

Journey to the Cross: In Search of Commitment



Devotionals for the 2012 - Lenten Season
The Concord Baptist Church of Boston
The Rev. Dr. Conley Hughes, Jr., Senior Pastor
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Season of Lent

Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter Sunday, is the first day of Lent. Lent is the forty (40) day period commencing with Ash Wednesday and ending at Easter, exclusive of Sundays. Lent commemorates the forty days Christ spent in the wilderness fasting and overcoming temptations. (Matthew 4:1-11) Lent is a time of introspection, prayer, self-examination, repentance, and general preparation to celebrate Easter.

The sixth Sunday in Lent is known as Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter. Palm Sunday marks Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Crowds lined the streets waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna" "Hosanna." (Matthew 21:1-9) The days of Holy Week are associated with Jesus' last week of ministry on earth. Holy Week includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Maundy Thursday was a time of intimacy with the disciples before his death. In addition to the institution of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, Jesus also washed the feet of the twelve disciples. Jesus later engaged in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was betrayed and arrested on Maundy Thursday. (Matthew 26:17-30) Good Friday marks the day of Christ's crucifixion. Jesus' body was placed in the tomb before sundown on Friday, the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, and remained there until sometime on Sunday morning. (Matthew 27:32-61) Easter or Resurrection Sunday is the principal day of the Christian Year, the day of resurrection. (Matthew 28:1-8) It is a day of joy, gratitude, praise and worship to God.

The primary color for Lent is violet or purple—the color of royalty. Through the suffering, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, we have hope and live in anticipation of the coming King. Purple also symbolizes a sign of preparation, confession and forgiveness.

Lent is a time of repentance—of recognizing our sin and making changes to become more of what God created us to be. The goal in keeping Lent is to engage more fully with God on a deeper level. Through Bible reading and prayer, we seek to understand more fully our own mission, what it means to serve others as one of Jesus' disciples, and to become more fully committed to Christ.



An Invitation to Drink

Rev. Dr. Conley Hughes, Jr.—Senior Pastor

First printed on February 21, 2007

It was perhaps during the closing assembly of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus stood and uttered this assurance: “If anyone is thirsty, let [him or her] come to me and drink.” (John 7:37b) The Savior’s invitation is still valid. Jesus continues to quench our spiritual thirst; but we must find him in the Scripture, communicate with him in prayer, and hear his voice as we quietly open our ears and minds through Christian meditation.

These sincere and practical steps are required of all Christians and can be attained by daily devoting time and attention to cultivating the spiritual landscape of our lives. Spiritual Disciplines are reverent, yet practical, resources we can use to receive nourishment from the rich streams of Biblical truth and faith. We look to the scriptures, the source of spiritual life, to identify the disciplines, or resources, that can bring us into closer fellowship with Christ and with our Christian brothers and sisters.

Prayer, meditation, listening, reading the scriptures, quiet time and fasting are powerful tools that, if used properly, can affect the maturity, spiritual vigor and dynamic faith each of us needs to navigate the circumstances of our lives.

One of the great misconceptions of the Christian life is that once a person professes belief in the Lord, Jesus Christ, Christian growth will occur automatically. This misconception must be cleared up in the minds of we who profess Christ as Lord. Jesus answered the Jewish elder, Nicodemus, that he would not have to reverse the birth process

to receive new birth; but that the “birth from above” would be accomplished through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (John 3:6)

Christian spiritual renewal cannot be achieved through secular institutions, couch psychologists, spiritualists, or the television network’s most popular advice guru. Christian maturity is the work of the Spirit as we make ourselves available to listen, learn, become transparent, and apply the Word to our lives. We are “as near to Christ, when we listen to His voice.”

With respect to spiritual disciplines, Jesus has never asked us to engage in any discipline he did not do himself. The ancient Church, led by the Holy Spirit, recommended a **season of Lent**. The 40-day period leading to Holy Week and Resurrection Sunday (Easter) was to be reminiscent of the forty days Jesus spent in the desert after his baptism in the river Jordan. Jesus prayed, fasted and communed with Almighty God. We can note that this was a time of spiritual testing, but our Lord did not succumb to the various temptations. We are told, “He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.” (Mark 1:13b) Jesus emerged from the wilderness in the spirit of power, much prepared for this ministry and spiritual journey.

The selections in this book are road maps that will lead you to the streams of living waters. I pray that each selection will prick your conscience, increase your faith and lift you to an inspiring level of Christian maturity and service.

In the Middle English, the word *lente* originally meant “spring.” As we read, pray, absorb and apply these words, may we “spring forth into renewal, hope and spiritual Resurrection.”

With prayer and focus, let’s get started!

February 22, 2012

Day 1

ASH WEDNESDAY

Lent – Journey to the Cross: In Search of Commitment

Conley Hughes, Jr.

Read: Luke 9: 51-56

Key Verse: *“But the people did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.”*

Luke 9: 53

Commitment is perhaps one of the most necessary virtues among those which are required to complete our goals in life. Jesus was determined to accomplish His mission and realized that the road traveled would ultimately lead to Jerusalem. It would be on a hill outside of the city gates that Jesus would meet His destiny. Early in His ministry, Luke records that “Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” Luke’s early account of the itinerary that shaped Jesus’ mission was not the final one, but it provides us with an early glimpse of a determined Savior. Ash Wednesday is a “wakeup call” to Christians! This day which marks the beginning of our journey to the commemoration of the cross and the joy of the Resurrection, challenges our commitment to Christ and the faith that has brought us into relationship with Him. We have all inherited a culture and moment in history where we are bombarded by more distractions than at any time in the history of civilization. Such distractions have caused many Christians to lose their focus and to trade their commitment to the Kingdom for immediate access to shallow realities. The Lent season should help us realign our faith so that we can *again* focus on Jesus and His message of hope and redemption. In the scriptures that frame our devotion today, we discover that the enthusiasm and commitment Jesus displayed in going to Jerusalem was met with rejection. Luke states that the Samaritans, through whose village Jesus had to, travel, “did not welcome him.” You may too experience a lukewarm reception by others when you commit yourself to a mission. You should not succumb to the icy winds of criticism and rejection by retaliation, or giving up. Negative responses to your mission and efforts should galvanize you to pursue your goal, even if you have to adjust your plans. Find a way to fulfill God’s purpose in your life.

Thought: Lord, as I begin this journey, help me to complete my mission!

February 23, 2012

Day 2

Thursday, After Ash Wednesday

Silence Speaks Louder Than Words

Moreen P. Hughes

Read: Isaiah 53

Key Verse: *“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”*

Isaiah 53:7

Many of us likely have heard the expressions, “silence is golden” or “silence speaks louder than words.” Years of experience have taught me that this proverb is true. Taking a page from Solomon in that great book of Ecclesiastes which states, *“there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven; ...a time to be silent and a time to speak* (Ecc. 3: 1,7b).

Sometimes you and I can give a better testimony by being silent much to the disappointment of some of our accusers. This was certainly the case as our Savior faced charges against Him before the Sanhedrin, Pilot and Herod (Mark 14: 60-61a, Matt. 27: 13-14; Luke 23: 8a, 9).

In today’s Scripture, Isaiah prophesied that the “Lamb of God” would remain silent before his accusers and those who unjustly condemned him. When under oath he did not answer, he did so with confidence and authority.

Jesus demonstrated the wisdom of Solomon, as witnesses gave their false testimony to convict him. He did not need to justify himself but endured to the end, trusting in the perfect will of his heavenly Father.

With God’s guidance and grace, we also can discern when the time is best to speak and when silence is a more effective witness for Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me the courage and the strength to take a stand for truth. Help me to remain faithful to you and your Word in all situations and seasons of life. Teach me when to speak and when to keep silent. Amen

February 24, 2012
Friday, After Ash Wednesday

Day 3

The Choice

Brenda A. Fluker

Read: Romans 6:19-23

Key Verse: *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Romans 6:23

If you work every day, you expect to be paid for your services. Wages are an obligation of the employer. If the work is done as instructed, there is no way out of the obligation.

Stretching the truth! Selfishness! Doing deeds for personal recognition! Greed! Emotional or physical abuse! Jealousy! Stealing! Unforgiving spirit!! Manipulation! Grudges! When sin is committed, the obligation for God to pay wages is automatically put in play. The payment for sin is death—separation from God. In other words, death is what we deserve for turning to sin instead of God. No excuses!

The good news is that you have a choice. Become a slave to sin and die. Or submit to God and accept His gift of eternal life through Christ. The choice is yours.

Reflection: In your heart, will you choose death or eternal life?

February 25, 2012
Saturday, After Ash Wednesday

Day 4

See the Truth

Brenda A. Fluker

Read: Romans 3:21-26

Key Verse: *"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"*

Romans 3:23

She said: You did it.

He said: No I didn't.

She said: Yes you did.

He said: No I didn't.

Even when we do something wrong, we're more likely to deny it or blame someone else than to accept responsibility.

He said: You're a sinner.

She said: No I'm not.

He said: Yes you are.

She said: No, I'm not.

YES YOU ARE! Often we believe that the wrong we commit is not as the wrong committed by someone else. So we lie to ourselves. We try to justify our actions by comparing our actions to others. We conclude we are not as bad as the other person. Maybe even that we're better than or more righteous than the other person.

Big mistake! If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8). We are all sinners saved by grace. No matter how many good works we do, God knows our heart and our true motives.

Thought for the Day: Confession must come before cleansing. Make a careful examination of your heart and confess your sins to God today.

February 26, 2012

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Paid in Full

Brenda A. Fluker

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Key Verse: *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* 2 Corinthians 5:21

Imagine that you owe Macy’s for a new outfit, possibly one that you should not have charged in the first instance. You have no way of paying the bill. When the bill arrives, it is marked “Paid in Full”. Would you be grateful? Joyful?

That’s what God did for each one of us through the work of Christ on the cross. Over the past two days we have reflected the penalty of death for sin, and how each one of us deserves to be paid our wages for sin. Most of us want to stop sinning and restore our relationships. But on a human level it is difficult, even impossible. On a spiritual level however, God has offered to restore our relationships. He has done so even though He did not commit any of the wrongs.

All we have to do is make a choice to see the truth about our sins, confess our sins to God and accept the forgiveness of our sins freely given through Christ’s death on the cross. Out of sheer gratitude, we repent. Repentance is not merely a change of mind, but a radical change in one’s life that involves forsaking sin and turning to God. What greater act of gratitude can we give for a debt that is “Paid in full”!?

Reflection: Do you experience difficulty in forgiving yourself or others? In gratitude for God’s gift to you, is there a bill you need to mark “Paid in full?”

February 27, 2012

Monday, First Week of Lent

Day 5

“Jesus is willing, are you?”

Danielle Gantt

Read: Matthew 8:1-4

Key Verse: *“Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”* Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. Matthew 8: 2b & 3a

As we read through Jesus’ many miraculous accounts of healing, we find that friends and loved ones usually brought the patient to Jesus. However, this account is different. The man with leprosy came to Jesus on his own. Prior to being stricken with this disease, the man probably had a family, lots of friends and associates. Yet when he became ill, there was no one around. He had probably forgotten what the human touch felt like.

The man with leprosy was alone because people with leprosy were ostracized from the public. Lepers had unsightly, painful sores on their bodies that oozed with puss, blood and other liquids. People did not want to be seen associating with lepers. The leper in this story was so used to rejection from others that he prefaced his request for healing with, *“if you are willing, you can make me clean.*

Each of us may experience this state of loneliness at some point in life. We may not have unsightly sores on our bodies, but life’s bumps and bruises may be visible to others. When things get rough or we are in what others categorize as an undesirable state, it is much more difficult to find someone willing to go through trials with us. But thank God that Jesus is willing to go with us! Jesus is that friend that sticks closer than a brother (Prov 18:24).

As we reflect on God’s love and grace toward us when we were undeserving, let us be mindful of those that are going through trials with no support. Is there an “untouchable” in your midst that you can extend an encouraging word to? Are you willing to be an agent of grace for another that needs a touch of love and compassion?

Thought for the day: A smile, a kind word or a gentle touch can make the difference in someone’s life today. Be willing to show love.

February 28, 2012
Tuesday, First Week of Lent

Day 6

Thinking Like the Crowd

Venessa B. Rosemond

Read: Luke 19:1-10

Key Verse: *"All the people saw this and began to mutter ,..."* Luke 19: 7a

Have you ever worked hard at bringing together diverse groups or differing ideals only to have an unidentified contingent undermine your efforts? When I was in college, I helped initiate the takeover of our administration building. It seemed like a good idea at the time. Looking back on it, I cringe at how full of righteous indignation I was at the time. The takeover did not last long for two reasons. First, the administration of the college agreed with our demands and was anxious to work with us to address our concerns. But more importantly our members started internal dissension. The solidarity among the students crumbled slowly like decay or rust. The focus on our demands shifted to the rift among the students concerning who would speak.

In the parable of today's scripture, there are two main characters, Jesus and Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector. And then there was the crowd. While Jesus was there to save, Zacchaeus came seeking to know who this Jesus was. The crowd objected but not in a manner that was upfront. They started grumbling and complaining indistinctly trying to spoil Zacchaeus' moment and discredit Jesus. They did not have the tax collector's desire to know Jesus. They objected to Jesus accepting an invitation to dine with the sinner, Zacchaeus.

There is a place for healthy discourse or disagreement. Yet too often, the unhealthy types emerge. Do we block our blessings or the blessings of others when we join the crowd of spoilers by trying to undermine? Are we treading on divine territory by trying for revenge? Christians have human failing, yet we know that we must use Christ's example and forthrightness in standing for good and not falling for pettiness and mean spiritedness.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive us for complaining and have mercy on us with our muttering crowd spirit. In Jesus' name Amen.

February 29, 2012
Wednesday, First Week of Lent

Day 7

Jesus is for All

Venessa B. Rosemond

Read: John 4:1-26

Key Verse: *"The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)"*
John 4:9

Black History month ends officially today. So for the remainder of the year the focus will move to something else. I buy books in February because the major bookstores collect and display books by and about African Americans then. So do others who are not African American. On one of my February forays, searches and purchases, I acquired Peter Gomes's book, The Good Book. His was a book, by a Black man that talked about being a part of a phenomenon larger than race, culture or creed. In his first section of the book, Gomes speaks about a Bible phenomenon of being inclusive. He says,

"What is more significant to observe, and indeed more profound, is the fact that people and cultures foreign to the people and cultures of the Bible find themselves drawn to the Bible and understand it not as somebody else's book made available to them as an act of charity, conquest, or missionary endeavor, but as their own book, theirs legitimately and on their own terms."

In other words, what God has for you is yours uniquely. Each of us can see and accept our place in God's kingdom. The family of God is the largest collection of multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual global village that exists. All of the lines that separate us in the secular world, race, class, education, wealth, gender, age, etc. cannot and do not apply to our invitation from Christ. Jesus defied societal constraints that were against the will of His Father. Jesus came for all, especially for you and me even when it's not Black History month.

Question for the Day: Do you know that Jesus is for all?

March 1, 2011

Day 8

Thursday, First Week of Lent

Jesus' Call to Service: A Cleansing of the Temple

Keith A. Turner

Read: Mark 11: 15 – 17

Key Verse: *“And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.’ But you have made it a den of robbers.”*

Mark 11: 17

The Book of Mark speaks about Jesus traveling to Jerusalem and upon entering the temple he observed people engaging in sinful behavior while in the temple. There were people buying and selling all sorts of things there. Jesus became disgusted and angry about the desecration of the temple. The sanctity of the temple had been tainted. Jesus began overturning the tables in the temple where there were money changers and dove sellers.

Sometimes we engage in practices that we don't anticipate others seeing. Just keep in mind that God sees, hears and knows everything. As you engage in these practices that you know are wrong, at some point you attempt to justify your actions and believe that they are okay. Remember, God sees everything. When the Lord confronts you about your activities, there will be a moment in your life when the tables in your life will be turned over. Jesus cleared the temple because the people had made it unclean. Jesus makes it very clear that the temple is a place of worship and the sanctity of the temple will be maintained. The people became idolaters of money, physical and material things. Jesus said: “But you have made it a den of robbers.” The people robbed the temple of its sanctity. There will come a moment in your life when Jesus will have to tear you down and turn the tables over in your life in order to build you up and place you on sacred grounds. Jesus will bless you when you have been cleansed and renewed in your spirit. Jesus will call you into service when he has cleansed the temple that is in you.

Prayer: Lord, I know that I am not perfect and I have done unfavorable things in my life. I pray that you clean me up Lord. I am ready when you call your faithful servant. Clean me up Lord. I am ready. Amen

March 2, 2012

Day 9

Friday, First Week of Lent

How is Your Service?

Howard A. McLendon

Read: Luke John 13: 4-15

Key Verse: *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.”*

Luke 13:14

Years ago children who received Aid to Dependent Children, would receive an annual school clothes allotment, above and beyond the regular monthly aid allotment. When fiscal constraints and welfare reform caused this practice to be discontinued, many persons with children began to panic. I remember saying to the congregation I pastored at the time, that the children of our congregation would have no unmet need if we simply followed the example of Christ and ministered to those in our midst who had needs.

Let me close by asking, how is your service? I know you pay your tithes, but how about the needs of the disciples, which includes more than you and your immediate family. Are you one who is concerned about the needs of others, or is that, “not your ministry?” After all don't we have a Missionary Circle that is supposed to be concerned with such? I wonder what would Jesus do?

Prayer: God as your son, my Lord and Savior, met the need of His disciples and washed their feet, help me to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus to serve our brothers and sisters.

March 3, 2012

Day 10

Saturday, First Week of Lent

Looking Down for Righteousness

Venessa B. Rosemond

Read: Luke 18:9-14

Key Verse: *"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

Luke 18:13

One of the first things we learn in school is to line up. Sometimes we line up by height and other times by another position. If we are very special, we get to be the line leader. Sometimes the line leader position is rotational; everyone gets to hold it for a preset time. Fairness is not much fun. What we want is to be the line leader because someone else has given it to us for an unfair reason. In these cases, we may be first all of the time. We learn to manipulate others to maintain that position and we are very quick to remind the un-first that yes, we are in front of them. As Christians, we know better and we eschew these secular ideals or at least we should. Yet our egos get in the way time after time and we fail to recognize that the position we should choose is not for others to see. After all, our intrinsic best for God is beyond our ability.

So what gets us to a right position with God? Obedience to His Word and His will in our lives. For far too many of us that is too passive. We have Pharisee hearts and ambitions. When we pray, our prayers are about ourselves thanking God that we are not like others, robbers, evildoers, adulterers. What is it about us that we want to believe that only we are blessed and highly favored? This parable is here to remind us that there is no head of the line with God. Let us examine ourselves during this Lenten season. Does our testimony about God's goodness begin with me or I? What are we teaching each other about God's favor? There will be moments when we cannot lift our eyes to heaven when we pray. We can only humble our hearts and ask God to have mercy on us.

Question for the Day: Who have you pushed aside so that God can see you at the front of the line?

March 4, 2012

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

God's Qualification for Greatness

Moreen P. Hughes

Read: Mark 10: 35-45

Key Verse: *... "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be the first must be slave of all. For as even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Mark 10: 43b-45

If you think for a moment of how our world and society measures greatness, you will see that it is based on material wealth, possessions, and popularity. People value greatness in terms of things and outward appearances. In the sporting world it is measured by talent, endorsements, the size of one's bank account or the mansion lived in. In the business world if your profits exceed your competitors, you'd be justified in saying that you have succeeded, and had achieved at least some measure of greatness.

So we can say, generally, that our world measures greatness and success competitively. Sad to say, in the church this nature and spirit has also seeped into our pews and pulpit. The success of the church or a preacher is often measured by the number of people in the congregation, the number of books that the person has published, the fame and the influence that he or she has in the ecclesiastical world.

But according to Jesus none of these things are predictors to greatness. The text teaches that those who want to become great must first learn how to be servants in the kingdom of God. To be considered great, one must take a page from Jesus Christ himself, when he said, "he did not come to be served but to serve." God measures greatness and success based on our willingness to be of service to others and to him. Are you a servant?

Prayer: Thank you God for every opportunity to be your servant and to be of service to others. Amen

March 5, 2012
Monday, Second Week of Lent

Day 11

Take It or Leave It

Sharon Bryant

Read: Luke 22:39-44

Key Verse: *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done”*

Luke 22: 42

Wow! That’s a hard thing to say and stand on. Not my will but your will be done. This means you totally forget about self, what you want to do or what you may be feeling about your situation. You go with what someone else wants for you. That sounds crazy right. Well that’s exactly what our Lord did here in this text. He submitted to the will of God for His life. Even though He for a moment prayed that if God were willing, let Him out of this ordeal, to die for a dying world. Then he prayed and totally went with what God wanted for Him, which was death on a cross. He did not have any regrets about His decision, He simply prayed more intensely and passionately for God to be with Him through it. So much so that His sweat was like drops of blood.

As saints of God, in spite of our situations, whether we are facing death or in a feel like dying situation we must get to the place where we can accept God’s will for our lives. But of course it is our choice whether we accept His will or leave it behind and do our own thing. Christ tells his disciples to pray that they do not fall into temptation and then he went about stone’s length ahead of them and prayed for them. That is just like Him to first instruct us on what to do. Then He intercedes on our behalf ahead of us but never out of reach to us. Wow!

Prayer for the day: Lord, I pray that Christians everywhere begin to accept your will for their lives, that you may perfect them in every way and their lives be filled with the passion and love that you have for them. That they may witness to a dying world. It is in your name I pray. Amen.

March 6, 2012
Tuesday, Second Week of Lent

Day 12

Alone in My Garden

Jarvis McCarther

Read: Luke 22: 39-46

Key Verse: *“And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly.”* Luke 22: 44a

After struggling physically, emotionally and academically during the first year of law school, I walked down Huntington Avenue in tears. I approached a church, which I had attended on occasion, but was not a member and asked the church clerk if she would allow me to go to the altar to pray. She did not know me and was skeptical; because it was a weekday, in an urban area and she was reluctant to open the doors and to turn on the lights in the sanctuary. Yet she saw my tears and was moved to compassion and allowed me in. You see that altar was my Garden of Gethsemane and like Jesus, I had to go alone to pray. My prayer was a cry for God’s help in the midst of my many struggles. For I knew God answers prayers – even if we are alone. Although there was no immediate response, I felt relieved having taken my concerns to God. Many years later, after having graduated from law school, God continuously reminds me that He did not leave me or forsake me.

Jesus in Luke 22:39-44, left His disciples and went further into the garden where He prayed alone. His prayer was that if the Father were willing, the cup might pass from Him; nevertheless He wanted the will of God to be done, not His own. In other words, if there was a way that sinners could be saved by His not going to the cross, He wanted it to be revealed to Him. The heavens were silent, because there was no other way. However, in the Garden, an angel appeared and gave Him strength to do God’s will. In our lives, we need to be comforted that the Lord hears our prayers and surrounds us with His protection. We need always to put our trust in Him especially when we are feeling our weakest.

Thought for the Day: God hears our prayers, no matter where our Garden of Gethsemane is located. He can deliver us.

March 7, 2012

Day 13

Wednesday, Second Week of Lent

No More of This!

Patrick Johnson

Read: Luke 22: 47-53

Key Verse: *"But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him."*

Luke 22:51

Even in the darkest period of his life as Jesus suffered the humility of being betrayed and arrested, he rebuked his follower who acted aggressively in cutting off the right ear of the high priest's servant. In all of Jesus' life he always preached tolerance and non-violence. It is ironic that although the Savior was aware of the brutal death that awaited him Jesus took the high road and did not succumb to the nefarious actions of his detractors.

We seem to live in a world that has lost touch with its gentler side. The traditional values and customs that we grew up with and have come to love and cherish seem to be rapidly diminishing. Nowadays, vices that were once an aberration have become the norm. Today our children are exposed to myriad sources of violence, from violent video games to real-life occurrences in the streets. We have sadly seen our playgrounds that were once considered places of safety slowly morphing into dangerous places. We have to ask ourselves the poignant questions. How did we get here? What can we do to alleviate the deviant behavior that seems to be permeating the society in which we live?

As Christians the burdens that we bear today pale in comparison to what Christ went through in order to save us. As we see the acts of decadence in our society we cannot afford to be apathetic. We know deep down that a metamorphosis will not come from wish-fulfillments, we have to make a concerted effort to let our voices and actions rise over the hubbub of depravity that we confront daily. In the pursuit of a noble cause the actions of one person can make a significant difference. Therefore, we should all take an introspective look and see what we can do to help. We all have to say "No more of this!" We should be mindful that no good deed goes unrewarded.

March 8, 2012

Day 14

Thursday, Second Week of Lent

Way of the Cross: Sanhedrin Trial

Keith A. Turner

Read: Mark 14: 61-64

Key Verse: *"But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"*

Mark 14: 61

During Jesus ministry the Sanhedrin and other Jewish sects were against Jesus when they began to say all sorts of evil things about Jesus. They engaged in physical harm and persecution against Jesus. Through all of the mistreatments, Jesus remained silent and humbled himself. Finally, Jesus answered and said: "I am." "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." When Jesus acknowledged who he was; it was understood that his royal Messiahship was revealed. Jesus' Messiahship is a position of authority. Jesus' authority intimidated the Sanhedrin because it weakened the Sanhedrin and government officials' control over the people.

There will be moments in your life when being a Child of God appears to send all sorts of evil people your way. Sometimes there are people in this world who just can't accept who you are and the relationship that you have with the Lord. Remember, although these trials, storms and episodes of evilness come your way; you must stand firm in the faith and know that you are a servant of the Lord. In order to withstand the fiery darts that come your way; you must put on the full armor of God and believe that the Lord will protect you. Your affirmation and relationship with the Lord provides you with the appointed royal authority and the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon you. It was at the Cross that Jesus sacrificed himself and shed his blood to atone for the sins of man. It was at the cross where the light of Jesus shined upon the people. The cross symbolizes Jesus' willingness to suffer for our sins. Through Jesus, we have become free from death and sin and made alive to God.

Prayer: Lord hear my prayer. Grant me the strength and protection that I need to withstand the fiery darts of those who are opposed to my relationship with you Lord. I stand firm in my faith and who I am as a Christian believer. I am blessed in the name of the Lord. Amen

March 9, 2012
Friday, Second Week of Lent

Day 15

Treated Like A Fake King

Christopher D. Williams

Read: Matthew 27:27-31

Key Verse: *"They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, the king of the Jews!" they said. "*

Matthew 27:28, 29

There were many things Jesus said and did during his ministry that people misunderstood. The disciples didn't understand how he could walk on water. The Pharisees and Scribes couldn't understand how he could forgive sins. The chief priests and elders couldn't understand his actions in the temple. The crowds couldn't understand his parables. Yet one thing was perfectly clear to all by the end of the Gospels, Jesus was claiming to be king.

This point is demonstrated clearly in this passage. The actions of the soldiers illustrate to us that in their eyes, Jesus was a fake messiah claiming to be the king of Israel. In order to show the futility of his kingdom and power, they mocked him and laughed at him.

When we read this story, we are able to uncover the irony because the veil has been removed from our eyes. We see the foolishness of the soldiers' actions by acknowledging the truth of Jesus' kingship. But the fact that the veil had to be removed from our eyes indicates that we at one time laughed alongside the soldiers. In reality, we are and were the soldiers. Anytime we resist the will of God in our lives we are the soldiers. When ideas of mainstream media interest us more than the Word of God, we kneel with the soldiers. When we treat our brothers and sisters spitefully and disrespectfully, we help the soldiers twist together the crown of thorns. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that sometimes we treat Jesus as a messianic pretender, a fake king. We chant "hail to the king" with our lips, but our hearts and minds are far from him.

Do you treat Jesus like a fake king? Do you give Jesus reign in every area of your life, or are there still places where his rule is off limits? During this Lenten season, do an honest assessment of your relationship with God. If Jesus is truly the king, honor his kingship by submitting to his rule.

March 10, 2012
Saturday, Second Week of Lent

Day 16

Will You Carry His Cross?

Moreen P. Hughes

Read: Matthew 27: 32-43; Luke 9: 23-24

Key Verses:

"As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross."

Matt. 27: 32

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Luke 9: 23

Have you ever felt that you were carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders? That you were under so much pressure you could scarcely stand straight? And the weights you were carrying were not your own but those of family, friends and others around you. In such situations who did you complain or grumble at the most.

Well Jesus had to carry the cross, for the burdens, the sins of all humankind. He was on trial for crimes that he didn't commit. Going up the hill to Golgotha, in agony and in pain, the soldiers knew that the cross was extremely heavy for Jesus to bear. Therefore forced to carry the cross for Jesus was a man from the crowd named Simon of Cyrene.

What about you? If called upon would you have been willing to carry the cross for Jesus? Didn't Jesus say, "Unless you take up your cross and follow me you cannot be my disciple"? Yes, sometimes it is difficult to be his disciple. Yes, sometimes it is hard to carry his cross. But when I think of all that he went through for me, when I think that it was on the cross that he suffered for my sins, when I realize that he felt the blows from the rod and the sting of the thorns and the indignity of his mocking so that my sin and my shame could be banished, it is an honor to be identified with his cross. God doesn't expect us to carry our cross all by ourselves. In fact, he even makes an offer to help us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you that you are there when we need you. Thank you that you help us when we need it. Help us to help you carry the crosses of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.

March 11, 2012

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Profound Truth in a Perplexing Place

Christopher D. Williams

Read: Luke 23:39-43

Key Verse: *"We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."*

Luke 23:41

In vintage Lukan style, the conversation between Jesus and the two criminals teaches us a profound truth in a perplexing way. In the climactic moments of the crucifixion scene, we are given great theological insight by a criminal. The Greek word used by Luke to describe Jesus' cross companions means a troublemaker, evil-doer, villain or criminal. In our society we would simply call him a thug or gangster. And yet this gangster, in the midst of his societal condemnation, recognizes something everyone else has missed. This man crucified as the king of the Jews was innocent.

It is this aspect of Jesus' suffering that makes the gospel and the cross so humbling. No matter how hard we try to visualize, identify with and feel the pain of Jesus on the cross, we can't. We can think about when we were abandoned, betrayed, abused and disrespected. But, it's not the same. We can recall feelings of hopelessness, despair, heart break and mistreatment; but, it's not the same. It's not the same because we all are guilty; guilty of lying, cheating, gossiping, hating, being selfish and unloving. It is our guiltiness that prevents us from understanding Jesus' pain. For out of all those who suffer, he is the only innocent sufferer.

This is the very theological truth that the gangster teaches us. Although he is in the same predicament as Jesus, he understands that there is a significant difference between them. He is a sinner and Jesus is righteous. In his humble confession of unworthiness, he finds life. He finds a profound truth in a perplexing place.

When we gain access to the power of God, not in our boasting about our righteousness, but in the humble confession of our unrighteousness. When we cast ourselves at the foot of the cross recognizing our weakness, we testify to God's strength. When we admit our unrighteousness, we become righteous.

March 12, 2012

Day 17

Monday, Third Week of Lent

The Way of the Cross in God's Family

Gloria Johnson

Key Verse: *"When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."*

John 19:26-27

The bonds between family members are very strong, even when the family is not a good family. We share and care for each other in our human families and develop love that sustains the relatives. Some family members are reliable. Others disappoint us. There is a formal tie to our human families. Yet that tie can break as we age and move away from the main family. Sometimes blood is not the only way to define family. In our community, we sometimes include in our family, people who are merely close friends. Lifelong neighbors can be as supportive as families. In addition, we develop strong bonds with friends that are as permanent as family.

In one of His final lessons, Jesus shows us that love will form a new family, the church family. It is His love that defines who makes up this new family. What brings us into the new family is our direct kinship with Jesus. His love for us makes it possible to call Him Savior. He appoints us relatives to each other looking out for our spiritual and emotional ties. We have many social agencies that will look to the care of those who are adrift of any family support. These agencies will help in finding shelter, food and other basics needs. Jesus gave us a new community where he is the center and the head. All needs are met at the cross. No one is left without support. This community is a family that cannot be completed until everyone who believes is enfolded. In this community we will recognize that we are the mother to all sons and the father to all daughters as well as the brother or sister to each.

Question for the Day: Do you reach out in love to find new family members?

March 13, 2012

Day 18

Tuesday, Third Week of Lent

The Way of the Cross – No More Curtain

Venessa B. Rosemond

Read: Luke 23:44-46

Key Verse: *“And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.”* Luke 23:45b

In the center of the Jerusalem temple was a place called the Holy of Holies. There dwelled the presence of God on earth. Because God is so Holy, a curtain woven of fine linen, and scarlet, purple and blue threads separated Him from sinful people. Cherubim adorned the curtain, which was 60 feet high and four inches thick. Only the High Priest could enter this area of the temple and only after offering sacrifices for his sins. Once a year the priest entered the Holy of Holies to offer sacrifices for the unintentional sins of Israel (Exodus 30:10, Hebrews9:7). Intentional sins or infractions of the Law were punishable by death.

When God moved during the time His Son hanged on the cross and two significant symbols emerge from the torn curtain in today's scripture. First only supernatural God could have torn the curtain at the moment of Jesus' death; it was too high and too thick for human effort. God's presence in the temple ceased. In current vernacular, He may have been saying, "I'm out of here." Secondly, he destroyed the separation between Him and us forever. While He is still so holy that we cannot enter His presence, Jesus can intercede on our behalf. No longer will we need a high priest. No longer will we need a sacrificial animal. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. Our sins are covered with His Son's blood. We can be our own High Priest, concerned for our condition and that of others. Instead of asking for forgiveness at ritualistic moments and high holy days, we can go to God at all times. What a precious gift. What an amazing God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are awed by Your gift of Your Son, Jesus. We thank you for His shed blood and for His intercession for us. Heavenly Father we are so grateful that you tore the curtain and gave us access to You through Your Son. Help us to be mindful of these gifts daily. In Your Son Jesus' name. Amen.

March 14, 2012

Day 19

Wednesday, Third Week of Lent

Laid in a Tomb: The Tomb is Only Temporary

Joseph L. Smith

Read: John 19:38-42, Acts 10:40

Key Verse: *“...but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.”*
Acts 10:40

The scripture written in John 19 serves as a reminder of some of the most devastating events ever recorded in the bible. One can only imagine how Mary (the mother of Jesus) and Jesus' family and friends felt when they saw Jesus hanging on that cross. He had been beaten so badly, he was almost unrecognizable, all for the forgiveness of sin and to save a dying world. The pain they felt while watching Him suffer at the hands of the Roman soldiers; they flogged Him, spat on Him, hit Him in the face and then they crucified Him. When Jesus died, his friends pleaded for his body and buried Him in Joseph's tomb. When God allowed Jesus to be crucified and laid in that tomb, He knew the third day was coming.

It can be terrifying when you have your own personal tomb experience. When circumstances in your life are seemingly insurmountable and you can't even pray or praise your way through. The enemy thinks he has you, but I have some good news for you, he's a liar. You are right where God wants you to be, in a place where only He can reach you. Sometimes God has to allow you to be shut in and shut out so that He can be glorified. God loves you so much even when you are experiencing pain, suffering, depression, stress, frustration, drinking tears for water and sin has a death grip on you. When you confess your sins and walk by faith, I'm writing to tell you that when you hold on to God's unchanging hand, the tomb is only temporary and your third day is on the way.

Prayer: Lord, help me not to be afraid to face my tomb but give me the strength to walk by faith, knowing that my tomb is temporary and you will never leave me nor forsake me.

March 15, 2012
Thursday, Third Week of Lent

Day 20

“Hiding in HIS view”

Danielle Gantt

Read: John 20:19-23

Key Verse: *“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together **with the doors locked for fear of the Jews**, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **“Peace be with you!”**”*

John 20:19

Immediately after that dreadful Friday afternoon when Christ was crucified the disciples went into in hiding. They feared being persecuted and even killed for having been associated with Jesus. We can imagine that they were distraught by the fact that their leader, teacher and mentor had been murdered for the very things that he taught them to believe in. What would they do now? If Christ couldn't survive, how would they?

We now fast-forward to Sunday evening. The disciples had already gotten word that morning from Mary Magdalene that Jesus was alive and well. Yet, because of fear, the disciples remained together locked in the house out of sight. No one could get in and they weren't going out. But Jesus penetrated the physical locked door and ultimately the door of their hearts. While they were in hiding, refusing to allow others to enter that place of hurt, pain, frustration and fear, Jesus showed up and spoke peace into the atmosphere.

There are times when we find ourselves in the same predicament as the disciples. After developing a strong relationship with Christ, we walk faithfully with him and we can't be stopped. Then a situation comes along that rattles us to our core. We can't feel God; we feel abandoned and left to sort things out on our own. We close the door to friends and family because they can't help. We can't see past our situation and it gets difficult to read the Word and pray. But thank God for the movement of the Holy Spirit! He penetrates the door to our heart and stirs up the word on the inside reminding us that God will never leave nor forsake us. Regardless of what we encounter, however great or small God always shows up to carry us through. There's no hiding from God!

For further encouragement: Take time to read and reflect on Psalm 139.

March 16, 2012
Friday, Third Week of Lent

Day 21

Sharing our Blessings

Patrick Johnson

Read: Mark 8:34-38

Key Verse: *“What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”*

Mark 8:36

It is an unpalatable truth that we live in a world today where we are constantly being fed on a poor diet of materialism. Conspicuous consumption seems to be the order of the day as our values seem to lie in the procurement of the most modern appurtenances, such as the latest electronic gadgets and motor vehicles, a signal to the world that we have arrived. The poor man who missed the luxury liners of opportunities but still manages to carve out a meaningful existence for his family in his vocation as a janitor or a gardener, etc., and still finds time to volunteer at the local food pantry, may not be afforded the same level of respectability on the success barometer as the man who lives in the big house and drives the expensive car. However, the functions that he performs are invaluable, and for the most part he and his peers are the bedrock of society

While we agree that everyone should strive to achieve their utmost in whatever realm of endeavor they decide to pursue, we should also be mindful of the aphorism “to whom much is given, much is required.” The Lord has blessed us immensely. We take so many things for granted but if it were not for the love and grace of God many of the goals that we set out to achieve would have been impossible. Every day we should take an introspective look and challenge ourselves to see how we can use our talents for the greater good. We should dare ourselves to do something out of a sense of community, something that is geared towards someone out of our immediate network of family or friends. Think of the many blessings that the Lord has bestowed on us and parlay those to help others who are less fortunate. We should look for volunteer opportunities in our neighborhoods and see what we can do to help. Our efforts, while not being a panacea will surely help to ameliorate the lives of others.

Prayer: Lord, please give me the will and courage to reach out and help someone as I go along my way. Amen

March 17, 2012

Saturday, Third Week of Lent

Cookies and Milk

James N. Fripp

Read: 1 John 4: 7-21

Key Verse: *"Whoever does not love does not know God, because **God is love.**"*

1 John 4:8

I remember in my 1st grade, Sunday School class that memorizing Bible verses was an important aspect of learning the lessons. Getting them right was very important because you got extra cookies and milk. I could have chosen the longest verse in the Bible, Esther 8:9 with its 81 words. But remember I'm in the 1st grade and wanted extra cookies and milk. So I chose John 14:8b God is love. We were blessed with loving and supportive teachers who accepted that sentence from the verse. Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Washington walked the Christian walk of daily demonstrating the truth that God is love. Sometimes I would employ Jesus wept. (John 11:35). But my reliable memory verse was God is love. I did like those extra cookies.

When I matured, I still liked milk and cookies, and I have been blessed to experience that solid, continuous, reliable, and trustworthy often repeated reality that God is love. There is so much wisdom in those 3 words; God is love, when my mother needed to have a pacemaker implanted-a safe but still a surgical procedure, my sister and I were concerned and God's love, presence, and foresight created a God-incidence. The Great Physician had in place at the Boston Medical Centre Electrical Physiology Clinic my former high school track-teammate. He was now a charge nurse for the clinic. I had not seen him in 44 years. God is love. Bob was professional, personal, and supportive. He said, "Don't worry you have chosen the best doctor in town to do the procedure." Bob also said, "We got your Mom, she will be fine." How great is God's love to be right there when you need him. You can like physicist Stephen Hawkins believe that the universe and everything in it, "just happen." Brothers and sisters I learned in Sunday School the truth, and have seen that truth again and again and again that God is love in word and deed. Pass it on.

Day 22

March 18, 2012

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Benefit & Cost of Discipleship

Debra Johnston-Malden

Read: John 3:16-18

Key Verse: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

John 3:16

This verse brings back fond memories of Sunday School. Growing up, we attended Sunday school several years after going to public school, so we knew the importance of reading, learning and listening to the written and spoken word. During that time, part of our lesson, and 'homework' was to memorize Bible verses (King James Version) each week, and remember from week to week. One of the first verses we learned after, "Jesus wept" was John 3:16.

Even though we were too young to comprehend the 'world', since our world comprised of our family, church and neighborhood, but what was the most difficult for us to understand was how a father could allow his son to die, for us. Of courses, that was before we gained the knowledge and understanding that God knows each and every one of us, in mind, body, and spirit, even though we have not experienced him in physical body.

Memory verse for the day: But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8 (New American Standard)

March 19, 2012

Day 23

Monday, Fourth Week of Lent

Forgiveness Is For You

Deborah Barabino

Read: 1 John 1:8-2:2

Key Verse: *"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*

1 John 2:2

When someone you hear or read about has something horrible done to them and are able to forgive the trespassers, do you take notice? Do you wonder if you could too forgive under those circumstances? We are reminded that God wants us to forgive others as we need forgiveness from him too for our transgressions.

However, it was not until I saw a Tyler Perry movie (Madea Goes to Jail) that what we say to nonbelievers was presented in an easier form, that "forgiveness is for you!" When I was in charge of a library in Florida we were responsible for 320 children three hours a day every week day. These children were growing up in homes that were violent, harsh and some were even loveless. Every day held conflict. Every day promised violence. Although the staff was of different faiths we all solidified behind the belief in redemption and a policy of forgiveness. Each day we broke up a fight the combatants were allowed to return the next day with a clean slate. We had to forgive them their harsh curse words towards us and they had to forgive us when we forgave them under duress. Soon though, fewer children were asked to leave for violence or breaking the rules and the staff was able to apologize to the children when they were wrong or intemperate. We had learned to do exactly what Jesus asked us to do...forgive others as he forgives us.

Like the characters in the movie we learned that forgiveness is for us more than the people we forgive. Forgiveness required that we forgave the children even when they expressly were not sorry for their behavior. The grace that Jesus offers us is generous. Through him all of our sins are forgiven. When asked for forgiveness, grant it. "Forgiveness is for you."

March 20, 2012

Day 24

Tuesday, Fourth Week of Lent

Understanding what it means to be dead to sin

R. Helen Davison

Read/Key Verses: Romans 6:3-4

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Dead to sin, literally you are not physically dead, but you are spiritually dead to sin but alive to God. Our Lord and Savior died on the cross and was buried in a tomb and rose three days later. When we confess our sins to God and are baptized by immersion into the water, this is symbolic of being dead and buried by baptism. Jesus walked on earth and lived a sinless life. Therefore, we were buried with him by baptism (immersion) into death. As Christ was raised from the dead, death has no more dominion over him. As Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of his father, we are to walk in the newness of life. Sin will have no more dominion over us.

In order not to live a sinful life, we need to know the real truth, in other words the real facts. The facts are centered upon the death and resurrection of Jesus. We must first believe that the facts are true. Believing is to confess that you are a sinner and that you believe that Jesus died to save you from your sins. Having Faith in Jesus lets you know that He truly did die for our sins. You are then dead to sin and living unto God. You are then a new creature in Christ Jesus realizing that all that you have must be presented to the service of God.

We are not to let sin rule or reign in our mortal body. Always be aware of evil desires and lusts, remember that sin shall have no dominion over you. We are not living under the law, but we are living under grace. We are not to let sin have any power over us. Being saved from the power of sin is Sanctification. Sin will no longer rule over your life. Being saved from sin is Justification. (Rom. 1-5) Then God will save you from the presence of sin when your salvation is completed that is Glorification. (Rom. 8)

Prayer: Father God please help me that every day for the rest of my life I will sin less and less daily. Help me that sin will have no dominion over my life. My whole mind, body and soul will be of service to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

March 21, 2012

Day 25

Wednesday, Fourth Week of Lent

What You Say Can Save You

Deborah Barabino

Read: Romans 10: 9-10

Key Verse: *“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”*

Romans 10: 10

If you believe what you say it can save you! If you believe that Jesus Christ was God on earth, was crucified, died, was buried, rose and appeared on earth again to prove that he had arisen then welcome! You are saved. Once you believe you are saved. First you say it in your heart then you say it with your mouth and you are saved forever! What you say can save you! That's best news mankind has had in a long time.

We say a lot these days. Often what we say is or can be unkind and certainly not useful. When I was seven years old I was asked if I wanted to go to heaven. Well, I thought not right now. When it was pointed out to me that if I died before I accepted Christ I would not go to heaven. Hell was something I did not want to experience. I told the church that I wanted to be saved. In my heart, I told the Lord that I did not want to go to hell and that I wanted to be saved to be with Jesus. The mature words came later. I was baptized and joined the church at seven years old. In my teens I was estranged from the Lord. He patiently waited for me to reclaim him. After being ill, surviving cancer and depression it was made clear to me that Jesus was far more patient with me than I was with myself. He never left me. All I had to do was ask for forgiveness and return to fellowship with his people. My salvation was intact.

Salvation is free. It involves both the heart and the mouth. Once done you cannot lose it. For this wonderful gift we can thank Jesus Christ for his sacrifice on the cross. Surely, if it were not him to bear our burdens who would?

March 22, 2012

Day 26

Thursday, Fourth Week of Lent

The Result of Allegiance

Christopher D. Williams

Read: 1 Peter 2:18-25

Key Verse: *“But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”*

1 Peter 2:20b-21

In Peter's first letter, he sought to encourage the believers who found themselves living in a society that was hostile to their faith. Unlike the society at larger, the Christians of the 1st century gave their allegiance to Christ alone. This allegiance put them at odds with their community neighbors who believed that loyalty to Caesar and the local deities were vital to maintaining the peace and welfare of the populace. As a result, they found themselves marginalized, mistreated, hated and isolated.

While we may see the treatment of these Christians as inhumane and wrong, we must understand that such treatment is a necessary mark of discipleship. When we truly decide to follow Christ, our faith commitments may cause us to be at odds with our family, friends and fellow Americans. We will find ourselves marginalized, hated on and despised when we pledge our allegiance to Christ and not the gods of our culture.

In light of this fact, Peter exhorts us to be encouraged by our privileged position in God. While we may not be in the societal “in-crowd”, we do have a prized possession in God that no earthly accomplishment, treasure, or popularity can compare to. We must set our hope fully on the grace to be given us by Christ, and not on praise and acceptance from people. We must bear the cross of unpopularity and marginalization without exchanging evil for evil. We must follow the example of our master and persevere in the suffering that may come on account of our allegiance to our God. Our unpopularity is never sufficient grounds for compromising our faith. Suffering is a part of discipleships, the result of allegiance.

Prayer for the Day: Father, help me to be a disciple that swears allegiance to you alone in the midst of a society that does not honor you. Amen

March 23, 2012
Friday, Fourth Week of Lent

Day 27

Committed and Daring Disciples?

Venessa B. Rosemond

Read: Revelations: 3-19-20

Key Verse: *"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."*

Revelation 3:19

When I first started teaching Sunday School, our Superintendent would invite divinity school students to help us develop lessons and increase our teaching skills. The guests would present the upcoming lesson with us as the pupils. They were so engaging and energetic. Initially I would timidly try at least one of the suggestions. If I were successful I would be elated, if not I would resort back to what was familiar. Over time, I learned that the comfortable feeling really meant I was teaching from my intellect rather than my spirit. A teacher should be intelligent, but a Sunday School teacher has to rely on the Holy Spirit. The more I lean to what I can do, the less I seek what it is that God has for me.

In this passage of Scripture, John is referring to the church that is lukewarm in its spirit because it has depended too much on its own resources. We as a church need to be daring in our future. We own a beautiful new edifice in a more affluent location. Are we looking to have it be a jewel to dazzle visitors? Can we truly thank God for blessing us and not remember that we wanted more space to do more? Many people contributed hours to acquiring the property we have. However, God did not bring us here for us but for Him. We have to act as we live believing that we exist to glorify God. Our new church is not a memorial, we cannot be complacent. It is the symbol of God's kingdom here on earth. We have to be about our father's business. To whom much is given much is expected. Let's get busy.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant to each of us the passion to put you first, the discipline to work tirelessly and the commitment to follow your guidance. In Jesus' name. Amen.

March 24, 2012
Saturday, Fourth Week of Lent

Day 28

Saved By His Grace

LaSonnya Hart

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

Key Verse: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith..."*

Ephesians 2:8a

Do you ever sit and think about where you were before you gave your life to Christ? The things you may have been doing, the company you kept? I mean really think about it. How about closing your eyes right now and just take a few moments and really think? Open your eyes! Right about now you are probably shouting and praising God! I know I am! Thank God I'm not what I used to be! I thank God I have been saved by His grace! Christ died for me and for you! Halleluiah!

We are not saved on our own deeds or actions. God's grace saved us! We are not what we used to be and we are still a work in progress. Keep your eyes on the prize. I want to see my savior's face! I want to see my mother again and all my loved ones gone before me. Don't you want to see our Savior's face?

Prayer: Lord God we thank you for sending your only son to save us! It was your grace and mercy that has brought us this far. Continue to help us to keep our focus on you and to keep you first in all that we do. In Jesus name. Amen.

March 25, 2012

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

I WED

Venessa B. Rosemond

Read: Matthew 10:37-39

Key Verse: *“Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”*

Matthew 10:39

Weddings evoke such strong emotions for us, mostly positive. Including money, a lot goes into the joining of two people and two families into a new entity. What make them memorable are the enduring marriages that follow. Not all weddings produce successful marriages yet they start with such hope. So fittingly enough when Pastor wrote our mission statement he also coined the acronym, I WED. The relationship between the church and Christ is like the relationship between a bride and a groom.

The scripture teaches us that when we meet Christ, we lose our old life and we are new creatures. The reward for losing our life for Christ is eternal life. Work on our new eternal life starts here on earth. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who belong to God (1Peter 2:9). Therefore, to keep the mission in front of us, we just have to remember, I WED.

At Concord, we are a family of believers who are also, “an **Inviting** people with a deliberate passion to welcome and encourage all people to learn and experience the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. We are a people for whom the **Word**, the Holy Bible, the written revelation of the very character of God to His people is our highest standard and moral source, a family of God who is **Endowed** with spiritual gifts, which are unique and diverse. We use these gifts to Empower each other for effective Christian witness, ministry and evangelism. We are an Empowering people, a **Discipling** people who embrace discipleship, a lifelong learning and living encounter with the teachings of Christ. We have been called to be and to develop disciples,” from our website www.cbcboston.org

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we surrender our old lives to you to live anew forever with you. Help us to be worthy of your love. In Jesus', name Amen.

March 26, 2012

Monday, Fifth Week of Lent

Consequences

Brenda A. Fluker

Read: Matthew 25:31-46

Key Verses: Matthew 25:34, 41, 45

³⁴ *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*

⁴¹ *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

⁴⁵ *“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’*

For every action, there is a reaction, a consequence. When we become followers of Jesus Christ, we become His servants. Jesus has no hands or feet on earth except ours. We are encouraged to serve each person we encounter as though they were Jesus.

This parable sets forth consequences both for those who serve as well as those fail to serve. Simple acts of service that require no special skills or resources are considered: feeding the hungry, giving drink to quench thirst, extending hospitality to strangers, providing clothes for the naked and visiting those in prison. To whom should the service be provided? Service should be rendered to the poor and needy, those without power or ability to repay.

Question of the Day: If Jesus judged your service today, what would be the consequences?

March 27, 2012

Day 30

Tuesday, Fifth Week of Lent

Have You Disowned Him?

Sharon Bryant

Read: Matthew 26

Key Text: 26:69-75

Disowning God is a humongous problem within the body of Christ. In the text Peter did it, the one Christ called the "Rock", the one that went so far as to cut off the soldier's ear when they captured Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. There was no doubt that he loved Jesus and followed Him wherever He went. But when the heat hit the fan, he turned the other way, forgetting about all they had been through together, the people they helped, the love they shared and any connection he had with Jesus. When they recognized him, he denied even knowing Jesus, not once, not twice but three times and even swore by it.

Well how many times have we done that, as people of God? When the going gets tough and it looks like we can be under some type of scrutiny for knowing or associating ourselves with Jesus, we turn and look the other way. You would think that, it would be a good thing if everywhere you went someone recognized you as one that hung around Jesus, so much so that you even sound like Him. That would be a beautiful thing. I would hope if someone were to approach you and say you look and sound like Jesus that you would not curse them out. But you would be proud of the fact that He has rubbed off on you in this way. Let me just say as a child of God and one that is glad to know and associate myself with Jesus, it sure feels good. After all remember Jesus warns us in Matt. 10:32, if we disown Him before men, He will disown us before His Father.

They are several ways we can disown Jesus without cursing someone out. Your decision making and other important traits are ways, you can disown Jesus. When you choose to do the right thing even though the wrong thing feels better, that's standing for Jesus Christ. When you choose to use Godly language instead of profane speech, that's standing for Jesus Christ. When you can say His name even in the face of your enemy, that's standing for Jesus Christ. If you stand up for Jesus today, He will definitely stand up for you before His Father.

Question of the day: Have you disowned Jesus? *Selah (think about it)*

March 28, 2011

Day 31

Wednesday, Fifth Week of Lent

What do you Treasure?

Moreen P. Hughes

Read: Philippians 3: 7-11

Key Verse: *"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. "*
Phil. 3:11

What is the treasure of your life? What do you value most? The question was once asked, if there were a fire and you only had time to grab three things what would they be. Photo albums, electronics, jewelry, heirlooms or other prized possessions? Nearly all of us have had these mental images or gone through this mental exercise.

In Phil. 3, Paul communicates that what he once considered "profit" he now considers "loss." Just before those verses above, he stated in verses 5-6 that he had a great family heritage, social status, biblical knowledge, and even led a moral lifestyle. But when he came into a relationship with Christ, he realized that apart from the Lord, everything else is "loss." Paul exemplifies to all of us what it means to be committed to Christ.

One thing we must understand is that all of these things that Paul had were good things. It's not wrong to be in a great family, to have a job that pays well, to be intelligent, or even to desire these things. But Paul is saying these things are worthless if they take our focus away from knowing Christ and experiencing a deeper love for him.

It's easy to get caught up in the things of this life, but keep in mind that whatever you value most, whatever you consider great or important is quite literally "rubbish" when compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ.

Thought: Our greatest desire in life should be to truly know Christ.

March 29, 2012

Day 32

Thursday, Fifth Week of Lent

Costs of Discipleship

Debra Johnston-Malden

Read: Matthew 26:69-75

Key Verse: *“And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. “ And he went out and wept bitterly.”*

Matthew 26:75

There is a price to pay for every decision we make. The Holy Spirit dwells within us to give us the freedom of choice, and appeals for us to make the right decision. In opposition is the enemy who works in our subconscious mind, struggling for the upper hand.

Like Peter, we have all faced times, where we lie. But the ultimate betrayal for Peter, and for us, is to deny the presence, power, and authority of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The question presented to Peter, was clear, you know the man from Nazareth, don't you? To which he replied, I do not know the man". How dare Peter deny the same Jesus whom he had met with his brothers as fishermen? How dare he deny the Jesus who he walked with, witnessing His miracles, and wonders? Was this not the same Peter who stated in Matthew 16, when asked “who do men say that I am? Replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

We must diligently strive to uphold Christ in our walk, thoughts, words and actions, and never deny Him, as the great I Am!

Thought for the day: And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and all your strength.'

Mark 12:30 New American Standard Bible

March 30, 2012

Day 33

Friday, Fifth Week of Lent

Sit Down Servant

James N. Fripp

Read: Luke 14 :25-34

Key Verse: *“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower, won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? “*

Luke 14: 28

Saturn car dealerships had an intriguing and bold concept for selling cars, in particular in pricing their cars. When you went to buy a Saturn you didn't need a calculator, your two big brothers, and a wise uncle with you to haggle over price. The price of the car was the price on the sticker. It was called up front pricing. No more “excuse me I have to speak with manager,” song and dance. The phrase bait and switch too often applied to many car dealers. Many would like to entice the buyers with one low price and switch up to a higher price. More recently homeowners who took out ARMS (adjustable rate mortgage) also discovered that bait and switch concept when their interest rate jumped up and they were unprepared to pay the unanticipated higher cost, leading to historic levels of foreclosures across the country.

Thank you Jesus for being abundantly clear about the ways and means and cost of discipleship of being a Christian. He asked not for a shifting price or cost but for **all** your being. He has already given his all on the bloody and painful cross of Calvary. His deep love for us was “for freedom Christ has set us free. (Gal. 51).” He asks us “To love your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. (Mark 12:30).” Writers Weeden and Venter in 1896 penned these guiding words:

“All to Jesus I surrender, All to Him I freely give
I will ever love and trust Him, In His presence daily live
All to Jesus I surrender, Humbly at His feet I bow
Worldly pleasures all forsaken, Take me, Jesus, take me now. . .
All to Thee my blessed Savior I surrender all.”

Thought: "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Matthew 10:39

March 31, 2012

Day 34

Saturday, Fifth Week of Lent

The Great Commission

Joseph L. Smith

Read: Matthew 28:16-20

Key Verse: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations."*

Matthew 28:19

How do you go about making disciples? First you need to know what is the Good News. The Book of Romans is a good place to start.

Why do we need salvation? Romans 3:23 tells us, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," There are no big sins and little sins, all sin separates us from God.

What is the consequence of sin? There is a punishment for sin. According to scripture in Roman 6:23a "For the wages of sin is death." We cannot be in the presence of such a holy God in our condition. God has no part of sin.

Instead of eternal damnation, God has a plan for our salvation. In Romans 5:8, we learn "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Our merciful God sent His Son to take the penalty for our sins. Remember Romans 6:23 because it says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Through God's grace, he holds back the punishment and gives us the victory.

How do we get eternal life in Jesus? Ask, Believe and Confess. Romans 10:9-10 instructs us, "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

Prayer: Father God, Hallelujah for Your Grace and Mercy. Thank You for saving me. Help me to share the Good News with others. In Jesus', name Amen.

April 1, 2012

First Printed on April 1, 2007

PALM SUNDAY HOLY WEEK

Finding The Road to Service

Conley Hughes, Jr.

Read: Mark 11:1-19

Key Verse: *"The Lord needs it..."*

Mark 11: 3b

During the end of my junior year in college, a young man approached me as I sat on a bench under a favorite tree that was frequented by students. The young man, he and I sitting alone beneath the canopy of that old southern pine tree, asked me, "What are you going to do when you leave school?" I told him I was planning to go to graduate school and become a pastor, and...and... After listening to my rather verbose plans, the young man looked me in the eye and said, "Pay your dues." The young man left and I don't ever remember seeing him again.

Seasons have come and gone, but I have never forgotten the stark admonition of that mysterious young man. Paying one's dues is an implicit term that means, "Give your life to some service." A life of service is a life of sacrifice. It is the pursuit of passion for a cause, a calling and a vocation. Service is the path a person must follow if he or she is to realize one's true destiny.

Jesus exemplifies what service is when he, having reached the hilly Olivet region, sent his two disciples down to the village to find a donkey that would be used for his providential entrance in the city

The Savior understood well that service requires resources, however limited the task.

Jesus corroborates this in the instructions he gave the two disciples: "Go to the village ahead of you... You will find a colt... Untie it and bring it here." Here, Jesus knew what he needed to fulfill his service. Then Jesus said to the disciples, "If anyone asks you, Why re you doing this? Tell him, the Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly."

The confidence we see in the final part of Jesus' instructions is an encouragement to all Christians, We must all come to understand that God has summoned us to service; we must be willing to use the resources the Lord makes available to complete our tasks.

Remember all service has a life span. Seize the moment, do what you're destined to do, and perform your task with confidence, diligence and reverence.

Thought for the Day: All service involves challenges and even risks, but the road to service will always lead you home. Meditate on Mark 11: 1-19

April 2, 2012
Monday of Holy Week

Day 35

In My Father's House

Venessa B. Rosemond

Read: Matthew 21:12-17

Key Verse: *"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 21:15

A well-known comedian made a routine about the word stuff. He talked about how we work hard so we can buy stuff, we buy a house so we can have a place to keep our stuff and then we are intimidated about leaving our homes for fear of someone taking our stuff. Our stuff displays our good taste, or has sentimental value or may have some use in the future. Stuff creeps into our homes and invades our lives.

Similarly, when Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem, there was some stuff there. Jesus took the opportunity to both say and demonstrate what was and was not acceptable practices in the temple. First Jesus drove out the moneychangers and sellers of sacrificial animals. Within the temple walls, these activities, meant for convenience, were occupying space allocated for worship. Next Jesus declared that His house was a house of prayer and then Jesus proceeded to heal those with physical challenges. The children, who may have been playing in the temple, took time to shout praises to Jesus. Unfortunately the rulers of the temple took offense at the good things He did and the praise He received.

For Christians today, nothing has changed. In our Father's House, there is prayer and praise. Periodically we should enter and look to see what stuff has crept into our church. Are we indignant about the wonderful things and the shouts of children? Do we raise our hands in praise more than we raise our voices in complaints? Do we welcome others into the spirit of worship or crowd them out with selfish aims? Do we shout "Hosannas" as the children did or do we strive to be seen but not heard? When you enter our Father's House what do you bring? Can we increase the praise and decrease the stuff?

Thought for the Day: Identify some stuff in your life and pledge to leave it out of our Father's House.

April 3, 2012
Tuesday of Holy Week

Day 36

Clothes for the Forgiven

Willie Mae Bennett-Fripp

Read: Luke 23: 31-34

Key Verse: *"And they divided up his clothes by casting lots."* Luke 23:34b

My grandmother always told me it's not what you have, but what you do with what you have that matters. She reminded me, sometimes not so gently, that I hadn't used what I had and here I was asking for more. That was one of my early lessons about coveting. We worked hard, we did not have many extra things but we were taught to be grateful for what we had. In other words, our basic needs were met. Whenever there was a surplus, my family shared the abundance, no matter how meager, with those less fortunate, dividing our good fortune whenever we were able.

The soldiers who divided up Jesus' clothes may have been following the tradition of taking the spoils of conflicts. Perhaps, the outer garment was of very high quality, the artisanship being so exquisite that it was not torn but ruffled. We know that the casting of lots was fulfillment of the scriptures. However, for those Roman soldiers the perverse pleasure of mocking Jesus was paramount. Whoever ended up with the garment certainly had bragging rights for one person for just that one time. Maybe the soldier cleaned the garment, wearing it to show others that he was the one upfront at the foot of the cross. He was the winner, the one who had it. However, when Jesus had it or one like it, the hem of it healed the woman with the issue of blood. Even as he was being stripped of it, He asked forgiveness for the soldiers' (and ultimately our) actions.

There is nothing wrong with having things simply to bring us satisfaction, such as collectibles. These things should represent just a small part of us. The majority of what we own, our gifts, our time, our tithes and our talents should be made useful to others. We have been blessed to bless others. Don't leave this earth with hoards of things not having helped or touched anyone along your life journey.

Thought for the Day: How like our Lord, to take what was meant for evil and make it a blessing.

April 4, 2012
Wednesday of Holy Week

Day 37

Upon Being Buried

Deborah Barabino

Read: John 19:38-42

Key Verse: *"Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. "*

John 19:42

After he was crucified Jesus' nervous follower asked for his body along with another follower and they performed the Jewish tradition of preparing his body for burial with spices and wrappings. A tomb near the place of preparation was available and he was buried there. Jesus' broken, torn and lifeless body was claimed by this follower who was afraid of the rulers and angry masses accompanied by another follower who was not a close disciple. Burial is an important part of death. This is true for most people and especially true for most religions. How we recognize the end of a life over the centuries has been of importance.

When Martin Luther King was killed had his followers merely cleaned him and quietly buried him would we know of what he tried to do with his life? The wagon pulled by mules accompanied by men in overalls spoke volumes about the man who cared for God's least of us. The attendance of his small children at his funeral was important for us to understand the gravity of his death not to every black person but to his wife and children who would have to shoulder on without his presence. His burial touched the entire country regardless as to where you stood on his life.

A burial is necessary to bear witness to a life. Jesus had two near anonymous caretakers to prepare his body and bury him. Everything about his burial was significant and necessary to bear witness to his life and his promised resurrection. It bears witness to his life from how he laid as a babe in a manger and as a crucified adult he lay in an unused but borrowed tomb. His life has provided the world with the greatest gift ever offered mankind...everlasting life. His life is the gospel, the good news!

April 5, 2012 (First printed on April 9, 2009)

Day 38

HOLY THURSDAY / MAUNDY THURSDAY

Trusting the Lord's Plan

Conley Hughes, Jr.

Read: Luke 22: 7-23; Exodus 12: 1-28

Key Verse: *"They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover."*

Luke 22:13

The Jewish Passover event is an essential part of Jesus' journey to the cross. The Passover lamb signified that Jesus himself would become the required sacrifice for the sins of all humankind. During the Passover meal, certain parts of the lamb were observed with particular attention, along with other items on the table.

The identification of the meat, bread, the cup of wine and the bitter herbs were symbols of both the suffering and the redemption of God's people. On the night of Jesus' betrayal he gave particular attention to the cup, which contained the wine, and the bread, which did not contain any yeast. According to Luke's account, Jesus blessed the cup twice. In the second blessing which occurred *after* the full meal, Jesus declared that the cup a symbol "my blood." This "blood" cup also served as a new covenant relationship between Jesus and anyone who would receive him as Lord.

To the surprise of his disciples, Jesus made sure that *everything* he and the Twelve needed was in place. Jesus simply gave the disciples instructions and when they entered the city, everything was exactly as Jesus had said. The room was available, so the disciples were able to quickly arrange the items for the meal. There is no record of the disciples carrying any food or items with them. We merely need to understand what the disciples did: *"They left and found things just as Jesus had told them."*

The Lord always has a plan. As His disciples we need only to trust His promises that all will be as He has said. Julianne of Norwich, a devoted Christian saint, was fond of saying that with Jesus "all will be well." The events of the day leading to the evening of Maundy Thursday, the night of the Christian's first Lord's Supper, remind us that because our Lord is a part of the great plan of redemption, all will be as He has said.

Prayer: O' Lord, teach me to trust the Savior in all that I do and to remember that everything will be just as He has said. In His precious name, Amen.

April 6, 2012

(First Printed April 2, 2010)

Day 39

GOOD FRIDAY

What Good Will A Day Bring?

Conley Hughes, Jr.

Read: Mark 15: 15-41

Key Verse: *"It was the third hour when they crucified him."* Mark 15:25

We Christians believe firmly that there was *no* moment in the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus that God the Father was not present. Perhaps this is why in the waning moment of His earthly life, Jesus cried, "Father into your hands, I commend my spirit." This prayer for which tradition holds every Jewish mother taught her child to utter at night, escaped from the heart and tortured spirit of Jesus.

Despite what is grim about the crucifixion of Jesus, there is good that emerges from the event. We know that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice and His death opened the gates to salvation and immortality. In Romans 5, the great Apostle Paul bluntly states that "death reigned through one man, Adam" but Jesus' death brought salvation and eternal life. The good news is *what* Jesus brought through His death and suffering: eternal life!

It is possible that the commemoration of the day Jesus was crucified inherited the name, *Good Friday*, in part because for the western world the word good came from the word God. Implicit in the use of the term is the fact that God was really in control of the events of Calvary. As dim as the day was, it was a good day because God was at work through His Son.

Life's miserable moments may be inherently better than we assume. Wherever God is present, some good is a part of the event. Remember what young Joseph told his brothers after he took perspective of his suffering: "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you (Genesis 45:5b)."

Strangely, Mark only mentions the hour the crucifixion began. "It was the third hour (9:00 a.m.) when they crucified him." Mark knew whether beginning or end, God was at work and that was good.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, bring to fruition all of the good that is to found in the events of my life. From the beginning to the end, cause your good purpose to prevail. In Jesus' name, Amen.

April 7, 2012

Holy Saturday

Day 40

"When Jesus Call My Name"

Moreen P. Hughes

Read: John 20: 1-21; 25

Key Verse: "Jesus said to her, "Mary". She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means teacher)." John 20: 16

As we go through life, many different people call our name. And it's amazing to me just how many different messages that can be conveyed to us, depending on just how people call our name. When we're growing up, our parents call our name. Sometimes that is done in a very calm, gentle, loving manner. But other times, especially when they use our full name, it conveys a completely different message. When we go to school, our teachers call our name. And the way they call can convey all kinds of emotions – from delight to disgust, from reward to reproof

When Jesus called Mary's name He created a whole new relationship with her. We know that Mary had a relationship with Jesus prior to His death and resurrection, but His resurrection changed the character of that relationship. No longer would Mary be able to experience the physical presence of Jesus, but she was going to get something far better – a permanent relationship.

When Jesus calls my name, it means that He is calling me to a personal, intimate relationship with Him. When Jesus calls your name he is calling you to experience the abundant life and joy that comes from a personal relationship with him and his Father. When Jesus calls your name, will you answer? Like Mary, will you cry out to him?

Prayer: Dear God, may I always listen and recognize your voice as you call me into relationship with you as my Teacher and my Lord! Amen

April 8, 2012

(First printed April 4, 2010)

RESURRECTION SUNDAY / EASTER SUNDAY

Beyond All Doubts!

Conley Hughes, Jr.

Read: Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-48; 1 Corinthians 15:20-58

Key Verse: *"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."* 1 Corinthians 15:20

The Apostle Paul's bold letter to the Christian community in ancient Corinth is the first major defense for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible. Paul's single word, *"But"* means despite all doubts or claims to the contrary! There is no other explanation for the empty grave, the unfurled clothing, and the removal of the great stone that sealed the borrowed tomb that domiciled the body of Jesus. *"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead."*

We note in the picturesque words of this great verse in Corinthians that God the Father was also involved in the act of redemption. Jesus cried to the Father in his dying moment, *"Father into thy hands I commit my spirit, Luke 23:46, NIV."* Paul says, Christ *"has indeed been raised."* The word Paul used for "raised," *egiro*, means "to summon" or "to call forth." Just as Jesus had called Lazarus from death to life, so did the Heavenly Father call Jesus to eternal life.

The *Resurrection* of Christ forever *cancelled* the power of death over life. The grave can no longer enslave the body it only retains the body temporarily. Sin no longer carries the penalty of perpetual death and suffering for those who follow Christ. The gift of God is eternal life. The night before His crucifixion Jesus prayed, *"Now this is eternal life: that they [all believers] may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent, John 17:3, NIV."*

We sing our most glorious songs on Resurrection Sunday for if Christ had not been raised from the dead all of what we believe and do would be futile. We join in the chorus with the saints present and past in declaring that our Lord has been raised from the dead, Hallelujah!

Journey to the Cross: In Search of Commitment

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February, 2012

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