

2023 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

DRAWING
CLOSER TO
GOD



LITTLE CHURCH ON THE PRAIRIE &
LAKEWOODGRACE

Ash Wednesday, February 22, 2023

BE LIKE CHRIST

READ: Philippians 2:5-11

OPENING PRAYER: Father, please humble my heart so that I may be more Christ-like towards everyone I encounter in life. Amen.

MEDITATION: Have you ever wished you could slow down, breathe the air, and just pay attention? Life is constantly pulling us in so many directions. It seems the only thing that matters is getting the things that need to get done, done. You rush through traffic, getting mad at the driver who just cut you off. You get offended at the cashier that seemed a little less friendly than you're used to.

It's easy to take such things personally. It's hard to pause for a moment and to consider why that driver cut you off or why that cashier was not friendly. If we did, then we would have seen that the driver had young kids and it appeared that she was trying to break up a fight and she honestly didn't see you when she switched lanes. Or that the cashier's eyes were red because she had been crying. I myself, am guilty of this.

That is when I realize, I am falling short from being Christ-like. He "humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death to the cross!" By humbling myself, and not centering things around me, I can be like Christ-like to those around me.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Take the time to slow down to be Christ-like to those around you.

Michelle Adams

Thursday, February 23, 2023

THE PROPHETS KNEW

READ: John 5:39, 44-47, 8:56-58

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for the prophesies of the coming of Jesus, and for the hope, love, and resurrection he brought us. Amen.

MEDITATION: As Jesus worked his way through Jerusalem, he astonished onlookers and believers alike with the miracles he performed. But the Pharisees were skeptical of Jesus and questioned his motives and validity. They believed themselves to be “experts” in the teachings of Abraham and Moses, and thought they knew best about the scriptures. When Jesus declared to them: “I AM”, his very life was in danger!

Today we have the ability look to the Bible for answers. However, we may still struggle with the promises that God gives us by his Word. Or, like the Pharisees, some of us may read the scriptures and think we know better. In actuality, ours is not to question. What God tells us, through his prophets, is that Jesus is and was the Messiah. We should recognize and accept this truth. There is great hope in these teachings and there is great hope for us, as Christians.

God has already told us what is to come. He sent Jesus to wash us of our sins. If we live by our faith and believe in God and Jesus there will be a place for us in heaven. The prophets knew this, and all we have to do is listen.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for saving us from our sins through your son Jesus Christ and for helping strengthen our faith through your Word. Amen.

Joan Jackson & Melissa Jackson

Friday, February 24, 2023

JESUS' PURPOSE IN COMING

READ: Luke 19:10

OPENING PRAYER: Good morning God – Just checking in. I'm enjoying this assignment because it's in this environment that I not only find, but also realize growth in my relationship with you. Now I call upon your Holy Spirit for inspiration and wisdom. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus came to do for you what he has done for me; to provide a bridge, a way back to a relationship with God. It also provides a maintenance/repair manual for a life with him.

I didn't realize what I was doing or what he was doing at the time, but the years of meditating on his Word prepared me for the life I now live: A life of contentment, a life void of fear (2 Timothy 2:7), a life free of stress, anxiety, unforgiveness, jealousy, and all the stuff that robs us of the life Jesus came to provide for us.

I spent years seeking the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). I sought with my heart – not my head and when his Word finally got through to me, I made a conscious decision and commitment to simply TRUST God. While trusting God does require risk, the return on that investment is significant. Why not take a chance and let Jesus complete his mandate?

CLOSING PRAYER: We have so many opportunities to explore and discover that which we do not know. How exciting! Thank you, Father. Amen.

Gordon L. Neu

Saturday, February 25, 2023

ENDURING WORDS OF FREEDOM

READ: Matthew 24:35, John 8:31-32

OPENING PRAYER: Our Father, help our unbelief. Guide us home to live among you and the saints. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus, in Jerusalem, has much to say about the frightening approach of the end times. Jesus says that when the Son of Man comes, he will reclaim his Kingdom for his own, to judge and to rule. That sounds terrifying to me.

But Jesus also reassures us. He tells us that:

- 1) The signs are unmistakable;
- 2) He will come in stunning, inimitable glory; and
- 3) His return will be everlasting – all things around us will vanish and pass away, but not him and not us, so long as we are with him.

His words are both enduring and life-giving. If we abide in his Word, then we are his, we are set free from sin and judgment. But what does it mean to “abide”?

The English word “abide” is translated from the Greek word μένω (pronounced meno). In English, “abide” means simply to reside. But in Greek, μένω also means to stay in another’s house as a guest. In other words, Christ wants us to welcome his hospitality; we reside with him in his home by following him and believing in his words of freedom. We will be known as his disciples, finding life and freedom in the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The coming of the Son of Man is our vindication. We, and all of creation, have longed for this moment since the fall. In that moment, this story will end, and the Great Story of eternity with Jesus will begin.

CLOSING PRAYER: Loving Jesus, help us to joyfully accept your hospitality, adopt your words and truth, and find life and joy in you. Come Lord Jesus, come! Amen.

Toby Steele

First Sunday in Lent, February 26, 2023

COME AND YOU WILL SEE

READ: John 1:35-39; 46-51

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, may we accept and extend your invitation to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Amen.

MEDITATION: Do we see Jesus as he is or merely as we would like to see him? For both the believer and non-believer, come and see is an invitation for all to arrive at a place to assess and examine the evidence.

For Christians, come and see means to come and be a disciple of Jesus, just as he had called those to trust and follow him. Yet, while we may think we are following him, we may find ourselves in pursuit of our own heart and desires. Coming to Jesus with a heart that seeks to see him as he wants to be seen opens the way to a life-altering encounter. *So come and see....*

As social activities ramp up again in this post-COVID era, this is the most opportune time to invite others to visit our church home to meet our spiritual family. The World seems to be gaining momentum in offering people a myriad of distractions to keep God's children away from worship and fellowship.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Imagine going back to busy or simply reflect on how isolating life had become during those lockdown periods. You may be surprised that your family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues are dreading the thought of going back to their former lives and lifestyle. *Therefore, be encouraged to extend God's invitation to come and see....*

Phillip K. Shelton

Monday, February 27, 2023

THE FOUR SOILS

READ: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

OPENING PRAYER: Father, help us understand your Word and make its meaning personal. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus rarely, if ever, spoke to crowds without using parables. The Parable of the Sower appears in all three of the synoptic gospels. It is perhaps the most complex allegory he used in his teaching, but was understood to be one of the most important. Parables are challenging and valuable tools. It is said that humans cannot understand a concept that cannot be compared to something already known.

Many perspectives have been applied to this allegory. And Matthew 13:18-23 offers an explanation that seems to contrast how different individuals (different soils) may respond to the Word.

My personal involvement with our Midwest farming enterprise suggests that virtually every cultivated field has one or more of these 'soil types' that must be contended with every year. It is a never-ending management challenge for the farmer to decide how to farm the field to achieve its maximum potential yield. How we till, plant, fertilize, control weeds, irrigate, harvest, etc., all have an impact on the quality and quantity of grain we produce.

Likewise, I personally find myself dealing with my own 'rocky soil' and my own 'weeds' in my journey to understand and share God's word. I often 'come up short' in the 'fertile soil' category.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Perhaps that is the lesson. First, that I understand that life will be constantly filled with challenges like these. Second, that I need to continually seek to understand God's plan for my life and work toward maximizing my potential yield.

Bill Miner

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

NOT WHERE TO WORSHIP, BUT HOW

READ: John 4:6-26

OPENING THOUGHT: Jesus loved us so much that he took the punishment I deserved for all my shortcomings and sinful ways. My Lord Jesus changed the world forever, regardless of race or nationality, all were welcome – strong, weak, rich, or poor.

- Forgiveness of sin, allowing a personal relationship through prayer
- Destroyer of death
- Promising eternal life with Jesus in heaven

MEDITATION: John 4:25–26 The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming (who is call Christ). When he comes he will tell us all things.”

Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

When in prayer, speak from the heart, truthful, good or bad, and share all feelings. He knows our thoughts and needs. By asking in prayer, we show faith and this is pleasing to God.

When worshipping with brothers and sisters in Christ, shout in song, praise, worship, and prayer.

When you find yourselves with non-believers, pray in your heart. He always hears our prayers.

Jesus loves to hear from us. Pray for blessings, daily needs, healing, for our church and for others in need.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you Jesus for my salvation, forgiveness, and your love. Thank you for all things. May my prayers be pleasing to you this very day. Amen.

David Byrd

Wednesday, March 1, 2023

JESUS KICKS OPEN THE HORNET'S NEST

READ: John 5:18-32

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly father, keep our hearts and minds open during this special season in order to get to know you better. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus' response in this chapter comes in two major parts. First, he describes the authority which he has been given by God (John 5:19-29). In doing so, Jesus lays claim to many of the same rights, attributes, and abilities as God. Jesus claims equality with God in works (John 5:19), in love (John 5:20), in judgment (5:22), and in honor (John 5:23). He also points out that eternal life comes only to those who believe in him (John 5:23-24).

These are concepts the "authorities" (religious leadership) don't take lightly. Earlier in the chapter he heals the man at the well **ON THE SABBETH!** What was he thinking? Until then, Jesus' healings and miracles had not been as public.

Jesus knows full well what his destiny will be. Within eighteen months there will be a mock trial and a crucifixion. Yet Jesus maintains the ultimate faith in God and his plan. This should continually inspire us to take our own stand using this passage as inspiration and adopt a mantra of getting closer to God and his Son.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you Lord for your Word. Help us to study and be inspired. Amen.

Clark Montgomery

Thursday, March 2, 2023

Thursday, March 2, 2023

A SACRIFICE THAT COSTS NOTHING IS NOT A SACRIFICE

READ: 2 Samuel 24:1-4, 10-24

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please help us focus on what you want us to hear and retain as we listen and study your Word. Amen.

MEDITATION: In today's passages we read about David, pride, taking things into his own hands, and returning to the Lord for forgiveness and direction. Individual decisions are like ripples in the water – we do not know how our good or not so good decisions will affect others.

During my journey as a Christian, what a blessing it has been to learn how the Bible, written so long ago, applies to my life now and how important God's Word is to my daily Christian walk. The Old Testament and the New Testament work together to provide us with a roadmap for our lives. The more we read God's Word, the more we realize the love the Lord has for us. We also learn that there are consequences for our actions if we choose to walk our own road instead of following the Lord. Just as David realized his sins and went to the Lord for forgiveness, we too have the same opportunity to pray and ask God for forgiveness and direction.

It is never too late for us to turn back to the Lord and give him our best by worship, Bible study, and spending time serving and helping others. Through these acts of love for God and his children, may we shine his light into a dark world that so desperately needs him. The lives we lead reflect whether or not Christ is at the center of our lives.

CLOSING PRAYER: We thank you Lord for the direction you have provided us in your Word. Remind us that our first priority is you, Lord. Be with us as we journey through life, keeping our hearts and minds open to you. Help us to actively live out our faith. Amen.

Marilyn Sexton

Friday, March 3, 2023

GOD'S LENS IS BETTER THAN OURS

READ: Matthew 22:24-33

OPENING PRAYER: God, please help us open our minds to see the world and its people as you do. Amen.

MEDITATION: When I first read this passage, I found myself thinking, "Wow, that's a good question to ask Jesus." As I continued to read and got to Jesus' response, I thought "Wow, that's why Jesus is Lord and why I need Him."

So often, I find myself trying to use a worldly lens to make sense of religion and understand God, when it should be the other way around. I'm sure those questioning Jesus thought long and hard about the scenario they came up with (and even thought they were very smart for it!), only for Jesus to remind them that they were focused on the wrong things. If we know God and the goodness of God, then we must trust and have faith in His plan for us, even when it doesn't make sense according to the world.

As humans, we have an innate nature to wonder, to question, and to seek out answers. As children of Christ, we should find joy in trusting that God hears all of our questions, and he knows our anxieties and pains, and that he has a plan for us greater than what we could come up with on our own. I know it's easier said than done, but learning to trust God's plan and future for me has been a huge comfort and peace in my own life.

CLOSING THOUGHT: When we start to look at the world and the people around us as God does, we start asking the right questions and doing the right things to bring people to Christ. Thank God for His plan because it sure is better than anything we could come up with on our own.

Kaitlin Kim

Saturday, March 5, 2023

WHAT GOD REQUIRES

READ: Micah 6:6–8

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, help me to remember that it's my heart and my attitude you want sacrificed to you and not anything of this world. Amen.

MEDITATION: It sounds so simple – act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord your God. How hard can that be?

The first two of these requirements address how we treat other people. When we act justly, we give all that's rightly due to our fellow man. That includes giving them mercy when we'd rather mete out some justice.

The last requirement is how we should live our life in relationship to God. We are to hold tightly to God's hand as we walk with him, acknowledging our inadequacy and humbly submitting to his will.

I don't think the people in Micah's day were all that different from us. They recognized their problem of sin and wanted an easy fix. Can't we just sacrifice a few bulls? Put some extra money in the offering plate? But no. God has something else entirely in mind and our pastors remind us of that each week. If God is not our Lord and this is not our place, the church doesn't want our money. But if God is our Lord, he wants not only my money but my heart, my time, my commitment, my soul.

CLOSING THOUGHT: What makes this requirement so deceptively hard is that we are told that God doesn't want our stuff. He doesn't require what I have. He requires my mind and heart as I strive to act justly and love mercy. And he requires my soul completely given to him.

He requires me.

Judy Brockhoff

Second Sunday in Lent, March 5, 2023

NEVER LOSE FOCUS

READ: Matthew 14:22-33

OPENING PRAYER: Jesus, help us to stay focused on you. Let us never take our eyes off you, and let us realize that we must spend time alone with you to feel your presence and joy in this life. In your precious name, amen.

MEDITATION: Our Father God, created us in His image. Once we accepted Jesus as our LORD and Savior, we are changed beings. We live our lives to love God, and love others. We must also develop the habit of spending time alone, in prayer with our creator, just as Jesus did, because he wants to be a part of our everyday life. He will not fail to rescue those who love him.

We must also be still and know that he is God (Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”) Do not ever take your focus away from God in good times or in bad times.

In this world we will have trouble (John16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”) Our goal is not to focus on problems.

Ask, “What can I learn from this?” Also, remember that Jesus overcame this world. Always maintain your faith in all situations.

CLOSING PRAYER: Father God, every passage, every story, every promise, every truth in the Bible shows how you love, pursue, and forgive sinners through your son Jesus Christ. Thank you for sending him to the cross. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Lizza Lockett

Monday, March 6, 2023

REPENTANCE

READ: Psalm 51:1-4, 10-17

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, may the Holy Spirit dwelling in each of us, remind us when we have done something wrong so that we acknowledge the guilt and ask for forgiveness. Amen.

MEDITATION: King David's greatest fear was that God would punish him for committing adultery with Bathsheba and getting her husband killed. He knew he had been chosen by God to lead his people and had received the Holy Spirit that provided the power and wisdom he needed.

He blew it, big time! Was he beyond redemption? Was it too late?

God heard his humble prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, Oh God! And renew a right Spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, oh Lord! Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of my salvation! And renew a right Spirit in me." And God forgave him.

Is not that what we all want – to be right with God? If God can forgive and restore King David, surely, God will forgive us. But we must ask – and mean it. And we do that every Sunday, at the beginning of the service.

If we do not repent and let God wash away our sins, then we cannot worship him and offer up our praises – the very thing that God wants the most from us.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Thank God we are given the way to return to his presence and renew the Holy Spirit within each of us.

Becky Huber

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

THE BREATH OF GOD

READ: 2 Timothy 3:16–17

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, In the words of an old hymn, “Open my eyes, my ears, my heart; illumine me.” Amen.

MEDITATION: In his final instructions to young Timothy, who has been trying to hold the church in Ephesus together, Paul says in a very special way that Scripture is useful for “teaching, rebuking, correction, and training in righteousness” to equip God’s servants to do good work.

He proclaims, “All Scripture is God-breathed.” What a poetic image! The phrase, meaning “inspired”, tells us that those who wrote God’s Holy Word were directed by God, infused by and with the Holy Spirit. All Scripture, Paul is assuring Timothy and us, is the “real deal.”

If God breathed out the Scriptures, doesn’t it follow that we should breathe them in? I find this easier said than done. When I checked my bookshelves, I found nine copies of the Bible in four different formats, none of them showing a whole lot of wear. Obviously, I need to get serious about inhaling the Holy Scripture!

Our Pastors regularly remind us of the need for dedicated Bible study, participation in small groups, memorization of favorite passages, etc. There is no shortage of opportunities to breathe in God’s Word and no excuse to not breathe it in deeply.

CLOSING THOUGHT: In the words of another old hymn, “Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what thou wouldst love and do what thou wouldst do.”

Carol Starr

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

CHRIST LIFTED UP

READ: John 3:14-16

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for patiently telling us over and over that You loved us enough to Sacrifice your Son for our salvation.

MEDITATION: As you read the text, you may have found verses 14-15 to be a bit obscure – but quickly overshadowed by the familiarity of John 3:16. In fact, by the time you reached verse 16, your eyes probably left the page as the words emerged from memory. But what about those preceding verses? It is a reference from Numbers 21, where we read about the sin of the Israelites. Despite God’s miraculous provision of food and protection for them, they complained and wished they were once again slaves in Egypt. As punishment, God sent venomous snakes that killed many Israelites.

The Israelites eventually acknowledged their sin and begged Moses to ask God to save them. The Lord said to Moses, “Make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. If anyone is bitten, he should look at it and he will live (forgiveness).” Moses obeyed. If those who were bitten by a venomous snake looked up at the bronze snake (believed God’s word) their lives were spared from death.

The Israelites were dying because of their sin – they refused to acknowledge the grace that was being showered on them. God heard their cry for help and saved them through a sacrifice that was lifted up on a pole. In the same way, we grumble and discount the many ways that God cares for us. We do not deserve to be forgiven, but God provided a Savior for us, who, like the bronze snake, was lifted up on a cross (a pole) to die for our salvation – just look to Christ (believe) and be saved.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: The events of history were orchestrated for God’s message to be made clear – out of His great love for us, God made the ultimate sacrifice, that we might live with Him forever. Undeserved, unimaginable grace; the unspeakable gift of salvation, thanks be to God!

Scott and Mary Mannering

Thursday, March 9, 2023

WHAT CHRIST'S DEATH MEANS

READ: 1 Peter 3:18

OPENING THOUGHT: Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are they who take refuge in Him. The fullness of our life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then we also will be revealed with Him in glory.

MEDITATION: "How are you?" people ask. "Fine!" "Good." "Great" are popular responses, which are almost universally untrue or at least only half-truths. Let's face it, life is full of surprises: blessings & burdens! Sometimes I answer, "I'm better than I deserve, if not as good as I'd like." In the context of this verse, Peter encourages believers to live in such a way as to be a blessing to others, even if they do us ill, and always ready to give a reason for the hope that lives in us.

Our model is Christ, the only One who can ever really say, "I'm good!" Jesus is the Just who suffered for us, the unjust, in order to bring us to God, the greatest blessing of all. Jesus did no wrong and never returned evil for evil. Instead, he loved, heard, healed, and helped. In the end, he absorbed in his very being, all the evil of this world and the judgment due us for our sin—all to bring us back to God. In this broken world, it is inevitable that we will suffer wrong, hurt, betrayal and loss. All that we see and love in this world will come to an end. Only God's love will prevail, and will renew and restore all things.

So that is the only thing that we can give that will last—God's love at work in us, given freely to all around us, so that through that love, alive in us, Jesus might be revealed—the One Who suffered once for all, to bring all His beloved back.

CLOSING PRAYER: Jesus, because of your life, death, and resurrection, we have life that can't be taken, hope that can't be shaken, and love that can't be mistaken. Amen.

Bill Ward

Friday, March 10, 2023

WHY WAS ONLY ONE JUSTIFIED?

READ: Luke 18:9-17

OPENING PRAYER: God, please open my heart to hear what you want me to learn today. Amen.

MEDITATION: How often do we seek to justify our thoughts, words, and actions through piety, good deeds, or our favorite groups' definition of "OK." Is "OK" really OK? Or is it an excuse? Whom are we trying to impress? Whom are we trying to fool?

God sees our innermost being, the inner depths of our heart. He is the one who loves, sanctifies, and justifies. This foundational truth should overwhelm us with love and gratitude. Why spend time playing games to seek approval elsewhere? If we will drop our disguise and come to God as honest and open as an innocent child, he will forgive us.

This may mean that we have to let down our guard or our bravado. Contrary to what our fears tell us, our child-like honesty will not make us weak. There is power in grace and forgiveness. There is justification (to be forgiven and made upright and in right standing with God).

And there is the Holy Spirit always with us, working out our ugly spots, and marching forward with us as we become stronger disciples every day. No games. No excuses.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please convict me where I need to quit making excuses and redirect my heart's focus toward what glorifies you. Make me a light that points others to you. Thank you for loving and forgiving me. Amen.

Jennifer Stafford

Saturday, March 11, 2023

GOD JUDGES THE HEART, NOT THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

READ: 1 Samuel 16:1-12

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, open our hearts today as we read this passage. Remind us that we need to obey in faith first, then trust in the plans that you have for us. Help us to see things as you do and not judge by the exterior. Amen.

MEDITATION: The story in this passage is a great reminder of God's provision and also illustrates the way we struggle to understand and obey. As God is sending Samuel off, he questions God's plan based on his own understanding of the circumstances. Don't we often do the same? We rely on our own grasp of things and try to manipulate and make our own plans based on our limited insight.

When we rely on God and trust that he sees things in a way far greater than we ever could, we can be open to better plans that He wants to provide for us. In the moment, this can be difficult because it takes faith to step out and let go of things the way we see them.

As Samuel proceeds on his journey, he again defaults to his own understanding as he is meeting the sons of Jesse and trying to discern who God is choosing to anoint. God reminds him that while mortals often rely on outward appearances to make judgments, God looks at the heart.

God renews and redeems people and situations in ways beyond our comprehension! It is our job to listen, submit to His Word, and try to see things as he does.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for your Word. Help us to keep it close to our hearts, so that we may be obedient followers. Amen.

Heather Epperson

Third Sunday in Lent, March 12, 2023

FAITH

READ: Romans 10:17 and Hebrews 11:6

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please help us to maintain faith, and hope in this crazy world that we all live in. In Jesus' name, amen.

MEDITATION: The Bible verse from Romans talks about faith being nurtured, encouraged, and grown by God's Word. The Lord tells his children to have faith and always hear instructions from him. He is doing it every day as a reminder to his children.

Paul states that our faith comes from hearing (obeying is implied) God's Word. So, if you want to increase your faith, spend time in his Word, studying and obeying.

The writer of Hebrews states that God desires us to live by faith in order to please him. We must believe that Christ is the true Lord and that he rewards all those who seek him.

CLOSING THOUGHT: I believe in faith wholeheartedly. Without faith you would not be able to hear what God is trying to tell you as it applies to how you live your life. He has plans for you every day. Once you understand what his plans are, you are better able to follow his will.

Virginia Wodtli

Monday, March 13, 2023

CHRIST IS THE ONLY WAY

READ: John 14:6; Acts 4:8-12

OPENING PRAYER: Lord help us to put our faith in you as you proclaim Jesus as the only way. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus makes it very clear in scripture that belief in him is the only way to eternal life. Let's look at a couple other passages that reinforce that. John 3:16 is familiar to most of us: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Another scripture John 11:25 says " I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

We, as Christians, believe these statements and know that we don't get to heaven with good deeds. It is by the grace of God and belief in Jesus.

Yet, many in our society believe that a good person, one who helps others and does good deeds enters heaven. They can't imagine that God will let them burn in Hell. I am not the judge, God is. All I know is that God, I AM, tells us our belief in Jesus allows us to have eternal life.

This is one of many "I AM" statements in the Bible. God said to Moses "I Am WHO I AM." It is understood as a name for God. Whenever Jesus made an I AM statement, he was identifying Himself as God. There are many I AM statements throughout the old and new testaments and Jesus made many.

CLOSING THOUGHT: I find it reassuring to know my faith and belief in Christ is my way to eternal life. I treasure the words that Jesus spoke to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

Harriett Triquart

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

TITLE: CHRIST DEMONSTRATES HIS AUTHORITY

READ: Matthew 8:2-3,14-16, 23-27, 31-32, 9:1-8

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for being an awesome, loving God. Please open my mind to your truth and wisdom. Amen

MEDITATION: Unlike going to the doctor, getting some medicine or treatment that may take a few days to work, in these 5 miracles we see that the healings of disease and sickness, the calming of the sea, the removal of the demons, and the forgiveness of sins were INSTANT and IMMEDIATE!

Jesus wasn't just a great teacher. These 5 miracles prove that Christ has authority over disease and illness when he healed the leper and Peter's mother-in-law, over nature and our fears when Jesus calmed the storm, over demons when he cast them out, and over sins when he forgave the sins of a paralyzed man.

We see in these 5 miracles that Satan tries to destroy lives. But Christ came to save lives. These miracles show us that Christ acts with love, tenderness, mercy, grace, and kindness. Not only did Jesus touch and heal people who were sick or had a disease, like leprosy, he also touched and healed their hearts. Most of the responses were obedient and humble, like Peter's mother-in-law who responded by humbly serving Christ. Many people praised and glorified God, like the disciples in the boat. But not everyone. The pig's townspeople preferred their pigs over Jesus, our Savior.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Thank you Jesus for showing us, through your miracles, that you have power and authority over disease, sickness, nature, demons and sin. Thank you for loving us so much that you can't imagine Heaven without us, and that you will forgive us of our sins, and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Let us respond to the love of Christ with a loving faith, a humble faith, a strong faith, and an active faith.

Cathy Norberg

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

WHO DEMONSTRATED THE GREATEST FAITH?

READ: Matt 8:5-13

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, open the eyes of my heart in your guidance from your Word. Amen.

MEDITATION: The disciples had given up their way of life and had been going about with Jesus for some time. They, along with the multitudes, witnessed firsthand Jesus' performing many signs and miracles. They heard his sermons about how God loves us, his compassion, his mercy, and what he desires from us, especially our faith and trust in him.

Then an extraordinary event took place. A Roman centurion (a gentile high military official) came to Jesus, entreating him to heal his paralyzed servant. Jesus offered to come and heal him, but the centurion gave a remarkable response that not only resulted in the servant's being healed, but causing Jesus to say, "Truly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel."

How could this Roman gentile show the greatest faith in the midst of Jesus' disciples and followers? My thoughts: The centurion was humble, stating that he wasn't worthy for Jesus to even come to his house, even though the centurion had a much greater standing in the eyes of society, especially under Roman rule and authority. He truly understood authority because he was under authority of Rome but was also a man of authority himself. He could just tell others to come, go, or do things and they would obey. Consequently, he truly recognized and believed in Christ's authority. However, Christ's authority was so much greater. Jesus had authority over nature, sickness, demons, sin, and death. Because the centurion truly recognized and believed in Christ's awesome power and authority, he came to Jesus in humility and asked Jesus to use his authority. "Just say the word and my servant will be healed."

CLOSING THOUGHT: Lord, help me to understand and believe in your authority over nature, sickness, and sin, as well as your love, grace, and forgiveness.

Hans Brockhoff

Thursday, March 16, 2023

HOW TO LOVE CHRIST

READ: John 14:16-24

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us to see you and experience your presence through our love of others. Amen.

MEDITATION: As a parent of young kids, I get many tough questions about God – questions that cause me to pause and think about qualities of God that I've otherwise taken for granted. What does God look like? Does he have a body like ours? Why can't we see him? Does he get hungry (ever eat rice crispy treats)? John 14:16-24 offers some insight. While we can't see Jesus or God physically here on earth with us, this is the time for the third part of God's Trinity to shine. The Holy Spirit was left to those of us who believe. We "see" God through the Holy Spirit he left within us – the Holy Spirit is our earthly connection to God.

While we can't see a spirit, we can certainly see the effects of God's spirit. The Holy Spirit prompts us to care for each other, as well as to pray, to make wise choices, and to share the love of Christ with others. When we do these things, God's power and presence on earth become evident not only to believers but also to everyone on earth.

How can we love someone we can't even see? This is a tough question with an easy answer. We love God by loving people. "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me." God commands us to love one another, to love our neighbors as ourselves. By doing this we love God, and in turn, we receive God's love and he reveals himself to us spiritually. God looks like acts of love and selflessness. Does he have a body like ours? We are the church body and act as his hands and feet on earth. Why can't we see him? His spirit is currently inside us and someday, we'll see him face-to-face in heaven. Does he ever eat rice crispy treats? We'll have to wait and ask him that one when we get there.

CLOSING THOUGHT: We see God through the Spirit of Truth within us, and we love God by loving his people.

Caroline Brumfield

Friday, March 17, 2023

JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

READ: John 8:12-14

OPENING PRAYER: God, I ask you to be especially present with us during the dark times of our lives. Sometimes we cannot even ask for your strength and presence, but help us to not stumble. Amen.

MEDITATION: In John 8 Jesus tells us “no one who follows me stumbles around in darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in.” Yet, we sometimes do not see the light and our lives become dark and distant.

In such situations, looking for the light becomes arduous and hopeless. We only look for what we can see or touch.

We often lose sight of Jesus during these times. We forget Jesus does not make snap judgments or decisions. It becomes hard to remember that scripture tells us we can count on his Word and we have not been abandoned.

CLOSING THOUGHT: It is during these times we can truly experience trusting God and calling on him to lead us to the light.

Edith Wallace

Saturday, March 18, 2023

GOD OF THE SECOND CHANCE

READ: Luke 15:11-24

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for our many blessings, the love you share and your word. I pray for guidance in our words, actions, and thoughts, that we do everything through you. Amen.

MEDITATION: This passage beautifully shows the Lord's love for us, especially when we have moments that we get lost in this world and need to refocus on the Lord. He welcomes us with loving arms!

The thought of knowing the Lord, His love and everything He gives us, and to just walk away, seems crazy. But it happens every day. Sometimes it starts out small, like a busy schedule, that gradually drifts you away. Sometimes it is a big life event, such as losing a loved one, that hardens your heart, and you try doing things on your own. No matter where you are, the love the Lord has for you does not change.

No matter how far or how long you have distanced yourself, you can always come to the Lord, and it will be celebrated!

CLOSING THOUGHT: Do not let the worldly things and your sins hold you back from strengthening your relationship with God. The love the Lord has for you does not change and your relationship with God will be celebrated!

Shala Nielsen

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 19, 2023

PERSEVERANCE

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:58

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, use me tirelessly to bring others to you. Amen.

MEDITATION: Do you, like I, sometimes get discouraged when it seems like what we do for the Lord does not bring the desired outcome that we had hoped for? I think of the dozens of times I have asked people to come to church with me only to be told “no” or have them say “yes” and then not show up. How disappointing!

In the Corinthian church there were those who did not believe in a physical, embodied existence after death. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reminds them that Christ died for their sins, was buried, was raised on the third day and appeared to the twelve disciples, to more than five hundred people, and to Paul himself. He tells them that if they deny the resurrection of believers, then they also deny Christ’s resurrection and their faith is futile.

But the fact is Christ IS raised from the dead and he now sits at the right hand of God. He is alive and working in the world on our behalf. We too have the hope of resurrection if we give up our will and follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

So, fellow Christ followers, take heart. Let’s steadfastly continue to make disciples, grow disciples, and share the love of Jesus with all people. Our work matters, both to ourselves and to those who do not yet know Jesus. The hope of resurrection encourages us and sustains us when the road gets hard to travel. Hard times will not last forever. We can do this!

CLOSING THOUGHT: God has a job for us to do. We can make a difference in the lives of others. Please join me in being fishers of men (and women).

Deanna Price

Monday, March 20, 2023

GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD

READ: John 6:26-29

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, give us this day our daily bread and help us to trust that you know what is best for us in our lives. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus fed thousands of people who were following him. He divided the contents of a small lunch, leaving more left over than he had to begin with. When addressing the crowd, he emphasized the spiritual lesson behind this miracle. He stated, "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE." He meant both food and spirituality. The crowd wanted only more food! Most of those who had been praising Jesus turned away in disappointment.

Jesus was clearly saying, "I am essential to your wellbeing in life, both spiritually and physically." He is the bread that satisfies our needs. God is the sole giver of all we need! We must have faith in him to provide just what we need, physically and spiritually, for every area of life.

During Vietnam in 1968, while I was leading a US/Vietnamese unit through jungles, supply routes by land and air were cut off by the enemy. Food and water rations were limited and troops were suffering. Our chaplains banded together in a display of spiritual support. Food rationing to our soldiers effectively eliminated the problem until supply routes became available. The clarity of the phrase "Give Us Our Daily Bread" was a theme of our chaplains during that time!

CLOSING PRAYER: Blessed Father, whose Son came to be the true bread which gives life to the world, give us this bread, that he may live in us now and forever. Amen.

Roy Davis

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

GOD HOLDS ONTO US

READ: Luke 15:3-10

OPENING PRAYER: God, please hold onto your children no matter how hard we wrestle against you. Amen.

MEDITATION: The desire for security and independence is something we seek from the time we are born. As children we cling to our parents while also vehemently saying, "I can do it myself."

Adulthood is not any different really; now we cling to our savings and IRAs for security but still feel anxious as everything around us changes. Honestly, is there really any true security in our independence? On our own strength, can we control anything around us so that we are fully independent and fully secure?

I think not; no matter how hard we search for independence, true security is resting like the little lamb upon Jesus' shoulders. You are treasured beyond measure and secure in his presence no matter what life throws at you. Instead of independence ("Suck it up, Buttercup"), ask Jesus for help.

Cry out for wisdom and strength to walk your journey; you do not have to do it on your own. He will pick you up and fill you with his strength every time. There is no greater security than when God holds onto us.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you that we can rest in you, Jesus. Amen.

Janine Saul

Wednesday, March 22, 2023

OUR HEARTS BURNED WITHIN US

READ: Luke 24:13-32

OPENING PRAYER: Once again, Lord, I thank you for the many blessings and love I have received during my life on this earth. I pray they continue until the day I enter your Kingdom. Amen.

MEDITATION: Referring to the verses in Luke, two believers encountered a stranger who shared a meal at the end of the day with them. It was only after he vanished that their eyes were opened and “their hearts began to burn within them.” They knew they had been in the presence of their Lord and Savior.

Numerous men were chosen by God, like Moses, Abraham, the prophets of the Old Testament, and disciples of the New Testament. Did “their hearts burn” when they encountered the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit?

Have you ever had an experience like that? Probably not. Neither have I.

Many of us have experienced earthly love from parents and friends and have developed trust and respect for each other. But does that cause your “heart to burn within?”

In these modern days the closest we seem to come to this type of event are those who have had a near death experience. After “passing” they report a warm intense light that seems to absorb them. They say it is the love of Christ. On return their lives are changed. They want to share that love with others and are anxious to return to that love forever. Did their hearts burn?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, I am a sinner and pray to be worthy to live in a room of the Father’s house, receive your precious love, and share that love with others in your Kingdom forever. Amen.

Shelly Shellabarger

Thursday, March 23, 2023

FEAR OF DEATH AND REJECTION

READ: John 13:36-38

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for your sacrifice on the cross to save us from our sinful nature. Thank you for your unlimited love for each of us. Help strengthen our faith and help us share that faith with those we meet. Amen.

MEDITATION: Peter claims that he is willing to lay down his life for Jesus. However, Jesus questions Peter about whether he will really follow through. Then Jesus tells Peter plainly that because of his fear he will deny Jesus three times. Jesus understands Peter's shortcomings, but continues to love him and believe in Peter's future.

This story allows us to see ourselves in Peter's shoes and how Jesus loves each of us in spite of our shortcomings. We all experience fear as a motivator in our everyday lives. The Bible frequently reminds us to "Fear not" and "Do not be afraid." When we have faith in God through Christ's teachings, we can experience less fear. The joy that results will allow us to share our faith and serve others without fear of rejection.

God is always with us and wants us to have fruitful lives.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, give us the ability to trust your promises given through Jesus Christ our Savior. Thank you Jesus for loving us sinners and for giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us. Amen.

Carol and Rob Wilson

Friday, March 24, 2023

BLIND BUT NOW I SEE

READ: John 9:5–7, 24–25

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, open my eyes so that I may see you are the only way to eternity. Amen.

MEDITATION: This scripture is about the physical aspect of seeing. There is another aspect: the spiritual.

In John Newton's song, "Amazing Grace", he says he "Was blind, but now I see." John was not physically blind. He was talking about finding God and believing, he received spiritual sight.

James, the younger brother of Jesus, was not a believer until he witnessed Jesus' resurrection. He grew up with Jesus and had to be present in order to see Him as the Savior.

The disciple Thomas did not believe Jesus had risen. Jesus had to tell him, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
(John 20:24-27)

I was seven years old when I saw a poster of Jesus sitting under a tree with children gathered around Him. I realized Jesus loves children and He loves me. My eyes were opened at that moment.

CLOSING THOUGHT: I thank God for sending His only Son to show us the way.

Lyris Marie

Saturday, March 25, 2023

THE FEAR OF THE LORD: HOOKING US UP!

READ: Proverbs 9:10

OPENING PRAYER: Thank you God for letting me see and understand how awesome you are. Always work your way in my life. Amen.

MEDITATION: When I was a young child, I sat in our Church with my mother and sisters. I will have to admit that I feared God!

Not until I grew older and more mature and read my Bible that I began to understand the meaning of the fear of God. "The fear of the Lord" is a powerful concept and is foundational to both good theology and a meaningful life. If we can get this straight in our thinking and actions, it will empower us to a different way of life.

God will not let us get away with stuff - God will not enable us! It is based on his tough love for us! Seeing him as he really is helps us recognize how awesome he is. God loves all his people. Glory be to God.

Through God's wisdom, as seen in many Bible verses, our works here on earth are established. Wisdom is knowing how to correctly apply God's Word. Foolishness often results by disregarding the Lord's wisdom and may lead to failure. Therefore, we must discipline ourselves to read and meditate on his Word daily. The more we do, the more we will begin to understand God's thinking and obey his commands.

CLOSING THOUGHT: It is so easy to get caught up in our world that we forget how much God loves us. Yes, I have felt his tough love but that makes me stronger. Thank you Father.

Jean Rich

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 26, 2023

GOD IS IN CONTROL

READ: Romans 8:28-35

OPENING PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for sending your only son Jesus Christ to die on the cross and rise again for my sin. Amen.

MEDITATION: This passage says God works for good. Sometimes it is hard to understand when we are in a global pandemic with war, death, disease, mental illness, homelessness, divorce, abuse, murder, theft, human trafficking, famine, wildfires, natural disasters, and disrespect for authority surrounding us. We need to remember that God is there in all of our tragedies; he is walking right beside us and sometimes carrying us when we think we cannot go on. God is taking care of all of us even when bad things happen.

We all face times when our faith tests our commitment to God. God is renewing and redeeming all of us as Christ suffered, died, and was raised for us. Sometimes good comes from hard times. We had online church due to the pandemic as well as more time with family. Disease prepares us and our loved ones for eventual death. Accidents show us that we need to slow down and take better care of ourselves. God is bigger than our tragedies, losses, and failures. God works for the good of those who have been called according to his purpose as well as those who are ignoring his Word and disobeying the rules. God's working for good does not mean working just for our pleasure, comfort, and security.

We are so fortunate that our God is a loving God and will forgive anyone who believes in Jesus for their sin. Love God and teach people about God's Word and the promise of everlasting life.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, please forgive me for my sin and guide me to be stronger in my faith. Amen.

Gayle West

Monday, March 27, 2023

PRAYER

READ: Philippians 4:6-7

OPENING PRAYER: Father God, we praise you for your grace and mercy. You provide, strengthen, and comfort us as we trust in you. You meet our needs even when we don't recognize them. Thank you for your love and sacrifice. Amen.

MEDITATION: The scariest thing I've personally experienced in my life was right after Lincoln, our son, was born. About 24 hours after he was born, he stopped breathing. At the time the doctors weren't sure what was going on with him. He was having unexplained apnea episodes where he would stop breathing for long periods of time. So, when he was just over a day old, in the dark of night, he was loaded up into a special ambulance and rushed from the hospital in Olympia to Mary Bridge in Tacoma. At the time we didn't know if he was going to survive.

The choices appeared to be, either get angry with God or turn to him. So, we turned to him in prayer. We were comforted by Jesus' words in Mathew 21:21-22. Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

As somebody who has struggled with anxiety my entire life it comforts me to know that our heavenly Father understands our anxieties. His Word guides us to the solution and it is simply prayer. The world is full of anxiety inducers: political uncertainty, financial struggles, social issues, family, and even health issues. Whatever it is that fuels our anxiety we can take it to our Heavenly Father. After going through that trying time, Caroline and I are so thankful to enjoy our life with our happy, energetic, and healthy 9-year-old Lincoln. We are still amazed by the peace brought to us through prayer at that difficult time.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Prayer is powerful. God has the power to not only change our circumstances, but also has the power to change our outlook and to find peace.

AJ Brumfield

Tuesday, March 28, 2023

FELLOWSHIP

READ: Hebrews 10:24-25

OPENING PRAYER: Father, as I so often ask in prayer, please open my eyes and ears that I may see, hear and *understand* what you're saying to me. In Christ's name, amen!

MEDITATION: A definition of fellowship: The friendly association, especially with people who share one's interests.

First and foremost, God calls us to be in fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ (in 1st Corinthians 1:9). We do that in daily Bible reading, prayer, meditation, and worship. Let's pray that we never lose sight of Jesus' being first.

In August 2007, a dear friend and Christian brother died. Jeff had "spurred" me to attend a weekly men's Bible study with him. I never went until a couple weeks after he died (huge regrets). That fellowship motivated me to begin reading my Bible every day. The following Christmas I started, and because of that, God personally speaks to me every morning. And that has changed my life: how I think, how I act, and who I am. I've come to *truly* believe Jesus gave His life for the forgiveness of **my** sins! That's exactly why, when asked how I am, I often answer, "I'm better than I deserve."

This personal experience emphasizes how important **fellowship** and daily Bible reading have been to me.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Fellowship with believers is important – very important – but so is fellowship with non-believers. How else can we hope to fulfill the Great Commission?

With whom are you sharing the Good News of the Gospel?

Jack Wilcox

Wednesday, March 29, 2023

HOW TO REMAIN IN THE WAY

READ: Psalm 119:9 and 11

OPENING PRAYER: Lord let us take these precepts to heart. Amen.

MEDITATION: So, the question is: How do people keep their way pure? And why is that important? Can't we just go out doing whatever we want without regard to God's plan and our future in eternity? Well, we see the consequences in our society: drugs, immoral behavior, crime.... So how do we keep pure? The answer is right there with the question. By guarding our ways according to God's Word, and by storing The Word in our hearts.

How do we do that? It needs to be purposeful. Worship with other believers on a regular basis. Do this in person, if possible, where you are actively involved. Seek out the counsel of other believers. Most importantly, stay in The Word. Be intentional in your devotions. My own routine is to do scripture reading in the evening and devotional books first thing in the morning. I have two different plans for getting me through the entire Bible in a year. We need to be faithful in a daily plan. Do it every day. But, if you miss a day or two, don't give up, jump back in.

Verse 11 says, "I have stored your Word in my heart." I have memorized key scriptures. Isn't it great if you can quote the Bible in answer to questions, or at least know where to go for the answer?

And don't forget the VERY most important thing – to have a personal relationship with the Lord. This can only be accomplished through prayer, our conversations with God – long conversations and also little bullet prayers. God is always there listening to us.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, keep sending us reminders that you are deeply interested in our lives, that you desire a personal relationship with us, and that we need to make the time to commune with you. Amen.

Carolyn Teevin

Thursday, March 30, 2023

SHARING CHRIST - BECAUSE THE NECESSITY IS LAID UPON ME

READ: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

OPENING PRAYER: Thank you, Father, for today. Open our hearts and minds to your Word. Amen.

MEDITATION: Paul's letters to the Church of Corinth, while sometimes poetic, they're also very clear. Many times, they cut right to the chase of what living a Godly life looks like for us all. Lucky us!

This passage starts by reminding us that pastoral compensation is appropriate, but for the rest of us, it goes on to remind us that we don't have to leave the sharing of Christ, or the good news of the Gospel, to paid clergy.

In fact, it literally says we are compelled because of Christ and what he did on the cross for you and me. We are free to share the good news because, as God's chosen people, the necessity has been laid upon us.

The story of the Gospel, the death, the resurrection, it's all good news! No...great news! For some of us, sharing the Gospel comes naturally. For many of us, it's intimidating. During this Lenten season, let's all agree to be a little more like Paul- open to sharing the Gospel of our savior, Jesus Christ, with love and grace leading the way.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for sending your Son to the cross and graciously giving us good news to share. Guide us in building meaningful relationships so that we may share the Gospel. Help us, as we live to be like Jesus each day. We love you. Amen.

Katelyn Billingsley

Friday, March 31, 2023

THE SIMPLE LAW

READ: Joshua 1:8

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of another day. May we use it to your Glory. Amen.

MEDITATION: This text seems easy, right? Just obey the law. Almost impossible at the time; a multitude of laws; difficult to understand and even more difficult to follow.

So let us simplify it: Jesus says in Matthew 22:37-39, "... Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

When we wake up in the morning, let us dedicate each day to the Lord. Day by day. Will we become distracted? Discouraged? Frustrated? Yes, yes, and yes. But with the Holy Spirit to comfort and to guide, and the greatest commandment at the forefront of our day, the challenges lessen.

The glorious joy of Jesus fills our day with peace and grace. Remember, step by step.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Father, thank you for your Word, your Son, your Spirit, and your everlasting grace. Please help me be aware of your presence and help me be a model and a comfort to someone today. Amen.

Luci Wickliffe

Saturday, April 1, 2023

BLESSINGS (EVEN IN DIFFICULT TIMES)

READ: 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, 16

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord lead me. May my thoughts and words glorify you.

MEDITATION: The past two years dealing with COVID put a strain on all of us, but we survived our spiritual life with the leadership of our pastors keeping us on track with their timely sermons. Small groups met through Zoom so that we could meet unmasked, to be able to see each other, blessed by technology to see and hear the sermons.

As we do our devotions and asking Jesus to be with us through the days come what may, he will be there, just invite him in.

When I saw the title for my submission, I thought of the period after my daughter passed. Without Jesus, the love and caring of my church family, I don't know where I would be today. I know I will see her again.

"Mornings with Jesus" starts my day. This was the closing thought on one of those pages by Grace Fox: "My future is secure solely because of Jesus' death and resurrection, setting my hope on anything else will send my soul adrift."

CLOSING THOUGHT: "If you can't have the best of everything, make the best of everything you have." Amish Prayer

Shirley Burrows

Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023

SAVIOR

READ: Isaiah 53:3-8

OPENING PRAYER: Father, thank you for sending your Son to make a way for sinners to become children of God. Jesus, thank you for paying the ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Holy Spirit, thank you for revealing this truth.

MEDITATION: We are changed from sinners to children of God because of Jesus and Jesus alone. We are found acceptable to God – not because we are obedient, not because we have promised to give up things, not because of anything we do – but because of the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Nothing else.

Jesus. Yeshua. Christ. Messiah.

- Jesus/Yeshua - literally means Savior
- Christ/Messiah - literally means anointed, set apart.

What was Jesus/Yeshua set apart for? To save sinners by dying on the cross and rising from the dead.

This was prophesied by the Prophet Isaiah six hundred years before the birth of Jesus. You cannot read Isaiah 53 without seeing Jesus all over the page.

We cannot earn salvation. We do not deserve or merit God's grace. It is all God. It is all grace.

Thanks be to God!

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, God, for sending your Son to die on our behalf. Thank you, Jesus, for your obedience and your sacrificial death. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for revealing to us the truth of the resurrection! Amen.

Pastor James

Monday, April 3, 2023

GOD'S PROMISES

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:9-12

OPENING PRAYER: Dear LORD, please help us to learn and grow closer to you through your words and promises. Amen.

MEDITATION: I feel this passage is one of many gifts God has bestowed upon us. It is difficult to know what God's gifts of the spirit are. But it is said that the Holy Spirit is freely given from God that we may understand and know more of God's spirit. If one is in the spirit of God, we will understand more of what God wants, so that we make better judgments through Him in prayer. God's spirit makes it possible for us to understand and believe spiritual things.

I find this passage difficult to write about and fully know if I am in God's spirit when I pray to God for wisdom and for his guidance in my decision making. Is it God's path or is it just a decision I have made based on what I feel is the correct path given to me by God's spirit?

As followers of Jesus Christ, we all pray for different reasons such as wisdom in taking the correct job, or for getting a new house. We pray for healing and comfort for people with illnesses and cancers.

Sometimes I feel we pray for what we really want or need, but it is not always what God and his Holy Spirit have planned for us. It is all in God's timing and plan.

CLOSING THOUGHT: We are given an amazing opportunity to learn and grow if we ask God to fill us with this grace and spirit, to help us to understand and make decisions based on his will.

Patrick Powell

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

READ: Daniel 4:28-37

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, you are sovereign. May you help us to put our trust in you as you transform our lives. Amen.

MEDITATION: The Canaanites sinned against God, and God gave their land to the children of Israel. When Israel sinned against God, he divided the kingdom, and sent the northern kingdom into captivity in Assyria. When the southern kingdom continued to sin, they were sent into captivity as well. God used King Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, to exact judgment on the southern kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar became rich and powerful because of this, but he didn't give any of the credit to God. Instead, he became prideful and took credit for building up the empire of Babylon into a world power. God then caused him to lose his mind for a set period until he was ready to repent and acknowledge that God is sovereign over every leader. After Nebuchadnezzar repented, his mind and his kingdom were restored.

After Babylon, other kingdoms, including Persia, Greece, and finally Rome would rise and subsequently fall. God showed his sovereignty by foretelling these future kingdoms to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. God's kingship is eternal, and he rules in every generation.

God builds up, and he tears down. But we can take comfort in the knowledge that "all his works are true and his ways are just. He is able to humble those who walk in pride." (Daniel 4:37 CSB)

CLOSING THOUGHT: May we always recognize that God is sovereign. Earthly kingdoms and leaders ebb and flow, but God's kingship is eternal.

Kirk Keppler

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU

READ: Matthew 11:28-30

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, give us the strength and will to learn from your teachings and put that knowledge into practice in our everyday lives. Amen.

MEDITATION: Unfortunately, our lives are filled with many negative and disruptive events that are happening around the world and in our local communities every day.... It's non-stop! These burdens can often be overwhelming, unless we remember the promise of Jesus.

With Jesus, we have the promise of everlasting life and that he will always give us the support we need to endure our difficult circumstances in our lives. Reach out to him through prayer and your support will be provided. Faith in his unending love and steadfastness is essential.

Just as Jesus always has our back, we are called by him to give support to those around us who are experiencing difficulties. Sometimes this can be burdensome to carry out, but the positive benefits to all involved are well beyond the effort it may take.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please use us to carry out and fulfill your Golden Rule. Amen.

Glen Graves

Thursday, April 6, 2023

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

READ: Psalm 23

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, give us wisdom as we read your Word. Amen.

MEDITATION: Through all the years I have known the Lord and read the Bible, this has been one of the most impactful Psalms. With my father being a pastor, I was brought up in Christianity and I knew nothing else. As soon as I was able to understand words, I was taught that the Lord was my Shepherd, and I am to follow Him.

Although I had a very supportive family that could help me through my walk with Christ, I still had my own uncertainty. Throughout the beginning of high school, I was questioning my faith. Everything felt like it was falling apart. At that point, the Covid 19 epidemic was at its peak and it made me fall into deep doubt. I was blaming God for everything that was happening.

I was blaming Him for my having a hard time in school, being isolated from my friends, and having sports seasons ruined. It was passages like this that brought me back onto the correct path. They were the reset points that helped me reinforce my beliefs that the Lord knows what He is doing, and all I need to do is to trust in Him and everything will end well.

CLOSING THOUGHT: This makes reading the Bible that much more important. I would have been stuck in that grim place if it weren't for the Bible. These comforting verses always seem to come at the perfect times.

Kaleb Kim

Good Friday, April 7, 2023

THE GOOD SHEPHERD (LAYING DOWN HIS LIFE)

READ: John 10:9-18

OPENING PRAYER: God, please help us know you better. Amen.

MEDITATION: God is the good shepherd. We are his sheep. It says that a good shepherd lays his life down for his sheep, and that a good shepherd knows his sheep, and his sheep know him. What I take from this is that God knows us, he knows our troubles and problems.

He died for us, as a good shepherd would do. Jesus says “the reason the father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again.” I think what Jesus means is that he died on the cross, his life was taken, but then he took it back.

It also says that “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” Jesus is talking about his life. I take what he says is that death can’t take his life, as we know from the resurrection. But what I also gathered from this is that he not only controls life, but he is the greatest power, because he beat death. He does this for us, so that we can have everlasting life.

It also mentions that “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” So, what I take it to mean is that he beat death, so that we can have life to the full.

CLOSING PRAYER: God, thank you for your everyday blessings. Amen.

Eli & Jerrel Davis

Saturday, April 8, 2023

TRUSTING JESUS IN A MESSED-UP WORLD

READ: John 14:15-27

OPENING PRAYER: Please give us ears to hear and reveal your truth to us even when we can't understand. Amen.

MEDITATION: Philip, Judas, and the rest of the disciples are trying hard and failing to understand what Jesus is saying. It's still hard to grasp that Jesus has God's infinite authority and power. We see such a messed-up world around us that the very existence of an all-loving, all-powerful God seems distant if not impossible.

Jesus explains an invisible spiritual reality. People who love and obey Him are different:

1. Jesus loves them, gives them life, and reveals Himself to them (v. 19-21).
2. God gives them the Spirit of Truth to help them, be with them, be in them, teach them, and remind them of Jesus' words (v. 16,17,26).
3. God and Jesus will come to them and dwell in them (v. 18, 23).

So maybe, on good days, I can see the messed-up world and still perceive that there's hope; that Jesus brings life for and through those who love Him. Recently I've been asking God to change hearts and minds so that they see Jesus and trust Him in time to avoid devastation. And to be honest, God hasn't shown up the way I want, at least not in the timeline I'm hoping for.

Then Jesus says something bizarre: He gives peace; not in the way the world gives peace, so I don't have to be troubled or afraid. I'm still struggling to give myself over to Jesus' love and truth, recognizing that I'm not enough but he is, and through Him, I will experience that peace.

CLOSING PRAYER: God, please draw me closer day by day to seeing reality through Your eyes – to hope in Your power, protection, and closeness in this painfully messed-up world. Amen.

Janta Steele

Easter Sunday, April 9, 2023

WHAT'S YOUR NEXT MOVE?

READ: Acts 1:6-14

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, would you grant us power to be a powerful witness to others? May you be glorified and may others come to know you through our actions and words. Amen.

MEDITATION: Just before this passage, in Acts 1:1-5, Jesus promised the apostles the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were to wait for a few days... and then... what exactly?

Although Jesus told the apostles several things, I would have stopped listening after he said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...."

Power?! I could use some of that for sure! Who doesn't want *power*? Are we talking the same kind of power Jesus demonstrated? Power to walk on water, power to heal the sick and raise the dead? Power to change water to wine? I'm sure Jesus would have granted that kind of power to his followers if those things were going to have the greatest kingdom impact, but with the exception of a few instances we read about later (Acts), his followers didn't receive that kind of power.

Instead, they received something that would have a far greater impact – the charge and authority to be witnesses of Jesus – a calling that would take Christ's message to all the ends of the earth.

Christ is risen! Don't just stand there! People have to know that Jesus is risen and he is coming again as King and Judge. Don't get caught flatfooted and staring – be a witness! The Text tells us what happens next. The apostles gathered together, were in constant prayer, and then when the Holy Spirit arrived, the world changed forever.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Happy Easter! What's your next move?

Pastor Brad