinkles – a problem. We use our money to pay the exterminator to rid our home of bugs – a problem.

Nevertheless, we must remember, we can never use money to rid our lives of the problems we have. There is no way to cover up the shame, guilt and sin of our lives; Only the blood of Jesus can do that. After making the mistake he made, Judas wanted to use the blood money to cover his failure. It is Christ and Christ alone who can pay for our faults and failures. It cost Jesus His life. His blood. That is real “blood money.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach us that there is a proper use of money. Teach us that there are things that money cannot buy. Help us to put the proper use of money in perspective. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Day 37

Wednesday, March 31, 2021

THY WILL, O LORD, NOT MINE

Rev. Derrick L. Boykin

Matthew 26:39

39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Here we find Jesus in a crucial moment of decision. This very moment highlights Jesus’ freewill as a man; the very same freewill held by all women and men. Jesus is faced with the possibility to choose a path for His life outside that of God the Father’s. Actually, this is a struggle of wills – the will of humanity versus the will of God. The choice here before Jesus is whose will shall He submit to?

Let’s never forget, this was no easy decision for the Nazarene; by far this was the toughest of all the choices He had to make during His earthly sojourn. For through his mortal eyes, he sees looming in that cup a horrific fatality – his very own! He knows the enemy has surrounded him and the cross is planted firmly before him. So, in the midst of this life and death struggle, he prays at first that God may come up with an alternative plan for him. However, his prayer doesn’t stop there! Even in that dreadful hour, the light of faith, trust and devotion to God Most-High shines forth in Him. With bended knee, Jesus’ immovable faith moves him to resign his very will to that of God the Father’s.

The lesson for us here is this: Jesus teaches us the most excellent and triumphant way is always in submission to God’s will. This was true for Jesus then and this is true for us now. In Jesus’s submission to God’s way—in spite of the tribulations faced at that moment – there rose out of that dark hour eternal and glorious blessings for all of humanity. It led to the defeat of our greatest foes – Satan, sin, death, hell and the grave –, while it simultaneously opened the gates of salvation to whosoever will believe on His holy name. Hallelujah to you Jesus!

Prayer: Eternal Father, despite the challenges of this hour, let your will be done, not mine! In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 38

Thursday, April 1, 2021

THE ELOQUENCE OF SILENCE

Rev. Dr. George T. Brooks, Jr.

Mark 15:5

5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us many lessons during His earthly ministry. He taught us lessons on forgiveness, judging others and loving enemies just to name a few. In this passage Jesus teaches us another life lesson. This time it was a lesson on the eloquence of silence.

The leaders of the Jewish religious hierarchy conspired among themselves and brought Jesus to Pilate. As it is with most enemies, they brought unfounded and felonious charges against Him. They had already declared Him to be guilty among themselves. However, the Jews needed Pilate to approve and exact his power of capital punishment.

As these Jewish leaders began to spread their untruths as to the teachings of Jesus, Jesus did an unusual thing. He never tried to respond to what was said about Him. Despite all they said, He refused to open His mouth.

His silence amazed Pilate. The word “*amazed*” here means to wonder, to marvel, to be struck with admiration or astonishment. Pilate was filled with amazement because he had seen the Jews vigorously and relentlessly seek to destroy the character of Jesus, an innocent man. Yet Jesus never spoke a word in His own defense.

We would do well to emulate the actions of Jesus in this passage. There will be people in life who will tell untruths about us as well as seek to destroy our character. But we should be like Jesus who was aware of the falsehood of the charges and chose not to dignify their slurs and insults with words. The eloquence of His silence spoke volumes about His character and conduct.

Prayer: Dear Lord give us the strength to remain silent against Satan's attack. Help us to lean on you. You are our sword and shield; you will redeem our character and conduct in the face of our enemies, if we just hold our peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 39

Friday, April 2, 2021

HE HAD TO DIE

Dr. Ngwedla Paul Msiza
Matthew 27: 50-52

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.

The gospel of Matthew states that it was after the ninth hour when Jesus finally said the last words and breathed for the last time and gave up His spirit. His lifeless body hung on the cross. John in his gospel says, that even when Jesus had died, the soldiers and Jewish leaders were not convinced that He was dead. In order to satisfy themselves that Jesus was indeed dead, one soldier pierced Him on the side with a spear and blood and water gushed out. He was dead. They did not understand that He had to die at that hour, hanging on the cross outside the wall of Jerusalem. God spoke through the prophets that the Messiah will come to die for the world (Isaiah 53). There was no other way that could satisfy the requirement for the redemption and the atonement for sins of the world, except that Jesus should die a cruel death on the cross.

The text mentioned several important occurrences which happened when Jesus gave up His spirit. The curtain of the temple, also called the temple veil, was torn from top to bottom. This is the curtain which divided the Holy Place from Holy of Holiest, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. That veil was not made of an ordinary cloth. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, this veil was 60 feet tall and 4 inches thick. It could not tear easily. This curtain barred people from accessing God's Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Tabernacle in the Most Holy Place.

This temple veil has symbolic meaning. It represented our separation from God, the Old Testament and the separation between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus had to die so that the veil could be torn and removed. At that moment, the Old Testament was ended and abolished. A new and living way into God's Mercy Seat was opened for all people, of all ethnic groups and languages on the face of the earth. If Christ had not died, the veil would be still standing and Gentiles would remain excluded from God's Covenant. The access into the presence of God and to the Mercy Seat would still be closed. Now that the veil was torn and removed: "*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal 3:28).

Prayer: Christ, you died on the cross for the sins of all humanity. Your body was torn to open a new way, which brings us into the presence of the Father and reconciles us to one another. I pray that the world will discover and experience the true reconciliation through Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 40

Saturday, April 3, 2021

A STONE, A SEAL, A SECURITY

Rev. Dr. John J. Cox
Matthew 27:66

66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

We are in an unusually sacred space. This scene is the uneven terra-firma where our salvation hung in the balance. Jesus the son of God, the Word made flesh has died an ignominious death outside the brown walls of the old city. His remains had been placed in Joseph's new tomb as a sign of quiet, uninvited respect. Joseph rolled a stone over the entrance of the tomb. And in response to resurrection rumors reverberating through the city, Pilate ordered that a seal and extra security be placed at the tomb. The obvious goal was to keep Jesus inside the tomb. But that was a calculated error. Pilate must not have known that God does his best work on the inside.

Adam will tell you I didn't come alive until the breath of God moved on the inside of me. Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night heard him say you must be born again – what is that but inside work. Cleophas and his companion will be walking and talking with the risen savior and when He leaves them, they will say together, “did not our hearts burn”, that's the inside work of God. But, more intimately you know God saves us from the inside out. One by one God stamps the imprimatur of Christ on our hearts.

Certainly, all was dark and quiet inside the tomb on what has become known as Silent Saturday. What Pilate, nor the seal, nor the stone, nor the security knew, was that quiet and darkness are ideal conditions for the creative work of God. When it gets dark and still in your life have you noticed how God can give you peace and comfort? Does it not bring back to your remembrance a time before time began when there was no sound and no light and God started talking with so much authority that things started happening. And things kept happening until everything that was a never before, became an already am. This quiet darkness behind the security, the seal and the stone might just become the backdrop for a new creation story. I believe I heard Him say He was going to make all things new.

Prayer: Lord in the still dark places in life where we are all closed in by circumstance, remind us that you are God over all, in all and through all. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Resurrection Sunday

Sunday, April 4, 2021

THE CONTINUING REALITY OF EASTER

Dr. J. Albert Bush, Sr.
St. Mark 16: 5-6

5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 6 “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus... who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here...”

By far, the absolute most important event in the long record of human history occurred two-thousand-twenty-one years ago. It wasn't a military invasion; a scientific discovery; a declaration of independence; an international treaty; or some sort of global trade agreement. It was a victory. Not a political or military victory, but, a spiritual victory. A victory of good over evil, of truth over falsehood, of love over hate, and of life over death. It was a victory brought about through the vicarious suffering and death and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Mark says that the miracle began, “Very early on the first day of the week.” But it was much more than the “first day of the week.” It was also the first day of new era; the first day of bright new

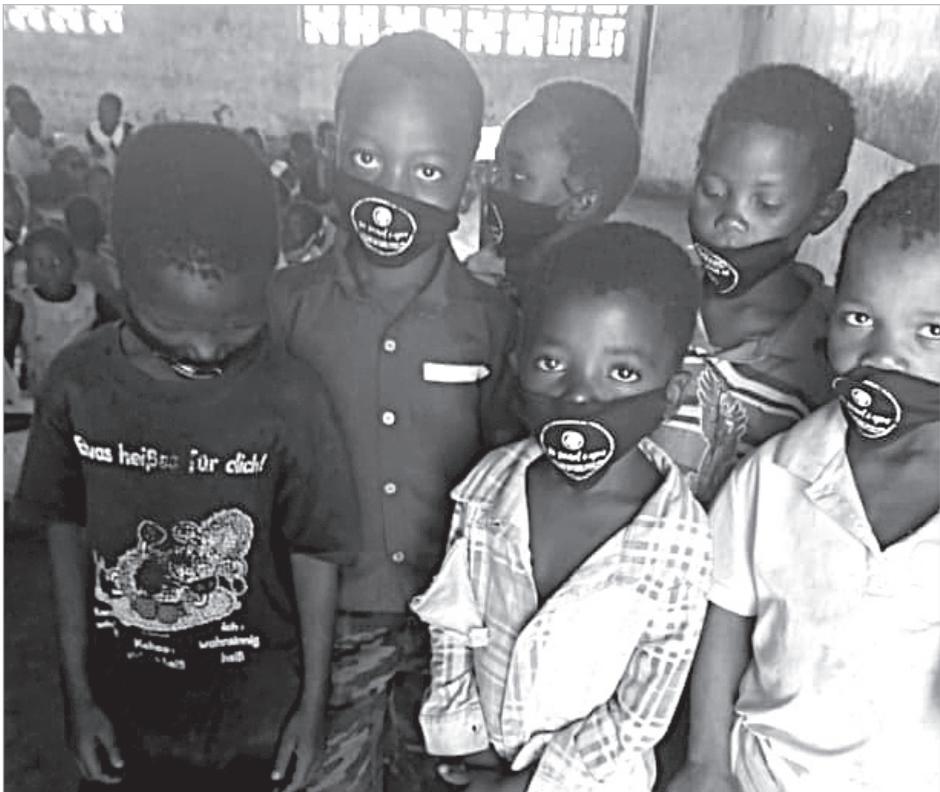


beginning; the first day of a new found faith; the first day of a new found hope; the first day of a radical new message; the first day of new found fellowship; and the first day of a new world community. On the third day, out of the gloom of the cemetery came the triumphant cry, “He is risen! He is not here.”

I offer you no arguments or theories concerning what happened, but it is certain that something extraordinary happened. Suddenly, the darkness disappeared and the dawn quickly came into being. Weeping was turned into joy. The slow, solemn march to the tomb was transformed into wild enthusiasm as the women went running to tell the glad news, “We have seen the Lord-not dead, but alive.”

Two-Thousand-Twenty-One years have come and gone since the angel announced the good news, and here we are today still celebrating. Just think about it: Centuries have piled upon centuries; Civilizations have sprouted and faded; Empires have risen and fallen; Kingdoms have bloomed and faded; and Dynasties have been built and collapsed. But praise be to our God, the Resurrection is here to stay. Let us then live in its power and die in its hope.

Prayer: O, Jehovah El Shaddia, we praise and adore You for Your awesome power by which You raised Jesus Christ, Your Son and Our Lord from the dead. Help us to live and labor in the power of its continuing reality. In Jesus' name, Amen.



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