

40 Days With Jesus And One Another



A Lenten Devotional
By The People of Crestwood
United Methodist Church

®

Beloved Friend,

We are embarking on the sacred journey of Lent, a season of reflection and preparation. We invite you to join in a daily ritual of reading and reflection. Every day except Sunday, join in reading the passage and the devotional thoughts. We encourage you to pause and ponder and journal a bit about how it resonates with your life and faith.

Lent, as we know it today, has evolved significantly since its observance by the early church. In the early centuries of Christianity, Lent was a period of preparation for those about to be baptized, a time marked by prayer, fasting, and repentance.

However, it wasn't long before the entire Christian community joined in this spiritual practice, recognizing its value as a time for personal repentance and renewal in their own faith journey. The early church fathers laid the foundation for what has become a significant period in the Christian calendar, a time for believers to introspect, fast, and pray. A time to both prepare for the journey ahead, and to reconnect with the source of life as we go along on that journey, God.

In keeping with this rich tradition, this devotional book is more than just a collection of daily Bible readings and reflections. It is an invitation to journey inward and upward, seeking a closer relationship with God and our community.

May this season be a meaningful time for you, filled with insights and understandings of God's love and sacrifice.

Love and Grace through Jesus Christ,
Your Sisters & Brothers at Crestwood United Methodist Church

February 16, 2024
Philippians 2:1-16 • Joan Bryant

We are supposed to be like Jesus in how we complete each other's joy, we're supposed to be like him in our humility, but not in exaltation.

Don't you know someone who quietly goes about God's work in caring for others with complete humility. I certainly do!

My sister-in-law exhibits this on a daily basis. Through the years I have seen her accepting her role as caregiver, faithful follower, devoted friend, and joyful servant. There is no selfish ambition or vain conceit present.

I thank God for her example of sharing in the Spirit.

Prayer: Dear God, continue to work on me to live my earthly life in humility, doing Your will when it comes to caring for others, showing empathy in all situations. Help me overcome my impatience in allowing life situations to be resolved in God's time, not mine. Amen.

My Thoughts



February 17, 2024

Luke 5:27-32 • Rev. Russ Broomell

Tax collectors in Jesus' time were often viewed with contempt, and considered “sinners” for their association with the Roman occupiers as well as for their dishonest practices.

A guy who makes his living working for the enemy? No Jewish person would want anything to do with him. Except Jesus.

Then, we see the other side of the coin. The Pharisees criticized Jesus dining with sinners because they missed the point: God's kingdom is not about looking good based on society's standards, but about mercy and love. Jesus' words, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," sting.

It seems obvious to me that Levi's response should be our model. Like Levi, we need to wholeheartedly follow Christ by setting aside our priorities, people, and property. We should follow Jesus through Lent (and beyond) holding nothing back.

Jesus' example of reaching out to “the least of these” and extending grace to those society might scorn is an invitation. We must offer the same unconditional love and forgiveness that Jesus shows, especially those who we might ignore or avoid. We should be free like Levi rather than judgmental like the Pharisees.

I must ask myself daily if I am embodying Christ's spirit of inclusivity, freedom, and mercy in my daily life the way Levi did. Some days I don't like my answer.

Prayer: Loving God, help me to follow Jesus' example of mercy and love. Help me to remember that I wasn't perfect when You called me. Teach me to see beyond societal labels and embrace all Your children with an open heart. Amen.

My Thoughts



February 20, 2024 John 3:1-21 • Klaus Mullinex

For the better part of my early life Christianity was largely absent. While my parents espoused Christian belief; they sadly never really lived their faith. God to me was a mysterious distant being that lived in the heavens and had no impact on my daily existence.

My wife Ginny, on the other hand, was raised in the church and had a strong faith. It was her influence and encouragement, early in our marriage, that finally got me involved in a Church in Lakewood, Washington. That wonderful group of believers patiently and lovingly introduced me to the Lord and it was there that I confessed my faith in our Savior and was baptized in 1977.

Unfortunately, the Army doesn't leave you in one place too long and so we left Washington State in 1979 and moved many times over the next 30 plus years. During those years I kept my faith, but moves and the demands of my profession, family and life in general took precedence over my involvement in Church and my maturation as a Christian.

Fortunately, God had a plan and he brought me to CUMC in 2012. Over the last 11 years I have been taught, encouraged and held accountable by a wonderful fellowship of believers. My faith has grown and matured to the point where it is now an everyday part of my life and I am now able to talk about God as though knowing him is a simple fact, not something distant and mysterious. I know I still have a lot of growing to do but for the first time in my life I feel confident in my faith and my salvation. When I look back at my life I know it is a miracle that I am here today. A miracle that only a loving God could have performed.

Prayer: God how do I begin to thank You for Your love and my salvation though Your Son Jesus? Words seem so inadequate to describe the miracle of my life and my faith. Time and again You put Christians in my life who not only set me on the path of salvation but helped me stay the course and strengthen my belief. I am a testimony to Your goodness and mercy. All praise and glory to You. Amen

My Thoughts

February 22, 2024

Hebrews 12:1-14 • Ryan Russell

The author of Hebrews reminds us that God is The Father. He is wholly loving, and He is at the same time wholly just. For what parent that loves their child cannot teach them justice, often through discipline? This discipline appears in two ways: through hardship and, as harsh as it may sound, through punishment.

We give our children chores, make them do their schoolwork, or put them through practice for sports. These, of course, are not punitive but they teach discipline. While the hardships we experience as adults are far from the days of taking out the trash and science fair projects, we still experience them as discipline. We are tested through difficult times, and we are always called to grow. We grow stronger and wiser. We grow up.

But Hebrews is calling us to use these times to grow closer to God and to Christ's ultimate example of hardship—His sacrifice on the cross. We should look at our hardships as an opportunity to put our faith and trust in God, so that we may grow closer to Him and grow into the versions of His children that we were called to be. At times we must discipline our children when they disobey. God as the ultimate embodiment of the Father does the same with us.

It doesn't appear that God punishes us for our sins in a direct, theatric manner. I'm not likely to get struck by lightning for telling a lie. However, his discipline comes just as sure if not as swift. When we sin, we suffer one way or another. This is not to say all our hardships are caused by our sin, but certainly some are. If we lie, steal, or cheat we break trust with our loved ones and community. We are distanced from them and must earn our way back.

The other day I told my oldest son not to attempt his daredevil stunt between couches. He said "OK." Low and behold, a few minutes later comes a cry from the other room. He was unsuccessful. He was disciplined with the pain he caused himself. We do the same thing every single day. God gives us rules. We break them. We suffer. Those rules are not just for His good, but for ours. Often when we are disciplined, it's because we say to God, "I want to do it my way." God grants us our wish.

Prayer: God the Father, I know You are with me in times of hardship. Help me to grow into the person You made me to be. Help me to grow into Your will. I want to do it Your way. Thank You for giving us the ultimate example of what it means to be Your child in Jesus Christ. Amen.

My Thoughts

MY WAY



February 24, 2024 James 4:1-10 • John Slider

We wonder what causes fights and quarrels among our friends and family. They come from the desires that battle within us. The Devil leads us to covet what we cannot get.

We falsely measure our worth to the world by the number of “Friends” and “Likes” on social media. James tells us that “..anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

Do you know someone who constantly boasts about his expensive cars, the exotic vacations taken by his family, the accomplishments of his perfect children etc. James tells us that “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” Do not let the Devil lead you into the arrogance of wealth and social status.

Prayer: God, please help me submit to Your will. Help me to understand what You desire for me to have and what You want me to do with these gifts. Cleanse me of worldly jealousy. Make me a humble servant to all those friends and family around me. Help me to love my neighbor as I love myself. Amen.

My Thoughts



A series of horizontal lines for writing, overlaid on a background image of a smartphone screen. The phone screen shows various social media icons: a message bubble with '10', a heart icon with '17', and a share icon with '25'. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page.

February 26, 2024 Ezekiel 36:22-32 • Joanne Taylor

As I read this passage, my first thoughts were of today's Israel and that God has kept His promise to them in reinstating them into their "promised land" which they have had to continue to defend many times over the years.

However, as I reread it several times, I began to think that we are all sometimes like these ancient Israelites and like to hold on to our "hardened hearts" in order to do things our own way. But God is holy and faithful and keeps His promises, not because we deserve it, but because He is holy and faithful! Over and over in this passage He says "I will" and then carefully states His plan for His people.... good things and things that will ultimately benefit them. Like the Israelites, when we are willing to turn our hearts to Him, He will do for us what He did for them. He will give us a new heart and a new Spirit, not because we deserve it, but because He is holy and faithful and loves us.

So, during this season of Lent, let's remember to keep His name holy and honor Him in our words, actions, and relationships. Let's remember what He sacrificed for us on the cross. God sent Jesus as our Savior that his name might continue to be made holy through us and how we live our lives. Today and everyday we should honor Him in all we do and say.

Prayer: Holy and Faithful God, point out to me places where my heart is hard, and give me the faith to open those parts to You that You might soften them so that I might bring honor and glory to You in everything that I do today. Amen.

My Thoughts

HOLY

February 27, 2024

Matthew 5 :13-20 • Brian Moore

Sometimes the verses we hear over and over can seem to lose their spark. As the preacher reads them aloud you can drift off into where you were other times you heard the words or get hung up on the literal explanations.

Of course if salt loses its saltiness it's no longer good for anything. Might as well be saw dust on your scrambled eggs. And of course no one would put a lamp under a basket. You'll start a fire! Now that would give you much more light than the lamp, but it would also destroy the house.

But if we back up and try to hear the words with fresh ears, these verses are a call to action. Jesus wants people to see us. He wants us to add spice to others' lives by being so full of God that He overflows out of us we can be vessels of His love. Through us He can reveal things that are hidden by darkness and provide spice to an otherwise bland existence.

It can be so easy to brush past these verses when there are 31 flavors on every corner and street lights in every direction. But when Jesus spoke these words, both spice and light were rare commodities. Eating meat that wasn't completely plain was an extravagance. And one small oil lamp could be seen from miles away at night. This is how we are supposed to be in the world. Different. Special. Extravagant even. We should be so different from the world that we stand out and can't be missed.

Prayer: Father God, help us today to find the spark again in Your Word. Guide us to the places You want to be seen and heard that we may be Your vessels of spice and light. Amen

My Thoughts



February 28, 2024

Isaiah 58:1-12 • Rev, John Street (Asst. D.S. Heartland District)

I was born and raised in a small town in Western Kentucky. I was baptized in the Methodist church, confirmed in the newly created United Methodist Church, and enjoyed the teaching and nurture of many good people and several pastors. It seems odd to me now that I don't remember hearing much, if any at all, teaching about John Wesley.

By the time I started school racial segregation was considered a thing of the past. What were once two separate schools that still stood in different sections of the town, were now combined into one. We didn't seem to notice at that age, at least that's the way I remember it. I had never not known that there were people that did not have the same skin color as I did. It didn't seem to matter. We played with each other, went to school together, ate in the lunchroom together, went to the same movies in the small movie house downtown. To me it seemed that everyone had a role or a job, or a purpose if you will, and they just co-existed.

We lived in a house my dad built on my granddaddy's farm. There were cornfields behind our home in the "bottoms". One day I was helping my grandfather with some chores outside. I noticed that there were some people roaming in the cornfield. I was too far away to see what color they were even if I wanted to. But I could tell that they were bending over and picking up things and putting them into baskets or bags. I asked my grandfather what those people were doing in our cornfields. He said, "Leave them alone, they're gleaning the fields". He went on to tell me what that was all about. That day was my first lesson in Social Justice.

Fast forward several years. It was my first semester in seminary. I had taken a religious interest inventory as part of the requirements for the class, or toward certification as a candidate for ministry, I don't remember which. I got a message from my faculty advisor, Dr. Robert Mulholland, to come to his office to discuss my results. What I remember most from that discussion is him letting me that I had scored low on interest in Social Justice issues. At that time, I don't remember knowing much at all about Social Justice. He then told me about John Wesley's teaching that without Social Holiness there can be no Personal Holiness.

At my age now I believe that our country is much like Israel was in Isaiah's day. We seek what we want as just decisions and are eager for God to come near. Yet our practice of the spiritual life of works of justice and mercy and kindness reveal our inability to put others first and love our neighbor as we do ourselves. Oh, if we could do away with the yoke of oppression, with pointing fingers and malicious talk, and spend ourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, how blessed we would be. We could truly and rightly claim God's promise always to guide us, satisfy us and strengthen us. We could be people that don't see color and who work together and play together, eat together, and worship together and find a common hope in the joy of the Lord, together.

Prayer: Lord, during this season of Lent, help me to grow in my desire to recognize opportunities to help someone along their way, and to notice and accept the help that is offered to me. May our desire be to please You more and more. Let us be those that will rebuild the ancient ruins and raise up the age-old foundations, to Your glory. Amen.

February 29, 2024
Romans 12 • Linda Hooser

Do you ever give thanks and pray for your adversaries?

During this season of Lent, Paul instructs us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1) This verse we can all probably recite from memory. Yet, how many of us can recite Romans 12:14-17? I didn't think so, me included.

In following these verses, we would and will prepare our hearts and minds to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Bless those who persecute you, bless, and do not curse (Romans 12:14).

Without our adversaries and persecution our hearts and minds would not be tested for our true faith in Christ and His message of love, grace and forgiveness.

So, this season's challenge is to check your heart and open it to bless your adversaries as you willfully bless your friends. May our LORD Bless you today.

Prayer: God of Infinite Love, help me to pray for the folks I don't like, those I don't agree with, and even for those who feel like enemies or who might wish ill for me. And help those challenging relationships show me Your power of Your love as You show me how to love them like You do. Amen.

My Thoughts



March 1, 2024

Luke 9:18-27 • Laurel Crimm

There are many “hard sayings of Jesus” recorded in the Gospels. Sayings like “You who are without sin cast the first stone” (John 8:7) bring me up short. I like the part of John 8:11 where Jesus says “Neither do I condemn you” but the next bit that says “Go now and leave your life of sin”, well, that’s hard.

Luke 9:18-27 is hard for me in another way. For me, It’s not just about actions I do, or don’t do. Instead I find it to be about what might be called a ‘life view’. In some circles it might be viewed as a “Rule of Life”. For me it deals with the very core of who I am and what I believe.

Up until this point in Luke, the Gospel writer has given us lots of stories about Jesus. The birth narrative, calling of the disciples, and many miracles are recorded. We learn of Jesus’ spiritual formation through being presented to God, spending time in the temple, his baptism and his time in the desert. There are important teachings of Jesus as well. But here, in verse 18, I note a shift in this story. Jesus turns to his disciples and gets right down to it. He asks “But who do you say that I am?” [Now, that’s THE question isn’t it?] Peter replies in verse 20 “The Christ of God”. This is a declaration of faith. Jesus is not just a gifted rabbi or a prophet. He is the Anointed One. The Messiah. The King.

For us here in the USA, having a king or ruler can be a hard concept. A core notion of us as Americans is that we are an independent people. We don't much like the notion of someone telling us what to do- indeed being in charge of everything, even our very lives. But in verses 23-27, that is exactly what Jesus is saying to me. If I, like Peter, am going to declare that Jesus is the Messiah, well then, my very being, must be his. Jesus isn’t asking me to give up something or do something. He is telling me to deny myself. My ambitions, my self-interest. Self is no longer the rule of my life. He is. I must follow Jesus.

Whew. This is a hard thing, but not impossible. Knowing that our entire Bible is all about God in relationship with His people, I know I am not alone in this. On page 49 of his book, “The Divine Conspiracy”, Dallas Willard says this. “To trust the real person Jesus is to have confidence in him and every dimension of our real life, to believe that he is right about and adequate to everything.” Willard goes on. “In the Gospels...’the gospel’ is the good news of the presence and availability of life in the kingdom, now and forever, through reliance on Jesus the Anointed”. There is also a community of faith to help. Church, Bible studies, small groups, pastors, teachers and other friends can help me form my life as one that follows Jesus.

For me, hearing Jesus ask “Who do you say that I am?” is a daily question. It can be hard to answer, yet it can be joyful as well.

Prayer: Loving God, may Your Holy Spirit give us the insight, strength and wisdom to daily declare Jesus as our Messiah, our King. May this be so in our words, actions and in the very essence of who we are as his disciples. We ask this in the name of Jesus who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

March 2, 2024 Luke 9:18-27 • Chris Koch

Some years ago, I went through a process to discover my personal purpose statement. After investing hours and hours of time reflecting and praying, I came up with the following: “I was created to help people realize and actualize their full value.”

It took me a while to finally land on those exact words because, at first, I thought my purpose was to “add value” to people. God got ahold of me however to remind me the truth about these people made in his image that I am trying to add value to. See, he has already given them such incredible value that there is nothing I could possibly add to it.

Psalm 139 praises God using such beautiful and vivid poetry to describe how God created us, knows everything about us, yet still values us as “fearfully and wonderfully made.” This is more than just empty words though. Even while knowing our innermost parts, God still loves us and values us. There aren’t many people who love you so much they would endure torture and death for you, but Romans 5:8 says that his love did that for us, even though he knows all our junk.

During Lent, we practice repentance, not out of guilt, but out of the desire to live as God so spectacularly made us. We repent, not because of his wrath, but because he gives us second chances, and third chances, and seventy times seven chances. This is only possible through his death and resurrection, the most selfless and perfect sacrifice. Let us take comfort during this Lenten season in recognizing how valuable we are to God, how much we are loved by God. Let us emulate his character by loving him and others in the same way.

Prayer: Abba, I can’t fathom how deeply You know me, and yet how infinitely You love me. Help me recognize how wonderfully You made me, and let Your love flow through me to others today. Amen.

My Thoughts



March 4, 2024 Jeremiah 31:31-34 • Penny Tucker

Our little three-year-old Amy was a child with big, dark soulful eyes that looked straight into your heart. But she was also fearless and adventuresome, requiring a consistent and strong hand. We had a covenant relationship. She could play outside but she could not leave the yard without asking me.

She was outside on the driveway with her Inch Worm. Remember, it was a different time in 1976. I looked outside and didn't see her so I stepped out and called her name. Our neighbor, John, called out "It's okay Penny. She's here on our swing set."

No, John, it's not okay. She has violated the covenant relationship. Amy heard my voice and came scampering. When she got to our yard she said, "See mommy, I'm in our yard." I squatted down in front of her, eyeball to eyeball. "Amy, you broke the rule. You have to be punished."

Now soulful, dark eyes are looking into mine. Man, it's hard to be a tough parent. At this point I caught a glimpse of her feet. Amy had wanted to put on her own shoes and socks that morning, little navy blue Mary Janes, but she had put the shoes on the wrong feet. You know the look. I fell over laughing. No, I literally fell over on my fanny, laughing so hard! Amy fell into my lap, little arms around my neck, also laughing. She didn't get punished. I had lost my edge. But she never violated the rule again. Apparently mercy trumped punishment.

Now, reread verses 31 and 32. Charles and I had a covenant relationship with God. Our daughters would be raised in a Christian home. We would "train up a child in the way he should go...." (Proverbs 22:6) We would attempt to be godly parents. Not easy. Not always fun.

Our daughters are now 50 and 52 years of age. They are beautiful Christian souls. They have found those churches that are right for them. They are working at knowing their Bible. Both are generous with the gifts they have. Amy, as a physician, prays with her patients and does things for them that are beyond the norm. Whitney is so tuned in to those who feel like "outsiders" and she has a heart for senior citizens. No longer do we teach them. In fact, they now teach us as we have adult to adult conversations. God's law is in their minds and written on their hearts.

Now reread verses 33 and 34. Am I over simplifying these verses? When I can relate things to my children, verses become real to me. I dearly love my daughters. They will always be "my babes" but what I feel is nothing compared to what God feels for them. My love is flawed. His love is perfect. He gave it all.

Prayer: Abba, Father, I need to look straight into Your eyes and face a hard truth. Your death was hideous, horrible beyond understanding. We can't glorify it. But Your love for us is perfect, unflawed. I will always be Your child. Perfect love, horrible death, beautiful resurrection, constant hope for tomorrow with You. We don't have to have all of the answers, just the faith of a little child who believes in the Easter Bunny. Amen!

March 5, 2024
Mark 8:34-38 • Andrew Wiegand

When I start to drift to old habits of self determination and what makes me feel comfortable, I remember when I asked Jesus to guide me for his glory not mine.

Instead of talking about what is comfortable with family and friends and even co-workers, I make myself interject Jesus in some way. The feeling of fear and rejection is always lingering like a scent in the air.

Denying yourself and taking up the cross to me is fighting the inner thoughts and selfishness asking Jesus to guide the way. Pushing through the temptations of the modern world so you can live a new life eternally with our lord and savior Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord please help me fight the self righteousness and be the best disciple I can be for Your glory. Help me to teach and spread Your gospel with others that might not know You or have been away for some time. Help me plant bamboo and pray that it will start to sprout in others in time. Help me, Lord, to keep evil away and shine a bright light on the darkness of this world for others to come to You. Amen.

My Thoughts



March 6, 2024

Colossians 3:1-17 • Courtney Garrett

In the midst of our busy lives, it's all too easy to lose sight of what truly matters. The daily grind, worldly distractions, and the pursuit of material possessions often cloud our vision, leading us away from the path of righteousness. However, in the book of Colossians, we find a profound reminder of where our focus should be and how we can live a life that is truly pleasing to God. Colossians 3:1-17 offers a timeless message of guidance and inspiration that should resonate with all Christians.

The passage begins with a call to set our minds on things above. This foundational idea challenges us to prioritize our heavenly citizenship over our earthly concerns. It encourages us to fix our gaze on Christ, who sits at the right hand of God. By doing so, we are reminded that our true home is not in this world but in the eternal kingdom of God.

Colossians 3:1-17 also challenges us to leave behind our old nature, which includes sinful desires and actions. This process of "putting off" the old self is essential for spiritual growth. It involves a deliberate choice to turn away from sin and its destructive influences. We are called to strip off the old self and its ways, allowing the Holy Spirit to renew us from the inside out.

As we put off the old self, we are encouraged to put on the new self, which is characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Above all, we are to put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. This transformation is a work of God's grace in our lives, empowering us to live as His chosen people.

So, how can we practically live out the teachings of Colossians 3:1-17 in our lives?

- **Seek Heavenly Perspective:** Make a conscious effort to set your mind on things above. Keep your heavenly citizenship at the forefront of your thoughts.
- **Renounce Sin:** Identify areas of your life where you need to "put to death" the old self. Seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in overcoming sinful habits and attitudes.
- **Cultivate Christlike Virtues:** Strive to exhibit qualities such as compassion, kindness, and love, in your interactions with others. Let your life be a reflection of Christ's character.
- **Embrace Gratitude:** Develop a habit of thanksgiving. Count your blessings and acknowledge God's goodness in your life.
- **Let the Word of Christ Abide:** Regularly engage with Scripture, allowing it to shape your thoughts, decisions, and actions.

Colossians 3:1-17 serves as a roadmap for Christian living. It calls us to a higher standard, reminding us that our identity is found in Christ, and our true purpose is to bring glory to God through our transformed lives. As we allow His Word to dwell in us, we can live out this powerful message and experience the abundant life He promises.

March 8, 2024

John's 15:1-8 • Alicia Heyne

I started gardening two summers ago. I feel like I am always learning and after each season I always wished I had just a little more time. I love that this scripture talks about and uses gardening.

I companion planted this year with my tomatoes for the first time. I planted basil next to some of my tomatoes. It smells amazing. When it starts to seed/ flower you are supposed to trim it off. From what I have heard, cutting it off saves energy for the plant. I thought about that with this scripture and although I don't think that's exactly pruning, it is similar. The goal is to keep the plant as healthy as possible and to have it produce. So when I cut the flowers off it was protecting the plant and causing the basil to be better. I am sure if the basil had words it would get upset at first then realize, "oh, ok, thanks."

If I was to accidentally step on my pumpkin vine and break it I would notice that the pumpkins would not thrive and start rotting. I damaged the vine and it made it to where it wasn't abiding in the vine and it did not make it. It was on the vine but not getting its life source from it, because of the damage I caused when stepping on it (on accident). I would know then I had to just pick that pumpkin.

There are many scriptures in which God is asking us to seek him daily. In our society it's a little harder to do that. Maybe it's also when you get older, I am not sure. There are so many distractions and pulls and things to do that it's easy to forget to go to God daily. He gives us what we need. He prunes us and, together with us, produces fruit.

Also pruning, it sounds so easy, but pruning, I think, is a process. God wants to cut off the things in our life that are not producing fruit. Sometimes that can be uncomfortable or painful. But when we rely on God daily we will get pruned and with that create fruit. We don't want to be the pumpkin that's kinda connected to the vine just there is a little break in it and we just start rotting.

Remain in Him.

Prayer: Lord, You're the ultimate Gardener, knowing just how to prune my life, and reminding me to stay connected to Your vine. Help me listen to and follow You and produce a ton of fruit for Your Kingdom. Amen.

My Thoughts

March 9, 2024 Galatians 5:16-26 • Laurel Crimm

But. So. Then. Little words that convey a lot of meaning. In fact if they are ignored, meaning can be misconstrued. These words indicate the writer's need to relate two ideas in a contrasting, or cause/effect way. In order to fully understand what is coming next, the reader needs to understand what the writer said beforehand. (Yes...in my working life I taught English to folks whose first language was something other than English.)

Why is this important? Read verse 16. Depending on your translation, one of those little words will be there, right at the beginning. These ten verses are often studied, taught and preached on as a unit because they do a wonderful job at drawing a stark contrast between a life that is lived to please only one's self and life that is lived in the Spirit. It can look like a list of do's and do not's for an individual Christian. And in some ways it is. But there's more to it. These verses were written to expand on a previous idea.

"Now for the rest of the story". Take a few moments to read verses 1-15.

Paul is writing this to a church that is dealing with division. He is writing to a community who is trying to figure out what it means to be free in Christ. They are trying to figure out who is the 'real' Christ follower and who isn't. What rules have to be followed? Do ANY rules have to be followed? The church is dealing with the symptoms of a heart issue. And not the kind for which we would go see a cardiologist.

Now, read 16-26. There they are....So. But. Then. v. 16 "Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves". (NLT) v. 25 "Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives" (NLT) Paul outlines some symptoms (various sinful actions and attitudes) of not living a Spirit filled life. When we live a Spirit-filled life, the symptoms are replaced by fruit. Fruit not of our own making, but from the Spirit. The body (the Church) is healthy and multiplying, instead of fighting and dividing.

As Christians we are called to live in community. Because of that, my personal discipleship is important not just because it leads to a deeper relationship with Christ, but also because it impacts the Body of Christ and the Church's witness to the world.

So during this season of Lent, as I look at the symptoms of not living by the Spirit, confess and repent of those sins, I seek to replace those actions with actions and attitudes that lead to a deeper relationship with God. In that, I learn to hear God's voice and become attuned to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It's critical for my walk with God, and just as importantly, my life in the Church.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, Bring to my sinfulness the cleansing waters of Your forgiveness, that having washed, I might know refreshment and release. May my mind and heart be full of Your presence and the fruit of Your work be evident in my life. All glory is Yours now and always. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. (Prayer based on 'Christian Prayers of Confession' www.faithandworship.com)

My Thoughts

March 11, 2024

Proverbs 28:13-14 • Dale Line

People who conceal their sins will not prosper. As the Lord knows everything we do and has given us the ability to make decisions we have the ability to do good in his eyes or to do poorly. If we choose to do poorly we will not receive his blessing. Even if the result of the sin might give earthly gains or pleasure we are on the earth for a very short time and the small gains received on earth are not worth not making it into his kingdom.

But if they confess and turn from them they will receive mercy. Jesus died so that we may have our sins forgiven but in order to receive grace we must understand we are sinners and must turn away from our sin. Being that we are human and will falter and slip in our journey to turn away from our sinning ways so we must continue to ask for forgiveness in order to receive god's mercy.

Blessed are those who fear to do wrong. In the Old Testament and in the teachings of Moses, we understand that we must fear the Lord's wrath. We have learned that even though the Lord never leaves us if we turn away from him and do wrong, he will not bless us for our actions and our return to grace can sometimes take time. For as we have knowledge that our actions are wrong and against his teachings we are looked upon differently than a one who has just found him.

But the stubborn are headed for serious trouble. When Jesus confronted the Pharisees and others who were teaching the only way to salvation was to abide by the laws, and they did not listen to his teachings, Jesus warned them that they did not understand the intentions of the law. This is something that we need to keep in mind as life changes and understanding evolve. Those who are not looking at life and their actions based on the teachings of Jesus, and are not willing to look past the literal words of the Bible as they are written can find themselves in the same position as the Pharisees and receive a scolding from the Lord!

Prayer: Blessed Lord, help me as I struggle with sin and allow me to understand and confess my sin to You so that I may heal and turn away from the sin. Help me do right in Your eyes so that I can help others, and for those who love You and believe in You but have trouble understanding the meaning of Your son's teachings, help them to look past the law so that Your grace can be shared with everyone. Amen.

My Thoughts

mercy

March 12, 2024 Galatians 2:19-3:5 • Elliot Hall

Galatians 2:19-3:5, written by Paul, focuses on the idea that the Law of Moses is important but that the only way to receive the Holy Spirit is to believe in the message. “Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ.” (Galatians 2:2)

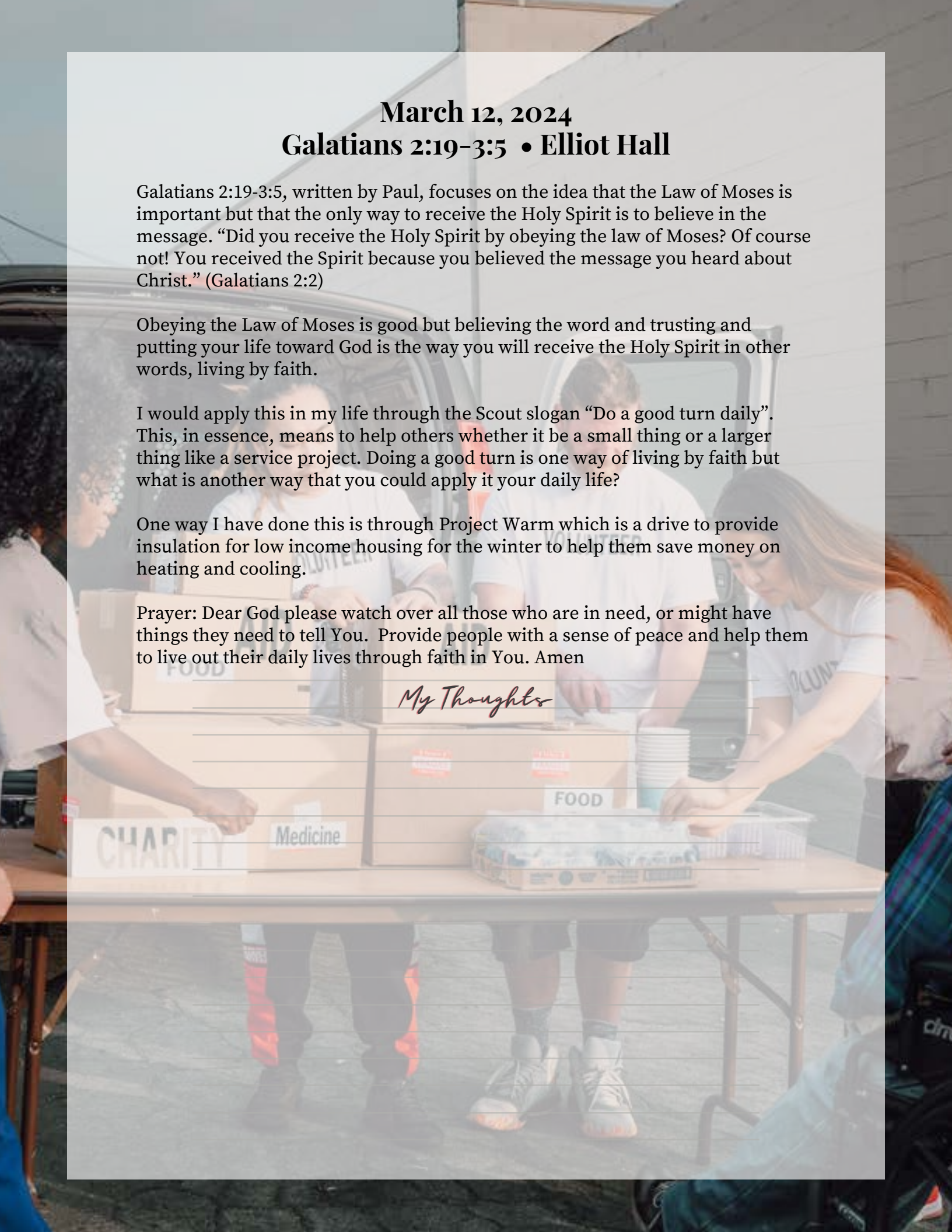
Obeying the Law of Moses is good but believing the word and trusting and putting your life toward God is the way you will receive the Holy Spirit in other words, living by faith.

I would apply this in my life through the Scout slogan “Do a good turn daily”. This, in essence, means to help others whether it be a small thing or a larger thing like a service project. Doing a good turn is one way of living by faith but what is another way that you could apply it your daily life?

One way I have done this is through Project Warm which is a drive to provide insulation for low income housing for the winter to help them save money on heating and cooling.

Prayer: Dear God please watch over all those who are in need, or might have things they need to tell You. Provide people with a sense of peace and help them to live out their daily lives through faith in You. Amen

My Thoughts



March 13, 2024

Colossians 2:2-10 • Lynn Broomell

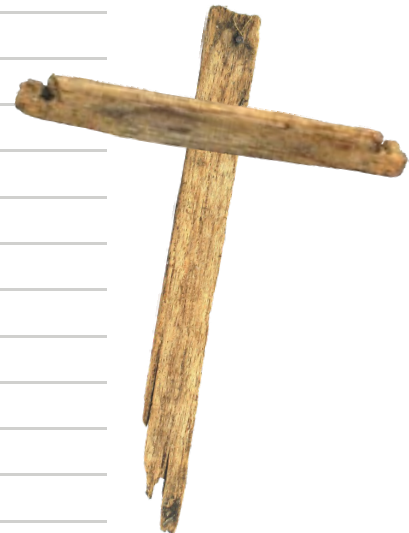
My faith in God is as strong as it is today, because of what God showed me at a time in my life that I wanted answers - needed them to keep living myself.

When my son died, taking his own life, I needed to know that Jesus had him. I was sitting on the side of my bed looking out the window at the clouds, when I saw a cupped hand come towards me. As it opened, I saw my son standing with Jesus and my past family members standing behind them. My son said that he was home with family and he was happy.

With tears streaming down my face as I realized that I was not dreaming but awake, God told me that he had plans for us and we would be moving to continue His work.

Prayer: Gracious and Loving God, In the quiet moments we find comfort in Your enduring presence. We love the fullness of Your grace and we cling to the hope and assurance found in Jesus Christ. Guide us as we continue on our journey, following the path You have set before us. Help us to trust in Your plans, even when the road ahead is unclear. Amen.

My Thoughts



March 16, 2024

1 Peter 4:1-11 • Steve Rudy

In today's scripture Peter talks about the need to remain faithful to God despite suffering for His name, and to turn away from sin. He also talks about how to respond to false accusation on account of our faith. Consider with me . . .

In order to live effectively as a Christian in a context where the world around is adversarial to the Christian faith, it is important – Peter says in this passage – to have two particular points on which to focus.

The first focal point is on the past. And in particular, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his suffering. Think for a moment about what Jesus did on the cross. Realize that this is the Master that you are following. And “arm [yourself] also with the same attitude” (v.1). We follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord who was crucified and died and rose again from the dead. We are to have the same attitude and not expect that the world around is always going to approve of our discipleship of Christ. We have a cross-shaped faith, and it should not be surprising if at times in our lives we have a cross-shaped experience. We will from time to time experience suffering. When we suffer for the sake of Christ, it's not because we have sinned and are being punished, but rather because we have made a commitment to follow Christ, no matter what. In the same sort of way, then, the gospel was even preached in the Old Testament (this is the quandary of verse 6) because at the heart of the salvation message, in the Old and New Testament, is the Gospel. The Gospel that saves us from the judgment to come. Many have explored verse 6 and attempted to understand and explain its meaning but for us today, we will lay that quandary aside and rest assured in the fact that we now know it is because of what Christ has done, that salvation comes through the cross and faith in the cross, and it means taking up our cross as well and following Jesus. A more complete discussion of this particular verse its meaning and implications would be another article for another day.

The second focal point is on the future. As Peter puts it, “the end of all things is near” (v.7). Because God's salvation plan culminates in Jesus' work on the cross, we now live with the imminent return of Christ. All that is necessary for His return has been done, and all that is left for us to do is to proclaim this Gospel to the ends of the earth. When we, through faith in Jesus share God's Word and serve this way, God is the One who gets the glory, and is praised through our service. God Himself, has made all things, and it is also He who has brought about a transformation in our lives, resulting in life everlasting. And so that said, ‘the end is near.’ Because of that we are therefore to live the balance of our lives alert and sober minded. We are to pray, to love, and use our gifts to serve others, so that in all things God may be praised through His Son Jesus Christ.

For today, as you experience the Lenten season, focus on the past: Christ suffered and died, and so do not be a surprised disciple if you too pick up your cross and experience suffering from time-to-time. That said, also focus on the future: the future return of Christ. Allow the anticipation of His imminent return to fill you with a sense of commitment, an urgency to share the Gospel, a great love for one another, and a motivation to use the gifts that God has given you for the glory of Christ!

Soli deo Gloria!!

March 18, 2024

Daniel 9:1-19 • Canaan Berg

Why is it so hard to repent? What makes us hesitate to respond to the Holy Spirit? Is it our fear? Is it our pride?

As I reflect on this passage, I am reminded of the importance of coming to the Lord with my prayers and petitions. I oftentimes sit with my thoughts stewing or I get too busy to stop and pray to the Lord.

Daniel is desperate for the Lord to revive and restore His people. They were conquered by the Babylonians and living in exile. Daniel prays humbly to the Lord to “we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God”.

How many times have you been here, not obeying God? Only praying when it's convenient to you? Not wanting to confess your sins?

As we read this passage let us be reminded to seek God always, to repent of our sins, and to come to God in prayer.

Prayer: Lord during this season of Lent, help us be reminded of Your goodness to us. Help us see when we fall short of Your glory. Help us come to You with our prayers and petitions. Help us seek You in times of darkness. Amen.

My Thoughts



March 20, 2024

Luke 15:11-32 • Vicki Slider

In Jesus' earthly ministry, his every parable, healing, sermon, his every action showed us the Father. In his words and actions, Jesus reveals to us God's character, his love, goodness, grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

In this parable, Jesus gives us the assurance of God's unconditional love. The prodigal son was truly lost. He had lost his way, lost his moral compass, and lost his place in his father's house. When he came to his senses, the lost son showed remorse, repented, and asked his father's forgiveness. The father responded with compassion, redemption, unconditional love. The severity of his son's wicked behavior made no difference. Jesus showed us that when we ask him and repent, God forgives us, no matter what we have done. In this same way, we should forgive others.

These are the questions I ask myself and encourage you to ponder as you pray this Lenten season. Do I need to ask God's forgiveness for anything? Is there someone I need to forgive as God has forgiven me? How can I show more grace and compassion every day? How can I be more like Jesus?

Prayer: Father, as we ponder these and other questions, search our hearts and reveal to us who we need to forgive, even if that person may be ourselves. Thank You for giving us Your son to atone for our sins. May we demonstrate his kindness and mercy in our everyday lives, forgiving others as we have been forgiven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

My Thoughts

I Forgive You

March 21, 2024 Psalm 130 • Donnie Jones

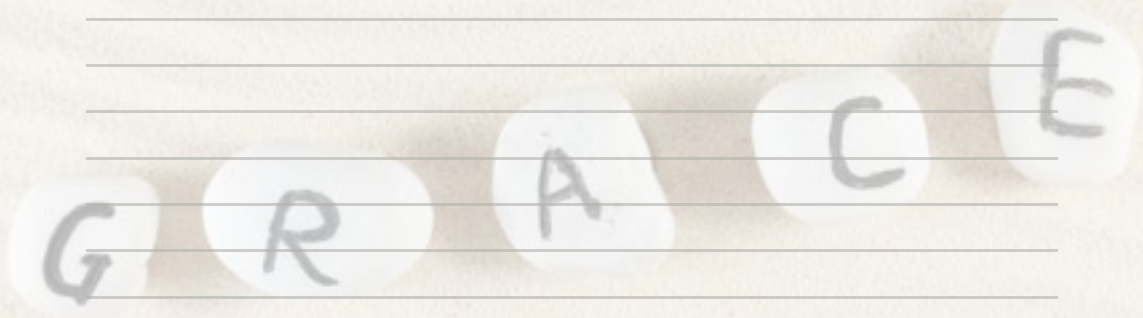
As we walk through the many seasons in our lives, we will ultimately come into one filled with much pain. The type of pain we have all had to witness. Someone we dearly love succumbing to cancer. Watching them endure the weeks, months, or even years of treatments and pain. It is during these seasons when we cry out the hardest to the Lord. And we wait. Waiting for the answer we desire. Pleading for His healing touch. Begging for His mercy on our loved one. Praying for His grace on that person and their family. God's redeeming Grace!

The grace, Jesus, pours out on us is such an amazing blessing to us all. Knowing that we are all sinners and fall short, the Lord still offers His forgiveness to each and every one of us. When we doubt His love for us, He forgives us. When we get angry with Him because things didn't turn out the way we wanted or thought was fair, he forgives us. When we choose to turn our backs to Him, he forgives us. The Lord doesn't keep record of our sins, or how many times he has forgiven us. He offers us His redeeming Grace so that we may continue to have a loving relationship with Him. That's what He desires the most.

As we travel through the hardest seasons in our lives, sometimes we have to remind ourselves to just put our hope and our trust in the Lord. His redeeming grace and unfailing love will get it us through anything we will face. His faithful love never ends. Our only hope for redemption is in God's forgiveness.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, we are so grateful that You're always there to hold us up as we travel through the heartbreaking and painful seasons in our lives. Knowing You hear our prayers when we cry out to You helps us get through these trying times. Thank You for Your redeeming Grace You pour out for all the people who love You. Amen.

My Thoughts



March 23, 2024

Matthew 21:1-11 • Nick Bradley

From my early teenage years, I have had the desire to have a family of my own. Despite the prodding and sometimes begging of my own mother (you'll never have a kid if you don't meet a girl first), my high school and college years were spent single. Not until my early thirties (32) did I meet my wife.

However, it didn't seem like a family was in our future. We struggled with infertility and the doctors said our chances of having children were low at best. Adoption would be the answer to our desire for a family, and we started down that path, we quickly learned, adoption is a slow, expensive, and sometimes painful experience.

Again, God's plan was revealed to us in God's own time. As it turns out, despite what the doctors said, after we had given up on fertility treatments my wife was pregnant! Married at 33 and a father at 35. Most people would say I'm a little old to be starting a family. Not God, his plan for us is not by mistake.

As proven by the donkey and colt waiting for the disciples ahead in the village, God has a plan for each of us. Have faith in God's plan, just because we do not understand or know his plan does not mean we are walking alone.

Prayer: God, give me the strength to remember and see that I am not alone. Not only are You beside me and all around me, but You will also guide me if only I will listen and obey. Amen

My Thoughts



March 25, 2024
Matthew 22:34-40 • Susan Ulrich

I moved to Kentucky the summer of 1963. I would soon be 10 years old and starting the 5th grade. My teacher was the kindest, gentlest person every time someone said “I love candy.” or whatever was the “thing” of the day.

We were reminded that you may like things very much, however, we are commanded to love God first and to always love one another. While we like many things that God has given us, we love God the most and our neighbors as ourselves.

My 5th grade teacher showed us every day what it meant to love one another. With her kind words, actions and fairness without judgement.

Our world is broken. Love is powerful and can heal a broken world. Let us embrace the call to love fervently and we will make a significant impact in the lives of those around us.

Prayer: Lord, let us be a reflection of the love You have shown us through the gift of Your Son Jesus Christ. We seek to love You wholeheartedly and to love our neighbors selflessly. May others see love, kindness and compassion in all we do. Amen

My Thoughts



March 26, 2024

John 13:1-17 • Dan Lavrich

Have you ever had the situation where you knew something was coming, whether it is company coming to visit or bad news you needed to deliver? You knew when that time was and you knew there were things you needed to get done. That's what the first part of this passage says to me. Get everything in order, your mind is filled with lists and priorities. This is what Jesus was doing, everything that he had left to do.

When I'm getting ready for some big event, I either write down that list or continually go over it in my head, and organize it by what is the most important to things that it would be nice to have done, but doesn't HAVE to get done. Jesus knew the most important thing He had to do was show the disciples HOW to lead. That's the second part of this passage that screams out to me. PUT OTHERS FIRST. Servant leadership is a fun catch phrase nowadays, I'm not sure how many truly think about it in their day to day lives. This doesn't have to be at work or if you are a manager or some other leader. We are all leaders to some extent. This doesn't mean be a doormat, it DOES mean that we should be helping others as well as ourselves.

Prayer: Lord, give me a servant's heart and thank You for not giving me what I deserve but what You know I need. Please help me have the knowledge to know what is most important and put that first.

My Thoughts

March 27, 2024
1 Corinthians 11:23-26 • Rebecca Northrup

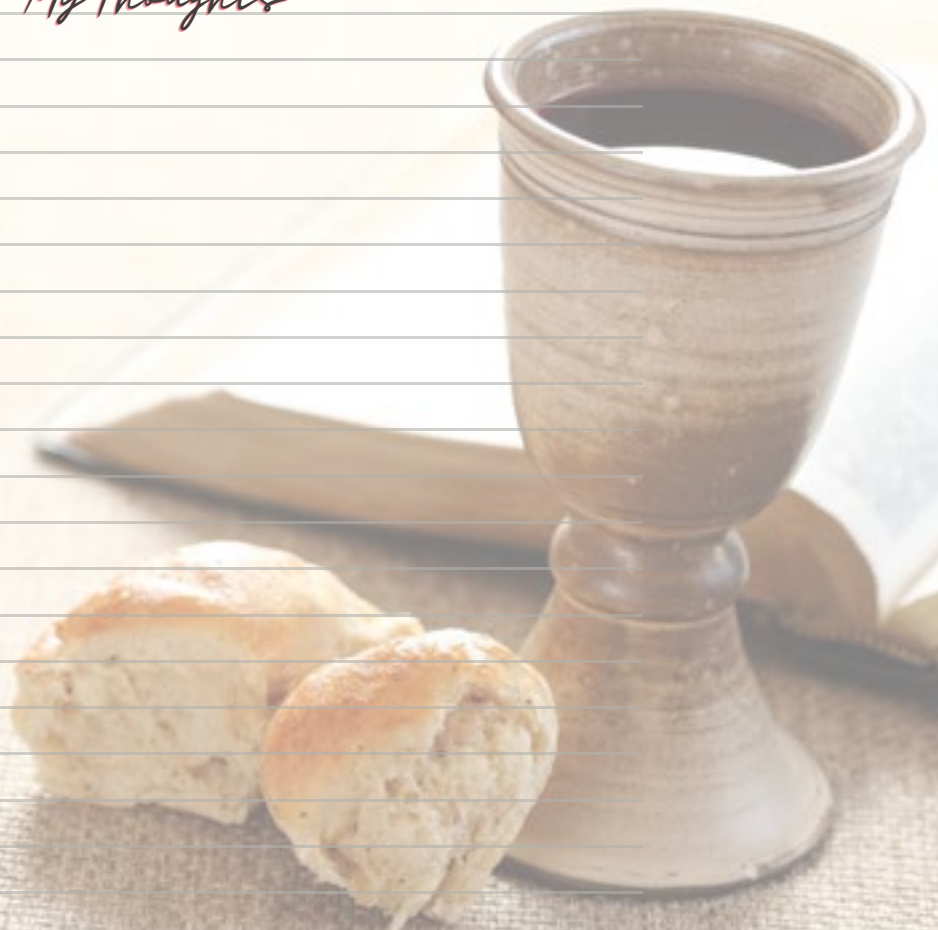
Communion is not just a ritual; it is an intimate communion with the living Christ. The bread represents His broken body, and the cup symbolizes His shed blood. This act is a poignant reminder of the depth of God's love for us. In our moments of reflection, we remember the sacrifice that brought us redemption and salvation.

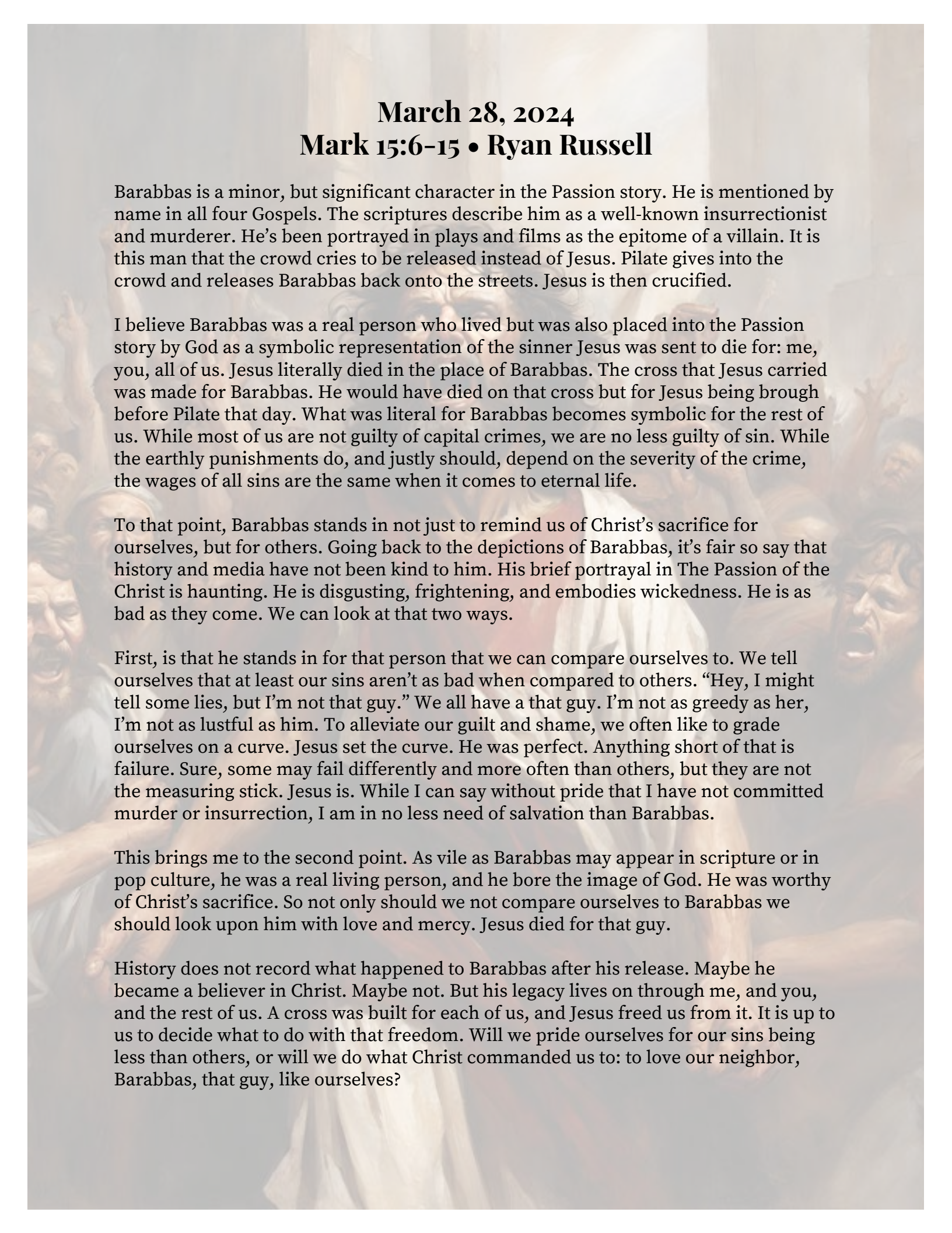
Communion also signifies our unity as the body of Christ. As we partake together, we celebrate the diversity within the community of believers. We come from different backgrounds, cultures, and walks of life, yet we are bound together by the common thread of faith in Jesus Christ. The table of communion levels the playing field, reminding us that we are all equal recipients of God's grace.

Paul emphasizes that communion is not just a backward glance but also a forward focus. In 1 Corinthians 11:26, he declares, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Communion is an act of anticipation, a declaration of our hope in the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we partake, we express our eagerness for the fulfillment of God's promises.

Prayer: Faithful God, May the bread and the cup be a tangible reminder to us of Your love, grace, and a promise of eternal communion with You. Amen.

My Thoughts





March 28, 2024

Mark 15:6-15 • Ryan Russell

Barabbas is a minor, but significant character in the Passion story. He is mentioned by name in all four Gospels. The scriptures describe him as a well-known insurrectionist and murderer. He's been portrayed in plays and films as the epitome of a villain. It is this man that the crowd cries to be released instead of Jesus. Pilate gives into the crowd and releases Barabbas back onto the streets. Jesus is then crucified.

I believe Barabbas was a real person who lived but was also placed into the Passion story by God as a symbolic representation of the sinner Jesus was sent to die for: me, you, all of us. Jesus literally died in the place of Barabbas. The cross that Jesus carried was made for Barabbas. He would have died on that cross but for Jesus being brought before Pilate that day. What was literal for Barabbas becomes symbolic for the rest of us. While most of us are not guilty of capital crimes, we are no less guilty of sin. While the earthly punishments do, and justly should, depend on the severity of the crime, the wages of all sins are the same when it comes to eternal life.

To that point, Barabbas stands in not just to remind us of Christ's sacrifice for ourselves, but for others. Going back to the depictions of Barabbas, it's fair to say that history and media have not been kind to him. His brief portrayal in *The Passion of the Christ* is haunting. He is disgusting, frightening, and embodies wickedness. He is as bad as they come. We can look at that two ways.

First, is that he stands in for that person that we can compare ourselves to. We tell ourselves that at least our sins aren't as bad when compared to others. "Hey, I might tell some lies, but I'm not that guy." We all have a that guy. I'm not as greedy as her, I'm not as lustful as him. To alleviate our guilt and shame, we often like to grade ourselves on a curve. Jesus set the curve. He was perfect. Anything short of that is failure. Sure, some may fail differently and more often than others, but they are not the measuring stick. Jesus is. While I can say without pride that I have not committed murder or insurrection, I am in no less need of salvation than Barabbas.

This brings me to the second point. As vile as Barabbas may appear in scripture or in pop culture, he was a real living person, and he bore the image of God. He was worthy of Christ's sacrifice. So not only should we not compare ourselves to Barabbas we should look upon him with love and mercy. Jesus died for that guy.

History does not record what happened to Barabbas after his release. Maybe he became a believer in Christ. Maybe not. But his legacy lives on through me, and you, and the rest of us. A cross was built for each of us, and Jesus freed us from it. It is up to us to decide what to do with that freedom. Will we pride ourselves for our sins being less than others, or will we do what Christ commanded us to: to love our neighbor, Barabbas, that guy, like ourselves?

March 29, 2024

Luke 23:26-49 • Rev, Derek Robinette

In our hardest moments our priorities are revealed. Today we find Jesus in his hardest moment. Denied, deserted, betrayed, belittled, bruised, and beaten he begins the deliberate ascent to Golgotha. In God's hardest moments God's priorities are revealed.

Simon of Cyrene. Simon is simply passing by and curious about all the commotion. Jesus is passing by as well and Simon's life is changed. He reluctantly takes up his cross and walks with Jesus supporting the Lamb of God as Jesus redeems the world. Simon is forever known for the work that day. His life was given new purpose and he took up his cross and followed Jesus each day after. He had the opportunity because he was precious in the eyes of the Father.

A thief condemned to die. A criminal that deserved death in the eyes of the Romans and religious leaders. A criminal that in our eyes might deserve death. In Christ's eyes he deserved life. Life forever more in paradise. Not based on works he had done but because he was precious in the eyes of the Father.

A Roman officer charged with overseeing the crucifixion. He could have stopped the crucifixion. He could have said it was unjust. He oversaw the belittling, bruising, and beating of Jesus. He didn't stop it. He let it continue. Yet, in a moment he was changed. As Jesus took his last breath the Roman officer believed. Despite the works he had done he was precious in the eyes of the Father.

And so are you. We pass by Jesus. Left alone in our sin, we deserve death. We sit by silent and still and let injustice happen. But Jesus doesn't just pass us by. He doesn't leave us alone in our sin. He doesn't sit quietly in the midst of injustice. Why? We are precious in the eyes of the Father. We are priorities in the life of the son. In Jesus' hardest moments his true priorities were revealed. Simon son of Cyrene. A thief who deserved death. An unjust Roman officer. You. Me. We.

Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, if we believe, one day we will be with Jesus and all of these in paradise. You. Me. Everyone. We are all God's priorities. Precious in the eyes of the Father.

Prayer: Lord of Forgiveness, in the shadow of the cross we find the depth of Your love and the measure of our worth. We rejoice with Simon, the criminal, and the Guard that we are Your priority and precious in Your eyes. May we remember Your grace that claims us as Your own, in every moment, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

My Thoughts



The background of the page features a soft-focus photograph of three crosses on a hill, likely Golgotha, silhouetted against a warm, golden sunset sky. The foreground is dominated by a series of horizontal lines, creating a writing area. The text 'My Thoughts' is written in a cursive font at the top of this area.

March 30, 2024

John 19:38-42 • Rev. Russ Broomell

This passage marks the third and final appearance of Nicodemus in John's Gospel. We first meet him in John 3, coming to Jesus at night. He has plenty of questions as he begins to think that Jesus may be the ultimate truth. Then, in John 7, he defends Jesus, suggesting that he deserves a fair hearing ... and suggesting that maybe he was taking Jesus' words seriously, and perhaps had even come to believe. Now, in the aftermath of the crucifixion, Nicodemus takes a huge risk and steps out to serve Jesus openly in a moment of profound loss and sorrow.

Maybe you have a journey with Christ much like Nicodemus. Maybe it's different. Remember, faith is not static but dynamic - an evolving journey. Nicodemus's story is a testament to the transformative power of Jesus's love and teaching. Initially a secret follower, Nicodemus's faith grew until he was ready to serve Jesus publicly, even in the face of potential danger, even feeling the heartbreak of his death.

We too are called to move from the shadows of hesitation into the light of Christ's love and truth. It may not be a sudden change or a gradual journey. There may be moments of confusion and searching and moments of deeper understanding and commitment. As you reflect on Nicodemus's journey, consider our own. Are you ready to move from spectator to participant, to take the next step, to take a risk?

Prayer: Always-loving God, help us to move from the shadows into the light. Teach us, like Nicodemus, to seek, understand, and serve openly and with courage. May our journey bring us closer to the love and truth embodied in Christ, and may our lives look like Jesus' life more and more each day. Amen.

My Thoughts



Dear Easter People,

We've journeyed together these 40 days, reflecting, repenting, and refocusing. As we step into the brilliant light of Easter, our hearts are overflowing with the message of resurrection, and the joy that sin and death have lost their power over us!

Easter isn't just a day of celebration; it's a lifestyle. It's about living with the joy that comes from knowing Jesus. It's about sharing love that knows no bounds, hope that doesn't falter, and faith that endures even in life's fiercest storms.

Our Lenten reflections and disciplines have prepared us for this moment. We've journeyed through introspection and recognized our need for grace. Now, we stand ready to embody the transformative power of the resurrection.

So, here's our call: **Let's be Easter people in a Good Friday world.**

Let's bring light to the dark places, hope to the despondent, and love to the unloved. Each day, let us be co-workers with Jesus and bearers of the incredible news: He is risen, and through Him, we can rise too.

May your Easter be filled with the fullness of joy that comes from our risen Lord!

In Christ's triumphant joy,
Your Sisters & Brothers at Crestwood United Methodist Church

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