

Following Jesus

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Lebanon
PRESBYTERIAN
Church

Lenten Devotional 2024

Following Jesus

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

The Gospel of Matthew chronicles the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Matthew's gospel also chronicles the experiences of Christ's disciples. As He did with the twelve, today Jesus still calls people to discipleship. This Lenten season, each week the LPC devotional focuses on one aspect of Christ's call on our lives.

On Ash Wednesday and the three days following, we consider the call to **repent**.

The next week's scriptures focus on the **call to follow Him**.

The following week's scriptures concentrate on **learning from His teaching**.

The emphasis for the third full week of Lent is on **understanding the kingdom way of living**.

Next, our devotions call us to **serve faithfully**.

The center of the following week is on **remaining steadfast in acting according to His purpose**.

During Holy Week our devotions converge on **following Him to the cross and beyond**.

May God bless this season as you recommit to following His Son.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Isaiah 30:15

ASH WEDNESDAY

“This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:
‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust
is your strength, but you would have none of it.’”

- ISAIAH 30:15

REPENT AND BE STILL

What was Isaiah calling on the Israelites to do 700 years before the birth of Christ? Return and be still was Isaiah’s guidance from God. But the Israelites had turned their back on God and his guidance. They were living wicked lives, and trying to solve their own crisis in the midst of impending doom. Thus, return and be still they would not! Some even told Isaiah to say something cheerful for a change!

Centuries later, obedience to God requires the same return (repent) and be still as long ago. Asking forgiveness for our sins, trusting and believing in Him and our salvation in Jesus, is what returning to God is about. In achieving a state of stillness, tranquility and quietness, one can, by removing distractions, communicate more closely with God.

For me, in a small room at home, a place where all visual and auditory distractions are removed, there is complete darkness and quiet. There, I feel a stronger sense of closeness with God, a place to pray and ask His forgiveness.

I have strengthened this practice of achieving stillness over the past several years, and so particularly cherish this scripture in Isaiah 30.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are grateful that you love us so much that you will always want us to return to repent, love and worship you. And in our stillness become more confident that we will commit to live a life that is holy and humble. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

RITA POTH

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Matthew 3:1-2

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

- MATTHEW 3:1-2

John the Baptist is the herald for Jesus’s ministry. John calls people to baptism, the water of repentance, and signals one who is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Why the need for repentance? Because “the kingdom of heaven has come near.” What is the kingdom of heaven, and why would repentance be a first step in living a kingdom life?

The Kingdom of Heaven is the rule of God: life under His gracious, sovereign will. The kingdom is near because Jesus himself is the King of that kingdom. Where Jesus reigns, the kingdom of God is present. As the beatitudes make clear, the blessings of life in the Kingdom are dramatically different than “worldly” blessings. Belonging to and living the life of the Kingdom is a new lifestyle altogether.

Repentance acknowledges our awareness of and need for transformation. It is a first and continuing step in a process in which we submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and King of our lives. and so belong to His Kingdom. The ashes that marked our foreheads yesterday (Ash Wednesday) may fade. Each day of life in the kingdom requires the repentance those ashes signify—including today.

PRAYER

Lord, lead us daily to repent of the sins of our lives. Enable us to see, understand, and enter the life of your Kingdom. Amen.

NINA DORSCH

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Matthew 4:1-4

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’

- MATTHEW 4:4

Last year, after months of sickness and pain, I was diagnosed with a chronic digestive disorder. I finally had an answer for why food was making me sick, but because there is no cure, I now have to be very careful about what – and when – I eat. I keep ingredients meticulously separate in my kitchen, scour ingredient labels for anything that will cause a flareup, ask for special accommodations in restaurants (you wouldn’t believe how many things have garlic in them!), and can’t eat when I’m anxious. It requires some vigilance on my part, but the price of not paying attention to what I’m putting into my body is too high – hours, and sometimes days, of pain and sickness.

So if I’m that careful with what my body consumes, why don’t I pay more attention to what I let my mind consume? Nine times out of ten, I worry before I pray. I’ll read an article before I turn to scripture. I call someone on the phone before I ask God for wisdom. And, inevitably, the spiritual sickness hits – usually in the form of crippling anxiety, guilt, or doubt. How much of that could be avoided if I would consume the right things? When Jesus told us we can’t live on bread alone, he was telling us to turn to Him with our needs – anything else will make us spiritually unwell.

Jesus offers us everything that we need to be whole, but we are surrounded by things that tempt us away from our walk with God. When we start trying to go through this life on “bread alone”, let us remember the word of God – our first defense, the lamp unto our feet, and the light unto our path.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the life of Jesus and the beauty of Your word. In a world filled with anxiety and uncertainty, help us to nourish ourselves with Your promises. Create in us a burning desire for your Word in the deserts of our lives. Thank you for being the God who sees us, and never leaves us to navigate this life alone. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

RACHEL GUERIN

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Matthew 4:17

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

- MATTHEW 4:17

Jesus was surely hungry, lonely, and cold in the wilderness those 40 days and nights. And Satan did everything he could to get Him to sin. But His eyes were on the Father, and He told Satan flat out “BEGONE! You shall worship God and serve Him” Period! Pretty clear! And Satan fled.

From that time on, as He returned to begin His ministry, He knew how wily and evil Satan was, how Satan could push men to sin. Jesus also know that He was the light to those who lived in the darkness of sin, those who were in despair and had no hope.

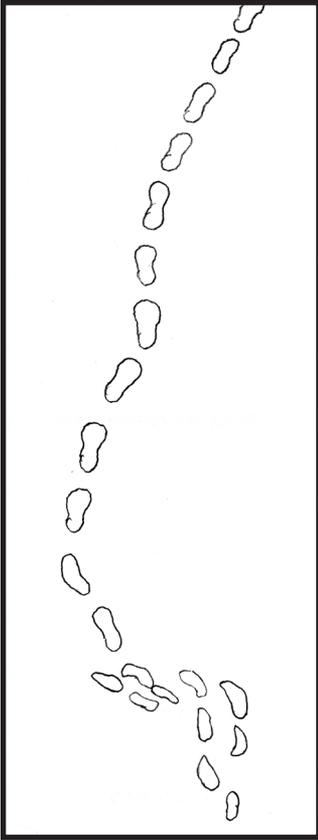
Sin had to be confessed and repented of. And most important to accept Christ as Lord and Savior! “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” This was Jesus’s warning then, and even more so now! Are we ready for His return?

PRAYER

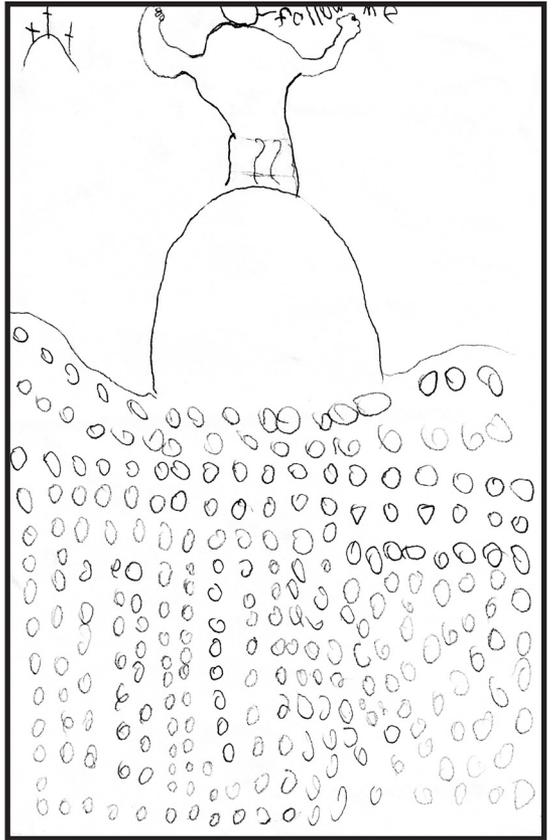
Dear Lord, let your Light fill the dark places in people’s hearts, so that all may repent and share in Your Kingdom. Amen.

CAROL A. HORNSBY

First Sunday of Lent



Artwork by
Elijah Catchpole & Aelin Grimes



Artwork by Matty Strouse

Called to Follow

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Matthew 4:18-22

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

- MATTHEW 4:19-20

When I was in elementary school, we lived in a neighborhood with lots of kids of all ages. In warm weather we would play outside long after dark, in loud raucous games of kickball or tag, partly I think, to stave off our mothers calling us for baths and ending our fun. We were content with life and didn't want any interruption. As an adult, I feel we are often the same way when Jesus calls us to discipleship. We are basically 'good' law-abiding people, we usually go to church, our work is challenging, we are content with our families and homelife, and we don't want anything else intruding on our busy independent lives. We are kings and queens in our castles, masters of our fates.

So, it is little wonder that many of us only come to discipleship when illness or some other catastrophe upsets the balance, or when we go on a mission trip or a spiritual retreat like Emmaus. In other words, only when we step out of our daily routines for a period can we effectively hear Jesus calling. The other sure way to hear Jesus is to pray and read the Word regularly. In this season of Lent, of renewal, if you are only a believer of Jesus and not yet a disciple, or if your discipleship has grown cold, I hope you will enter into the silence and accept what Jesus is asking.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Please help us to hear your voice when you call and to answer obediently for whatever task you put in our lives. In your name we pray. Amen.

INGA KIMPLE

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

Matthew 8:18-20

When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

- MATTHEW 8:18-20

Imagine having nowhere to lay your head. Jesus, the Son of Man, truly human, truly God, had to live out that humble existence in our world. He had no permanent home base in his ministry and moved from place to place relying on the hospitality of others, all to fulfill the will of God for his life. The scribes were wealthy and somewhat entitled. Perhaps the scribe offered to follow Jesus thinking it would be a shoo-in to His kingdom, setting himself up for glory on earth.

However, there is a cost to following Jesus. There is no earthly glory and often there is earthly suffering instead. What have you had to endure because you are believer, and how far are you willing to be all in? Can we forsake all to follow Jesus and give up that which stands in the way? This is my prayer for all of you and for me each and every day on earth so that our eternal home will provide that place to lay our head and find peace and rest in Christ's presence.

PRAYER

Heavenly father, please give us the will and strength to truly follow you no matter what personal sacrifice it requires. We want to live with you forever. Amen.

PATTY CORFMAN

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

- MATTHEW 9:9-13

Go and learn is Jesus' call to action, not only for the Pharisees of His day but for us today.

Go and learn... who Jesus is.

Go and learn... why Jesus came.

Go and learn... why you are called by Him.

Find Jesus in the scriptures... then come and follow Him.

PRAYER

Let us Pray. Merciful God, may your Holy Spirit guide us through the scriptures to learn of your Son. May we follow him through paths of righteousness to claim your gift of eternal life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TOM WAY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

- MATTHEW 11:28-30

Isn't it wonderful that we serve a God who loves us and wants to carry our burdens. These verses were part of my dad's celebration of life (Donna). He didn't have an easy life. His father had a stroke when he was twelve. So he always worked from an early age. He also suffered with two bouts of cancer. The last one was terminal. After he got the diagnosis, naturally he was afraid of dying. One night in a dream, God reassured him he was going to a peaceful, beautiful place. He had such peace after that. God really lifted that burden of fear from him.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, during the season of Lent may we remember that you always want to carry our burdens. Thank you for loving us so much. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DICK & DONNA KAUFMAN

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Matthew 16:24-27

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

- MATTHEW 16:24-27

When we come to Christ, we are filled with joy, hope, and wonder. Then reality hits; following Jesus means giving up self. Following Him means seeking His will not ours. Following Him means sacrifice, as He sacrificed for us!

Do we follow His path for our lives, or our own? Instead of reaping the rewards of His Kingdom, we seek wealth, prestige, and pleasure. These things are temporary and can be lost so easily! They do not save us, give peace, or hope. But accepting His salvation does!

Taking up His cross and giving up our will isn’t easy. But the rewards are eternal! Are we ready to follow Him?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, Help us to see the joy of walking with you and not in the world! We put our hearts and souls in Your loving hands. Amen.

CAROL A. HORNSBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Matthew 19:28-30

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

- MATTHEW 19:28-30

The twelve tribunal leaders doing the judging are the twelve disciples. Jesus challenges our sincerity by asking us to give all our wealth and follow Him. Our refusal demonstrates how easy it is to prefer wealth to dependence on God. God gives us all things for our enjoyment and pleasure yet He does not want us to live or die for things. He wants us to have the correct perspective; living life with open hands and not grasping hold of earthly possessions too tightly.

Verse 29 references God and the gospel. Christ tells us that following Him is radical and extreme. We must be willing to leave everything behind. He tells us that there are both present and eternal rewards when we follow Him. He is saying that the only way to achieve eternal life is by focusing on Him - our true spiritual identity, over any and all human distractions. We are to find sufficiency in Christ, not in our earthly possessions. Like Jesus' parable, in order to get into heaven, we must be like little children who are free of earthly baggage.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to focus only on You and what You would have us do each day. In your Son's name we pray and believe. Amen.

JAN WATSELL

Second Sunday of Lent



Artwork by Allie Rachedi



Artwork by Aelin Grimes

Learning

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Matthew 6:9-13

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

- MATTHEW 6:9-13

This is the relatively short answer Jesus gave to the disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray. Over the years it has become known as the Lord's Prayer and has been repeated countless times since the Lord gave it to them. Unfortunately, it is often repeated by rote without the participants really considering what they are praying. I personally think that the Lord gave this to us as a model prayer, and not so much as a prayer to be prayed every time we pray. David Platt has a very insightful way of looking this prayer. He calls his view the Four G's- which stand for God's glory, gifts, grace and guidance. These are the points Jesus is teaching us to observe when He gave them this prayer. His prayer begins by giving God glory. The prayer then shifts to petitioning the Lord for His bountiful gifts. The emphasis then is on His grace as we ask for forgiveness. Then we pray for His guidance as we ask not to be led into temptation. Whenever we pray, let's try to remember those four points. They will lead to our prayers being pleasing in the sight of the Lord

PRAYER

Lord help us to pray always being led by the Holy Spirit. Thank you Lord for giving us your precious guidance through your answer to the disciples request. Amen.

RON WARNCKE, M.D.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Matthew 7:24-27

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

- MATTHEW 7:24

Jesus is wrapping up His Sermon on the Mount, His longest recorded discourse, and leaves His listeners with a choice—to either ignore His words or put them into practice. Then He simply explains the consequences of both responses through the parable of the wise and foolish builders. Jesus illustrates it’s too easy for us to stop with an awareness of how we are to live and not progress to application or obedience. After all, it’s much easier to talk the walk than it is to walk the talk. Indeed, James seems to echo Jesus’ words by saying, *“faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”* James 1:17.

Did you note the act of skillfully building on a rock foundation didn’t mean one would escape the rainy torrents, floods and high winds? True, but a life built on Jesus, our firm foundation, will help us weather the storms of life and prevent falling victim to them because we’re anchored to Him. In spite of the claims of those preaching the prosperity gospel that faith will result in good health and wealth, Jesus makes no promise our lives will be trouble-free. In fact, He tells us the opposite. However, He does promise to always be there for us, never abandon us and that all things will work for our good!

Lest we have remorse for the fool in the parable on account of his “ignorance,” the Bible defines a fool as one misusing the intelligence God has given him. A fool isn’t ignorant. Proverbs tells us a fool refuses to listen to wisdom or learn from discipline. *“Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them.”* (Prov. 26:27). Rather than learning from his mistakes, a fool repeats them. Net, we should pity the fool’s stubbornness and persistence, not his ignorance.

PRAYER

Our Heavenly Father, When we reflect on the parable of the wise and foolish builders, we have a strong desire to be wise builders. Yet, if we’re honest, there are too many times we’ve acted like the foolish builder. Please forgive us and renew our strength through the power of your Spirit so we might grow into more faithful and obedient followers of Jesus and His teachings. Amen.

STEVE NEWBY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Matthew 11:25-26

At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.”

- MATTHEW 11:25-26

You’ve heard the expression, “You can’t see the forest for the trees.” You probably have used it yourself to describe someone’s blindness to something that should be so obvious. Well, if Jesus was the forest, what were the trees that kept people from recognizing him as the Messiah? The learned scholars and priests who were well versed in the Law and the Old Testament prophecies should have known, yet they did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God. What caused their blindness?

There are still many people in the world today who can’t see the forest, who do not know Jesus, and they are blind to the truth of God’s promises and His love for all His children. When we stop trying to control everything ourselves, when we let go of our need to fix our problems ourselves, when we admit we don’t have all the answers, when we believe and trust in Jesus to be our strength, comfort, and our Savior – the trees thin out and we see very clearly Jesus is the heart and center. He is the forest. And we are able to see how God’s plan to save His creation (us) was pointing directly to Jesus from the beginning.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we acknowledge that we are sometimes blind; that we try to control all aspects of our life when we should turn everything over to you and trust in your divine wisdom, justice, and love. We humbly acknowledge that it took the sacrifice of your Son, who was without sin, to save us and allow us to have a relationship with you and the promise of eternal life with you. We ask that you please keep our eyes and hearts open to your Word and truth. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

VICKI DALZELLE

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29

Matthew 13:13; 16-17

This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

- MATTHEW 13:13; 16-17

When I was approached to write this devotional, I froze like a deer in the headlights. I worried that I wouldn't know what to write but then I prayed and God told me to write what was in my heart. This is it.....

I try my best to live my life for Jesus and I do this by walking by faith. Jesus is always in my heart so I decided to explain my "heart" more fully.

H is for **Humble** and to be reverent of God's word

E is for **Earnest**, to be focused and sincere in sharing God's word

A is for **Absolute**, a total and complete genuine sincerity in my love for God

R is for **Ready** and **Radiant**, to be prepared and emit a joyful aura in sharing how God has blessed my life

T is for **Thankful**, reflecting on God's blessings and also being thankful for God NOT answering your prayers because He knows His plan for us

PRAYER

Dear God, please help us to have a heart like Jesus and please help us to help others focus on Your word. Let us be a lighthouse. Amen.

JULIE CRAGO

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

Matthew 18:1-4

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

- MATTHEW 18:1-4

How often do we as adults minimize what a child observes or tries to tell us? We think or say in a condescending manner “what do they know? They are just a child.” Of course we are not trying to be mean, we are just being practical; after all, we know better since we are adults. However in this scripture, Jesus is reminding us that we don’t know better and that we need to remember and live in that “child-like” state of not knowing everything and relying upon the Lord for everything. One of my greatest personal struggles – self-sufficiency – points to how far I need to move in that direction; can you relate?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word and thank you for the children in our lives. May those children continue to serve as reminders for us to shift our thinking into being like children and relying upon you in all that we do. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

SHELLEY BONDURANT

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

Matthew 21:18-22

Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done.’”

- MATTHEW 21:21

As I read Matthew 21:21, the word faith stands out. Do I have the kind of faith that makes me righteous like Abraham? I strive to, but I don't hit the mark – not all the time anyway. But when I do, WOW – God does great things.

About twenty years ago, a friend asked Doug and me to take in a seventeen year-old, black South African young man for a year. He would be sponsored by Athletes In Action – all we needed to do was let him live with us and become part of our family. I told him I did not know – he asked me to pray about it.

At the time our children were eight and twelve. We were concerned about bringing someone we didn't know into our home and letting him influence our boys. We decided “no” and moved on. One Saturday evening, we were getting ready to go to church with my sister when the phone rang and it was the gentleman asking again about housing this young man from South Africa. “Argh” I thought, “Why did I answer the phone?” He asked me if we were considering letting him stay with us. I expressed we did not think it was a great idea. He then asked if I had prayed about it – I had not. He asked me again to pray.

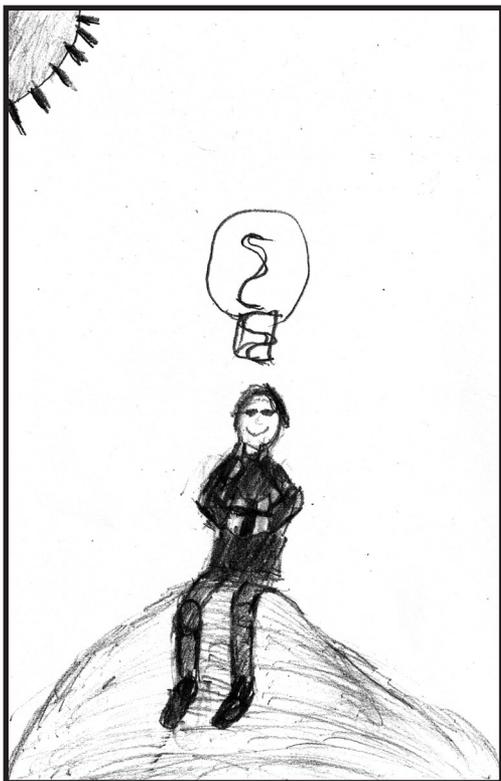
That evening at church, the Pastor's entire sermon was relating that God doesn't care what kind of house you live in, but who you invite to live in your home. And God doesn't care what kind of car you drive, but who you drive in your car. Needless to say, the young man stayed with us for a year and he was one of our all-time biggest blessings. His name is Ntokozo; we call him Zo. Zo is a kind, sweet, gentle soul that grew up in the worst of situations – but had and has such faith. We are so thankful God prompted us to have faith and invite Zo into our home.

PRAYER

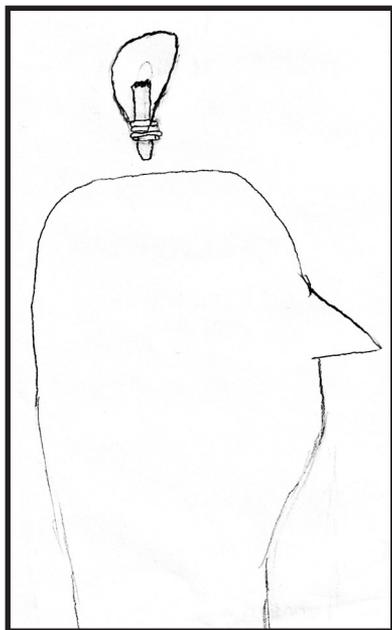
In moments of doubt, let our faith be a steady flame. May we find strength in trusting Your plans, and may our hearts rest in the assurance of Your unwavering love. In Your name we pray, Amen.

REGINA MORGAN

Third Sunday of Lent



Artwork by Allie Rachedi



Artwork by Aaron Johnson

Understanding

MONDAY, MARCH 4

Matthew 13:36-37

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.”

- MATTHEW 13:36-37

I'm grateful that scripture includes the fact that the disciples often pulled Jesus aside after he was teaching to ask him what in the world he was talking about. Jesus spoke in parables, which often revolved around everyday situations that the people of the time would find familiar. Yet, there was still an explanation needed by those closest to the Lord. The disciples wanted that extra confirmation about what Jesus was trying to explain. They wanted to understand who Jesus was calling them to be. Jesus consistently sowed “good seed”, and just as the disciples, when we seek to understand who He is and who He is calling us to be, we become good soil.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to be good soil for your teaching. Help us to read your Word and follow your law. Equip us to follow your lead and to understand where you are calling each one of us to seek you. Lord in this Lenten season, help us to let your word seep deeper into our souls, to allow good fruit to be produced. Amen.

PASTOR STEPHANIE POBLENZ

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

Matthew 13:47-51

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied.

- MATTHEW 13:47-51

As the church of Jesus Christ, we are fishing for people. We will catch all kinds of people – some will believe and some will not. God will sort them out in the end through His angels. Those that believe will be with God for eternity. Those that do not believe will be without God for eternity.

Pretty scary stuff. Obviously, we need to be diligent to teach what it means to believe.

But I can't help but wonder if the disciples really did understand all these things – or if they were just too afraid to ask questions. We have the advantage of the Holy Spirit, and we still struggle to grasp the full meaning of Jesus' parables. But because we have the Holy Spirit, we can ask Him to open our understanding when we read a scripture that is confusing, or if we just have questions about how to apply it. We can be sure that He will reveal to us what we need to know if we keep seeking.

PRAYER

God, you are so good! Thank you for your Holy Spirit to guide and instruct us. Help us to always seek greater understanding from You. Amen.

KAREN KILPATRICK

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

Matthew 15:1-2;10-11

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

- MATTHEW 15:1-2;10-11

Jesus always seems to have a perspective that is more profound than our human view. In verses 1-2, the Pharisees complain that Jesus’ disciples break tradition by not washing their hands before they eat, implying that this makes them unclean before God. It seems to be human nature to want to have rules that tell us something simple and specific that we can do to please God. Washing our hands before eating definitely seems like a good idea from an earthly perspective, but most of us today don’t believe that this practice is related to our spiritual cleanliness. Of course, there are rules in scripture that we need to respect and use to guide our behavior, but that in itself is not enough.

In verse 11, Jesus points out that it is what comes out of a person’s mouth, not what goes in, that can make the person “unclean”. Making sure that what comes out of our mouths honors God is so much more challenging! It requires us to be constantly aware of and willing to champion God’s perspective on anything that might be a topic of conversation with others. This in turn requires us to not only be educated in His Word, but also be in frequent communication with Him in prayer seeking His guidance on all aspects of life. We also need to be alert for the nudging of the Holy Spirit during conversations.

This is a pretty tall order, and one that I know I fail at often. After a conversation, I often wish I had either said less or in the case of a “God Space” conversation that I had said more. I’m grateful that I can ask for and be assured of forgiveness when this happens and that striving for His standard provides an opportunity for growth.

PRAYER

Lord, help us as we constantly strive to honor you with everything that comes out of our mouths. Help us listen for nudges from your Holy Spirit when we aren’t sure what to say. Amen.

MARGE CUNNINGHAM

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

Matthew 16:8-12

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- MATTHEW 16:8-12

I love the smell of warm bread fresh from the oven. It’s a comfort for my senses and it gives me a warm feeling all over. I personally prefer a white bread, but there are wheat breads, rye breads, potato breads, sweet breads, and many others. And just like bad yeast can ruin any bread, wrong teaching can misdirect us into the wrong life.

Every day, directly or indirectly, we receive suggestions and recommendations of how to live. We hear TV programs, music, discussions around us, comments, and criticisms that affect how we think and make decisions. If we don’t focus our thoughts on Jesus, and fill our time in the Word, we will easily be lead astray and ruined.

Jesus wants us to know Him and follow Him, but we can’t if we get distracted with false or wrong learning. Study the Bible and share it, by word or deed, with everyone you come in contact with. Then Heaven will gather many more basketfuls of the overflow of the Bread of Life.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for giving us your Word. Thank you for coming to earth and being an example for us to live our lives. Continue to guide us daily and arm us with the words and actions to show others your love. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

LARRY BRACEY

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

Matthew 16:13-17

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

- MATTHEW 16:13-17

WHO IS JESUS?

At this point in Matthew’s gospel, the disciples had heard Jesus teaching and witnessed His miraculous healings for some time. They have experienced Jesus as a rabbi and a teacher. But they knew He was more than that. So they responded with what they heard others claim: that Jesus is some kind of reincarnation of one of the Old Testament prophets, foreshadowing the account of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17. So Jesus rephrases his question: “Who do **you** say I am?”

In a moment of God-given clarity, Peter states that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised one who will deliver God’s people, a savior who is Prophet, Priest, and King.

Jesus still asks that question of each of us. WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?

So many descriptors come to mind: friend; guide; source of strength and healing; confidant; lover of my soul; the one who heals me in body, mind, and spirit; the one who leads me to heaven. Jesus is all of those things, and so much more.

Peter got it right.

PRAYER

Father God, day by day reveal your Son to me, in me, and through me. Enable me to confess Jesus, as Lord of my life, my all in all. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

Matthew 17:1-5

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

- MATTHEW 17:5

The setting of this verse takes place on a hill-side where Jesus had led Peter, James and his brother John, that was quiet and away from the crowds who had been following them. In the solitude God spoke revealing Jesus again as His beloved son just as He had done at Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist three years before (Matthew 3:17). Following God’s pronouncement of Christ’s glory the disciples began making plans to construct shrines at the location of the Transfiguration, where they had become eyewitnesses of Christ’s majesty.

It is so easy to become spiritually distracted. The disciples became distracted with their own plans. Do you find yourself focusing on everything else but Christ and the work He is doing around you? Are you so eager to “get to work” that you have not clearly heard what is on God’s heart? Does the Father need to remove from your life those things that are proving to be a distraction to you? Do you need to refocus on Jesus?

PRAYER

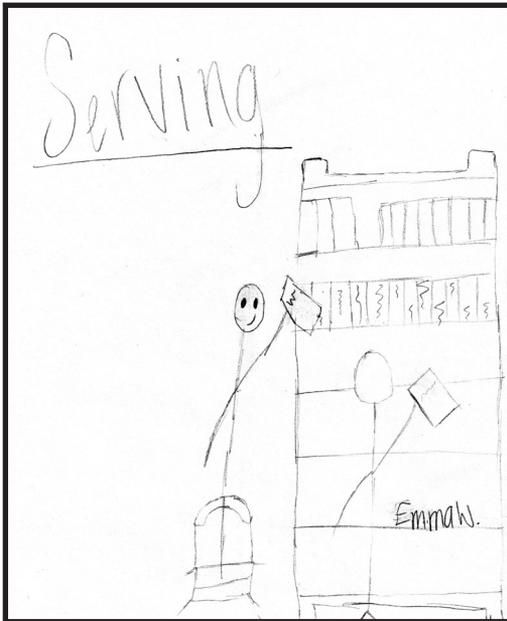
Heavenly Father, All that we are and all that we have is a gift from you. May always seek to serve you first in all we do, your will for our lives is our highest good. Amen.

SHAREN BENNER

Fourth Sunday of Lent



Artwork by Jayden Cornett



Artwork by Emma Wong

Serving

MONDAY MARCH, 11

Matthew 11: 2-4

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see.”

- MATTHEW 11: 2-4

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to our faith is doubt, and that is something Jesus tackles head on in this passage. When John, in prison and despairing that perhaps all his work was for nothing, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the Messiah or if they need to keep looking. Jesus doesn't just give the answer.

And this is true of much of his interactions with people; he does not spoon-feed simple answers. Instead he tells the disciples to go and bear witness of everything they have seen to John so that they can judge for themselves.

And in that same way, he is telling us “Look, look at all that I have given you and all that you have witnessed. Do you believe, or are you still waiting for a man made miracle?”

We are also seeing a time in Jesus' journey when he has been apart from his disciples, traveling alone or in a smaller group after giving them wisdom and training and the guidance to do what they are called to do without him. He knows that his time on earth is coming to an end, but that while they will not be with him they will also not be alone. He has given them the tools to prepare for their work, and in the same way he has given us the same tools for our work in the world today.

There is no shame in being a Christian, even when it seems unpopular in the mainstream. And when doubt rears up, when we are not sure that the walk we are walking is right or that God is who he promises he is, this passage is calling us to look on what He has promised and done.

PRAYER

Lord, when we doubt, let us turn to your Word so that we may be reminded of all You have done and of your faithfulness in keeping your promises. Amen.

SARAH JAYNES

TUESDAY MARCH, 12

Matthew 14:13-16

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

- MATTHEW 14:13-16

As I look at my calendar, I see that almost every day has something written in for me to do. Soccer, doctor appointments, visits with family, dinner with friends, church meetings, vet appointments. It's starting to feel overwhelming as I try to find a single day when the five members of my family can do something together that doesn't involve one of them playing soccer. More importantly than all of these things is finding time to be in the presence of the Lord, to invite Him in to my chaos on purpose, and spend time focusing on what He wants for me, and for my family, and turning my worry and fear over to Him. It's not really about finding time, it's about making time to withdraw from the daily chaos and spend time in my relationship with Him. Jesus made his relationship with God a priority, and we should be doing the same.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are so grateful for the busy, full lives we have. As we move through this season, may we be constantly reminded to spend time in Your presence and strengthen our relationship with You. In Your Son's sweet and loving name, Amen.

COURTNEY WILLIAMS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

Matthew 20:25-28

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.

- MATTHEW 20:26

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

I remember one of the first times I was ‘promoted’ and put in charge of a group of individuals. I was a Boy Scout and became the patrol leader of about eight boys. I was so excited to finally get some authority. I was in charge and would be able to do the things that I wanted to do. I had a lot of great ideas that I knew everyone would agree with and it was going to be great! Well, it really didn’t work out that way. Several of the boys did not listen to me or even agree with me. I had to yell at them to get things done my way and when they disagreed, I had to remind them that I was the one put in charge.

Being a boss, a leader, the one with authority; is not a bad thing. You should feel blessed that people have the confidence in you to lead. And each person has their own leadership style – some good and some bad. Jesus knew His disciples would be called to lead someday, and He gave them so many great examples on how to do that. In Matthew Chapter 20, he shows them how some rulers “Lord over the people” and “exercise authority over them.” He then continues and tells them “Not so with you.” He shared that if you want to be a “Great Leader,” learn to serve them and meet their needs. Each of us has several opportunities to be a great leader; in our jobs, community, or family and friends. When we are blessed to be in these roles, let’s remember to not be the boss over them, but figure out the best ways to serve them.

PRAYER

Lord, as we continue to undertake the role of leader let us be affirmed by the servant leadership we witness in your son Jesus. Let us walk in the path He has set and let those who will, follow. Let our greatest passion be compassion. Our greatest strength love. Our greatest victory the reward of peace. In leading let us never fail to follow. In loving let us never fail. Amen.

JOHN UNTENER

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

Matthew 23:8-12

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

- MATTHEW 23:8-12

Five seemingly straightforward statements spoken by Jesus to the crowds and disciples. I can just imagine the initial comments:

“What? No Titles? How is anyone going to know what I can do and how I measure up?”

“Wait a minute - the greatest can’t be a servant!”

“What do you mean? I don’t exalt myself and don’t need to be humbled!! I’m letting people know my extensive skill set!!

So often we only hear part of what is being said. Jesus had been pointing out the flaws of the Pharisees and how they had traded their faith for a facade. And He now wanted the disciples and the crowd to know they were accountable only to Christ. The living Christ that came to serve. The Christ that showed them how to serve by how he lived and cared for others. The Christ that changed the act of serving others into the most noble pursuit one could follow.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the many wonderful souls we have at LPC who serve You by serving this body of Christ. May we continue to strive to be more like Christ during this season of Lent and all the days that follow. Amen.

CLAUDIA CUNNINGHAM

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

Matthew 25:19-21

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’”

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”

- MATTHEW 25:19-21

Matthew 25: 19-21 is the story of a wealthy man who is going on a long journey. Before he left, he gave some of his talents to three servants. A talent refers to a large sum of money. When the man returned home, he found that the first two servants invested and profited from the talents given to them. They were rewarded by the master. The third servant feared he’d lose the talent, so he hid it until the master returned. His talent was taken from him and given to the servant that had made the largest profit on his investment.

I’m not a trained singer, so I can’t join the choir. I’m not fluent in the Scripture, so I can’t teach the Word to others. I don’t have experience working with kids, so I can’t help with Children’s Ministry. It’s easy to focus on what we cannot do.

This parable isn’t about money, but our relationship with God. If we use our own abilities to lovingly invest in God, the reward is a relationship with Him.

PRAYER

Gracious Father, Help us to invest our time and creative talents to worship you. May we be fulfilled in knowing we are using our gifts to praise your name. Amen.

SARAH GOODWIN

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

Matthew 25:34-40

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

- MATTHEW 25:40

I know that at one point or another, all of us have done something or said something that, immediately afterward, we have thought, “well, that wasn’t very nice -or-that wasn’t a very good idea.” And likewise, when we say something nice or do something good for someone else, it makes us feel pretty good!

How often do we think that everything we say and do affects God?

It only makes sense. When we are hurt, he cries for us. When we are celebrating a success, he is filled with joy and could not be happier for us.

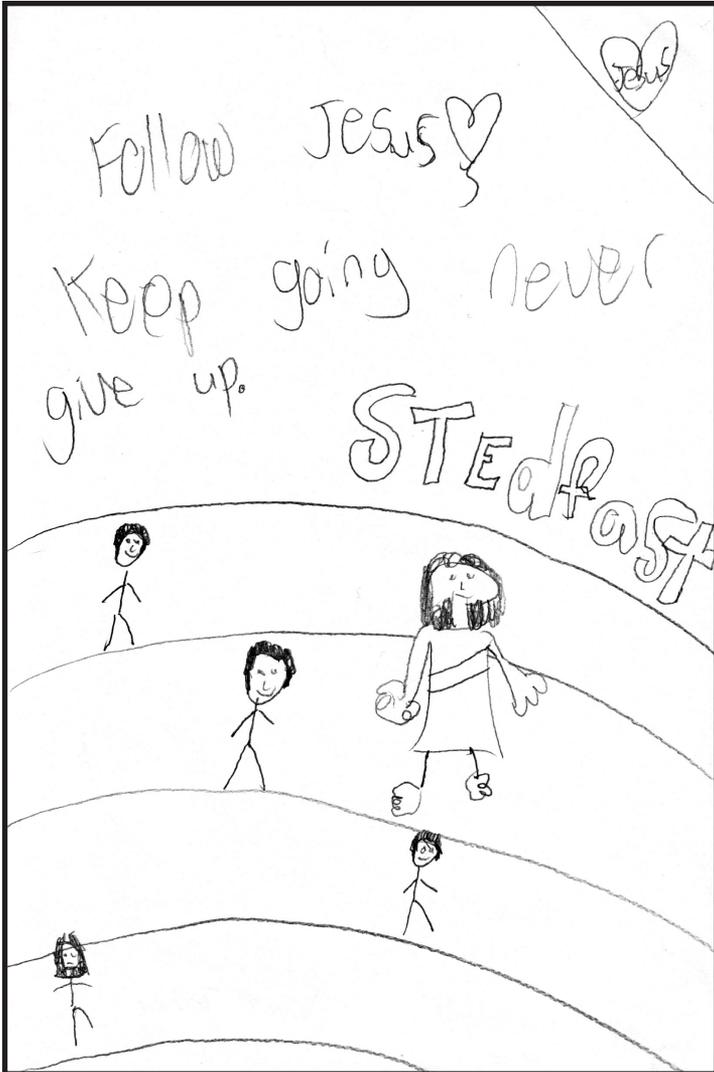
I recently had the opportunity to help someone that has been ill for some time. They were so overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and support from their LPC family. This wonderful opportunity reminded me that my assignment from God is to love and to serve and to give Him the glory for all that I do.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, may we continue to be Your hands and Your feet and spread Your love and light with others. May we be reminded that all that we say and do should be done in love and to Your glory. It is in Your precious Son’s name that we pray. Amen.

CHRISTINE OLDING

Fifth Sunday of Lent



Artwork by Wyatt Tabor

Steadfast

MONDAY, MARCH 18
Matthew 9:35-38

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

- MATTHEW 9:37-38

Jesus, the son of God, is asking for help! He taught, proclaimed the good news, healed every disease and sickness, but “when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them...” Certainly, he had the power to solve all their problems. But maybe he was constrained by his human form that he could not spend the time with each individual. Maybe if he instantly removed their harassment they would not seek the true solution, the peace of God. And they would not be aware of or nor acknowledge God’s grace.

Whatever his reasons, he invited ordinary humans to join him in compassion for the lost and helpless. First, pray to God to send workers. Then respond to that call from God to be a worker in the harvest field. How glorious that we can participate and work alongside Jesus. With the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit we can be useful to God.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for allowing us to share in the compassion of Christ for the harassed and helpless. Enflame us and empower us to witness to your love and the good news of the kingdom. Please send more workers into your harvest fields. In the example of Jesus we pray. Amen.

JOE MCKENZIE

TUESDAY, MARCH 19
Matthew 10:22

“You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

- MATTHEW 10:22

What a promise! Am I ready for this?

On one hand, deep down in my spirit, I find myself excited and joyful as I meditate about this verse. I do love Jesus! And following Him is worth paying any price.

On the other hand, my real responses to real people surface in everyday life. There, I find myself both victorious and failing, sometimes responding poorly even to inconveniences hardly worth comparing to persecution.

Thankfully, enduring to the end does not require perfection, but humility and repentance. I take comfort in Peter’s painful self-discovery when he declared himself loyal to death and then betrayed Jesus (Mt. 26:33ff.). He repented and served Jesus boldly after that, even giving his life for his faith.

PRAYER

Lord, I say yes to you; I want to follow you at any cost. Forgive me where I have fallen short. I receive your grace and strength to endure to the end. Amen.

DANIEL SACHS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

Matthew 14:25-33

“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

- MATTHEW 14:29-30

By this time, Jesus had performed many miracles in the presence of the disciples. They knew that he was the Messiah. Yet, there were still times, when they fell back into their wordly ways and didn't realize that Jesus would take care of them. It is then that he tells them “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”

How many times a day do we forget that he is in charge and will take care of us? I know for me, that is more often than I would like. Don't be afraid, don't worry. Turn it over to God in prayer. He will take care of us. Pretty easy right??

Not really. Look at Peter, he got out of the boat and was walking on water! When he suddenly realized what he was doing, he became afraid and started to sink. He cried out ‘Lord Save me!’ And guess what, Jesus did just that. The message is clear, Jesus will do the same for us as long as we believe in him, strive to live our life like he lived his and turn our problems over to him.

Not being in control and allowing Jesus to guide us every second of every day is the hard part. Turn to him in prayer. It doesn't have to be a long drawn out prayer. Just a simple one. “Lord help me right now.” I find that this really helps me get through my daily life here on earth. Let him know, that you trust in him, realize that he is there for you and will take care of you.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, Please help me to be steadfast in my love and trust in you. And help me to remember that you will always take care of me. Amen!

BERNIE UCHTMAN

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

Matthew 21:18-21

Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

- MATTHEW 21:21-22

As I prayed before writing this devotional, I said to God, “If only I truly realized the power of prayer, I would make it a priority. Help me to know how powerful prayer is.” I had not yet chosen the verses I would write about but I kept being drawn to Matthew 21:18-22. I did not know what this passage was about until I opened my Bible after I had prayed. The Holy Spirit confirmed that these were indeed the verses I was to talk about because the subject was prayer. In verse 21, Jesus tells the disciples that they have the authority to tell a mountain to throw itself into the sea. Then in verse 22, He says, “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” Isn’t that amazing? It’s so amazing that it’s kind of hard to believe, right? I wonder what would happen if we really believed what those verses say? What would happen if we abandoned our fears and doubts and dared to ask Him for the impossible?...you know, those things that are personal to us, the hard things that we have given up on and render hopeless, the burdens we quietly carry and can never lay down... the nagging day-to-day “impossible” things that God surely couldn’t change. WHAT IF WE BELIEVED God could actually do something miraculous in our own lives? How would that change our prayers? Our thoughts? Our lives?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, Help us to give you our “impossibles”. Teach us the power of prayer so that we may not neglect one of your most precious gifts and so we may know your deep, deep love for us. Show us that when we step out in faith, believing and hoping in You and asking for the “impossible” that You will meet us with Your grace and splendor. Embolden us to ask for the mountains to move in our personal situations. Help us to remain steadfast and faithful, trusting that You hear us and are working out Your purposes. In your precious name, Amen.

AMY BOYER

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

Matthew 26:31-35

But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

- MATTHEW 26:35

Have you ever been called “sheepish”? Phillip Keller in *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* notes that “...it is no mere whim on God’s part to call us sheep. Our behavior patterns and life habits are so much like that of sheep it is well nigh embarrassing” (p. 65). Handel’s *Messiah* includes a chorus based on prophecy in Isaiah 53: 6—“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

As we think about today’s devotional scripture, a pertinent question arises: When challenged about “knowing” Jesus or being a follower of Jesus, what is our response?

Jesus was being put on trial and condemned for calling people to follow a higher, holy power rather than the established order of his society. Admitting to being a follower of Jesus might lead to trouble with the powers that be. Certainly, Peter didn’t want to get into trouble—hence, his denial of knowing Jesus. Similarly, and increasingly, our society relegates faith in Christ to not being “woke.” Public statements of faith are denigrated by current social norms. Church affiliation and attendance is decreasing. So the challenge Jesus presented to Peter (and all the disciples) is as apt today as then: Am I willing to endure the scorn or castigation of others in declaring Christ as our Lord and Savior?

PRAYER

Lord, the temptation to be quiet about our faith is great. Make us steadfast and bold in owning you as our Lord and Savior. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

Matthew 24:3-7

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

- MATTHEW 24:3-7

It's easy to see how these verses describe today's world. Wars, famines, and earthquakes are featured on the nightly news! What may be harder to see is how they also describe the Holy Spirit. There is both instruction ("Watch out!") and reassurance (we are not "alarmed.")

Jesus called the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of Truth." (John 14:17) When we listen to the Holy Spirit, we are not deceived. When we read our Bibles, He is with us, reminding us that what we read is Truth.

Jesus also called the Holy Spirit the "Comforter." (John 14:16) We read our newspapers and our first instinct is alarm! But our Comforter is there with us, reminding us that everything will be all right. We have no need to fear, because the end – when Jesus returns in glory – is still to come.

By relying on the Spirit's help, we are neither deceived nor alarmed. In His strength, we remain steadfast. Instruction and reassurance, caution and comfort – our loving Father knows we need them both.

PRAYER

Gracious Father, thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to guide and comfort us. Teach us to be steadfast and unafraid as we await that glorious day when Jesus returns! Amen.

LINDA HENTSCHEL

SUNDAY, MARCH 24

Matthew 21:8-11

PALM SUNDAY

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

- MATTHEW 21:10-11

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asking, “Who is this?”; The crowds laid their garments in the street, broke off palm branches, shouting and glorifying our “Messiah-King” as he entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He was the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee, fulfilling Moses’s promise:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers it is to him you shall listen.”

As Jesus ascended into Jerusalem, he wept tears of mercy and sorrow over His city and His people, because they would not accept his terms for peace and redemption for their sins. He was fully aware of the coming devastation that would come upon Jerusalem and the temple. With great agony, he cried, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” All of Christ’s travail went unnoticed by the crowds.

The scripture tells us that “the whole city was moved.” But, much like today, many people still dismiss Jesus as the Messiah. They do not know him in their hearts and are no different than the religious rulers of the Jews during Jesus’ time.

On this glorious day of Palm Sunday, let’s cry out with all of our hearts to the Lord Jesus, who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and Shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, how can we thank you for your love and mercies but follow you in each step of our lives? We humbly ask that you grant us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of your son, Jesus Christ. Teach us, Lord, to open our hearts so that we may know and understand the hope of your calling. Amen.

JAMES MARTIN

MONDAY, MARCH 25

Matthew 21:12-15

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, “ ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’ ”

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

- MATTHEW 21:12-15

When reading scripture, we often apply a hermeneutic that places ourselves in the story. Case in point: many read the account of our Lord cleansing the temple and presuppose it presages the cleansing that would occur in our own lives (as living stones being built into a temple of God). In placing ourselves in the action, however, we miss out on the full meaning of the passage found in its original context (sans us).

It was the domain of priests under the old covenant to sanctify the Holy Place of God. 1 and 2 Chronicles documents how after the reigns of unrighteous kings – who defiled the temple with idols – righteous kings would commission the priests to purify God’s house in order to reinstate proper worship. It was the right of kings to commission and the duty of priests to carry out the sanctification of the temple. In Matthew 21, we witness Jesus taking His authority as a King and Priest to cleanse His Father’s house.

If this were not enough, Jesus demonstrates Messianic authority in the public healing of the sick, making Israel’s stiff-necked leaders indignant. They not only witnessed their fortunes being cast to the ground (by the temple cleansing) but understood the implications of all these acts: only a Messianic Priest King could do all this. Becoming to them “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense,” (1 Peter 2:8), their hard hearts would not allow them to follow Him.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, please let us read in this passage a story about you, and not us. Allow us to recognize your authority as Messianic Priest and King and enable us to respond to this with hearts eager to follow and obey. Amen.

EMILY MORALES

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.

- MATTHEW 22:15

We are approaching a deadline; we must report and “give back to Caesar (Uncle Sam).” We have an authority who doesn’t require a report proving we paid our fair share. There isn’t an earthly penalty if we “file” late. There is no collector.

There is reward for those who give back to God. Matthew 6:20 *“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*

Giving is a tricky thing. Matthew 6:24 *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”*

There is so much wisdom in Jesus’s teachings. Jesus is truly clear about what our priorities should be. Let us follow only one Master, to steadfastly serve Him with our time and resources. Let us store up treasures in Heaven!

PRAYER

Father in Heaven, thank you for all you have blessed me with. You have blessed me with much and I know everything comes from you. Help me be generous and give back to you what is yours. Amen.

LARRY OURY

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

Matthew 26:1-2; 14-16

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, “As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

- MATTHEW 26:1-2; 14-16

WHY did Judas betray Jesus? A week earlier, when Jesus and his disciples visited Bethany and Mary poured expensive oil on Jesus’s feet, Judas objected, saying “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?” He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.(John 12: 1-5) So was it for the 30 pieces of silver the chief priests gave him?

WHY? Luke’s gospel suggests “Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.” Luke 22: 3 So was it because the devil led him to do this?

WHY? Some scholars suggest that unlike the other disciples that called Jesus “Lord,” Judas instead called him “Rabbi,” teacher. While other disciples at times made great professions of faith and loyalty (John 6:68; 11:16), Judas never did. So was it because he didn’t believe Jesus was the Messiah?

WHY? Other scholars surmise that Judas, like most people at the time, believed the Messiah was going to overthrow Roman occupation and take a position of power ruling over the nation of Israel. But Jesus had made it clear that was not His plan. So was it because Judas was disappointed in Jesus?

WHY? Jesus chose 12 disciples. One was a traitor. That one fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus’s sacrificial death. (Zechariah 11: 12-13). So does that mean that God’s purposes can’t be thwarted, even by evil deeds?

PRAYER

Lord, there are times when we cannot understand why bad things happen to good people or why people do evil things. And we find it almost unbelievable that You would allow Your Son to die for our sins. All too often, your ways are not our ways. By your Spirit, help us to believe in and trust You. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28
Matthew 26:26-29

MAUNDY THURSDAY

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

- MATTHEW 26:26-29

What Is the Cost of Following Jesus Today?

1. Deny self & interests to seek God first
2. Conform to the example of Christ.
3. Follow him in all righteousness.

Your life should be committed to serving & loving God & others.

NOW get your Bible. Locate & read Matthew 26:26-29

We were part of the team that just wrapped up our ten-week WNT series, **Loving People to Christ**. It was much like what we are sharing with you today on this Maundy Thursday—**Following Jesus to the Cross & Beyond**. Two dozen participants did not meet to learn more about church. We gathered to stoke the fires of AWAKENING & to forge the kind of friendships that becomes the stuff of history.

We experienced ten blessed weeks of learning & connecting, designed to build lasting fellowship among awakened leaders with a shared calling.

“Example,” “Follow in his steps,” “Be Holy”—A follower of Jesus will pursue a holy & righteous life. We will not get it right 100% of the time because we are human, but our aim is to live a life that honors him. **DENY SELF | TAKE UP ONE’S CROSS | FOLLOW HIM**

“*Seek first*”— Everything comes after him; our focus set on God. When you commit your life to Jesus, you commit to putting Him first, above all else.

PRAYER

Thank you that in the Garden of Gethsemane, you did not turn from what had to be done. You knew the coming pain, but you asked only for escape if it was God’s will. Help me to have a spirit of obedience where I too can ask, “not my will, but your will be done.” AMEN.

JOHN & FRAN MORRIS

FRIDAY, MARCH 29

Matthew 26:36-41

GOOD FRIDAY

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

- MATTHEW 26:41

“You had ONE job!” could have been the frustrated utterance from Jesus when he returned to Peter, James and John in the garden the night before he was betrayed. Jesus had brought the 3 disciples with him, asking them to “stay here and keep watch with me,” but he found them sleeping. SLEEPING! The Son of God was about to be betrayed, arrested, tortured, crucified and these friends of his couldn’t keep watch while Jesus went to pray!

We are so much like them at times. Jesus may have used this example to show them and us that the weaknesses of our flesh, our spiritual vulnerabilities, must be watched for and prayed over so that we don’t fall into temptation. We must be ready to discern the subtle works of the enemy and the slow slide into sin. This is accomplished through prayer for wisdom and awareness. Watching!

PRAYER

Dear Lord, strengthen our spiritual muscles and help us be physically strong and ready to shun temptations that would lead us away from you. Thank you for your teachings and for loving us unconditionally. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

CATHY RIGGIN

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

Matthew 28:5-7

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

- MATTHEW 28:5-7

Then, the angel of the Lord said, “Don’t be Afraid” or “Fear Not!” You’ve got to be kidding me. A man appears, and was so bright It looked like lightning, like bright sunshine on a snow (now that’s dazzling) and also there’s an earthquake! In different places, in different experiences in the Bible, it reads, “Fear Not!” It was a terrifying scene and you’re supposed to be calm? The words, Fear Not appears 365 times in the Bible.

The stone was rolled away, not to let the women in, but to let Jesus out for he had risen. The angels were there to declare that Christ is alive! The ladies now departed quickly with fear and great joy! The promise of Easter is that Jesus is going ahead of us, and we do not need to fear the future.

He still calls his disciples his brothers and he can’t wait to see them. What love and forgiveness he has for them and for us!

PRAYER

Resurrected Father,

The message of Easter, as Jesus said, because I live you shall live also. There is no fear in love, for love drives out fear! We pray, in the name of our loving, living, Lord Jesus. Amen.

GINNY KUNTZ

SUNDAY, MARCH 31
Matthew 28:16-20

EASTER SUNDAY

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

- MATTHEW 28:19-20

Hallelujah! The Lord is risen!
The Lord is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

Today we celebrate the triumph of Jesus through his resurrection from the dead! Life wins! Through faith in Jesus, his resurrection becomes our resurrection. We are conquerors with Christ! Praise his name!

So what does this mean for us? As people resurrected with Christ, what are we supposed to do until he comes?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 28:16-20. Most succinctly, we go and make disciples of Jesus. We go and share the grace we have found in Christ with people who may be far from him.

This commission isn't an add-on to the Christian life. It is the core of it. Jesus says that while we are going about our lives— while we work, raise kids, serve others, do what we love to do— we make disciples. We make the most of every moment and use the things we naturally do to point friends to Jesus, the risen one. That's our job.

And here's the amazing thing— our triumphant, magnificent, glorious, risen Jesus promises us his power (16) and his presence (20) as we walk with him. He is always with us!

PRAYER

Jesus, we praise you for your resurrection power and authority. Make yourself known through us as we walk with you in obedience. To the praise of your glorious grace! Amen.

PASTOR JEFF MOORE

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