

Sunday, April 3, 2022

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

READ: Mark 6:30-44

OPENING PRAYER: Father, feed me today as I meditate on this Scripture. Amen.

MEDITATION: I grew up on Wonder Bread. That's what we had in those days, not much to be desired. Then I discovered real bread: Fresh-baked, homemade, baked, warm. Nothing like it.

Jesus and the disciples had been super busy all day. There were people everywhere "coming and going" looking for Jesus, watching Jesus, listening to Jesus. The disciples had no chance to rest or eat. They tried to get away by boat but couldn't. A crowd of more than five thousand followed them by land and were waiting on the other shore. It was late in the day. They were hungry. The subject of eating came up. Jesus suggested that the disciples feed the people. They had no idea how that could possibly happen. No money. No food. But then they were able to scrounge up a few loaves of bread and fewer fish.

Notice that Jesus looked up to heaven and blessed what little the disciples had found (vs. 41). He gave thanks for what they had. As a result, all ate and all were satisfied. There was not only enough, there was more left over than they began with. Real "Wonder" bread. To thank God for a little is the way to obtain much. **This is not a story of the greatest magician. It's the story of the great Provider.**

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, help me to believe who you really are, and be truly thankful. Amen.

Ray Larsen

Monday, April 4, 2022

TUG OF WAR

READ: Psalm 119:105-112

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, open our ears to hear and our hearts to accept your word. Amen.

MEDITATION: I find this passage both easy to read and difficult to understand at the same time. It starts with an opening metaphor that I am sure is familiar to most, so much so that we even have songs dedicated to it. I can't count the number of times I've said this phrase, yet I feel uneasy reading this passage. Why? Am I truly living my life according to the word? Has this phrase become so commonplace that it has lost its very meaning?

I often find myself late at night working on countless spreadsheets – not for work – but for various parts of my life: planning out Christmas gifts in July, creating step-by-step plans for my MBA, tracking my finances, and so on. Yet, this passage tears away at the illusion of planning and control we think we may have. We say we give God control, but I think most of us act as if we are in a game of tug of war and can never fully let go. David also acknowledges this.

CLOSING THOUGHT: I invite anyone feeling anxious about giving away control to take a deep breath. God doesn't expect us to be perfect, but he expects us to at least try. I pray that we continue to give more and more of our lives over to God.

Sara Pelster

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

OUR UNITY IS IN CHRIST

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:1-15

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, we are prone to division and quick to compare. Open our eyes to see your image in one another as you conform us to the image of Christ. Amen.

MEDITATION: It's amazing how much our culture is driven by personalities and popularity. This can creep into the church as well. The Corinthian church apparently fell victim to this with Paul, Peter, and Apollos, none of whom likely encouraged it in any way. Perhaps we gravitate toward those we perceive as like-minded, perhaps to smooth orators, perhaps to those who simply already have a following. And we love to think of ourselves as superior, as being on the "winning team." But when divisions arise within the church that set believer against believer, our witness to the world suffers greatly. And God's heart is broken.

But if we are in Christ at all, we are one in Christ, for Christ cannot be divided. We may disagree, we may emphasize different gifts and ministries, but we are always only one in Spirit. For you see, we don't come to Christ in unity and agreement. We come to him in division and brokenness. And Christ himself draws us to himself and we become one in him. He alone is the source and the substance of our unity, not uniformity: For God loves our diversity, after all, he created it! He loves community and interdependence. As we draw closer to Christ, inevitably we draw closer to one another. This is a winsome witness - and a joy to God!

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, you alone are both the source and substance of our community. Draw us closer to you, and thereby closer to one another, and may our unity be your glory. Amen.

Bill Ward

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

READ: Mark 8:34-38

OPENING PRAYER: Father, thank you for wanting what is best for me. Thank you for having mercy on me, even when my fear overwhelms me. Help me to remember that when I take up my cross, you took it up first, for me and for all of your people. Open my heart to you today. Amen.

MEDITATION: In his last days, Jesus tried so hard to get through to his disciples. Earlier in Chapter 8, Jesus is still trying to pound into the disciples' heads that when he is gone and all they have is memories, they need to remember his miracles, and remember the good times. He reminds them that others will try to turn them against his memory (v. 15 "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."). Just like today, many people in that generation would try to shame them for following Jesus. Today it is difficult, not to mention scary, to stand up for Jesus. People in other countries face prison and death. Here in America, we may face public humiliation, job loss, fines, and jail. When we follow the way of the cross, we are often in direct opposition to the way of the world. Denying ourselves means a lot more than giving up something we really enjoy for Lent. Giving up chocolate or coffee is a lot easier than losing a friend, our job, or being sued. If all we have is this world, it doesn't really make any sense, right? But that's not where it ends. The Greek word used in this passage means either "life" or "soul"; while our life here will end eventually, our soul is saved in Jesus. Thank you, Jesus!

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, give me courage to stand up for you and your words in the world today. I can't do this without your strength. Thank you for caring for me. Amen.

Amy Trevino

Thursday, April 7, 2022

GOD'S GRACE: A RENEWAL

READ: Psalm 51

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for the power of grace and forgiveness and help us to understand the power of your love. Amen.

MEDITATION: Children are one of the most precious blessings. Sure, the sleepless nights, the worry, the work, the exhaustion – it's all difficult, but when I see my children, I can't imagine loving anyone more. It's a powerful perspective and one that I am grateful to have. These are my children – I would do anything and everything for them. This is how God feels about you and me. It's incredible.

Psalm 51 helps us to better understand this. On first pass, Psalm 51 can seem intense. The psalmist, David, is reflecting on the story told in 2 Samuel 12, where David is confronted by the prophet Nathan about his adultery with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of her husband. It's a tough story, but it gives us more than just the pain of guilt and shame. Psalm 51 shows us the power of God's forgiveness and teaches us to turn away from sin and instead turn toward God. When we do this, we see that it doesn't just alleviate guilt, but rather it fosters a deep joy, which is what we need to seek in our relationship with the Lord.

After my children have made a mistake, I don't look at them with disdain. I want to help them through it – to help them fix it – to love them through any situation. This is God's love for us. It's unfailing. It's full of mercy, grace, and most importantly, a renewal.

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for allowing us to seek and to have a relationship with you. Open our hearts to the power of your forgiveness, love, grace, mercy. Amen.

Nichole Zuger-Cheney

Friday, April 8, 2022

SOARING ON WINGS LIKE EAGLES

READ: Isaiah 40:28-31

OPENING PRAYER: Father God, your grace and love are beyond our understanding. Nothing on earth compares to you. Your power is limitless. We are like dust compared to you but still you've chosen us as your people. I'm thankful that you created us and that you care for us. May we continue to faithfully put our trust in you. Amen.

MEDITATION: People often ask if I like my job and my response is always the same, "I think I have the best job in the world." I work for the Department of Transportation on the Incident Response Team. This means I get to spend my workdays helping drivers in need and getting the road clear in order to minimize traffic backups from incidents. It is a very rewarding job.

While reflecting on this passage in Isaiah, I was trying to think of the time I felt most powerless. Of course, work came to mind. If you've ever stepped out of a vehicle onto an active freeway (I don't recommend it!) you know it makes you feel pretty powerless very fast. It is encouraging to remember that God is all powerful. He doesn't rely on us or anything for his power, but we can rely on him. Despite the fact that we are mere dust, compared to him, he gives us power and strength. Power and strength are a GIFT that he GIVES to us when we trust him despite our weakness. The Lord has our backs when we trust in him. We can run and not grow weary. We will soar with wings like eagles!

CLOSING PRAYER: Father, we give you thanks for your hand of protection on us. We are encouraged by the promise of your gift of strength despite our weaknesses. I pray that as we go forward today and forever that we would remember that we are trusting in you for our strength. May we continue to faithfully trust you every day. We pray this in your name. Amen.

AJ Brumfield

Saturday, April 9, 2022

HOMECOMING

READ: Psalm 84

OPENING PRAYER: Father, our souls are never truly satisfied apart from your presence. Please give us the wisdom and courage to put you first in the choices we make each day. Help us to look forward to our homecoming with you. Amen.

MEDITATION: Whenever our family is bored (especially on long car rides) we like to play a game that we call “would you rather?” One person asks a silly question such as, “Would you rather have to wear only purple for the rest of your life, or have to wear the same single outfit every day forever?”, or “Would you rather have the beak of an ostrich, or the feet of a penguin?” Then each person takes turns answering and explaining why they chose their answer. For us it’s a game that keeps us laughing and thinking creatively. But in reading Psalm 84, we’re reminded that the Bible has several of its own more serious “would-you-rathers.” Would you rather live one day in God’s courts, or 1,000 elsewhere? Would you rather be a doorkeeper in God’s house, or dwell in the tents of the wicked?

Psalm 84 describes a final home so beautiful, so comfortable, so peaceful that it’s worth the work, the wait, and the sacrifice. This house of the Lord is worth giving up the comforts and lifestyle of this world. The word used to describe the pathway to this destination is “pilgrimage”, which is no easy walk, but a long and tiring journey. May we not give up on our journey or settle for anything less than the courts of the Lord!

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord God, blessed is the one who trusts in you. Help us to choose your courts each day. A life with you is worth more than anything this world has to offer us. Fulfill the yearning of our hearts for an eternity spent with you. In your name we pray. Amen.

Caroline Brumfield