

into the Wilderness

2024 Lenten Devotionals



GRACE COVENANT
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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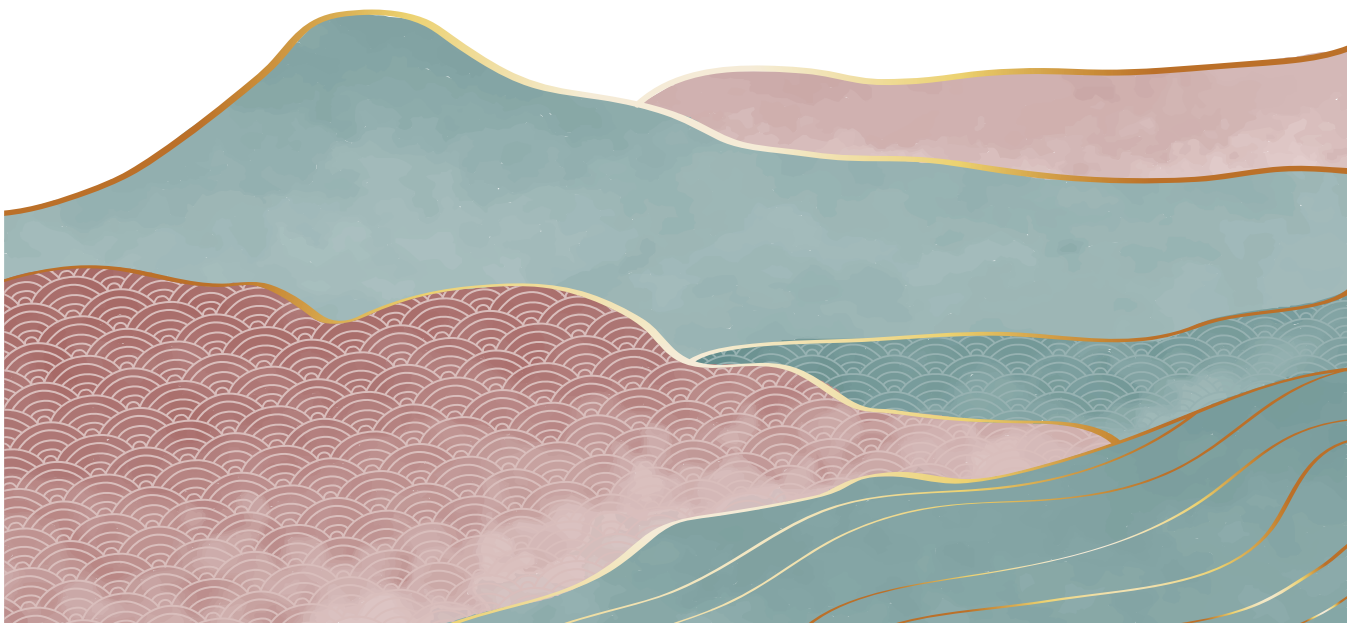
This Lent, journey through the wilderness with our devotional booklet. Beginning with Ash Wednesday and ending with Easter Sunday, this devotional includes writings paired with a piece of visual artwork and a bit of music, most recorded on YouTube.

For Christians across the world, Lent is a season of reflection and confession that ends in the celebration of Easter. It provides an opportunity to pause, to lament, to pray, and to worship together in community.

In this Lenten season, these daily devotions are intended to stimulate thought about God's word. They are offered with love and with hope, that by reading them, you will be motivated to think more about God, to pray more to God, and to draw closer to those around you.

Contributors:

Harold Frye, Cheryl Johnson, David Pack, Nelson Townsend, Andrew Frye, Kevin Johnson, Barbara Douglas, Nancy Kalesz, Stephen Wing, and Sarah Evans



Ash Wednesday, February 14

by Harold Frye

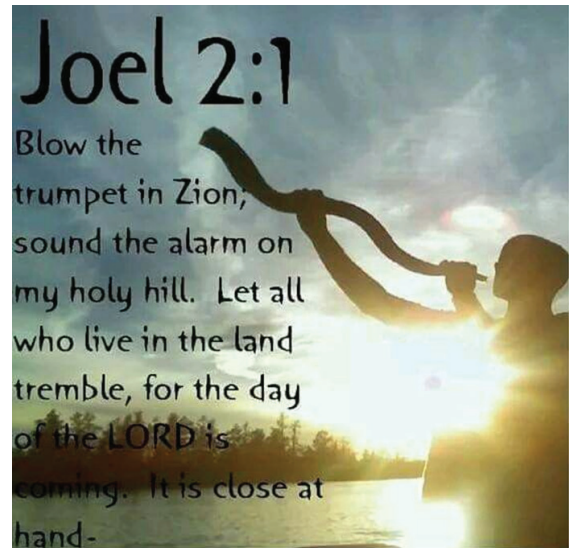
Joel 2:1 "Blow the horn in Zion."

There is a difference in what the horn looked like in Biblical times. The shofar or ram's horn is portrayed by some artists, with its characteristic wide base and one twist leading to the pointed tip. Other artists render an image that is longer and narrower, a horn that is more like an antelope or a kudu. Much of these differences may be attributed to the background of the artist.

Those familiar with big horn sheep likely lean toward renderings similar to those horns, while those familiar with African or animals of the plains may lean toward the longer, narrower horn. Regardless of the horn's appearance, in Biblical times when sounding alarms was critical to survival of the people, alerting everyone of impending danger was huge.

As the Lenten season begins and we anticipate the darkness that will cover the land and lead to the death of Jesus, the shofar's sound warns us that the earthly life of the Savior will come to an end. Prepare!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lxDOEv_E2U



Thursday, February 15

by David Pack

Isaiah 58:6-7 and 10 "Isn't this the fast I choose: releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke? Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family? ... if you open your heart to the hungry, and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted, your light will shine in the darkness, and your gloom will be like the noon." (CEB)

Today's full Bible passage is Isaiah 58: 1-12. In the Common English Bible there is a title over Isaiah 58 that says, "Fasting from Injustice." The early verses criticize people's meaningless fasting from food while they continue to "oppress all your workers" and "quarrel and brawl." Fast from injustice. Fast from ignoring the poor. Then "your light will shine in the darkness."

This passage led me to think about the numerous professed Christians in our country who fail to understand what God asks of them. There are countless Biblical passages like those above that speak of helping the hungry or the homeless. How many Biblical passages are there about abortion? Zero! How many Biblical passages are there about people's sexual orientation? Very, very few. Does the Bible support the concept of a "Christian nation?" It does not.

Let us all pray for the wisdom and courage to know and act on God's priorities for living our lives.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZctNWsWOK8>



Friday, February 16

by Stephen Wing

*Psalm 51:1-17 "I know how bad I've been; my sins are staring me down."
(Psalm 51:3, The Message)*

The whole sordid story behind this King David Psalm can be read in 2 Samuel, chapters 11 and 12. It is a story of the dreaded slippery slope. Lust slid to an affair, which slid to sex, which slid to unwanted pregnancy, which slid to scheming, which slid to abuse of power, which slid to murder. All done by King David, described in the Bible as, "the man after God's own heart." (Maybe the Bible should be banned from schools with stories like these.)



The question is, what do you do now, if you are David? Let's say you are David. Just pretend. What is your next move now that your sins have been publicly outed and you find yourself at the bottom of that slope? You could rely on everyone's two best friends: blame and denial. Or you could collapse in a heap under the weight of your sin, your face in your hands, wondering, "What the hell have I done?"

Which is how we find David. Praying this mea culpa (Latin for "my fault") prayer in Psalm 51. At least a couple of times I have slid down some slope to its bottom. One of those times I sat in a chair in tears for my sin. I sensed Jesus sit beside me and gently tell me He forgave me. But. But, he told me, there were some consequences of my actions I was not going to be able to see, and would be unable to fix. He said He would take care of those, that I needed to trust Him to do so, over time. The rest was up to me.

Mother Teresa once wrote that we hold on to our humility best by remembering our humiliations. This Psalm, this prayer, this confession, this mea culpa is where we must start.

Prayer: I plead "guilty," Lord. It was me. I did it. It was me. I throw myself on the mercy of Your court. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LxJ52urGB8>

Saturday, February 17

by Harold Frye

2 Corinthians 6:8-10 "We were treated with honor and dishonor and with verbal abuse and good evaluation. We were seen as both fake and real, as unknown and well known, as dying—and look, we are alive! We were seen as punished but not killed, as going through pain but ways happy, as poor but making many rich, and as having nothing but owning everything."

Many of my earliest and fondest memories come from my childhood home's kitchen for it was there that our family gathered, prayed together, ate meals, washed dishes, and did homework. One of the clearest memories is of my mother's baking when pies were prepared. She would blend the ingredients for the crust and roll it out with a well-used wooden rolling pin. Then she carefully laid the dough into a ceramic pie dish, running a knife around the edge to cut off the excess dough. It was this excess dough that brought our delight as children. She let us use her rolling pin to flatten the dough once more, spread margarine on it, and dust it with cinnamon and sugar. We rolled up the dough and cut it into sections that were placed on a cookie sheet to place in the oven. These cinnamon tarts were treats we savored right from the oven. Mom's teaching was not only about baking, but, more importantly, about using everything to enrich the lives of others.

We work to gain all the things in life we want and think we need when Jesus taught us that the most important task in life is to attend to the needs of others, especially the poor. While disciples of Jesus spread the Word to the people of Corinth, they realized that they were both rich and poor, just as those to whom they ministered. With Jesus in their hearts, they had everything.

There are people in need nearby. What can you do to help them today?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Midu8M670Zs>



Monday, February 19

by Andrew Frye

Matthew 6:1-6 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."



One of my favorite parts of Sunday mornings is the beautiful music. GCPC is so blessed to have such a talented congregation and strong music leadership. I especially enjoy when the orchestra performs, which is what came to mind as I read through this passage.

In Matthew 6: 1-6, Jesus invites us to see our devotion as a grand composition, where each act, like an instrument, contributes to the beautiful orchestration of a life lived in harmony with the divine.

A life of devotion is similar to the beautiful music that fills our sanctuary. The divine reward is likened to the satisfaction of the musicians knowing they played their part well. Jesus warns against seeking recognition from the audience, stressing that the true reward lies in the harmonious connection with the Divine Conductor.

To take this orchestra metaphor further, we can compare acts of kindness to the individual instruments, each contributing to the overall symphony. Jesus advises against seeking applause through a loud trumpet, encouraging instead a seamless integration of giving—where the left hand (giver) plays its part without seeking acknowledgment from the right hand (audience). Prayer becomes the silent communication between the musician and the Conductor.

Jesus then directs us to a private room, akin to the practice room where our musicians refine their art away from the public stage. The divine reward is the symphony of life resonating in perfect harmony with the will of the Conductor.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8Jz8C3TEFY>

Tuesday, February 20

by Barbara Douglas

Genesis 9:8-17 "Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."



Rainbows. Such a special way of God communicating directly to us. It is a bright reminder that all will be well after the rain.

Rainbows have a special place in my heart. On a gloomy, rainy early morning in mid-December before sunrise, my husband passed away into the everlasting arms of God. Of course, it was a very difficult beginning to the day and plunged us into grief and the finality of life on earth. My kids and I were deep into dealing with our grief and all the procedures that must be taken at that time. As the day progressed the rain was ending, and the sun was emerging from the clouds. Unbeknownst to us at that moment, a beautiful bright rainbow appeared in the sky. Two friends, one mine and the other my daughter's, from very different vantage points had seen the rainbow that day and sent each of us beautiful pictures of it. What a glorious gift we received that day, not just from our friends, but a clear sign from God that all will indeed be well. Our healing may not have occurred that very day, but it was a beautiful reminder to us that indeed God is with us throughout whatever we are going through and dealing with. The promise of sunshine after the rain in our lives.

My friend was outside with her daughter when they saw that gorgeous rainbow. She looked up at her mom and said, "Look mom, God sent a rainbow to welcome Mr. Douglas into heaven." What a gift of faith from a nine-year-old child! I will never forget those words. The rainbow picture and those words were sent to me that very afternoon. My heart was renewed that day and every time that day rolls around each year, it is a special memory that I treasure.

The rainbow pictures came to us from two very different sources of friends in our lives. We couldn't help but feel that God was indeed still blessing us in ways far from our understanding. We used these pictures on the cover of the bulletin for his memorial service. God's ever-loving presence comes to us in various ways and circumstances in our lives. Praise be to Him! God is good! God is good always!

Prayer: Gracious God of ours, thank you for your ever presence. We need you each and every day of our lives. Help us to be open to your loving presence in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. Blessings and honor to you, our Lord. In your son Jesus, holy name we pray. Amen

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_152HIDx20

Wednesday, February 21

by Stephen Wing

Psalm 25:1-10 "GOD is fair and just; He corrects the misdirected, Sends them in the right direction." (Psalm 25:8, The Message)

Ready. Fire. Aim. Which is how you might find yourself living in certain circumstances. Just shooting off, before you figure out what you are aiming at.

The phrase, "He corrects the misdirected" is an interesting one in the Hebrew in which it was written. It should be literally translated, "He helps the archer aim so that he hits what he is aiming at." The Psalmist is giving a graphic picture of what God thinks being human is about: Aiming; Direction; Sighting.

There is an old saying: "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." It is not enough to just put one step in front of the other. There has to be a direction for those steps. Our eyes have to gain a line of sight to where we want to go, then we step out. To ask yourself, "What do I AIM to do with my one precious life?" God is saying, through this Psalm, "I can help with that."

Prayer: Prone to wander, Lord I feel it..." I sing those words to the old hymn, and I think, I don't want to wander any more. Line me up, Lord. Set my sights. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9IUCHKYIG0>



Thursday, February 22

by Sarah Evans

1 Peter 3:18-22

Our text is Peter's illustration to explain the point that we are called to bear witness in a hostile world, but we can trust God to vindicate us. Peter uses Christ as the main example, showing that His unjust suffering resulted in witness and that He was vindicated through His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. Noah was another example of a man who bore witness to a hostile world and was vindicated by God who delivered him and his family through the flood.



I am not a pessimist by nature, but we do live in a world of conflict, disagreement, where times with family, friends, and neighbors near and far, can be tense. We make mistakes, say the wrong thing, or say too much, lose our patience, act too quickly, let our egos get in the way, and forget how to be loving to one another. In a word, we forget how to be Christlike. We ignore the poor, overlook the "unseen" in society, rely on our wisdom rather than the abundant love and grace of God. We are all such humans, with unending faults, but we are all still called by our Lord and Savior to be present and care for God's kingdom.

From pastor Steven Cole, "Christ's death for sins was "once for all." His death was sufficient to pay for all the sins we have committed and will commit. The author of Hebrews makes this point repeatedly and with great emphasis, contrasting the repeated sacrifices of animals under the old covenant with the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ under the new.

The point is, if you've put your trust in Christ, then your sins are on Christ, and you have been reconciled to God once-for-all. God wants every believer to come to the place of full assurance where you understand that the basis of your acceptance with God is not your performance; it is God's grace, that Christ died for your sins once for all and you have trusted in Him, not in your own good works. The hymn writer (Horatio Spafford, "It Is Well") put it,

My sin, O, the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

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

Friday, February 23

by Harold Frye

Mark 1:11 "And there was a voice from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.'"

My father was a quiet, humble man who, as most of his generation, didn't express his emotions outwardly. I knew he loved me and was proud of my accomplishments; however, there was an incident when I was in high school in which I learned not only a lesson in behavior, but more so about fatherhood. A few friends and I made a mistake and were detained by the police. Our parents were called and required to come to the police station. As I rode home with my father, I expected him to lash out at me. Instead, he was silent. In fact, for the rest of his life he remained silent about that event. Looking back on the whole thing, his silence hurt more than if he had punished me verbally or even physically (which never happened anyway). My response to his silence for the rest of his life and mine has been to do everything possible to make my father proud of me, to bring happiness to him.

God knew what lay ahead for Jesus. He knew that His Son would face humiliation and pain. But at this moment, God expressed His love for His Son.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zu_Sgm55beo



Saturday, February 24

by Nancy Kalesz

Genesis 17:1–7, 13–16 “Ninety-nine, and the Lord is giving me a child.”

“You’ve got to be kidding.” But as we know from reading on—God is not only giving Abram and Sara a child, God is establishing (setting) a covenant with Abram to make him the ancestor of a multitude of nations (all through one child). And God gave Abram a new name and fixed this covenant as an everlasting promise. Wow! That’s a lot to take in—in one conversation—and a huge responsibility for anyone, much less a man of advanced age. It was a new beginning for not only Abraham, but the establishment of God’s promise to all generations. Trust me — you will see.



Here at Lenten time in 2024 it sounds like an impossible happening. Yes, we know that what God sees for the world is way beyond our understanding.

All morning, I have been singing, “the hymn of promise.” It is about how things that are small become great. If you don’t know this hymn, it goes like this:

In the bud there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter there’s a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

(Hymn #250, words by Nancy Allen)

God sees way beyond what human eyes can see—or ever imagine. God sets these things before us that we can barely understand. In this Lenten season—look for the promises that God has made in nature, as we ponder the questions of our world, our faith, and our individual lives.

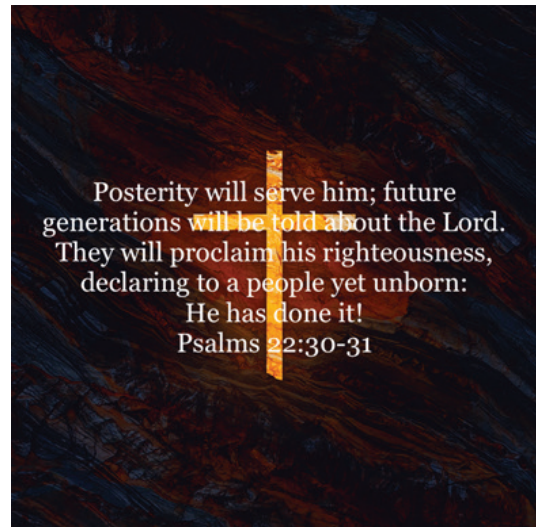
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDz-7OX4C9k>

Monday, February 26

by Stephen Wing

Psalm 22:23-31 "Here in this great gathering for worship I have discovered this praise life. And I'll do what I promised right here in front of the God-worshippers." (verse 25, The Message)

I have heard, far too often, people say things like, "I don't need to go to church to worship. I can worship just as well at the lake, or on a walk, or at the golf course." (I grew up playing golf, and I don't know about you other golfers, but if I said the name of God on the course, it wasn't because I was praying or worshipping.)



There are a couple of "aha moments" the psalmist discovers while worshipping with a group of other people. First, worshipping with others enhances worship. It's like laughter: if you laugh to yourself, or by yourself, it is not the same as laughing with others. Your laughter, the hilarity of the moment, is enhanced when there are others to share it. If you are truly honest with yourself, worshipping by yourself has a detracting factor rather than a boost.

And secondly, worshipping with others is a way to solidify your accountability. If you try to hold yourself accountable to your promises it is so easy to justify a slip or a lapse. No one else knows. Just you. It, then, all breaks down, doesn't it? But letting others in on the vows and promises you have made to God and to each other, creates a mutual accountability. You have others, in worship, standing beside you, watching your back for you and with you. Each time you worship "in this great gathering" you are reminded of that like in no other way.

I'll see you in worship!

Prayer: I really do not have any good reasons not to go to worship, Lord. So, I am on my way. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed-GQ7st59w>

Tuesday, February 27

by Cheryl Johnson

Romans 4:13-25 "The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith."



This chapter in Romans is one of those times when Paul is using logic to prove his point. He's using what I believe is called Talmudic logic which takes statements from the Torah and uses

them to prove his point. It can be exhausting, at times, to try to follow his reasoning. I often wish there were a few commas or a parenthetical remark or two to make Paul's meaning clearer.

But here's what I've gleaned from this passage. Abraham was old. Really, really old and his wife Sarah was too. Still, God said Abraham and Sarah would have a son and they'd have as many descendants as stars in the sky. And Abraham's faith was so strong that he believed God, despite what his common sense would have told him was a hopeless cause.

Paul makes the point that God wasn't rewarding Abraham because he followed the Law, which means the laws handed down to Moses. That wasn't around when Abraham was alive, so his behavior wasn't influenced by the Law but by his love for God. And, besides that, Paul points out later that no one can follow all those laws anyway.

So, why did God make this wonderful promise to Abraham? It wasn't to repay Abraham for his good behavior because, in that case, it would be like paying a worker for his labor. God's salvation would be a debt that God owed to humans, instead of a gift of grace.

Instead, Abraham is highlighted as a righteous man whose faith was strong, even when the thing he wanted most in life was not likely to occur.

God, Help me to grow my faith so that I can learn to trust you more every day. Amen

<https://youtu.be/OXXrk1IXluY?si=CB1O6iLqHyUMFIX->

Wednesday, February 28

by Sarah Evans

Mark 8:31-38 *"Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: 'The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead.' He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him. Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: 'Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts.' After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, 'All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them. Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? What will people give in exchange for their lives? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father's glory with the holy angels.'" (CEB)*



How many times have we heard this passage, where Jesus rebukes Peter with the words, "you are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts"? And how many times have we been reminded that we are wrapped up in our own human thoughts, pursuing our own selfish interests, feeling worry, anxiety or jealousy? We are truly such humans, with all of our oddities and imperfections. Our faith is tested daily and our commitments to equality, inclusion, kindness, generosity, and truth seem challenged. In some ways, I can hear my parents saying, what is this world coming to? What are people thinking? And my questions are, why are we still having these conflicts in 2024? But then, I am humbled to remember that our journey in life is with God. God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God does not abandon us, at our darkest hour. Our perspective is to live into the strong foundation that Jesus has set. That foundation does not promise warm beaches and puppies every day!

Jesus furthers says, "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me." Tough words. And that means different things to different people. What does taking up the cross mean for you? What would it include to saying no to yourself? What does it mean to follow Christ? Big questions. And yet, may it be so.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wfx_tKBZtrM

Thursday, February 29

by Nelson Townsend

Mark 9:2-9 *“After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”*



In this passage, Mark relates the Transfiguration of Jesus in a sparse narrative that leaves gaps. Mark tells us that Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah, but we don't know what is said. I like to think that they were sharing “tips and tricks” for leading reluctant, aimless, and hard-hearted people. Moses and Elijah should know. Wouldn't it be great if Moses wrote a book on transforming organizations?! What if Elijah wrote a book on strategic vision? What would they say? After Jesus' conference call with the Law and the Prophet; Peter interjects, “Wouldn't it be awesome if we built a retreat right here?! And we could base it on a three-pronged approach: the Law, Prophecy, and Divinity! We could transform the whole world! Isn't this the perfect place?!” But Peter's big idea got bulldozed, because God busted in. God said, “This is my son. I love him. Listen to him!” Listen to him. All we have to do is listen. Mark moves right on with the story, telling us only that Jesus gave Peter, James, and John “orders not to tell anyone what they had seen.”

Have you ever tried to keep a secret? In my experience, at first (with good news), it is hard to keep it in. You want to tell everyone! If you are expecting a baby or you are getting a promotion, that is a hard secret to keep! But after a while, you become “comfortable” with keeping it inside; and you wait for the time when you are ready to share your “good news” with the world. What about terrible secrets? What if you just got bad news from your doctor or your retirement has to be postponed another five years? Is that something you want to share? Who would you share it with? Each of us are a legion of secrets. We have secrets we choose to share, and others that we hide and bury. Yet, God knows everything about us, and God loves us. That is truly Good News!

Prayer: Gracious God, help me to hear Your voice and the words of Jesus. I will listen quietly and intently.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rTY-hPNGOw>

Friday, March 1

by Harold Frye

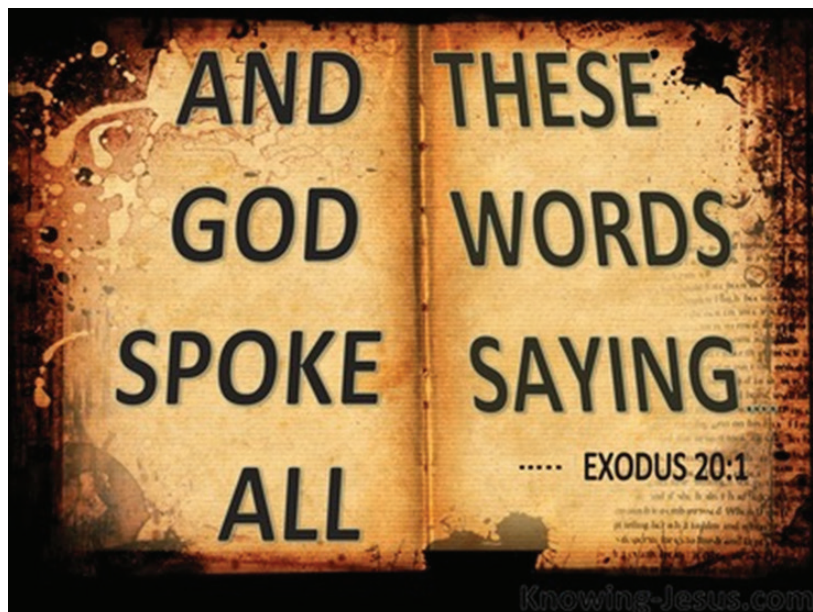
Exodus 20:1 "Then God spoke all these words."

Perhaps, with a bit of prodding, those of us who have spent our early years in Sunday School classes can recall "all these words," the Ten Commandments. When this scripture came up in the Lenten lectionary, the thought came to my mind, "Is there a missing commandment?" A little research took me (thanks to the Internet) to the work of Jerry and Denise Basel, and their book "The Missing Commandment: Love Yourself." The Basels are therapists who counsel individuals and groups in recovery and in retreat groups across the country. How might your life change if you really believed God loves you—not just in your head but down where it counts, in your heart? An excerpt from their book says,

"Imagine how different things could be: The lies you've believed about yourself all these years dispelled. The wounds of abuse healed. Your future lit with hope, peace, and purpose. Your closeness with God and others deepened immeasurably. The true, heaven-born you free at last to live a life unclouded by shame, guilt, and fear and empowered to love others fully."

The eleventh commandment: "Love yourself as much as God loves you." What a revelation!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHL47XsNBU4>



Saturday, March 2

by Stephen Wing

Psalm 19 "Who is aware of unwitting sins? Cleanse me of any secret fault. Hold back your servant also from willful sins, lest they get the better of me." (verses 12-13, Revised English Bible)

When I got a new car a few years back, I was happy to have a number of safety features that were not on my old truck. One of those safety features is little orange icons that light up in the outer rear view mirrors if there is a vehicle in my blind spot. It is so nice to have that warning system.

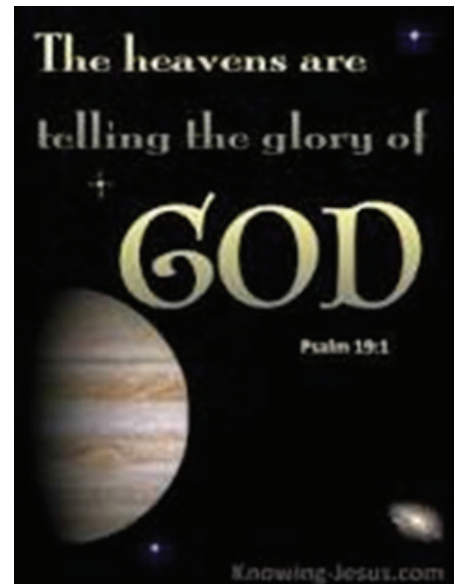
The only thing I wish is that they could be installed in my eyes to alert me if I am doing something stupid or hazardous. To override my "blind spot." But, alas, it is called a blind spot because I am not aware of what that blind spot is. It keeps me from seeing something that may be so clear to others. Some behavior that I keep doing that I am unaware of that is hurtful to others and/or myself. I just keep doing it because I can not see there is anything wrong with it. I have been thankful for those who have had the courage to come to me and say, "Steve, ummm, you keep doing this thing and you seem to not know it--and you have to stop."

And, there are other times I know I am doing something (maybe, terribly) wrong; all the sirens are sounding, red lights are flashing, but I launch myself right into it anyway. I may even have a smile on my face while doing so.

In both of these cases, I, at some point, realize I cannot deal with either blind spots or willfulness on my own. I need help, not just from friends, but from The Friend who knows how to get my attention, hold that attention, so that it can be taken care of.

Prayer: Get my attention, Lord. I think I have some blind spots and bad intentions that need your attention. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-1tGZFgN3g>



Monday, March 4

by Cheryl Johnson

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 *“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”*

In Paul’s lifetime, Corinth was a prosperous city, located at a convenient spot for commercial shipping. As such, it attracted people from all different backgrounds and walks of life. The church at Corinth was made up of a melting pot of people from many different regions, speaking different languages. Some were slaves, some were wealthy, some were illiterate, and others were well-educated. We know so much about the Corinth church because they seemed to have a lot of disagreements or theological questions that Paul felt compelled to write letters to address.

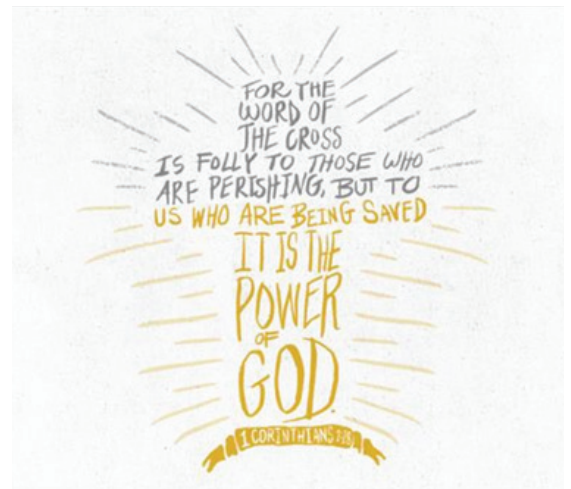
In this passage, he turns the concept of wisdom and foolishness upside down. Anyone who is “wise” would wonder at the wisdom of following a God who died on the cross. And, to the Jews who were expecting a powerful leader to come vanquish their foes, Christ would have seemed the very opposite. Yet, who has had a greater impact on the world’s history than Jesus?

I heard a story once that students in one of Albert Einstein’s classes were discussing the existence of God, and most had decided there was no God. Their logic and wisdom had led them to this conclusion. Einstein asked them how much of all the knowledge in the whole world they had all together as a class. They settled on 5 percent as the amount of human knowledge that they, as a class, could account for. As the story goes, Einstein replied that their estimate was probably a little generous but, even if they did understand 5 percent of world, wouldn’t it be possible that God could exist in the other 95 percent?

The world’s wisdom will not lead the way to understanding God. Only a faithful heart will do that.

Dear God, Help me to remember that you love us, despite our reliance on human knowledge. Amen.

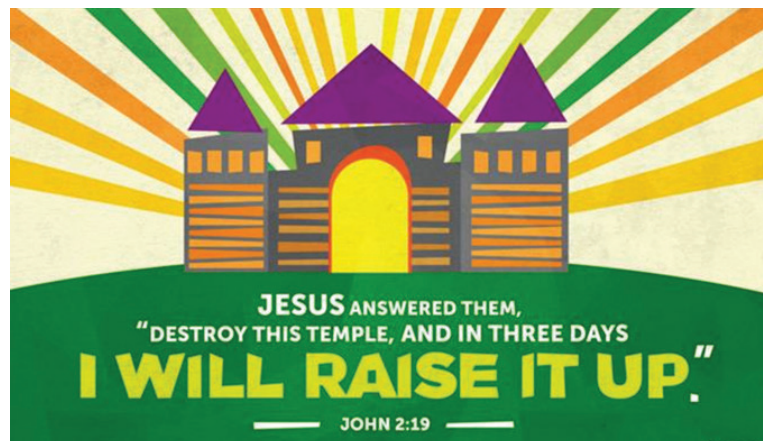
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Si-j96oYwQU>



Tuesday, March 5

by David Pack

John 2:18-22 "Then the Jewish leaders asked him, 'By what authority are you doing these things? What miraculous sign will you show us?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up.' The Jewish leaders replied, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?' But the temple Jesus was talking about was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered what he had said, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (CEB)



Today's full Bible passage is John 2: 13-22. The early verses in the passage describe Jesus entering the temple in Jerusalem and chasing out people who were making "my Father's house a place of business." (That is the "these things" referenced above.) Verse 15 says, "He made a whip from ropes and chased them all out of the temple, including the cattle and sheep. He scattered the coins and overturned the tables of those who exchanged currency."

Wow! It is Jesus the activist! I like the image, being a sometime activist myself, protesting nuclear weapons at the Kansas City National Security Campus in Kansas City, MO, or the next war in our endless wars at the Plaza Fountain.

I am not aware of other Biblical stories of Jesus the activist, but then I have a long way to go in terms of Biblical knowledge. I did find that this story occupies a unique position in that it appears in all four gospels (Matthew 21: 12-13, Mark 11: 15-18, Luke 19: 45-46). One source said there are only seven such stories.

Do your Christian beliefs motivate you to some type of activism? Think about it. Pray about it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNyw-lnubuM>

Wednesday, March 6

by Kevin Johnson

Numbers 21: 4-9 "In the wilderness we must recognize when we move away from God and only then will we be safely and lovingly led back to our true home."

During Lent we are called to pause and look into our lives. We try to find ways in which to change ourselves in order to move deeper into God's love (our true home). The wilderness journey is an excellent metaphor for our Lenten journey. The Israelites were rescued from bondage in Egypt only to immediately begin grumbling when their expectation of arriving soon to the promised land didn't happen. Earlier in the book of Numbers they are condemned to wander in the wilderness because of their inability to trust in God's love. They are made to wander until the entire generation that doubted and left God behind had died off.



Now again the Israelites are complaining. They expect a Rose Garden and don't recognize that happiness is not often found in a Rose Garden. So things get worse. Poisonous snakes infest their camps and bite and kill many of them.

Like all of us, for the Israelites things have to get worse before they realize their current path is unsustainable on their own. We too want to find happiness which really only exists in our true home with God. We need to surrender ourselves to God.

Just as the bronze serpent on a pole reminded the Israelites to look to God to find what they need, we turn to the season of Lent to help shake our hearts and send us back into the loving arms of our Mother God who only wants to hold, cuddle and love us more deeply than we could possibly believe.

Let Us Pray: Dear heavenly creator, please allow Lent this year to shake my world. Help me to look towards the serpent on the pole as a reminder of how to find my true home in Your love, mercy and grace. I know I just can't do it on my own. Be with me. Be near me. Love me... Love me... Love me and help me to then share that love with all others. Amen

No YouTube video link today.

Thursday, March 7

by Stephen Wing

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 "Tell how he freed you from oppression, Then rounded you up from all over the place, from the four winds, from the seven seas. (verse 2-3, The Message)

One of the most important words in these lines from Psalm 107 is, "Tell." It is not enough that we are freed. It is not enough that we are gathered from the wandering sins of hither and yon—the times we climbed the fence thinking there was something better on the other side. There has to be a way to celebrate our freedom, our being found, our being gathered. That celebration needs to be a festival of "Telling" the stories of what God has done in our lives.

Back in the late 1960's and early 1970's our church created one of the many Christian Coffee Houses that sprang up. We had bands playing Christian rock music. We had bean bag chairs to sit in. We served coffee and soft drinks for free. The coffee house attracted big crowds.

One of the highlights of what we were doing was when some of the Jesus People (remember them?) would give their testimony of how their lives had been freed and they had been rounded up by Jesus. They were dramatic before-and-after personal stories of being released by Jesus from drug addicted downward spirals. They couldn't wait to tell their stories, and did so with energy and inspiration. I was a little jealous that I didn't have such a dramatic story to tell. But I had a story to tell of what it is like to have the peace from Jesus' constant presence and leading.

What's your story to tell?

Prayer: I know what my story is, Lord. Now I just need to get past my fear to tell it to others. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKN2yQ157v4>



Friday, March 8

by Cheryl Johnson

Ephesians 2:1-10 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God."



There have been whole Bible study curriculums written on points raised in this passage. I know it's certainly been debated frequently among Bible study participants. Basically, this passage says that you can't earn your way into heaven. As an earlier passage in Romans pointed out, if God granted salvation as a reward to people for the good works they've done, then it's a payment, or something God owed to us, and not a gift of grace. So, if volunteering our time to help others won't earn us any points with God, then why do them? Why not sleep in on Sunday mornings? Why not keep a tight hold on our purses whenever we're asked to help the poor?

Maybe it will make you happy. A psychology professor at the University of California, Riverside, has studied happiness for more than 20 years. People who performed one positive act once a week were significantly happier than those who didn't.

Maybe it will make you healthier. A 2013 study about the relationship between volunteering and hypertension found that adults over fifty who volunteered about four hours each week were 40 percent less likely than non-volunteers to have developed hypertension four years later.

Maybe you will develop a "helper's high" because you enjoy helping others. A 2012 study in Psychological Science found that thinking about times you've helped others will make you want to help others again.

As valid as all those benefits are, maybe the strongest motivation to help others is as a response to God's amazing gift of salvation. We can't earn it but God gives salvation freely to those who have faith.

Dear God, Strengthen our faith and make us truly grateful for the gift of salvation. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD8FzwkdIXg>

Saturday, March 9

by Andrew Frye

John 3:14-21 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not



condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”

Growing up, I was given one of the greatest gifts a son could receive: the unconditional love and support of my parents. I made some mistakes, perhaps more than most, but having that unwavering support led me back to the right path. Knowing that you are loved despite your flaws, mistakes, or imperfections creates a sense of safety and stability. One of my greatest hopes is that I can give the same to my sons.

The heart of this passage beats in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world...” These words are not a mere expression; they are a proclamation of unconditional love. God's love is not selective. It doesn't pick and choose but embraces the entirety of humanity. It is a love that sacrificially gives, offering the most precious gift—the Son—offered for the redemption of our world.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxQ4DB5F9JI>

Monday, March 11

by Sarah Evans

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

This passage is one of the more familiar ones in the Old Testament, which lays the foundation for the good news of the New Testament. In this passage from Jeremiah, J. Blake Couey, a Biblical scholar and commentator, says that “the new covenant remains a collective relationship between God and the ‘house of Israel of and the house of Judah’. No individual can take credit for their participation in it. The sole basis for the new covenant is God’s gracious initiative and unmerited forgiveness, as made clear by verse 34.”



In this case, God’s commitment to us is by grace and forgiveness. The passage in the Old Testament is not to be discounted by any means. Isaiah said “Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth” (Isaiah 43:18-19).

In Jeremiah, the author writes from the perspective of survival. Making it through difficult times, knowing that God’s got this. God is with us in all our times of difficulty and questioning.

In Jeremiah, the author writes from the perspective of survival. Making it through difficult times, knowing that God’s got this. God is with us in all our times of difficulty and questioning.

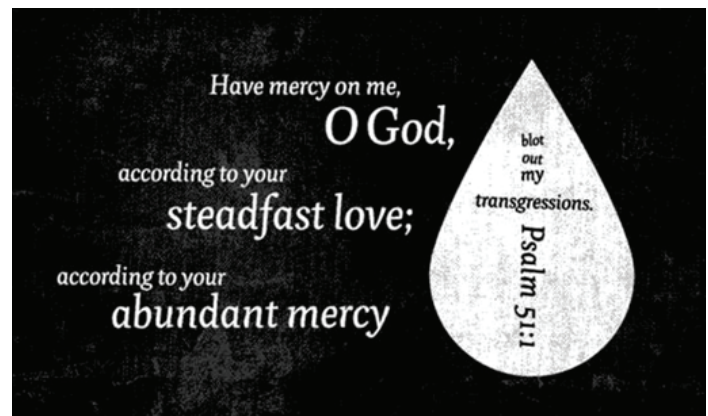
Commentator Couey continues, “The requirements of the old covenant stood outside of the individual, as external teachings that had to be passed on communally. But if a new generation was not properly initiated into the covenant—not adequately catechized, we might say—then the covenant could be broken. By contrast, the requirements of the new covenant reside “within” each individual, no matter what their social standing, from the least of them to the greatest.” This internal writing on one’s heart, an individual promise, seals the deal in terms of our relationship with Christ. This commitment is for any individual, regardless of who you are, what you’ve been through, whether you are new to your faith, or you have questioned your path many times, the covenant is available to all. And all means all. This covenant is from God to us, not from us to God. It is the parent’s commitment to her child, unconditionally, unwittingly, without bounds, to the end of time.

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

Tuesday, March 12

by Stephen Wing

Psalm 51:1-12 "What you're after is truth from the inside out. Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life." (verse 6, The Message)



The television doctor, House, had a mantra that he used in dealing with most of his patients: "Everybody lies." In order to cure what was going on in the patient, House had to cut through the lies the person was telling about their symptoms.

It is so hard not to lie. Sometimes we lie by not saying anything and letting others make assumptions and think what they want. I often wonder what life would be like if we were all truthful all the time. But the hard part for me is trying to figure out what is the actual truth. I may make a statement that I think is true, (usually concerning some tidbit of gossip) based on the information I have at the time; later, I get more information and find out what I said was not truthful. Am I just being inaccurate in that case and not actually lying?

There is so much misinformation out there these days. A lot of it is intentional. It is a pack of lies. I can not make others stop doing so. I can only deal with myself. Am I lying? Am I a liar? Am I a person of "truth from the inside out"? Am I allowing the Spirit to create a "new, true life" every time I open my mouth?

Prayer: Lord, I would be lying if I said I am a person of truth. I need sorted out. And courage to live a true life. Amen.

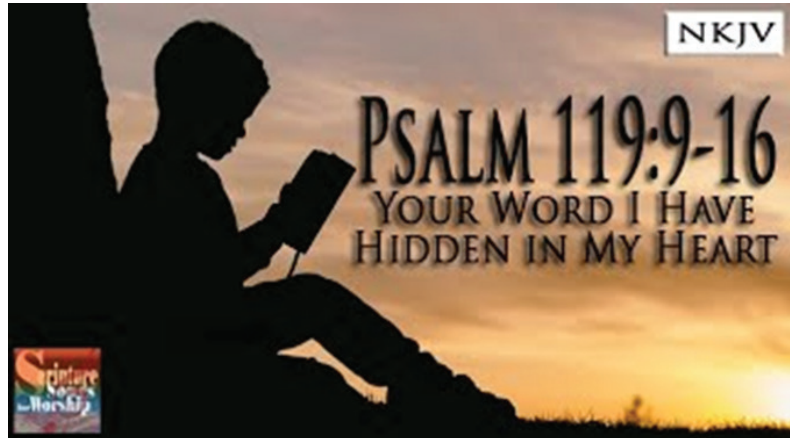
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjsG6iHEUUE>

Wednesday, March 13

by Stephen Wing

Psalm 119:9-16 "I'm single-minded in pursuit of you; don't let me miss the road signs you've posted." (verse 10, The Message)

One of my favorite books is *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. In this allegory, Bunyan tells the story of Christian, who decides to leave the Wicked City he has been living in and sets out on the journey to the Celestial City. He is told to stay on the road if he is to come to his destination.



Along the way, Christian sees another, easier path that parallels the road he is on. He takes the easy path, but it veers off ever so gradually, so that Christian loses total sight of the Way he is supposed to be on. He comes to Doubting Castle and is captured by a giant named Despair, who throws Christian in a dungeon. Christian thinks he is doomed. But he is rescued by Hopeful, and together they get back to the Way and continue their journey.

One of my mentors was Eugene Peterson, translator of *The Message Bible*. One of the books he wrote was, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. He describes well that the Christian life is making sure we not only keep going, but that we keep going in the right direction. There will be many opportunities to veer off, thinking everything will be fine. Then find out it is not. The work of the Christian is to first get going the right direction and then obediently keep on it.

Prayer: Lord, I get tempted at times to just sit beside this road I am on and think I have gone far enough. I need a kick in the pants to get up and get on with it. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BID7tswLDNs>

Thursday, March 14

by Barbara Douglas

Hebrews 5:5-10 "During the days of Jesus' life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."

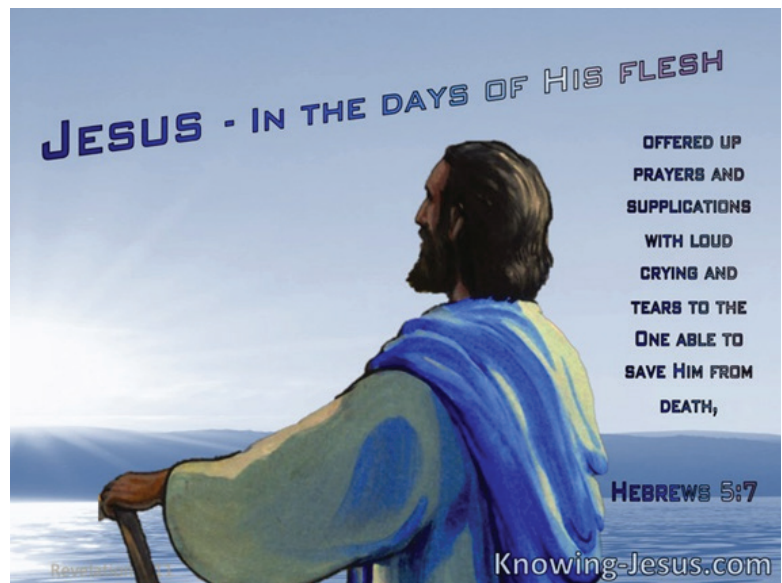
Jesus walked upon this earth as a human being. As human as any of us. That fact alone can be overwhelming. God sent Jesus for all humanity, not just those who were "righteous and learned." What a gift! Jesus listened to all who were needing his words and healing touch. No one had to be special or possess riches to come into his presence. Rather, Jesus came to the needy, to those who would hear his words and be moved by them.

Amidst his teaching and healing, many wished him to just go away. But that was not God's will. Jesus was sent to earth to feel the fears, frustrations and pain of our human existence. He offered up His prayers to God as the one who would heal and bless those human beings on earth. He came to heal the broken of this world. Jesus lived, ate, slept and felt pain just as any human being has done. He knew what it was to be fully human and divine. That is a hard concept for our little human minds.

Praise God that we have the example of the Son to help us live out our faith these thousands of years since he walked on this earth. We are forever blessed to call him Savior and to realize that he has come into our lives as well. As Christians, we are blessed to know that God sent Jesus TO US on earth. We don't have to earn our way into His presence. We just need to believe, have faith and accept salvation.

Prayer: God of our salvation, we praise you and welcome you into our heart. Thank you for your grace and your loving presence in our lives. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09jx0VXliNo>



Friday, March 15

by Kevin Johnson

John 12:20-33 "As the bronze snake on the pole reminded the Israelites in the wilderness to look to God for life, healing and happiness, so Christ's sanctification on the cross is our reminder to return to our true home which is found only through God's infinite love for us."



The glory of God shines upon us. In anticipation of his death on the cross, Jesus explains "...unless a grain of wheat falls into earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

We must give up the stuff this world is made of in order to find life in Christ. This doesn't mean that we need to sell all our stuff and live on the streets. It means we need to reevaluate what we value. We need to realize that stuff cannot make us happy... no matter how much we have.

"Those who love their life, lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Imagine living a life where so much stuff is not important. Where we value others and our relationships with them more than things. Where we can live happily day-by-day in the safe assurance that love is always there for us.

When we live so, then we find it is easy to glorify God's name. To demonstrate to others the joy and happiness God offers to us and all others. The light of God's Holy Spirit then burns brightly within us and is reflected in our eyes and our actions.

Prayer: Creator God, I open my heart today and invite your Holy Spirit in to show me the way to die to this world so that I can live eternally in the light, joy and grace of your love. Amen

No YouTube link today.

Saturday, March 16

by Stephen Wing

*Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 "Thank the LORD because he is good. His love continues forever."
(Verses 1, 29, New Century Version)*

This psalm begins and ends with the same exact words. They serve as bookends for all the situations in which the psalmist had found himself that God's love took care of: trouble, fear, enemies, broken trust, feeling surrounded by an out of control world, defeat, even death itself.

I have been reading some Westerns lately, and every once in a while one of the characters is a snake oil salesman. Traveling in a rickety old wagon, he sold some kind of elixir,, a concoction mostly containing whiskey, that was supposed to "cure all your ills." He would soon be run out of town because people who had been duped discovered it cured nothing at all, but usually made a person feel worse.

We get leery of some magic elixir, some cure-all. The psalmist dares to make the case that God's love, God's goodness, has a curing quality like no other. Emotional and spiritual ills abound—but they do not last forever. God's good love has the only everlasting quality that we need to cure what ails us.

Prayer: Lord, I too often use you as my last resort after I have tried everything else. So here I am, again, finally ready to lean on your good love. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ9cXmZCXe0>



Monday, March 18

by Nancy Kalesz



Mark 11:1–11

The scripture reading for today is the beginning of Holy Week—known as Palm Sunday. These verses are filled with references to the Old Testament scriptures that foretold the coming of a King who would be the savior of Israel. People of Jesus' time understood the meaning of these O.T. references as well as their own culture. Jerusalem was the holy city—and an unriden colt referred to the unyoked consecrated animals that were considered set aside for the temple sacrifices. The use of Mark's term "the 'Lord' has need of it" seems to have been an understood prophecy of a humble King, coming not as a warrior, but as a peace maker. What, I wonder, would we make of such a small occurrence in the middle of a large city, in today's culture? Could we even imagine the meaning of such an occurrence ... or dare to hope that this man of God is the "savior of the world"? Celebrating with palm leaves and branches would seem a small way to honor God's greatest gift. What then would we do if such a celebration was happening in our city of today?

Here are some things to think about if Jesus came as a man of peace and humility in today's world:

- Would we even notice a small parade in a large city?
- Would we recognize Jesus as the Messiah—the chosen one—a man proclaiming God's love for the world—not one of his own king-ship, but as a peace maker—not a ruler by force.
- Would we join in the celebration and understand the meaning of a "teacher of God's word" riding humbly into our city or town?
- Would we celebrate with others to honor him or just go on about our own business?
- Would we dare to believe that this man was the Messiah? the long awaited one? The savior of the world? OR—would we think that it was only one of many pretenders, charlatans, false prophets, that had declared themselves to be "savior" over the centuries, but who are not any of these things—maybe even "a wolf in sheep's clothing."

I myself might just turn away and mutter, "Another grabber of power."

What made Jesus different is Christmas and Easter—a gift and a sacrifice "Emmanuel," God with us and the death, resurrection, and life that God gave us through his son Jesus, the savior of the world.

Palm Sunday will come and go. We will continue our busy lives, hardly noticing the celebration of those who knew Jesus—who celebrated his teachings and believed the prophecies of old (the promises that God would send a savior.) and the believers throughout the ages who have passed the words of Jesus down to us, across many generations.

Don't miss out! Take time in this celebration of God's working in our live in our time. Spend time in your thoughts and prayers, for all that Jesus taught us—for coming as a King of Peace—a son of God who loves all creation, and with thanksgiving for the sacrifice Jesus gave to all generations. We love because God first loved us and sent his only son to the world to redeem the world—then, now, and always.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCZRmZB5VaE>

Tuesday, March 19

by Harold Frye

John 12:16 "His disciples didn't understand these things at first."

Likely it doesn't matter whether you are a trained teacher or not. We're all teachers to others, especially if we have children of our own. So how many times have I said "Do you understand?" My mentor, Dr. Madeline Hunter (UCLA), often scolded us for asking that question. Rather than asking "do you understand?" she would explain that it was far better to ask a question to which the response demonstrated understanding. In a group of students, the only response given to "Do you understand?" is the nodding of heads or the blank stare. No one is likely to expose their stupidity by saying, "No, I don't understand." With one's own child, the question was almost always asked not as a question, but as a stern warning: "You had better understand!"

Jesus' disciples were His students. They were plucked from their jobs as fishermen or other toilsome occupations. They were probably not well versed in the teachings of the synagogue and, much like those who gathered to hear Jesus speak, learned best because Jesus chose to tell stories that they could understand.

Jesus was the greatest teacher of all.

Prayer: Help me to understand what it is You want me to do. I am here, Lord. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiXuzcHISR4>



Wednesday, March 20

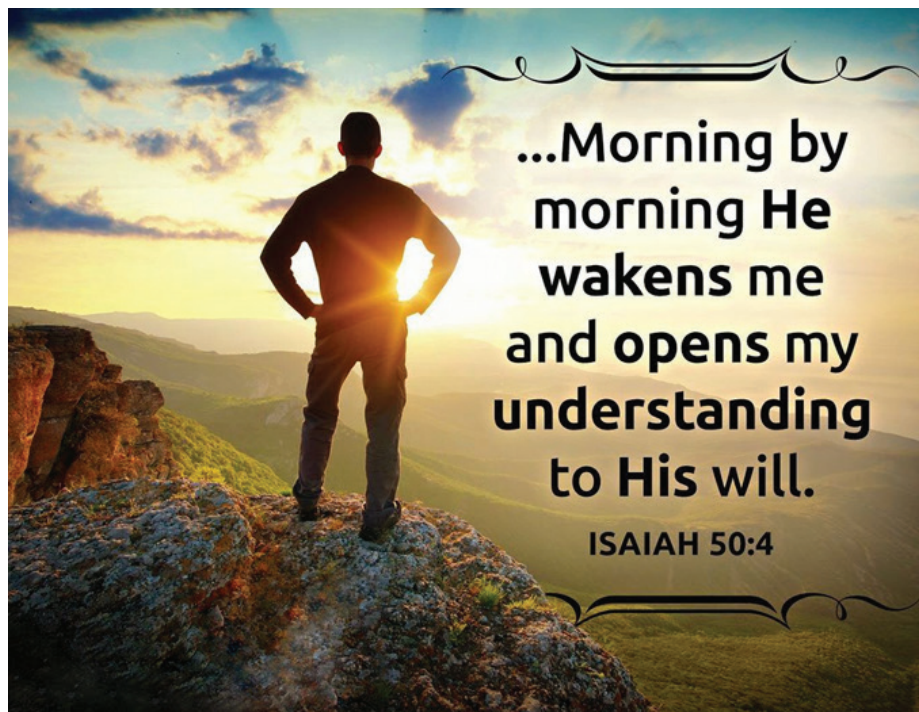
by Harold Frye

Isaiah 50:4 "The Lord God gave me an educated tongue to know how to respond to the weary with a word that will awaken them in the morning."

When I started my volunteer work at ReNewed Hope Food Pantry, a young woman was in charge of the bus that carried large bins of food to several places throughout the Kansas City area. She was quite open about her life and her difficult past that had changed when she began attending church. I was fascinated by her openness about her life's journey and about her commitment to prayer. She left the bus ministry to start a new "street ministry" in which she worked to find those in need of God in their lives. She sought out the weary among the homeless and made arrangements for them to attend church with her. As she provides transportation to these homeless individuals, she is also looking after their needs. I marveled at the descriptions she gave of her conversations with God. It makes me wonder how I can use my voice to further the work of the Lord.

Prayer: Give me a voice today to speak out in ways that will respond to the weary. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUX_Sm2p3Rc



Thursday, March 21

by Stephen Wing

Psalm 31:9-16 "For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed." (verse 10, King James Version)

99.9% of my purchases are paid for with a credit or debit card. I carry some cash, but hardly ever use it. I never write checks anymore. All my monthly payments are made electronically. It makes my capital, my money that I am using to buy stuff, invisible. My money is just numbers on a statement. When I do use cash,



it certainly makes what I am doing more "real." I am actually giving something valuable over to someone else. I think more often about how my life, my minutes, hours, days, is also valuable capital that I am spending. I am spending my life. I am giving my life over each day, and so wonder what I am getting in return for that expenditure. On what am I spending my life?

The psalmist sadly realizes that he is spending his life on "grief" and "sighing." That spending his life on such things is tantamount to "iniquity." It is sinful to spend his life on that which saps his strength all the way down to his bones.

I am, you are, we all are going to spend our life on something. We are giving up the coinage of our life to get something. If the spending is inevitable, why not spend your life on something that strengthens you all the way to your bones? Such a waste to spend your life only on grief and sighing.

Prayer: Lord, you have given me one solitary and amazing life. Forgive me when I misspend it. In the spending of my life, I want to make you smile. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTIPRjK7Wpo>

Friday, March 22

by Andrew Frye

Philippians 2:5-11 ***“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”***



In the past fifteen years, education has placed a significant emphasis on instilling a growth mindset in students. Research by Stanford professor Dr. Carol Dweck reveals that students with a growth mindset persist in the face of failure, viewing it as a steppingstone in the learning process. As a teacher, it is my hope that my students will not only learn the content, but also develop a growth mindset by understanding how to view failure as an opportunity to learn and improve rather than as a setback. The teaching of mindset is nothing new. As we are instructed at the beginning of this verse, “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.” So how can we be like Jesus?

To embody the mindset of Jesus, we must nurture love and compassion towards others, even those who may be different or challenging. Following Jesus’ example as a servant leader involves prioritizing the needs of others, leading with humility. We must also maintain faith and trust in God’s guidance and purpose by adopting a mindset reflective of Jesus’ teachings.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YII4o33rJdA>

Saturday, March 23

by Harold Frye

Mark 14:7 *"You always have the poor with you; and whatever you want, you can do something good for them."*

Many churches, civic clubs, and charitable organizations provide food to people to lessen their food insecurity. Our church supports through donations and volunteers the Renewed Hope Food Pantry that gives needed food in drive through and a bus-turned-food-pantry operations. Hundreds and hundreds of pounds of food are given away each week. Those who volunteer regularly see some of the same people each time. Those who fall into the "poor" category in Greater Kansas City suffer from homelessness, joblessness, and, therefore, struggle to feed themselves and their families.

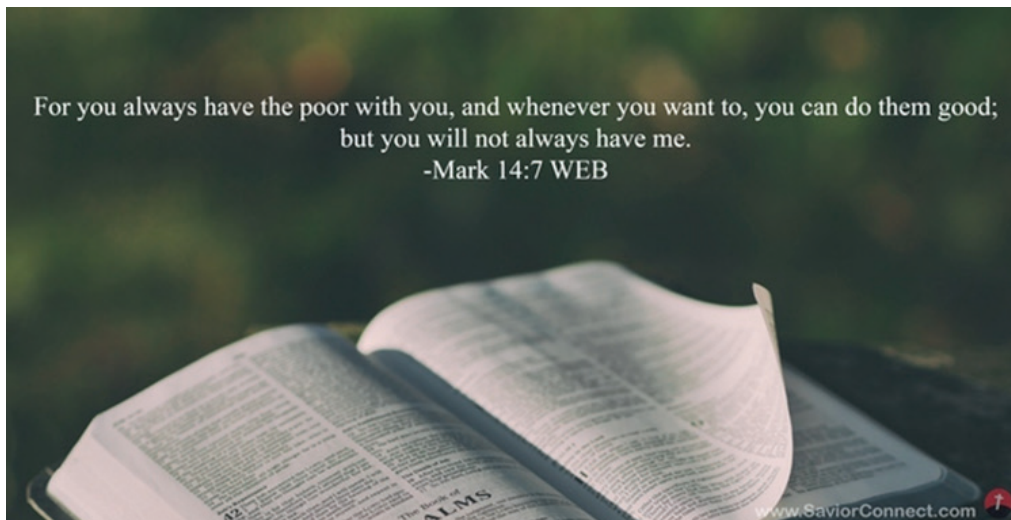
Jesus knew of His coming crucifixion and that He would leave the earthly realm. He knew, too, that there would also always be the poor and needy.

"Tend my sheep" was His command (John 21:17) We have many in Jesus' flock. Some need food. Others need clothing. Still others need shelter. Some just need a smile and a kind word.

Can you give to one of Jesus' sheep?

Prayer: I may only be one person, but I can do for others what You ask. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPynp9JlbCA>



Monday, March 25

by Harold Frye

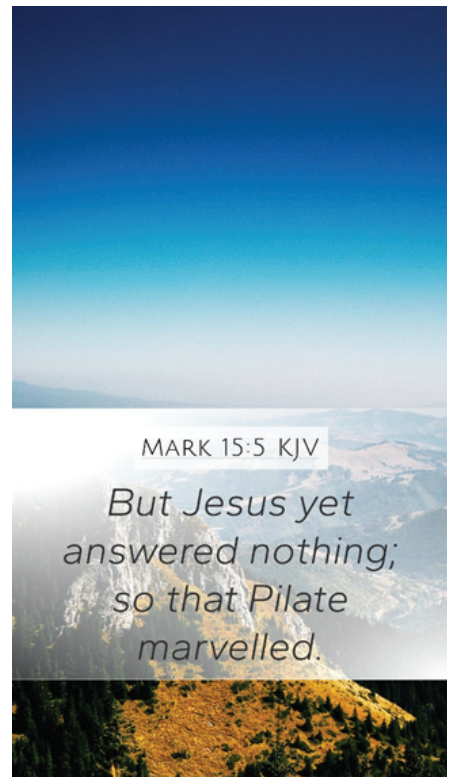
Mark 15:5 "But Jesus gave no more answers."

This passage is a small part of the account of Jesus' trial before Pilate that recounts how the soldiers belittled Him and prepared Him for crucifixion. The account reminded me of how much the execution scene from Mel Gibson's "Braveheart" was similar. The crowds' mocking, the loathing of the person in charge when William Wallace stood silent. When I think about either of these accounts, I wonder where I would be if I were present in either one. Would I be a part of the crowd shouting insults? Would I be one of those charged to carry out the executions? Or would I be one of William Wallace's loyal followers standing frozen among the hostile crowd? Or one of Jesus' disciples who denied him?

Jesus knew his fate. He didn't need to respond, for in doing so, He would have only delayed what He was called to do by His Father.

Prayer: May I know what You expect of me, my God. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4fvspRkkHw>



Tuesday, March 26

by Sarah Evans

Mark 15:40-47 "Some women were watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James (the younger one) and Joses, and Salome. When Jesus was in Galilee, these women had followed and supported him, along with many other women who had come to Jerusalem with him. Since it was late in the afternoon on Preparation Day, just before the Sabbath, Joseph from Arimathea dared to approach Pilate and ask for Jesus' body. (Joseph was a prominent council member who also eagerly anticipated the coming of God's kingdom.) Pilate wondered if Jesus was already dead. He called the centurion and asked him whether Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that Jesus was dead, Pilate gave the dead body to Joseph. He bought a linen cloth, took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in the cloth, and laid him in a tomb that had been carved out of rock. He rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was buried." (CEB)

In this Scripture passage, we find Jesus' body is attended by random people. Joseph of Arimathea, and the centurion, (who later proclaimed that Jesus was indeed the son of God). One might ask, where were the disciples who had followed him throughout his ministry? The disciples who had left their families and lives, prayed with him, loved him, and were his students? But, in his final hours and following his death, they were not around. Instead, we find the women in his life, Mary Magdalene, likely his mother, Mary, and many other women who had followed him to Jerusalem. It was this group of individuals who were present with him, watching from afar. This sense of presence is powerful, and rare, whether in life or in death. The skill of being able to sit with someone in their grief, anxiety, or fear, is an amazing experience. Sitting with another person, without giving advice or talking, is an amazing gift. Friends can do it, family members, chaplains at hospitals, ministers, counselors, etc. One doesn't have to have a degree in humanity, or listening, just a caring, nonjudgmental heart, willing to just sit and wait with another person. May we all lead with our hearts more, listen more to the needs of those around us, and not be afraid to just sit with our sisters and brother, when in need. May it be so.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4fvspRkkHw>

Wednesday, March 27

by Nancy Kalesz

Isaiah 7:10–14

Well to be honest with you, I found these brief verses in Isaiah confusing in our reading for today. I am wondering why the lectionary came so late in our Lenten readings. Why are we returning to Isaiah's proclamation reminding us that God made a promise way back in the Old Testament. These verses in Isaiah seem to be reminding the people of that day that "God will give you a sign" centuries before the time of Jesus. This sign was one well known to the people of Israel. Look! God said the sign is a young woman who shall bear a child and shall name him "Emmanuel" (God with us).



Perhaps the reason for including these verses is because humanity doesn't listen very well. I think the immediate gratification of the Old Testament people was as short as that of ours today. Save us God! Save us now.

In today's world, we ask the same questions. Save us!—from all that assails us. Do it now! Yes, we know the promise of God has come—and continues to abide with us through the greatest gift ever. Emmanuel—God with us, Jesus son of God whose birth, life, death, and resurrection seals that promise of God from ancient times to today. Believe in what God gave to the world. A child a peacemaker—God's own son who died to save the world and rose again to be the full promise of "God with us."

So perhaps these brief verses are just a reminder to recognize Emmanuel. God will come—God has come—and God is with us always.

Dear God, let us look for and see the love you have for the world. Emmanuel, Jesus, God with us now and forever. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdxcRP0KIt8>

Thursday, March 28 (Maundy Thursday)

by Stephen Wing

Psalm 45 *“Beautiful words fill my mind, as I compose this song for the king. Like the pen of a good writer my tongue is ready with a poem.” (verse 1, Good News Translation)*

The rest of this psalm is a song to the king. It is effusive with high praise: how handsome the king is; how deadly the king is to his enemies, single-handedly insuring a victory simply by his presence at the battle; how the king is always happy; how all the women swoon on weak knees when the king walks by. Wonderful.

But on this Maundy Thursday, picturing Jesus as such a king creates a sharp disconnect. The prophet Isaiah sings a different song from the psalmist:

The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum. (Isaiah 53:2-3, The Message)

There is certainly the temptation to picture Jesus as the psalmist did. We would like to follow that kind of a king, that kind of a Savior. Super heroic. Majestic. A powerfully magnetic personality. Good looking. But the truth is closer to Isaiah’s song. If you lived back then you would have walked right past Jesus and never known it. Mother Teresa was asked why she nursed the tragically infirm, the disgusting, the dying. She replied, “Because they are Jesus in disguise.” Look around. Do you see Jesus?

Prayer: Do I see you, Jesus? Do I really see you? I wonder... Amen.

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



Friday, March 29 (Good Friday)

by Stephen Wing

Psalm 40:3-10 "More and more people are seeing this: they enter the mystery, abandoning themselves to GOD." (verse 3, The Message)

People would come to me asking questions: "What about this?" "What about that?" "How come this?" "How come that?" "Why me?" "Why now?" And all the variations of these questions. I thought I needed to have an answer to them all. That there must be explanations and I had to discern them to help people with all their questions.

But it got to the point where I was more and more comfortable saying, "I don't know." What I ended up discerning was not answers but mystery. I realized there is always more going on than what I am seeing, and even though I didn't understand what that was, I was OK with not knowing everything.

Look at Jesus on the cross. Why him? Why a torturous death? Why couldn't God, in a booming voice that everyone on earth could hear, say, "Good news, people! I forgive you all for all your sins! Enjoy!" But no, it was something much more awful. Why? Why did God go with "the Cross" plan? There's a mystery here. Instead of being like all those who stood around the cross taunting, seeing only a crucifixion, thinking they had all the answers, we need to just "enter the mystery." Don't take your eyes off the mystery.

Prayer: I'm happy to say, Lord, I don't know everything. The why's and wherefores. But I keep my eyes on the edges of my questions because I think that's where the mystery is—that's where you are. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cmXOn50ROA>



Saturday, March 30

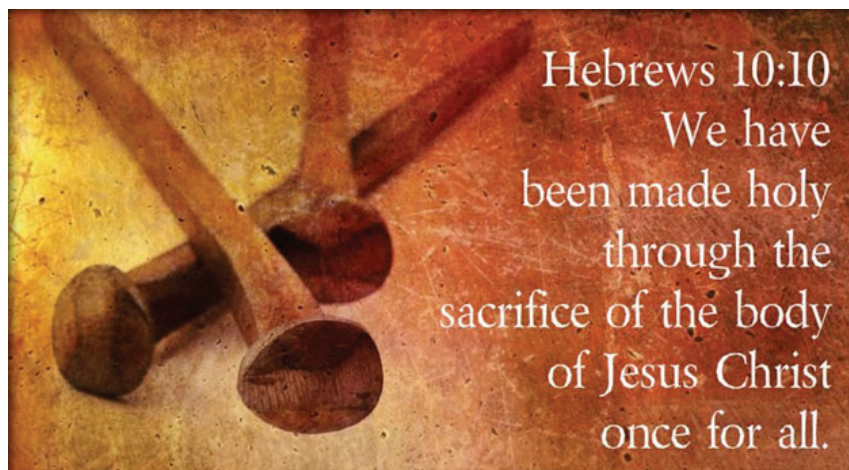
by Barbara Douglas

Hebrews 10:4-10 "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me, with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.' Then I said, 'Here I am- it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will O God.'"

Jesus came to earth as fully man and fully God. He himself said he had been sent from the Father to bring good news to man. One of the greatest gifts we received from His teaching is that we do not have to "earn" salvation. He fully states that sacrifices and burnt offerings are not what is necessary to earn God's love. No longer are people bound by the sets of laws and restrictions. God has sent mankind GRACE through the presence of Jesus life on earth. We cannot earn God's love by doing a list of "things" to get His attention. It sometimes seems it would be easier if we were provided a list of things we could DO and be able to check them off when completed. Sorry, that's not the way God/Jesus works, nor are "things" necessary to earn our way into the heart of God. All we have to do is believe that Jesus came into the world for our salvation. God's grace is sufficient. We have the knowledge that God is always available to us. Faith is all that is necessary. Faith is indeed a journey, and we may not always feel that we are strong in it, but we realize that God will be with us in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. Praise be to HIM!!

Prayer: God of our fathers and of us in your presence now, we praise you and glorify your name. We are thankful that you are ever present even as we walk this earthy path. We pray for your guidance and wisdom as we walk in faith with you. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhxWHC0qdQw>



Sunday, March 31 Easter

by Kevin Johnson

Luke 1: 26-38 "The Annunciation is a celebration of the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary to announce to the world the coming of Jesus Christ. It is celebrated on March 25 each year, symbolically nine months prior to Christmas. At Easter the good news of the completion of Christ's mission on earth bursts forth striking the hearts of humanity in the glorious realization that God is with us and for us with love that knows no bounds. The cycle is complete and we start all over again seeking this love."

Prayer: LORD God. Make me an instrument of your peace. Help me to see your love and grace and to share it with others. Amen

No YouTube listed.



Domenico Beccafumi, 1545



Leonardo da Vinci,
dated to c. 1472-1476

into the Wilderness

2024 Lenten Devotionals



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