

Lent Devotional

2022



**Boone Advent Christian
Church**

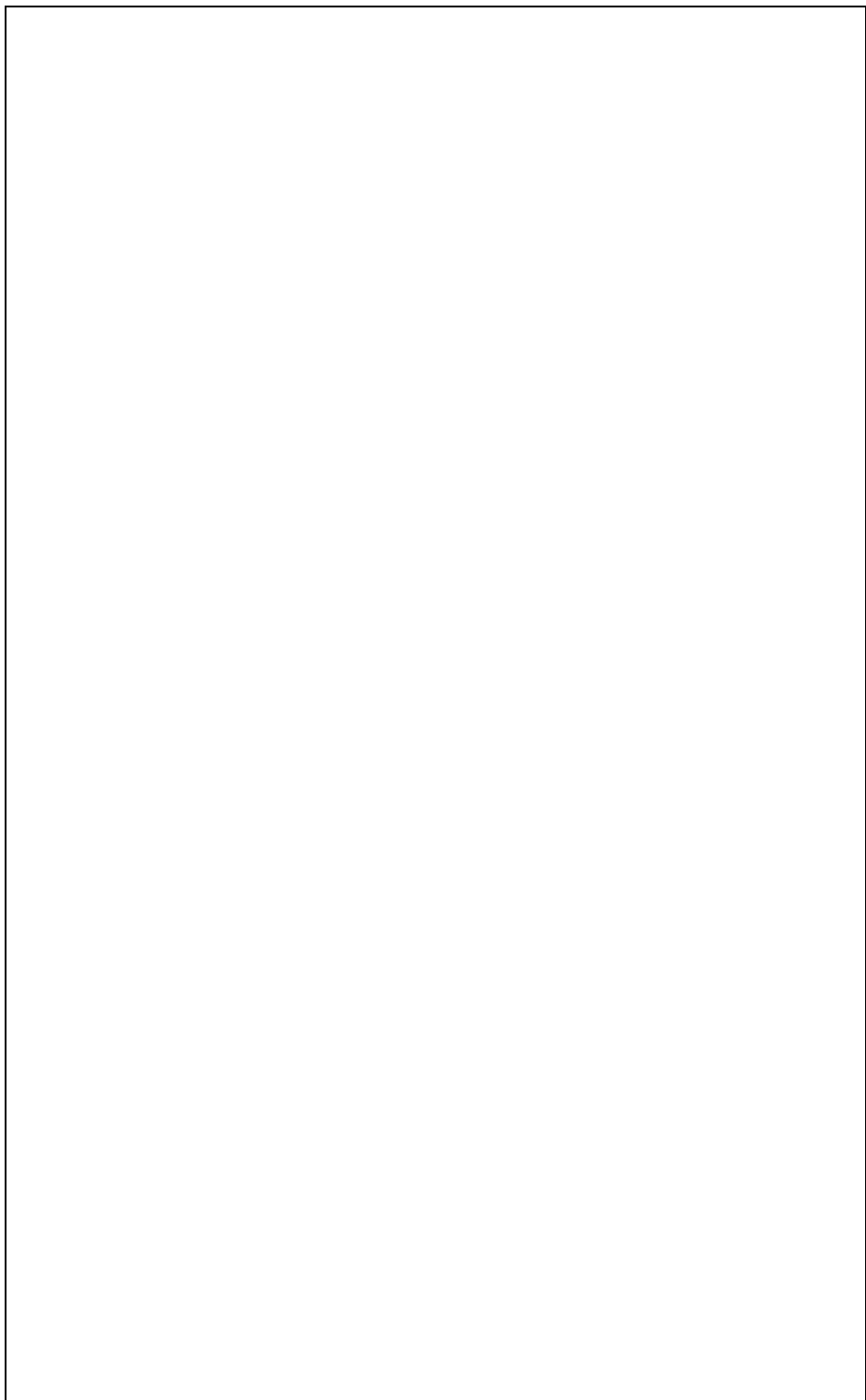


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Introduction

“Lent” is such a strange word! It is very unfamiliar to many of us, and often Evangelical Christians see it as a legalistic tradition that has lingered around even as Catholic influence has faded in our faith. Yet, when we truly engage in the season of Lent, there is so much to deepen and strengthen our faith as we are guided to read and meditate on God’s Word and to ponder ideas and themes from the life of Jesus that we don’t usually consider.

Lent is the six and a half week period between Ash Wednesday (March 2, 2022) and Easter Sunday (April 17, 2022). This period of forty days represents the time that Jesus spent fasting and praying in the wilderness before the beginning of his public ministry. (Sundays aren’t counted in the “forty” because they are still days we celebrate the resurrection of Christ.) Traditionally, this has been a time of prayer and fasting before the celebration of Easter. You probably know about celebrations of Mardi Gras (or Fat Tuesday/“Pancake Tuesday”), when folks have their last “hurrah” before the stricter dietary and lifestyle restraints people choose during Lent. In recent years, Christians of many denominations have chosen to fast (to abstain or deny oneself) from specific pleasures such as meat, social media, sweets or other enjoyments in order to focus more on their relationship with God. Any craving for these things is used as a reminder to pray and to return to thinking on spiritual matters. Along with lessening their dependence on trivial things, people usually spend the season of Lent doing more for others like being intentional about giving to the poor, sharing the gospel, making amends with friends or family members, reading more from the Bible or from Christian writers, or performing acts of service. You may choose to dedicate these upcoming forty days to God in any way that you feel led! Use these traditional ways to experience Lent as a springboard to discover what would be the most helpful in your own life.

For our church, we pray that each of you will use this season of Lent to seek the Lord in prayer, to take time to evaluate your walk with Christ (both what is going well and what needs to be improved) and to meditate on these daily scriptures. We encourage you to not only read through the devotions in this booklet, but to engage throughout the day in what God has in store for your life and journey with Him. Read the Scripture for each day from your own Bible (and read what comes before and after it if you have time!) and consider what it means from your own perspective. Take the time to actively pray, and reflect on what God's Word indicates you should do (or stop doing) in your life. We will be here to encourage you and cheer you on as you follow God in this Lenten journey!

Rev. Mitch Marlowe, Rev. Brittany Jackson, Sara Speed
Boone Advent Christian Church
February 2022

Week 1

Temptation and Confession

This, the first week of Lent, we are looking at the themes of temptation and confession. The wilderness experience of Jesus is our example of enduring temptation in our own lives. Christ was without sin, but when we go astray we are reminded of the necessity of confession and repentance.

March 2 (Ash Wednesday)

Bible Reading: Luke 4:1-3

Devotional thought: Just like Jesus, we are tempted in many ways. We are barely making it and all of a sudden that one thing we cannot resist is within our reach. It is typically at our weakest that temptation raises its ugly head. We see from our reading today that was the case for Jesus - He had been in the wilderness for forty days and He was hungry. We may not have gone forty days without eating, but the circumstance we are facing might have drained us of mental, physical or emotional energy. That is when the devil likes to remind us if we would just do this or that, he can make things better. It would be easy to give in, take what he is offering and think we are rid of the problems we face. Jesus didn't. He resisted and we should too!

Whatever the devil may offer you today, don't give in. Stand firm Child of God. Hold your head high and tell him that you are protected by the blood of Jesus. Tell the devil that whatever he is offering you do not need because you have everything you need in Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me for the times I have given in to temptation. Purify me Lord and give me Your strength to resist the temptation that is facing me right now. Because I am Your child Lord, you are all I need. Accomplish your purpose in my life. Thank you that because of Jesus, I can stand firm when temptation comes calling. You are my strength, my shield and my Strong Tower! In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Application:

- What are the temptations you face?
- How do you resist temptation?
- What is the outcome when you resist temptation? What are the ramifications when you give in?

March 3

Bible Reading: Luke 4:4-13

Devotional thought: Have you ever wondered why “It is written” is written in our Bible? Read this passage again. Can you spot all the times that phrase appears in these verses? A very careful count will show “It is written” appears 3 times and is implied a fourth time. Jesus says it 2 times and implies it once. However, the third time, it is stated by the devil. It is interesting that evil tries to distort the sacred meaning of scripture in order to satisfy an evil desire. Sometimes, we need to be careful of taking scripture and making it into what we want instead of the intended purpose that God has for it. Temptation is overcome only when we are true to the meaning of Scripture. Pay attention to that which is written in God’s Word. By doing so, you will overcome and win the battle of giving into temptation.

Prayer: Father, thank You for Your written Word! Help me become a student of Your Word so that I can win the battle of giving into temptation. Thank You Lord for the example of Jesus using your Word as well. It is in His Mighty Name we pray, amen.

Application/Questions:

- What does “It is written” mean to you?
- How can you overcome temptation with God’s Word?
- What can you do during this season of Lent to be a better student of God’s Word?

March 4

Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:13

Devotional thought: Often, we feel like the struggles we face are completely unique to our situation and that no one has gone through what we currently experience. Held back by embarrassment, fear of judgment or the belief that no one else would understand anyway, we have the tendency to make our situation even more difficult by pushing others away. It is a whole lot easier to justify giving in to the easy or sinful way out when we think we are alone in our struggles and our temptations.

You can combat this lie from the devil by remembering the promises from 1 Corinthians 10:13:

- You are not alone in what tempts you and in what struggles you face.
- God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. There is always a path to do the right thing.
- There will always be a “way out” of any temptation.

In your struggles, doubts and temptations, don't ever stop searching for the escape provided by God. And be sure to share your difficulties with other believers so we can support one another as a family!

Prayer: God, thank you that I am never alone in my temptations and struggles. Though it might seem like life is more overwhelming than I can bear, your truth is that you love me and will lead me through every hard situation in my life. Thank you for the folks in my life that encourage me to do what is right and help me not to feel alone. Help me to do what is right, according to your word, in every decision I make today. In your name, amen.

Application/Questions:

- In what situations do you feel the most alone and most tempted to give in to sin?
- Brainstorm some potential solutions that would glorify God.
- Who are some people you can partner with to support and be supported through difficulty?

March 5

Bible Reading: Ezra 10:1

Devotional thought: We all know what it is like to have unconfessed sin in our lives - how it weighs on you. Imagine feeling the weight of a nation's sin. Ezra did. This is one of several instances in the Bible when a godly man confesses on behalf of the nation of Israel. What do you think would happen if we all confessed the sins of our nation - confess not just for show, but confess with true remorse for what we have done? Confess and then make the changes that are needed to prevent that sin from creeping back into our culture. Once we begin to acknowledge and confess our sin before God, not only will we see a difference in us, but also in our outlook of the world around us.

God promises that He will heal if we humble ourselves, seek Him, and turn from evils ways (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Prayer: Almighty God, we ask that You would show us distinctly how to pray and confess the sins of our nation. We ask, Lord, that You hear our petition of forgiveness of the sin of greed that has overtaken us. We ask Lord, that you listen to our cry for mercy for our sin of selfishness that is so prevalent in our nation. We plead for your forgiveness for the hatred we have for others. We ask, Lord, that You would act. We ask, Lord, that would not delay. Thank you Father that you are righteous, just and holy. We ask all of these things in the name of Jesus. Amen

Application/Questions:

- What is a specific sin that we as a nation need to confess?
- What steps can you take to confess on behalf of our nation?
- What do you think would happen if all believers began this practice?

March 6- Sunday
Spend time reflecting on the devotional thoughts of the past week

March 7

Bible Reading: Psalm 32:5

Devotional thought: When one acknowledges his or her sin, they are owning it. They do not try to cover it up. Sometimes it does not come easy to acknowledge one's sin right away. We might be ashamed, embarrassed or even in a state of denial. The pattern that is established in this reading is that once acknowledgement happens, the groundwork for confession can take place. Then, forgiveness comes immediately. When forgiveness comes, the guilt can be removed. The old saying, "confession is good for the soul," must really be true! As we ponder our sin, remember that it in part was what nailed our Savior to the cross. Let's not let any linger anymore. Rather, let's acknowledge it and confess it so we in turn can be forgiven and released.

Prayer: Thank You Lord for the provision you have given us in acknowledging and confessing our sin. Thank you for the promise of forgiveness and the removal of guilt. Help me just now by bringing to my mind any sin that I need to acknowledge and confess. Thank You that Jesus has taken my sin as His punishment that I might have life. It is in His Precious Name I pray, amen.

Application/Questions

- What sin do you need to acknowledge and confess right now before the Lord?
- Spend time in prayer thanking God that your sins are forgiven.

March 8

Bible Reading: 1 John 1:8-10

Devotional thought: One of the biggest failures of the Church in modern times is the lack of confession for the wrongs we do. In most churches, the desire to be seen as a “good Christian” far outweighs the desire to actually do what God calls us to do. As a broader group, churches and denominations also tend to hide moral or ethical failures rather than confess and make amends for their sins. (We’ve seen this recently with the “Church Too” movement revealing toxicity in churches throughout our nation.) Yet, when we hide our sins in order to look “good” or “holy,” others only see hypocrisy. When we think we are presenting an image of Christ by hiding our sins, unbelievers and outsiders only see our deceit.

Here in First John 1, we are reminded that how we look to others isn’t the most important aspect of our faith (see also 1 Samuel 16:7). If we aren’t aware of and confessing the sin in us, “we make Him (God) out to be a liar” - especially to unbelievers who need the truth of God’s love and forgiveness most!

Prayer: Lord, I know you already know my heart. But right now I need to confess the sins I hold inside and pretend aren’t a problem. You are always faithful and promise to forgive us and cleanse all of our failures, and I cling to that promise as I confess what has been holding me back from my life with you. Wash me, cleanse me, and make me whiter than snow, Lord. Amen.

Application/Questions:

- What sin(s) are you covering up to look good for Sundays?
- Are you willing to confess them and repent in order to glorify God?

Week 2

Forgiveness and Community

Since we have all sinned and are equally guilty of breaking God's law, we recognize the importance of forgiveness. We need to willingly accept God's grace and forgiveness to restore our relationship with Him, and freely offer pardon when others fail us because we can only have true community when our grudges are released.

March 9

Bible Reading: Psalm 32:1-2

Devotional thought: Forgiven. Forgotten. Forever! When our sins are forgiven God forgives and forgets. He doesn't bring it up again. He doesn't throw that sin in your face. He doesn't say to you, "Do you remember that time when you...?"

God blesses you with forgiveness. He blesses you by canceling your debt. He forgives you and looks at you through the blood of Jesus. Then He blesses you by forgetting. He blesses you with forgiveness so that you can forgive others.

Prayer: Father, I thank you that you have forgiven me. Lord, I praise Your name for canceling my debt. I thank you for the blood of Jesus as it is the lens by which You look at me. Thank You, Lord, for the blessing of forgiveness. Help me Lord, to forgive as I have been forgiven. Show me, Lord, the people for whom I have unforgiveness in my heart. Help me forgive them, Lord. It is in Jesus' name that I pray. Amen.

Application/Questions:

- Do you feel blessed by God's forgiveness?
- How does it feel to have your sin debt paid?
- Spend time praising God for His forgiveness, grace and mercy.

March 10

Bible Reading: Ephesians 1:7

Devotional thought: In Christ we have the redemption of all redemptions. The sacrifice of all sacrifices. Once and for all. By pouring out His blood, Jesus redeemed us from any bondage to sin. We are forgiven in the absolute riches of God's grace. As a result, God lavishes us with all wisdom and understanding. Think about that word lavish. It means it was given to us in great amounts. It is a profusion, an abundance. It is given to you.

Prayer: Father, thank You that you saw fit to lavish upon us your grace that has given us redemption through Jesus. We plead your forgiveness when we take that for granted and we do not live up to Your standards. Remind us Lord that the price for our foolishness has been paid in full. Help us to never forget.

Because of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Application/Questions:

- Make a list of ways God has redeemed and blessed you through Christ Jesus.
- Spend time thanking Him for each one.

March 11

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 33:8

Devotional thought: We have all committed whoopsie sins. Without intentional forethought or malice, we have messed up. In both Hebrew and Greek, most often the word we read as “sin” in English comes from the idea of archery. When a marksman doesn’t hit the bullseye (or totally misses the target), it is a “sin.” We often miss the mark and don’t do exactly what God wants for us to do. And we are blessed to receive God’s forgiveness and restoration when we accidentally fall into sin.

But did you know, even when it wasn't a mistake, even when we consciously know what we ought to do and then do the opposite, God is ready and willing to forgive? In many places in the scripture our sin is described as “rebellion.” This means “an act of violent or open resistance to an established government or ruler.” We deliberately disobey God, pushing our own self-interest, and in essence are trying to overthrow his reign as Lord. And yet, even when we find ourselves in rebellion, God is faithful. His forgiveness is abundant and available, no matter what kind of sin we have committed.

Prayer: God, thank you for always forgiving me, even when I have deliberately rebelled against you. Thank you that you never tell me I’m too broken or too far gone, but always show me love and compassion. I’m sorry for when I have broken your heart with my actions and thoughts. I repent of my failures, and I’m trying to do better- please help me!

Application/Questions:

- In what times of your life have you gone from “whoopsie sins” to full out rebellion against God?
- Have you accepted God’s full forgiveness or are you still holding on to the guilt of your past actions?
- Think of those who have accidentally or intentionally hurt you. Who do you need to forgive today?

March 12

Bible Reading: Matthew 6:14-15

Devotional thought: Forgiveness is difficult isn't it? We feel vindicated somehow in holding on to our hurt feelings. We carry anger and bitterness like they are our best friends. If we are honest, the only one that is being hurt by unforgiveness is us. Some carry unforgiveness for days, weeks, months, years, and yes, even decades. It would make sense that they are very unhappy people.

Forgive as you have been forgiven. Jesus makes it very clear how we are to forgive those who have wronged us. There is no distinction between offenses. There is only the promise: If you forgive others, you will be forgiven.

Prayer: Lord, I have unforgiveness in my heart. I have held onto it far too long. Lord, I don't want to live this way anymore. I forgive _____ for what they have done to me. Show me Lord - give me wisdom and discernment to know if I should face the person and let them know what they did to me and tell them I forgive them. Lord, I want to be more like You. To know that you forgave me of my sins, how could I ever harbor unforgiveness toward others? Cleanse my mind and my heart from the hold unforgiveness has had on me. Forgive me Lord for not following Your example. I thank you, Lord, that now I can live free from these chains. In the mighty name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Application/Questions:

- Are you harboring unforgiveness?
- Ask God to bring to mind anyone that you need to forgive
- How does it make you feel to forgive?

March 13

Spend time reflecting on the devotional thoughts of the past week

March 14

Bible Reading: Luke 6:37

Devotional thought: A college professor once told his psychology class, “Every time you open your mouth to judge, your intelligence is on exhibition.” How true. Judging leads to condemnation. Condemnation leads to unforgiveness. Jesus was adamant in His teaching that we be careful about judging, condemning and being unforgiving. If Jesus did not give us an example from His life and teachings about this, there would be no reason for this devotional thought. However, He has taught us and shown us that this is His way. We are to forgive as we are forgiven. That means that we forgive fully, completely, and everlastingly, right?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, sometimes I am not very smart. I often judge others because they are different than I am in some way or another. I condemn others because I think I am better than they are, when in reality I am just as guilty as they could ever be in one way or another. Please forgive me for judging and condemning. Remind me how I have been forgiven and in turn show me how to forgive as well. Thank you Jesus, for your example. Help me by more like you! Amen.

Application/Questions

- Who are you still judging and condemning?
- Ask the Lord to show you how to forgive as you have been forgiven.

March 15

Bible Reading: Acts 2:44-47

Devotional thought: Community is a group of people who share a common bond, perhaps an occupation, interest, geographic location, belief or goal. There are lots of ways that people bond with one another, but there is just something special about Christian community. This week we have focused a lot on forgiveness, which is vital to cultivating the fellowship we have with one another in Christ. It is easy to get along with people when everything is going well and you like the same things; but when we get hurt or feel left out it is incredibly easy to decide to be selfish and to withdraw from the group.

Because we have forgiveness from God and are called to share forgiveness with others, we can focus on the needs of the whole community (or church) and not just ourselves. The early Christians living in Jerusalem knew that Christ, the bond which held them together, was so much stronger than any personal need or desire. Any disagreements (petty or significant) were unimportant in comparison with God's love for all of them. They shared all their possessions, spent time together in worship and in everyday life, and they were blessed by God adding to their number daily.

Prayer: God, thank you for the example of what church is supposed to be like from Acts 2. Help me focus more on the needs of others more than my own self and to prioritize fellowship and friendship-building with my fellow believers. Help me to forgive and accept forgiveness so that your church can be united and undivided as we follow you. In your name, amen.

Application/Questions:

- How is God calling you to push away your selfishness in order to support the Christian community and the church?
- Do your relationships with other Christians match those of these first Christians? How can you grow closer to other believers?
- What needs do you know about that need your help to fill them?

Week 3

Baptism and Ministry

At the start of his ministry, Jesus was baptized, giving us an example to follow even though he was without sin. When we confess our sins, we are cleansed from all unrighteousness and prepared to serve others through Christ.

March 16

Bible Reading: Psalm 51:1-3

Devotional thought: If you have ever watched a Western movie you have seen when one of the characters were covered in dust and mud. The wash tub would be set in place. Then you would see someone pouring boiling water into the tub mixing it with the cold water that was already there. The character would get in, grab the soap and before long, they would be clean. Then came more water to rinse the soap away. The dirt and grime was gone. They had a clean body.

Imagine that dirt and grime is your sin, clinging to your skin and marring your appearance. You ask for your sin to be blotted out - washed away - cleansed. God's fountain of living water is poured into that big tub of forgiveness. His mercy and grace are the soap and brush and Jesus' blood rinses you clean. Sparkling. Radiant. Resplendent in His image.

Prayer: Father, thank you for cleansing me. Thank you for Jesus' blood that cleanses and purifies. My sins were covering me with the filth of this world and now I am clean, washed in the blood of the blessed Lamb. My life is now in you, Lord and I am so grateful. Blessed be Your holy name! Amen!

Application/Questions:

- How does it feel to have your sin washed away?
- Spend time thanking God for your spiritual cleansing

March 17

Bible Reading: Zechariah 13:1

Devotional thought: When was the last time you got really dirty? Maybe you were working on a project of some type and you got filthy. Maybe you were using something like paint and your hands became stained. No matter how hard you tried, the stain would not wash out. Maybe you found yourself quoting Shakespeare's Lady MacBeth as you scrubbed, "Out! Out you ____ spot!" In Lady MacBeth's case, she was trying to get rid of the stain of guilt and the part she played in another's death. Perhaps your stain is not from another's death, but nevertheless it still is stain. God knew that we would become stained with sin and corruption. He knew we would fall way short. So He established a fountain that would come from the house of David, a royal line full of impurities and horrendous mistakes, yet that fountain would cleanse us all from sin and impurity. The stains have been wiped clean. The fountain is called Jesus and the flow of His fountain is His sacrificial blood. That fountain remains open to us all. Jump in and be cleansed!

Prayer: Father, thank you that because of Jesus, you have wiped away all the stains that sin has caused in my life that has separated me from all You are! Help me to be cleansed from my sin and impurity. Wash me white as snow. Thank you Lord for the cleansing fountain!

In Jesus Name,
Amen

Application/Questions

- Spend some time thanking God just now for the cleansing of your sin.
- Ask God to show you have to live a life free from any impurities that would cause you to fall in the trap of sin.

March 18

Bible Reading: Matthew 8:1-3

Devotional thought: Recently, I learned about the last leper colony in the United States. Even though leprosy has been fully curable since the 1940s and is considered an “eliminated” disease by the WHO, from 1866 to 1969 the Kalaupapa peninsula, located on the island of Molokai, Hawaii, was where Hawaiian law forcibly required its residents with leprosy to reside. Even though its residents were allowed to leave once the law was lifted in 1969, as of 2015, 16 former patients/inmates continue to live where they were banished so many years ago. Even though leprosy is contagious (but very difficult to catch from someone else) and disfiguring, the real tragedy of this skin disease is the societal stigma its victims faced. Since ancient times and even throughout the era of the Bible, it was assumed that a person only was afflicted with leprosy because of a huge moral or spiritual failure. That harsh isolation, guilt and the exile and separation from our friends and family would bring even more pain than the joint pain, rash, numbness and skin growths of the actual disease.

We, too, often face repercussions from our sin, or from when others consider us to be in the wrong. Jesus didn't only heal the physical symptoms of the leper who came to him, but healed him completely. When Jesus said “I am willing. Be Clean!” he wasn't just giving him a shower or making him look and smell better. No, he cleansed his body of the disease, his soul of sin and restored his relationships within the community. He returned to his community, not as an unwelcome outcast but as a forgiven and whole child of God.

Prayer: God, I humbly and wholeheartedly ask that you choose to make me clean. Heal my physical wounds. Heal the spiritual brokenness I face. Heal the emotional damage I have endured from others. Restore the relationships I have harmed through my own wrongdoing. You say in your Word that You are willing, and I trust you will cleanse me! Thank you Lord! Amen.

Application/Questions:

- Imagine what it would be like to be completely shunned for something you had no control over. How would you feel? What would you think of yourself and of God?
- Would you have the courage, as the leper did, to defy social stigma to come to Jesus for healing? What pain or burden can you give to Jesus instead of carrying yourself?
- How have your sins and mistakes damaged your relationships with other people? What do you need to do to repair them?

March 19

Bible Reading: Matthew 20:26-28

Devotional thought: Have you ever heard someone say, “Well, that’s not my job!” or “Someone else can do it.”? In essence they are saying, “I cannot stoop to do such things.” In our world today, being first is the way we think. Being the boss is what we want. However, in God’s eyes, being last makes you first, being a servant makes you great. As Christians, we are called to serve instead of being served. We are called to do the thing that no one else wants to do. We are called to be in the trenches, setting up chairs, rocking babies, washing the dishes, serving drinks at the church social and providing for the needy. So the next time someone asks you if you can help, please do not say, “That’s not my job.”

Prayer: Lord, make me a servant. Thank you for calling me to serve you by serving others. Help me to see what needs to be done and take action. Lord prepare me to take on any task - big or small - to further Your kingdom. Keep my heart tender toward others and to see when they need my assistance. Thank you for loving me, Lord. Help me to love others as you have loved me. In Jesus name. Amen.

Application/Questions:

- What are the ways God is calling you to serve others?
- Take time to start a list of things you can do to serve others.
- How does it make you feel to serve instead of being served?

March 20 - Sunday

Spend time reflecting on the devotional thoughts of the past week

March 21

Bible Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20

Devotional thought: The word reconcile means to bring into agreement or harmony. It is to make something compatible and consistent. Often, things become so incompatible and inconsistent that they seem irreconcilable. This happens often in marriages, partnerships, and in relationships which leads to some type of breakup. People part their ways and often never return to a reconciled relationship because they do not want to do the work. God, however, already had put the work into effect. God uses the reconciliatory acts of Jesus to help us reconcile to Him and to others. In fact, reconciliation is the heartbeat of Jesus. What do you have to do to be more like Jesus?

Prayer: Thank you Father for making the way for us to be reconciled to You. Teach us, show us, and guide us as we are to reconcile with others!
Because Jesus has loved us to do so,
Amen.

Application/Questions:

- How had God reconciled you to Himself?
- What does God want you to do in order to be reconciled with others?

March 22

Bible Reading: Romans 6:4

Devotional thought: Have you ever wondered why on earth we celebrate baptism as a symbol of our faith in Jesus? We talk about cleansing and freedom from sin, but we don't even have a bar of soap in the baptistry! While it may not "do" much physically other than get our clothes wet, baptism is an important way we show our obedience to God. It recognizes that our salvation is dependent on Jesus' death (going underwater) and resurrection (returning to the surface). The ritual of baptism also acknowledges that by trusting in Jesus for our salvation, we die to ourselves - our selfish desires, craving for power and recognition, and image - so that we can live a new life, wholly devoted to Christ.

Perhaps, like famous Christian reformer Martin Luther, you face anxiety or doubt about lots of different things, but especially your own salvation. At times, Luther felt as if Satan were before him, ready to usher him through the gates of hell. What he did to combat these feelings was to place a large plaque in his room stating: "Remember your baptism." You may have been baptized as a baby or your baptism was quite a long time ago, but its power still remains. Each of us can look back to our baptism as a physical symbol of the internal experience of salvation. While our emotions can change and passion wane, baptism, that precious act of obedience, will always remain as an eternal monument to our commitment to Christ.

Prayer: Precious Jesus, thank you for the example you set through your own baptism. Help me to rediscover what it means to be dead to myself and alive in you. Give me the same passion today that led me to seek you for salvation and to follow you in obedience through baptism. Let the history of how you have worked in my life before shape my trust in your faithfulness and lead me to worship and glorify you in all that I do. In your name I pray, amen.

Application/Questions:

- Can you remember your baptism? What does it mean to you?
- What sin and selfishness did you "bury with Him in baptism?"
- What do you need to change to "walk in the newness of the Christian life?"

Week 4

God's Love

Although it is often sung about, preached on and discussed, God's love remains more amazing, wonderful and steadfast than we could ever sing or speak. It is only because of His love and the salvation provided in the death and resurrection of Jesus that we may have a relationship with Him.

March 23

Bible Reading: Romans 5:5-8

Devotional thought: Have you ever poured your love into something? Maybe a child, spouse, job or even a meal. You spend time thinking of ways to make everything special, to make that person loved or you give everything you have to your work. Knowing how it feels to pour your love out, consider how great God's love is for you. Our reading today says that He poured His love out into our hearts through the blessed Holy Spirit. Jesus loved us so much that He willingly gave His life knowing that we are sinners. God's love has been demonstrated by the fact that He gave up His Son to die for sinners. The requirement for sin has always been a sacrifice. Jesus became our sacrifice because of God's great love for us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for pouring out Your love for me in the form of Your Son, Jesus. Father, that You would love me so much to provide a sacrifice for my sin way in advance is amazing to me. Thank You, Lord, for loving me! I feel so unworthy, but then realized that Jesus made me worthy by shedding His blood for my sin. Praise Your holy name for Your great salvation plan. In the most precious name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Application/Questions:

- Spend some recalling all the ways that God loves you.
- What are ways that you can demonstrate your love for God?
- How do you pour out love to others?

March 24

Bible Reading: Psalm 86:15

Devotional thought: Aren't you glad that our God is compassionate and gracious? We, no matter who we are, deserve absolutely nothing. Yet God, because He is compassionate and gracious, is slow to anger and abounding in love. And furthermore, He abounds in faithfulness. What does that mean for us just now? It means we can trust Him with all things even that which makes us selfish and ungracious. His abounding love and faithfulness is more than we could ever imagine. Allow that thought to draw you into a time of worship just now.

Prayer: Oh God, Thank You for being compassionate and gracious! Thank You for being slow to be angry about my shortcomings and loving me enough to show me that You are faithful. Help me be faithful to You in return.

Application/Questions:

- Make a list of ways God has shown you His compassion and how he has been gracious to you.
- How can you be more compassionate and gracious in your everyday life?

March 25

Bible Reading: Ephesians 2:4-5

Devotional thought: It has been over a decade since the beginning of the “Walking Dead” tv show. Although the word “zombie” wasn’t created until the 19th century, did you know that Paul talks about the “walking dead” in this scripture from Ephesians? He says that all are dead in “our trespasses.” Spiritual death is the alienation of the soul from God, and our sin results in death. We all live our lives as “dead” until we receive Christ, though we are physically living and breathing.

From the imagery of the vine and branches in John 15, I am reminded of the process of grafting a branch onto an existing tree. We are like branches, cut off from all nourishment and dead in our sins when we are separated from God. Yet, all hope is not lost! Through God’s love and rich mercy, we are made “alive together with Christ.” When we allow ourselves to be grafted back to the True Vine, to Jesus, we are supplied all that we need to spiritually live. We are cultivated into the image of the True Vine, not anything like we were previously! Thank God for this opportunity to live when we thought all hope was lost!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the opportunity to live, even though my sins should be enough to condemn me eternally. Help me to live in my current life with you instead of returning to walk like the dead! Thank you Jesus, amen.

Application/Questions:

- Evaluate your own life: how is your connection with the Vine?
- What disciplines do you need to improve to receive more “nutrition” from Jesus?

March 26

Bible Reading: Zephaniah 3:17

Devotional thought: “The Lord your God is with you.” How comforting is that? Not only is He with you, but He delights in you. Have you ever watched a parent take delight in a child? Their eyes gleam, their smile is contagious as well as their laughter. “That’s my son” or “That’s my daughter” you may hear them say. Parents love to brag about their children. Even the simplest thing can bring about a boast. Multiply that by God’s infinite love and you may catch a glimpse of the delight God has for you. He loves you! He rejoices over you! He sings in delight because of you. Child of God, can you feel His love today?

Prayer: Lord, that You love me is so hard to comprehend. That you rejoice and take delight in me astounds me. Lord, thank You for Your beautiful, wonderful, infinite love. Thank you for the countless ways You demonstrate Your love for your children every day. What a mighty, awesome and wonderful God you are! In Jesus name I pray. Amen!

Application/Questions:

- Did you know that God loves you so much that He delights in you?
- How many ways has God shown how much He loves you?
- Name a specific time that you would hope God delighted in you.

March 27 - Sunday

Spend time reflecting on the devotional thoughts of the past week

March 28

Bible Reading: 1 John 3:1

Devotional thought: God loved us so much that He adopted us as His children! He skipped over us having to be in a foster care program and has made us completely, fully and assuredly His! We do not have to worry about whose we are because our God has certified us as His. The love He has lavished on us is quite phenomenal. It is a love that seeks the best interests of those to which it is given. God gives us this love for many reasons, but don't you think His greatest reason is to show us how to love others? Yes me too...but why then do we not show love to others better? Maybe it is because we need to learn more about how to do so from Jesus. Ask Him. He is ready to show you how to lavishly love others as well!

Prayer: Oh the incredible love of God! Thank You Father for demonstrating to us just how much You love us. Help us to love the way your Son has shown us. Help us to be bold and courageous in our love, but help us to do so lavishly!

Application/Questions:

- Make a list of the ways the Father has lavishly loved us.
- Circle in that list the ways you can lavishly love others.

March 29

Bible Reading: John 3:16

Devotional thought: Have you ever set up a domino run? With one push of your finger you not only knock over the first domino, but (hopefully!) all of the dominoes you arranged in the group. The way that God's love is described in John 3:16 acts like the domino effect, too!

The direct result of God loving his creation and people is that he sent his Son. And it is only through the gift of Jesus that we have the opportunity to "not perish but have eternal life." We can know that God loves because he gave, and we can know eternal life is available to us because he gave everything, his only Son. Does your love for others and for God lead directly to action? Do you give wholeheartedly and give even your "only" or most important possessions because of your love? Can your love be proven because of the domino effect it creates?

Prayer: God your love is overwhelming and amazing. Thank you for giving more than I can imagine because of your love for me. Help me to love you unconditionally and to share your love to others through giving of myself. In your name, amen.

Application/Questions:

- Spend some time evaluating your love for others. Do you love like God does or do you reserve your "best" for yourself?
- Who do you need to share God's unlimited love with today?

Week 5

Waiting, Anxiety and Trust

God's timing is not the same as ours. When we don't get the answers we want when we expect them, it is only human to experience anxiety during the time we wait. Yet, the more we wait and are rewarded for it, the more our trust in God grows.

March 30

Bible Reading: 1 Peter 5:7

Devotional thought: Anxiety is a real thing! Left unaddressed it can cause health issues, emotional and mental trauma. The pandemic that we have dealt with has brought anxiety to many. There are some that just cannot handle the anguish it brings and the end result is harming themselves.

As believers in Christ, we are instructed to cast our anxiety (our cares, burdens, messes) on Him. That means fully setting them at His nail-scarred feet. That means not giving to Him and then taking them back. That means trusting that God is capable and able to handle anything you can give Him. Give your anxiety to Him. He loves you!

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for being my burden bearer. Lord, thank you that you are more than able to handle anything. You are Mighty God. You control the sun, moon and stars. You orchestrate how the Earth makes its rotation around the sun. Oh Lord, You are the maker and sustainer of all things. Because of this, I know that you can do all things. I can trust You - I can trust Your Son to take my anxiety. Help me Lord, to lay it all at Your feet and to never pick it up again. It is in Jesus' name that I pray. Amen

Application/Questions:

- What do you need to lay at the feet of Jesus?
- Do you trust Jesus to handle your anxiety?
- Make a list of things that you need to give to Him. Then pray and ask Jesus to take it.

March 31

Bible Reading: Proverbs 3:5-6

Devotional thought: An English teacher in High School knew that she was limited to how she could share her faith in a public school. She had lived her life with these words from Proverbs 3:5-6 as her mantra and she wanted to share that with her students. She was impressed to trust the Lord with an idea that popped into her mind. All her students asked her to sign her picture in their school yearbook. In doing so, she wrote a personal message to all her students and listed the reference for these incredible verses. By trusting the Lord and applying her life verses, many students also made that their mantra for life. In fact, many became ministers, doctors, and teachers, all whom in turn went on to share with others their faith and how they had spent their lives trusting the Lord and leaning not on their own understanding. The investment was made and the dividend continues to pay out. What is the Lord prompting you to do that requires you to trust Him with all your heart?

Prayer: Lord, forgive us when we trust You with only part of our hearts and we weave into our lives only our own understanding. Father, we know that Your way is always best. Help us to trust You and Your word! Help us acknowledge You and make our paths straight.

Application/Questions:

- What bold idea is the Lord asking you to trust Him with all your heart?
- How can you make that investment daily?

April 1

Bible Reading: Romans 15:13

Devotional thought: When Paul wrote the letter to the Roman church, he knew that just a few years earlier (around 49 AD) the church had endured the first of many trials and persecutions when a number of Jews and Christians were exiled from the city under the emperor Claudius. The exiles were eventually allowed back in the city, only to face greater problems under future emperors. Yet, his prayer was not that their adversity would cease or that all would be restored to “normal.” Instead, he asked God to fill the church with joy and peace as they believed and for them to overflow with hope from the Holy Spirit.

When we face trials of various kinds, would we prefer that God fixes everything and restores normalcy? Or do we first believe he is working for the good, and trust that our belief will bring the joy and peace we are missing? Does our hope look backward at the way we wish things were, or do we cling in anticipation to how the Holy Spirit is moving our church, our world and our souls forward to a better place than we could ever imagine? May the power of the Almighty God allow you to believe, and to abound in hope, no matter your circumstances today!

Prayer: Lord, all around me are examples of pain and hardship. I see things I just can't understand, especially as part of your loving plan for our world and her people. Help me to focus on trusting and believing instead of doubting your goodness. Fill me with joy, peace and hope so that I can be empowered to do the right thing today. Amen.

Application/Questions:

- When is it hardest for you to believe God is in control? In what situations in your life do you feel the most out of control?
- What would cause you to release your anxiety about those situations and simply believe? Do you think God can work it all out for you? Trust Him today!

April 2

Bible Reading: Isaiah 26:3-4

Devotional thought: Do you find it difficult to trust others? Have you experienced a time when you trusted someone and they betrayed you? We live in a day and age where it pays to be cautious. However, we can know without hesitation that there is One that we can trust. Our Bible reading today makes it clear that as we trust God, He will keep us in perfect peace. We could definitely use more peace in our lives. Why should we trust Him? Because He is trustworthy. He is faithful. He will never betray our trust. We can cry out to God. He hears us and He listens. He will keep in confidence everything to tell Him. God is the Rock eternal. He is reliable, He is reasonable and He is righteous.

Prayer: Lord, when others betray me, I know that I can trust You. You have proven over and over again that You can be trusted with my sorrows, my pain and my experiences. Thank you Lord, that You will befriend and not betray. Thank you that you will be a confidante not a gossiper. You are my Rock. You are my Strong Tower. I will trust you Lord! In Jesus name. Amen!

Application/Questions:

- How has God proven to be trustworthy in your life?
- How does trusting God bring you peace?

April 3 - Sunday

Spend time reflecting on the devotional thoughts of the past week

April 4

Bible Reading: 1 Peter 2:6

Devotional thought: From the earliest of times, the cornerstone was the starting place from which the foundation was laid for a building. It was also the stone that brought two sides together. If the foundational cornerstone was off, the whole building would be off and the construction would be fallible. The capstone would be that stone that would top off the top of the wall, also securing it and making it sturdy. Throughout the Bible, these terms are used to show Jesus is the beginning and the end of the spiritual temple we use to house our faith. Peter quotes from the Prophet Isaiah in that this stone is both chosen and precious. It was picked by God Himself to serve as our foundation and ultimately what holds us all together. His name? Jesus. Chosen and precious for you to make your temple complete and trustworthy.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for being my Cornerstone. Help me anchor my Spiritual Temple in You and build upon only what You have established.

Application/Questions

- What are you building your Spiritual Temple out of right now?
- How is Jesus both chosen and precious in God's eyes?

April 5

Bible Reading: Micah 7:7

Devotional thought: If I (Brittany) had a nickel for every time I have said to my kids, “please be patient,” or “just give me a minute!” I think I could hire a full-time nanny (and maybe even a butler, too!). But it isn’t just kids that have a hard time waiting for something they want. As adults we hate to wait. It seems like the wait time to eat at a restaurant has doubled or tripled in the last few years, and it causes me lots of frustration, making the whole experience a lot less enjoyable than I remember it being BC (before Covid).

Micah had experienced the foolishness, disobedience and downright rebellion of God’s people in his time. He had even had to prophesy against his people, knowing that God was preparing to bring the destruction of the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. He knew the despair that was coming but continued to endure the mockery of his people in order to do as God called him to do. Micah, and later the Jews who were in exile far from home, were also waiting for the eventual return back to home and restoration to favor from God. It is really hard to wait for God’s promises to be fulfilled, but our waiting is always rewarded by God’s faithfulness. He will always be faithful, regardless of whether we are patient or not, but oh what a greater blessing to remain true to God’s plan rather than to mess things up for ourselves!

Prayer: God, help me to be satisfied with you, even when I want my situation to improve right now. Allow me to watch for your movement and work in my life rather than trying to force something to happen at the wrong time. You are always trustworthy and faithful, and I want to be willing to wait when you tell me to sit tight and watch you work. Amen.

Application/Questions:

- In what situation are you most impatient for God to work in today?
- How can you wait with expectation for God to act instead of pushing forward by yourself?
- What is the benefit of waiting in that situation rather than rashly charging ahead?

Week 6

Gethsemane and Suffering

We know that suffering is part of the human experience, but that doesn't make it any less painful. Jesus serves as our example of enduring pain for the glory of God, and gives us hope that our suffering will not be in vain.

April 6

Bible Reading: Acts 16:25

Devotional Thought: Imagine being dragged into court, not given a fair trial (or any kind of trial for that matter), stripped and beaten; then thrown in jail. Not only thrown in jail, but your feet placed in chains that would prevent you from moving around. After all you had been through, would you feel like singing? Most likely, that would be a big NO. Paul and Silas most likely did not feel like singing either, but that is exactly what our reading shows us today. Singing in the midst of pain and suffering. They did not cry, "Why me?" or "This isn't fair." Neither did they blame someone else for their current situation. They praised God with singing. They demonstrated to the other prisoners that being a Christian means that you trust God in the middle of scars, bruises and torn skin. Paul and Silas are wonderful examples of dealing with suffering in a way that is honoring to God. Child of God, sing. Regardless of pain, sing! God sings over you. Now is your turn to sing to Him.

Prayer: Lord, there are absolutely times that I do not feel like praising. However, it is in those times that I need to praise You the most. Thank you Lord, for the gift of a voice that can be lifted to You in song. Trials, pain and suffering are a part of life. You Lord, are life and light and my salvation. Today Lord, I sing to you! Praise Your holy name! Amen.

Application/Questions:

- Name a time that you were suffering and in the midst of suffering you praised God.
- How does it feel to praise God through your pain?

April 7

Bible Reading: Isaiah 53:3-4

Devotional thought: Perhaps you remember the harsh years of middle school. The awkward body development that took place and the raging hormones made it a difficult time. Many middle schoolers feel unwanted and unloved. They hide their faces in shame while those that mock often hide their faces in disgust and judgmental hate. Sometimes this feeling lingers well into adulthood. There is hardly a worse feeling than to feel despised and rejected. The Prophet Isaiah foretold of One that would experience being despised and rejected. However, this was far from the previously described middle school experience. This was a man who left it all to become absolutely nothing in order that we could have everything. It doesn't make sense does it? The King of kings and Lord of lords left the Holiness of Heaven and all its glory only to suffer and experience the greatest sorrow ever known. "He was despised and we esteemed Him not." Why? So He could take up my infirmities and carry my sorrows. So He could assume what was despised about me and what caused me to be rejected. He did it so I would not have to do it. He did it so you would not have to do it.

Prayer: Father, I may never understand fully why you allowed Your Son to leave His Heavenly throne to become so despised and rejected. The gift of salvation is something for which I can ever thank you enough. So, Father, help me show you through my actions, deeds and throughout my life. Help me be what you have called me to be and may I never forget the price that was paid for my infirmities.

Application/Questions:

- Review the ways that Jesus was despised and rejected.
- Meditate on the suffering Jesus did in order that we might have abundant life.
- Spend time in worship today thanking Him for the price He paid for you.

April 8

Bible Reading: Philippians 3:10

Devotional thought: What is the difference between knowing *about someone* and really *knowing someone*? We can have impersonal knowledge about someone (say a celebrity like Dolly Parton) and know every fact about her life, and never have met them in person. You might even be acquainted with Dolly, having met her at a fancy restaurant, told her your name and a great joke. Perhaps you even talked back and forth to her for years through agents or fan clubs and are her most loyal superfan. But... do you really know Dolly? Even if you have all the knowledge and interaction with her, none of you reading this would be considered her friends or confidants. There isn't that close bond that comes with personal knowledge of someone.

To really know someone is to be open with them, communicating directly and participating together toward a common goal. Paul talks about knowing Christ, but not the particulars about when he lived on earth, or who his favorite disciple was. To know Christ is to share with him in his work; that is, by "sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in death." Jesus did not come to us on earth to make a name for himself, to make friends or even to perform miracles. He came to provide salvation for all and was obedient to this goal at the cost of his own convenience and self-interest. Can we really say we know Him if we don't deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24)?

Prayer: Jesus, help me be willing to go to the effort to truly know you in your suffering and death. My desire is to grow in my relationship with you and to drop anything that is hindering my walk with you. Give me the strength to both count the cost of being your disciple and to follow through, pressing on to make my obedience to you complete. Thank you for what you endured in order for me to be able to really *know* you! Amen.

Application/Questions:

- Who do you fully trust and know in your life? What caused you to become close with them?
- How have you seen people know *about Jesus* without really *knowing* Him?
- How could "becoming like him in his death" bring you closer to God and share the good news of the gospel with others?

April 9

Bible Reading: Psalm 119:50

Devotional thought: The suffering that Jesus went through was horrific. Medical journals have documented over the years the effect of what His body would have gone through especially the last 24 hours of His life. The stress itself would have been unimaginable. The agony in the Garden prior to His arrest produced drops of blood coming through His skin like sweat. The torture and the beatings prior to the actual crucifixion would have been more than the average person could ever have withheld. Having to carry the cross to which He would be nailed to was physically and mentally draining. The nails, the sword in His side, the loss of blood would all factor to be a terribly slow way to die. The suffering of Jesus indeed was horrific. However, the promise of God is that the suffering of Jesus would preserve our lives. God thought that we were worth the price that was paid. The debt of our sin was paid in full. May we never take that for granted but always be assured of the great promise of our Lord.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank You for Your precious promises. We realize that as Jesus suffered, You suffered as well. Thank you that through His pain we can have life. Help us to trust You more and never forget that Your promises can be completely trusted.

Application/Questions:

- Ponder the pain and agony the Lord Jesus went through for us.
- Spend some time reflecting on the truth of this promise found in Psalm 119:50.

April 10 - Palm Sunday

**Celebrate the triumphant entry of Jesus into
your life!**

Week 7 - Holy Week

As we approach the joyful celebration of Easter, it is important to not dismiss the events that led up to Christ's resurrection. Jesus was anointed at Bethany, cleansed the temple, washed the feet of his disciples, was betrayed and denied by those he trusted, was brutally tortured and killed before being locked away in a tomb. And yet, "Up from the Grave He Arose!" What joy Easter brings when we have prepared for the resurrection! He is risen, indeed!

April 11 - The Anointing

Bible Reading: Mark 14:3-9

Devotional thought: What is the most expensive item you possess? Imagine that somehow that it would be in a liquid form and you carry it with you everywhere you go. You hear about a teacher going to this dinner party and somehow, you get invited to go. However, when you get there, you are so enamored with who and all he is, you find yourself taking your liquified treasure and pouring it over him in the act of worship. As you are pouring out the treasure, the other guests question your intentions. They call your act a financial waste. The One on whom you poured this treasure calls it an act of worship. The treasure mentioned in Mark 14 was a very expensive perfume. One can imagine it was all this woman had to offer, but she offered it all in a way one would pay tribute to a king. What did she know that the others did not? Jesus made it known that she was preparing Him for His burial. That statement would cause lots of confusion among the dinner guests. It seems that the woman that poured out this treasure did so with the intent of giving Jesus all she could. Her most prized possession became an act of worship. He in turn gave her the greatest gift of all: dying so she could have eternal life. What will you pour out?

Prayer: Jesus, thank You for receiving the anointing that you received in Bethany. Thank You for receiving all that this woman had and in turn giving her and all mankind all that you had so we can have eternal life. Help us live now for you each and every day.

Application/Questions:

- What in your life do you need to pour out on Jesus?
- Would this be easy to do or very difficult? Why?

April 12 - Cleansing the Temple

Bible Reading: Matthew 21:12

Devotional thought: We don't often picture Jesus as furiously flipping tables and causing chaos. We much prefer imagining Jesus sitting on a rock in a fresh white robe, preaching or giving a small child a hug. At least that is what all the pictures in my Children's Bible shows! I'm sure he knows what we find most comfortable and that "you catch more flies with honey than vinegar," and yet the temple was his first stop as he entered Jerusalem the week of his death. He saw that the house of God had become defiled through greed and lust for power and had become a place of injustice rather than a place of worship. He didn't try to ask politely or to justify that the sellers weren't really the ones in charge and look for a manager. He immediately took matters into his own hands, because it was urgent and vital to have true worship of God in his house.

Most of the anger we experience is not righteous anger. Sinful anger is motivated by selfishness and seeks to hurt or punish those that have wronged us. But Godly anger, the kind that Jesus exhibited in the temple, is always motivated by the love of God and other people. It seeks to destroy sin in order to heal and save others. When you realize that righteous anger is bubbling up inside of you, overturn the tables of injustice and let the glory of the Lord shine through your actions.

Prayer: Lord, let me be in tune with your heart so that I can celebrate when you rejoice and become angry with what brings you outrage. Help me to never lash out for selfish reasons, but to be quick to act when people are being kept from knowing you because of others' sin. Give me discernment about how and when to respond to injustice and to work for peace. In your name, amen.

Application/Questions:

- What is God calling you to become angry about? Why is it so important to God for this injustice to be corrected?
- How have you seen worship interrupted by sinful distractions? How did you act in the moment and what do you imagine Jesus would have done?

April 13 - Washing Feet

Bible Reading: John 13:1-5

Devotional thought: Jesus knew that His time had come. He knew all things - He knew that Judas struck a deal with the Pharisees to betray Him. He knew the pain and agony that was just hours away. He knew that He would die. Even with all of this, He knew who He was and from where He came. The Prince of heaven lowered Himself a bit more to wash the feet of the men with whom He had spent the past three years. He took a basin and a towel, gently washed their feet and in doing so showed that a position of leadership means service. Jesus washing the dirty feet of the disciples displayed love and mercy and grace to a bunch of ragtag fishermen, tax collectors, and impulsive men - those that should have been washing His feet - that regardless of your status, you need to serve others. In doing this, He calls us to follow His example. "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring good news."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You lowered Yourself to come from heaven to earth. You lowered Yourself to a servant's position to wash the feet of the men You loved. You were scorned, beaten and hung to die on a cross for me. Your example Lord, spurs me to be a servant for You and to others. Make me a servant Lord, full of humility and grace to those You put in my life. I love you Lord and thank you for loving me. It is in Your name that I pray. Amen.

Application/Questions:

- How is God calling you to serve others?
- Whose dirty and stinky feet do you need to wash?

April 14 - The Denial

Bible Reading: Mark 14:66-72

Devotional thought: Can you imagine what Peter felt? Confused? Conflicted? Scared? Standing in front of accusers whether they are right or wrong is never a fun place to be. Yet, there Peter stood. He was just trying to blend into the crowd. He was trying to comprehend all the events that had taken place. In the midst of accusation and confrontation, it is easy to deny the truth. Peter felt the pressure. Perhaps he wanted to disappear or close his eyes and make it all go away. Then something happened that jogged his memory. The simple sound of a rooster crowing. Isn't it strange how sounds can often bring up memories? As that rooster crowed, Peter remembered the words foretold by Jesus, "Before the rooster crows twice you will deny me three times." The Bible says that Peter then broke down and cried. Conviction set in. Guilt took over. What happens when your rooster crows? In other words, what will happen when a reminder comes into your life of how you had denied your Lord and Savior? One can be sure that these same overwhelming feelings that Peter experienced will also be experienced. Conviction does that. However, it is necessary to go through conviction in order that repentance can take place. Peter later would receive an embrace of forgiveness and love from a Resurrected Christ and go on to lead many others into those same arms. It can happen to you as well. Let it.

Prayer: Lord, please forgive me when I deny you. Help me to remember the price paid for my sins and the love that covers them all if I confess and repent. Help me be strong and courageous. Help me be bold and faithful.

Application/Questions:

- What areas of your life have you denied the Lordship of Christ?
- What do you need to do as you are reminded of these areas of denial?

April 15 - The Cross

Devotional Thought: Today is “Good Friday,” when we remember the crucifixion and death of our Beloved Savior. It doesn’t feel very “good” to consider all that Jesus endured as he intentionally moved toward his own death on the cross. Though we mention the cross a great deal in church, we don’t often take the time to really sit down and dwell with the agony Jesus bore because of his love for us. Take time now and read through John chapter 19, slowly and thoroughly, imagining what it would have been like to be present on that universe-changing day.

Bible Reading: John 19:1-42

Prayer: Lord, I know that each step you took toward the cross was on my behalf. I can’t imagine that “thank you” could ever cover the gratitude and recognition you deserve for choosing this path to save me. Help me to show my thanks with my life as I honor your love and sacrifice for me. Amen.

Application/Questions:

- What emotions do you feel as you focus on how Jesus was sentenced to death, crucified, died and buried? How do you think Jesus experienced the events of that Friday?
- What part of this story moves you in a new or different way when you read it today?
- Spend some time considering the cost God the Father deemed necessary to redeem you to himself.

April 16 - The Tomb

Bible Reading: Matthew 27:62-66

Devotional thought: Jesus mentioned many times in His teaching that He would rise from the dead. The Pharisees were afraid that His disciples would somehow steal His body to falsely proclaim that He had risen. They wanted to be sure that this would not happen so many precautions were put in place to prevent this teaching to be perceived as truth. They wanted to control the outcome and once and for all put to death what they thought was a conspiracy. Imagine that, a group of religious people that wanted to control an outcome. There are many shortcuts we take like the Pharisees to get around what the Word of God proclaims. Sometimes we do this consciously and even unconsciously. We will go to great lengths to move the truth around to make sure we get our way. A guard, a sealed tomb and a decree to make sure their plan worked. However, God had a bigger plan. In fact, His plan is always bigger.

Prayer: Father forgive us when we do not believe or trust your plan. Forgive us Father when we plot to get our way. Show us Father that indeed your ways are bigger and that you can be trusted.

Application/Questions:

- What truth of God's word are you struggling to believe?
- How can you be reassured that the words and teachings of Jesus are both reliable and will come true?

April 17 - Easter Sunday

Bible Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Devotional thought: New dresses. New suits. New shoes. Bright spring like colors are painted on eggs and chocolate bunnies find their ways into carefully created baskets with fake grass. Spring is in full bloom and the creation displays great beauty. Many of us have celebrated Easter in one of the many ways described above. There is definitely a sense of newness with the celebration of Easter. In some way or another, Easter reminds us of that which was old being transformed into something brand new. It wasn't just the old rugged cross that makes Easter so grand, it was the new empty tomb! Yes, Jesus died on that old rugged cross, but on the day we call Easter, He arose from the dead. The old life is exchanged for the new.

So, dear friend, today, this Easter Sunday, shout aloud this verse:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come!

Happy Easter!

Prayer:

Thank You Father, for the gift of our Resurrected Lord! Help us all today truly recognize that we are new creations in Christ. Indeed, help us to live like the old is gone and the new has come! We love you Lord!

Application/Questions:

- What are some old things in your life that you need to let go of and become new?
- Spend some time today in personal worship praising God for our Resurrected Christ.

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