



St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Boyertown

2023
Lent Devotional

Verses 1-4: This passage starts out with the words “Watch Out!” This to me is a warning, I want to listen to what or how I could be in danger. The warning is not to do your good deeds in public “to be admired by others”.

Don't draw attention to your acts of charity like the hypocrites do – they have received all the reward they will ever get. Give your gifts in private and your Father who sees everything will reward you.

So don't look for praise or approval here on earth by the bystanders – God sees All and you should be doing good deeds FOR God, not for the compliments and praise of people on earth. God's approval is all you need.

Verses 5-6: The same holds true for when you pray – the scripture says when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. That is all the reward they will ever get. It says to pray by yourself, shut the door behind you and pray to your Father in Private – then your Father who sees everything will reward you.

I pray in the car out loud every day and that is my private time in prayer – but we can also pray all day, while working, while shopping, while talking with friends, coworkers or family, we can be praying to ourselves for the people we are conversing with, or the circumstances in front of us. Praying without ceasing is a part of life, a part of survival – it's not a display for others to see. Only God hears us and that is all we need.

Verses 16-21: The same also holds true for when you fast.

Again, this scripture refers to the hypocrites who draw attention to themselves but that is the only reward they get. Fast in private and no one will notice except your Father who knows what you do in private and your Father who sees everything will reward you.

We want to store up treasures in Heaven, not here on earth. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

When you recognize that God sent his son to die for your sins, and then the Holy Spirit to live in you, you understand that God wants to be part of your daily life because God loves you. And life gets easier with the constant connection to God. Helping those in need, Prayer and Fasting are all things God wants you to do – but you don't need

any accolades from anyone here on earth. As long as you know you are serving God and doing what matters to God, you will have all the accolades you need!

Father God, thank you for loving me so much that you sent your son to die for my sins and the Holy Spirit to be my connection to you every day. Thank you for loving me and acknowledging what I want to do for others. In this selfish, competitive world, your Love and Praise is all I need. In your precious son's name. Amen.

Bonnie Moatz

Call to Obedience through Faith

How would you greet a stranger? Today, with our use of social media, emails, text messages, IMs, DMs, etc. that replace real socialization, we seem to have lost the art of formally introducing ourselves – who we are and what we stand for. As a result, we tend to have superficial relationships. Paul was anticipating his visit to Rome to meet with the Christians there. In this letter's introduction, Paul shows us how to properly introduce ourselves. First, Paul introduces himself to the church (which was composed predominately of Gentiles, with a minority of Jews) as “a servant of Christ Jesus” – someone who willingly chooses to serve his master. Paul states that he was called to be an apostle, commissioned by Jesus, to spread the Gospel. He then goes on to establish the credentials of Jesus, giving a Cliff's Notes summary of Jesus' earthly life's history from the prophets in the Old Testament through his resurrection.

Paul then encourages all who are called to be his holy people by the grace and apostleship extended to us to become obedient through faith, since we “belong to Jesus Christ” - called to be God's holy people.

Wow! Paul's whole mission in a nutshell. If we could only follow Paul's example to introduce ourselves similarly and truthfully, what a difference each one of us could make in the world.

Dear Lord, strengthen our faith so that when we meet people, we can introduce ourselves as Paul did. Amen.

Jim Kershner

As we go through this season of Lent, and especially on this day, it seems appropriate to offer thanks of all kinds, and in many different ways. Specifically, because in this passage, Paul offered a prayer of thanks through Christ, and gave God credit for the faith of those who believed in Him. It's observed that Paul was not thanking the people for believing in God. Instead, he thanked God because He is the one who enables people to believe. Paul gave God all of the credit for the people's faiths. This shows us that Paul serves God with his spirit, from his heart. We learn in these verses about Paul's longing to visit Rome. He wanted to impart to the Romans spiritual gifts. He was inspired to become encouraged by each other's faith, and he was longing to be fruitful. The most important thing is that Paul did not want anything in return from them, besides to preach the gospel and love of God to others. He understands that the gospel brings salvation to those who believe, and that salvation comes to those who believe, no matter who they are. Let this passage today be a reminder to you that we should now, through Lent, and always- strive to be disciples who share the good news of our Lord and Savior. Let us all remember to do this, with Paul's loving example in mind.

Dear God, thank You for the glorious gospel of Christ. Thank You that the righteousness of God has been revealed in the Cross. Thank You that I am saved by grace through faith in Christ. Lord, I want to live my life by faith and grow in grace. I pray that my life may be lived by faith, to Your praise and glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lauren Frey

When I read this scripture passage, I thought of my 3-year-old granddaughter. Vin wakes up without a care in the world. She does not worry. She has no planned agenda. She has no thoughts of competition, of measuring up. She does not think about her appearance. She holds no grudges; she has no regrets, no guilt, no anger or resentment. She does not yet know what these emotions are. She is open to whatever happens that day. She speaks the truth of how she feels and what she thinks. She asks questions and accepts the answers given. She does not argue or complain.

Why? Because she knows that mom and dad will take care of her. She trusts them. Their control of her life leaves her free to enjoy whatever comes along.

Oh, to have the mindset of a child! To trust God like my granddaughter trusts her parents! To be open to each day, knowing that God is in control of my life and allows only what will redeem me and make me ready for an eternal life of joy and contentment.

But as I write these words, I realize that some of you may not have had such an idyllic childhood. At an early age you may have lived with fear and abuse and confusion and neglect.

God is aware. He knows. And He offers verses 6 and 7 as comfort and hope to you. There will be justice. God will compensate you for your loss of childhood. God will redeem the years of pain and suffering. Hold on to your faith in His plan for your life and future, which is good and brings joy.

Lord God, maker of Heaven and Earth, sovereign over all creation, YOU love and YOU act out of that love to bring about goodness and redemption of every situation. Give us the mindset of the child YOU want us to be.

Martha Bentley

Just prior to the events in Matthew Chapter 4, we learn that Jesus has been baptized, followed by the Holy Spirit descending upon him to equip him for his work as the divine-human Messiah. Although Jesus was sinless and needed no repentance, this humble act of Jesus allowed him to identify himself with our sin and failure.

As we follow the events in chapter 4, we learn that the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and nights and then to be tempted by the devil. After each of Satan's temptations, Jesus quotes scripture from Deuteronomy. Each quote confirmed that there is only one Lord God who we are to serve.

Throughout our own lifetime, we, too, have wilderness moments when we feel alone, hungry for answers and, unlike Jesus, we are often ill-equipped to handle the pressures of life that confront us. But as baptized members of the body of Christ, we have professed our belief that Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose again. With that belief, we have been given the Holy Spirit to guide us each day and in every circumstance.

Reflect, if you will, on the following scripture passages:

John 6:68 – Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” We are to daily pray and daily be in the Word of God for guidance as to how to live our lives.

Matthew 6:33 – “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Where will you find his kingdom and his righteousness? In the living word of God, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, Proverbs 3:5-6 – “Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, you have the words of eternal life and the answers to all our needs. We pray your Holy Spirit will guide us each day to seek you first for Godly wisdom and Godly understanding. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Jean Machamer

In the book of Hebrews the writer is trying to convince the Hebrew readers and us that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah.

Jesus needed to become human. He was flesh and blood just like we are. He faced the same challenges we face every day. We make excuses for our behavior, saying "That's just the way I am." Jesus never said it was okay to do wrong because we are human. He wants us to do the right thing always. He knew what it felt like to be tempted and He doesn't leave us to overcome our weaknesses by ourselves. Jesus came to help us. He is right there giving us the strength to make the right choices. He knows we can when we look to Him for help.

God, who is beyond and above the range of normal physical human experience, is revealed in the suffering, death, and resurrection of the man Jesus. With Jesus' suffering and death God destroyed the power of Satan.

In the book of Hebrews, physical death is less a threat than spiritual death. Spiritual death is our self-absorption while ignoring the needs of our neighbors. We are held in slavery until we live our lives by reaching out to those in need, which includes those so self-absorbed that their Sin, as well as their spiritual death, is invisible to them.

Heavenly Father, we pray for Your help through the Holy Spirit to look beyond ourselves to the world and peoples You created. Guide us toward Jesus our Savior to seek the help we need to live lives pleasing to You, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Virga Brown

Hebrews has two relevant purposes. One is to encourage Christians to endure and not to weaken their faith in Christ. Faithfulness, love and sound doctrine are encouraged.

In the passage Jesus is able to sympathize with human weaknesses. During days of Jesus on earth prayers came forth. It is understood Jesus has been through weaknesses and testing.

Jesus is available to represent our struggles to God. Jesus understands when we need help. Jesus is a mediator of God's grace. Jesus is a great high priest - a divine son of God. It is important to hold fast to confession and to find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. We have a full path to prayer. It is important to remember prayer is an avenue to Jesus.

Jesus is able to deal gently with the wayward since he himself is subject to weakness. He learned obedience through what he suffered. He was designated a high priest by God.

Jesus, help me with my struggles. I am able to share them with you and look for guidance. I can hold on to your mercy and forgiveness. Many times there are difficult decisions and questions, I need to keep others in my prayers as well. Look in mercy on the hungry. Help me to check in with you. Amen.

Dave Long

“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

Is Jesus speaking about children (for the sake of discussion possibly those under 12) or is He speaking about all those who believe in Him and have become like children in acknowledging their vulnerability and need? Either way, but especially if the latter is the case, Jesus’ words of warning and exhortation give witness to the tremendous care and devotion God has for each of us. God wants nothing more than to be in relationship with us and would risk everything to seek us out.

If the “little ones” includes *anyone* who is vulnerable and in need, it’s not so much a matter of Jesus aligning Himself solely with those who believe in Him but with those who are most vulnerable. In which case the church, must be a gathering of disciples rather than a social club, and must follow Jesus’ example in caring for those who are weak.

Dear God, help us to believe that you love us more than anything, and then enable us to believe that you love everyone else just as much. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Pastor Bob Machamer

The apostle Paul is in jail awaiting death and writing to Timothy, his dear partner in ministry. Paul is in a position to reflect on his life and his relationship with Timothy. It was Paul who laid hands on Timothy, bringing him into the ministry of disciple-making in these early years following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While it was Paul who brought him into ministry, Timothy's *calling* to ministry was a gift from God, a spark from the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds Timothy that despite Timothy's living faith (verse 5), there will be times when the spark will have to be fanned into a flame. When we find ourselves like Timothy, with a living faith, but just a spark in our gifts, we should not be ashamed or timid, but actively seek the source that can re-ignite our gifts, "for the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline." There's no doubt that Paul and Timothy had a mentoring relationship and that they worked in community. I believe that Paul helped to sustain Timothy's flame. But Paul is preparing Timothy for Paul's death, when Paul will no longer be able to assist in the same way. But that's okay! Because Paul has equipped Timothy for acts of service, and sometimes that service need be directed to one's self. The Spirit gave us power, love, and self-discipline to rely on when in need.

Dear God the Spirit, Thank you for the gifts you have given us as we live our lives of faith. While we desire to always burn bright for you and through you, we know there are days when we feel our flame is a mere spark. We are thankful for those who have ministered with us to fan our sparks into flames. Help us see that we are equipped to do the same for others for the sake of Jesus the Son. Amen.

Jen Schlegel

LOVE IS ALL YOU NEED?

Nope.

So, we search our souls asking what does truly bring us love, joy, fulfillment, and peace. And we know in our hearts as Christians that we cannot achieve those things without being “Right” with God. Our verses today are a very simple roadmap to find that righteousness with God.

Is it by confessing our sins, doing good works, tithing regularly or praying devoutly?

Nope.

What if we did none of those things. What if we have committed multiple sins? Can we ever be righteous in God’s eyes?

With certainty, yes.

WITH FAITH.

We find “the righteousness of God through FAITH in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by this grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through FAITH...”(Romans 3:22-25).

A simple roadmap, where Paul directs us, “For we hold that a person is justified by FAITH apart from works prescribed by the law” (Romans 3:28).

FAITH, and FAITH alone is our answer.

Holy and eternal God, give us open hearts and curious minds that we may seek and find faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, with faithful devotion to delight in His will and walk in His ways to the glory of Thy name. Amen.

Tracey Smith

St. David’s Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA

The centurion, a Gentile, a Roman soldier, sends some of the Jewish elders to Jesus to ask for healing for his servant, and they describe the centurion as “worthy,” as deserving of this healing gift. And yet, when the centurion himself meets Jesus, he says he is “*not* worthy” to even have Jesus in his house. I’m fairly confident that, no matter how my friends might describe me on my best day, when I one day stand before Jesus, I will feel most unworthy.

But see how Jesus responds to the centurion in verse 9! Jesus doesn’t use the word “worthy,” but He finds the centurion worthy not only of healing for his servant, but of public commendation for his faith. The centurion, with all his power and respect among the people, displays not only great faith but great humility. He recognizes and understands the authority of Christ. The disciples closest to Jesus, those who observed his miracles of healing day in and day out, those who witnessed him walking on water and calming the sea, didn’t always seem to understand, but this centurion, this Gentile, this outsider, did. And Jesus commends him for it.

Loving Creator God, You alone are worthy of all glory and honor and praise! I am reminded daily of all the ways I fall short of my unworthiness. But, because of Your Son, your greatest gift, because of His sacrifice, death, and resurrection, You say I am worthy. I am clothed in the righteousness of Christ and declared worthy. Help me to live by faith, with humility and grace, surrendered to Your authority, and always with gratitude for Your great love. Amen.

Amanda Ehst

This passage features one of the most well-loved verses in Scripture: “God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life.” That type of unconditional love seems almost unfathomable in its magnitude. God loved each and every one of us so much that he made the ultimate sacrifice by sending his only Son to die for our sins, so that we could have the gift of eternal life. This wasn’t something we asked for or earned, but rather it was freely given to us as a sign of God’s love. In the Scripture, Jesus also teaches Nicodemus that we can receive new life through the Holy Spirit. That promise of being made new by the Spirit, something that only God could achieve, gives a message of hope that all of us, despite our brokenness or our sins, can have the promise of new life in Christ. The message from this passage can serve as a reminder to us that we are made new and whole by God’s unconditional love, which we should share with all those around us.

Lord, thank you for loving us so freely that you would give your only Son for us so that we can have eternal life. May we remember that your Spirit gives us new life and may we strive to share your love with those around us. Amen.

Molly Byrne

Christ is greater than Moses... *...why certainly he is.*

Hebrews 3:1–6 underscores the apostolic and high-priestly ministry of Jesus, who in himself becomes the mediator between God and man—since he is divine and human. He speaks God’s word as the divine apostle; he sanctifies and saves humanity as the glorious high priest. He co-furnishes the universe and the church with God, and he thus shares in the glory and honor of God, while at the same time is said to be formed by God. The author of Hebrews affirms the dual reality that Jesus is both divine and human, uncreated and created.

The shocking reality is that we become included in the life of Jesus - his glory, honor, sanctity, salvation, and representation, because we become children of God due to his incarnation, sufferings, resurrection and ascension. We become participants in the heavenly reality of Jesus and gain the status as children of God through Him (and we are his house) - the very household that Moses was only a servant of.

However, these rewards, honor and glory only come to those who “hold fast to the courage and to the hope of which we boast.” This holding fast work does not imply anything about our ability. Rather, it implies that we speak to the Father with boldness because of our hope in Jesus our High Priest. In short, we hold fast by holding fast to the confidence we have, because Christ suffered for us and for our salvation.

Heavenly Father, thank you for always working to reintroduce us into your spiritual family and all that that means. We praise you for the gift of your Son, Jesus, your Holy Spirit and the Bible, all of which helps to train us to be family members in better standing and into your Spiritual family where acceptance, forgiveness and peace in the family reigns supreme, knowing that you welcome all and having shown us that Jesus welcomes all, that we too can welcome all, as none of us have earned or deserve the love and acceptance that you shower unto each of us. Help us to give grace in the same way that we so willingly accept it. Amen.

Brian Moatz

Paul reminds us in this scripture that the outward sign is not as important as the inward reality. Abraham realizes that righteousness is not earned through the law or by who you are, but by faithfulness to God. Circumcision was a sign to others as a seal or certification for the Jews that they were thought to be God's special people. Ceremonies and rituals serve as reminders of our faith, but they do not give us any special place or favor with God. Everyone is forgiven for their sins as long as you have faith in the Lord, and you ask him for forgiveness. Confess your sins and you will be forgiven. Forgiveness, mercy, and grace are granted to everyone, no matter your race, nationality, or religion as long as you believe in God and ask for forgiveness. You do not have to publicly confess your sins. You can do this privately in a one-on-one conversation with God – he will forgive. Believe and ask.

Heavenly Father, thank you for granting us forgiveness, grace, and mercy, by believing in you and just asking for forgiveness and confessing our sins. Thank you for your unconditional love no matter what our race, nationality, or religion. Amen.

Mary Kay Heimbach

The speed limit is 25 mph. There is no one on the road and no pedestrians. Will it matter if my speedometer registers 35 mph, 40, or even 50 mph? There is NO one around. Does it matter that I'm breaking the law?

They thought no one knew. She was achingly lonely; he could not get along with his wife. But someone noticed and told. The Pharisees and scribes were anxious to ensnare Jesus. So, they brought her (how I wonder: did she struggle or scream, did she cry or plead?) to Jesus while he was teaching. They had an audience, witnesses.

There is no mention of whether the adulterous act was for money, for love, or for comfort. But, according to Mosaic law it was illegal. Its penalty was only for the woman – stoning until she died. Did she have a child or an elderly relative she needed to provide for? I don't know. I do know her situation looked bleak.

Sometimes when situations are most dire, God is silent. He may just be writing on the ground, trying to block out the cacophony of voices demanding their kind of justice. Or, he may be waiting... He asks if anyone is without sin. (Certainly not in the same category, but, have I ever broken the speed limit?) The person without sin can pick up the first stone. That person is Jesus. He is without sin and yet died for the woman and for us. He did not pick up a stone.

Both she and I are told to sin no more. I don't know if the woman lived a virtuous life after her encounter with Jesus. I do know that I continually need his forgiveness for my sins of omission and commission. The next time I get into my car and become annoyed with the car in front of me carefully observing the speed limit, I hope I think of the woman who was not stoned.

Help me, Lord, to sin no more, or at least less. I know that despite my best efforts, I will probably fail. Yet, I trust in your mercy, love and forgiveness to help me strive to be like you. Amen.

Cathy Krause

Christ is Supreme

v.15: Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

This line has made me really think. God is the maker of all things in the universe, including Christ. God created Christ to give us someone tangible we could look to and who could show us how he wanted us to live. However, we didn't trust or learn the lessons Christ was trying to teach. Christ died on the cross for us to take our sins away, but it wasn't until God had him rise from the dead that people started to believe.

God will always welcome us into his Kingdom, but he wants us to live in a way that serves him and his people.

Dear God, please help us in our efforts to serve you and help us with the daily temptations we face. Thank you for your unending love and help us reach out to those who need our help. In your name we pray. Amen.

Melissa Eidle

God is on a mission to reconcile all people to God's self; *therefore* our purpose should be to join in that mission. In the verses just prior to this passage, we hear the familiar message of saving grace: "it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." In gratitude for this free gift of grace, we can't help but serve others. And that brings us to the first word of verse 11: *therefore*. What an important word! We are called into service, executing our purpose to join in God's mission of reconciliation of all people to God (v.15-16).

Paul reminds us that any separations, any divisions that remain are separations and divisions that humans make consequential. They are not consequential to God. Verse 14 speaks especially strongly to me: he has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility (v.14). While the barrier and the wall of hostility do not have to be physical, and more times it seems they aren't, I can't help but recall seeing the wall that divides Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It's immense and threatening; it's also beautiful and inspiring, as the Palestinian side of the wall is filled with art and graffiti. Much of this graffiti contains messages of reunification, messages denouncing apartheid, messages imploring humane treatment for all people. In his book, "The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope," Lutheran pastor Munther Isaac writes about life behind the wall. He provides a message from the other side of the wall, and it is a message "of grace, the unmerited love of God. We have a message of love, forgiveness, and mercy. We have a message that loving God and loving neighbor are expressions of one another. We have a radical message with radical implications about loving and humanizing the enemy."

Where are the walls that we have built in our lives here in the greater Boyertown area? As individuals? As a community of faith? These walls prevent us from joining God's mission to reconcile all people to God. *Therefore*, it's about time we tear down walls that separate and divide God's people so that we may indeed be "fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (v.19-20).

Dear God, I pray for all to know the hope that is found in the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ. May we act on that hope today by joining in with your mission to reconcile all people, removing barriers and walls that prevent us from loving you and loving our neighbors as one community, one humanity. Amen.

Jen Schlegel

This passage gives us some background for the woman at the well. Jesus made the decision to go to Galilee by way of Samaria. He could have taken a longer, safer route that would have avoided Samaria. The residents of Samaria had hated Jesus and his followers. Why did Jesus take this longer route, was it geographical or was it theological? Was it theologically planned that with Jesus going around Samaria midday He would encounter the woman at the well?

Sometimes our life journey takes us on a different path rather than the best one. Instead, we follow the one that is the easiest, the shortest, or the one that makes the most money. Is this God's plan? We can get lost in a wilderness of wrong doings and have encounters with people and things that lead us on the wrong path. It is our faith and our belief of God that leads us back to the correct way.

We pray that we are on the correct journey to do what is God's plan for us. Amen.

Betty Long

Drink From a Different Well?

When first reading this scripture passage, I was drawn toward the obvious acceptance Jesus had for the Samaritan woman. But the initial dialog between the two is what really stuck with me.

Here we have a woman who comes to the same "well" always with the results. This time Jesus is at the well and asks, "Will you give me a drink? ... "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst." Is Jesus really saying, "This time, give me a try, let me help ease your burdens and your troubles" ... "with me, all can be better,"?

Each of us has our own "well" we drink from. Whether in public, or more likely in private. Maybe it's time to drink from a different well? Maybe our burdens and troubles will not feel so impenetrable if we accept the help already waiting for us through Jesus?

Lord, we thank you for meeting us where we are. Not expecting more or less, but exactly as we are. We are open and willing to accept you and your guidance from this day forward. Amen.

Mike Omlor

v.6: And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands.

Anyone who has been a parent knows that having a child who obeys is such a delight. On the other hand, a rebellious child brings much heartache. And so, it is with God. We bring Him much joy when we obey and disappointment when we don't.

But do we know what He commands? Most of us know "love God, love others." Jesus gave other commands.

Did you know that Jesus said anyone who gossips or slanders another is a murderer? (Matthew 5:21-22) You have murdered their reputation and are worthy of severe punishment. Have you ever done this? I have.

Did you know that Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. Matthew 5:38-39

Would you allow someone to take unfairly all that you had and not complain? Trust God to give you whatever you needed? Wow. I'm feeling guilty right now.

My point is, we must know everything that Christ told us, not just "believe" and "love God, love others". And to do that, we must study Scripture. The Lenten season is the perfect time to begin the practice of reading the gospels daily, a little at a time, over and over, so we remember and obey.

Heavenly Father, Savior of us all, we want to please you. But we need your help. We need you to show us in your word what you want us to do and give us the gift of insight to see our weaknesses clearly, the gift of humility to confess these faults, and the gift of strength to obey all your commands. Amen.

Martha Bentley

Paul starts off in his first four words with an admonition to the Christians at Corinth not to forget what God did for their ancestors in the past. It is something we all do quickly when things do not go the way we would like. The people forgot how God saved their ancestors at the Red Sea, how He fed them manna every morning, gave them water from a rock that followed them in the wilderness, and how He led the people with a cloud by day and with fire by night.

God gave us the bible with all his unfailing promises. He only asks that we read it, study it, and discuss it with other Christians. This is a very important and basic duty that God and Jesus ask us to do. I have come to believe in small group meetings to accomplish this. I ask that you read verses three and four in the living bible, if possible. Thank you for this opportunity.

Blessings to all. To God be the glory. Amen.

Bill Smith

v.24: Don't judge by appearance. Judge by what is right. (CEV)

Oh, my! How do I judge? With whom do I stand in this passage? The temple leaders who wanted to know where Jesus learned his teaching, the crowd that can't understand why Jesus would be killed, the crowd that think he might be the Messiah, the people who want Jesus arrested or the people who believe in Jesus?

How often do I fall into all these categories! Have I ever questioned a person's origins based on the color of their skin? Have I ever thought someone was crazy (demon-possessed in Jesus's day) based on my incomplete knowledge (think: social media)? Have I ever judged a person whose religious life is different from mine?

This group of verses occurs during the Feast of Tabernacles. It is one of the three major pilgrimage/festivals which every man was required to attend. It occurs at the end of the Jewish year. It is kept for 7 days. See Leviticus 23: 39-43.

On the 8th day, the great day of the feast, the ceremony of water-pouring happens. It celebrates rain as a gift from God that enables the harvest. Jesus uses this to teach about the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit has been given to us, think baptism: to live among God's faithful people; to hear the word of God; to share the Lord's Supper; to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; to serve all people following the example of Jesus; and to strive for justice and peace in all the world. Every one of these promises requires judgment and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

How often do I neglect the Holy Spirit and my baptismal promises? I need to hear Jesus's words: "Don't judge by appearance. Judge by what is right."

Dear Lord, I have failed so often by judging by what is not right, not true. I continue to need your forgiveness and mercy. Help me to be more responsive to the Holy Spirit. Help me to judge by what is right, not appearances. Amen.

Cathy Krause

In this passage from Ephesians Paul reminds us (through his letter to the Ephesians) that we are all one body through Christ. As Jesus said in John 13:34 “A new command I give you: Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

If we are to become Disciples of Jesus we need to live as God wants us to. I think what Paul says here is we need to have a rebirth (born again) way of thinking and acting.

1. Put off falsehood and speak only the truth to our brothers and sisters. Don't lie and be deceitful, rather be open and honest. We are all of the same body in Christ!

2. Its ok to be angry, but do not sin. Anger is an emotion and can be controlled. Don't be angry and sin to retaliate for some wrong someone may have done (don't give Satan a foothold). Don't let the sun go down on your anger or as my grandmother reminded me “don't go to bed mad”

3. Paul says; do not steal any longer, do something useful with your hands. I think this also means don't take something you're not entitled to such as government or insurance benefits or accepting the too much change when paying for something. The passage tells us to do something useful with our hands so we can help those in need.

4. We need always to speak encouraging words to and about each other. We should think before we speak so that we can help those we are speaking to and those listening! Sometimes saying nothing is best. Remember silence can be golden!

5. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit. After some research I found that grieve is a verb in this case, when we follow our ways, instead of the path of the Spirit, we cause the Spirit to grieve. When I understand that I cannot live my life without following the Holy Spirit, I don't want to grieve him.

6. We must turn away from bitterness, anger, rage, brawling, slander and every kind of malice. We must replace these feelings with kindness, understanding and compassion. We must be quick to forgive just as God forgives us through Christ.

Precious Lord, Thank you for all your blessings, mercy, grace and your word. Grant us strength that we may live your word through Christ Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.

Dave Babb

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (v. 1-2).

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of the light (v. 8).

In reading this passage I am reminded of the lyrics of the children's song I once sang in Sunday School a very long time ago; "This Little Light of Mine." There are many versions, but the message remains the same.

Paul's message to the Ephesians and to us today is to repent our sins and live a life that is pleasing to God. This will bring us out of darkness and into the light of the Lord. We are also called to spread that light to others and show our love to God and neighbor just as God through Christ loved us and gave himself up for us through the darkness of his crucifixion and the light of his resurrection.

Gracious Lord, may I be a light of your love to those around me. In your name I pray. Amen.

Bev Blake

The Word Became Flesh

1) In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made.

4) In him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it.

6) There came a man who was sent from God, his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light, he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

In the beginning God created everything in the world. Some people don't believe that God is the creator. As a result, the light that they use doesn't light God's world. So, they are in darkness. They see some things that they want to see but they do not understand God's creation. They live in darkness in a chaotic and competitive world that doesn't make any sense quite a bit of the time and which can be very upsetting to themselves and their friends and family too. They make bad decisions because they don't see God's world. We know what it's like because sometimes we live our life and forget about God's world and make mistakes too.

Jesus came into the world as a light of God and from God - so we all can see God's world. Jesus is the true light. In verse 6 it says a man named John was sent by God as a witness to the light of Jesus. John the Baptist was there to tell us and convince us that Jesus was more than just a man. Jesus is the Son of God and through him we can know God and understand God and his creation. John was a witness to the light of Jesus so we can see God's world.

Thank you, God, for your wonderful creation. We are so fortunate. Help us to remember all the good things we have that you gave us. Our grateful actions are a way for us to be a light of God too like Jesus is and to show others how blessed we all are. When we think of you and do your will it shows others the beautiful and special miracle that you created for all of us to understand and appreciate. Thank you for everything.

George Hill

This passage from John is telling me that no matter what type of pain you may be going through, there is always a light. The blind man was a beggar, and he was suffering. Jesus was his light amongst the pain and suffering. Jesus saved him and cured him from his blindness, and he was able to spread the word of this amazing encounter. Anyone who acknowledged the work of Jesus was removed from the church. This man's new-found faith was tested by the authorities, but his faith held strong. Persecution may come when you follow Jesus. You may lose the ones you love; you may even lose your life. But no one can ever take away the eternal life that Jesus gives you when you turn towards Him.

Being in pain and suffering was believed to be a result of sin. Christ used this man's suffering as a way to teach him faith and the glory of God. If God took away suffering whenever we needed, we would follow him for comfort and convenience, not out of true love and devotion, which is His intent. No matter what caused the suffering, Jesus can help us handle it. Instead of asking God why bad things happened to you, ask Him to be alongside of you while you are searching for the light amongst your darkness.

Dear God, whatever our darkness may be, let us know that God is with us every step of the way and is guiding us to the light. I pray that we are not blind enough to know that God is with us. I pray that we use our experiences with God to share his word. I pray that we find our light, whatever it may be, but that in everything we give thanks to God. Amen.

Camryn Friz

The Conversion of Paul

This chapter tells of Saul and his vengeance against the people who were following Jesus. He would threaten them with death. He decided to travel to Damascus, a city with a high population of Jews. On his journey he is overcome with a flash of light bringing him to his knees. The story continues with his conversion to an apostle for Jesus.

Just the journey tells me of his determination to carry out his mission of eliminating followers of Jesus. There were others traveling with him, but we don't know if they were on the same mission. On his trip, he heard a voice asking why he was persecuting Jesus. The story continues his experience of being converted to the apostle Paul.

It's a great story and I wonder why Jesus called him to be an Apostle. Was it because he was a hard worker and devoted to his cause? Could he be trusted? Was he alone in life, no family or friends? Was it a way for Jesus to stop the threat of death to the other Apostles?

Knowing his former cause of eliminating followers of Jesus, can he be trusted to remain faithful to an exact opposite mission?

Trusting in Jesus answers my questions.

Heavenly Father, help us to have and trust in you for all things. Thank you for your son, Jesus, to show us the way. Amen.

Phyllis Kershner

We can learn so much from Paul...discipleship, relating and connecting to others, acceptable behavior in the church. The letter to the Colossians, one of the letters written when Paul was in prison, begins similarly to his other letters, with thanksgiving and prayer. He demonstrates two ways in which we can connect to others: writing a letter and praying for them.

Often when I send a note of condolence or reach out when someone is going through a difficult time or a challenge ahead, I tell them "I'm praying for you." During such heartbreaking or challenging times, I'm not sure what else to say. Most times all I can do for them is pray. It creates a connection, an intimacy, shows love. I know God is with me and God is with them, so when I pray, it's an acknowledgement of our connection as siblings in Christ. It's building an intentional relationship.

Taking it a step further and verbally praying for that person in their presence is such an intimate act. It reveals the heart that the one praying has for Jesus as well as the one for whom they're praying. It's partnership, investment, connection, LOVE.

Who can you pray with today?

Good and gracious God, you gave us your son, Jesus, as a demonstration of your love and to show us how to love. Help us to love you and each other more deeply and boldly every day. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Jen Friz

This gospel shows God's true love for us and his compassion to heal us. It is always easy to accept love when there is trust. Jesus had asked the blind men if they believed he could heal them, and they did. They accepted his love and compassion by trusting in what he could do for them. He gave them vision like he gave the mute a voice. We may never know or understand what God's reasons are, but what we know is we need to trust and obey what he gives to us. Trust that everything he does is with love and compassion and receive it with open arms. Sometimes it seems as though we may be crying out to someone that isn't listening, as did the blind men begging for mercy. But we must have faith in his plan. Though it may be scary, we must follow God, even when we don't know where he's taking us. Faith and trust in Him is most important to receive what he has promised.

Lord, we praise you for your abundant compassion and love for us. We thank you for giving us faith and trust in you and your plan for us. We ask you to please fill us with your compassion so that we may use it to help others see your love. Give us guidance in life so we may continue to do your will. In your name we pray. Amen.

Alina Friz

Why is God silent? Isn't God concerned about us? Can't God run the world any better? He has been King over heaven and earth and the whole universe. What is John trying to tell us in the 10th chapter of Revelations?

In verse 1, John sees a mighty angel coming down from heaven. The angel's description doesn't bring a vision of calm and peace but of strength beyond human understanding. This angel has a little book open in his hand. He cried with a loud voice and seven thunders respond with their voice. John wants to write what he hears but a voice from heaven tells him not to write it down but seal it up.

Early Christians expected Jesus to return in their day. Paul certainly expected it in his lifetime. Christians in every century since have expected the Lord to return in their time.

In verse 5, the angel before John raises his hand to heaven and swears by God, the creator of all things that there should no longer be a delay. When the seventh angel sounds the mystery of God will reign. God has never reigned on earth. He has ruled on earth, and he has overruled. He governs human events, bringing them into being and changing things, but he does it without being on earth.

In verse 8, a voice from heaven tells John to take the little book from the angel. John obeys the voice, takes the book, and eats it. The book tastes like honey in his mouth but makes his stomach feel sick. Revelations tells us that judgment touches us, that God already has loosed judgments on the earth that finds us right where we live. God's judgement invades our lives whether we like it or not. The Word touches us personally; then we discover we are part of the problem. We must change and search out the secret places of our heart.

In verse 11, John is directed to prophesy again, and it will involve "peoples and nations and languages and kings."

God, we await Your return to earth. Send the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and ears to guide us with Your word to search out the secret places in our heart, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Richard Brown

This passage has been titled “The Last Trumpet”. God revealed to us how the story ends with the sound of the last trumpet. In the meantime, while we are living our lives on earth, we face many trials and tribulations – disappointments, job loss, family strife, health issues, loss of loved ones – the list goes on and on. We also look beyond our immediate circumstances and see violence and crime in our society, political unrest and disagreement, floods, hurricanes, and more. It is important to continue to give thanks to God always – not only for the wonderful and pleasing things we have been given, but also throughout the life challenges we experience, because these afflictions take our minds off God. We must focus on the victory God has for us, and when that last trumpet sounds, He will bring His kingdom and will reign forevermore.

Dear God, please help us to keep our hearts and minds fixed on you and give thanks that, despite earthly trials and tribulations, because of God's sovereign grace we will see His face and reign with Him forever. Amen.

Michele Frey

This scripture tells us how, after Jesus's resurrection, he reminds and opens the minds of the disciples to help them understand the necessity of three things as it is written: his suffering; rising from the dead on the third day; and repentance and forgiveness of sin should be preached to all the world. Jesus had told them of these things while he was with them, yet he needed to remind them.

Don't we need to be reminded of these necessities too?

These disciples witnessed Jesus' suffering. They saw him with their own eyes after he rose from the dead. They could testify to his ascension into heaven. While we didn't see these things with our own eyes, we are witnesses of God's love for us. We experience him in our lives every day.

Just as the disciples were told of three necessities, we too need to open our minds and understand the importance of three things. It is necessary for us today and every day to: testify of our love of Jesus; share how we witness God at work in our lives and in others; and readily lean on him and turn to him. Let others see with their own eyes the work of God through you. Do all this joyfully!

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your forgiveness of our sins and your never-ending love for us. Keep our eyes and ears open so that we can always hear your whispers and see your good works. Help us to be your witness, to give testimony of your love, and to do your will, so others can hear, see and learn of you. In your son's name we pray. Amen.

Mel Roth

It became clear that Jesus delayed going to Lazarus until his death to show his divinity to his disciples once and for all. Martha had faith in Jesus to heal Lazarus. Martha had faith in God and asked Him to restore Lazarus to life and it was granted. This raising of Lazarus is Jesus' last miracle which represents his ability to conquer death itself, through bringing the dead back to life. Jesus raising of Lazarus also shows Jesus' triumph over death through the resurrection three days after His crucifixion. This last miracle that He performed in His life was similar to His own resurrection with the stone rolling away from the tomb, similar to this with Lazarus. A main point taken away from this scripture is the following: Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

Dear Heavenly Father, in this Lent season help us to remember all of the miracles that You have shown us. Thank You for the constant reminder that if we live and believe in You, we will never die but have everlasting life. Amen.

Bill Rohrbach

In these verses we find Paul, during his last night in Troas, holding a worship service, much as described in Acts 2:42-47. The apostle Paul was gathered in a home with other believers, teaching, sharing a meal and offering prayer. One of the believers, Eutychus, couldn't stay awake as Paul "talked on and on" and fell out the window three stories to his death. Paul goes to Eutychus, throws himself on him, and Eutychus is restored to life. Then Paul went back to worship, broke bread, and "talked on and on" some more until daylight when he left. What a worship service!

It would be easy to see these verses as commentary on a long-winded preacher. But only Eutychus fell asleep and fell out the window. Perhaps Eutychus wasn't prepared for worship, to hear the word of God, to share in the breaking of bread, to prayer in community. In today's terms, we might consider Eutychus more of a consumer of worship rather than a participant in worship. With a consumer mindset, there's a distance created because the person is viewing the experience rather than participating in the experience. We are called to participate in worship, preparing our hearts and minds in community with others to experience God's love and grace through the sharing of the Word, the sacrament of holy communion, and prayer.

Dear God our Creator, you have gifted us with all we need to stay awake, yet we are prone to fall asleep to your call nonetheless. Help us resist the evils that tempt us to sleep, and give us the presence of mind and heart to become active participants in worshipping you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Jen Schlegel

This letter celebrates the benefits of faith in Christ. Through faith, believers have been delivered from the death of sin and made alive in Christ.

This is one of my favorite verses. Years ago, during a joint adult Sunday School class we all were asked to share a bible verse and what it meant to us. I shared Ephesians 2:8-10 “For it is by **grace** you have been **saved, through faith** and this not from yourselves, **it is the gift of God**, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

I remember getting emotional while sharing, knowing that I have been saved by grace. I didn’t need to do anything! WOW! I only needed faith in our Lord and with that faith I can do good works in his name. I am so highly valued by God that he not only made me and redeemed me, but he created me to bear fruit through good works in Christ.

Gracious and Loving God, thank you for your grace and mercy that I know I don’t deserve. Thank you for the love you give me and the things you provide for me, especially knowing that I have salvation through the death of your son, Jesus Christ. Guide me to continue to do good works which you have prepared in advance for me to do. Amen.

Sandy Wade

In this passage, we see the Sadducees trying to “trap” Jesus with a far-fetched scenario. How likely is it that seven brothers in a row would die, leaving a woman to marry each in turn? Why would they even ask a question like this? Ultimately, the Sadducees were very concrete thinkers, resisting anything supernatural in their faith other than God Himself. They were too focused on technicality and lost sight of the bigger picture. When Jesus spoke of the resurrection, it threatened their worldview. They wanted to discredit the premise of the afterlife. Even when a new viewpoint offers such promise, hope, and comfort, they resist it. What wonderful news that we will be like angels in heaven, feeling the love of God and love for others beyond what we even experience within marriage. Yet still, they refuse to accommodate this message from Jesus.

I'd love to be able to scoff at the Sadducees and feel that I am nothing like them. But then, I consider, how hard is it for me at times to demonstrate flexibility? I can tell when I am being too rigid, holding on to plans or ideas too tightly in the face of change, that even my body feels tense. In fact, a lack of openness can affect our bodies and minds. In recent years, the field of psychology has been paying increasing attention to the importance of psychological flexibility in mental health. Basically, that means staying present-focused, in the moment, and responding with actions from your core values rather than from temporary emotional states. When we are present-focused, we are more open to seeing the many small and large ways that God is revealing Himself and His work to us. We can receive and process new information and perspectives offered by others in conversation without half-listening and focusing on our rebuttal. We can be truly open. We are then able to respond in ways more in line with our values and faith (which of course go hand in hand).

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of your love for us, given freely, and the promise of the resurrection and life everlasting. Please grant us wisdom and openness to change in line with our faith in You. Let us be able to stay present and focused in difficult conversations with others that challenge us, and let us be moveable when we should be moved. We ask this in Your name. Amen.

Chelsea Hersperger

Although Paul is in a time of struggle, he felt joy for the Philippians as they were experiencing God and his grace. Paul put aside his struggles with imprisonment to devote himself to God and the joy he felt for those experiencing God. He was confident in the Philippians to continue to do God's work and that the presence of his grace in their lives would also continue. Paul says that he is right to feel this way towards the Philippians and to hold them in his heart because they share God's grace with him and the joy he feels from God's grace as he is struggling.

Dear God, help us when we are in difficult times. Allow us to realize that you are with us through these times. Let us continue to see and feel your presence to provoke us to be joyful and carry out your work. Amen.

Ashley Gheer

We've all heard the catchy slogans, "living the dream", "living my best life", "living my truth", "yolo" (you only live once). We may have even used one of these sayings a time or two. All of them clamor for our attention to live for ourselves, focus on what the world tells us, and buy into the hype of what everyone else is doing. The truth is the only way to live your best life is to live for Christ. A life lived without Christ doesn't bear fruit.

After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul, formerly Saul, is one of the people responsible for spreading the gospel across Asia Minor and into Europe by his own journeys or by equipping other disciples to do the work. Eventually Paul was imprisoned in a Roman prison for sharing the gospel. Even though he was waiting to see if he was going to be executed, he encouraged the church at Philippi to keep growing and sharing their faith. Paul didn't regret his choice to follow Jesus even in the face of losing his own life. He considered living for Christ the only way to live, being set free from his sins by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. He couldn't help himself from boasting in all that Jesus had done for him and wanted everyone to know Jesus could do the same for them as well.

Chances are none of us will be asked to die for our faith, but over the course of our lives we will have opportunities to grow, share, or defend our faith. What if we took advantage of those opportunities? What if we lived out the baptismal promises (live among God's faithful people, hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper, proclaim the good news of God in word and deed, serve all people following the example of Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the earth)? How different would our individual lives look, the lives of our family, our community, the world?

Dear God, you have freed us from our sins through the sacrifice of your son Jesus on the cross. We can never truly repay You, but please help us to live lives that are a reflection of all You have done for us. Amen.

Steph Krause

The heading for these verses is “Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time”. We read that the disciples were astonished. They were astonished that Jesus was leading the way undeterred even though he knew the end of his time on earth was near. Even though Jesus had mixed feelings, he knew what had to be done. This would be done to glorify the Father. This would free all people from sin. No more sacrifice since this would be the ultimate sacrifice. The servant did not come to lead a war over the Romans. He came so we could have forgiveness of sins and our salvation. He came so that we would learn how to love one another, how to be humble and serve each other. This is not so we can boast about how much we serve, but to serve one another for the glory of God. This should be easy, but it is not. We live in a world that is “me” first. We were raised in a country to not trust, and/or slander people who were different from us. If they were not like us, they were inferior, unequal. In reality, we are all children of God. We all are equal.

Our Father – we have been led astray in so many ways. Instead of questioning or fighting injustice, we just went with the flow. Jesus came down to be a teacher for all of us, but we shunned his teaching. Help us to learn to love as Jesus loved us. Teach us how to be humble. Be patient with us as we learn how to love all people as your children and our brothers and sisters no matter how different they are from us. Amen.

Tom Engle

There are situations in our lives when we have expectations of others. Maybe their behavior or the outcome of how something should be done, doesn't line up with our way of thinking.

Does that make them wrong and us right? Does it give us permission to discount, condemn or judge them? Would it be God's way for us to go behind their back and betray their trust and friendship?

Definitely NOT!

These are sobering thoughts and questions. They lead to the path that Judas Iscariot walked. How easy it is to be swayed by greed, temptation and favoritism. Often, they lead us towards poor or evil choices.

Friends, Satan is alive and well, so keep your eyes and ears open, lest you fall into his trap. God has given us free will. When unsure, pray and seek if your thoughts line up with God's Word.

The scene shifts to the Passover Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus directs his disciples to go and prepare a shared meal. During the meal he tells them that one of them will betray him. Each one questions; "Is it me?" Even the one about to betray him questions, and Jesus confirms that he knows that it is him.

Today we still share that same meal as he shared with his disciples. Some call it "The Lord's Supper", which commemorates the Passover meal Jesus ate with his disciples. Others refer to the "Eucharist" (thanksgiving) because in it we thank God for Christ working for us. At St. John's we say Come to the Table in "Communion" because through it we commune with God and other believers.

As we eat this bread and drink the wine, we need to reflect as we remember his death and promise to come again. It's important to be grateful for God's wonderful gift to us and joyful for the opportunities we've been given to meet together with other believers in Christ's presence.

Heavenly Father, as we walk in faith as your disciples, may we be led by the Holy Spirit to reflect your character. When others view our words and actions, may it be your light that shines through us. As events in our lives shape us, may the truth of your Word guide our behavior. Every day, help us to give you praise for who we are in you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Ros Moatz

This lesson has led me to think about where my “Agenda” lies with Jesus Christ.

Do I humbly and emphatically serve others to the glory of God, am I serving with a clean heart like Martha? Is there a thought in my mind that if I serve more or outwork others that the “prize” of Christ’s redeeming grace is somehow going to come easier or quicker?

Am I just simply “hanging” with Jesus enjoying my life with him in it? Lazarus was doing just this, but he is also enjoying “new” life in Jesus following his being raised from the dead. I pray that I don’t keep Jesus for myself. When I reflect on this it reminds me of a bible verse that was always displayed on my grandmother’s wall, Romans 10: 9-10, “⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.”

Could I be more like Judas with my eye on the “prize”: money, personal gain? Is it the satisfaction I get by seeing the results of God using me for good works, the good feelings I have after helping others that is my prize? Knowing and recognizing all that God has provided me, have I wasted these gifts by prioritizing myself over Christ. I hope that I’m more like Mary and treasure Jesus more than my belongings.

Praising and humbly devoting myself and all I have to the glory of the Lord seems impossible with the way we live our lives. Can I be like Mary? Mary showed how completely possible it is, she showed her absolute love for Jesus because she recognized his love. Without regard for what others thought she poured out the most extravagant gift she could give and all of this because of his love for her. I think Mary caught the message sitting at the feet of Jesus. In true worship you are completely saturated in the love of Christ just as their home must have been filled with the aroma of the nard.

Lord, I pray that we find the love you have for us as Mary did. That we can all kneel at your feet and fully worship you with all that we have. May the love of Jesus permeate our souls and be a fragrance of his love shown through us for all the world to see. In Jesus name, Amen.

Jason Friz

Jesus was at a festival and hid after he told the crowd about his death! Why did he hide? Imagine you're in the crowd and you hear this news — perhaps the crowd erupts in confusion, concern, disbelief, fear — panic? You are among the crowd and when you finally begin comprehending what Jesus has said, you realize you cannot find him. Looking above the heads of the sea of people, you cannot find the Messiah. Where did he go? How could you have possibly lost sight of him that easily? Has he already died?

Jesus asks us in order to receive God's love, we must let go of our lives. Our lives are in God's hands, as Jesus' life is in his father's.

Now imagine you are in the crowd again. Jesus is nowhere to be found; you sense the confusion around you. You acknowledge your worries and fears, but then take a step back from where you are. And then realize how ridiculous this all is. Of course he hid! He wants us to talk among each other about this news, why should he bother being there? For people to ask more questions? He just announced some of the most important news about his life to us, why bother sticking around for us to ask silly questions? What is said has been said! Is not that what he had just told us? That “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit” (John 12:24)? He told us what would happen even before the voice from heaven did.

Dear God, help us to remember to trust in your Word. As we experience fears and worries and sorrows and pains, help us to step back from those feelings and remember what you have always said. Help us understand why your son hid himself from us when he revealed his death to us. Help us remember that our lives are in your hands because you love us so much. And please help us to remember that in times of strife. Amen.

Rachael Geary

I picture the scene. Jesus and the disciples having just finished a meal together followed by Jesus washing their feet. They're all kicked back, relaxing, maybe joking around or reminiscing about their experiences together. Then out of the blue, Jesus reveals to them that one of them will betray him.

What?! Who would do such a thing? Surely not one of them. How awkward and uncomfortable must the room have become? The disciples immediately began to suspect each other, wondering who it could be.

But Jesus knew. He knew it would be Judas. He also knew it needed to happen to fulfill God's promise of salvation. But did that make it any easier for Jesus? Did that take the sting of betrayal away? This was Jesus' friend and student. Although he could, Jesus did not try to change the situation. And being human, he most likely felt this pain of disloyalty as any of us would.

But here's the thing. He didn't stop loving him (or Peter for that matter).

In what ways have I betrayed God? We like to vilify Judas, but is there some of Judas in each of us? If we say no, are we deceiving ourselves? We can also take heart in the sense that Jesus loved Judas, even if he was the betrayer. No one is beyond Jesus' love and redemption.

Heavenly Father, your love is for everyone and never-ending. Thank you for loving me when I am not following your ways as I should. Help me to find this love for others when I too feel betrayed. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Shannon Omlor

So if I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you (vs. 14-15).

Jesus knew the inevitable hour was fast approaching and he would soon be departing this world to return to the Father. His washing of the disciples' feet during the final supper was an act of love and service to them. Even though Jesus was their Lord and Teacher, he became a servant to them.

Jesus knew Judas Iscariot had already betrayed him and Simon Peter would deny him, but he washed their feet with the other disciples. This unselfish act showed Jesus' unwavering and unconditional love for them.

The want to help and the need to care for others comes from the heart. Regardless if the person shows gratitude or not, Jesus wants you to love and care for that person. Before Jesus departed from this world, he gave the disciples a new commandment to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. (v.34)

Almighty God, thank you for your unwavering love for us. Help us to follow the example that Jesus set for the disciples. Amen.

Joe Blake

Jesus is betrayed by one of his own while another tried to protect him by wounding the high priest's servant. Knowing what was written in the scriptures, Jesus asked Peter to put away his sword so God's plan could continue to play out. Jesus is then arrested. Peter denies him three times, fulfilling what Jesus told his disciples would happen.

How many times have we kept quiet about our faith in God and how Jesus is our Savior? Have we denied that Jesus is our Savior? We may all be guilty of this at some point in our lives. But as we continue to participate in the community of our church, read scripture and grow our faith, we gain the knowledge and develop the pride in proclaiming our belief and faith in Jesus Christ. We know that Jesus forgives us as we confess our sins to him and ask for his mercy. Remember, Jesus promised he would never disown Peter even though he would deny him three times.

As Jesus is questioned by Pilate, he calmly and clearly answers. It appears as if Pilate believes Jesus is telling the truth and has not committed a crime. However, when Pilate tells the crowd several times that he does not find Jesus guilty of anything, he still allows the chief priests and temple police to nail him to the cross. Jesus knew Pilate heard the truth, but he also knew what God's plan was and why he was on trial. Jesus was in control. As we go through life, we may be mocked or laughed at for various reasons, including because of our faith. This passage reminds us that those laughing and jeering at us may think we are on trial, but the reality is that those who are laughing at us are the ones on trial with God. This passage also teaches us that when we are presented with the truth and a tough decision, we must not take the easiest path possible. Instead, speak the truth regardless of the cost to ourselves. Otherwise, we commit yet another sin.

Jesus' death on the cross fulfilled what was written in the scriptures and God's plan. As followers, Jesus' death has immense meaning to all of us. We strengthen our beliefs; we are given the courage to declare our faith and continue to serve God in our daily lives. We know we have eternal life because Jesus gave his life for us.

Merciful God, thank you for the gifts you give us daily, including the strength to profess our faith to those around us as well as the courage to know and speak the truth without blame. Most importantly, we thank you for your Son who gave his life so that we too may have eternal life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Sue Grofe

Oh there is so much to experience in this passage! I mean, the entire story in verse 16a: “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’” And her life was changed (again!) by her Lord. And then there are the opening verses of Peter and likely John running to the empty tomb, summoned by Mary who first saw it. Just months ago, I was at the place called Golgotha – or so it is said – and peered into an empty tomb. I, too, was filled with faith and doubt. Faith in the promise of the resurrected Lord, doubt that this was indeed THE place. But as I read this passage now, I am caught by verse 17: “Do not hold onto me for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Jesus tells Mary to not hold onto him. To let go. To go and bear witness in community with others. Do we have the courage and trust to let go of our dependency on a personal relationship with Jesus so we can tell all the others? While there are certainly times we turn inward to Jesus, we must also commit to turning outward to others and share – and receive – the love of Jesus in community. We are called to love God and to love our neighbors. The neighborhood is pretty darn big. Are we willing to be less inward facing, dependent on one relationship with one neighborhood, and open to facing outward, growing relationships with others in God’s grand neighborhood?

Dear God the Father of our Resurrected Lord and Savior, you have summoned each and every one of us by name and you have equipped us with everything we need to obey your commandments. Strengthen us so we can move away from clinging to what once was and turn outward to joining You in Your mission to reconcile all people to You. Help us celebrate Your work in our lives and commit to loving all in Your neighborhood. In the Resurrected Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Jen Schlegel

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So, they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Do you remember Easter 2020? It was unlike any Easter Sunday I’d ever experienced. As far as I know, it was unlike any Easter any of our members have ever experienced. We were not alone. Our churches were empty. They were not filled by the crowds we’d hoped for. Our members were unsure of when they would get to attend in person again. Many were afraid for their safety, for their lives, for their futures. That wasn’t all that long ago.

In our text, Matthew reports Jesus saying, “Do not be afraid!”. The angels say, “He is not here.” It might help us if we put the two together leaving us with the question “Where is Jesus in the midst of what we are not to fear?” The answer is obvious. Jesus is always out ahead of us, inviting us to meet Him in Galilee. “They will see me there.” Also, in the faces of and need of our neighbors and in our care for one another and the world. Jesus is inviting us to move forward and outward in faith, still promising to meet us up ahead, still reminding us that He will be with us always, even to the end of the age.

Jesus knows us, loves us, and calls us by name. These are not insignificant things. Like the disciples, we may just hear this Good News anew and find the faith and courage not simply to survive but also to flourish. And perhaps it’s worth remembering that this small

gathering of disciples – once they were called, named, and sent by Jesus – changed the world. Which might just be what is happening at St. John's once again.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for always being ahead of us.

Thank you for calling us.

Thank you for naming us as your children.

Thank you for sending us. Amen.

Pastor Bob Machamer



GATHERING SCHEDULE

ASH WEDNESDAY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

7:00 pm

UNFAILING LIGHT MIDWEEK SERVICE

WEDNESDAY,

MARCH 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

7:00 pm

BREAD BOWL & BIBLE

learning opportunity

SUNDAY, MARCH 12 & 19

3:00 pm – 6:00 pm

PALM SUNDAY

SUNDAY, APRIL 2

9:30 am

MAUNDY THURSDAY

THURSDAY, APRIL 6

7:00 pm

GOOD FRIDAY

FRIDAY, APRIL 7

7:00 pm

EASTER

SUNDAY, APRIL 9

9:30 am

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church

45 N. Reading Avenue

Boyertown, PA 19512

610.369.1024 | stjohnsboyertown.org

Worship Celebration - Sunday 9:30am

