

Lent

2020

DAILY DEVOTIONAL



BIDWELL PRES

IN GOD'S TIME

Lenten Devotional 2020

In scripture, time is presented in two ways: *chronos* and *kairos*—our time and God's. *Chronos* is the watch on your wrist. It's the tyranny of the urgent, your daily calendar, and the myriad interruptions that fill your day. It's a schedule full of tasks, holidays, traditions, and customs that fill our lives to overflowing. Valentine's Day, national holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, celebrations, and other events focus our attention on occasions that may or may not relate directly to our faith in God. These occur in world time, "*chronos*" time.

God's time is "*kairos*." It references God's appointed time to act in history. The time we live now is appointed by God in Christ, for us to act. God desires that we live intentionally, living fully into each moment knowing that God has ordained purpose into it. He sees the fullness of time throughout eternity and gives us a limited life span in which to seize each moment and look for his purposes throughout. God desires that we view life from the fullness of time from which he views it, to look toward *kairos* rather than merely *chronos*, for ultimately we will live with Christ in eternity.

The Lenten season grants us each an opportunity to experience a finite period of 40 days to live intentionally, ever mindful of the reality that we are of the dust of the earth. (Genesis 2:7) We acknowledge this reality on Ash Wednesday and remember that our days are finite. This verse from the 39th Psalm captures our nature well, "Show me Lord my life's end, for my days are numbered."

Lent reminds us of our life in *chronos* in order to further steep us into the more purposeful life of living into *kairos*. Lent gives us the time leading up to Easter to focus more intently on our life with Christ. It is an opportunity to fast or take up a discipline that deepens our Christianity. Your Senior Staff and Session ask you to allow this Lenten Devotional to be a discipline you take-on, in addition to your personal version of self-practice or sacrifice, to grow in faith and allow Jesus Christ to bless you.

The following are devotions, written by church members and staff, centered on the Bible passages from a daily lectionary prescribed in 2017, which follows a two-year cycle of reading through the Old Testament and New Testament. The selections in this devotional reflect the witness of *kairos* in the lives of the writers. These are devotions used and reflected on in previous years with the addition of new ones. These expressions of spiritual

conviction, thoughts, and insights, witness to the powerful presence of God in our daily lives. I encourage you to take the opportunity to delve more deeply into scripture and to let God engage you.

I pray God's richness, mercy, and grace upon you during this sacred time of Lent. May you discover anew the appointed time and times to which Christ calls you to most meaningfully engage in the salvation work to which you are invited in this most blessed of seasons.

With much joy and expectation in Christ,

Pastor Henry

Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020
Psalm 5; Psalm 147:1-11; Psalm 27;
Psalm 51; Luke 18:9-14

EXPRESSING OUR HEARTS

David was the greatest king of Israel. But Eugene Peterson reminds us that the world has been far more impacted by David's worship than by his politics. We find his worship in the book of Psalms. Some of my favorite Scriptures are from the Psalms. They are the lyric-book of our worship; we have simply lost the melodies. In today's reading we have four psalms. One Psalm is full of praise, another is a lament. One looks to God for strength while the fourth is a confession. If you spend time reading in the Psalms you will find the expression of every emotion. There are Psalms of confession and repentance, songs of great joy and praise, expressions of anger, grief and deep sorrow. Some of the best melodies and words that the church sings have from the book of Psalms.

When you find yourself struggling for the words to express before God I encourage you to look to the Psalms. It likely will not take long to find the expression for your emotion. You may also find the words that transform a heavy heart to a heart of praise or the words that increase your strength and faith to move forward.

Lord, hear my heart today. When I cannot even find the words to express what I feel I know that you can supply all my needs, including the words to express myself before you.

Tammie Veach

Thursday, February 27, 2020

Psalm 126

FAITH IN THE FAST LANE

Beneath cloudy, misty skies, I longed for a soup-and-sandwich combo. Taking a very late lunch at Panera Bread, I walked in to an empty lobby. To my right there were “Fast Lane” kiosks meant to alleviate long lines. (This is in addition to other technology and a drive-thru window). I opted to order with the cashier. She instructed me to wait down the hall for my food. I sat on a bench and looked up at a digital screen. The only word on the screen: Ryan. During busy times, the screen would show a queue of names so guests knew when their order would be up.

After no more than five minutes, a Panera worker called my name, handed over my food, and apologized with urgency, “I’m so sorry for the wait, sir.” I tilted my head in confusion. I explained that it didn’t register as a “wait” at all—that was quick! I imagine that worker endures impatient huffs and rolling eyes most days. We do like things fast. In fact, it’s often an expectation. Whether it’s food, an Amazon order, or reactions to our social media posts, the notion of patience hardly enters our consciousness.

While these may seem like trivial things, the habit can seep into more consequential territory like our relationship with God. In Psalm 126, the author assures us, “Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!” Farming takes time, it takes hope and faith. You may even be weeping in despair as you plant your seeds, but in God’s time, there will be a harvest to celebrate. Do you ever find yourself tapping your watch at Him?

Ryan Arnold

Friday, February 28, 2020

Titus 2:11-15

WE'RE TEACHING ALL THE TIME

We're all teachers, all the time, everywhere. As we go about our everyday lives, there are certain things we're called to teach, and to certain people. Pause to consider who your students are; go back and re-read the text. It's more people than you may think! Who are the younger people in your life? Who might be modern-day "slaves"? Are there employees or others serving you?

How about your lesson plan? Go back and re-read the passage to find out what you've been called to teach. How will you teach it? Sometimes we teach directly, and sometimes we teach by example. Have you noticed we become more like the people we hang out with? This is one way we teach, by modeling. We literally have "mirror neurons" in our brains that help us "copy" those around us.

Would you say you are proficient in the things you're called to teach? Don't worry- you're probably not, yet. Read verses 11-14 about the grace of God and its active work on us, and about Jesus Christ, who redeems and purifies us. When you struggle, go to Jesus. Expect help.

The best teachers embrace that they are also students, learning all the time. Keep in mind we all fall on both ends; we are both teachers and students. So, you are also a student, and there are people in your life to teach you. Pause and think of your everyday life teachers. What are you learning from them? Praise the Lord!

As for "maligning the word of God," giving others anything "bad to say," and "making the teaching of God our Savior attractive," this means that our behavior and the condition of our hearts matters. People rightly connect us with God. We affect the way they see Him! You are powerful, and what you do and say matters.

Thank you, God, for giving us power and purpose. Help us to lean on you when we fill this student/teacher role.

Bonnie Johnston

Saturday, February 29, 2020

Psalm 31:14

WHO'S IN CONTROL?

"But as for me, I trust in You O Lord. I say, 'You are my God. My times are in your hand.'"

I love calendars! I have one on my desk, one on my refrigerator and a smaller one that I always carry with me. Most mornings begin with this calendar open on my lap. I sit with my cup of coffee and look over the day, the week, the month, and make my plans: checking off what's been done; adding new items; and planning for future activities. I get a great sense of satisfaction and comfort from holding "my times in my hand." I feel secure. I feel in control.

Much to my frustration, my well-crafted days are often interrupted: a friend needs to talk; a sick grandchild needs care; an email requires immediate attention; and heaven forbid, my husband has a plan that isn't on my list! And those are the easy ones, what about unexpected illness, financial troubles, or the death of a loved one? My world begins to shake and suddenly my life feels very out of control. I think, "Hey Lord, this wasn't exactly what I had in mind!"

The truth is hard to accept: We are not in control! But thank goodness, God is. He has our "times" in HIS hands. He knows us and loves us. We can trust him to guide us every day, especially in those situations that aren't on our calendar! Stay open to his unique leading. Often those very times are when we experience God in a fresh way. Unexpected blessings come in surprising packages.

Take control of my life Lord. Your will, not mine be done. My times are in your hands...and for that, I am very grateful.

Karla Shelley Albert

Monday, March 2, 2020

Psalm 119:73-80

WHO AM I?

This deceptively simple question has inspired countless reflections, how-to books, songs, poems (and now, blogs!). It drives many major life decisions: career, relationships, lifestyle... what we do with the time we have here on earth.

But what if I'm uncertain about the answer? Like a boat with loose moorings, not having a clear answer to the question of which we are means we can bump and drift about when winds and waves come. Particularly in times of challenge and change, it is easy to feel confused, unsure, even lost.

We need to know who we are. We need to know WHOSE we are. "You made me and formed me with your hands. Give me understanding so I can learn your commands.

Let those who respect you rejoice when they see me, because I put my hope in your word" Psalm 119:73-74. This marvelous Scripture points us to the sure foundation of our identity. It clarifies our origins, our source of wisdom and guidance, our self-image, our fundamental hope. It is an assurance and a prayer.

Today – and throughout the Lenten season – let's spend some quiet and thoughtful time in reflection on what belonging to Christ means for our core identity. Here are some life-forming passages in which to rest and reflect:

My origin:

Psalm 139:13-14

Isaiah 64:8

1 Peter 2:9

My self-image:

2 Corinthians 5:17

1 John 3:1

My source of wisdom: My hope:

Isaiah 33:6

James 1:5

Joshua 1:9

1 Peter 1:3-6

Lord, I want to know you more deeply, to experience the fullness of your presence, to rest in your timing, to reflect your character. Thank you for your Word that guides me, and for your Holy Spirit who comforts and counsels me. Who am I, God? I am Yours.

Jo Anne Cripe

Tuesday, March 3, 2020
Psalm 25

TELL ME A SECRET

The word, “confide,” conjures up the image of someone whispering something important in your ear; a secret, a kind word, a precious thought or a deep need.

We do not confide our deepest longings to a stranger or an untrustworthy acquaintance. We choose those we love, value and trust.

Psalm 25:14 says, “The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.”

Can this be true? The creator of the universe chooses to confide his ways to us? Yes!

Earlier on in Psalm 25:4-5, David says to the Lord, “Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior and my hope is in you all day long.”

David is illustrating to us what it looks like to ask the Lord for guidance and direction and gives us the hope that when we do so and give God his rightful place in our lives, He responds by lovingly confiding His ways to us.

This requires we be an active participant in our relationship. Throughout Psalm 25, the psalmist gives insight into the role we play – trusting the Lord, walking in humility, keeping our eyes ever on the Lord – always with the HOPE that he will deliver us.

Lord, settle my heart. Help me to place you in your rightful place in my life. CONFIDE in me your ways that I can rest in your love and care, moving forward with confidence.

Nancy Bultema

Wednesday, March 4, 2020
John 2:23-3:15

NICODEMUS

What was it that drew me to Jesus? Was it his passion in sending the moneychangers from the Temple? I couldn't get him out of my mind. Doves and tables flying, men falling over themselves, bawling oxen and sheep all over the place! It was something. And then there are the miracles. Everyone spoke of them. Everyone spoke of him! So, yes, I had to see him. I went at night, crafting my questions carefully. I thought I was prepared.

He said that being born of the Spirit is like the wind. Born of the Spirit? Born again, anew? Could the wind provide answers, inscrutable and secret though it was? I dreamed of wind, and woke thirsty. I felt as if the wind inhabited me. Capricious, it lifts sand and leaves into the air. Fierce, it could rip off rooftops, uproot trees. I found myself repeating his words, wanting to make sense of it all. Sitting by the shore, I observed the sails of a boat move across the sea by an invisible power. He was right: the wind blew where it wanted, just as the Spirit does. I wanted to know this in my soul. He had told me heavenly things and I wanted to believe. How divine yet wild must the Spirit of God be!

I'd hoped my standing with the Sanhedrin would make a difference for Jesus but they mocked the idea. The wind blew. He was crucified. I brought 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes for use in preparing his body and helped Joseph of Arimathea to bury him. The air was gentle against my face. I raised my eyes to the heavens. The Son of Man must be lifted up.

He speaks of heavenly things...will you believe him? Will you allow the wind of his Spirit to blow over you?

Lauren Mesa

Thursday, March 5, 2020
Hebrews 4:11-16; John 3:16-21

REST

There is a rhythm, a time that keeps across the ages and throughout creation, a heart that beats with love for this world. Measuring out day and night; sunshine and shadow; seasons of bounty and times of drought; planting and harvest; time for the earth to lie fallow and be replenished; we feel it beat in our sorrows, and dance to it in our joys; work and play and rest.

The eternal, ageless, changeless God is the keeper of time. He holds our times in his loving hands. The ages of this world and timeless space are his. He works, and surely, he plays, and he rests.

We are creatures of time. Sunrise and sunset, work days and weekends, seasons of the world, and seasons of our lives set the pace of our days. Hebrews 4:11-16 speaks of a rest for the children of God. From our perspective, time can be relentless: consuming our energy, resources, abilities, and talents. Yet, God offers us rest.

John 3:16-21 assures us of the love this timeless God has for the world we inhabit and invites us into the light of his Son, Jesus Christ. Through faith, given us by this gracious God, we lay our burdens down and rest. Jesus has finished his work and by faith we rest in the knowledge that we can trust him, not only with the joys, cares, and demands of our daily lives, but ultimately with the burden of our sin.

When we lay that burden down, we receive forgiveness and new life; life lived to the rhythm of God's love for this world: working for his kingdom; playing for his delight; and resting in his peace through the assurance of life given beyond the confines of space and time.

Janis Barnett

Friday, March 6, 2020
Deuteronomy 10:12-22

GOD'S REQUIREMENT OF OUR TIME

In Deuteronomy 10:12, the writer asks what the Lord our God requires of us. As I reflect on this passage, I confess that I think much more about what the world requires of me than what God requires of me. Pressures of the world require me to achieve, spend, and attempt to be perfect. This couldn't be in starker contrast to what God requires.

I admit that at first glance, the list of what God requires of us in this passage looks pretty overwhelming. "Only to fear the Lord your God, walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord with all your heart and all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees." The core of this passage is about loving God and being in right relationship with Him. If this happens, we respond to God's love and grace by being love in the world and living into his commandments.

What does loving God look like in our lives? Can we just rest in God's love, or are we called to action as a response to God's amazing grace? This passage shows us God's heart for the orphans and widows, and calls us to love strangers, providing clothes, food, and shelter. Who are the strangers in your life that God is calling you to love? Are they the poor and marginalized here in Chico? Are they refugees fleeing violence in Central America or the Middle East?

God, I pray that you form our hearts so they break for what breaks your heart. Stir up your power among us that we might act on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, migrants, and refugees, and fashion us in accord with Christ's teachings.

Audrey Denney

Saturday, March 7, 2020

John 4: 1-26

HE HAD TO GO

Jesus does everything with a clear and purposeful strategy. In his perfect time. Every time I read this story I am convicted as soon as I arrive at verse 4. Jesus HAD to go through Samaria. What compelled him towards this place? Jesus entered into a country when many Jews chose to go around. Sitting down at a well, he initiated a conversation with a Samaritan woman coming to draw water in the heat of the day. She was, by Jewish standards, someone to be avoided, ignored. She was an outsider of not much worth, likely shunned by her own community.

For this woman, it was a normal moment lacking any expectation that a life-changing event was on the horizon.

But he HAD to go. Jesus welcomed her, initiated and engaged her. Whatever walls she and society put up, Jesus stepped right through. He invited her into deep relationship, asking questions, listening, and offering a gentle word. In these few moments she met her Savior and her life would never be the same. Her transformation was so complete that she could not contain her pure joy. She ran back to her village, inviting them all, "Come see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Could he be the Messiah?"

This Samaritan woman boldly and courageously allowed her entire town to see the powerful, trans-formative work of Jesus in her life, and in doing so, their lives were also changed.

What has been your experience with Jesus this week? How have you responded as he has invited you to experience his transforming work? Or perhaps, he is compelling you to love, serve or act on someone else's behalf, to enter into their story. Where might you have to go this week?

Kimberley Wun

Monday, March 9, 2020
John 4:27-42

EYES THAT SEE

There goes Jesus again, breaking down walls - this time, with an unmarried Samaritan woman. Culturally those are three strikes, and she is very definitely out of fellowship and out of society. It's no wonder the disciples are shocked, astonished, surprised. Jesus is dialoguing with The Other Side.

We all have our Other Side, and the emotions that swirl around it can cut deep divisions in our minds, reflected in our thoughts, words and actions. I'm sure we feel just as justified in our disdain of those we label "other" as the disciples did regarding Samaritans. Who falls into your "other" list? Be honest. Is it liberal Democrat supporters? Is it Conservative Republican voters? Is it those who marched for or against abortion? Is it persons of different gender, race, religion, socio-economic level? Is it the homeless, white supremacist, or illegal immigrant? It's important that you know, or else you'll miss - like the disciples did - the point of this passage.

They thought their job was to acquire food in town, and were concerned that Jesus eat. Jesus wanted them to acquire spiritual eyesight for the town, and be concerned for the people, so ready to receive the message of salvation. Jesus makes it clear that God has already been working, and nothing will satisfy us more than finding those who are responding to the message of grace and reconciliation. God's time is now.

Verse 28 reveals the woman left her water jar – an important item, necessary for her survival – in her rush to tell people about Jesus. Ask yourself, what do I need to leave behind to show Jesus to those around me? No doubt it will be our dearly held opinions that create division instead of compassion. Nothing takes precedence over the Gospel.

God, I confess my judgment. Jesus, open my eyes to the harvest. Spirit; reveal what I need to leave behind.

Tina Hoover

Tuesday, March 10, 2020
Psalm 34

ALLOW TIME FOR A DIFFERENT KIND OF ACTION

As I read through scripture, it is my practice to underline verbs. In Psalm 34, David gives examples of God's actions: "He hears, answers, delivers, and saves us; The Angel of the Lord (Christ) encamps around us; he is near to us when we are brokenhearted, and saves us when our spirit is crushed. He redeems."

David also shares some of his own actions: "I cried for help and sought the Lord and took refuge in Him; I revered Him and praised Him." David, who sought the Lord unashamedly, vividly illustrates how God supplies what is needed to those who seek him. God continually reaches through time and space to meet us each day. A challenge today is to release the grip on our schedules and electronics and seek time with God as David did, then trust God to sustain us through the challenges before us.

When moments are taken each day to nurture our spirit through prayer and meditation of scripture, we can discover peace amid the stressors the world brings. Spend time with the One who offers an open-ended invitation to spend time with him. What a gift: intimate time with a Savior who loves us just as we are!

As you read through today's scriptures, I encourage you to underline or make a list of the verbs. And for today, allow time for these other types of action: stop, sit, be still, seek, listen, pray, rest, wait, bless, and trust.

God I thank you for your steadfast love and faithfulness. May my desire to seek you increase as I release control and entrust myself and my time to you. Guide me as I seek and pursue peace. Through the love of Christ's name, I pray, Amen!

Leslie Amani

OUR PRAYER FOR TODAY'S WORLD

Humming birds flit and fly very quickly from here to there. Then suddenly they stop in mid-flight only to be off again just as suddenly. Most wonderfully they live among the twigs, limbs, branches, and filled spaces of the trees. They never clip, or crash, or fall short. They are always whole to who they are. How do they do it?

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, describes society in very negative terms with frightening phrases about the “times” of his world. Place Paul in any age or any time and he would say the same. Yet, his gospel, through every age is always the same, that is, to contrast the Kingdom of God with “the world.” In the world there are branches of lust, twigs of greed, and clusters of hatred, spaces filled with want, and on and on. How does Paul’s gospel finally get us through to the Kingdom of God ... to “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven”? Where is the comfort of peace? It is in God’s time. How do we get there?

Someone who studies birds can tell you that the humming bird navigates very simply. How? It navigates by going to the light. They have no fear of the twigs, branches, or limbs. Like the hummingbird, our answer and comfort is found in navigating by the light.

The good news of the Gospel is the light of Christ himself. That’s all. When things happen that shouldn’t happen, or when things that should happen don’t happen, we ask ourselves “What would Jesus do if He were me?” His answer: “Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Dear God, allow the gospel of love, the gift of grace, and sincere prayer always to guide me through the fearful branches, limbs and twigs of my world.

Lou Nevins

Thursday, March 12, 2020
Psalm 27

TIME IS A GREAT TRAINER

You have a choice: you can trust in God, or you can worry. We are all great worriers. We like to have control. We plan our day as soon as we wake up each morning. Our expectation most often is that our day will be problem free, but this life is not a given and what happens today might surprise you. God wants to offer you the peace that comes when you trust in him. "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace" John 16:33.

When adversity strikes, as it will strike each one of us, we remember that God walks beside us, no matter our circumstances. When we trust God we don't have to rely on our own courage or strength. God doesn't want you to worry about the future; he wants you to experience each step of the journey, remembering he is with you, in every step. When you offer your fears and worries to God, you tap into his peace and God removes the burden from your shoulders and takes it upon himself. When you are in a dark place and feeling helpless, reach out to God, who reminds us that he is with us. "The Lord is my strength and my shield; in Him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to Him" Psalm 27:7.

Time is a great trainer, teaching us not to worry, but to trust in God, even when adversity strikes...because God ENDURES beyond time; beyond all generations; beyond imagination itself.

Sandy Moore

Friday, March 13, 2020
Psalm 105

GRATITUDE IN GOD'S TIME

“Give praise to the LORD; proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.”

Praise for the wondrous works of God, as recorded in the scripture, and seen in our own lives, flows out from hearts filled with gratitude. The more we understand how big God's love for us is, the more grateful we will be for what we have; who we love; and for the creation around us. As the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, God's will is for us to give thanks in all circumstances. God is in control. God can bring good out of evil. God will do what's best for us – in God's time.

Gratitude builds up our relationship with God and with the people in our lives. Gratitude builds faith. The more thankful we are, the more we cannot help but share our gratitude for God's goodness as we speak with others. They, in turn, will also find reasons for gratitude. Our associates will see God's faithfulness through our praise of him, and want it. It can even lead to those little miracles in life which come from being open to God's presence in our lives.

Gratitude builds trust. As we see how reliable God is in all circumstances, we trust in his guidance and control. Trust leads to peace of mind. Gratitude brings on God's generosity. He blesses those who acknowledge him, and then, in return, our gratitude overflows into generosity.

Gratitude leads to happiness, transforms our outlook on life, and relationships with others. It leads to contentment with what we have. It even promotes health of mind and body.

As we remember all that Jesus said and did, right up to the cross and beyond, may gratitude fill our hearts.

Jeff Oster

Saturday, March 14, 2020
Psalm 143

WAITING IN HOPE

In a sense, we are always waiting on the Lord for something. We wait for anticipated phases in our lives: school, work, relationships, vacation, healing, even death. As Christians, we wait with hope. Because we know God, and Jesus as our Redeemer, we have hope that we can do well in school; or at work; that we can build relationships; and that we can be healed; even that we can die with His peace.

We experience hope when we go to God in prayer. David says, "I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Answer me quickly, O, Lord." When we open ourselves to God's presence in prayer, we feel assured that He is with us. Hope. For me, God is so present in nature. His hand is all over it. Feeling His presence helps me wait.

We can experience hope through our relationships. God speaks through our companions. He gives us encouragement through praying with friends, through group worship in church. Our friends inspire us with the difficulties they have overcome by waiting and hoping in the Lord's presence.

Lord, we want to wait for your answers, not substitute our own. We ask, with open hands, for your calming presence, for the hope that only you can bring us.

Penny Oster

Monday, March 16, 2020
Psalm 119:73

IN YOUR HANDS

“Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn your commandments.”

How can I follow you, Abba, when I keep stumbling off on paths of my own choosing, cursing both the stones in the road and the pebble in my shoe? Ah – Look up? Choose the light instead of darkness? Breathe?

A while ago, I discovered a little book called *One Thousand Gifts*, by an author unknown to me then: Ann Voskamp. A farm wife and mother of six, Ann found herself stumbling down a road much like mine: grumbling; seeing piles of dirty laundry on the floor; missing the light beaming on a perfect, fuzzy peach on the counter. She was missing God in the mire of living, though quite honestly, since her husband was a pig farmer.

And she changed. Not in the moment of light on peach fuzz, but in the months that followed, as she looked for you, Abba. She sought and recorded moments of grace to be thankful for, a better road, though one admittedly still strewn with rocks poking up through shoe leather.

I began to read, and notice you in my day. And I began to write, almost as a dare, betting against myself that I would be able to walk this way. I rarely see a sunrise, but your sunset over the western mountains fills me with warm gold. I'm learning to celebrate moments: a call from a far-off friend; a favorite lost book found; a hurt healing. I am learning to change, one moment at a time, grace by grace. I begin to see a sliver of who you would have me to be.

If I rush down the road, suffocated by the world pressing in, my feet become bloody and I am surely lost. But when I stop to listen for you, to be still, to let you deal with the pebble in my shoe, I can find again the narrow way that leads me back to you. I am thankful, and I am found.

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice . . .” Psalm 32:11a.

Abba, may it be so.

Vicki Bertaina

Tuesday, March 17, 2020
John 7:37-52

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” John 7:38 (NIV)

I grew up in a Christian family and accepted Jesus as my savior when I was in high school. It was time for me to taste God’s word which is sweeter than honey. I remember reading other translations of this verse as well. “He who believes in me - rivers of water shall flow from his belly.” I learned that the “rivers of water” refer to the Holy Spirit but I didn’t understand why water flowed from his belly.

According to William Barclays, the Jews placed the thoughts and emotions in certain parts of the body. The heart was the seat of the intellect; the kidney and the belly were the seat of the innermost feelings. The writer tells us in Proverbs 20:27, “The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts.”

This would mean that Jesus was promising a cleansing, refreshing, life-giving stream of the Holy Spirit so that our thoughts and feelings would be purified. It is as if Jesus said, “Come to me and accept me, and I will put into you through my spirit a new life which will purify and satisfy you. I will give you the kind of life you have always longed for but never had.”

God’s perfect time is offered to all of us. God gives us satisfaction when we obey him. Even though fear can keep us from obedience, Jesus’s perfect love removes fears. Is it time for us to allow the rivers of the living water to flow from within us?

Lord, may your spirit empower our listening and speaking so that your streams of living water can flow through us to other people.

Sungok Jun

Wednesday, March 18, 2020
Psalm 5; Psalm 147; Psalm 27

YOU BE YOU

I love gravy. I spent five years of my childhood living in Texas. Fried chicken, with mashed potatoes and gravy were Sunday staples. Also, for a month every summer I visited my biological father in Salt Lake City. His breakfast specialty was S.O.S. – “stuff” on a shingle – toast topped with ground beef and smothered in gravy. It was heavenly.

I’m 42 now and don’t eat much gravy. My life is a bit more complicated. Over the last few years my faith has been challenged and tweaked. I have been disappointed by my own shortcomings. And like many, I have despaired about the condition of our world.

One author who has been an encouragement to me is David Dark. So when I recently discovered an article Dark wrote for the publication “Gravy” about an intriguing man named Reverend Will D. Campbell, I had to read it. Dark writes that Campbell “was possessed and haunted by a devastatingly revolutionary idea: *Katallagete*, a Greek word he picked up from (Second Corinthians.) It means ‘Be ye reconciled’ to one another in view of God’s mercy. Or, as Campbell liked to translate it, ‘Be who you are.’”

So who are you? You are God’s delight, Psalm 147:11. You are received and accepted by him, Psalm 27:10. You are justified – declared righteous in the sight of God – and at peace with Christ, Romans 5:1!

Life is lumpy. It’s a mess. We burn those we love the most. And we get burned. But when you cover up that mess in the good stuff (In the case of gravy, salt and milk; And in our case, the redeeming blood of Christ), the results are spectacular.

You are a child of God. You are reconciled. Today, how can you practice being who you are?

Luke Reid

Thursday, March 19, 2020
Psalm 27

ON TRACK

“The one thing I ask of the Lord – the thing I seek most – is to live in the house of the lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord’s perfections and mediating in his Temple. For he will conceal me there when troubles come; he will hide me in his sanctuary.”

As a kid I lived by train tracks, and my sister and I loved watching the trains pass. What intrigued me most, however, were the tracks. How two metal strips could be aligned so perfectly that such a machine could roll flawlessly for miles upon miles. Standing at the track, and looking down the long strip as it weaved right, then left, all parallel – flawless – always amazed me. The parallel track kept the trains moving, rolling, one click at a time. I wonder if the conductor ever worried that one of the tracks would stray, or if trust was a given – all is well – this path is reliable and true.

The psalmist was no stranger to distractions and troubles, nor are we. “My heart has heard you say, “Come and talk with me.” And my heart responds, “Lord, I am coming.” The quiet, still voice of the Holy Spirit invites us to follow his lead, stay focused on the promise that we won’t miss out on God’s goodness, even in hard times. When the tracks of life are uphill or the storms of life rage, he is always the best place to focus our attention. “Light, space, zest – that’s God!”

What might the quiet, still voice of God be inviting you to today, so to live in tandem with him? How might this take courage?

Lord, let us delight in your perfections and keep focused on you amidst the busyness of life.

Janine Reale

Friday, March 20, 2020
Psalm 22; Psalm 148; Psalm 105

CRIES OF THE HEART

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” cries the writer of Psalm 22. Surrounded by enemies, with no help in sight, he feels abandoned by God. Yet to God he cries, where else can he turn for help? In brutal honesty, the psalmist describes his situation and expresses dismay at what looks like God’s refusal to help. “Why” he asks. How often has that word passed our lips as we look at our circumstances and wonder where God has gone? This is the very Psalm Jesus invokes as he hangs dying on the cross, forsaken, given over to the power of his enemies. What a reading for starting out the day! Yet it reminds us that Jesus knows exactly what God’s absence feels like, that we have a Savior who understands us utterly.

Psalm 148 is the next lectionary reading for the morning, calling the whole earth to join in a song of jubilation to God. It’s a startling shift from darkness to light. Whether we’re overshadowed by loss, and abandonment feels like our sole companion, or we are experiencing deep joy, we are called to look up into the light of God’s glorious face, and give him praise. Psalm 105 exhorts us to remember God’s wondrous works. Recalling past experiences of God’s goodness and faithfulness enables us to trust and praise him, not only when we feel his nearness, but also in our most difficult circumstances, even when we feel lost and alone.

Lord, call to our minds your goodness, and remind us of your promise to never leave or forsake us. Your mercies are new every morning; therefore, songs of praise arise from our hearts.

Janis Barnett

Saturday, March 21, 2020
Romans 6:12-23

TO WHOM DO WE BELONG?

How do you feel about being a slave? What about being a “slave to righteousness”? (Rom 6:18) How does it impact your life to be a “slave of God?” (Rom 6:22) Think on that for a minute.

In the ancient world, a slave was the lowest ranking person in the home and in the economic system. A slave was not a citizen and had no legal rights of their own but was simply the property of their master. Property, not a person.

The idea of being a slave makes us uncomfortable. We don't want to belong to anyone but ourselves, but the fact is, we belong to God. Thankfully, as slaves to righteousness and to God, we have the most gracious master imaginable and it is through a process of redemption and freedom that we have been brought from a life that leads to death (slavery to sin) into a life that leads to life (slavery to righteousness).

We are God's, everything we are and everything we have, including our time, is God's. God calls us to live each moment, each hour, each day, week, month and year in obedience to him – listening to his voice, discerning wisdom, and following Jesus. Our time is not our own; our time belongs to God, and in freedom he points us to living in righteousness.

When life leaves you questioning “Who am I? Where do I belong?” You can answer with confidence: “I belong to Christ, I am His!”

God, thank you for the redemption made possible in Christ's death and resurrection, that I am no longer a slave to sin, but belong body and soul to you, my gracious master. Lead me in your paths of righteousness today. AMEN.

Tammie Veach

Monday, March 23, 2020
Jeremiah 16:1-21

DELIGHT IN DISCIPLINE

I know many Christians who don't even read the Old Testament due to passages of scripture like this; they cannot comprehend how a loving God would bring about such harsh judgment upon His people. Rather than wrestle with the scripture, they remain in their immaturity. Though take note that even when judgment is passed against Israel, a time of restoration is promised. Because that is what God's judgment does for his children. It brings them back to Him in mind, body, and spirit.

The hope and restoration in this passage of scripture comes with a promise from the LORD in verses 14 -15 when He declares, "Therefore behold, the days are coming...For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers." God disciplines those he loves, (Proverbs 3:12). Since God truly sees us as sons and daughters; He takes great care as a perfect loving Father to not allow us to remain in sin, which can not only destroy us physically but also spiritually.

Unfortunately, affliction is often brought on by our own doing. The people in this passage were so hard-hearted in their sin that they even dared to ask, "Why has the Lord pronounced all this great disaster against us?" (v10). Does this not sound like the attitude of many in our culture who are so blind to their own evil that they believe it's good?

Can you remember a time in your life when you spent so much time pursuing something that God did not want for you? What excuses did you make? Are you in pursuit of something like that now? What is your attitude toward God bringing you back to your senses? Do you know that God is looking to restore you?

Jesus, I thank you for being the only way for my life. I have great faith and confidence that you love me too much to allow me to remain where I am. You know when I need grace and understanding. But you also know when I need discipline. Thank you for this comforting thought; you love me so much that you actually care to get involved in my life and restore me as your son (daughter), Amen.

Ricky Hayes

Tuesday, March 24, 2020
Psalm 91

MY REFUGE AND MY FORTRESS

The Ten Booms were a Dutch family and dedicated followers of Christ. As a way of living out their faith, they put their lives at risk by being part of the Dutch underground resistance movement during World War II. Their home was a hiding place for Jews hunted by the Nazis.

When their home was invaded, the Ten Boom family was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp. Corrie spent ten months in concentration camps. One week before all the girls her age were executed, Corrie was released from the prison due to a clerical error. She said, "There is no panic in Heaven! God has no problems, only plans."

Corrie lived with a deep faith in God until she died at age 91. Her autobiography, "The Hiding Place" was made into a movie in 1975, and, among many things, it shows the power of God's love and protection during even our darkest hours.

Psalm 91 begins, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.'" Throughout the Psalm, David uses powerful, evocative words about God's protection: Shelter, shadow, refuge, wings, fortress, shield, buckler... to name a few! Remember that when we walk through tough times, we are never alone.

Think back on a time in your life that was a struggle. Read Psalm 91 as a prayer, making it a personal statement from you to God, as the psalmist does in verse 4 . . .

"Thank you Lord that you cover me with your pinions, and under your wings I find refuge. Thank you that your faithfulness is my shield and my buckler."

Lisa Stone

Wednesday, March 25, 2020
Jeremiah 18:1-11

IN GOD'S TIME AND GOD'S WAY

Eugene Peterson has said, "Everything we think and feel is by nature a response. And the one to whom we respond is God. We never speak the first word. We never make the first move. God is always previous."

I pondered the idea of the potter and his wheel in this selection, especially as it connects to our introspection at this time of lent. It has always bothered me that I did and thought things that needed to be reshaped by the Ultimate Potter. I could hear his voice, in those very moments, speaking to my heart and mind reminding me of verses from the Bible that countered my evil. It can be too easy to blame others for our waywardness. God told Jeremiah to watch the potter and that he, God, could do the same with the people of Israel . . . and with Sandy Mercer, and others including communities of believers, down through thousands of years.

This Lenten season is once more a time for us to consider his reshaping of our lives. Our guide to living this reshaped life could be summed up by Romans 12:1-2, "So here's what you do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him."

When we wonder, and consider whether it really is worth it, consider this from Jacques Ellul: "In Jesus Christ we have received the irrevocable certainty that, no matter what happens, God loves all of us more than we can ever know."

Sandy Mercer

Thursday, March 26, 2020
Psalm 27

DO NOT FEAR! THE LORD IS YOUR LIGHT!

What do you fear? Financial burdens? Relational conflicts? An unknown future? Health issues? “The phrases, “Fear not” or “Be not afraid”, occur 365 times in the Bible. Psalm 27:1 says, “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid.” Somehow when we gaze upon the glory of the Lord and that he is our salvation and help, our fears grow smaller

Whatever it is that you fear, consider gazing on the “beauty of the Lord” instead. Verse 4 says, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”

Philippians 4 reinforces this idea and gives us some other places to redirect our focus. Instead of dwelling on our fear we can turn our hearts and minds to praise, and then dwell on the things that are lovely, noble and admirable. When we pause to redirect our focus we can see God’s faithfulness, glory and beauty around us. In creation, the smile of a child, the hug of a friend. We will find that God desires to replace our fear with trust, peace and faith.

Gracious Lord, when my mind wants to linger on my fear, help me to redirect my focus to the good in my life. Remind me of all the times that you have been with me in the past and how I can trust you in the future.

Tammie Veach

Friday, March 27, 2020
Psalm 22

“WHERE IS GOD?”

The opening words of this Psalm are probably most familiar to us as words uttered by Jesus while he hung dying on the cross. There are times in every person's life when we wonder where God is. We may feel a sense of absence, a sense of aloneness, maybe even a sense of abandonment.

In the book *Silence*, Shusaku Endo tells the story of a 16th century missionary in Japan who witnessed years of torture and killing of Christians. He kept waiting for God to act, to be present, to answer their prayers for help. At the end of the book, while in prayer, the missionary said to Christ, “Lord, I have resented your silence.” And then he heard the voice of Christ saying to him, “I was not silent. I suffered beside you.”

Christ calling out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” teaches us that Jesus did not merely act as if he were like us. He suffered like us and for us. He even experienced the feeling of being “godforsaken” that we may sometimes feel when we suffer. This is one of the unique claims of Christianity. Having a God who suffers is what qualifies God to also be the “Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” 2 Corinthians 1:3.

Even though God feels absent to the psalmist, he knows God's character and God's promises and therefore chooses to praise God. Sometimes when we're just not “feeling it,” we need to rely on what our minds know – who God is and how God acts.

Father God, in times when we feel like you are absent, may you strengthen us and help us to remember that you are a God who promised to never forsake us or leave us.

Shannon Coon

Saturday, March 28, 2020
Psalm 31

MY TIMES ARE IN YOUR HANDS

Doesn't it seem that many Psalms cycle around David's troubles and his unrelenting trust in God's provision in their midst? David prays for help and the Lord rescues him. We, too, know how to make such Psalms our own: we struggle and cry out. God comes to our aid again and again. But Psalm 31 holds us in its grip for yet another reason: the very last words Jesus used from the Cross come from it. "Into your hands I commit my spirit." Ah, we think, Jesus prayed this Psalm too! Knowing this, our desire might be to look deeper.

The psalmist entrusts his life to the Lord's hands because he knows that the Lord holds his people safe. In the shelter of God's presence we are hidden, held. Like a good father, he lifts us from our dire circumstances, not once, but many times. And where does he place us? In a wide, spacious, and safe place.

God showed his wonderful love to David when he was in a besieged city. I don't know about you, but I have been besieged a time or two in my life. Besiege is defined as being crowded, hemmed in, overwhelmed. Synonyms include: beset, pester, harass, hound. When such times occur, are you reminded, as David was, as our Lord was, that you are in God's hands and can "be of good courage"?

We are not alone. He holds us close. The psalmist says his times are in God's hand and that does not mean one day or event, but all days and all events. Jesus knew this when he faced the Cross. Do you know this? Can you trust the One who holds you?

Lauren Mesa

Monday, March 30, 2020
Psalm 6

CRY OUT TO JESUS

Plenty of us hesitate to admit the “bad” stuff, and for a lot of good reasons: we don’t know how, we’re afraid, embarrassed, ashamed, etc. David wasn’t afraid. He knew he needed God. Desperately. He shows us that even a KING, powerful and beloved and close to God, can struggle deeply. He shows us what to do when our grief is nearly unbearable. And when we don’t have any words at all, we have David’s to guide us.

David shows us it’s good to be honest with God. In Psalm 6, David complains of three things: pain in his body; trouble in his soul; and his enemies. At the start, he seems worried about God’s potential response ☒ David knows he is a sinner. He knows he deserves God’s wrath and anger. Yet he asks for God’s mercy and deliverance. “Save me! Heal me!” he cries out.

David spares nothing when he shares his feelings with God. He goes into great detail, the imagery of filling his bed with tears is so powerful. Notice the trust he places in God as he shares his experiences. Then notice David’s change of tone by the end of the psalm: he speaks confidently; knows God has acted in his favor; and shows faith in God’s mercy.

It is always the right time to tell God the truth about our suffering, our pain, and our fears. It is always the right time to ask God for help. There is no greater action in our times of need. Like the enamored and attentive mother of a newborn baby, our loving Father listens to our cries and lovingly accepts them. The Lord shows us mercy and acts on our behalf.

Take a moment now to use David’s words, or your own, to cry out to Jesus and receive his mercy.

Bonnie Johnston

Tuesday, March 31, 2020
John 9:18-41

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

We hear a lot these days about truth, lies, “alternate truth,” and “false news.” Speaking truth to power is a risky thing, riskier by far than telling the powerful what they want to hear. Though it may seem we live in “unprecedented” times, there have always been those who see only what they want to see, those who shout down any who disagree with them. And there have always been a courageous few willing to speak truth in the face of danger.

In John 9 we read about ordinary people who find themselves having to speak to power. Jesus gave sight to a man born blind. He did it on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees were livid about it. They questioned the man and suspected a hoax, that the man hadn't been born blind. So, they questioned his parents, who confirmed that he was born blind. But, as to who healed him and how, they said, “Ask him; he is of age.” (John 9:21) Why? “Because they were afraid of the Jews.” (John 9:22) The Pharisees had the power to put them out of the synagogue. For them it would mean being cut off from God.

Yet their son, under the same threat, spoke the unwelcome truth. Read his response to the Pharisees in John 9:27-33. The man didn't get that courage from his parents. No, Jesus had walked into his life, touched, healed, and transformed him. How could the Pharisees cut him off from God, when he had just had a personal, powerful encounter with God? The man was fearless.

Lord, give us the courage to speak the truth in love, to bear witness of your saving, healing, transforming power in our lives, even when it seems risky.

Janis Barnett

Wednesday April 1, 2020

Psalm 147:1-11

PRAISE THE LORD!

One of my favorite things about my job in Kidwell Park is that I get to share God's love with kids. When I was reading these verses, I couldn't stop thinking about how exciting they would be to teach to kids. You see, the psalmist is talking about one thing...why we should praise God. "Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit." Psalm 147:5.

God didn't just make us; didn't just send his son for us; doesn't just know us; God understands us...each one of us, personally. Do you see the difference? The Psalmist writes that God numbers, supplies, and provides for the elements of creation: stars, sky, earth, grass, cattle, and even ravens. This represents relationship at its most basic level. He provides for their existence.

In contrast, there is a unique intimacy in God's relationship with humanity. Look at verse 3, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." It would be hard to be more intimately involved with someone than to treat their wounds and know those things that break their heart. Similarly, verse 6 tells us that God strengthens and supports those who put him first and removes the wicked from their path. God delights in the intimate knowledge of our trust and hope in him.

Psalm 147:7 says, "Sing to the Lord with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp." If you ask me, the God who knows me, understands me, and still delights in me is definitely worthy of praise!

God, I stand in awe of you as creator and sustainer of the universe yet even more as the God who knows me and loves me personally. Sustain in me that awe so that I always remember to give you praise.

Christi Harrington

Thursday, April 2, 2020
Psalm 27; John 10:19-42

NOT YET

“Wait for the Lord,” we’re told in Psalm 27; “be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” It takes courage because waiting is so difficult. We ask God to act, and the answer often seems to be “not yet.” But could it be that the “not yet” is as full of God as the answers to other prayers that give us such delight?

Christians are ushered into God’s gift of Resurrection Time. The “appointed time” came for the incarnation, as well as for the death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that event changed the time we inhabit. Between the finished work of Christ and the promise of new heavens and a new earth is a “not yet” age.

Listen to John’s gospel, chapter 10. Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.” We must listen to his voice that comes to us in the midst of “not yet.” That voice kindles hope in us. It is his gift, just as he has given us faith and love.

So we must take courage, we must persevere. “It is,” as theologian Karl Barth writes, “to live in hope, in glad but patient hope, no less surely than to live in faith and love. For the object of hope is identical with that of faith and love. It is the man Jesus, the Lord Himself, who is the Lord of all times, who fulfills all times, and who does not leave his followers empty. ...”

The appointed time will come.

Lord, help me to see your gracious hand even in the “not yet” of my life, knowing the day will come when all tears will be wiped away forever.

Dan Barnett

Friday, April 3, 2020
Jeremiah 29:11-14

HIS PLANS OR OURS?

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile,” (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

It is possible Jeremiah 29:11 is one of the most frequently misunderstood passages of scripture. We so often read it as a promise that we will get the object of our plans. We lean on it as a promise that we will prosper in happiness and success. The problem with that understanding is that nowhere in this passage do we find a promise for our plans. God is making a promise to his people. A promise that he, and he alone, knows the plans that he has for us. If we expect the plan of our life to always make us happy, what does that say about God when life is difficult or we are struggling to prosper in the ways we so desire?

I am reminded of the scene of Christ in the garden when he so fervently prays for God’s plan to overpower his own. In the midst of our lives of faith, whose plan do we trust? Have we set our plan so strongly in stone that we lose sight of where God desires to lead us?

Our goal is simply to make sure that our plan is in line with his plan. Our plan should be to put ourselves into that place where we “seek him and find him,” and then, we will be found by him.

May we move each day toward his plan with great hope.

Brian Solecki

Saturday, April 4, 2020
Romans 11:25-36

DOXOLOGY LIVING

The readings for today contain a “doxology” – one of many in Scripture. In the middle of a carefully crafted treatise on the nature of salvation, the Apostle Paul pauses and bursts out with this passionate hymn of praise:

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! ...For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.” Romans 11:33, 36

Glorious!

But just what are “doxologies”? We’ve certainly sung them countless times, but have we really given them much thought?

Derived from the Greek words “doxa” (glory) and “logia” (oral or written expression), doxologies are powerful expressions of praise to God. The Bible includes a plentiful variety, used in both public and private worship. We find them in formal celebrations, in spontaneous personal prayers, as benedictions, and as triumphant conclusions to many portions of Scripture.

Doxologies aren’t found only in the Bible. Throughout history – from the catacombs of the first century, to village huts across the globe, to the most splendid cathedrals – God’s people have crafted and sung joyfully expressive responses to His gifts and glory.

And it won’t end here on earth. Think of it! Throughout eternity, God’s people will endlessly worship Him – exploding in new and ever-expanding doxologies of praise as His glory is revealed in forever-deepening ways. Let us make “doxology” a characteristic of our daily lives as we walk in awe of and gratitude to the God who made us, redeemed us, loves us.

Early in the 17th century, poet George Herbert wrote:

Thou that hast given so much to me,
Give one thing more - a grateful heart...
Such a heart, whose pulse may be
Thy praise.

May we be people whose every heartbeat is a response of praise.

Jo Anne Cripe

Monday, April 6, 2020
John 12:12-14

NOT WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR

“The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted, ‘Praise God! Blessing on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!’ Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: ‘Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt.’”

This is called the “triumphal entry of Jesus.” It was triumphant! Palm branches were laid at his feet, which was a way of honoring soldiers returning from a victorious battle. It must have been a glorious thing to witness! The crowd was wild with adulation! They wanted him to perform miracles. They wanted a king that would fit their ideas.

Yet Jesus, rather than enter riding a beautiful steed, chose to ride upon a humble young donkey. The King of Kings, God incarnate, came in humility. At the time, the crowd didn’t know that Jesus would be crucified on a cross in six days. They didn’t know that they would be yelling, “Crucify him!”

They thought he would dominate. He sacrificed. They thought he would be a powerful earthly ruler. He succumbed to death to rule in our hearts. They thought he would deliver them from their enemies. He delivered us from sin. They didn’t know that through his death, he would offer himself a ransom for all mankind. They had such great plans for Jesus, but they didn’t know God’s plan.

Lord, when we have plans, no matter how great we think they are, help us to surrender them to your plan... to your will.

Lisa Stone

Tuesday, April 7, 2020
Psalm 91

ON EAGLE'S WINGS

I attended a memorial service where the hymn, "On Eagle's Wings" was beautifully sung. It's a powerful, uplifting hymn, based on Psalm 91, that tells us to trust God and he will protect us. Here are some of the lyrics:

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord,
Who abide in His shadow for life,
Say to the Lord, "My Refuge,
My Rock in Whom I trust."

And He will raise you up on eagle's wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun,
And hold you in the palm of His hand.

It's encouraging that we, as believers, can feel God's protection from dangers and difficulties if we "abide in His shadow for life." We are confident that God will "hold us in the palm of His hand" when we are disappointed and confused by worldly things. His grace is sufficient and comforting if we adopt a spiritual view and seek not our own will, but the good and perfect will of God: "My Refuge, my Rock in Whom I trust."

So trust in God. Be filled with his love and "shine like the sun" and light the path for others!

Wally Sipher

Wednesday, April 8, 2020
John 12:27-36

JESUS GLORIFYING GOD

In this poignant vignette, just before Jesus goes to his death he says, "... it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Jesus goes on to glorify the Father thus:

"Now is the time for judgment on this world..." John 12:31. God is glorified through the judgment of the world in the death of Jesus. If you trust Jesus, you are united to him and his death is your death, Galatians 2:20, and his condemnation is your condemnation, Romans 8:3. Jesus bore the condemnation for all who believe in him.

"...Now will the ruler of this world be cast out" John 12:31. God is glorified through the casting out of Satan. Through Jesus' death, Satan cannot have final victory. Satan's weapon of sin no longer has power over us.

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" John 12:32. God is glorified by Jesus drawing all his sheep to himself. Jesus' death makes salvation available to all people.

"Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light" John 12:36. God is glorified by shining as the Light of the world in the lives of those who believe in Jesus. By believing in Christ, we don't just see the Light of God, but we shine forth the glory of God through our very lives.

On this day of Holy Week, can you name the ways God is glorified through your life?

Shannon Coon

Thursday, April 9, 2020
Psalm 27

LIGHT AND STRENGTH

On the evening that I wrote this piece, a stunning coral-colored full moon rose over the mountains, adding beauty to our already beautiful North State. How differently the nighttime looks when there is a full moon compared to just a sliver or no moonlight at all! For those of us accustomed to immediate light with the flick of a switch, the significance of this free night light can be overlooked. But put yourself in the time of David, before electricity or flashlights or even torch-specific lighter fluid. With the full glow of brightness, vision is obviously improved, which leads to better navigation, clearer decision-making and easier protection of both people and animals.

David states that it is the Lord who is his light, the one who helps him see clearly, navigate life circumstances, make decisions, give protection from enemies of all kinds (and as we read in the Psalm, David has no shortage of enemies). The Lord is his light. The Lord. And not only is the Lord his light, but also his stronghold, his place of refuge, his strength. Not a palace or armies or even his own muscle, which, being a shepherd, was likely significant. The Lord.

Fast forward to now, and I wonder what things have replaced Jesus as our light and our strength. Careful observation might reveal self-improvement books are my light, and my family, my strength. Or years of education my light, and a well-diversified stock portfolio, my stronghold. Those things can be helpful, but they are not meant to replace Jesus as our true light and strength.

Lord, show me what I have substituted in my life as light and strength instead of You. I ask you now to return to being the light and strength of my life.

Tina Hoover

Good Friday, April 10, 2020
Psalm 22, Genesis 22:1-14

GOD FORSAKEN – SO THAT YOU ARE NOT

Don't let the power of the words "My God my God why have you forsaken me" (Matthew 27:46) abandon you too quickly. Sit with them for a while. Ponder them in your heart. Soak them up.

Jesus' final words on the cross matter deeply to us as a people of faith. He quoted the 22nd Psalm written by King David, and yet this isn't ruddy King David prancing in gallantly on a white horse beholding a worldly reign of power. This is darkness. It is suffering, and the ever looming totality of death.

I'm tempted right now, aren't you, to jump to Sunday morning. I'm wandering. My foot is slowly slipping out the door thinking already ahead to how "Sunday's coming." But don't go there. Not yet.

Let Jesus' words of dereliction penetrate your hearts. Think about his sufferings. Imagine the psychological suffering of knowing his Father submitted him to the most humiliating type of death possible, crucifixion. Jesus took deep lacerations from bone fragments lashed against his body, his hands and feet were nailed pierced, his whole body laid bare publicly, his final breath cut off from asphyxiation; his body collapsed, his lungs crushed beneath him. Think of your parent submitting you to this. Incredulous. My mind shudders at the thought.

If you sit with this and hold it in tandem with its foreshadowing of Genesis 22, where Abraham sacrifices his son Isaac, it is stunning. Jesus is the final completion. It's what God was pointing toward as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. It happened for you and for me. Martin Luther the reformer said these words "'My God my God why have you forsaken me' are the greatest words in all of Scripture because in Christ, the God-forsaken sinner has a Savior who has taken on himself the full depths of human estrangement from God." He will also, Luther concludes, overcome it, when Sunday comes.

Your God suffered deeply for you. You will never experience God-forsaking you because he did. You have a Savior. Let your heart resonate with the words of the classic hymn *Were you there when they crucified my Lord*, "Oh how it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble."

Tim Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, 51-52

Henry Hansen

Saturday, April 11, 2020
Romans 8:1-11

NO CONDEMNATION

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

On Holy Saturday we remember that Christ is in the tomb. Since the early days of the church, this day has commemorated the end of the season of Lent. We pause and remember the truth of this season, this faith, and what our Savior did on this day. Tomorrow we celebrate the truth that Jesus conquered death through the Resurrection.

Today, as we reflect that we are set free by the work of God through His son Jesus, consider this ancient affirmation the early church read during worship on this day of the year: “There is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised-up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.”

We view death as weakness, and often see it as losing the battle. But the ancient words of the early church remind us of this great truth: Jesus’ death caused the entire earth, heaven and hell to tremble. Creation trembled, not out of despair, but out of fear, a holy fear in the unfathomable power of the God who loved us to the point of sending Jesus to his death. It was this power that allowed Paul to write the words, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

As we prepare our hearts and minds for the celebration of Jesus’ Resurrection on Easter, may we be ever mindful of the truth of how God used all his power in order to save you, me, and all who do not live according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

Brian Solecki

