

# Lent

**2024**

*A DEVOTIONAL  
BY AND FOR DOXA CHURCH*



## Introduction

Lent: the 40 days before Easter. I don't know what tradition you come from or what experience you have with Lent - maybe it was a time of somber reflection, a time of dull religious duty, or something totally foreign to your experience. The earliest records of Christians observing Lent go back to the 300's as a time of preparation to celebrate Easter. The word Lent comes from the old english word for "lengthen," because this is the time of year when the days get longer.

For many Christians, Lent is a time of fasting: saying no to something in order to say yes to more of God. In that same spirit, we get the opportunity to prepare our hearts to celebrate the incredible realities of both our desperate need for a savior, and the lengths God went to in order to save us. Regardless of your personal history or the tradition you've been in, you and I have a chance to set aside these 40 days to prepare our hearts to remember Jesus' sin-atonng sacrifice on the cross, and victorious resurrection on the third day.

The devotional guide you have in your hands is an updated edition of what we've done as a church over the last couple of years. You will be led on a journey through the storyline of Scripture up until the cross and Saturday just before Easter. Each day will have a reference of where in the story of the Bible we find ourselves, followed by a reflection on that passage, a connection of that place in Scripture to Jesus, and finally a prayer and question to serve as a jumping off point for you. On Sundays we'll walk through phrases in Jesus' prayer in the garden on the night he was betrayed from Matthew 26. If you've walked with us through Lent before, you'll recognize some of the entries here. You'll also encounter some new authors from our church body.

We hope this helps grow your hunger for Jesus, your delight in the Bible, and your joy in the Gospel as we look toward celebrating Easter Sunday together.

Before you begin, take a moment and pray through these questions:

Father, What are you already stirring in me as I enter this season of Lent?

Are you asking me to give anything up these next 40 days to increase my appetite for you?

Would you help me be devoted to meeting with you through the Word and prayer?

Father, please grow my awareness of my need for a savior, and joy at the saving work of Jesus.



# **The Beginning**

## Genesis 1

As God speaks the world into existence, we see every living thing as it was intended to be: good. We see God's care and creativity as He thoughtfully calls into place every constellation, every ray of sunlight, every creature destined to soar the skies and swim in the seas until there's only one more creature to call. On the sixth day, God says "Let us make man in our image." Before focusing on ourselves, pause to consider this: God did not need to make us. John 1 affirms this as the apostle writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Before our creation, God was not lonely or lacking anything. Rather, He experienced complete community within Himself.

We were created out of abundance, not scarcity. We were not a backup plan or a burden, but the result of God's overflowing love and mercy. Before we were knit together in our mothers' wombs, we were chosen by the Creator. Even though He knew we would sin against him, He declared us as His people, because no matter how far we ran from His goodness, we would never hinder His perfect plan. God's goodness cannot be diminished, only glorified. As His good creation, our greatest ambition is to bring Him glory and to do so with joyful hearts as we recall the love from which we were made.

Prayer:

God, thank you for loving us and including us in your perfect plan. Help us to see your love in creation today.

Question to consider:

How have you experienced God's goodness in your life?

02/15/2024

## **The Breaking**

Genesis 3

The story of the Bible, and ultimately the world, doesn't get very far before the wheels seem to come off: God's good creation, His good relationships with Adam and Eve are broken through sin. God gave them one command in the Garden: don't eat from this tree. But Adam and Eve chose not to obey. One interesting note: the original Hebrew highlights the word "eyes" over and over. The tree was beautiful to the eye, it was supposed to open their eyes, Eve saw that it was delightful to the eye. Ultimately they eat and their eyes are opened, just not in the way they thought. They "know" good and evil, but only because they have tried out evil to know what it feels like to disobey God. That's the false promise of sin: delight, beauty, enlightenment, but in the end it leaves us feeling empty, dirty, and more foolish for our experience. Our eyes are darkened, not opened.

Why do we need to consider sin at the start of Lent? Because this season is a time of reflection not just on Adam and Eve's failings, but our own sin and need for a savior. 1 John 1:8-10 is so clear: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." As we journey toward Good Friday and Easter, consider your need for a savior by looking at your sin.

Prayer:

Father, help me see my sin with truth and clarity. Please protect me from self-justification or self deception so that I can more fully understand your salvation.

Question to consider:

Where have I been choosing sin rather than God? Where have I been playing with what may look good on the outside, but is actually contrary to God's plan for me?

## **The Voice**

Genesis 12

God calls Abram to leave behind the comforts of all that he has known to be the head of a new nation. Obeying this call from the Lord likely left Abram asking the question “Lord, why me?” We will see why as the book of Genesis continues to unfold. Abram’s name will change to Abraham and from his family lineage will come the fulfillment of the promises spoken by the Lord in Genesis 12—Christ.

Through Jesus a new nation of people from every tribe, nation, and tongue will be one. He is the head of the new nation - the church. And it is through Christ that we, the church, are led into a new land where we will dwell with the Lord in perfect communion forever. Hearing and obeying the voice of the Lord leads us down the narrow road which leads to following in the footsteps of Christ. This is not a road we walk alone. The Lord sees us as He calls us to follow Him, He is working ahead and behind us in our going, and He cares for and sustains us in each of the steps that we take. The voice of the Lord will not speak to us then leave us to walk alone. Rather, the Lord speaks and He is near as we are sent. Let our lives be marked by hearing and following the voice of the Lord.

Prayer:

Lord, lead us to hear and follow you.

Question to consider:

What is the Lord calling you to leave in order to hear and follow Him?



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## **The Ram**

Genesis 22

In this passage, Abraham is asked by God to sacrifice his beloved son, the very symbol of all God's promises to him. Abraham must have been filled with a learned, deep trust in God that carried him to the land of Moriah and to the altar where he was prepared to offer his son; yet, as Abraham moved forward in faith, God mercifully stopped him. He lifted Abraham's head to see the ram caught in the thicket. God provided a way. Our God is kind and merciful, providing for all our needs. Think about the ways that the Lord has provided for your needs, and praise him today.

Also, as we read this passage, another Father and Son should come to mind. Another sacrifice. Another provision of God. God the Father sends his son, Jesus, to earth; yet, as we look at Christ, we see God doing what He held Abraham back from doing—He sacrificed His Son in order to provide a way for us to know Him. Our God provided sinners with a way to escape death, and live with Him forever through our faith in His Son, who took on the punishment we deserved.

Prayer:

God, thank you for providing Christ, the sacrificial ram.

Question to consider:

What does it mean to you today that God provided his Son as a sacrifice for you?

## **SUNDAY**

Matt 26:38a

*Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death..."*

Jesus, God in flesh, the source of light and life and love for the universe, finds himself so weighed down by the suffering in front of him that he feels like he has to share these moments with his friends. Imagine it for a moment - the author of life sorrowful to death. It would be unbelievable if he hadn't told us this himself. Death was against his nature, the essence of his being, but this was the plan he chose to walk in.

As we walk through both the sorrows of life and this season of Lent, we walk alongside Jesus, the one Isaiah called the man of sorrows who was acquainted with our grief. He knows the fear of death and the pains of life. He knows what it is to weep and mourn. He knows what it is to live in the tension of hope coming down the road, while pain, sorrow, and grief are right in front of him. He willingly walked this path so we could have a sure hope with him beyond the sorrows of today.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for knowing my sorrow and pain. You don't stand far off, but you've drawn me near through your death and resurrection.

Question to consider:

What sadness, pain, or fear do you need to bring to Jesus today?  
Where do you need to remember he can understand what you're going through?

## **The Trade**

Genesis 44:33

Today, we find ourselves in the middle of the story of Joseph. Judah and his brothers have returned to Egypt with Benjamin, their youngest brother, per Joseph's request. Upon their arrival Joseph is overcome with emotion by the sight of his younger brother, Benjamin. The following day as the brothers were getting ready to leave to go home, the palace manager was instructed to place Joseph's silver cup in Benjamin's bag. As they left, Joseph commanded that the manager go after them and bring back one who stole the cup. To the brothers' surprise the silver cup was found in Benjamin's bag. Judah, the one who failed his younger brother Joseph years ago (Genesis 37), now pleads to take the place of his brother, Benjamin.

It is evident that God has shaped and humbled the heart of Judah and led him to repentance through all he had endured. Judah was the brother that originally advocated killing his brother Joseph, and now he is offering to take the place of his brother, Benjamin. This is a foreshadowing of what Christ would do. Judah, a flawed man, showed remarkable love for his brother by offering to take his place. How much more does Jesus, who is perfect in every way, love us by standing in our place, taking the punishment that we deserved in order that we may be reunited with our Father.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for your steadfast love and willingness to stand in our place. Help me to daily remember the cost of my salvation.

Question to consider:

In what ways have you (or are you currently still) striving for your salvation? Spend some time thanking God for all that He has done for you and ask Him to help you in your unbelief.

## **The Relief**

Genesis 50

Prior to this chapter, Joseph's brothers have both sold him into slavery and left him for dead. They have every reason to fear how Joseph will deal with them.

What his brothers don't realize is that Joseph had a heavenly perspective, which influenced his response. Instead of revenge, he met their sin with grace. Joseph says "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good". He doesn't ignore the evil of his brothers, rather, he acknowledges it while emphasizing that God was sovereign over all. Joseph then forgives, comforts, and cares for his brothers.

Joseph's perspective and response foreshadows the work of Christ. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and ultimately that would require his death. The people who put him to death meant it for evil but Jesus knew that God planned it for our good. Through his death and resurrection he paid for our sin and now meets us with grace and mercy. Ultimately, this story shows us that although our sin might be great, His love is greater; and that God is working for our good.

Prayer:

Jesus, help me to see you rightly, that you stand with open arms, welcoming me, comforting me, and protecting me. Help me to remember that even in my lowest valley, You are with me, and that You are sovereign over all.

Question to consider:

From what perspective are you considering this season of your life? What would happen if you lifted your eyes to Jesus? How would this affect your response?

02/21/2024

## **The Hearing**

Exodus 2:24-25

The people of God have suffered under the rule of Pharaoh in Egypt. They are a displaced people—a quick reading of Exodus 1 and 2 show them experiencing severe political, economical, social, infanticidal, and racial oppression. They are a people in pain. They are a people in suffering. They are a people in hopelessness. “Relief?” an Israelite might whisper: “Relief from where?” Where could relief come from? Another nation? No, Egypt was the power of the Near Middle East. Inside the nation? No, they were the people of Goshen—an insult. Goshen meant “plenty and comfort,” yet the experience of Israel was anything but. Relief? From where? “God heard... remembered... saw... and God knew.” Relief would come from God Himself through the Hebrew baby, Moses, who’d been placed among the reeds. The God who heard and saw their pain would bring relief.

Has this ever been you? Your suffering and pain may not be the same as theirs - but it is suffering and pain nonetheless. We have a God who knows our suffering. He suffers so that one day, now or in eternity, your suffering may end. He sent a Savior who suffered on the Cross to save us from our sin. Our God hears, sees, knows - and does something. He sends Christ, the Son of suffering who will free us fully one day from our suffering. Every tear, He will wipe away. This is the Christ who has come.

Prayer:

God, remind us that one day you will wipe away our tears as you have wiped away our sins.

Question to consider:

What would it look like to bring your suffering to Christ? How can you remember that God hears and sees you today?

## **The Bush**

Exodus 3: 7, 14

I AM WHO I AM. The definitive, declarative, name of God given to Moses in Exodus 3. The God who called out a people for His own possession has heard their cries and come down to rescue them. His plan of rescue, Moses: a shepherd, hiding in the wilderness because he was a murderer. Moses had run away and found his own freedom, and had left his people behind in chains—but the I AM had not turned away from His people or ignored their cries. The I Am had a plan for his people's salvation, and He would accomplish it through unlikely means in his servant Moses.

Fast Forward some 2000 years to Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Jesus, often found in the wilderness, not hiding, but to be with His Father. Jesus, completely innocent, but willing to be murdered on the cross in our place. Jesus, who would leave His place of comfort not to distance himself from suffering, but to enter into the middle of it. Jesus who would also introduce himself as I AM...

- ... the Bread of Life (John 6)
- ... the Light of the World (John 8)
- ... the Gate (John 10)
- ... the Good Shepherd (John 10)
- ... the Resurrection and the Life (John 11)
- ... the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14)
- ... the True Vine (John 15)

In Jesus, God once again has a plan for his people's salvation and redemption—and he will accomplish it through unlikely means.

Prayer:

God thank you that you are the I AM, the Good Shepherd, and my God. Come down to rescue me and to help me to bring your message of rescue to others.

Question to consider:

How could God use you in his plan of salvation for those around you? What parts of your life are you tempted to think disqualifies you from being used by God?

02/23/2024

## **The Family**

Exodus 12:38

Amidst the familiar story of the exodus, verse 38 shares with us a piece of God's heart and his plan that in a quick reading, we may "pass-over" (no pun intended). God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham and his descendents was already beginning to see its fulfillment. "A mixed multitude" refers to an ethnically diverse group of people that were not descended from Abraham, but saw Yahweh's miraculous work while living alongside them in Egypt and decided that life believing in Him and living among His people was their best hope. They had a faith in God by which they were ready to follow Him into the wilderness, and God mercifully allowed them to step into His blessing.

Today, in Christ, we see this promise being fulfilled as many around the globe worship Him. Christ's death and resurrection are an invitation to all, everywhere, to know God. Just as the mixed multitude joined the Israelites to follow God, God continues now to use his followers to build his international family. We can look forward to the new heavens and earth, where every tribe, tongue and nation will join in His praise. God is faithful to His promise, and draws us to Himself and one another across all cultural, political, ethnic, and economic divides.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for your faithfulness to care for all nations, even since the exodus.

Question to consider:

What role has God given you in building his international family?  
Who might you encounter today that needs the hope of our faithful God?

## **The Deliverance**

Exodus 14

If only we could see what the Israelites saw. If only we could watch a flowing sea rush towards the heavens, becoming literal walls, opening up the only way to freedom. If only we could see with our eyes a seashore covered with our enemies, proof that the Lord was, and is, on our side. They needed only to be silent, and the Lord would fight for them. He would be their only deliverance. The Israelites got to taste and tangibly see that the Lord is good.

Oftentimes when we are stuck in cycles of sin and see no way out, we first try fighting for ourselves, to be our own deliverers. Like the Israelites, filled with fear, thinking they knew a better way, we can cling so close to weight and sin that we neglect looking to Jesus, where our only true victory and freedom lie.

We don't get to observe a sea open up, but we do get to see our glorious Savior, who lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and rose again, overcoming the grave. This is finished, final, overcoming, delivering work. He does it, not us. We need only to believe and trust that he is faithful.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to see Jesus as the only true way to deliverance, to sit with you in silence and gaze upon your beautiful sacrifice for our freedom.

Question to consider:

Where is an area in your life that you've not trusted God to deliver you from? Where has fear kept you enslaved to sin?



02/25/2024

## SUNDAY

Matt 26:39

*And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying,  
“My Father...”*

Jesus' prayer begins like it so often did: "My Father." He walked in unity with God throughout his incarnation as he taught, healed, and walked toward the cross. In his greatest moment of pain and need, Jesus falls on his face and cries out to the Father again. Picture it: the Son of Man lays his heart bare with the Father about the plan they worked out together even as his soul recoils in horror at what's to come.

In your pain and sorrow, where do you turn? Relationships? Distraction? Isolation? As we walk through the tension of a God who is in control, who loves us, and who allows us to walk through pain and suffering, we look to Jesus in these moments. He is the perfect example, but more than that he is proof that our pain is not meaningless and our prayers do not go unheard - even if we don't get the answer we wanted. Alongside Jesus, pray through whatever is before you with the words "My father..."

Prayer:

My father, thank you that you see me, know me, and understand what I'm going through. Please show me your heart, even when I can't see your hand.

Question to consider:

Is there something you've been turning to in your pain and sorrow? Consider how you've handled these moments. What steps can you take to focus your gaze on the Father?

## **The Mountain**

Exodus 19:21

At this point, the Israelites have been out for Egypt for a couple of months. They found themselves at the base of Mount Sinai, where God appeared to Moses. God instructed Moses to tell the people to prepare for Him to come and dwell with His people in a thick cloud. They were instructed to perform specific purification rituals in order to be clean and also create physical boundaries that would protect them from being in the direct presence of the Lord. God warned Moses many times that if the Israelites broke the boundary they would be destroyed. This is a reminder to us of the glory of God and the chasm that separates sinners from God.

In God's sorrow, the kindest thing that He could have done in the Garden of Eden was to send Adam and Eve away from His holy presence. Apart from this act of grace Adam and Eve (and generations to follow) would never have had the chance to be reunited with God. God made a sacrifice to cover Adam and Eve as they left the garden, and He made the ultimate sacrifice by sending His Son, Jesus to live a perfect life. He died the death that we deserved in order that He would crush the head of the serpent so that the chasm between sinners and God could be filled. The veil has been torn allowing those who are in Christ to dwell in the presence of our Holy God.

Prayer:

God, I praise you for making a way for the chasm to be filled. Your kindness and grace is unwavering.

Question to consider:

How do you view the weight of God's glory?

02/27/2024

## **The Commandments**

Exodus 20:1-2

After the Lord comes down on Mount Sinai, He speaks to the people of Israel and gives them the Ten Commandments. The commandments are meant to be a guide for Israel, describing how they should relate to God and how they should relate to the people around them. The commandments are the first part of the law, and they are to be kept so God's people can flourish in the land He is giving to them; however, we see soon after the commandments come in that Israel is unable to keep them (Exodus 32)—and we know of our own inability to keep them today.

In the Gospels, Jesus not only reminds us that the commandments are a reflection of how we are supposed to love God with all we have and love our neighbors as our own selves (Matthew 22), but He also does the impossible: He comes to fulfill the entirety of the law and to accomplish its original purpose on our behalf (Matthew 5). Christ took the death we deserve on the cross in order to give us His righteousness and the life He deserves. He welcomes us into this life by His grace and through our faith in Him.

Prayer:

God, give us hearts of obedience and help us to love you above all else.

Question to consider:

How has Jesus fulfilled the law specifically for you where you could not?

## **The Tabernacle**

Exodus 40

Because God is holy and can not be in the presence of sin the only way He could come to dwell with His chosen people was for them to build a mobile temple or tabernacle they would set up wherever they went. The presence of God in this exodus account would fill the tabernacle and the people would wait on God to decide when to pick up the tent and move. If the presence of God stayed in a spot for a while God's people would stay. If the presence of God moved this people would move. Their entire lives were informed by the presence of God and they would actively wait for God to move before they would go to the next place.

Our sin separates us from the kind of relationship we were supposed to have with God the Father. We see an interesting moment in Exodus 40:35: "Moses was unable to enter..." He is unable to enter due to the sin of the nation. There is separation due to sin—but God has a plan to right our wrongs so that we can be in his presence. God the Father sent His only and perfect Son Jesus Christ to come and live the perfect life we could not live. He is tested the same way that Adam and Eve were in the garden but not sin, and take the punishment of our sins in His death on the cross. Because of Christ's obedience and His victory over death, sin, and the grave we now have an eternal hope of dwelling in his presence for eternity. We not only get to experience His presence after this life but now every believer has the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, living in us and interceding on our behalf.

Prayer:

Thank you God that we no longer need a tabernacle in order to be in your presence but that because of Jesus we now have the Holy Spirit who hears us, ministers to us, teaches us. Thank you for making a way to redeem us from our sin.

Question to consider:

When was the last time you longed or were thankful to be in the presence of God? What does it look like for you to wait on God?

## **The Law**

### Leviticus 1

In Leviticus, we see the Law outline a need for the people of Israel to sacrifice, which was shocking, bloody, and costly. What is the need for sacrifice? The author of Hebrews gives a summary: "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." (Hebrews 9:22) The Law required perfection, which no human could attain. All sinned and broke the law, which meant they required a sacrifice to be forgiven. The Law that was broken in sin outlines how they could experience relief from sin through a sacrifice for sin. The story of sin is a sad story - separating us from God. The story of sin is a serious story - requiring sacrificial shedding of blood for forgiveness. Forgiveness is bloody. Sin is costly.

The story of sin is a sad story with a shocking ending. Christ comes, fully God and fully man to be our sacrifice. The shocking ending is that the Giver of The Law would be the One who would satisfy the requirements of The Law through His own perfect life and offer everlasting forgiveness by being the sacrifice for our sin. His costly blood is shed on a cross so that all who trust in him might be forgiven (Hebrews 10:19-22). Where our sin once separated us and kept us far off, one who perfectly kept The Law and all righteousness has come. Christ had no sin and needed no sacrifice, instead becoming the sacrifice we who have sinned ultimately needed so we might be forgiven and, through Christ, draw near to God.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for being our sacrifice. Thank you for forgiving us of our sin and giving us your righteousness before God.

Question to consider:

What does the cost of the blood of Jesus shed for you mean for you? How could weighing the cost of His sacrifice for you bring you to a place where you worship him?

## **The Lamb**

Leviticus 16:1-4

On the Day of Atonement, only the high priest could perform the sacrifice. He would have to bring a sin offering and burnt offering for himself, before beginning an additional sacrifice on behalf of the people. This process (and the number of animals sacrificed) required an incredible amount of labor for the high priest. All of this to atone for the sins of the priests and the people to be “at one” with God. Leviticus 16 shows that the people of Israel could not approach God in His dwelling place without a high priest and several sacrifices between their sinful hearts and His righteous heart. The Day of Atonement was filled with reverence, repentance, and blood spilled as payment for Israel’s sin.

While difficult to read, we can rest knowing that the Day of Atonement would ultimately point to Jesus, who would be our sacrifice, using His blood to pay for our sin. We are not coming to God apart from a blood sacrifice, for it is the blood that makes the atonement. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). There is no way that we as sinners can have fellowship and “be one” with God until our sin issue is dealt with. Jesus Christ dealt with that sin on the cross and made a way for us to come to God through His sacrifice cleansing our sins.

Prayer:

Father, forgive me for my sin. Thank you for salvation through your son Jesus Christ who shed His blood on the cross and rose again that I may be saved.

Question to consider:

Am I living a life that is still bound by my sin, or one that reflects the inner joy of having my sins washed away by Jesus?

## The Judges

Judges 1:1, 21:25

The bookends of Judges paint a bleak picture. Joshua has died and the people are questioning - who will fight for us? Who will lead us? Who will guide us? And while the Israelites were anxious about their enemies—perhaps their fears blinded them to the greater enemy inside of them. Perhaps their questions should have been—who will fight for our holiness? Who will lead us in the way of the Lord? Who will guide us into righteousness and justice? The Lord provided for them in the Judges - both as warriors and prophets. Warriors to lead them into battle against their enemies, and prophetic voices to try and call out the sin of the people. However, at the end of the book we find the people are again without a leader, each deciding they would be Judge over their own life.

Today we find ourselves in a similar situation—each person living by whatever we think is right. Isn't this the very posture of our first parents in the Garden that brought the curse of sin crashing into our world—a curse that brought death and requires judgment? Praise God! In Christ our true judge has come, abounding in mercy, yet perfectly righteous. He came, first, to offer salvation from our deserved judgment—not to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17). However, there is a day coming that Paul speaks about in Acts 17:31 when all evil will be rightfully brought to justice. Jesus is the appointed judge, the proof is in his resurrection, who will “judge the world in righteousness”, once and for all taking His throne and rightful place as Judge over all.

Prayer:

Jesus, remind me that you are the true judge, not my own thoughts or the world around me - lead me into righteousness today. Thank you for receiving the judgment my sins deserve.

Question to consider:

Where in your life do you find yourself prone to do what is right in your own eyes? Take some time to confess and repent.

## **SUNDAY**

Matt 26:39

*And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me..."*

Jesus was well aware of what he faced on that night in the garden - pain, fear, shame, but so much more than that. This cup is the cup of God's good justice and wrath against sin. Psalm 75:8 says "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs." Who is supposed to drink this cup? The wicked, not the sinless Son of Man! But this was the plan - for Jesus to take this cup as the final payment for sin for all who trust in him.

How does this change the way you view your relationship with the Father? Do you picture him angry, frustrated, or waiting to punish you? Or do you see his plan to spare you the wrath you deserve? How do you view the Son? Do you see him as a good teacher, a nice example, or do you see him as more? In Lent we both look at our sin, the cause for the cup, but more than that we look at our savior - the one who drank it to the dregs for us so through him there would be none left.

Prayer:

Father, thank you that through Christ there is no punishment left - he drank it all for me so I can be fully forgiven and free before you.

Question to consider:

How does this prayer change how you see the Father? The Son? Yourself?



03/04/2024

## **The Cycle**

### Judges 3

After God rescued Israel from Egypt, He made a covenant with them (recorded in Deuteronomy 7:6). Despite the Lord's faithfulness to them, the Israelites often chose to reject God. In Judges we see a repeated cycle: Israel sins by not obeying God's command to drive out the inhabitants of the promised land > Israel starts to adopt the ways of the inhabitants of the land in direct opposition to God's command > Israel experiencing oppression by the inhabitants of the land > Israel repents of their sin and God sends a Judge as a deliverer > peace reigns for a period of time, but upon the death of the judge the cycle repeats.

In Judges 3, Israel chooses to intermarry with nations God commanded them not to and worships other gods. Much like Israel, we often live in direct opposition to God. We think we know what is best despite how He has proven throughout history that His ways are higher and better than our ways. In love, God sent Jesus, His beloved Son, to break the cycle. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection a new covenant was made. Jesus was the once and for all sacrifice necessary to redeem God's people. This new covenant made eternal life with God available to anyone who would repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus.

Prayer:

Father, forgive us for our rejection of You and Your ways. Thank You for Your grace and mercy lavished on us through Jesus. Help us through the power of the Holy Spirit to obey You and Your ways for Your way is always better.

Question to consider:

In what ways have you rejected the ways of God? How have you seen Him transform your desires to obey Him more?

## **The Desire**

1 Samuel 8

God's desire for Israel was that they would be a holy people—a set apart people—a different kind of people. He would be their God, and they would be His people; yet, their desires countered God's. They wanted “a king to judge [them] the same as all the other nations...” God's desire was that they would look up and see that He was doing a new thing and making them His own people. The Israelites desire was formed by envy, by wanting what the other nations had. God speaks to Samuel and says “they have rejected me as their king” and He gives them what they ask for: they get their kings, and these kings eventually lead to their exile. God made a way for them to have Him as their king, and still they chose another.

God's desire for His Church is that we would be a holy people, a different kind of people, who don't look around in our search for a King but look up. In Christ, we see the King who makes a way for us to be in His Kingdom. The Good News is that He is the Good King who has defeated what was destroying His people. Yet, we are tempted to look elsewhere for a King to lead and guide us. May our desire align with God's: that we would be a part of His Kingdom and look to Jesus Christ as our true King.

Prayer:

God, help us to see Jesus not only as our Savior but our Lord and desire His good rule in our lives.

Question to consider:

Is there something or someone else you look to as your king? Who (or what) has final say in your life apart from Christ?

03/06/2024

## **The Hopeless**

1 Samuel 17:24-27

Before focusing on David in this familiar passage, consider the role of Israel, God's chosen people to whom He promised strength, abundance, and victory in their promised land. Is this the Israel we see when Goliath walks onto the battlefield? If we're honest, no, it's not. All the fighting men of Israel were terrified of what they saw, seeing an insurmountable challenge and an enemy they'd never survive defying. They spent their days and nights cowering before the Philistine army and its champion, Goliath. They didn't seem to remember that they themselves were God's chosen people. Instead, they let fear extinguish the courage that comes with God's promises—until the young, unimpressive shepherd David spoke truth to the whole situation. He reminds them that if God is for us, who can be against us? In other words, why should they have feared this Philistine giant or any opposition to God's people? In David, God provides a hero for the hopeless.

In this story, we won't identify with David. Rather, we are Israel. We are frightened and overwhelmed to take on a challenge seemingly alone that would end in our demise. Like Israel, we need a deliverer like David to save us from a future of bondage and death. God, who loves and cares for us, sent Jesus to defeat our enemies and to save us, leading the charge as we follow Him. Jesus, the hero for the hopeless.

Prayer:

God, forgive my lack of faith. Give me courage to continue to follow you as you lead me. Remind me that my hope is in Christ.

Question to consider:

Where do I find hope when I am overwhelmed in this life?

# The Temple

1 Kings 6

The account of Solomon's temple being built highlights something about God's heart: his desire to be with all people. After seven years of building, every detail executed to the smallest thread, the temple was finished. The Lord spoke to Solomon, promising that He would dwell among the children of Israel and not forsake his people (1 Kings 6:11-13). What an incredible promise: a Holy God ensuring he could dwell with his people in this set apart place.

There was a part of the temple called the Court of the Gentiles, an area set aside for those outside of God's people to also come and worship. Even though at this point in redemptive history those who were Gentiles could not come as close as Israelites, the beautiful details for God's temple still included a place for all nations. When Jesus comes into Jerusalem before his crucifixion (Matt 21:12-17), he visits the temple and finds this court of the Gentiles overrun with booths selling animals to sacrifice - essentially turning the one place these people could come to worship into a shopping mall on December 24th. Righteously angry, Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7:

these I will bring to my holy mountain,  
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
**for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples."**

...and cleanses the temple so right worship can continue.

The Temple was always intended to be a place where people of every nation, tribe, and tongue could come to worship, and in Christ's death and resurrection, we see that he "has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14).

Prayer:

Jesus thank you for the power of your blood to reconcile us to God and to one another.

Question to consider:

Read Revelation 7 and consider the beauty of all nations being included in the worship of God.

## **The Split**

1 Kings 12

In our story today, we have two imperfect kings- King Rehoboam (we'll call him "Rey") and King Jeroboam (let's use "Jerry"). First, we have Rey, the son of Solomon. Naive to his own arrogance, Rey refuses to lighten the workload and economic burdens placed on the people of Israel by his father. As a result, Israel divides. The ten tribes of the north (Israel) now elect King Jerry to rule and the two tribes of the south (Judah and Benjamin) remain under King Rey. Jerry, driven by fear of losing his power, sets up altars, golden calves and temples, appoints non-Levite priests, establishes his own days for feasts and sacrifices- all without any regard for God. Fear leads Jerry to rely on his own efforts, not on the Lord.

Through the division of Israel, arrogance of Rey, and fear-driven rule of Jerry, God is still in control. Although the Israelites can't yet see, this is all a part of God's redemption story. God, being rich in mercy, will send His son, Jesus- who fulfills every need and brings unity for all God's children. Finally, a perfect king!

We must also remember that this perfect king must give His life on the cross for the complete forgiveness of our sins and the defeat of death itself. Even in the sorrow of a perfect king on a criminal's cross, there is hope in the promise of redemption.

Prayer:

God, help me to see the ways in which I often turn from you.

Question to consider:

When you have a decision to make, do you go to God first for wisdom? When you experience fear, do you ask God to fulfill your need for protection? How can we look to Jesus, rather than anything else we may turn to?

## **The Exile**

Psalm 137

Israel is in Babylonian captivity and in exile from their home. Jerusalem, also known as Zion (a hill in Jerusalem), has been overtaken and mostly destroyed and the people of Israel are feeling hopeless and longing to be back home where life was easy and good. They are remembering better times and crying out that God would save them and destroy the Babylonians. The Israelites ultimately are longing to be restored. But why has God allowed Jerusalem to be exiled? The whole reason God sent the prophets was to warn the people of God to stop turning from God and to stop sinning. However, they continued to rebel against God and not listen—so God allowed them to be defeated and exiled so they might feel the weight of their sin and turn back to God.

In the same way, we as a collective and as individuals are exiled and separated from God apart from Christ because of our sin. The only way that we are able to be restored again is through the movement of God the Father in sending His Son to suffer and die in our place. Jesus received the punishment of exile and death from the Father for us so that we could once and for all come home to the Father, restored and unmarked by sin. This is the work of God - “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Prayer:

God thank you for your correction of sin so that we may be led back to the right relationship with you. Thank you for Jesus and how you chose to save us through his death and resurrection, so that we are not defined by our sin. Help us to strive to combat sin and recognize the beauty of your presence like the Israelites thought of Zion, that we would long to be with you in your presence, and that the idea of sinning would be ridiculous.

Question to consider:

Have you stopped and considered what your life without Christ would look, both in relationship to God and in our daily lives?

03/10/2024

## SUNDAY

Matt 26:39

*"...not as I will, but as you will."*

In his prayer we see Jesus do two things that are incredibly difficult: he completely pours out his heart to the Father and he fully surrenders to the Father's will. This line between clearly knowing and expressing what he preferred in that moment, but living in faithful and free surrender is incredibly difficult to walk. We must be clear: the Father and son were united in will from eternity past, but in this moment we see the full humanity of Jesus as he counts the cost of the road before him and the perfection of Jesus as he walks in faithful unity with the father. Jesus wasn't floating above the reality of the suffering he would endure - he was looking right at the terrible cost he would pay. He also wasn't somehow caught like a spider, unable to run if he wanted to. Not my will, but yours be done.

How do you walk this line? Are you clear and upfront with the Father about everything in your heart and on your mind? Are you living in active submission to His will, even if in conflicts with your own?

Prayer:

Father, teach me to pour out my heart to you and open my hand to your will.

Question to consider:

What am I holding back from the Father? Why? What am I not surrendering? Why?

## **The Pain**

### Lamentations 3

Scholars believe the author of Lamentations had just witnessed the decimation of his city at the hand of his enemy: the Babylonians. Picture it. Temples destroyed, family and friends taken captive, and God's people left wondering if their Lord would avenge them. In the wake of such tragedy, the author withholds nothing from God in his powerful lament. His cries are guttural, and his pain is obvious, but what's most compelling is his firm belief that despite the horrors he witnessed, God was still there, listening. It was by faith that this servant held onto hope with everything he had, and so must we.

While sin has caused unspeakable brokenness in this world, it cannot extinguish the greater hope we have in the Lord Almighty who sacrificed His son so that we could be set free to live eternally in His kingdom enveloped by His goodness and His glory. As Christians, we were never promised a painless life; we were promised a Savior who, having never given into temptation, would pay the penalty of our sins and the price of our salvation. In the face of suffering, we have a beautiful and bountiful hope in Jesus. He sees us, He knows us, and He has redeemed us.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to cling to you in every circumstance, remembering that you are our one, true hope.

Question to consider:

How do you respond in seasons of suffering? Do you distance yourself from God, or do you lean into His presence, lamenting with Him?



## The Scroll

Isaiah 61:1-2

We find ourselves jumping into the tail end of a message delivered by God through his prophet to the nation of Israel, a message of hope in the midst of reeling from national trauma. Way back in the book of Deuteronomy, God's people were warned that should they choose to turn from Him, they would be sent into exile, albeit not forever. Then, at the start of the book of Isaiah, God gives another warning as they are headed straight down this path. "You regularly rebel against me, you embrace idolatry, and you abuse the poor and vulnerable." See, if you were poor—that is, not only financially destitute, but more broadly socially outcast—God's kingdom was meant to be a beacon of hope. Instead, Israel had become just as terrible a place to live for the vulnerable as anywhere else. God puts it bluntly: "I cannot tell the difference between you and Babylon." So their rebellion meets its logical conclusion: Israel and Babylon become one and the same, their nation is taken over, and God's people are sent into exile.

Now in the back half of the book, God's people have come back from exile—just as God had promised! And what's more, Isaiah looks forward to a future where a coming Savior will restore the people of God not just to their former glory, but better. He envisions a coming One who would be anointed by God's Spirit, and would once and for all end the curse of sin, bringing good to the poor, hope for all nations, and life for anyone who would turn to God.

Prayer:

God, though I constantly give myself to sinful desires, I am never too far from your grace. Thank you that in Jesus, I always have hope for forgiveness and new life.

Question to consider:

Does Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for you feel like "good news?" If it often begins to feel unimportant to you, why do you think that is?

## **The Waiting**

Jeremiah 29:1-14

What do you do when you're waiting in exile? What do you do when you're waiting and it feels like the end will never come? God's words to the Israelites are the same to us today. To the people waiting in exile, who feel trapped and stuck, He tells them to build culture where they are (29:5-7) and seek Him (29:13). Build homes, build gardens, build families, build the city, and pray for it while you are in your waiting. Seek me with your whole heart, not when everything settles but while you are waiting. These are practices of hope in our waiting.

Right between these verses, God says to the Israelites "I know the plans I have for you...plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." If you were to see their condition in the exile, these would have felt like painful words to hear. Welfare? Future? Hope? Hardly. But we know what God was about to do: in an impossible situation, He would deliver them out of exile and return them to their home. To look at Jesus on the Cross is to see the Exile physically embodied. Naked. Beaten. Crucified. Dead. This is the Savior of the world? While some would shout that He could not even save Himself, this was precisely the plan of God. As Christ suffered a seemingly hopeless death, He made a way for those who look to Him to have a future hope.

Prayer:

God, help us remember that you have made a way for our welfare and given us a future hope through your Son's giving of Himself on the Cross.

Question to consider:

How might God be leading you to embody hope in waiting? How might He be leading you in your waiting to build culture and to seek Him?

03/14/2024

## **The Pressure**

Daniel 3

We come to this scene in Scripture with King Nebuchadnezzar having made a golden image of himself that was about 100 feet tall. He orders “all people, nations, and languages” to bow down and worship this statue image when they hear the herald cry out and the loud musical noise play. If anyone did not follow this decree, the king would have them publicly executed by throwing them into a fiery furnace. Three young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, openly oppose Nebuchadnezzar to his face. They do not serve his gods nor worship his image. The furious king binds them and throws them into the furnace. When Nebuchadnezzar looks into the furnace, he doesn’t see three dead men, but four men walking around! The fourth’s image is “like a son of the gods”. There is another in the fire with them.

When we find ourselves under the most severe pressure in the worst circumstances it’s natural to feel absolutely and utterly alone. Who would ever want to be brought into my personal anguish? The three men of our story are met and delivered by Jesus Himself. They were not alone in the most dire of circumstances—and neither are we. There is another in the fire, and He’s standing next to us. Jesus is with us in our pressure—and He will never leave.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for your loving care and walking right along side of me when I feel alone in my struggles.

Question to consider:

Who should I reach out to and remind them that Jesus is with them today?

## **The Return**

### Nehemiah 1

Why Nehemiah? He wasn't a major prophet like Isaiah or Jeremiah. He wasn't even a minor prophet like Jonah or Hosea. As a matter of fact, he wasn't even a priest or scribe. Some scholars believe that in the original texts this book was part of the book of Ezra. So, what's the significance of this layman, cupbearer of King Artaxerxes, mentioned only in this book and nowhere else in the Bible?

Nehemiah was a faithful man who loved and feared God. He understood that there were consequences for sin and begged for God's forgiveness for all of Israel. His mission then became to rebuild the wall so that the Jews in exile could return home. Through God's provision, Nehemiah was able to orchestrate the rebuilding of the walls (Chapter 6), God's Law is read and understood (Chapter 8), and the Israelites repented (Chapter 9).

Nehemiah is significant because he truly cared for God's people. For generations the Jews looked for and waited for the promised Messiah to show up as a mighty king, but much like Nehemiah, Jesus came as a loving servant.

Jesus prayed for God to forgive His people (Luke 23:34) and because of Him, the veil would be torn, reconciling us to God. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we can return home to our Father.

Prayer:

Jesus, Thank You for loving us even through our rebellion and disobedience to God. Thank you for loving us in spite of our sin! Thank you for creating the way for us to return to the Father!

Question to consider:

What in your life right now is more important than your relationship with God? What does it look like to lay it down and return to God?

## **The Rebuild**

Ezra 3:11-12

Some of the Israelites have just come back to their land after being in exile for the past 70 years. They come back with a mission to rebuild the temple. Once the temple foundation was laid they worshiped just like they had for the first tabernacle (Leviticus 9) and the first temple (1 Kings 8) but this time, there was no fire or cloud that came down from heaven to signify God would dwell with His people. Even when the temple was finished, there was no sign like this (Ezra 6). For those who had not experienced the first temple dedication there was joy in the finished work. For the elders there was deep grief (so much so they wept). This rebuild was not like the past and it affected their hope for their future.

I can only imagine the pain of expecting God's presence to show up like I had seen before and then it not. But the temple was never the final place that God would dwell with His people. It was always pointing toward His new Kingdom, the one to come where there will be no more tears. In fact, God will be the one to wipe them away (Revelation 21:3-4)! The start of this Kingdom began when Jesus came into the world, died, rose again, and was raised in glory. He brought us back into a right relationship with our Father until we get to dwell with him for all eternity. This is our hope! Find joy in this today!

Prayer:

Father, would we believe so deeply that we will one day be in Your presence for all eternity that we can't help but sing, dance, worship, and exude a deep joy to those around us. Remind us that You are faithful and keep Your promises.

Question to consider:

What have you put your hope in that has not been what you thought it would be? How can you shift your gaze to the One who our hope should be in?

## **SUNDAY**

Matt 26:41

*“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation...”*

Jesus spent the night of his betrayal watching and praying, and inviting his friends to learn from him in his hour of trial. Temptation is the fork in the road at which we choose to walk in the Father’s will or choose to walk our own way. Hebrews 4:15 is clear that Jesus was tempted in every way we are, but was without sin. His disciples were tempted that night and chose sleep rather than watching and praying with Jesus. What did this mean for them? In a few short hours they would be scattered, hiding in fear, denying their involvement with Jesus. They were rested, but unprepared for the trial to come.

We watch and pray through this season of Lent because, like the disciples, we are prone to temptation. Whether it is the sorrow of life, the exhaustion of the world, or the pain of sin, we are so tempted to choose quick relief. It feels easier than what Jesus asked his disciples, and us, to do. But watching and praying with Jesus is the path to light, life, and hope. In our waiting we can experience the father’s presence, see His ultimate control, and find empowerment to walk in trust through the dark nights we face.

Prayer:

Father, teach me to watch and pray through whatever comes. Please strengthen me to say no in the moments of temptation and yes to your promises.

Question to consider:

Where in my life am I experiencing temptation? Where is Jesus inviting me to pray and seek the father in my exhaustion?

03/18/2024

## **The Seeker**

Hosea 1-3

For Hosea to marry a prostitute comes with more strings attached than what we see on the surface. God didn't tell Hosea to go find a retired or previously employed prostitute to wed, it was present tense. This would mean that more than likely even after he wed Gomer, she would continue the same lifestyle. As we continue to read, we see that sure enough, she did just that. And if that wasn't enough, God sent Hosea after her again and Hosea bought her back for himself. In other words, not only was Gomer not worthy of Hosea's love to begin with, but even after their marriage, when she turned her back on him, he still pursued her.

The faithful and unwavering love and pursuit of us by God should leave us completely humbled. Not only did we not deserve His love in the first place when He sent Jesus to die for us, but He did it knowing that we would reject, deny, disobey, neglect, and be straight up ungrateful for this sacrifice as we continued to sin against Him. But just like God told Hosea to pursue Gomer, Jesus pursues us faithfully based on his character, not ours.

Prayer:

Father, Thank you for your unwavering love and pursuit of us even when we don't deserve it and repetitively sin against you. Please take this sin (be specific) that I'm hiding from you and deliver me from it. Give me the strength to overcome it in the future, knowing that you are with me so that I might not sin against you!

Question to consider:

What sin in your life are you hiding from God? What are you afraid to confess? He already knows and He's still seeking you! Acts 17:27 says: "Yet he is actually not far from each one of us..." So turn around and receive him!

## **The Peacemaker**

Joel 3:10, Micah 4:3

In Joel, the Lord tells the nations to prepare for judgment and war. Verse 10 tells us that in this war the plows will be made into swords and pruning knives into spears; however, in Micah, we see a day where the swords are restored to plows, as the Lord brings peace to us. On this day, the nations will cease their fighting, and there will finally be true rest and peace. This is a day our hearts long for. God is a god of peace, who made us to be people of peace.

How will this peace come? We feel the tension and conflict in our world today—each nation has armies with “swords” at the ready. Peace will come fully through Jesus. He is the one who gives His peace to us (John 14:27) and who says that peacemakers will be called sons of God (Matthew 5). He will fully defeat sin and death, and will bring us into a restored heavens and earth where peace will reign eternally. For now, we experience the peace that is a fruit of living in the Spirit, but we look forward with longing to the day when peace will rule and reign forever.

Prayer:

Lord, let your peace come soon!

Question to consider:

What does it look like today to live in the peace Jesus has given you?



03/20/2024

## **The Message**

Jonah 3:10

Even though Nineveh is considered a “great city” by the ancient world, God sees the evil in Nineveh and tells Jonah to take His message against them. Although Jonah attempts to flee this call from God, ending up on an infamous (or in-fish-mous) detour, he eventually tells the people of Nineveh that they will be overthrown. The people of Nineveh hear Jonah, believe God’s word against them, and turn away from their evil and violence. In response to their repentance, God is compassionate and does not bring disaster upon the city.

When Jesus starts His ministry, He also has a message from God, but this time it is not just for Nineveh. Jesus lets everyone know His message in Mark 1:13-14: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe in the gospel.” Along with this greater message, Jesus also has a greater sign for us than Jonah in the cross and the resurrection (Matthew 12). Jesus made a way for us to be called into the Kingdom of God by His life, His death, and His empty tomb. This is such good news for us because we can repent and believe in Jesus who saves.

Prayer:

God, remind us of your compassion and help us to see our sins and bring them to the light.

Question to consider:

Are there any ways you see God calling you to obedience? Are there any ways He is calling you to repentance?

## **The Suffering**

Habakkuk

In Habakkuk, we find judgment looming. God is raising up the Chaldeans (1:6) who are fierce and terrifying (1:7) and come to do violence (1:9). The people have sinned without repentance. They have openly rebelled against God. What is to come for this sin and unrighteousness? The suffering of judgment. God, being just, “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:7). Their sin has been seen in greed (2:6), dishonest business (2:9), injustice (2:12), dehumanization (2:15), and idolatry (2:18). Their sin is flagrant and it is before God and His presence (2:20). God says “the righteous will live by faith” (2:4) and the unrighteousness of their actions reveal their faithlessness to God. Judgment looms - and suffering with it.

In our lives, we find that judgment looms. Our sin is not so different from theirs. Our rebellion is as open as theirs. Our unrighteousness is as plain. We have sinned and judgment looms - it would be just of God to give it. However, we are reminded by Habakkuk that where judgment looms God “will come out to save His people” (3:13). He has come in Christ to make the only way of salvation plain to us in Christ. Without turning to Him, judgment looms. Now, because of Christ, we can join in with Habakkuk: “I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!” (3:18)

Prayer:

Jesus thank you for taking our place, our sin, our judgment, and our suffering. Help us to remember all we have been saved from and rejoice in your Salvation.

Question to consider:

Do you consider the judgment you have been saved from? What could contemplation of our salvation from the just judgment of God for sin form in you?

## **The Hometown**

### Micah 5

Micah was a prophet of God warning of the destruction that was coming because of Israel's disobedience. But out of this destruction there is a future hope in a future ruler. In verse two, we see Micah talk about how "out of Bethlehem" will come someone who will be the ruler of Israel. It says "whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days." Micah is prophesying about the coming Messiah, who would be both God and man. This chapter is seen as one of the most important prophecies in the Old Testament as it reconciles Jesus's human birth with His existence in eternity. This passage also gives us a glimpse into what this Messiah will be like and how he will rule. This future ruler would bring peace and restore Israel.

The awesome truth of this prophecy is that we can see God's heart in the coming of Christ. Not to destroy and bring chaos and division but—as we read in verse 5—to be their peace. Christ is the fulfillment of the serpent crusher spoken of in Genesis 3. Jesus is the one who has come to defeat Satan, death, and sin. Jesus was with God in the beginning and he condescended into humanity in order to right what was wrong. He is both man (born to Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem) to reach us and God (the eternal, Ancient of Days) to save us and be our peace.

#### Prayer:

God thank you for sending Christ to bring peace and reconciliation between humankind and yourself. Thank you for redeeming us and bringing us into your family. And that we would worship you in light of all that you've done for us.

#### Question to consider:

How do you daily allow Jesus and the Gospel to be your peace?

## **The Ministry**

Luke 4:14-30

Jesus had just been baptized, tempted in the wilderness by the devil, and now has “returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.” This is when and where his ministry started, in the city he was raised in and at the synagogue he most likely grew up going to. Jesus began his ministry by reading Isaiah 61:1-2 from a scroll and ended the reading by saying that this Scripture had been fulfilled. But how? How could the one who had just read these verses be the “anointed” like it said in Isaiah? How could this man be the Messiah who came to fulfill all these things?

In the verses Jesus read it said Jesus would bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives and oppressed, sight to the blind, and proclaim the year of Jubilee. Jesus did so much of this in his earthly ministry, and more: he brought good news to our spiritual poverty; he proclaimed liberty from our captivity and oppression to sin; he brought sight to our spiritual blindness; and he canceled our debt by paying for it on the cross. Isn't it amazing to look back at the reading from Isaiah and see he accomplished all of this in his life, death, resurrection, and glorification?

Prayer:

Father, would I not miss the work of Christ that has been done for me. Propel me to see what you are doing and join in on that work to make your Kingdom come. Thank you for inviting us into that work. It is a gift to partner with you - help me remember that.

Question to consider:

What is God inviting you into, asking you to partner with him in?

03/24/2024

## SUNDAY

Matt 26:41

*“...the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

In one pithy statement Jesus pinpoints the difference between his faithful obedience and the disciple's stumbling. The disciples didn't have the willpower, strength, or innate ability to obey the Father on their own, no matter how much they wanted it. This has always been true of humanity: we can't work our way to the perfect obedience the Father deserves, no matter how much we want it. Even face-to-face with the perfect example Jesus laid out and listening to his direct command, his disciples couldn't parrot his obedience.

As we consider the night of Jesus' betrayal and look toward the cross, we can't escape our need for the cross. Even as Christians historically fast and seek God during Lent, our best religious devotion shows us how short we fall of God's holiness. Our spirits may be willing, in some way, to obey God and walk in righteousness, but we can't actually do it on our own. That's the point of the cross! As we approach Good Friday and Easter, let's turn our whole, willing, and weak selves to the savior who came for us.

Prayer:

Father, I come to you in my weakness. I want to want you more than I do, I want to follow you more than I can by my own efforts, and I want to walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel. Please meet me in my weakness and show me how your grace is sufficient for me.

Question to consider:

Where have I been trying to will my way towards obedience, relying on my own strength to obey? Where am I discouraged or disillusioned because of the past failures of my willpower? How can I take these to the cross today?

## **Cleansing Monday**

Mark 11:15-19

It's Monday of Holy Week and Jesus is making it abundantly clear: as He moves toward the Cross this week, He has all nations, tribes, tongues, and people on His mind. We see Jesus's anger at those who would look to swindle those who would come to the temple who weren't Jewish. These merchants would set up in the outer court of the temple, the only area that those who weren't Jewish could come to worship. It was in this place that they would take advantage of these people, overcharging them for the payment of sacrifice. Jesus flips these tables of the obstructors and profiteers of worship and quotes Isaiah 56 which speaks of "the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord... who love His name." They have come to worship—and Jesus will permit nothing to stand in their way.

Christ will cleanse the temple here, but on Friday He will cleanse their sins on the Cross. He will cry out that "it is finished" and the temple veil that separated the innermost court of the temple, the Holy of Holies, will be torn. God is not only available to some anymore, but to all people. Christ will "break down the dividing wall of separation" (Ephesians 2:14) so there is no longer a separation of the nations, but an invitation to all people to be reconciled to God for eternity and to one another through Christ.

Prayer:

God, thank you for making a way for those of us outside of the people of Israel to worship you, know you, and be saved by you through Christ.

Question to consider:

What does it mean for your life that Christ has reconciled you both to God and to one another?

03/26/2024

## **Ambush Tuesday**

Matthew 21:18-27

Jesus was returning to Jerusalem and on His way He grew hungry. As He was walking He came across a fig tree that was full of leaves, but bore no fruit. In that moment He cursed the tree and it withered. This is one of the two destructive miracles that Jesus performed during His ministry. The disciples were amazed at what Jesus had done—and the strength of their amazement would only be matched by the severity of the Pharisees ambush. The Pharisees ambush Jesus with questions to test Him—they were so concerned with rituals and regulations and protecting their power, that they failed to produce real fruit. They had all the knowledge, but lacked faith in the Lord. The Pharisees lack of faith is evident when they ambush Jesus in the temple inquiring about who gave Him authority to speak such things.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees caused them to have to make a decision between answering rightly or saving face in front of the crowds. The Pharisees were more concerned with outward appearances than their inward reality. There is no room for self-righteousness in the Kingdom of God. Jesus, came to save those who know they are inwardly depraved. There is nothing apart from the saving work of Jesus that can cleanse our inward reality. What authority does He have? They will see it come Friday—as He dies on the Cross. They will see it on Sunday—as He is resurrected victoriously.

Prayer:

God, remind us today that it is finished. There is no amount of work that can change the status of those in Christ before the throne.

Question to consider:

In what ways are you still striving to change your outward appearance to please man? Also, take some time to thank God for the work that He has done IN you.

## **Spy Wednesday**

Matthew 26:14-16

Why did Judas betray Jesus? Christians have pondered this for centuries, and many wise men and women have ideas, but the simple truth is that the Bible does not make it explicitly clear. Scripture gives us some insights (the various gospel authors hint that Judas did not view Jesus in the same high regard that the other disciples did, and Luke and John indicate that there was demonic influence involved, money is exchanged for His betrayal, etc.), but for whatever reason, the authors did not see it important to lay out his personal motives as explicitly as we modern readers might like.

The Bible does make it clear, though, what his motive was not: that they weren't close. For a long time, I assumed Judas was just some evil guy who somehow made the cut in Jesus' 12. But a heartbreaking detail is revealed in how Jesus responds to Judas' betrayal in verse 50: "Friend, do what you came to do." Jesus was not betrayed primarily by the crowds, or by a stranger, but by his friend.

Perhaps the question we should be asking is this: why did we betray Jesus? We, God's beloved, chose to go our own way. Though God had blessed with everything good, we chose to seek blessing on our own terms, ensnaring ourselves in the sin curse and ultimately killing Jesus. But take heart: John 13 says that knowing Judas would betray Him, Jesus washes his feet, and Romans 5 tells us that while we were sinning against Jesus, He died for us.

Prayer:

God, help me feel a healthy sorrow for how I've sinned against you—but let that godly sorrow also lead to repentance and rejoicing that my debt has been paid in Jesus.

Question to consider:

Though we may know "on paper" that Jesus loves us and has our best in mind, we constantly sin against him. Why do you think that is?



03/28/2024

## **Maundy Thursday**

Matthew 26:26-29

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus set up a distinct new tradition that the church has followed since, but more than that he revealed how one of the richest traditions in Jewish life was really all about him. Passover was a core piece of identity for the Jewish people. It was a reminder of how God had rescued them and called them His own. It was an annual mark of what it meant to be one of God's people. Jesus takes this powerful moment to revive it around himself. He is the true passover lamb. He doesn't just save God's people from physical slavery, but more than that our slavery to sin. He doesn't just cause death to pass over the house, but swallows up death through His own death. And just as a mixed company of people left Egypt because of faith in the God of Israel, any who trust in Jesus can participate in this family meal - his body broken for you, his blood shed for you.

Today as we remember the last supper, as we look toward Good Friday, let Jesus' words sink in again: His body, his blood for our salvation, freedom, forgiveness, hope.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you that you chose to have your body broken. You chose to shed your blood. I can't fully count that cost, but I can do what you commanded: remember what you've done for me and walk in the new life, identity, and community you earned for me.

Question to consider:

What piece of Jesus' finished work do you need to meditate on today? His total payment for sin through his broken body? Your complete covering in righteousness through his shed blood? The new community of God's people you're part of that Jesus has led from slavery?

## Good Friday

Matthew 27

Dawn breaks after a sleepless night.  
Abandoned by his closest friends, betrayed by one and denied by another.  
Unjustly accused and condemned by hypocritical religious leaders.  
The Perfect Judge of all standing silent as a defendant under Pilate.  
The rebel Barabbas set free, while He took his place.  
The cries of the people have turned from praise and worship to demanding His death.  
Mocked as He's stripped and dressed in a king's costume and crown of thorns.  
Beaten. Spit on. Cursed. Whipped. Crushed. Bruised.  
Nailed to a tree—spikes in his wrists and ankles.  
Thirsty. Suffocating. Bleeding. Crying. Suffering.  
Abandoned... Alone... Forsaken...  
Willingly giving up his Spirit—He breathes his last.  
Dead.  
Pierced in the side.  
Buried in a borrowed tomb.

How could we possibly call this day Good?

How could we dare to call this day Good?

How could we dream of remembering this day as Good?

This day could only be good because of the infinite goodness of the One on that cross.  
This day could only be good because of the infinite love of the One on that cross.  
This day could only be good because of the healing that comes from the wounds of the One on that cross.  
This day could only be good because of the infinite perfection of the One offered as a sacrificial lamb. Paying the price. Bearing our sickness. Carrying our pains. Pierced because of our rebellion. Crushed because of our iniquities. Oppressed and afflicted. Interceding for the rebels. Punished for our sins to purchase our peace.

How could we possibly call this day Good?

How could we have possibly paid this price ourselves?

Christ in our place.  
God saving sinners.  
That is what makes Friday Good.

Prayer:

Take some time to listen to or read the lyrics of How Deep the Father's Love for Us.

Question to consider:

Why should I gain from His reward? // I cannot give an answer // But this I know with all my heart // His wounds have paid my ransom.

03/30/2024

## **Holy Saturday**

Psalm 13

It has been over two thousand years since Christ ascended to Heaven, promising he would return and make all things new. Two thousand years. We know what it means to wait. Imagine for a moment what it felt like for the apostles to wait on that first Holy Saturday. The light of the world seemingly extinguished, leaving them confused, scared, and heartbroken. Their Messiah was dead and hidden away in a tomb. Praise God that was not where the story ended! Just as the disciples rejoiced at the sight of their Savior, alive and victorious, we rejoice not only in the salvation we experience today, but also in what's to come: that final day when Jesus returns, in all of his glory, bringing with Him a new Heaven and a New Earth.

Revelation 21:4 says that on that day “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” When was the last time you thought about what awaits us on the other side of Heaven? About what it will mean to live a life without fear or envy, suffering or sorrow? As we prepare to raise our voices in praise this Resurrection Sunday, let us also rejoice in our hope for what is yet to be: an eternity dwelling with God, the Father.

Prayer:

God, help us to wait with joy in our hearts until that final day when Your kingdom comes and Your will is done.

Question to consider:

What does the empty tomb mean to you? Where have you seen God fulfill His promises in your life?

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