



Devotional readings

for

daily reflection

Lent 2020

Absorbed. Our lives seem to be absorbed with things to do. Planning and preparing meals, play dates for the kids, catching up with social media, following the local and national news...so much to do! When and how do we squeeze in time for God? I've been a proponent of reflective thinking, those times when the mind goes on auto-drive and brings into sharp focus ideas, thoughts, events, and happenings from past experiences. For most, reflection is a time to make connections between abstractions and more concrete realities. In the next 40 days before Easter, in that space in time when preparation for all that took place in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, commit to squeezing in five minutes each day to read these short pieces. You will likely find yourself reflecting on them in the hours and days that follow, even when you are at your busiest.

Harold Frye, Ed.D.

Lent 2020

February 25, Shrove Tuesday

“God of feasting, we give you thanks for the richness of life.

As Jesus turned water into wine at wedding, we think of your desire for all your people to celebrate all our days.

Bless us as we observe the joy of being your people.

Send your Spirit to dance and sing with us.

We know that you created the world and created us in it.

You make possible times of joy and moments for reflection.

Enable us to embrace this Pancake ‘Shrove’ Tuesday

in a spirit of celebration of the goodness of your creation.

As we enter the Season of Lent, may it too, be a celebration of life: of an inward journey of contemplation and wondering, of confessing and forgiving, of learning and loving.

And in all of this, may we grow closer to Jesus, to one another, and to You, O Lord.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

(Wyoming Presbyterian Church, Millburn, New Jersey)

February 26, Ash Wednesday , 1st Day of Lent

Joel 2:1 “Blow the horn in Zion, give a shout on my holy mountain.”

Wednesday at 11:00 a.m. I can count on the sounding of the storm warning alert system a few short blocks from our house and another near our offices. At the same time I am irritated, I am thankful. I recall a stormy night May 20, 1957, when our family was celebrating a graduation ceremony inside the huge auditorium of Wyandotte High School. No sirens sounded, no alerts were blown. At the same time we were applauding the academic accomplishments of our brother and his classmates, a terrible tornado across town was wiping the community of Ruskin Heights from the Earth.

The warning of coming disaster is a welcome sound. Time to prepare is afforded. Lives are saved.

Preparing for the coming catastrophe that Jesus would experience is upon us.

You gave everything for my salvation, my Lord. Amen.

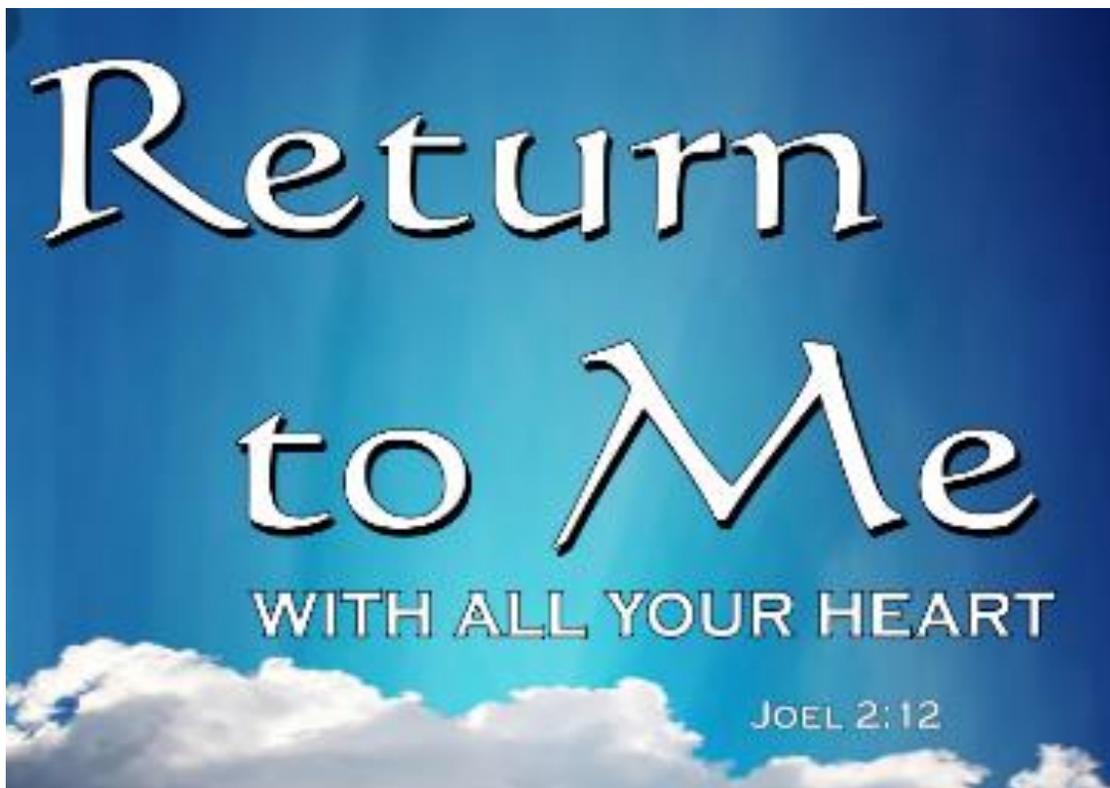


February 27, 2nd Day of Lent

Joel 2:12 “Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your hearts.”

Studying ancestry is a popular pastime with many. Thanks to our technological tools, we can search archived records, compare DNA, and connect with others who share the same origins. Not long ago, our family learned of Heinrich Frey, a 17th century resident of Alsace, France, whose father, Jacob, migrated from Guteswil in what is now Switzerland. Heinrich was a Huguenot, a follower of the teachings of reformed Protestantism and Calvinism. He suffered for his beliefs and chose to leave his home to immigrate to America, settling in Philadelphia in the mid-1600s. He would likely have been aware of the construction of the Cathedral at Notre Dame, for the persecution he endured came mostly from the Catholic Church. Heinrich had not left God, but his decision to make the long and arduous journey required that he and his family tolerate many hardships. Because of his strong faith, he was returning to God with all his heart.

Give me the strength of my heritage that I may return to You. Amen.



February 28, 3rd Day of Lent

Isaiah 58:6 “Isn’t this the fast I choose: releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke?”

Perhaps, not often enough, but every once in a while, the news brings us details about an innocent person being released from prison. This often happens given the technology and science in play today that wasn't there a few decades ago. In some cases, errors and omissions are found in the original prosecution processes. And, more importantly for most of us, Isaiah's message urges that we carry out deeds expected of us by God...to lift the burdens we too often place on others that trap them in unhealthy relationships or in our own biases toward them.

Now is the time in this Lenten season to set them free.

Set others free from constraints I place on them. Amen.



February 29, 4th Day of Lent

Psalm 51:10 “Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me.”

This verse from the Psalms has special meaning to those of us who have struggled with heart issues. As much as I wanted a “clean” heart, my hereditary inheritance prevented it and I faced surgery a few years ago. I often wonder if the advances in medical science I enjoyed and survived because of their existence might have benefited my dad. A “clean” heart nowadays is even more a possibility without the extreme and invasive surgery that I experienced. As the practice of medicine continues to advance, what might the future hold?

Of course, a clean heart in the Biblical sense has a different meaning, speaking of the soul of a person. The faithful spirit of God does lie deep inside each of us who accepts Him and opens our minds, our souls, our entire beings to His will.

I cannot worship You, my God, without a clean heart. Help me to cleanse my spirit.

A bit of added inspiration can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONf87GP7BTw>

May I glorify You. Amen.



March 2, 5th Day of Lent

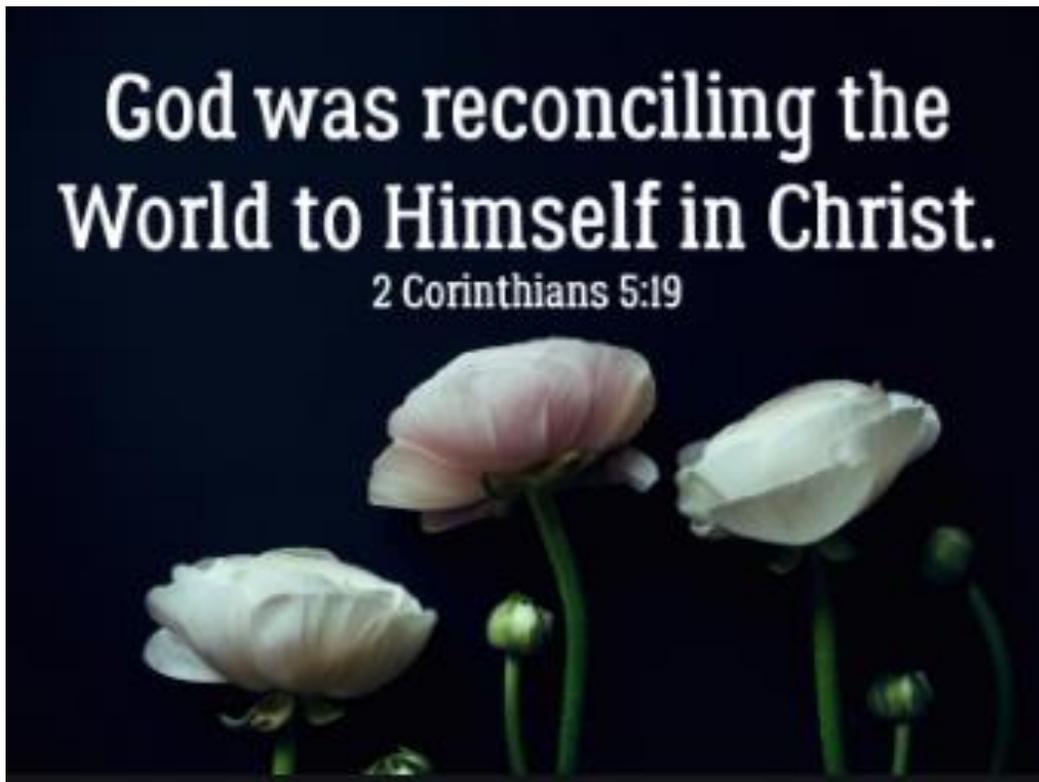
2 Corinthians 5:19 "He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation."

In today's social media world of Facebook and Instagram, friends come and friends go. We hardly notice, especially when someone "unfollows" us. Are we hurt that our thread of thoughts may not align with their own? Without getting political, I've experienced a few times when I chose to "share" or support something and have lost "friends" because of it. I want to reach out and say, "I'm sorry!" "I didn't mean to offend you!" "Your friendship is important to me." But, much like it was when a spat on the playground caused hurt feelings, the friend doesn't come back and I'm left to wonder if there is any chance at all to reconcile.

Paul's discipleship with the church at Corinth fell onto rough times. Even after successes and hardships, celebrations and mourning, Paul didn't want to lose these people as followers of Christ.

The experience of Ash Wednesday when many were marked with a cross on the forehead might be the right time to reconcile, to reach out to those with whom we have fallen out.

Give me strength, dear Lord, to move toward reconciliation. Amen.



March 3, 6th Day of Lent

Matthew 6:2 “Whenever you give to the poor, don’t blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people.”

When I was in the 5th grade at Quindaro Grade School in KCK, my younger sister fell from a jungle gym, suffering a concussion that sent her to the hospital for a week. The accident occurred near the Christmas holiday and the teachers, intending to cheer me up a bit, sent me on a bus with other students to the annual Salvation Army Christmas Party at Wyandotte High School. I was totally embarrassed and angry! I didn’t mind being with the other students, for some were my classmates and friends. What I rebelled against was the feeling that people were looking at me as also being one of the “poor ones.” Since then, I have avoided any situation in which recipients of my contributions would be made to feel that way, too. In administering the donation of musical instruments through our charity, Music 4 Jeremy’s Cherubs Foundation, I drop off instruments at schools to be delivered without fanfare. I do not want children receiving assistance to feel in any way as I did back then. They have self-esteem and dignity even though their parents may not be able to purchase or pay rent for an instrument. In fact, our process for verifying need is simple and doesn’t require that parents fill out forms and admit they are poor. Praise from people just isn’t important nor is it helpful.

Let me be sensitive to the needs of everyone. Amen.



March 4, 7th Day of Lent

Matthew 16:21 “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and legal experts, and that He had to be killed and raised on the third day.”

You may recall the stories of one of America’s most famous generals, William Tecumseh Sherman, who led armies of men into battle resulting in victories for the Union in the Civil War. Sherman’s quotes were numerous and often are remembered for their candid and pointed opinion. Perhaps, best known was his statement in 1884, “I will not accept if nominated and will not serve if elected.”

Jesus knew his destiny. He was God’s only Son who would be put to death and be raised to save humankind. He could have escaped what was to come, but He chose to follow His Father’s plan. As the Savior, He could very well have risen to power, smiting His enemies and reigning over all the Earth. But He did not. The disciples would plead with Him to take the safe path, the path that would allow Him to survive. But He did not.

General Sherman chose not the path of power and glory. Instead, he chose to serve others.

Dear Lord, my God, thank you for your great gift. Amen.



March 5, 8th Day of Lent

Genesis 2:16 “The Lord God commanded the human, ‘Eat your fill from all of the garden’s trees, but don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!’”

When I hear reports about farming on the radio, my mind often drifts to my great-grandfather, who farmed in central Kansas in the late 1800s. The radio report told of recent developments in artificial intelligence that would allow computers to guide equipment across fields, targeting individual weeds and taking them out. As with most radio reports, the good news about technology advancements was juxtaposed against comments from a farmer who wouldn’t trust that the computer would recognize a wash-out in the field ahead that would bring disaster to the equipment.

We know the outcome of what happened to Adam in the Garden. Adam, the farmer who tended God’s glorious Garden, was tempted and disobeyed God. And, we know, too, that, rather than bringing death, God chose to banish His children from His special place.

Unlikely as it is that artificial intelligence would have saved Adam from a lifetime of despair and distress, he wasn’t able to predict the disaster that lie ahead.

All too often, neither are we.

Give me strength and wisdom to turn away from temptation. Amen.



March 6, 9th Day of Lent

Genesis 3:4 “The snake said to the woman, ‘You won’t die! God knows that on the day you eat from it, you will see clearly and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

Lies, lies, and more lies. We seem to be surrounded by so many who are willing to tell falsehoods, hoping that we are gullible enough to believe them.

This falsehood told by Satan to Eve was an attempt to insert mistrust into the God-Man relationship. What might God be withholding from Eve? God had created them in His own image and placed them in the Garden with all its beauty, reflective of His own mind. What could God be keeping from them? Would they not die if they ate the forbidden fruit? If they ate it, what would their eyes see that was hidden from them? Satan placed self-centeredness in their minds. By their disobedience, they entered into competition with God. Paul exhorted the congregation in Rome, “So the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God” (Romans 8:7). Unless we are willing to suffer with Christ, we will not be able to be glorified with Him.

Take away my sin and bring me into Your glory. Amen.



March 7, 10th Day of Lent

Psalm 32:1 "The one whose wrongdoing is forgiven, whose sin is covered over, is truly happy!"

If you are familiar with the Psalms, you may know that Psalms 142 and 78 along with Psalm 32 are called "maskil" meaning enlightened or wise. Unlike the others, these Psalms impart wisdom. I hope you will read Psalm 32 and, perhaps, the other two. Like the Beatitudes, this verse alone goes beyond promise, beyond potential, rejoicing in the knowledge that Christ's sacrifice already atoned for our sins and our happiness is assured. The word "happy" seems almost trivial and shallow. Is "blessed" deeper? Is "blessed" more profound?

Oh, that I may know happiness. Amen.



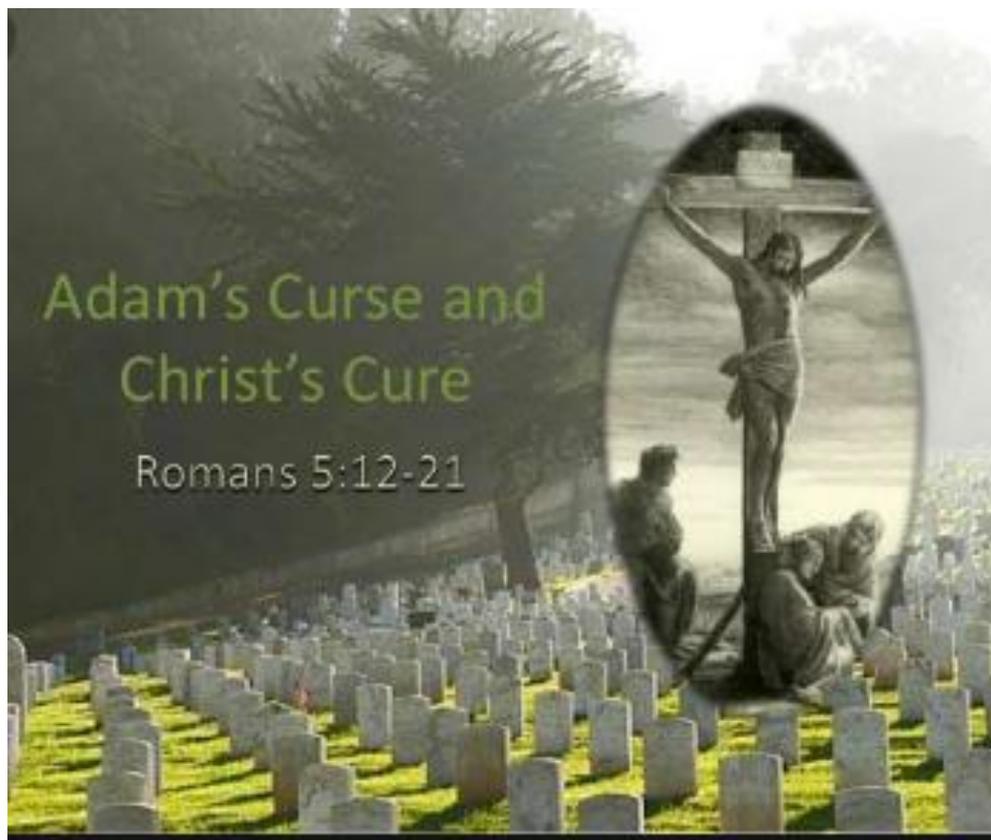
March 9, 11th Day of Lent

Romans 5:12 “So in the same way that sin entered the world through one person, and death came through sin, so death spread to all human beings with the result that all sinned.”

If you are a social media user, you know about trending. With the varieties of algorithms and multiple platforms, what starts with a single person’s entry can easily spread rapidly across the country and even around the World. Marketers, pollsters, and entrepreneurs pay close attention to what is trending, for public opinion can often be shaped by these single entries.

Adam’s sin trended to us all. His sin became an infectious disease that no one escapes. Only through the saving grace of Jesus’ death and resurrection can the condemnation of death become eternal life. Fix your trending focus on what can become.

I acknowledge you are my Savior. Amen.



March 10, 12th Day of Lent

Genesis 15:17 “After the sun had set and darkness had deepened, a smoking vessel with a fiery flame passed between the split-open animals.”

God commanded that Abram offer a sacrifice on the altar consisting of a specific kind and number of animals. As in the passage above, a smoldering receptacle that radiated its warm light appeared and mysteriously passed among the offerings. Even today, smoke signifies purification and light represents the knowledge that God’s covenant with mankind remains strong. A smoking lamp is used in many religious services to connote the presence of the Almighty. Abram, just as God’s people throughout the ages, received His word that He will be faithful to them. In return, God asks only that we be faithful to Him.

Praise be to our God, the Almighty. Amen.



March 11, 13th Day of Lent

Matthew 4:1 “Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt Him.”

What does the wilderness hold for you? After spending a life at scout and church camps, hiking through forest-covered mountains in Tennessee, Colorado, New Mexico, Wyoming, and South Dakota, wilderness is a place of peace (except for an occasional bear). When the distractions of the city lights, noise of traffic, and business of people going about their lives are removed and replaced with quiet, my mind becomes filled with thoughts and contemplation about so many things. One of the roughest wildernesses I’ve seen were the trails of the Wind River Range in Wyoming. Vast areas had yet to re-green from earlier fires and seemed bleak and desolate. Still, the peacefulness of the wilderness prevailed. Had the devil been present (and he likely was), I would easily be tempted for food and water and a dry pair of socks.

Jesus was offered much more. Yet He resisted, knowing that the Word of God commanded Him to deny temptation.

Help me resist temptations, my God. Amen.



March 12, 14th Day of Lent

Genesis 12:1 “The Lord said to Abram, ‘Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you.’”

In a YouTube video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXuELYj_Jhw, a train rocks back and forth on the tracks, the roofs of its cars covered with people young and old. The train is known as “The Beast” and carries migrants north toward the U.S. border. Some have made this same journey before while for others it is the first time they have traveled, seeking freedom from all that threatened them. Imagine leaving behind all that you know, almost all that you possess.

Abram and his family were nomads, accustomed to picking up their belongings and moving as conditions dictated. This time it was different. God commanded Abram to accept the promise of a new nation, a nation whose story would become the Bible, a nation that would be fulfilled by the birth, death, and resurrection of God’s only Son.

As we prepare for Easter, let the darkness of death be replaced by the Light of everlasting joy living in your heart.

May I do Your work, my Lord. Amen.



March 13, 15th Day of Lent

Psalm 121

"I raise my eyes toward the mountains.
Where will my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth.
God won't let your foot slip.
Your protector won't fall asleep on the job.
No! Israel's protector
never sleeps or rests!
The Lord is your protector;
the Lord is your shade right beside you.
The sun won't strike you during the day;
neither will the moon at night.
The Lord will protect you from all evil;
God will protect your very life.
The Lord will protect you on your journeys—
whether going or coming—
from now until forever from now."

I trust in You, my Lord. Amen.



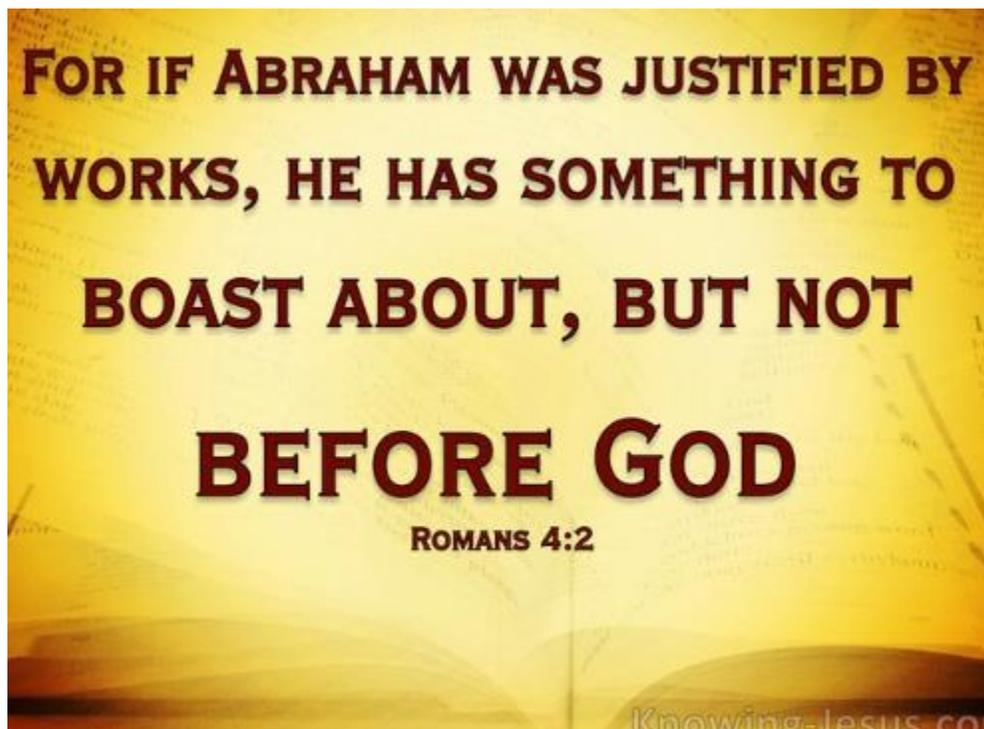
March 14, 16th Day of Lent

Romans 4:2 “Because if Abraham was made righteous because of his actions, he would have had a reason to brag, but not in front of God.”

Leadership training programs have stressed the importance of listening. Many of us aren't good listeners and, as a recent commercial notes, we're too busy thinking through what it is we're going to say in response. Research by David Keirsej into the works of Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, calculates that only about half of adults are good listeners. The rest of us have to work at it.

Imagine a conversation with God. Would we carefully listen to what He said to us, or would we be formulating our response to Him? Doubtless we wouldn't say one single word that could be interpreted as bragging. Not even Abraham in all his righteousness would brag to God. What then do we have to say? How do we comport ourselves in the presence of God? As noted in I Peter 5:6, “Be humble in the presence of God's mighty power, and He will honor you when the time comes.”

Let me listen for Your voice, dear Father. Amen.



March 16, 17th Day of Lent

Romans 4:13 “The promise to Abraham and to his descendants that he would inherit the world, didn’t come through the Law but through the righteousness that comes from faith.”

Confidence, trust, conviction, belief, assurance, devotion...these are listed as synonyms for the word “faith.” But what do they really mean when a relationship between two people is involved? When someone close to you tells you they have confidence in you, when they trust you, are convinced by you, believe in you, have assurance you will follow through, and are devoted to you, it would seem to be a two-way street. If the faith they have in you is equally strong as you in they, the relationship can achieve great things. We see so often, unfortunately it seems, relationships that are broken when one party fails to uphold promises made. We see them in our professional as well as in our personal lives.

God had faith in Abraham to do what He asked of him. Abraham had faith in God that His promise of a family almost too large to count would begin with him. No law could ever be concocted by man that would ever take the place of this kind of faith.

Is your faith in God?

I know what You want of me. Give me the strength to carry it out. Amen.



March 17, 18th Day of Lent

John 3:8 “God’s Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. It’s the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Toddler grandchildren are marvelous! They’re little learning machines, exploring new things and trying out new skills. A string of birthday celebrations brought back memories of something as simple and innocent as blowing out the candles on birthday cakes. Once the candles are lit, we all urge the celebrant to blow them out. Try as they may, it just doesn’t happen. Their breath isn’t yet focused. They haven’t yet learned to pucker their lips into a cone so that the air can be directed at the flame.

I think of God’s Spirit much like those candle blowing attempts. “You hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going.” To command the Spirit to behave in a particular way is just not possible, for God’s Spirit brings life anew. Just as God blew life into the nostrils of Adam, so too, does He breathe new life into anyone who is born again in Christ Jesus.

So, it’s not about extinguishing the candle...it’s about declaring a life growing and developing anew.

I listen for God’s Spirit to fill me with life anew. Amen.



March 18, 19th Day of Lent

Matthew 17:4 “Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, ‘Lord, it’s good that we’re here. If You want, I’ll make three shrines: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’”

As a teacher, countless times have occurred when students raised their hands to say something in class. Most times, especially when I posed a question that begged a response, I could almost always assure that the hand waver would give the correct answer; however, and the younger the student, the less assured I might be that the response would not only be wrong, but might even be about a topic totally different than the subject at hand.

Peter was like that. He knew of the history of mountaintop experiences such as with Moses and his son. This was a time he didn’t understand, for there had never been a transfiguration, a transformation of a man into a being not of the earth, but of Heaven. Jesus admonished the three disciples not to tell anyone until after His resurrection, for it would not have made sense at all. Jesus was transformed from a human being into the Son of Man. His face shone as bright as the sun. His garments were white as light itself. Jesus was preparing his disciples to know and to carry on the resurrection of Christ.

Hallelujah!

May I understand my part in carrying on the Light. Amen.



March 19, 20th Day of Lent

Exodus 17:7 “Is the Lord really with us or not?”

When have we not called upon God to answer our prayers? The phrase “Our thoughts and prayers are with you” has become almost trite, a cliché of seemingly necessary acknowledgement of others’ loss, tragedy, or despair. In those times, who hasn’t lost faith that our trust in God isn’t diminished? We want to believe in God’s love for us, protecting us and providing for us. But we are unsure.

A Facebook post showed a homeless man on his knees, hands folded in prayer, with the provocation “If he, having nothing, can be thankful to God, then what about us?”

Moses was trapped between God who had delivered the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt and his followers who now demanded that he do something about their plight. Would God step in to rescue him and them again? Without water, they would perish. And, as the story goes as before when they were saved from slavery, saved from death at the Nile River, saved from starvation with manna, God directs Moses to strike a rock to bring forth lifesaving water.

God responded to need. He continued to reinforce His relationship with His people. Generations would pass as He continued to add steps to His plan that would end with the birth, death, and resurrection of His greatest gift to His people.

Let me discern Your plans, my Lord. Amen.



March 20, 21st Day of Lent

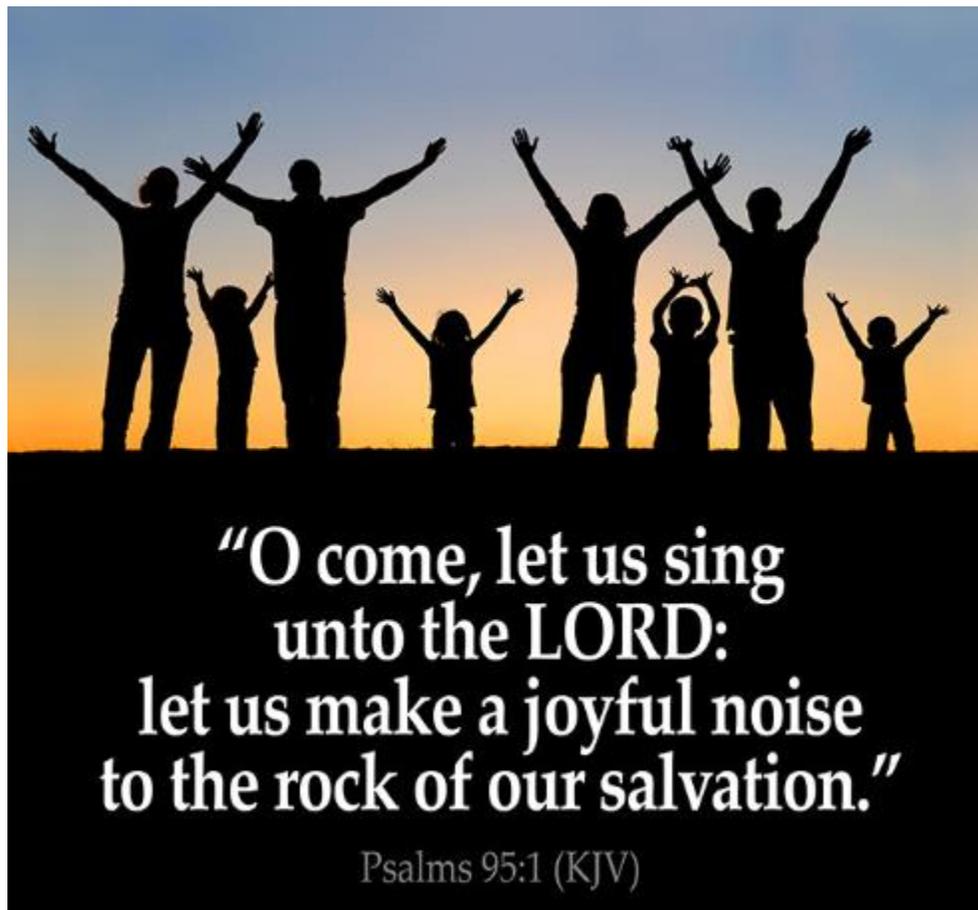
Psalm 95:1 "Come, let's sing out loud to the Lord! Let's raise a joyful shout to the rock of our salvation!"

In many Christian congregations, there seems to be a split of opinion about singing. Some prefer the "traditional" hymns and songs accompanied by organ and orchestra, written and passed down for decades in hymnals. Others prefer the "contemporary" songs accompanied by guitar, drums, keyboards and tambourines. Traditionalists enjoy the harmony brought together by printed music with soprano, alto, tenor, and bass parts. Contemporists sing along with words projected on screens, clapping in rhythm with hands held high.

William Young's book, *The Shack* (2007) describes the multitudes in Heaven singing, praising God nonstop. The question then becomes, whether traditional or contemporary, why do we sing? It's not to be entertained; rather, it is to celebrate our God. It is to praise our God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord!

I raise my voice in praise of You. Amen.



**"O come, let us sing
unto the LORD:
let us make a joyful noise
to the rock of our salvation."**

Psalms 95:1 (KJV)

March 21, 22nd Day of Lent

Romans 5:5 “...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit...”

You may recall the story of Wesley Autrey who made the instantaneous decision to jump from the subway platform onto the tracks in front of an oncoming train to save the life of a man who fell after suffering a seizure. Autrey explained that he did so because he “just felt like it.” What causes these acts of bravery? The soldier that jumps on a live grenade to save his brothers? The mother who sacrifices her own safety to protect her child who has dashed out into traffic?

Studies have revealed that altruism, even at the cost of one’s own safety, is strongly associated with compassionate concern. Contrary to this, when people experience distress in response to another’s suffering, they will usually avoid the situation rather than try to help.

Hundreds watched as Jesus traveled His journey to the cross. Most stood by, unable to act, unable to put a stop to what lay ahead. They may have experienced distress, but they were sinners not yet saved by the sacrifice of His blood. Compassion and altruism were yet to be revealed in the resurrection of the Christ.

Oh, that we may come to take action for others’ pain.

Place me on a path of compassion for my fellow beings. Amen.



March 23, 23rd Day of Lent

John 4:13 “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life.”

One of our hiking treks took us to the Great Smoky Mountain region along the Appalachian Trail in eastern Tennessee. The AT is a difficult hike that extends from Maine to Georgia. Because of its construction from point to point, little concern was made to provide hikers with easier pathways that included switchbacks and detours. Instead, points along the trail were designated for camping and refreshing. Some, especially those within the mountains, were established at sources of water. These natural springs were fascinating and most welcome as clear, clean water bubbled up in a constant flow. We used water purification techniques even though it was likely that giardia and other microbiomes were absent from the water. Still, we knew to fill our canteens for the miles ahead as no other water sources would be available for ten or more miles.

Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well. He broke with His culture by first talking with her, then by relating His knowledge of her past, then by suggesting that the well’s water was unlike the water He could give. His water was the water of life that brought eternal life through faith.

Let me drink of that eternal water. Amen.



March 24, 24th Day of Lent

1 Samuel 16:7 “God doesn’t look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the Lord sees into the heart.”

Although the thesis has been debunked, some still hold to the belief that eye movement can signal whether an individual is telling the truth or lying. When facing the person and their eyes move to the left, they may be constructing their response while eyes moving to the right are searching through their brain files to find what they know. Those that purport this to be correct further define eye motion upward to be more linguistic, to the center more auditory, and downward more kinesthetic. As with any theory, the method is certainly not 100% accurate and, of course, naysayers dismiss its accuracy altogether.

The reality is that God can see inside us. He doesn’t need an eye movement schema to determine our truthfulness. As Samuel was sent by God to anoint the next King of Israel, God looked beyond the sons of Jesse, past age and experience, and into the eyes, the heart of His chosen candidate, the young shepherd David. David, ancestor to Jesus, brought forth God’s great nation.

Forsaking what I can see in others let me look deeper into their hearts. Amen.



March 25, 25th Day of Lent

Psalm 23

Of all the Psalms, the Psalm 23 may be the most familiar and most memorized of all. Soldiers carry copies in their helmets. Hospice patients repeat the words softly as they await their meeting with God. At its very mention, you may recite its words to yourself as do I.

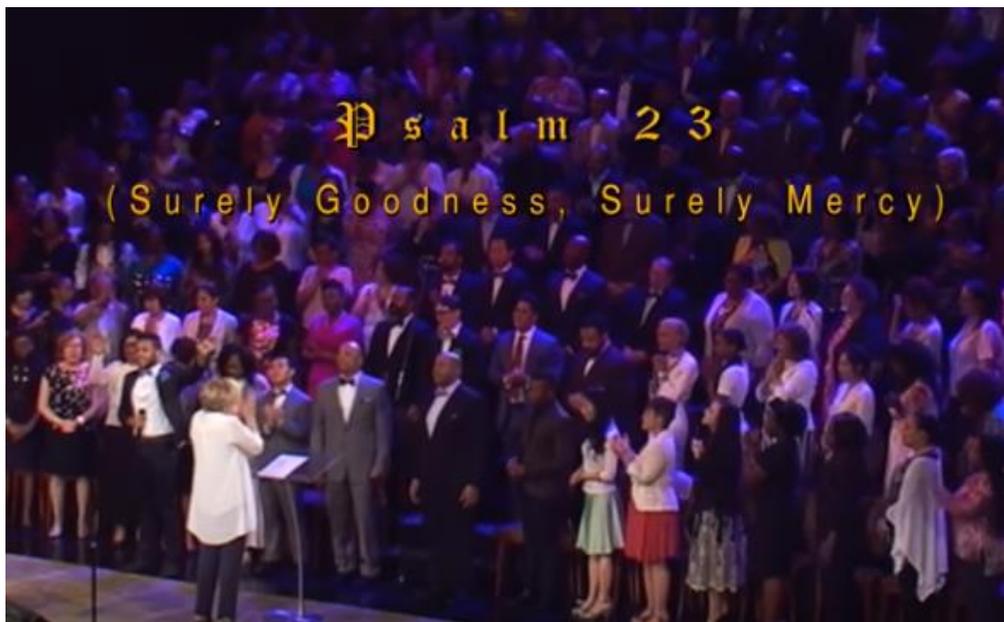
If you don't have Psalm 23 committed to memory, I challenge you to do so. Below is the Common English Version that may sound a bit different.

The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.
He lets me rest in grassy meadows; He leads me to restful waters;
He keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of His good name.
Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me.
Your rod and your staff they protect me.
You set a table for me right in front of my enemies.
You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over!
Yes goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life,
And I will live in the Lord's house as long as I live.

Rejoice with the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbgxBvLFErg>

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me." Amen.



March 26, 26th Day of Lent

Ephesians 5:8 “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light.”

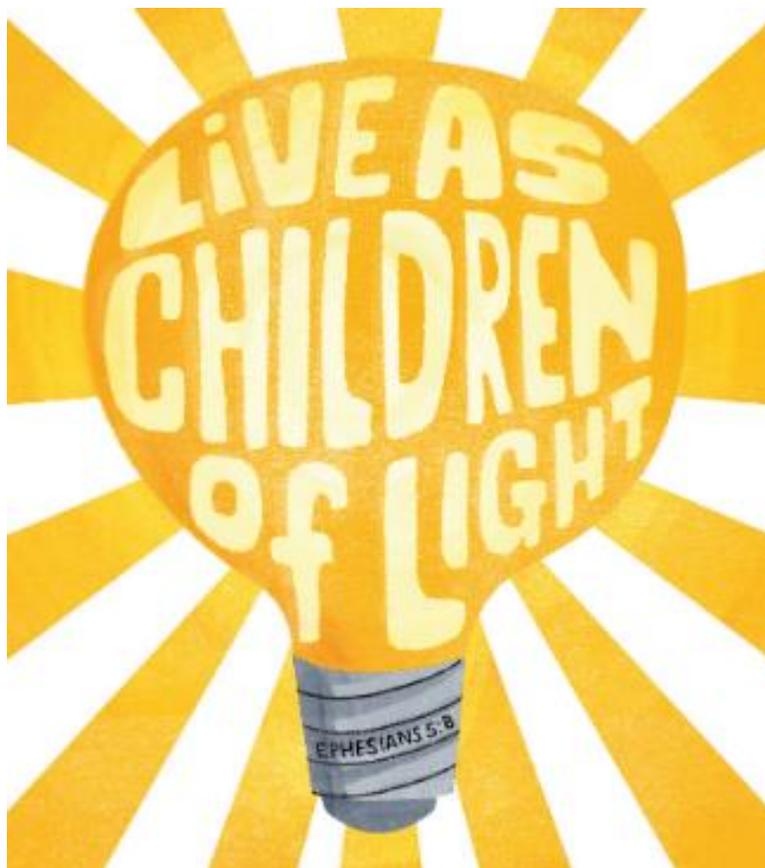
Did you play flashlight tag when you were young? Nothing was more fun than to chase one another around the yard, hoping to shine a flashlight’s beam on someone.

Paul told the people at Ephesus that they were not IN darkness, but they WERE darkness. He told them that they now not IN light, but they WERE light. Subtle but extremely important difference. As the Lord’s light, we bear responsibility for doing His work, whether that be in service to the poor, in prayer, or in modeling Christian living.

And, as Paul notes, we are children of light, unbounded by fear and reservation to proclaim ourselves as followers.

Be the light!

Fill me with Your light. Amen.



March 27, 27th Day of Lent

John 9:25 “Here’s what I do know: I was blind and now I see.”

In the times that followed Abraham Lincoln’s proclamation of emancipation for slaves, most had no idea what to do. They had been born into slavery, products of more than 400 years of bondage. Thousands remained on the land they once labored on, not certain what lie ahead. All they knew was that they were free. Attempts to form their own government on a South Carolina island failed as former plantations promised to them were eventually returned to their original owners. Because of their state of slavery, they were “blind” and unable to gain the social and civil status they desperately needed.

Jesus healed a man blind from birth. But those who sat in judgment within the Tabernacle were skeptical, not willing to believe that such an act was possible. They questioned the man and questioned his parents. Unconvinced, they cast the man out of the Tabernacle. When questioned by the Pharisees, Jesus responded, “If you were blind, you wouldn’t have any sin, but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

We are slaves to sin. We think we see clearly what our lives would be like if we were to be freed, but we continue to be tempted and fall back into the pit of transgression. Being “blind” meant innocence. Being able to “see” meant an awareness of sin.

What would it be like to be free of sin yet be able to go about our lives free of that burden?

I have the power to loosen the bonds that keep me captive. Help me gain the strength to escape my sin. Amen.



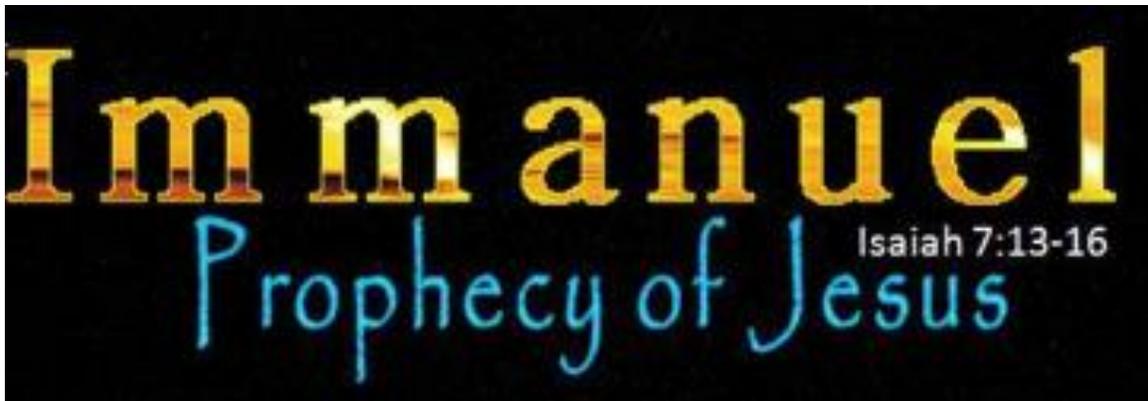
March 28, 28th Day of Lent

Isaiah 7:13 “Then Isaiah said, ‘Listen, house of David! Isn’t it enough for you to be tiresome for people that you are also tiresome before my God?’”

In 1964, Brant Parker and Johnny Hart began a comic strip, “The Wizard of Id.” After 55 years, the gag-a-day strip that features a host of bumbling characters including the king has continued to entertain. The king is a tyrannical ruler who, even though he lacks many attributes afforded his subjects, continues to consider them to be idiots.

Ahaz, King of Israel from 737 -716 B.C., was anything but benevolent. He destroyed parts of the Northern Kingdom and defied Isaiah’s pleas to trust God instead of foreign allies. He installed props in the Tabernacle that followed that glamour of the Assyrians’ religion. Overall, he lowered the character of Israel’s religion. Isaiah admonished that he watch for a sign from God that would come in the form of a birth. The succession of the House of David with its many kings faced numerous challenges, wars, disasters, and trials. The people longed for a savior, but that savior’s arrival was deferred for generations.

The presence of the Savior on earth has come and gone, but His grace remains. Thank you, My God. Amen.



March 30, 29th Day of Lent

Psalm 45:4 “Ride out on behalf of truth, humility, and righteousness.”

The 17th Century lyrics of the hymn, “Fairest Lord Jesus,” paint Jesus as the fairest of all, fairer than anything in nature or among mankind. Some picture Him in a chariot drawn by three horses: Truth, Humility, and Righteousness.

Interestingly, the 1926 Warner Bros. production, “Ben Hur,” featured a cast of more than 150,000 (mostly extras) in a silent “photoplay,” and included chariots drawn by four horses racing full speed around Circus Maximus. As was the practice with silent movies, a sound track added music matching the action on the screen. Doubtful Jesus in a chariot race would be accompanied by this song.

Enjoy vocalist Amy Grant as she sings this wonderful hymn. Picture Jesus riding forth toward His glorious resurrection.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vhnb2GS8llo>



March 31, 30th Day of Lent

Psalm 40:5 “You’ve done so many things – Your wonderful deeds and Your plans for us – no one can compare with You! If I were to proclaim and talk about all of them, they would be too numerous to count!”

When the time comes to prepare for a new job, most will construct a new résumé or brush off and update an old one. For those of us in the academic world, the curriculum vitae or CV is super sanctimonious. We organize the CV around three categories that are a part of our work: Teaching, Research, and Service. Depending on how active an individual might be or how long the person has been on the job, the CV can become lengthy.

How long might God’s CV be? His mighty works, His creation of all that we have and all that we are comes from Him. Through His greatest gift, His only Son, He teaches us about righteous living. His publications are cited more than any scholar. He models service to others.

None can compare!

I praise Your holy name. Amen.



April 1, 31st Day of Lent

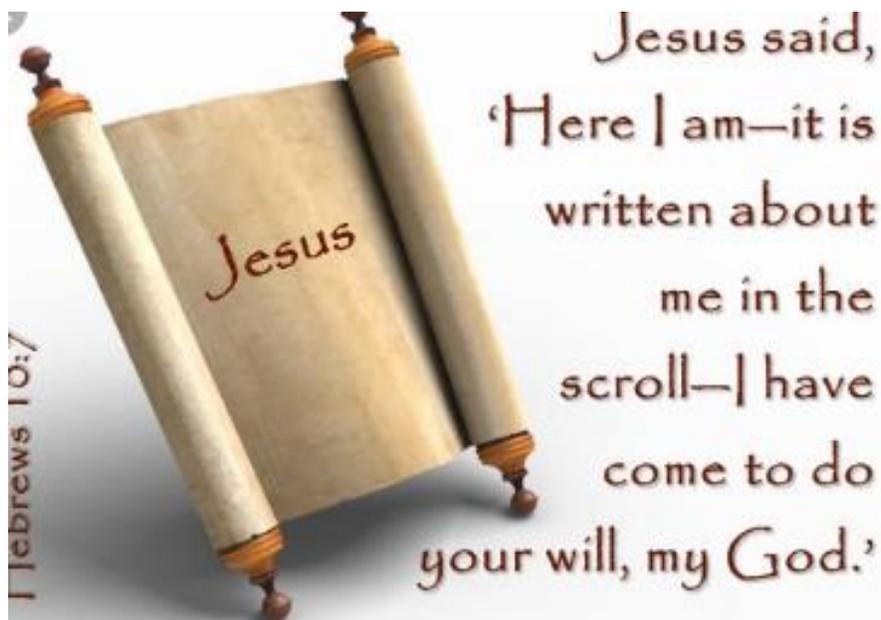
Hebrews 10:7 "So then I said, 'Look, I've come to do your will, God.'"

As a young, first-year teacher assigned to a self-contained classroom of 32 students, half in the 5th grade and the other half in the 6th grade, I was challenged to develop a set of norms and expectations for their behavior, partly so that they would grow and mature in self-control and partly so that we could get some work done. Knowing that I needed to establish a reputation not only with the students, but also with my colleagues and, especially, with my principal, it was clear to me that sending miscreants to the office wasn't the answer. Time out became my answer. Sending a student to the hall to "cool off" seemed to be a reasonable strategy. Out of sight... Of course, gaining obedience wasn't achieved quite so easily.

God sent Jesus to live among His people, to serve and to set an example about how to impact the lives of others. Practical actions of love and kindness were the hallmarks of His life. Not the resurrection of His body, but the life He lived were what God wanted us to see. And Jesus was enormously obedient. He carried out God's mission without question. No timeouts were meted out. Jesus lived and died as commanded.

Oh, that we could be such.

I strive to be obedient to Your will, my Father. Amen.



April 2, 32nd Day of Lent

Luke 1:37 "Nothing is impossible for God."

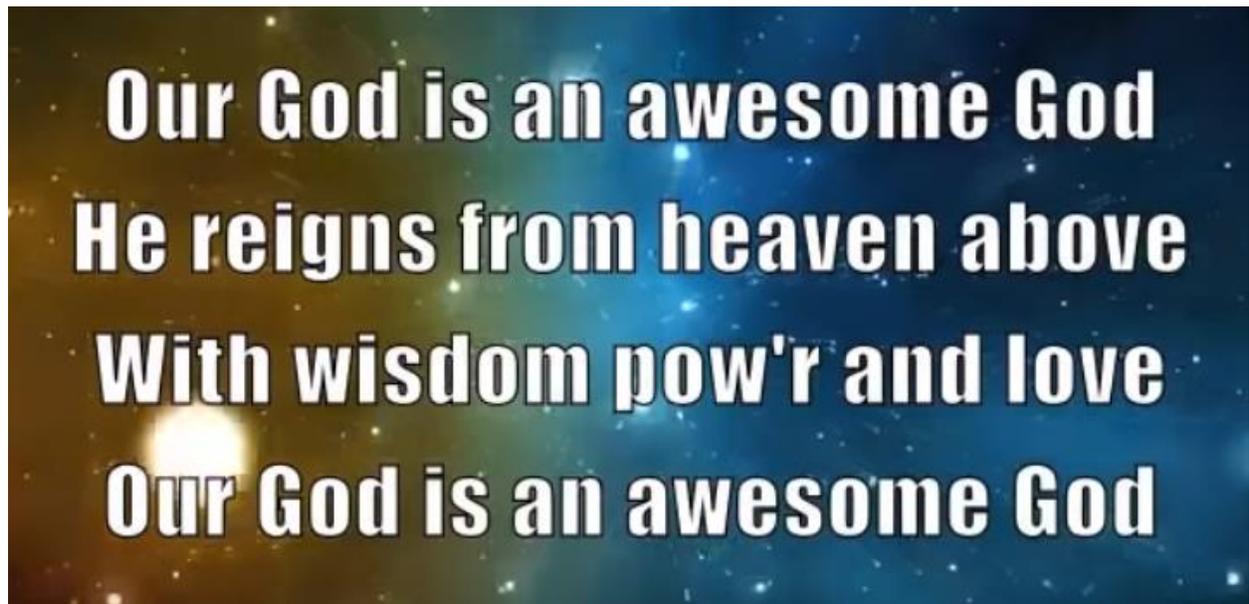
If you are around young people much these days, you likely hear their response, "Awesome!" I suppose that to a young person with much of life's experiences yet to be realized, there is much that is awesome.

And how about you? Is a virgin birth, life of service, death on a cross, resurrection and ascension to heaven enough to convince you that God is awesome?

Infinite omnipotence. Awesome!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PP9BjKnDaFk>

With You, God, ALL things are possible! Amen.



April 3, 33rd Day of Lent

Ezekiel 37:1 “The Lord’s power overcame me, and while I was in the Lord’s spirit, He led me out and set me down in the middle of a certain valley. It was full of bones.”

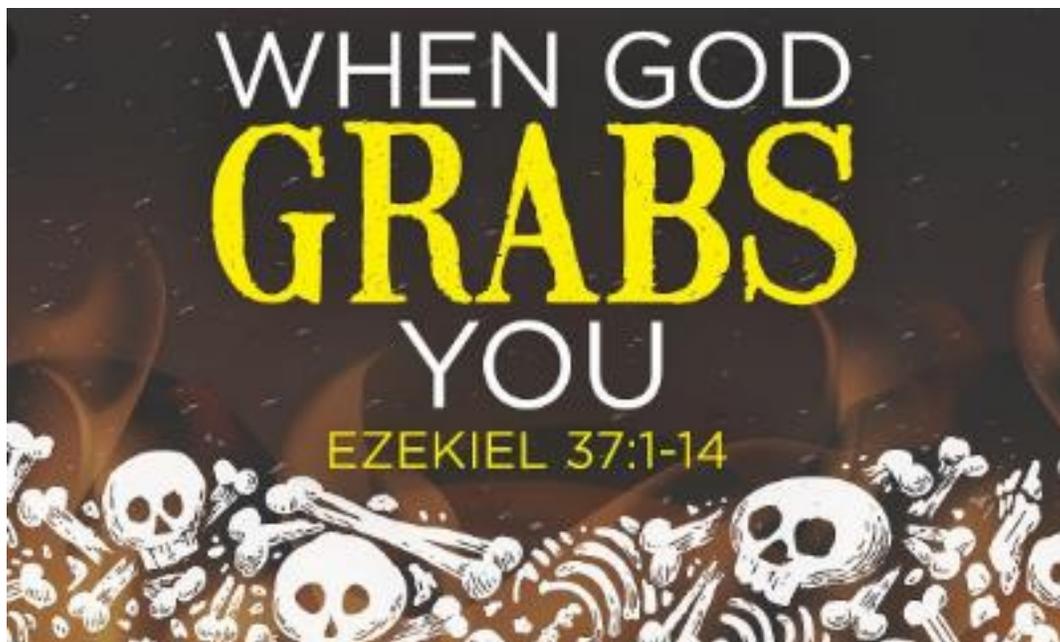
This passage is hard for me to read without seeing that scene from *The Lion King (1994)* in which young Simba and his friend wander into the elephant graveyard. From one point to another, the valley is filled with the bones of deceased elephants. The two are set upon by a pack of hyenas that have only one thing in mind, to kill the future king of the jungle.

Prophet Ezekiel has a story to tell and a point to make. A valley of dry bones represents the hopelessness of God’s people, but Ezekiel brings a message of hope. The bones are brought to life with flesh and, finally, the wind blows into their lungs representing the spirit of God. His people have a future filled with hope that they will be brought back from exile.

Just as Simba and his friend escaped the elephant graveyard and certain death from their aggressors, God’s people escape Egypt and turn their lament to a vision of anticipation.

Expectation places a vision of God’s spirit at work in our lives.

Keep Your spirit alive in me, God my Father. Amen.



April 4, 34th Day of Lent

Psalm 130:7 "Israel, wait for the Lord! Because faithful love is with the Lord; because great redemption is with our God!"

If you have read some of my former writings, you know that I find symbolism in movies and that one of my favorite sources is the Indiana Jones series. In the 1989 adventure, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Indiana's father, a noted but absent-minded archaeologist, is shot as a ploy to motivate Indiana to enter a cave and retrieve the Holy Grail. While Indiana's father lies mortally wounded, his father repeats over and over the verses relating to penitence that are the secret to Indiana's safe passage. Atonement comes when individuals bow before the Lord. Indiana escapes harm by bowing as he passes safely by a sharp blade.

Reparation for our sins comes from God for those who are faithful to Him. The journey to the cross grows short and the journey to resurrection lies just beyond. With it, God promises restitution for our sins.

Turn Your mercy on me, Your sinful child. Amen.



April 6, 35th Day of Lent

Romans 8:8 “People who are self-centered aren’t able to please God.”

We all know them. They stand out in a crowd, and not in a good way. Those whose lives are all about themselves are easy to spot, but hard to live with. Listen to them speak. It’s “I this...” and “I that...” If they manage to stop talking long enough to listen to you, they aren’t really listening; rather, they are thinking through what they will say as soon as your lips halt. Personal desire lacks authenticity and transcendence. Their earth-bound lives are spent apart from Christ.

Man’s true objective is to please God. Man cannot be indifferent to Him, but to truly please God, must come to Him on His terms. And what are those terms? They are found in Romans 12:12 “Be happy in hope, stand your ground when you’re in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer.”

May I please You. Amen.



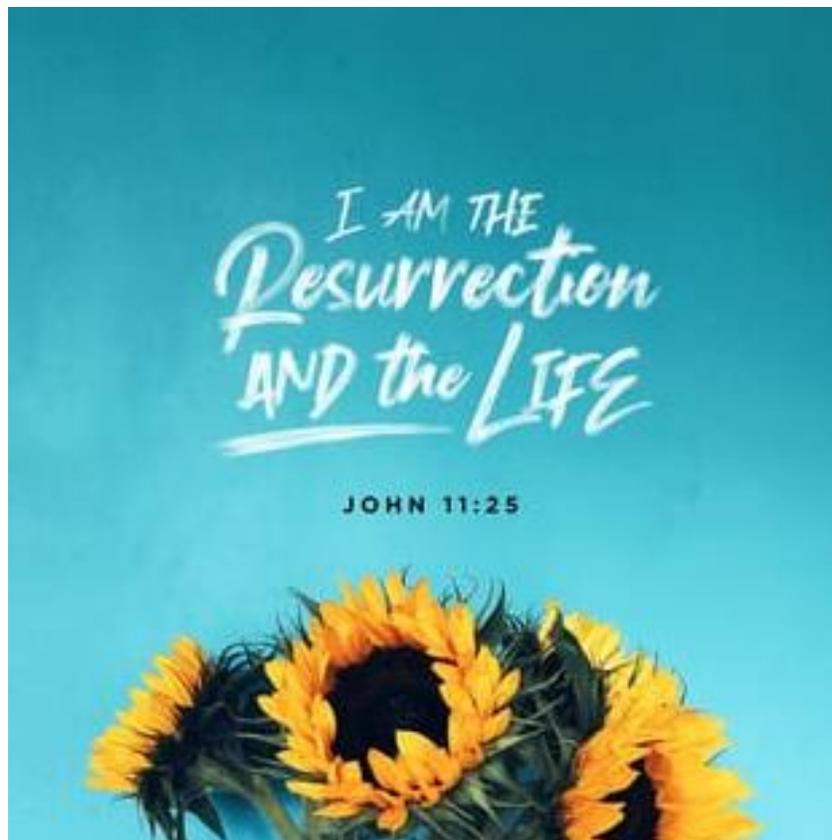
April 7, 36th Day of Lent

John 11:25 “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”

Eben Alexander’s book, *Proof of Heaven* (2012), tells of his near death experience. Dr. Alexander, a highly accomplished neurosurgeon, had numerous familiarities with death, but this time it was his own. In his book’s prologue, he states, “My experience showed me that the death of the body and the brain are not the end of consciousness, that human experience continues beyond the grave. More important, it continues under the gaze of a God who loves and cares about each one of us and about where the universe itself and all the beings within it are ultimately going.”

Ours is life now and life after death of our earthly body. That life, both now and then, is with Jesus. The only requirement is belief in Him who sacrificed His own life to save ours.

Praise Jesus! Amen.



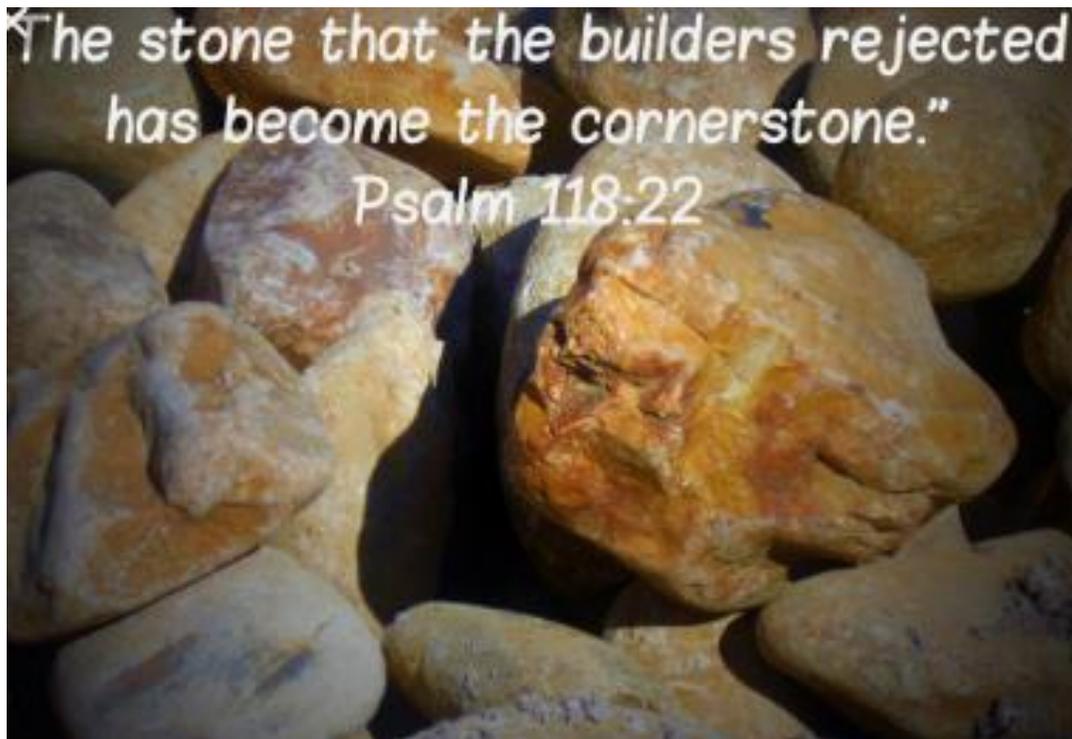
April 8, 37th Day of Lent

Psalm 118:22 “The stone rejected by the builders is now the main foundation stone!”

Cornerstones are an age-old tradition in the construction of buildings. Known for their strength and ability to provide a solid footing, they also serve in many situations as the repository for time capsule materials. Recently, a group of scouts buried what they hoped would be a 15-year time capsule. Theirs was not a part of a building, but was strategically located in a part of a wooded area at their scout reservation. What a most appropriate place for such a piece of future history. Many of the scouts will likely return in 15 years to unearth the capsule and be amazed at what they chose to represent this time in their lives.

Jesus wasn't the most popular person in his day. He was rejected by the leaders of His own faith. Little did they know that He was destined to become the foundation of the Church. If the Pharisees and the Roman government officials had buried a time capsule during the ministry of Jesus, they likely wouldn't have included newspaper clippings extolling His work or the miracles He performed. But His impact on the future was greater than all of their efforts combined. He was and is the Savior.

Your wisdom brought us salvation. Thanks be to God. Amen.



April 9, 38th Day of Lent, Maundy Thursday

Isaiah 50:6 “Instead, I gave my body to attackers, and my cheeks to beard pluckers. I didn’t hide my face from insults and spitting.”

Much attention is given to those who suffer from traumatic involvements. Soldiers who survived from World Wars I and II were termed “shell-shocked.” Vietnam and more recent wars brought post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. Some of us were lucky enough that we didn’t suffer from PTSD, but carried away survivor’s guilt and periods of depression. Regardless of the source, those who are afflicted find their lives impacted.

Isaiah writes of the abuses of being a servant of the Lord. Vindication of those abuses comes to those who are obedient. Such comes as a cost of faithfulness.

The journey to the cross is almost finished. Our faithfulness continues...

Your rewards outweigh the costs for following You. Amen.



April 10, 39th Day of Lent, Good Friday

Psalm 31:12 "I am forgotten, like I'm dead, completely out of mind; I am like a piece of pottery, destroyed."

If you are familiar with the works of Carl Jung and his student, Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers, you know about the four major typologies that their work identifies in the adult population. Researcher David Keirsey further defines one of those typologies as Seekers, individuals who are more creative, gregarious, influencing, and entertaining. Keirsey's work estimates that approximately 17% of the adult population fall into this typology. In addition to their strengths, he identifies liabilities including their fear of the loss of social approval.

Social degradation, the scorn and rejection of others, inflicts the deepest wounds upon the afflicted. Feelings of uselessness and worthlessness lead to believing one is utterly unwanted. Even so, the writer of this Psalm continues to assert trust in the Lord.

As Jesus comes to death, scorned and rejected, He proclaims His trust in God, His Father.

You are my God! Amen.



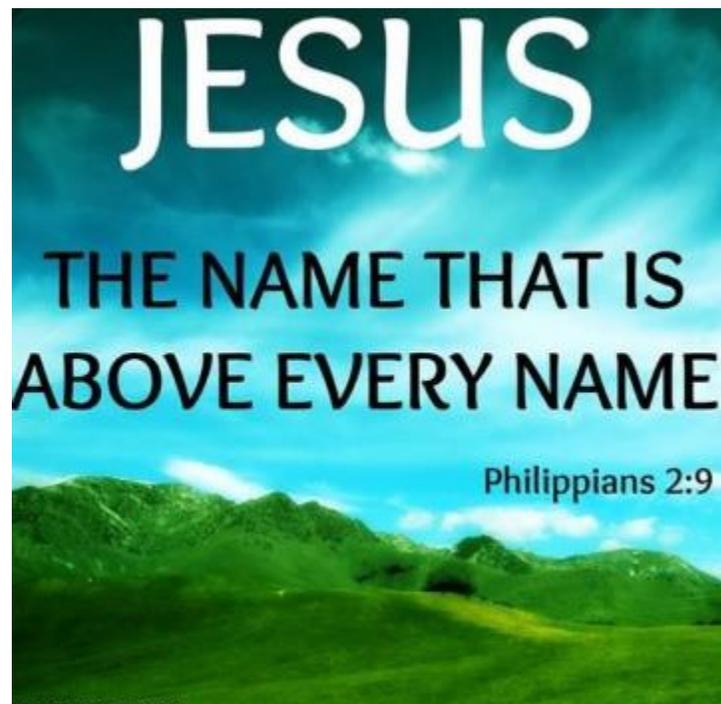
April 11, 40th Day and Last Day of Lent

Philippians 2:9 “Therefore, God highly honored Him and gave Him a name above all names, so that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

You may have heard the story last fall of a young man who entered the Medtronic TC 10 Mile in Minneapolis. The runner, Tyler Moon, decided to express his faith by entering “Jesus Saves” on the bib he would wear in the race in place of his own name. At mile 8, he collapsed, the victim of a heart attack at age 25. Astonishingly, another runner, a nurse anesthetist by the name of Jesus Bueno, came upon the runner and immediately began administering CPR. His quick actions saved the runner’s life.

Miracle? You decide.

You are my Savior, Jesus. Amen.



April 12, Easter

Matthew 28:1 “Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.”

Easter! Hallelujah! Praise God’s name in the highest! Let the celebrations begin!

Part of the Easter celebration at our church includes confetti. It’s a celebration! Confetti tubes are disseminated throughout the sanctuary releasing small rectangles of multi-colored tissue paper. Several members of the congregation volunteer to clear away the confetti using leaf blowers. Other volunteers throughout the following year come into the sanctuary each week to straighten things in preparation for that week’s worship services. Well into the year following Easter and even with thorough cleaning immediately afterward, bits of confetti manage to appear. I collect those I find and save them in my wallet for the next year’s Easter service, joyfully tossing them in the air along with the new crop. It’s like they survived a year. It’s also a reminder that the one-time celebration lasts long past Easter morning.

Celebrate the Resurrection of our Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

