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25
Lent
DEVOTIONAL

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, BOYERTOWN

God needs us to speak about him to those who don't know him or need reminding of his love, grace, and mercy. So many of us are guilty of being quiet about our faith rather than the possibility of being criticized for our beliefs or the way that we express them. People throughout history have risked their lives to spread God's word. The least we can do is allow ourselves to be pushed beyond our comfort to talk about God. There are so many tragic and difficult situations in our world. Many people find life a challenge they cannot face alone. We are all ambassadors of Christ, and now is the time to be present for others and give them the news that they are never alone; God loves them and is with them always. As Christians, we need to work together to reconcile all people with God.

Dear Heavenly Father, use our voices to spread your message to all people. In this age of technology, use our ability to communicate responsibly in a positive light to your glory. Let us remind each other that we should each be continuously seeking to make things right with you because none of us live without sin. Let us be careful not to alter your message to suit our needs but instead lead us to give hope to others through explanations of your grace and mercy. Amen.

Michele Eidle

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shelter of the Almighty, will say to the Lord. "My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust."

In this Psalm, we find refuge and protection.

In my research for this passage, the words sounded so familiar. Then I had an "Aha" moment! The inspiration for the song, *On Eagle's Wings*, is taken from Psalm 91. Both the lyrics and the passage provide us with comfort and protection.

As a child I felt safe knowing my parents loved and protected me. My home was a safe place for me. Unfortunately, this is not true for all of us, but God is always there for us as our refuge, not only as children, but as we grow into adulthood. As adults we know we will still face difficulties, but Jesus walks by our side through both the good times and the difficult times during our life providing us with the protection and refuge that we need.

Gracious God, we thank you for providing us with shelter and a safe place. May we continue to find comfort in your promise of salvation as you hold us in the palm of your hand. Amen.

Bev Blake

This text recounts the words of Stephen as he faced the Sanhedrin (the Jewish governing council), where he was accused of blasphemy and rejecting Moses and the Law. Speaking boldly and bravely, he suggests to the Sanhedrin that temples are not needed to worship God. He tells them that they don't need to keep offering sacrifices at the temple each week, nor should they expect that by keeping the law they will be saved.

The religious leaders did not want to hear this or believe what he was saying! He was calling them out and urging them to listen. But they didn't, just as others didn't listen to Moses and other God-chosen messengers. Throughout the Bible we read that many of God's messengers met much resistance from those they were sent to lead. Why is that?

We can ask that same question today. Why do so many people continue to choose false idols instead of God? Why aren't churches overflowing with believers? Why do people resist God's will? Why aren't people spreading His good news? What is stopping more from doing His work and loving their neighbor?

Why aren't we more like Stephen? He put everything on the line to glorify God! We must be willing to do what is right, no matter what hardships or challenges it may cause. When we put God first in our lives, He will open doors for us that we never thought possible. He loves us despite our flaws, our mistakes, our shame, our sins, our everything. He is faithful to us, even when we are unfaithful. We will never be perfect, but He still loves us!

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your never-ending love! May we have the courage to do what is right and help others to get to know you. In your son's name we pray, Amen.

Mel Roth

Jesus knows what he needs to do even though he dreads it. He chooses not to give in to what he wants. Instead, he follows his Father's plan and brings glory to his Father's name. We have been given the gift of eternal life through his sacrifice.

Do we choose to live a life where we only do things that benefit ourselves? Or do we do what Jesus did? We are continually called to serve others in so many ways that please God. Do we have our eyes open to see and our ears open to hear where and when these opportunities are in front of us?

Jesus asks us to follow him in the light so we can be children of the light, learning the truth and knowing God. Even in our very busy lives, we are encouraged to take time to think about what we are doing and how we are doing it. Is it done to benefit us or to glorify God? Are we letting Christ's light shine through us?

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us eternal life. I pray we follow Jesus' way and do what glorifies you. May we always follow the light so that as your children, we shine bright and service all ways in your name.

Sue Grofe

After being filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, Jesus is led in the wilderness. Through his responses to the temptations of the devil, he defines what it means to be called “the Son of God.”

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

John tells us in his letter that we should not sin because it separates us from God. In a world full of temptation, we will sin because we are human, and sin is a daily struggle for every Christian. We do not start our days looking to sin but sin creeps into our everyday life. Acknowledging our sins and knowing we have Jesus Christ as our advocate to God, we will no longer be slaves to our sins.

We can be sure that Jesus walks beside us to the cross, where our sins are left to die, and our relationship with God becomes closer and stronger.

The second part of John's letter, verses 3-6, is a bit more concerning. John gives us a difficult task. How can we obey all of God's commandments and the toughest task of all, is to walk and live as Jesus did. Wow! That is setting the bar high. After reading the verses many times, it occurred to me that God is not looking for us to be perfect in our actions but perfect in our love for God. There is nothing we can do that makes us perfect to God. Loving God and knowing his love for us is perfection is all that is needed.

Dear God, I pray that we do our best not to sin and keep our relationship with God close. When we do sin, we know that Jesus is there for us as our advocate to God and help us better ourselves. Let our love for God be the center of our days and remember God's love for us is perfect and never ending. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

John Gheer

The word filthy is found in verse 3. When I read this the first time, I was reminded of my childhood. Saturday nights were for getting a bath, having hair washed, and having nails trimmed to be clean to go to Sunday school. But that isn't what filthy is referring to in this passage. In this verse, filthy means sinning.

All people are sinners and need to be made clean. Putting on clean clothes and a new turban are ways that show one has cleaned one's body of sin. Christ, the Branch, comes and takes away the sins of the people.

The passage continues with a message for all to hear:

Zechariah 3:10 (MSG): "At that time, everyone will get along with one another, with friendly visits across the fence, friendly visits on one another's porches." We need to hear this message today, and we need to follow this today. The election is over, fences need to be mended. As children of God and people welcoming all, walls need to be torn down so we can live together in peace.

Dear God, be with us and the whole world. Remove the barriers that cause friction. Help us to live in peace and harmony with our neighbors. Amen.

Betty Long

In the beginning of this passage, Jesus tells the disciples to remain diligent in their watch for His return. They must remain ready.

We, as followers of Christ, must also remain ready. We cannot let life's temptations lead us away from faithful living. We dedicate much time planning and preparing for special events (i.e. weddings, birth of a child, home purchase, etc.). These events are known when they will occur and prepared accordingly. If we knew the date and time Christ is returning, would there be procrastination in our preparation followed by furious out-of-control behavior to get everything ready as the deadline approaches?

The same amount of diligent preparation should be in place for Christ's return.

When Judgment Day arrives, you do not want to be unprepared. Nobody knows when this will occur. You want to remain strong in your faith in Christ and hopefully escape the events that will take place.

How a person prepares for Christ's return will determine what their eternity will be.

Remember, nobody knows when Christ's return will happen.

Dear Heavenly Father, as we prepare for your Son's return, help and guide each of us to remain strong in faith. Faith in Your Son is the reason our salvation is possible. In your name we pray, Amen.

Jerry Krause

Wait for the Lord

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. (v. 14)

If you are like me, patience is a virtue not fully adopted. The anxiety of anticipating, hoping, and waiting becomes a challenge that we strive to minimize – although not always successfully.

In Psalm 27, David praises the Lord in a song of confidence (vv. 1-6), where he expresses a desire to “...dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life...” and “...to seek him in his temple.”

This is the ultimate exercise in patience. Although God provided David with the plans and all the building materials and resources necessary to construct the temple, he was told that his son Solomon would build the temple, because David was a warrior who had shed much blood, while Solomon was a man of peace. Construction began 4 years into Solomon’s rule, so the wait for David to begin seeing the temple come to fruition must have been painful. He never witnessed the temple's completion.

David then concludes with a prayer for help, realizing that he can’t survive on his own (vv. 7-14). Here he asks God not to forsake him as did his father and mother, but to receive him. We should also ask God to receive us with all our shortcomings.

Lord, give us the patience that we long for so that we may lead lives in anticipation of seeing You at the end of our worldly journey. Amen.

Jim Kershner

“Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their God is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In this world there are people who believe in God and follow a faith, and there are some that do not. This passage is somewhat of a reminder to us believers of Christ. It is a reminder that the people who do not follow Christ fill their needs up in an unhealthy way or in a selfish way. They think for themselves and only for themselves. To them that may seem satisfying, but in the end that will do nothing for them, and they will only see destruction. Living a life following Christ instead of seeing destruction, you will see growth and prosperity. You will be lifelong replenished by God instead of by selfish needs that feel good for a moment. And as followers of Christ, we need to remind ourselves that it is okay for people to live that way. We have the opportunity to teach them, but we have to make sure we are not falling into the same trap and leaning away from Christ.

Heavenly Father, please watch over your children who follow your faith and live through your name every day. Please shine light over people who do not follow your way and show them love. Equip us with your love so we can teach others. Dear Heavenly Father, guide your people when times are getting rough, and you see them straying away from your ways. Sometimes we just need a reminder of how important you are in the height of everything going on around us. In your heavenly name, Amen.

Abbe Grofe

In this passage, Jesus is talking to the people of Jerusalem and telling them how disappointed he is in that they killed prophets, are hypocrites and do not believe in him. He spoke some harsh truths to them and I can only imagine that he was feeling sad. When I think about this, in today's world some people are the same way. They are nice to your face but down deep inside, they have hidden agendas, sometimes which aren't with good intentions. Some people are not willing to accept Jesus into their lives, just like the people of Jerusalem. The people who do not believe in Jesus, still need your prayers. Prayers are very powerful and know that Jesus is always listening.

All Jesus wants is for everyone to open up their hearts and minds and let him in. Jesus loves ALL people and wants every person to believe in him. I am sure he is smiling down at St. John's coming together as a church family and taking care of one another and the community in need. When you receive Jesus in your heart, you will be truly blessed.

Dear Jesus, I pray for those people who have not found a place in their heart for you and hope that someday they find their way to you. Never give up, always have hope. We are truly blessed to have you in our lives. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

Shelba DiPietro

Neither Herod's plotting nor Jerusalem's resistance to maternal love will deter Jesus from his sacrificial mission.

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to [Jesus,] “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³²He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

In order to understand the passages, I needed to go back and read previous chapters of Exodus. What was going on and why was the Lord angry with his people?

Moses talks with God on the mountain. The people are impatient. Aaron falls into sin, pressured by the people. A golden calf is made. The Lord is angry. "Angry enough to want to kill the people". Moses reminds God of the power and strength He used to free His people.

God sends Moses down the mountain with two tablets, but when he sees what the people have done, he too is angry. He breaks the tablets. He melts the calf. Moses asks, "Whoever is on God's side, join me". The Levites come forward. They killed brother, friend, and neighbor. Moses tells them that even though the cost was great, God will bless you.

God says, "lead the people to the land flowing with milk and honey. An angel will lead you". God settles accounts for those who have sinned against him. God sends a plague on the people.

Exodus 33:1-6 So what is God saying to us in these passages?

Moses stood in the gap before God, saying; I can't go forward. These people can't go forward *without You*. We need you!

God kept Pharaoh from continuing to oppress the Israelites and from destroying them. He moved them into the wilderness to begin developing them into the nation He wanted them to become.

This is a reminder to us that every time God *delivers* us from a situation, immediately following will be a time of *development*. A time for us to look back, learn, and grow from what we've experienced. It's a covenant relationship. Its practical rules of what God expects of us in return. These rules reflect the nature of God.

Mark 12:30-31 reflects these rules:

"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'. The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Lord God, come into our hearts, dwell in our being so we can experience daily your unconditional love for us and then share with all those who cross our paths. In Jesus name, Amen.

Ros Moatz

In this scripture passage, the Israelites are at the edge of the Promised Land. The scouts tell the people it is a wonderful bountiful land, but there are some large warriors. The Israelites instantly balk, even though they have seen miracles from God save them at least 10 times. They want to return to Egypt, to the land with which they are familiar. Because of their distrust, they are destined to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Their children will be allowed a chance to enter in the future.

I wonder if I am an Israelite. When I am faced with a crisis, do I instantly panic? Or do I take the time to look back at my very comfortable, for the most part carefree, life and realize that God has been with me and blessed me over and over.

Do I begin to go through my crisis by telling God that I recognize He has taken care of me in the past, and I ask Him reverently to go through this new issue with me? I acknowledge that I need His help always, every day.

This is what God wants of us. This is trust. And, as He promises us, "Ask and it shall be given you." God will open a way for us to go through, to overcome any obstacles, even if it is not what we expected.

Lord, God, Maker of heaven and earth, Sovereign over all things, remind me daily of Your blessings to me, so I may move forward with You, calmly and courageously, on whatever path You have set for me. Amen. Let it be so.

Martha Bentley

In Luke 13: 22-31, we are introduced to the parable of the narrow door. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, stopping along the way to teach, as He often does.

When I first read this passage, I started to worry. Pastor Bob often teaches us about how God comes down to us, how we don't have to earn our way to heaven and salvation, and that it is a gift freely given. At first (and honestly second) glance, this parable seems to contradict that message. Luke describes Jesus telling people that they need to "Work hard to enter the narrow door to God's Kingdom" and that "...many will try to enter but will fail." It sure sounds like if we don't follow the teachings of the Bible just so, that we will be shut out from God.

However, maybe these words can be understood differently. I think it is true that "many will try to enter and fail," in that it is fruitless to **try** to earn your entrance, because we already have it. Rather, we are all told to work hard. We are called to use our own gifts and strengths in the service of our Lord. That might mean welcoming others with a smile, toiling in the fields to harvest potatoes, baking treats for church events, volunteering to pack bags with food for hungry children, or a myriad other endeavors large and small. These efforts will at times truly be hard work—at St. John's, radical generosity and sacrificial service are two of our core values.

This passage closes with the well-known verse, "there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last." I believe it is meant to remind us that in the hard work of living as Christians, we need to remember to let our lives be guided by the teachings of Jesus rather than the priorities of man. A celebrity having a fancy sports car, millions of social media followers, and several coastal mansions will not be "ahead" of anyone else in God's kingdom. What truly matters is striving to live our lives in accordance with Jesus' teachings.

Dear Lord, thank You for reminding me to continually use Your teachings as a North Star, guiding my actions to reflect my gratitude for Your grace. Please help me today and every day to be intentional in my words and deeds, so that they may reflect Your will. Amen.

Chelsea Hersperger

Can you feel the raw emotion that is coming from David's heart and soul in this Psalm? It pierces you straight into your soul! David's deep *longing* for God, his *thankfulness* for all God has provided, and his enthusiastic *praise* to the Father.

The words David chooses to express his emotions are very powerful – He “*thirsts*” for God, his “*whole being longs*” for God. Can you feel how much David wants to be connected with God? It is such a heartfelt plea! David's raw and pure desire to follow God is inspiring!

David goes on to proclaim what he will do to praise God. Again, you can feel the raw emotion in his words. David says he will glorify God, praising Him as long as he lives, lifting up his hands and singing God's praises. David says he will dream of God through the night and cling to Him endlessly.

But what I find just as beautiful are the words in this Psalm that say what *God* does. In verse 3, David says God's “love is better than life”. WOW! Better than life? That is pretty amazing! David goes on to say that God will “fully satisfy” David, help him, and uphold him. I don't know about you, but if someone would tell me they would provide me with a love that is better than life itself, fully satisfy me spiritually, and uphold me through even the darkest times...That's an offer that is hard to refuse!

David's relationship with the Father is so deep. He longs so desperately for God's loving hand. He trusts God wholeheartedly and will shower God with all the glory and praise. This Psalm is a beautiful declaration of David's devotion to the Father and I pray that it inspires us all to trust in God in the same way that David did.

Dear Heavenly Father, may the words of David inspire us to trust in you as your servant David did. We pray that we would have faith in you that is so strong that we cling to your Word and praise you at every turn. Amen.

Angie Berkosky

Sardis was one of the seven churches Jesus sent messages to in the book of Revelation. Jesus' message was a warning about how some members of that church were acting. They were doing the work of their church, but they did not have faith. Jesus told the church of Sardis "I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead" (v.1). Those are some powerful words. How many times do we go through the motions of being invested in our faith? We attend worship on Sundays, read our Bible, and maybe even attend a small group, yet we feel more excited about checking the box that we did something than about growing our faith.

Jesus wants to be in a relationship with us. He loves us so much that he went to the cross for our sins. Even as Jesus is calling out the church of Sardis, he is giving them a way to turn their lives around. He said, "remember then what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent" (v.3). He even tells them that he will clothe them in white robes like those members who were living out their faith and their names would remain in the book of life if they repented.

Our church only thrives if we all commit to growing our faith and using our spiritual gifts to join in the work Jesus is already doing. This Lenten season and beyond, let us be purposeful in our faith. The more we worship authentically together, invest in intentional relationships and exhibit sacrificial service and radical generosity our faith will grow.

Dear Jesus, please help our congregation keep our eyes focused on you and what you are doing. Let us be brave enough to grow our faith so you can use us to further your work in the world. Amen.

Steph Krause

A Tree and Its Fruit:

In these verses in Luke chapter 6, we see the use of metaphors comparing trees bearing fruit to the notions of our hearts. These three verses have a simple message for us. The message is that words matter, and those words reflect our character. The verse that stuck with me the most in this passage was the ending. “For it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.” Our words and actions are rooted in the abundance of God’s love because we are good trees bearing good fruit. We must spread the good news of God’s love and do good works in His name.

Heavenly Father, thank you for all of my good treasures of the heart that produce good. Be with me now as I go into the world and help me to reveal your love to the world. Amen.

Amy Moyer

Asked about current tragic events, Jesus turns a lesson about whether suffering is deserved into a hard call to obedience. He then tells a parable that holds out hope that the timeline for ultimate judgment will be tempered by patience.

¹At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.² [Jesus] asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?”³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.⁴ Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” ⁶Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.⁷ So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ ⁸He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

In this second chapter of Romans, Paul reminds us that even though we attempt to live our lives following the laws/rules, none of us are without sin. Therefore, we are not to judge others because we all need God's mercy and grace to have eternal life. He also points out that God can judge us because he can see past the "works" we have done throughout our lives, to the heart of whether we have lived our lives in true repentance of our sins and love for God and our neighbor or for selfish and self-centered reasons.

Dear God, help us turn away from judging others and instead live our lives, selflessly helping others, rooted in our sincere love for God and our neighbor.

Becky Erb

The underlying lesson is to understand the importance of keeping their oaths and agreements. Through the lesson of the two eagles and a vine, God makes us understand his sovereignty and that he too is in control of all things through his punitive power. He delivers this message using a riddle and parable, telling a story relatable to humanity. As Christians, one can become easily lost without staying true to our history and beliefs. The allegory of the two eagles and the vine illustrates how easily corruption can occur.

The lesson of planting and nurturing the first vine illustrates how to live a spiritual life. It grows and flourishes all while bearing fruit and becoming a strong and splendid vine. The second vine, planted in the same manner, diverges from its path, becoming withered and weak, and is likely not to survive.

No matter how withered our lives may appear, God's redeeming power can restore and breathe new life into us.

Heavenly Father, thank you for taking us under your wing and guiding us from despair and toward redemption. With your help, we believe anything is possible. Help us understand and live through you. We pray for your ultimate control of all things and that we will learn to live in humility and submission to you. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Matthew Robb

Numbers 13:17-27 tells the story of twelve men sent by Moses to explore the land God had promised to the Israelite's. When they returned, everyone agreed the land was good, but ten of them focused on the dangers, the strong people, and fortified cities - while only two, Joshua and Caleb, had faith that God would help them. Because of their fears, they hesitated and missed out on God's blessing.

Trusting God and embracing others:

Today, fear still creates division in our communities, politics, and churches. Fear of differences can lead to judgment, exclusion, and barriers between people. But faith calls us to something greater. Faith leads us to see people through God's eyes, reminding us that every person is created in his image. Faith takes us outside our comfort zones, pushing us to engage with those who are different instead of avoiding them. True faith leads to inclusion, reflecting Jesus' example of welcoming the outcast, the foreigner, and the marginalized. If we truly follow God, our faith should lead us to build bridges, not walls. Stepping forward in faith, knowing God's love is for all people will help us overcome our fears.

Dear God, help me to see others as you do. Remove any fear or prejudice in my heart, and give me the faith to love, welcome, and include all people as you have called me to. Amen.

Jason Friz

Fixing Our Eyes on the Unseen

"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18)

Paul writes that we should shift all our focus from the visible attributes of life to the unseen eternal realities of God's kingdom that awaits us. This is an extremely radical change in perspective. The things we experience in this world are only temporary and brief, but the truth and promises of God are eternal. By fixing our gaze on the unseen, we fix our hope in the eternal and find strength to persevere.

We can fix our gaze on the unseen, by not concentrating on our troubles, but by spending time in contemplative study of God's word and immersing ourselves in it. By focusing on the unseen, we align ourselves with the values of God's kingdom and find a renewed purpose and clarity on our spiritual journey.

The passage from 2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:5 offers great encouragement for our Lenten journey. It calls us to welcome our inner renewal, endure our suffering with hope, fix our eyes on the unseen, and long for our heavenly home. As we reflect, may we draw nearer to God and experience the power of His grace. Let us journey through Lent with hearts full of faith, hope, and love, ever aware of the eternal glory that awaits us in Christ.

Our great and redeeming Father, allow us to focus all our attention to you. To be nourished with every word that comes from your lips onto our hearts. Give us the heart to help strengthen others whose troubles are more than they can bear alone, so they also can focus solely on you and the treasure that awaits us in your kingdom. Amen.

Tom Engle

Before we dive in, let's get our bearings and set the scene. When we join the Israelites in Joshua 4, we're at a pivotal transition in the story of the exodus from captivity in Egypt to the wandering in the wilderness to the Promised Land. Decades of wandering are over, Moses has died, and Joshua is now leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. The Israelites have followed the Ark of the Covenant into the Jordan River, where God stopped the waters, and they crossed over on dry land. This passage begins with Joshua commanding the priests to step out of the Jordan and the waters returning. This was no small creek - the waters of the Jordan overflowed their banks this time of year. Just look at what God does!

As we read this passage, notice the LORD takes action, and Joshua and the Israelites are participants.

"The Lord exalted..."

"The Lord said..."

"The Lord your God dried up the waters..."

When we get to the conclusion of this passage, verse 24 says it is "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, and so that you may fear the Lord your God forever."

Over and over again, the Lord commanded, and Joshua (and the Israelites) listened and obeyed. This passage compels me to ask myself: Am I listening? And when I listen, when I hear God's voice, do I take action? Do I obey? God does the "doing" in this passage, but the Israelites get to bear witness to it. They get to be part of the story, and they get to tell the story.

The Israelites took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan and set them up as a memorial so that generations to come would be told of God's provision. This begs more questions: When your children ask their parents... do we encourage/foster an environment where children (and those who are not so young) are encouraged to ask questions? Do we tell them what God has done? We, too, are invited to bear witness, to participate, to be part of the story, to tell the story. What will you do with the story God is writing? What story will you tell?

Gracious Father, thank you. Thank you for all that you have done, for all that you have provided, for your leading and guidance, for

your love and grace and mercy. Thank you for making a way through the rivers. Help us to listen. Help us to remember. Help us to tell Your story. Amen.

Amanda Ehst

Lost. What a terrifying feeling. Many group hikers are told that if you get separated from your group, you should stay put. Staying put renders the lost individual utterly dependent on an outside person. Someone else needs to notice that you are missing, care enough to look for you, and be strong and smart enough to find you. For a lost person, staying put requires deep trust in someone else. Who is worthy of that trust?

In this passage, Jesus tells parables about two lost items – a sheep and a coin. It is important to note our role in these parables: we are the sheep or the coin. These parables reassure us of the character of our Seeker – Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

What characterizes the seeker in these two snapshots? Both seekers are highly motivated to find the missing item, even experiencing personal loss to conduct their search. The shepherd leaves an entire flock to look for one. He leaves any comforts that he may have and braves the elements alone to conduct his search. The widow abandons all of her ordinary pursuits to seek her missing coin.

Jesus sacrificed to seek us. He left heaven and became a human, with all the messy troubles and mundane tasks that are part of human life. In Philippians 2:6-7, Paul reflects that Jesus made himself nothing, taking the role of servant and coming to earth.

There is a second characterization of the seeker: joy. Five times “joy” and “rejoicing” appear in this passage, so this is key. Jesus wants us to know his heart. He wants to find us, and he loves to find us.

Immediately prior to this passage is a discussion of the cost of following Jesus. Jesus’s contemporary listeners did not yet know of the cross and resurrection, so why should they be willing to pay the price of discipleship? The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin demonstrate the trustworthy, wise, and able heart of our loving God who takes joy in giving of himself for our benefit.

Thank you, loving Father, for this glimpse of your heart. Teach me to trust you, no matter how dark my surroundings are or how lost I feel. You are good. You are loving. You are able. Today, help me to rejoice in who you are.

Bethany Calderwood

Jesus tells a parable about a son who ponders his father's love only after he has spurned it. The grace he receives is beyond his hopes. That same grace is a crisis for an older brother who believes it is his obedience that has earned his place in the father's home.

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³So he told them this parable:

^{11b}"There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. ²⁵"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father,

‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

Individual songs, poems, and hymns make up the composition of the Psalms. Each Psalm has its own historical and biblical content. There are a variety of themes.

Psalm 53 begins stating that the fool (the fool is someone senseless, irrational, or lacking in wisdom), denies and rejects God's authority. Our nature sometimes brings us to place much importance on our own desires.

It is important to point out God's call to us and constantly seeking him. We should always consider God's salvation and righteousness in our daily lives.

The biblical text praises God. It delivers the children of God from those who deny the existence of God.

The Psalm contrasts the universal nature of sin and folly, the denying God with seeking him and highlighting the triumph of God's justice.

Some have not opened their hearts. The Holy Spirit seeks our hearts and is ready to heal them with strength and a new life. Children of God will be blessed with joy, friendship, and love.

Heavenly Father, let us always keep our hearts open to you. Help us to always remember that you are with us. Amen.

Dave Long

Jesus, the center of Christian life

To understand this scripture verse, I had to do some exploring of the Bible. As I was reading the story of Revelations, I discovered it was written by John, probably not the apostle, but someone with that common name.

In chapter 19 we learn of the great multitude of God's people depicted as the Lamb, hence the marriage of the Lamb to God. Are we willing to be a lamb and are we ready for the Marriage? Prayer and fellowship will help with this decision. God is waiting for us.

In verse 9, John had been active in 7 churches teaching and establishing them as places of love and Christianity. In verse 9 he sees an angel telling those who follow the word of God are blessed.

In verse 10, he fell to his knees to worship the angel and is told not to worship him. I am only a servant just as you and your friends who believe in Jesus and his teachings and worship God.

The lesson here tells us to follow and listen to the teachings of Jesus and to worship God. Help others to learn of the blessings God gives us as we follow the testimony of Jesus.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of Jesus. I pray that through prayer and study I continue to learn of his teachings. I thank you for those who teach the Word of Jesus to help understand his testimony. Thank you for all the blessings I have received and help me to continue the journey. Amen.

Phyllis Kershner

This story of divine provision speaks powerfully to the themes of Lent: dependence on God, surrender, and transformation. The widow faced a desperate situation, and all she had was a small jar of oil, seemingly insignificant in the face of her overwhelming need.

During Lent, we are invited to reflect on our own insufficiencies and to bring them before God with honesty and humility. Like the widow, we may feel that what we possess (whether faith, resources, or strength) is not enough.

Miraculously, the widow's small jar of oil kept flowing until every jar was filled. What seemed small and insufficient became abundant through God's intervention. This is a reminder that when we offer God the little we have, He multiplies it beyond measure.

As you journey through Lent, ask yourself:

- What areas of my life feel empty or inadequate?
- How can I surrender these to God, trusting Him to fill and transform them?

The same God who filled the widow's jars longs to fill our hearts, renewing us with His grace and love as we prepare for the celebration of Easter.

Gracious God, in this season of Lent, I bring to You my emptiness and inadequacy. Help me to trust in Your power to provide, transform, and renew. Fill me with Your Spirit, that I may live in the abundance of Your grace. Amen.

Sarah Eidle

“Offers comfort to the people of Israel during times of affliction, promising deliverance, forgiveness, and God’s protection.”

When I first read these verses in Isaiah the lyrics from a favorite song of mine came to mind: “and I get a peaceful easy feeling, and I know you won’t let me down.” Hard to believe that a song from the 1970’s can help you relate to God, but it certainly does now to me.

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have summoned you by name, you are mine.” (v1)

God knows us by name, how much more reassurance do we need? But that is only the beginning, he wants us to personally relate to him daily in all things as we are his treasure, and his love is unwavering.

Throughout this passage we hear how God’s love is steadfast and he loves us just as we are, God has restored us to his family, He is present with us, protecting us from harm, and He has a purpose for us and his forgiveness can humble us and make us want to do better.

Dear loving God, thank you for calling us by name and that your grace and love are unconditional. Remind us that you want to hear when we have difficult times and also our joys in life. Strengthen and guide us to trust in your promise to be with us always. Amen.

Terry Wade

You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe in me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. (v10)

How do we witness that God is our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior?

The definition of witness, taken out of the Lutheran Study Bible is simply to tell who God is and what God has done! What is God up to?

As I have watched the media coverage of the recent wildfires in California, as well as the fires in Maui and flooding in the Carolinas, it is evident that neighbors, communities, and the country have gathered to witness and serve those in need. God's work, Our hands.

At St John's, I see us witnessing God's love through praying for others, welcoming all, sharing food and the gospel with those at Come to the Table, delivering bags of food to food-insecure students in the area, and being actively involved in the community.

God is love and comes to us. When we love by serving others we are witnessing our faith in God.

Dear God, thank you for your unconditional love and calling me by name. Keep my eyes and ears open to your truth and empower me to be a bold witness to your love by serving and giving grace to others. Amen.

Sandy Wade

Editorial note:

We are blessed with two writers for today's devotional.

In Isaiah 48: 8-15, we hear that God truly knows and loves us, flaws and all.

From birth, we may forge our own path. There are times in life that our faith is tested. Perhaps we rebel, perhaps we lean into our relationship with God. When we rebel, we are not able to hear God as our guide. 9 “For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, so that I may not cut you off.” God is patient, and he knows we will find our way to him again despite the adversity we face. He will not turn his back on us. His word will reach us no matter the armor we may try to surround ourselves with.

God continuously calls us. He has a purpose for us in the world, even though things feel really hard at times. He knows our true selves, our wants, our needs, our intentions. Who else loves us and knows us this truly and deeply? Are you ready to let him in and fully receive him?

Dear God, sometimes we unintentionally close ourselves off, especially in times of adversity. Thank you for loving us unconditionally and always being there. Give us the strength to open our hearts to you and help us listen so that you may guide us in whatever you intend for us.

Sarah Everingham

Editorial note:

We are blessed with two writers for today’s devotional.

In John 11:45-57 we see the aftermath of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus' miracle gained him many followers which threatened the Pharisees. In response the Sanhedrin decided killing Jesus would save their power and people. Without knowing it, their selfish decision was fulfilling God's plan for Jesus Christ the righteous one to die for the unrighteous. This passage reminds us of the struggle between God's divine plan and human opposition. We may struggle in our lives, but we can trust that God is in control. Even in times filled with uncertainty and hopelessness, God works to fulfill his purpose through our lives. Just as Jesus' death brought life to many, our struggles when surrendered to God can lead to growth in our faith.

Lord, open our eyes to your plan and give us the strength and courage to follow wherever you lead us. Let us trust that our faith is greater than our fears and we can give our full attention to your will. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

Ashley Gheer

Judas willfully misinterprets as waste Mary's extravagant act of anointing Jesus' feet with costly perfume. Jesus recognizes that her lavish gift is both an expression of love and an anticipation of his burial.

¹Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

After reading this passage, the main part that sticks out to me are verses 23 through 25. These verses talk about how all people need to love and encourage one another. This speaks to me deeply because I am one who loves to encourage. The love to encourage others comes from my teaching of Taekwondo. I encourage my students, and I can see the impact that it has on them, and that's something that I think everyone needs. It also talks about how we need to show love to others, and that includes showing love to others that might not be getting as much love as they should.

In verse 25 we read, "Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." People need to meet with each other and discuss their needs and what they want to do, because if we don't talk about these things then nothing will get done and people will be upset. A lot of people are stuck in their ways and don't want to discuss what's happening in their lives or in the world, which is what I think it means by "some are in the habit of doing." I think it's important to have these discussions because people need to know what is happening in others' lives so we can make everyone's life better together. I believe this is what Jesus would want us to do.

Dear God, we know that your Son is faithful to us, and we hope that people do not lose hope in His return. We also pray that we are able to love and encourage everyone and that we can meet with each other and discuss our future with You, Amen.

Myles Omlor

Siblings in Christ, John's wishes are clear: accept Jesus as Christ and lead not astray from Him. Praying, reading the Bible, going to church are great ways to be close to Christ, but reading the teachings of Jesus will allow us to know that one of the closest ways to be with Christ is to see God in one another. Being involved in your community, loving your neighbor, and taking care of those in need are all ways to live out our faith and abide in Christ. So, dear siblings, hold fast to His teachings, abide in His love, and let His truth guide your hearts each day.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and for the anointing of the Holy Spirit that guides us in truth. Help us to remain steadfast in Your love, to see You in one another, and to live out our faith through acts of kindness and service. Keep our hearts from being led astray and strengthen us to abide in You always. May we stand before You with confidence and joy when You appear. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Rachael Geary

In this passage Jesus is talking to his disciples explaining that they are going to Jerusalem where the prophets' predictions will come true regarding the son of man. Jesus explains that the son of man will be handed over to the Romans, where he'll be mocked, spit upon, flogged and killed, but he will return on the third day.

The disciples do not understand that Jesus is talking about himself. They don't see that he is trying to prepare them for what is going to happen, and they didn't understand that Jesus would be resurrected.

Dear God, please help us navigate the things we don't understand and let us see things with open eyes and hearts. In Jesus' name with pray, Amen.

Melissa Eidle

Watch a small boat tied to a dock. Imperceptibly it starts to move – maybe by currents or wind, or the kids doing cannonballs off the other side of the dock. The boat starts to move away, perhaps slowly at first, but definitely away from the dock. The only thing restraining it from drifting into the center of the lake is the rope. If the rope unties from the boat, the boat might be lost.

“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” verse 1.

How often have we experienced someone attending church regularly, only to watch them slowly decrease their attendance and participation in church life? They are like that small boat. Have we tugged on the rope to bring them back to the dock? Have we asked them why we don't see them as often? Is there something we can do to change the drift? Pray, of course; but anything else?

Sometimes we are the boat, drifting away. How strong is our rope? How do we change direction, stop drifting? What has caused the drifting? Is it a physical illness, a challenging work situation, a family issue, a mental crisis? We could pull on the rope to return to the dock.

Those of you reading this have heard the words of Jesus. He is the dock. He speaks through us, through the Holy Spirit, and to continue the analogy, the rope. He does not fail.

“But we do see him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely* Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” verse 9

“For since He himself was tempted in that which he has suffered, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted, *drifting*.” verse 18 (italics mine)

O Lord, how often we have drifted in small and large ways. Knowing you are always coming to our aid, bringing our boat back to the dock, helps grow our faith. May we know that your sustenance is sufficient for each day. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Cathy Krause

In this passage from Isaiah, God is speaking to the people of Israel (much like a husband would speak to his wife). God swore he wouldn't cover the earth with water again like in Noah's flood. He would not be angry with them.

He promises undying love, come what may (in sickness and in health, for better or worse).

I feel that this passage foretold of a messiah or Jesus coming with the promise of grace and mercy. And that God loves us warts and all.

Good and gracious Lord, we praise your holy name, and give you thanks for all the blessings you have shown us. We are especially grateful for your greatest blessing, your son Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

Dave Babb

In today's passage, we focus on the plot to kill Jesus, and the preparation of the Passover. One of my first thoughts connected to this text is that how could one of Jesus's closest friends betray him?

We know that in the plot to kill Jesus, that Judas Iscariot betrays Him. I think about how being one of the disciples, Judas traveled with Jesus, followed in His footsteps, and learned from His teachings. It was clearly a series of poor decisions that Judas made at this time.

As much as we wonder why he made those poor decisions, scripture does suggest that Judas did show remorse for betraying Jesus. When we think about the preparations for the Passover, we know that the other disciples obeyed Jesus, and found everything He asked them to find, just as He said. Here Jesus was focused on His disciples, the Passover meal, and wanting to feel the sense of community of sharing it with them one last time. We know that following this passage, Jesus and the disciples engage in the Passover meal. Jesus wanted to share that He is giving real and true spiritual gifts not only to his disciples, but to all through the eating of the bread, and the drinking of the cup. Those spiritual gifts embody forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This passage brought some thoughts to mind about how we as a congregation have been striving to be committed to serving others.

Just as Jesus offered Himself and these gifts to His disciples, we in return should offer our gifts not only to each other, but to others in the community. Forgiveness, life, and salvation are what Jesus offers us, and I've often thought about what are all the things we can offer as individuals, and what are all the things that we together can offer the community, or in the world?

Dear Lord, as we prepare to enter this final week of Holy Week, help us to be in remembrance of all that Jesus offered of Himself with us in mind. Inspire us to reflect on the ways that we can offer ourselves and in work with others, to join in God's mission in the community. In Your name we pray, Amen.

Lauren Jones

Entrance into the final days

²⁸After he had said this, [Jesus] went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴They said, “The Lord needs it.” ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” ⁴⁰He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

The first 4 verses of this passage in the NIV translation state that God's servant, Jesus the Messiah, will bring justice to all the nations and the earth through God's spirit three times! In the last few years at St. John's, we've focused on our Baptismal Covenant and recall that the liturgy in the Affirmation of Baptism includes the directive to *strive for justice and peace in all the earth*. The use of the verb "strive" reminds me that we cannot do this alone, but as disciples, we are called to act in supporting God's mission.

This passage further describes the way in which Christ will bring justice:

- With gentleness and compassion, especially when one is desperate and hurting, "a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out"
- He will be relentless and resilient, "he will not falter or be discouraged"
- He inspires hope for those who are desperate, desolate, and suffering, "in his teaching the islands will put their hope"

I find these words comforting as this reveals the gentle, loving, and compassionate nature of God. God's love is everlasting, persistent, tender, and filled with hope, even when we feel isolated, alone, and discouraged. During this time of chaos and divisiveness in our country and around the world, let us be a community connected through our loving Jesus and share our witness in our community and the world.

Good and gracious God, help us to live out our baptismal covenant every day and to strive for justice and peace, and to do it with compassion, kindness, and love as your Son has taught us. Amen.

Jen Friz

In this passage, the reference to serve and follow really jumps out to me. This is very clear as you read verses 26 and 36. For me the reference to follow the light is like following the light to your house at night but we need to make Jesus the light to follow. We have many opportunities to serve and follow and Jesus. The light is that little nudge you feel to do this. Pray on this nudge contained in the light and see where it takes you to glorify God.

Dear God, I pray for everyone to follow Jesus, the light. As we follow the light, I pray that we feel that little nudge contained within us to be able to serve for God. Amen.

David Eidle

As I read this passage, I was struck by the powerful imagery of a race, filled with energy and momentum. Picture it: a crowd of supporters, their cheers rising in unison, their hands raised high, fists pumping in encouragement. The air is electric with anticipation as each runner passes the baton to the next in the relay, signifying the continuity of effort, the shared responsibility, and the commitment to the journey. There's a sense of unity in that moment, a sense that we're all in this together, lifting one another up toward a common goal.

This uplifting image mirrors the journey of life, where we often face challenges, uncertainties, and moments of exhaustion, but are lifted by the encouragement of others. Just as in a relay race, we are called to run our individual leg of the race, but it is never done in isolation. God walks with us, and the story of Jesus gives us the strength to endure, no matter how difficult the course may seem. Jesus' own life—marked by struggle, sacrifice, and ultimate triumph—becomes a beacon of hope and a model for perseverance. In the midst of our own trials, we are reminded that endurance is possible, not through our own strength, but through the grace and presence of God.

We are part of a relay team. Are we passing the baton effectively to others? Are we investing in those who will run after us? Just as in a relay, each generation has a responsibility to pass on the lessons, the faith, and the wisdom they've gathered. The baton symbolizes the knowledge and the spirit we are meant to share, to teach, and to inspire others to carry forward. It's not just about surviving the race ourselves but ensuring that those who follow us have the tools and the strength to keep going.

So, as we run, let's ask ourselves: *Where is our focus?* Are we looking to the finish line with hope and confidence, knowing that we are not running in vain? Are we actively teaching the next generation how to run their race well, passing on the baton of faith? In this relay race of life, each of us has a role to play. And with God by our side, there is no limit to the strength and endurance we can find to finish well.

Heavenly Father, thank you for providing others in my life that have passed the baton of faith to me. Help me to continue the race with grace and mercy and to nurture the faith journey of the next generation. In your name I pray, Amen.

Shannon Omlor

In verses 1-17, this scripture takes place just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew it was almost time for him to leave this world and go to the Father.

Jesus got up from the meal, and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. Peter objected that it was not fitting for the role of the Messiah to wash his feet, but Peter needed to learn that the Messiah came to serve, not to be served. Jesus was setting an example for the disciples to do what he had done for them. Foot washing represented the spirit of humble servanthood.

In verses 31b-35, Jesus told his disciples he would not be with them much longer and they could not come where he was going. He gave them a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

This commandment has been our mission, our message, and our goal at St. John's to become true disciples of Jesus, Humble Servants, to Love One Another, Our Neighbors, All People just as Jesus loves us.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son, Jesus Christ, to walk this earth with the first disciples, to teach them to be humble servants and to Love One Another. We pray for your loving guidance as we strive to be true disciples of Jesus and walk humbly on his path serving others.

Bonnie Moatz

“Yet”

Before we begin, please ask yourself these questions, then read Psalm 22 (NIV)

- Have you ever felt forsaken, left behind, betrayed, or forgotten? When?
- How did you handle it?
- How does the writer of the Psalms cope with it?

Let’s consider how these play out in this emotional monologue by King David.

Beginning with a passionate cry, a question most likely yelled and not whispered: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” There’s no wondering what King David’s emotional state is. He is feeling alone, abandoned, and betrayed by both God and people...just like Jesus.

Psalm 22 is one of the Psalms that most refers to Jesus’ crucifixion and is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. Check out these verses and recognize their similarity to Jesus’ death on the cross.

- Verse 1: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- Verse 7: All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
- Verse 14: I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.
- Verse 16: Dogs surround me; a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.
- Verse 18: They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

This Psalm is clearly about suffering; however, there’s a tiny little word in verse 3 that changes everything: *Yet*.

“*Yet* you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted, and you delivered them.”

“*Yet* you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast. From birth I was cast on you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.”

Even in immense pain and confusion, King David follows with what he knows to be true: God continues to be faithful, even when David doesn’t understand his circumstances. The Psalm ends with this climactic verse in 31: “They will proclaim his righteousness to a people *yet* unborn--for he has done it.”

He has done it!!! Does that remind you of another of Jesus’ phrases on the cross? “It is finished.” Jesus promises righteousness for everyone. That means that all our suffering, all the ways we feel lost and betrayed on this sinful earth, will be redeemed because “*yet* God is still enthroned.”

Brian Moatz

Despite what I imagine to be the heavy weight of grief on her heart, the debilitating trauma of having attended a lynching, the dawning dread of life without Jesus, Mary followed conventional expectations and came to Jesus' tomb the morning after his crucifixion and burial to anoint his body.

What Mary and the other women with her found was the empty tomb that defied human expectations and fulfilled divine order.

Mary was an early follower of Jesus. She traveled with Jesus and the other disciples and was part of the community of believers. She provided care for Jesus and the other disciples as needed. And she was exceptional among them, for while all the disciples but John hid in fear during the crucifixion, Mary remained present and public with her support for her Lord.

So of course she was there the next morning.

How did she do it? How strong was her faith? Did she have the confidence in the things hoped for, and not yet seen? Did she lean first on her own understanding, that "they" must have removed him? Or was the resurrection literally dawning on her? Is that why she ran to tell the disciples about the empty tomb?

When Mary returns to the scene, weeping, she looks into the tomb, and through her crying, tear-filled eyes, sees figures where Jesus had lain. These figures, the angels, ask why she is crying. Mary replies, bearing witness to Jesus' role in her life, saying "they" have taken her Lord away. She turns, still, I imagine, with tears in her eyes, and does not recognize another figure, the resurrected Jesus, as he asks the same question as the angels. "Why are you crying?"

Mary may not have had the clearest eyes to see in that moment, but she had the ears to hear Jesus then call her by name, instantly restoring her into a right relationship with her Savior and Redeemer.

And in that relationship Jesus reminds Mary that His Father is her Father and His God is her God. Blessed assurance indeed! Mary went out, with Easter joy, to witness to the others. The Word has been fulfilled! Alleluia!

Why are you crying? What is the source of the tears that prevent you from proceeding with faith and having the eyes to see? Who is it that you are looking for?

Seek him, and you shall find him. Rest blessedly assured!

Dear Father and God of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and the rest of us, we thank you for the liberating power of the Resurrection of your Son and our Redeemer. Alleluia! Strengthen our faith that we might see clearly through whatever restricts our access to you. Send your Spirit upon us that we might be more like Mary, ever faithful and courageous witnesses to your work in us and through us and among us. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Jennifer Schlegel

Evidently expecting to find Jesus' corpse, some of the women among his followers go to the tomb with embalming spices.

After a perplexing encounter with the empty tomb and angelic visitors, the women become the first to proclaim the amazing news of resurrection.

¹On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.



ASH WEDNESDAY

Wednesday, March 5
7:00 pm

UNFAILING LIGHT - MIDWEEK SERVICE

Wednesday,
March 12, 19, 26 & April 2, 9
7:00 pm

PALM SUNDAY

Sunday, April 13
9:30 am

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Thursday, April 17
7:00 pm

GOOD FRIDAY

Friday, April 18
7:00 pm

EASTER

Sunday, April 20
9:30 am



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