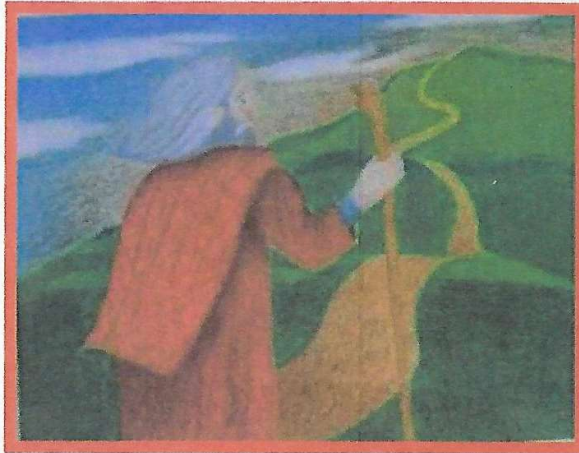


The Little Church on the Prairie Lakewood Grace



*Lenten Devotional
Booklet
2022*

Sojourners

**THE LITTLE CHURCH ON THE PRAIRIE
LAKEWOODGRACE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, USA
2022 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET**

How to Use This Booklet: Pick a quiet time each day during Lent for devotion. Start with a prayer. Then it is important to read the Bible passage before proceeding. The authors of these devotional messages assume that the Bible passages will have been read first, because the messages refer back to the Bible passage on the daily devotional page. Then reflect on what you have read and end with a prayer. It is a five-step process: Pray, read the Bible passage, read the message for that day, reflect and discuss, then close with a prayer. It is our hope that this devotional booklet will be a blessing to you each day of Lent. As you read each daily page, remember that you are connected to the author of each page through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

About This Booklet: This year we once again reached out to members and friends of The Little Church on the Prairie and Lakewood*grace* to write a page for this booklet. Our theme for this year is: **SOJOURNERS**. During Lent the pastors will be emphasizing through the sermons that we are really voyagers passing through this life to the next. They will be using the stories about Abraham.

It is hoped that each contributor to this booklet will gain from the experience. It is also hoped that each person who uses this booklet will be moved to a deeper relationship with Jesus, will become a better disciple, and will be motivated to bring the good news of Jesus to others, showing the love of Jesus to all. It is also hoped that you will, through these devotional pages, receive a better understanding of the meaning of Lent and Easter.

About the Lenten Season: The term “Lent” comes from an Old English word that means springtime. The Lenten season is a time for spiritual preparation for Easter by remembering the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Lent is the period between Ash Wednesday and Easter. The Lenten spiritual disciplines such as prayer, alms giving, and fasting are meant to help us realize our dependency on God for everything and to prepare our hearts to hear what God will say to us. May our Lord bless your spiritual journey this Lenten season.

Ash Wednesday, March 2, 2022

JESUS STARTS HIS MINISTRY

READ: Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:14-21

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, open the eyes of our heart so that we can increase in wisdom and knowledge. Help us to be able to see Christ as he is truly revealed in scripture. Amen.

MEDITATION: After forty days of fasting and the three temptations from Satan, Jesus started his public ministry in Galilee. He read from the Old Testament that foretells the coming Messiah.

This incident is extremely wonderful and remarkable for a number of reasons. First, Christ read Isaiah 61:1-2a indicating that he was the chosen one, the anointed one from God. Second, Jesus stated that he was sent by God to bring the message of salvation to the poor, to heal, and to liberate the hearts and souls of people. Interestingly, Jesus broke off reading in the middle of a sentence. This indicates that Christ came the first time to fulfill the Messiah's prophecy of salvation. The remainder of the sentence is concerning the Messiah's second coming. Jesus came to give us hope and salvation to all who choose to believe in and follow him.

We are still living in the wonderful day of that gospel. The question for all of us is, do we really believe in him whom God has sent? Do we trust fully in Jesus' ability to save us, to forgive our sins, to renew our spirit, and to give us hope and courage? Do we rely on the Holy Spirit to lead and comfort us, even as we encounter the sometimes dreadful and significant storms of life?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, you promised that you have not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and sound mind. Your promises never fail! We claim that promise. Amen.

Hans Brockhoff

Thursday, March 3, 2022

GOD KNOWS ME

READ: Psalm 139

OPENING PRAYER: Dear God, please open the eyes of my heart that I might begin to comprehend your unconditional love and the unfathomable gift of salvation. Amen.

MEDITATION: The words of Psalm 139 bring a warm, fuzzy feeling of comfort to the reader.... I am known! I am loved! I am accepted! Everything that my heart longs for can be found right here in this Psalm. The same God who knit me together, continues to hold me together. I will never be out of his sight. My soul is at peace.

However, these same words can be equally horrifying. **Every single thought** I have is known by God. Every poor choice that I have carefully hidden is revealed, every embarrassing mistake is laid bare. Even the sins that I promise myself I won't repeat, but inevitably will, God knows them all. Nothing can be hidden from him.

Yet with this shameful realization of just how truly "known" I am, a more powerful sense of reassurance washes over me. It is only in acknowledging the darkest parts of myself that I can begin to grasp the significance of God's atoning sacrifice, his unfailing love, and his complete forgiveness.

CLOSING PRAYER: Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24). Amen.

Mary Mannering

Friday, March 4, 2022

FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

READ: Philippians 1:9-11

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, keep me focused on your unconditional love, rather than unnecessary worldly noise, so that I may show sincere love to others through Christ. Amen.

MEDITATION: Paul writes about how we should love unconditionally, using our head and testing our feelings to ensure we're showing sincere love.

Paul wrote this to the Philippians while he was in prison. He was showing them he was going to be joyful and fearless in all circumstances. He wanted them to do the same.

Paul wanted the Philippians to be united in Christ and to continue to love and help each other. He prayed that their love would grow. Paul didn't want them to argue about things that didn't matter, but rather to be understanding and to find a common ground to unite with others.

Even those who do not believe in Christ may come to the faith because of love. Love never fails.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Paul showed his love for the Philippians by praying for them. He prayed that they would grow and mature in their walk with God. You can pray for people you love too and strive to show the unconditional love of God.

June Fields

Saturday, March 5, 2022

WALK IN WISDOM

READ: Proverbs 3:21-26

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, please prepare my heart, mind, and eyes to receive your blessings and trust in the paths you prepare and reveal for me. Amen.

MEDITATION: We tend to get wiser as we get older. There are sayings like "wise beyond their years." Wisdom is something valued and cherished, and spoken about like something acquired over time.

I am a teacher, so I deal with knowledge all the time, which has something to do with wisdom, but not everything. We live in a world filled with knowledge, in many ways, a world with more knowledge than we've ever had before. Knowledge feels like something that is always growing. Think about all the things you've learned in the past week, or even the past year. Think of the lessons you've learned over the course of your life.

What makes some lessons stick with us for so long? Why do some lessons seem more important than others? This is where wisdom begins to enter the picture, and what I think about as I read this passage. No matter how much we know, there is always something more to know. We do not know the future, and we never know the full consequences of any of our choices. Still, there are good choices and bad choices, and separating out the good from the bad is the work of wisdom.

The lessons that stick with me aren't filled with more knowledge. They are filled with more wisdom. If knowledge is our guide, then we will always be left wanting more. We need wisdom to find peace and have faith in the path we walk. Wisdom has an eternal quality. I believe because wisdom comes from God. We gain wisdom when we experience God's presence in our lives.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for walking with me and giving the gift of wisdom, to guide me and assure me in only the ways you can. Amen.

Tim Chalberg

Sunday, March 6, 2022

ARE WE STILL WAITING?

READ: Mark 1:1-8

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, may our meditations on these words be pleasing in your sight. Amen.

MEDITATION: For centuries, the Israelites, Hebrews, Jews, and (pick one) waited for the Messiah. Many prophets spoke of his coming, and what he would do once he got here. During this long waiting period, the people were involved in many wars with their neighbors and others who were just passing through. As a result, the people started believing that the Messiah would use similar strategies and tactics to solve their problems for all time.

The people must have been surprised when John the Baptist started talking about repentance, forgiveness, confession, and that the one who was coming would also baptize with the Holy Spirit. It is apparent that his message resonated with the people, since more and more folks joined the ranks of those baptized with water.

Once Jesus appeared on the scene, many of John's followers became Jesus' followers. As we have learned through reading the scriptures, many people waited until after his death and resurrection to become his followers.

However, since we know the rest of the story, we do not need to wait until we celebrate Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, etc. to accept him into our hearts and our lives. We do not need to wait any longer to reaffirm our faith and trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior!

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, it is so easy to use any excuse to wait for the "right time" to accept you whole-heartedly into our lives. Help us to live our lives like John the Baptist proclaimed, so that others will see by our example that waiting to accept Jesus is not a good option. Amen.

Bill Amblad

Monday, March 7, 2022

THIS WORLD IS NOT MY HOME, I'M JUST PASSING THROUGH

READ: Deuteronomy 10:12-13

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, as I sojourn through my short time on earth, help me to walk in all your ways, love and serve you with all my heart, and keep your commandments. Amen.

MEDITATION: Throughout history, most people lived their entire lives in a relatively small circle, rarely leaving their village or region. Unlike our forefathers, people in our generation are likely to live and travel to other regions and other countries throughout the world! But our spiritual sojourn has little to do with the distance we travel, the countries we visit, or the cultures we experience.

Our spiritual sojourn begins when we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. Step by step, we proceed to grow in knowledge of Christ, and further progress as we commit ourselves to the study of God's word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers. Travel can be fun and exciting. Our experiences in other countries make for great conversation. We certainly learn more about our world and ourselves. But "walking in all God's ways" is the sojourn that God calls us to. It's the trip that begins here on earth and lasts throughout eternity.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Lord, help me to not get so consumed with the "trip itinerary" of this world that I forget to walk in all your ways and sojourn with you.

Judy Brockhoff

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

TELL GOD WHAT YOU NEED

READ: Philippians 1:15-30

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to understand your words and the many ways we can honor you. As we experience troubles in our lives, we pray that our good works and perseverance will bring glory and praise to you. Amen.

MEDITATION: Paul wrote to his followers in Philippi while he agonized in prison. He was suffering greatly and his life was in jeopardy. He was overwhelmed by troubles and in a state of despair! It was from this state of mind that he wrote his letters. He expressed his deep feelings to his believers to include his love for them and how thankful he was for their friendship and ministry. His final words of wisdom were: "Don't worry about anything, instead, pray about everything." Tell God what you need and thank him for what he has done. We should forever be grateful for the blessings we have received. In times of frustrations and turmoil, give thanks to God for leading us forward!

Our Pastor recently said: "God loves you. God wants the best for you. God already has a plan for your best to be a reality. So, seek God! Seek God first and all these things will be added to you as well."

I reflect on these words as I recall anxious times in my life when taking part in military combat operations or reacting to man-made or natural disasters.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord God, thank you for being with me in the many trials and tribulations of my life. I know that you are in control of all things and that nothing is too difficult for you. As I praise you, fill my heart with hope. Amen.

Roy Davis

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

GOD TEACHES US HOW TO FAST

READ: Isaiah 58:6-14

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us a guide to live by and for becoming more like you. Help us to open our hearts and minds so that we may understand what it is you are asking of us in this passage. Amen.

MEDITATION: Lenten season: A time for fasting and reflection. What does God want from us? What does he call us to do? What does it mean to fast? When you look up a definition of fasting it says: "to abstain from all or some kinds of food or drink, especially as a religious observance." That seems a bit vague. Just to abstain from food or drink without any context? What are we fasting for? To be more like Jesus.

That is what God is asking of us in this passage: To care for each other. To humble ourselves and give what we can to raise up one another. This will bring us to his glory and only then will we be his light amidst the darkness. Lifting up others, in turn, lifts us up as well. Isn't that the truth? When you help someone, don't you feel a sense of uplifting and humbleness? God wants us to share the same love for one another as he has for us. When you see someone in need, ask yourself, "What would Jesus do in this situation?" Let us all humble ourselves in this time of fasting and remember what we are truly fasting for.

CLOSING PRAYER: Loving God, we humble ourselves before you and ask that you help us in our time of fasting and reflection. Give us the strength to battle injustice and spread the love you have for us with all of your children. Help us to be good disciples of your word and spread grace in all that we do. We pray these things in your precious name. Amen.

Molly Crane

Thursday, March 10, 2022

THE CALLING OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES

READ: Mark 1:14-28

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, these are difficult times that we, as a nation, are going through. We pray for hope, healing, and unity for us to get through it together. Amen.

MEDITATION: After John was imprisoned, Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of God was near. Jesus was filled with faith, hope, and love. He summoned Simon, Andrew, James and John to follow him. He told them that he would make them “fishers of men”. Jesus was also a great teacher. A man with an evil spirit jumped out and asked what Jesus wanted with them. Jesus spoke with the man, shook him and the evil spirit disappeared! The people were very impressed with his teachings and authority and the news of Jesus’ presence spread throughout the area of Galilee.

Growing up in the “Bible Belt” in the state of Tennessee, I attended church on a regular basis. At home, we watched Billy Graham on TV every week. During my years as a military spouse, I did not attend church services on a regular basis. In 1985, then in civilian life, Roy and I were invited to attend services at LCOP. Like the disciples who were summoned by Jesus, we felt that God was telling us, “It’s time to come back and make a commitment.” We are glad we did!

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for the many blessings that you have given us. Forgive our sins and shortcomings. Please walk beside us and guide us on our journey. Amen.

Vickie Davis

Friday, March 11, 2022

THE LORD IS MY SALVATION

READ: Psalm 27

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for this Lenten season. Please guide us as we seek to find you in the mundane as well as in the miracles. I pray that the lessons learned during this time will draw us close to you the rest of the year. Amen.

MEDITATION: What stuck out to me as I read Psalm 27 was verse 4 that says: "One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple."

I know for our family that the Lenten season is a time for prayer, fasting, and alms giving. Yet children are asking for presents from the Easter Bunny and attention from exhausted parents. Jobs are asking for more time, effort, and energy. Charities are asking for donations. So many asks. Verse 4 reminds us what is the most important ask, our ask to be with the Lord, to dwell in his house, to gaze on his beauty, and to seek him. That should be what this Lenten season (and every season) is about, seeking Jesus and dwelling with him. May there be reminders, both big and small, of the beauty of the Lord this Lenten season. Let his beauty shine and let us slow down enough to dwell and gaze. this

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, help us to ask, seek, dwell, and gaze on your beauty. Remind us of what is important and good and worthy. We celebrate you! Amen.

Justin Davis

Saturday, March 12, 2022

LET LOVE AND KINDNESS RULE THE DAY

READ: Philippians 2:2-11

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, give us the strength and wisdom to always consider the needs and concerns of others with equal or greater importance to our own, and let our hearts be filled with grace and love for others throughout each day. Amen.

MEDITATION: “Sometimes it’s hard to be humble,” the old joke goes. Unfortunately, our lack of humility seems to be too often the case in our competitive society and culture of today. We tend to hold our opinions and actions to be superior to others and our grace and humility “go out the window.” In order to provide for our family, maintain an advancing career and a sparkling reputation, we think we have to put our own needs at the forefront, often at the expense of our consideration for the needs of others. This is particularly true when it comes to those suffering from misfortune.

In this time of hyper division and partisanship, it is more important than ever, that we put aside our selfishness, and conceit, and remember that as disciples of Jesus, we are commanded to serve others. Our faith, prayers, and actions must overcome our desire to be self-centered and surround ourselves with people who are “like us”. We must imitate Christ’s humility and fill our lives with love and respect for others.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please help us to reach down deep inside ourselves and come out of our comfort zone; to grant us the humility and strength to be in service to others. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Glen Graves

Sunday, March 13, 2022

HEALING AND PRAYING

READ: Mark 1: 29-45

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, you are the ultimate healer of our souls. Thank you that you are with us each and every day in all situations and that we can depend on you for peace and comfort, whatever our circumstances. Amen.

MEDITATION: Healing and praying go hand in hand. Not always when we pray are our prayers answered in the way which we would want them answered. But God hears our prayers and wants and decides what is best for us. Healing does not always come in the form of healing from illness. We need healing from insecurities, from our past and present unkind actions, from being judgmental, and for help with our everyday living. In our prayers for someone who is ill, I believe God answers those prayers in the way that is best for that person who is ill. In the case of Simon's mother-in-law, there were no prayers. It only took the disciples to tell Jesus about her fever. This speaks to their faith in Jesus' healing powers. The leper had faith that if only Christ was willing, the leper would be healed from his leprosy. What a joy to hear Christ's words, "I am willing" and to receive that healing.

As we seek to become more like Christ, finding quiet times and quiet places to spend time with him is crucial, just as he had to draw away to a solitary place away from the crowds to pray. When life becomes crazily fragmented and overwhelming, I get to a point where I need to shut myself off from everything around me and spend quiet time with God. When peace begins quieting and relaxing my mind and body, I feel like I can breathe again. Then comes the happy anticipation of how God will guide my days.

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we are infinitely blessed that you are our Lord and Savior. You bring us healing in so many ways. As we yearn to be more like you and come closer to you through prayer and quiet time, your promises become more fully felt. May we never take you for granted. Help us to live into the life into which you call us. Amen.

Jan Edwards

Monday, March 14, 2022

WE MUST KEEP GOD'S COMMANDS

READ: Deuteronomy 28:9

OPENING PRAYER: We come to you knowing that in order to live our best lives as your disciples we must follow your commandments. Please help us to strive in our walk with you and to be a shining example. In your name we pray. Amen.

MEDITATION: In the passages following 28:9 you will see you are to listen to God's word and follow his commandments. In turn he will open to us all his good treasures, in our work and in our families. In giving us his commandments, he left us no doubt as to what he demanded of us when we become children of God.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: In these troubled times when it might seem no one is listening to God's words, remember to find peace within us and with God, the way is to follow his commandments and his words.

Carolyn Lee

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

NOTHING MORE

READ: Philippians 3:1-11

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, help me to understand your words so that I might know you better and understand you more completely. Amen.

MEDITATION: Sometimes, all I want to do is talk about myself or tell others what I have done or accomplished. But there is only one thing I should be boasting about and striving towards, and that's my relationship with God. As Paul says, it's "the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord."

After reading this passage, I thought to myself, what are my take-aways?

1. Be careful to discern truth from error.
2. There are "dawgs" out there sent from the evil one, who are trying to confuse us about what God wants us to do.
3. There's nothing that we can do to earn points with God. No human effort will get us into Heaven.
4. We need to make an intimate relationship with God our number one priority in life.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, I too often worry about keeping up appearances and living by my own efforts. Help me to change my focus so that I may find my strength and place my hope in you alone. Amen.

Cheryl Buell

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

HEALING THE PARALYTIC

READ: Mark 2:1-12

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for all the wisdom that you provide us, so that we can live a faithful life and get through all of today's struggles.

MEDITATION: When Jesus had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that he was home. Many were gathered, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some men came to him carrying a paralytic. Jesus was impressed by the man's friends. Their faith was active, showed care, compassion, and friendship to someone who was excluded from both the financial and relational rewards of work.

In their faith, there is no separation between being and doing. Jesus saw their efforts as an act of collective faith. Jesus' claim to be able to forgive sins was a claim too controversial, which the teachers of the law saw as blasphemous. It was clear that one purpose of the miracles was to give evidence of Jesus' deity.

In short, we learned how Jesus serves as a model of faith, a warning of doubt, a lesson of spiritual discernment, and a testimony of the power of our savior to change lives, heal, forgive sins, and grant eternal life, lessons that apply to us each and every day.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for your forgiveness, even when there are times when we may have our doubts. But through you, all things are possible. Amen.

Joe Kagarise

Thursday, March 17, 2022

IN GOD IS OUR TRUST

READ: Psalm 40:1-4

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, help us to always put our trust in you. On our own we can do nothing. With you all is possible. All honor to you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

MEDITATION: Our society is so much inclined to the idea of "you can do it." It's so easy to forget to include God's will in our decisions. We rush right into things without going first to God to discern what is his will and the best for us. We don't have to get on our knees – just close our eyes and be open to what is God's will. Be patient just like David in this Psalm.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, you are an awesome God. May I always turn first to you in all my decisions. I put my trust in you. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Doris Johnson

Friday, March 18, 2022

PRESSING ON TO THE GOAL

READ: Philippians 3:12-21

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we long for the day when you bring us home to meet you face to face. In Jesus' name. Amen.

MEDITATION: Reflecting on this passage, my first question is: **What is the goal?** Verse 20 says we are citizens of heaven where the Lord Jesus lives. This tells me that all of the challenges we face in this life are only temporary. We must press on and look forward in order to receive our heavenly prize.

A favorite song "I Can Only Imagine" by Mercy Me, asks several questions about what our arrival in heaven will be like. "Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for you Jesus, or in awe of you be still? Will I stand in your presence, or to my knees will I fall? Will I sing hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all? I can only imagine."

The next question that comes to mind is: **How do we reach our goal?** The next verse answers this by acknowledging that it is only through the power of Christ that we will receive our prize.

The last question: **What does Paul mean by "press on"?** With all the uncertainty of the last couple of years this has meant several things for me. Wait – wait upon the Lord. Acknowledge – The Lord is in control. Pursue the Lord through prayer and the reading of his word.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for the cross. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Deena Saffell

Saturday, March 19, 2022

CALLING AND FASTING

READ: Mark 2:13-22

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, be with us this Lenten season. Open our hearts to your word as we mediate on the devotions for your coming. In Jesus' name. Amen.

MEDITATION: The theme, "We are Sojourners" conjured up a different thought to me than what the scripture tells us. I thought of the wagon trains that moved our country west to the Pacific Ocean. Had they not persevered, where would I be now? I might still be in Nebraska or Kentucky.

Fasting selfishly? I can't remember having ever truly fasted. My faith and belief in Jesus are true and strong. The Pharisees fasted for show. The teachers of the law had the rules about fasting written on their scrolls and in their law books. For many of them fasting was a meaningless exercise. Learn about true fasting by reading Isaiah 58:6-9a. Read it now!

Every Sunday we confess our sins and are granted forgiveness. Yet some of those same sins keep reappearing. Will we ever be sinless? Most likely not. Jesus knew the hearts of the Pharisees and what they would soon learn. Jesus sojourned to Jerusalem, where he knew what awaited him. Jesus is still waiting for us to become his emissaries to the world, and how belief in him will enrich us, not only with worldly goods, but with a good heart to spread his goodness and the reward of a heavenly Father who loves us.

CLOSING PRAYER: As sojourners with Christ, let our hearts be filled with love and goodness so his light shines through us. We pray in his precious name. Amen.

Shirley Burrows

Sunday, March 20, 2022

MOST HIGH GOD AND ALMIGHTY LORD

READ: Psalm 91

OPENING PRAYER: Life is hard, but God, you are so good. Dear Father, draw us nearer to you and increase our faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

MEDITATION: Journeying with God is often "painfully good." In 2020 a deep depression, loneliness, panic, and fear filled me after I placed my husband in long-term care due to his Alzheimer's disease. For the first time I truly clung to the Almighty because I had no-one else to hold onto.

Alzheimer's dementia is not a journey for the faint-of-heart and I wouldn't wish it on anyone; however, neither would I avoid it. Alzheimer's forced me to choose between fear and embracing the unknown. I chose to trust God, to abide in his shadow as my fortress against fear. By doing so, the depression and loneliness were replaced with peace and joy.

Living with dementia, cancer, or COVID is like diving into the deep end of the unknown. You're not in control, and that feels scary; trust God with the unknown, for it is not unknown to him. Abide in God so that the "painfully good" journey is worthwhile.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for your presence, comfort, strength, and peace. Draw us near and help us to trust you more. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Janine Saul

Monday, March 21, 2022

REJOICE!

READ: Philippians 4:4-9

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for giving us hope, peace, and thanksgiving. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

MEDITATION: In Paul's letters, joy and rejoicing are a response to the Good News. Joy is not dependent on circumstances. Believers find joy in the Lord even in the midst of stress and suffering. Believers are to be confident in their response to others even in persecution. Leave justice in God's hands. Not worrying tells us that God loves his children and cares about their needs and has invited us to pray about everything.

When I think of this passage, I am reminded of the hope, peace, and love that we are to live by. We are commanded to be kind and trustworthy, rejoicing in the Lord. When I start to worry or become anxious, I am reminded that God is always with me. I pray to him for guidance, then the worry changes to joy and happiness as I witness the things around me. God is LOVE.

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for your love and guidance. I pray that all have comfort in your words of peace and rejoice with the knowledge that all one has to do is pray for guidance and peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Barbara Riggs

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

THOUGHTFULNESS

READ: Mark 4:1-20

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, in a world where we are quick to judge please give me the patience to reflect and find the meaning of what you are trying to say to me. Amen.

MEDITATION: God has chosen us to live at this time and place for a reason. We are part of his master plan. Nothing happens by accident. From my limited perspective, I have trouble understanding what is happening around us in society, government, and even the church. I find myself shaking my head and questioning what I thought was true. Whenever I feel the world spinning off its axis, I need to pause. God has a plan. Disconnect from social media. Take the time to reflect and be thoughtful. Don't fall prey to marketing specialists who try to inflame our emotions and turn us against each other. In the parable of the Sower, I find the inspiration to create the fertile soil that allows God's word to take hold. No matter how crazy the world seems to be, there is a greater purpose. His purpose. I am but one piece in an infinite puzzle that God is assembling. I need to invest in creating the right soil to let what God is trying to show me and tell me take root. Only then will we have the inner peace we all desire.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, forgive me. I know you are trying to communicate with me, but my daily life interferes with your message. Help me to slow down, reflect, and be thoughtful. We are here today because that is your plan. I must never forget that you are in control and because you are in control, all will be well. Amen.

Bill Pelster

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

IT WORKS!

READ: Joshua 1:7-9

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, I ask that you encourage your truth and love to grow in me, not just for my own joy, but also so that I may show it to others and they may be attracted to you. Amen.

MEDITATION: Joshua led the Israelites back into their homeland after their long journey from Egypt. God tells Joshua that he will get him and the people through it if Joshua is strong and courageous and obeys God's Word. Fine for Joshua, but why is God telling us this story? Of course, it is important in the history of our faith. But that was then, and this is now. Yet, we are much unlike Joshua – few of us are chosen leaders of great numbers in critical times.

I don't have all the answers and am suspicious of those who seem to. But I think the lesson applies. We all face things, sometimes very hard things. And I believe the formula given to Joshua works.

It works! That might be this limited earthly person's (my) best argument for believing and following. Keep going, and keep in the path that God has made for us. It has elevated me as it did Joshua, made life make sense for me, and connected me with a kind of love, with God, and with people, that is deeper and more encouraging than anything else I've found. A small example: when in law school, I started having a strange blockage. When I was out of answers for myself, I turned back to the faith of my youth, started reading the Bible, and got better from it. I'm grateful that happened. Things like this are partly beyond the limits of intellectual understanding, and that's OK with me. It works; faith works.

The path for each of us is a little different. But try to be courageous in your challenges and stay in the Word, and I believe you will find strength and encouragement.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for all that you offer us. Amen.

Alan Macpherson

Thursday, March 24, 2022

THANKS FOR GIFTS

READ: Philippians 4:10-13

OPENING PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for giving us the opportunity as a church to study your Truth together. We ask you to guide us as we read Scripture, talk about your goodness, and encourage one another in faith. Amen.

MEDITATION: From this verse, I learned how to be grateful for what I have regardless of my situation. Even throughout a worldwide pandemic where I have faced many hardships, I knew that there was always someone beside me who would be concerned for me, even if I could not see him.

The strength I have is the accumulation of my faith, as well as the support I have received in my daily struggles. It was through these experiences that I was capable of growing to the point where I could find peace and rejoice because I knew that in any situation I was never truly alone.

This verse has taught me to be disciplined and through these words I am now able to be content, even when the situation may look difficult in the eyes of the secular world. While the words I have said before may seem as if I have mastered the art of discipline, I still find myself struggling to truly rely on the Lord, my Father. But I know that through practice and through developing greater faith, I will eventually be able to find peace and comfort through him.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Thank you for granting us the opportunity to live in your light and walk in your truth. May the things that have been revealed and the thoughts that we have shared dwell in our hearts and stir us into action. We ask all this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Kaleb Kim

Friday, March 25, 2022

US AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

READ: Mark 4:21-34

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please help me to hear your voice and to see my purpose so that I may grow and produce a crop for your kingdom. Amen.

MEDITATION: On reading this passage I see five parables contained here that illustrate how we should live out our faith and how our behavior works in building God's kingdom: using our light, using our measure, using our talents, the sprouting seed, and the mustard seed.

Matthew 5:14-16, 7:2, and 24:14-30 help to explain the first three parables. We are to let our light shine in the world so that our fellow man will see our love of Christ through our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. We are not to judge self-righteously, but we are to discern what is good or true by measuring it against scripture. We are to remain vigilant in our good deeds so that we may make a return on God's investment in us. For all who have worked to increase the number of those saved in response to their faith in God and love of God will inherit the kingdom prepared for us.

We don't know how all these things will work together to produce a crop for God, but we can be sure that they will (the sprouting seed). And we know that what started as a small group of believers in Jerusalem will grow to provide salvation to all those in the world who come to believe (the mustard seed).

CLOSING THOUGHT: We are part of something big! We know that something will happen; we just don't know exactly how it will happen. Our job is to listen and then do our part, however God calls us to do it.

Rick Norberg

Saturday, March 26, 2022

OUR SWORD AND SHIELD

READ: Psalm 33

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, we not only give thanks for your unfailing love and protection in the face of hardship and adversity, but we also give thanks for the strength in which you instill your righteousness. Amen.

MEDITATION: I like this passage because it proclaims exactly how Christians, such as we, should carry ourselves. Christianity in recent years has turned passive toward the injustices that occur day in and day out. Christianity is the number one persecuted religion in the world, and we are even persecuted in this country.

A few months ago, I was in a class of mine where one of my peers advocated for the abolition of the church. According to her, the church, and Christianity in general, only exists to enforce racism, sexism, and white supremacy. Every single person in the class, my Christian friends included, stayed silent. They stood idly by while their classmate made assumptions about their belief system that were not only completely baseless, but potentially harmful.

I did not. I raised my hand and asked quite simply, "I'm sorry, just to clarify, are we talking about the religion founded on the premise of loving thy neighbor?" I did not say that to ridicule her or because I hated her. I understood where she was coming from. So many evil men throughout history have used Christianity for heinous purposes. But that is not who we are. That is not Christianity.

When I look at our church, I don't see a bunch of racists, sexists, or white supremacists. I see people of all ages, races, classes, and genders that come together to celebrate God. We must not hesitate to stand up for what we believe in because if we don't, we allow the name of the Lord to be tarnished by members of our society who solely aim to destroy what is good in this world. Then we will lose everything.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Go forth and spread the good word of the Lord. This is important now, more than ever.

Jonathan Pelster

Sunday, March 27, 2022

GREAT IS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

OPENING PRAYER: Help me to stay faithful to your word and watch over me forever. Amen.

MEDITATION: God is faithful. In this brief opening section, Paul has described the glory of God's grace to us in Christ. In short, it is Christ who does all the work and we receive all the benefits. Paul has described his own personal gratitude that God has done this for the Christians in Corinth, people whom Paul knew well from the time he spent with them.

Paul has written that God has sanctified the Corinthians in Christ and made them rich in spiritual gifts. God will hold them blameless on the day of the Lord, but he closes with a big understatement: God is faithful. The rest of the letter will reveal deep and ugly problems about the Church of Corinth. None of these things will keep God from being faithful, by grace, to any person who has come to him through faith in Jesus.

All Christians are called into fellowship with Jesus Christ. He does not mean to save us and then have us keep our distance until we arrive in eternity. Jesus wants us to be in deep fellowship with him, our Savior, and with each other.

CLOSING THOUGHT: I am looking forward to eternity – are you?

Jean Rich

Monday, March 28, 2022

CALMING THE STORM

READ: Mark 4:35-41

OPENING PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for this beautiful day. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and for my salvation. I need nothing more, for you are with me. Amen.

MEDITATION: A powerful teaching of a life-changing event was experienced without complete faith in Jesus. Mark 4:39-40: "Then he arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But he said to them, 'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?'"

There have been events in my life so challenging and overwhelming that I began to drown. It was as if I had forgotten how to swim. But then I remembered that I was wearing the best life jacket in the world, Jesus Christ.

I have learned to always go to prayer in faith to Jesus. One of my favorite hymns is, "His Banner Over Me Is Love." He is always with us. How wonderful that your love for us is so great. You know what we need before we ask. Always guided with faith, it will be given, if it be God's will.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the living word. My faith grows every day. I pray for a long life with many days allowing my faith to grow and grow. May I be pleasing to you this very day. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

David Byrd

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

MY HELP COMES FROM THE LORD

READ: Psalm 121

OPENING PRAYER: Thank you Lord for always being here with us and watching over us. We are all sojourners on this planet and will only pass through once. Give us discernment in our everyday lives to better follow you and do your will. Amen.

MEDITATION: As Vinnie Barbarino (ref: “Welcome Back Kotter”) used to say, “I’m so confused”. Nothing in our world seems to make sense anymore. We’re living in a world of alternative realities. Our eyes and common sense tell us one thing, while our political leaders, media, and educators tell us something totally different. New vocabulary has cropped up such as “memes”, “reimagine”, “reframe”. What’s going on? HELP!

Where do we go for understanding and help? Psalm 121 tells us to “lift up my eyes to the mountains. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (NIV)

We live in a world saturated with social media, Google and non-stop cable news. Is this where we form our opinions and try to sort out what’s real and what isn’t? Look to God; look to the mountains for peace and understanding. We need to put our faith in the Lord, who watches over us day and night, going and coming.

As Pastor James teaches us, read, study, and consume the Word every day. Read it “as it is”, not as we would like it to be. Put God first and trust him to help you find truth in these confusing times. He is in control.

CLOSING THOUGHT: It’s so easy to follow society’s lead in forming our thoughts and opinions when we are bombarded daily with the latest trends, etc. Therefore, it is important that we begin our days with God’s Word and prayer.

Jim and Laura Pledger

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

THE LORD IS STRONG BUT GENTLE

READ: Isaiah 40:10-11

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for being the constant strength among the constant turmoil of this world. I pray that I will continue to seek you first when I need your strength and your comfort. Amen.

MEDITATION: This passage reminds us of the ways in which God is constant in his love, through his strength, and through his mercy. We can be reassured that what is completely overwhelming to us cannot stand up to the strength of God. And when we are overwhelmed and broken, God is there to heal, protect, and to love us.

I know I have been reminded many times this last year that my strength alone is not enough. But, like the sheep knowing that the shepherd is watching, I find peace knowing my hope is not in my strength alone, but in the strength of the Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I am grateful for your strength and for your mercy. Lord, please help me to remember that the troubles of this world are not a surprise to you and that your sovereignty overcomes all. Amen.

Ryan Reid

Thursday, March 31, 2022

A DEAD GIRL AND A SICK WOMAN

READ: Mark 5: 21-43

OPENING PRAYER: God, I pray that my faith in you grows stronger every day. Thank you for your grace and for your blessings. Amen.

MEDITATION: Mark tells us the story of two different people in two very different circumstances that have similar outcomes after encountering Jesus. The first, a woman in the crowd who has been sick for many years. She has lost everything and likely has been cast aside by her community. The other is the daughter of one of the rulers of the synagogue, someone well respected and well positioned in the community.

Just as it was then, we know today that sickness, pain, anxiety, and loss affects everyone, no one is immune. What is also true today just as it was then, is that Jesus is for everyone. Salvation is for everyone through faith. He came to save all sinners and we all need him. Regardless of where we are in our lives and what our needs are, Jesus knows and will meet those needs.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for the grace that you give to me every day. Thank you for your constant presence in my life. I pray that my faith in you continues to deepen and that I remember you have a plan for me. Amen.

Jenny Reid

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Friday, April 1, 2022

A LIFE MEASURED BY GOD'S GOODNESS

READ: Psalm 34

OPENING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we praise you for who you are. We thank you that our joy in life is

based not on our circumstances, but rather upon your goodness. Amen.

MEDITATION: A simple reading of Psalm 34 would make it seem the author had just encountered a time of great joy, happiness, and prosperity in his life. This was far from the situation for David!

Not yet a King, David penned the words to this psalm during a harrowing phase in his life. David wrote this psalm while hiding out in the cave of Adullam after having narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Philistines in Gath. He was also on the run from King Saul, who was jealous of David's success as a warrior and had attempted to take David's life many times.

This was arguably one of the lowest points in David's life. He was probably tired, cold, broke, and hungry: running for his life, and the leader of a ragtag band of desperate men who were also outcasts from society.

Yet he trusted in God. And that trust shines through in his call to extol, glorify, and seek the Lord. David exhorts us to taste and see that God is good. Even when life is not very good, God is. Always.

CLOSING THOUGHT: When we measure our life's journey with experiences of our God, and not our experiences of this world, we find ourselves radiant with his light, his glory, and his goodness. May we taste and see more of Christ this Lent.

Jinshil Yi

Saturday, April 2, 2022

WISDOM

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:1-13

OPENING PRAYER: Good morning God – Gordon here checking in. I’m out of my comfort zone – but I’m used to that because it is in this environment that I find growth. Lord, provide me the words that will encourage those who read this. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

MEDITATION: Look up meditation in the dictionary. (I realize that you already know what it means, but look it up anyway). Wisdom is only attainable from God. No university offers a degree in wisdom. Gods’ wisdom requires a high degree of trust. Trusting God requires that I maintain my faith and take risks. Building my trust was a slow process, but once I took that giant leap a whole new world or way of thinking became available. I see differently now. I hear differently now. I act differently now. Scripture really means something now and I enjoy reveling in the closeness and comfort of my relationship with God. What God has done for me, he can do for you. Do you know what it is like to lay your head down at night, without a single worry?

In summary, it is our responsibility to seek first the Kingdom of God, (Matthew 6:33 NIV) and not wait to be taught, but to learn. Nothing is learned until a question is asked and an answer is found.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, Jesus, for my salvation. Thank you, Lord for your love and patience with us. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your guiding my thoughts and actions when I take the time to seek your assistance. Amen.

Gordon Neu

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 8, 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

Palm Sunday, April 10, 2022

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

READ: Mark 11:1-11

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, help me face hard times in my life knowing that you are with me. Please help me to feel your peace rather than fear. Amen.

MEDITATION: I remember looking down on Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and thinking what Christ must have thought before he rode the colt down the steep hill across the Kidron Valley and up into Jerusalem.

Twelve years ago, I found out I had cancer by phoning a new doctor's office and listening to a recording before a person came on the line. I was unhappy my doctor's nurse had told me that I had "abnormal proteins" rather than a personal visit to tell me I had a form of cancer. Fortunately, I have loving support from Carol who let me know that we could get through this together. Also, we had faith that death has no hold on our lives! Christ's promise of loving me enough to face death for my sins, gives me the courage to live out my life in peace, loving others and following Christ's example.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Christ faced his death for us carefully, fulfilling prophecy, controlling details, and loving us sinners all the while. What a wonderful example his life is for us to follow. Thank you, Jesus!

Rob Roy Wilson

Monday, April 11, 2022

NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE

READ: Romans 8:31-39

OPENING PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for giving us these priceless words, Paul's passionate affirmation of faith in your love. Help me remember that what *really* matters in this world, are not the struggles, griefs, and pains, but rather that you love us fiercely through all the days of our lives, both here and beyond. Amen.

MEDITATION: I was startled when the subject I received for a devotional was my very favorite passage in the Bible! Paul's words to the Romans, to *us*, are words I cling to and repeat to myself in dark times. This passage strengthens me when I grieve the passing of family and friends, when I contemplate the very uncertainty of our future, and when it seems that the world is becoming filled with anarchy.

Paul cites a list of troubles we may face in this world, but declares that *not any* of this can separate us from the love of God. If we festooned ourselves with bits of scripture as the ancients did, I would have verses 38 & 39 dangling from my wardrobe: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." So be it.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, help us to remember that you love the persons next to us, and across the street, and across the city, and in the other political parties, and in the other nations, just as *fiercely* as you love us, that these words Paul wrote apply to ALL of your children, so that we may live in harmony with them. Amen.

Jan Swartz

Tuesday, April 12, 2022

LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS

READ: Hebrews 12:1-2

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help us focus each day on the eternal meaning of Jesus' impending death before his resurrection. Amen.

MEDITATION: This scripture has personal meaning to me, because at a young age I was diagnosed with a severe visual impairment of near sightedness. Without my glasses everything is blurry. This scripture to "Fix your eyes on Jesus" is a healing phrase. It is somewhat of a miracle that my eye doctor can prescribe lenses that sharpen every image I see! Often our choices in life appear blurry, don't they? Jesus Christ teaches us how to love and serve others as He did, in order to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear crucified Lord, we know that your Holy Spirit has the ability to grant us your gracious healing power. Thank you for your amazing plan of eternal life made possible by Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection. Continue to open our eyes in ways that lead us to serve the needs of others. Amen.

Carol Wilson

Wednesday, April 13, 2022

SALVATION IS GIVEN NOT EARNED

READ: Ephesians 2:1-10

OPENING PRAYER: Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your many blessings. Help us to understand your word so that we might live the life you created for us to live. Amen.

MEDITATION: Have you ever thought about the best gift you ever received? When I was teaching, I read "The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein to my elementary students every year. It's the story of the relationship between an apple tree and a boy throughout their lives into old age. Because the tree loved the boy, it gave everything it had to him, and the boy took it, until finally the tree had nothing left to give.

In Ephesians, Paul writes that we were once spiritually dead. But God loved us so much, he sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to die for us, paying for our sins so that we may live in grace and have everlasting life with God. It's by God's grace that we, through faith, are saved and not by anything we have done. What an astonishing gift!

Unlike the boy in Silverstein's story who took everything and gave nothing, Christians know that because of God's greatest gift of salvation, much is required of us. We were created by God to do good works, which he prepared in advance for us to do. God expects us to live a righteous life, do good works, serve, and give thanks for all that he has done for us. Faith without works is not enough. So, let's get busy! Thank God for the greatest gift of all by living the life he prepared for us every day.

CLOSING PRAYER: Holy God, thank you for your grace and your mercy. Help us to live a righteous life every day, holding up Christ's light in everything that we do in order to draw to Jesus those who are lost. Amen.

Pam Shaw

Maundy Thursday, April 14, 2022

JESUS PRAYS ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

READ: Luke 22:39-46

PRAYER: Lord, I pray that I will remain alert and able to discern your will for me. Amen.

MEDITATION: On his way to the cross, Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples and then proceeded to the Mount of Olives to pray to his Father. Some of his disciples accompanied him. Jesus specifically asked them to remain alert and to not enter into temptation (American Standard Version). However, being mere mortals, the disciples fell asleep while Jesus prayed.

We too have a tendency to fall asleep or to be distracted by secular things; duties and events that keep us from prayer. It is a temptation for me to become so involved with daily tasks and commitments that I forget to allow myself time to talk with Jesus. Or if I do pray, am I alert to what he is saying to me? Think of the temptations we all face daily; there is always television to distract us, a book, computer time, errands, household chores, even the temptation of eating. I am grateful that our Lord is a forgiving God. He sees our transgressions, but if we confess our sins and shortcomings to him, we are forgiven by his grace. Praise the Lord!

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, I pray that I will never be too busy to spend time in prayer, to thank you for all the blessings you give us, to praise your generous spirit, and to be cognizant of your will for me. Amen.

Laura Page

Good Friday, April 15, 2022

THAT'S NOT FAIR!

READ: Isaiah 53:4-5 (better yet, just read the entire chapter!)

OPENING PRAYER: For our sake, Lord, we thank you that life is not fair. We have so little to offer, and you have so much to give. Thank you for your mercy. Amen.

MEDITATION: Have you ever wondered why life seems so unfair sometimes? You're trying so hard, you've been so nice, and because of somebody else's negligence, you get the short end of the stick. "Life is not fair!" we protest.

Sometimes, we even have the nerve to blame God when we think life is unfair.

Can we talk about fairness for a moment?

Take a minute and read Isaiah 53:4-5. This is one of the "Suffering Servant" passages; one of a number of Isaiah's passages that tells of the suffering that Jesus will endure. Understand that this passage is *explicitly* referring to Jesus, and notice what Jesus receives: pain, suffering, punishment, and affliction. He is pierced (John 19:24), crushed, and wounded.

Now look at who is responsible: "Surely, he took up *our pain*, and bore *our suffering*... he was pierced for *our transgressions*, he was crushed for *our iniquities*...."

CLOSING THOUGHT: Look back at what Jesus received again, and compare that to what we receive: peace and healing. He gets all that, and we get peace and healing in exchange? Do you suppose our sense of justice had any say in this exchange...?

Pastor Brad Epperson

Saturday, April 16, 2022

REDEEMING SHEPHERD

READ: 1 Peter 2:21- 25

OPENING PRAYER: Dear God, thank you that you are in and with us in our suffering. Amen.

MEDITATION: First Peter is a letter written by the apostle Peter to believers in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Christians at that time (about 62-64 A.D.) were under threat of persecution because they refused to give worship to Caesar. Peter writes that believers should live moral and godly lives as a witness to unbelievers even in the midst of suffering. Peter writes, "Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God..." (1Peter 2:12 NIV.)

In our passage, Peter points to Jesus as our example in suffering. Jesus entrusted himself "to him who judges justly" and so can we. Peter points out that Jesus' suffering secured our salvation and that he cares for and protects us as Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (1 Peter 2:25 NIV.) It is also worth noting that Peter quoted phrases from Isaiah 53 in the passage showing that he saw Jesus as the suffering Servant/Messiah figure depicted there.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, few, if any of us, will ever suffer for our faith like those First Century Christians or the many believers today living under persecution. Help us live and act in ways that show your love to people and give you the glory. Amen.

Jim Foster

Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022

THE RESURRECTION: THE ABSOLUTE GAME CHANGER

READ: Mark 16:1-8

OPENING PRAYER: Father, thank you for the gift of eternal life through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for doing for us what we could not do on our own. Amen.

MEDITATION: As horrific, horrendous, and torturous as the death of Jesus was on the cross, there is nothing unique about his death on the cross. On the day that Jesus was crucified, the gospel writers tell us that there were at least two others crucified with him. Historians tell us that, under Roman rule, the Romans crucified thousands upon thousands of people.

That Jesus died is not unique. Every human being who has ever lived dies. That Jesus was crucified is not unique. There were over thirty thousand who died such a death. But only one person in all of history ever conquered death and rose again from the grave!

The death of Jesus on the cross was unlike any other crucifixion and any other death. What makes the death of Jesus unique? The resurrection. The empty tomb of Easter morning changes the kind of death that Jesus died. Because of the resurrection, the death that Jesus died wasn't just dying, but a sacrificial death for all those who trust in him as Lord and Savior. Christ died on the cross for sinners so that we might rise with Christ as God's children on Easter morning.

The resurrection changes everything!

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 Kim