

North Stelton African Methodist Episcopal Church



*Closer Still: A Lenten Devotional of
Prayer, Fasting, and Reflection*

Lenten Devotional Guide 2025

Rev. Ritney A. Castine, Pastor

Foreword

As we enter the sacred season of Lent, we commence a journey aimed at deepening our connection with God. Lent serves as a period of contemplation, repentance, and renewal—a time to momentarily disengage from the distractions of everyday life and seek the presence of the One who invites us closer.

The focus of this devotional, "Draw Me Nearer," resonates with the cherished hymn by Fanny J. Crosby:

*"Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
To the cross where Thou hast died;
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
To Thy precious, bleeding side."*

Lent invites us to a holy space where we can surrender, seek, and experience renewal through God's love. Whether this marks your first Lenten season or is a familiar aspect of your spiritual journey, my hope is that this devotional will serve as a pathway to a deeper relationship with God. May the daily reflections, Scripture passages, and prayers encourage you to draw closer to the heart of Christ, to the hope found in the cross, and to the promise of resurrection.

In Christ's Love,
Rev. Ritney A. Castine, Pastor

Introduction

Lent represents more than just a season; it is an invitation—a sacred call to draw nearer to God, to still our hearts, and to align our lives with His purpose. It is a profound journey of introspection, characterized by fasting, prayer, and repentance, as well as renewal, hope, and grace.

This devotional, "Draw Me Nearer," is crafted to support you throughout these forty days with Scripture passages, reflections, and prayers designed to foster a more intimate pursuit of God. Each day will feature:

- A Scripture passage for meditation
- A reflective devotional
- A prayer to guide your dialogue with God

Lent transcends the notion of merely sacrificing; it is about creating space for more of God in our lives. Whether you choose to fast, dedicate yourself to prayer, or explore new ways to encounter God, this devotional is here to accompany you on this journey.

May these forty days draw you closer to the cross, to Christ's love, and to the abundant life He promises.

Let us embark on this journey together as a family of believers.

Rev. Ritney A. Castine, Pastor

Lenten Meditation Hymn- *He Looked Beyond My Fault*

Amazing grace shall always be my song of praise,
For it was grace that bought my liberty.
I do not know just why He came to love me so;
He looked beyond my fault and saw my need.

I shall forever lift mine eyes to Calvary
To view the cross where Jesus died for me.
How marvelous the grace that caught my falling soul;
He looked beyond my fault and saw my need.

Why celebrate Lent?

1. Lent provides us an opportunity to open our hearts to Jesus' sacrifice afresh.
2. Lent can be a meaningful time of preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ.
3. Easter is too important to not spend time preparing for it.
4. Lent gives us an opportunity to highlight undervalued elements of the Christian faith –fasting, moderation, biblical self-examination, confession, and repentance.
5. It gives us an opportunity for our entire congregation to participate. Lent gives us an opportunity to practice spiritual disciplines as a corporate body.
6. This season can prompt us to pray for those who do not know Jesus and invite them to our Easter services, with the hope that they will hear the gospel, repent, and surrender their lives to Jesus.
7. Lent could be a spark for personal and corporate revival and greater spiritual intimacy with Jesus in our own lives and in our church.

Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Psalm 51:1-17

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Millions of Christians gather on Wednesday, March 5th, to begin a season of reflection, prayer, and often fasting, to prepare for this year's encounter with the saving power of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Lent begins our preparation for this year's celebration of Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost.

The focus of these forty days of spiritual formation is upon forgiveness, cleansing, and renewal, enabled by God's Spirit present in our midst. Often, we turn to Psalm 51 to guide our Lenten practices. We invite David to lead us into the worshiping heart of the forgiven sinner: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions" (verse 1).

The Psalmist draws together the petitions in Psalm 51:1- 9 with the summarizing plea in verses 10-11: "'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy Spirit from me.'" This convicting and liberating Spirit guides the penance of the community, preparing it for the joyful witness of Easter and Pentecost. This annual encounter with the creative Spirit enables us to grow as witnesses to Christ whose praise will "teach transgressors your ways" (verse 13).

Prayer

Creator God, Accept our sacrifice of Lenten contrition and "sustain in us a willing spirit."

Thursday, March 6, 2025

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

“We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known ... as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

Over time I've grown to appreciate paradox. I used to think matters were either black or white, but there are limitations in the conjunction “or.” The word “and” is more generous and helps us comprehend that we can be grieving and grateful; tender and tough; knowledgeable and ignorant. Paradox is a gift.

In 2 Corinthians 6:8-10, Paul models how to embrace the spaciousness of “and” and not to live under the tyranny of “or.” As participants in the reconciling work of God in Christ, we are true to our word and yet distrusted; we are immersed in tears and yet submerged in deep joy; overlooked by the world and yet seen by God.

Christ himself inhabits paradox. He is the sinless one, and he became sin for us; He is the one who was alienated, and He makes reconciliation with God possible for us; He is the one who was despised and rejected, and He is the one who is highly exalted and accepted by God.

This Lent, I invite you to find beauty and hope in our mysterious and paradoxical journey with God, increasing your trust in the One who, in love, willingly faced death, and who raises the dead.

Prayer

Reconciling God, we don't want to receive your grace in vain. Help us to endure these trials with genuine love and patience, believing that you, Christ, both have walked this road before, and you are walking with us now. Amen.

Friday, March 7, 2025

Isaiah 58:1-12

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

I remember I tried fasting at a very young age. I remember how I tried to let people know that I'm fasting to make sure they are not eating in front of me, for less temptation or just to show-off how faithful I must be because I was fasting.

Reading Isaiah 58, we can see at the first half which captures how the people are displeased with the Lord's apparent lack of response. Because for them, fast is for "show."

The prophet Isaiah in a different context and time reminded his people that fasting, no matter how "good" it looks or how well it is done, if piety is turned inward and not accompanied by fair treatment of others, is empty.

Prayer

Grant us the wisdom to understand that in this time of Lent, we need to humble ourselves before You, O Creator, Source of Light, and Protector, now and always. Amen.

Monday, March 10, 2025

Matthew 6:1-6. 16-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Lent is often a time of giving up things. Whether it is forgoing material goods, limiting the excesses of life, or practicing a minimal lifestyle, giving things up during Lent can help to remind us of where our treasures are and help us to refocus our heart's desires. Lent can also be a time of adding in things; adding more into our lives can also help us to see more clearly where we are storing up our treasures.

The practice of generosity is one way of adding more during lent. Adding almsgiving can be as simple as committing to saying yes when your generosity is requested. Adding generosity does not have to be monetary, you can say yes when volunteers are needed.

Generosity is a flexible practice, you can commit to adding it every day during Lent, or you can add it one day a week. Adding generosity should be tailored to fit within your means and done in a way that ensures you feel safe. How you add this practice is between you and God. And that's what this passage is encouraging us to do - to add in more without trumpeting our virtue. For when we add more, we align our hearts with Jesus and will find where our treasures truly lie.

Prayer

Lord, during this time of Lent may we refocus on the ways of Jesus – caring for the poor, lifting up those who are oppressed, ensuring the needs of others are met. Through quiet unassuming ways, may I place my treasure where my heart desires to be.

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Genesis 9: 8-17

“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you.”

“I will remember my covenant and the waters shall never again destroy.” “Never again!” I have said that. I am going to get slim and trim. Next thing you know, I am watching tv eating greasy snacks. That is why promises we make in church are quickly followed by prayer. “Without you, O God, no promise is sure . . .”

In Genesis, God promises “never again,” twice. The promise is that all things – the birds, domestic animals and every animal and the earth itself – will never fall into ruin again. And the promise is for future generations.

The call to participate in the healing of God’s world is ours to inhabit. If it is just about our resolve, God knows it will never be enough. God’s promise, “never again,” means that we get covenant in the place of chaos. God swears an oath in God’s own name. Puts a sign in the sky to remind himself. The “never again” rests squarely on God.

Prayer

Merciful God, your faithfulness knows no ends, and your grace is beyond measure through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We give thanks. Amen.

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Psalm 25:1-10

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.

In Psalm 25:1-10, David is speaking from a heart that seems filled with gratitude and wonder as he proclaims his trust and reliance is in God. He begins by lifting his soul to the Lord, recognizing his dependency upon God and placing his faith in the Almighty. He encapsulates that yearning for certainty, guidance and protection we all have as we journey through life.

Much like David, we often find ourselves at crossroads, uncertain of the paths laid before us. In these moments, we're invited to mirror David's posture—a humble surrender to God's will. David's prayer isn't just a request for direction; it's a declaration of trust. He acknowledges God's faithfulness in the past, recognizing that the Lord has always been a steadfast guide, leading with mercy and steadfast love.

As we try to keep pace with the demands that life presents us with, it is tempting to seek immediate answers or instant solutions, forgetting that some of the most meaningful journeys require patient steps guided by faith. This psalm reminds us that God's guidance is revealed to those who are willing to trust, wait, and seek His ways. It's a reminder that our reliance on God's wisdom and timing leads us to paths of righteousness and fulfillment.

As we navigate life's complexities, may we echo David's prayerful plea, trusting in God's faithfulness.

Prayer:

Lord, show me your ways, teach me your paths, so that when the road ahead is unclear, I can move forward with confidence, knowing that I am guided by Your unfailing love and wisdom. In Jesus name I pray.

Thursday, March 13, 2025

1 Peter 3:18-22

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..."

When I was a kid, I used to love the rain. Not long after, I entered a new phase of the marvels of mud. In school, we learned about everything under the soil. That year, for the science fair, our project was to reflect our learning. I remember it clearly, I proudly brought in worms in an old yogurt container filled with dirt. Oh, it was marvelous. However, I didn't think of how dirty digging up dirt was going to be.

After mud play, when I got cleaned up, I always seemed to miss some dirt under my nails. When I think about water purification rites in the Old Testament, it was a temporary cleansing ritual, and you had to scrub extra hard or repeat this ritual to be spiritually cleansed.

Today, Peter points out the difference in baptism. Jesus appeals for us. Jesus redeems us from our own filth, dirt, and mud. And as we stand at the foot of the cross, His blood washes over us and we are made clean. Our sins are washed away. Our lives are shifted, transformed, and made in good appeal. We are cleansed because Jesus died and rose again. Friends, His grace extends to us. In our muddy situations, in our messy lives and in our sinful desires, Jesus appeals to God on our behalf. Jesus suffered for our sins, and now, we have a clean slate. This season, which areas of your life do you need to allow Jesus to wash over? Friends, Jesus extends this grace to you and me, and continues to extend it. May we not be ashamed of our identity in Christ and live lives of grace.

Prayer

Lord, help us claim our identity in Baptism and share with others the hope that is within us, based on your grace and goodness. Amen.

Friday, March 14, 2025

Mark 1:9-15

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

Mark doesn't go into a lot of detail in this passage. He records the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit descending like a dove and then these beautiful words uttered by God from heaven. God calls Jesus, His Son but God doesn't stop there. God says that Jesus is beloved, and that God is pleased with him. Why was God pleased with him? Was it because Jesus was baptized by John or was it a statement of encouragement that would stay with Jesus as he went through the wilderness and time of testing. Would those words along with the Holy Spirit strengthen him on his journey and the completion of his purpose? I think so.

Jesus was able to resist Satan and come out the other side proclaiming the gospel of God.

Once again, Mark doesn't include many details pertaining to the wilderness period that followed, or the specific temptations Jesus faced except to say that it would last for forty days, that there were wild animals and that the angels looked after him. So, what about our wilderness periods? According to this passage, they last for a certain length of time. There is a beginning and end.

Prayer

Loving and merciful God, we thank you for being with us and attending to us as we walk through our times of wilderness. Help us to remember your words of love and encouragement as we do your will and purpose for our lives. Amen.

Monday, March 17, 2025

Isaiah 42: 1-9

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.”

As this passage describes a servant of God and a list of what God promises, from beginning till end, each sentence is written in absolutes; in what *will* happen.

This passage is drenched in God’s authority and assurance. It carries the confidence of the sun rising each morning after going down to set each night.

In holding such powerful authority over anything we’ve ever known; we are blessed to be under the rulership of a King who cares for every heartache and tribulation of His people.

Our God hears the quietest whimper of each heart, and He will stop at nothing to see that we are healed, unbound, and seen.

In the passage before us today in this Lenten Guide, before all that is promised, the Lord begins by holding out His servant, His deliberately chosen one, and makes it so clear and known the treasure this servant is to Him.

Will I remember His call on my name, His dearness of me, and what He has promised?

Prayer

Lord, may my mind be sober, heart be hopeful, and spirit remain in You. Amen.

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Mark 9:2-9

⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”

I remember an episode of the cartoon *Arthur* in which a character assumed their teacher lived at school and was very surprised to discover they had lives just like everyone else. It was an interesting experience for the student because they never considered the teacher’s identity beyond the school walls.

When reading Mark 9:2-9, this came to mind. Moses and Elijah were two of the most significant figures in Judaism. If I had only ever known Jesus as my teacher, the personable man with time for individuals, suddenly seeing Him among some of the most important and respected people in biblical history would be a big shock.

As we experience Lent, we know to anticipate the magnitude of the cross and the wonder of His resurrection, but the disciples had yet to recognize this part of Christ, even as God explicitly told them of His Son’s identity many times. I encourage you to ponder which parts of Jesus’ multifaceted identity you recognize most often, and then go deeper, noticing and appreciating the aspects of Him you might not always see.

Prayer

Father God, thank you for sending your Son – the teacher, the healer, the fulfiller of promises, the willing servant, the unblemished sacrificial lamb – to be countless things for us all at once.

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Romans 4:13-25

“As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.”

The three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are sometimes called the “Abrahamic faiths.” In one way or another, we are all descended from old Abraham. To him there came a promise, that God would bless him with a son and make him the “father of many nations.”

According to the story, Abraham was an old man and, more importantly, his wife Sarah was old and withered also. The promise seemed somewhere between extremely unlikely and impossible.

But Abraham believed the promise, or, more precisely, put his trust in the One who made the promise, “being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” So Abraham put on his sandals and started walking toward what we call, even in these troubled times, the Promised Land.

But the God of Abraham, who is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ specializes in the unlikely and impossible. We are children of Abraham and God has made many promises to us and to the Church.

Prayer

*Father, thank you for your promises to us as children of God.
Help us to trust in your grace and goodness at work in the world –
healing and holding all in your care. Amen.*

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

“I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.”

In today’s passage, Abram has already been waiting twenty-four years since his initial encounter with God when God promises to make him into a great nation. Now at ninety-nine years of age, Abram encounters God once again and the promise, the covenant, is repeated. God changes Abram’s name from “exalted father” to Abraham, “father of a multitude.” However, the promise becomes even grander this time.

What can we use as reminders of how God has been and is currently, actively working toward our good? In what ways can we, as individuals and as churches, step out in faith, knowing God dreams bigger for us than we even dare to dream?

Prayer

Holy God, grant us grace and peace when waiting on you is difficult; and inspire and empower us by your Spirit to not only dream big for your Kingdom but to step out boldly in faith in following your call upon us. Amen.

Friday, March 21, 2025

Psalm 19

“The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.”

Notwithstanding music videos and YouTube or Tiktok clips, we absorb a lot of information through the written word. After all, you have picked up this devotional with some expectation of something new to ponder.

Reflect for a moment: what has been the best book you’ve read in the past six months? What did you learn? Why was it so enjoyable? Did it change your life in any way?

How about the reading you do for work? Any of it inspiring? Surely, intriguing or challenging?

Reading the scriptures- and acting on what you read- brings refreshment, wisdom, light and even joy. Surely as we journey toward Easter and are aware of our need to follow Jesus more faithfully, this is good news. But the good news is not only the gift of God’s holy word, but the God scripture reveals. The God whose commands are perfect, trustworthy, right, and radiant. The God, incarnate in Jesus, who loves us and forgives us and calls us ever closer.

Prayer

Jesus, help me to come to know you more fully through your word: may your commands penetrate my heart and be expressed more readily in my daily living. Amen.

Monday, March, 24, 2025

Exodus 20:1-17

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

Moses walks down Sinai carrying 2 stone tablets with the 10 commandments written on them. Have you ever wondered why God gave Moses two tablets? Some people think that God ran out of space on the first tablet, so he kept writing onto a second one. They picture in their mind, 5 commandments on 1 tablet, and 5 on the other. Others, however, think that the commandments were split 4 and 6. After all, the first 4 commandments deal with our vertical relationship with God, and the next 6 deal with our horizontal relationships with each other. And so, the first 4 commandments were written on one tablet, and the last 6 on the other.

However, we must remember that the 10 commandments come as a result of our covenant with God. Thus, I think that the first tablet had all 10 commandments written on it, and the second tablet had all 10 commandments written on it too. Two copies to mark and be witnesses to this covenant. One tablet for Israel. One tablet for God. It's like how wedding rings work. I have a wedding ring. My wife has a wedding ring. Every time I look at my ring, it reminds me that I'm married. I made vows. I belong to someone else. That's why there are two tablets. Israel was given a ring. A tablet that could be read publicly to remind them of who they belonged to! Israel had one copy, and the other copy belonged to God. Since God lived in the tabernacle, both copies were kept together in the Ark of the Covenant.

Prayer

God, thank you for the words of the 10 Commandments. May we relish in our covenantal relationship with you. Amen.

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Psalm 22:23-31

“My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation.”

This is the second part of Psalm 22. In the first part, verses 1-22, the psalmist describes his struggle and calls for divine help. Now, he includes the entire community in his praise of gratitude for the deliverance that was given.

What once seemed like the absence of the Lord now turns into a song of celebration for God’s help. Then this song goes further, as it becomes a testimony of the help coming from the hand of God. The one who suffered alone now affirms that God does not abandon and ensures that everyone hears this message.

The composer of this psalm suffered alone, but the victory granted was shared with everyone, just as Jesus suffered alone, but the victory over death was shared with everyone.

God's saving action in this psalm is guaranteed to everyone: poor, rich, nations and generations. We can, in this time of Lent, reflect on how Jesus' death includes people we will never even know.

Being God-fearing does not exempt us from suffering. Jesus, God the Son, suffered. The difference is that we fear a God who not only accompanies us in our suffering, but who has also suffered the worst in our place.

Prayer

Dear God, we believe that you hold our hand and guide us in our struggles. Therefore, we will sing about your greatness and your deliverance. Amen.

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Matthew 17:1-9

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

After Peter’s declaration of Jesus as Messiah at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus takes a handful of his disciples up the mountain behind what is now called Banias in Israel – likely Mt. Hermon. As they climb higher the disciples could never have imagined what happened next. There on the mountainside, the whole area is filled with light, and they see their Rabbi speaking with Moses and Elijah – the two great heroes of their faith representing the Law and the Prophets.

And here they were, all together. The disciples long to hold onto this moment too. But all at once, things get even more amazing – a theophany takes place – God the Father speaks! Just like at Jesus baptism, God the Father declares Jesus to be his beloved. With this confirmation of Jesus’ identity, he leads the disciples down the mountain and “sets his face towards Jerusalem.” From now on, every step Jesus takes will be towards Golgotha. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, to Holy Week, to fulfilling the Father’s mission as his Beloved.

When have you experienced that significant, even dramatic, encounter with God that reminds you of your identity as a beloved child of God? How might this Lenten season be another turning point in your life of discipleship?

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the moments in our journey of faith where we remember your active, saving and transforming presence in our lives. May we live in anticipation of your revelation this very day. Amen.

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Hebrews 10:4-10

“And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Sometimes we think that following Jesus requires great sacrifices or dramatic evangelism (and sometimes it does), but mostly, following Jesus means saying, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.”

It is seeing a need before you, and then saying yes to the invitation to serve. For some, that may mean volunteering in a school setting. For someone else, it might be showing up once a month at the food bank, or driving a senior to church, or hosting a home prayer meeting, or inviting a young family over for lunch after church.

It is the quiet everyday actions, one after another, where we are made holy.

Prayer

O God – help us to be open to your call, in the ordinary and everyday moment of life. May we answer your call and do your will. Amen.

Friday, March 28, 2025

Luke 1:37-38

“For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.”

In the story of the Annunciation, Mary declares herself to be “the servant of the Lord” and bravely accepts God’s will in difficult times. It is a fine example of faith, love, obedience, and humility. We see here a universal nature to Luke’s Gospel. Women take an equal place with men in God’s plan. God moves through the young and old, rich and poor. No one is left out. This Gospel and this Savior are for our whole world. In Luke, Mary is there as *one of us*.

The power of her story is not how special she was, but how great God’s grace is. It speaks to the power of God and how God can use this power in our lives. It doesn’t matter what condition we find ourselves in, because having Jesus in our lives means having a steadfast hope that God has an immense love for us.

During this season of Lent, we can resolve to change our lives with the certainty that Jesus will never come down off the cross. He never leaves us because of the immense love he has for us. Even if like Mary, we may be going through a difficult time in our lives, we are still in the center of God’s plan.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for giving us this day. Each day is a new opportunity for us to follow you, and to fill ourselves with your love, kindness, and mercy. Amen.

Monday, March 31, 2025

Exodus 17:1-7

*Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me?
Why do you put the Lord to the test?”*

Complaining is a part of life.

When we come to the complaint in Exodus we read *“But the people thirsted for water; and the people complained against Moses...”*

That is a straightforward complaint—people need water to live, and they currently do not have any.

However, it also points to something deeper. Another way to say it might be, “We have left our lives behind, we do not know where we are going or, if we will survive.”

When their needs are met, the Israelites feel that God is there, and when they are hungry and thirsty it feels like God has abandoned them. The challenge for them was trusting God when things felt uncertain.

We likely understand those feelings. When difficult things come either in our lives, or our churches we might feel alone or abandoned. We might complain, “We don’t have enough money, volunteers etc.” What we are really saying is, “the future is unclear, and unknowns are scary.” That is an honest complaint. However, God reminds us to trust, even if all we see ahead are stones, because God knows where there is water.

Prayer

*Loving God, help us to trust you and to follow your call in our lives.
Help us to see the water you have placed in our lives, especially
when we are afraid.
Amen.*

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Psalm 107

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Compared to other times and places, most of us enjoy comfortable and easy lives. We live in a secular world and have been influenced by that. We find safety and security in stable finances, good grades and successful employment, thinking we are simply reaping the benefits of our very own accomplishments, failing all too often to recognize that all the good we have, we have received from the Lord.

May this season of Lent help us reflect on our great need for a Savior, so our hearts are filled with true joy when we proclaim His wonderful deeds in songs of praise at Easter, the happy celebration of God's love for the whole world. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Prayer

God, help us to recognize your steadfast love in all aspects of our lives. Amen.

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

Ephesians 2:1-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

The opening verse of the text declares, "You were dead." At first glance, I questioned whether this could truly be the focal point of the passage, as death isn't always the conclusion in Christian teachings. Yet, I recognized that this statement serves as the conclusion, signaled by the word "were."

Indeed, we were once dead, but now we live in the grace of Christ. Though our past may have been marred by various negative aspects such as sins, disobedience, and the influence of the devil, it's not crucial because it's behind us.

We now live as children of God, embraced by the grace, love, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Lord. It's crucial to remember that in the grace of Jesus Christ, death is merely a past chapter, and a new life permanently resides within us.

Prayer

God, we pray that you might help us believe that death is not the conclusion of our lives, but rather, by grace, the beginning of new life is in us. Amen.

Thursday, April 3, 2025

John 3:14-21

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

Nicodemus arranged to meet Jesus at night, hoping to find out in secret who Jesus was. Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council, a Pharisee, and an esteemed scholar widely respected as Israel’s teacher. When they met, Jesus ignored the flattering remarks offered by Nicodemus but declared that no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are “born again”. Nicodemus was taken aback by that unexpected comment and countered intellectually that it was an absurd idea. How can a grown man go back into his mother’s womb.

He simply did not get it. Jesus explained further, with reference to being born of water and the Spirit. Nicodemus remained unconvinced. Nor it seems did he understand Jesus’ prophetic remark that the Son of Man needed to be lifted up to save humankind, like Moses’ bronze snake on a pole.

But John the disciple, a fisherman, likely overheard the conversation, and in a “hallelujah” moment, got it! He subsequently penned the two most important sentences in human history. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world, to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

During this time of Lent let us let go of the worldly things that encumber us from seeing the eternal truth, let us look to the Son on the cross, and let us hear these two most beautiful sentences with our heart.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for leading us to your truth and light. Amen

Friday, April 4, 2025

1 Peter 4:1-8

“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.”

Not many of us enjoy opening up our Bibles and immediately being faced with the topic of suffering. But these words in 1 Peter are guiding us to think about a specific kind of suffering—the kind of suffering where we are harassed or bullied for choosing a life in Christ.

Jesus said to the adulterous woman in John 8:11, “Go now and leave your life of sin.” Christ calls us to enter into a new way of being as citizens of His new kingdom, initiated by Him through His suffering on the cross. Through His death and resurrection, we are new creations. Born again. Re-imaged. Given a blank slate. And when we live into these realities, others will be surprised by how we live. Perhaps they’ll be intrigued; but others will undoubtedly be confused, uncomfortable, or even hateful of our ‘new life.’

Don’t worry about them, says Peter. Don’t fixate on how they’re living. Don’t focus on what they’re saying. Look at Jesus. Put on His attitude.

We all fall into the temptation of wanting to be liked, to be popular, to be appreciated. But as it turns out, this doesn’t give us the kind of life that Peter is talking about.

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,” wrote the hymnist. “Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.”

Prayer

Living God, enable us to live by your Spirit rather than by our own desires, and grant us the courage to face obstacles and hostility in our lives with a posture of grace and love. Amen.

Monday, April 7, 2025

Isaiah 60: 1-3

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you."

In many ways, the Lenten journey is one of moving from darkness to light. We begin in the heart of winter and watch as the days get longer. We follow Jesus from the Mount of Transfiguration as he sets his face towards Jerusalem. We experience the darkness of Good Friday and await, with anticipation and faith, the brilliant light of the resurrection morn. How will you experience the light and love of Christ anew in this dark world today and in this Lenten Season?

Prayer

God of revelation, speak to us of your grace and goodness as you did with Moses on Sinai long ago. Help us to hear and see you at work in our lives, calling us into covenant relationship with you and all creation. Amen.

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Hebrews 9:11-15

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”

I can't imagine living in ancient times and having to make physical animal sacrifices at the altar for my own personal mistakes and transgressions. I don't know about you, but if I had to bring animals to a tabernacle and priest to offer to God on my behalf, I wouldn't even know how to begin to find the time, let alone the resources to accomplish such tasks.

As I ponder how the Hebrew people lived those rituals, I certainly give thanks. Yet these ancient offerings and sacrifices pointed us to the perfect and final sacrifice of Christ. A sacrifice made once and for all.

Thank goodness for our Savior who was and is our perfect sacrifice so that we can be truly cleansed – inside and out. The sacrifice of Christ truly accomplished what other sacrifices could not. Praise be to our God indeed!

As we continue to journey in this Lenten Season, may our hearts truly be cleansed as we contemplate the true sacrifice offered not by the blood of goats and calves and animals, but the blood of Christ – the blood that was shed for us all.

Prayer

Loving God, we give you thanks for Blood of Christ, the only blood needed to truly cleanse and atone for the sins and mistakes we've made. Amen.

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

Psalm 51:1-12

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Psalm 51 situates this prayer of confession in that dramatic moment in David’s life when Nathan the Prophet tells a story that subversively exposes David’s sin with Bathsheba. The story is about a poor man who owned only one lamb, a lamb who was “like a daughter to him.” When a rich man, who owned a multitude of sheep, desired to serve a feast to a traveler, he confiscated the lamb from the poor man. Upon hearing the story, David was irate, demanding that this greedy rich man be brought before him and killed. Then Nathan utters those words that stuck in David’s heart like a sword: “You are the man”.

When our wrongdoing is exposed in such a blatant fashion, our response can take various routes. We can fight back, blaming others. We can ignore, obfuscate, or deny our wrongdoing. Or we can choose to confess our wrongdoing, take accountability for our actions, seek restoration, and ask God to help us amend our ways. In this situation (but certainly not in all the wrong done in his life), David chose the latter route. And this poem/prayer in Psalm 51 has become a prayer that has been uttered by countless Jews and Christians since, expressing the words we may have otherwise fumbled for when our own wrongdoings have been exposed.

In our society obsessed with appearances (akin to how many leaders in Jesus’ day were concerned with external purity), David’s prayer and Jesus’ words invite us to something very different. *They invite us to build a correspondence between our desires, convictions, motivations and actions.* Such re-integration is what David longed for. Such reintegration is key for each of us to become more human and to “see” God.

Prayer: *Create in me a clean heart O God, that my life may be a reflection of yours. Amen.*

Thursday, April 10, 2025

Psalm 23

*“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”*

There is beauty and simplicity in this beloved Psalm. It reads like a peaceful poem that settles one’s soul. It conveys a timeless message we can rest within as we trust in God’s faithfulness and provision. Sometimes I recite this psalm to myself when I’m feeling vulnerable and anxious. Maybe you have prayed it in times of calm and crisis. I remember reciting it in community during times of grief when my parents and dear friends died. I memorized this psalm as a child, and I have never grown tired of it.

The psalmist affirms the divine shepherd’s abiding presence and protection in the face of fear, the unknown, and long dark nights; the shepherd brought him comfort. And when we, in our worst moments, feel we are alone in our suffering, we can call out to the One who walks alongside us ... so our fears will diminish, and our courage will grow. In the journey of life, we all experience dark valleys and sit at tables where our enemies are in view. The goodness and mercy of God chases us down all the days of our lives and guides us through our troubles to the other side.

Where in your life do you need the divine shepherd’s guidance, rest, or pursuing love?

Pray

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on
my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when
I arise (St. Patrick). Thanks be to God. Amen.*

Friday, April 11, 2025

Psalm 119:9-16

“I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

This is a verse that, no matter my situation, always comes back to me. When I get cut off by another driver. When someone I trust lets me down. When a stranger does something disappointing. When I am angry, jealous, envious, or otherwise sin against someone or against God. Unbidden, these words come to mind – I have hidden your word in my heart. Deeply buried, but so much a part of me. Intrinsic to my being. I don't remember all the laws, all the commandments, all the decrees listed in the bible in detail. But my heart reminds me of this verse.

And that is what His Word does. It reminds us of His promises, His strength, and His glory. As we face our daily struggles, temptations, challenges and problems, God has given us His Word. He has given us His promise. We can know this deeply in our hearts and be assured that He is always with us. Let us hide his Word in our hearts and let us delight in His promises.

Prayer

Lord, we rejoice in your promises, that we hold deep in our hearts. Help us to not forget your Word and stay focused on you and your ways. In Jesus name, Amen.

Monday, April 14, 2025

John 9:1-41

“Though I was blind, now I see.”

Today’s passage recounts highly dramatic scenes beginning with Jesus’ healing of a blind man on the Sabbath. After rigorous questioning by the religious authorities, the healed man is cast out of the community for claiming that Jesus is from God. Jesus then seeks out the man, who recognizes him as the Son of Man and worships him. The drama ends with Jesus’ rebuke to the Pharisees, accusing them of spiritual blindness.

Who are we in this story? The blind one given sight who testifies again and again to Jesus’ miracle? The bystanders watching events unfold, unsure of what to think? The man’s parents, too afraid to speak the truth that Jesus healed their son? The religious leaders, secure in their authority, who bully and refuse to open their eyes?

This Lenten season invites us to look within and consider these themes of blindness, arrogance, fear, healing, and the loving claim of Jesus upon us. As individuals and as faith communities, how are we blind to what and whom we should truly see? In our arrogance or complacency, how often do we miss the presence of Jesus among us? Jesus’ act of healing transformed this man – both his sight *and* his spirit. This is our story too. Jesus seeks us out, heals our deepest hurts, and restores all to wholeness. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Jesus, Light of the World, open our eyes and make us your disciples. We long to see you. Amen.

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

1 Corinthians 1: 18-31

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

It seems that some things don't change! What was true in Old Testament times was similarly true in Paul's day and is also true today — humanity is drawn to its own 'wisdom', abandoning the true wisdom of God for a 'wisdom' that cannot help, transform, or save.

For Paul preaching in Corinth, the Gospel of Christ was being met with skepticism and ridicule. A crucified Savior didn't make sense!

Today, the world is similarly skeptical! TikTok and other social media platforms are awash with voices casting doubt, demanding evidence, and offering alternate viewpoints and understandings. The wisdom of God, however, cuts through this dissonant noise and worldly chatter with the good news of the cross—how the steadfast love of an eternal God has been made manifest through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today, as in days past, the cross, which the world sees as foolish, offensive, and naive, remains for the believer the focus of our hope, and the truth by which we are saved.

Prayer

Loving God, draw us to yourself, and may your wisdom fill us with that sure and certain hope that comes with trusting Christ, our Savior. Amen

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Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

“This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Though we often move too quickly to notice, the Lord has made our days and made them full of moments marked by God’s good purposes and steadfast love which endures forever. For some of us it might be necessary to add: even on a day like today.

Today, on our approach to Easter, may we remember the one who made us, made our mourning turn into dancing, who made enemies into family, made dead people alive, and made the cross - an instrument of shame and death - become the glory of God and our salvation.

Prayer

God, you made all that is good: give us grace and joy to perceive your marvelous works through Christ this day. Amen.

Thursday, April 17, 2025

Philippians 2:5-11

“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

Paul urges the church in Philippi to give out of their abundance, to respond to God’s sharing of God’s self in Christ, by in turn sharing of themselves with each other. The *like-mindedness* instructed by Paul is an ongoing challenge for a life lived in Christ. As followers of Jesus, we are called to pause and consider the gifts of encouragement, comfort, tenderness and compassion we have received from God through him. From that pause we will be inspired to act, to do.

This pastoral wisdom passed first to the church in Philippi, and again to Christ- followers down the ages, is still fresh and alive for the church today. In pausing to reflect on our abundance in Christ, we will be naturally motivated to respond to God’s great love for us with humility and service to others.

In this season of reflection, may we all hear again Paul’s challenge to participate in the flow of abundant love, both receive it and give it. All of this so that Jesus Christ would be further known as Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God the Father.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us how deep your love for humanity is, that you would humble yourself, even unto death. Grant us like-mindedness with you, that others would see you in our words and deeds. Amen.

Good Friday, April 18, 2025

Psalm 22

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

During this day known as “Good Friday,” we are reminded of the type of sincere and authentic relationship that Jesus had with His Father, God. Jesus is being crucified, and two books of the Bible show Jesus crying aloud “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34) Jesus prays the words of the Psalm 22 to express his feelings of abandonment to God.

On the third day after this crying out, Jesus was, according to Paul’s letter to the Romans, “appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.” The Father answered to Jesus’ prayer, and had shown that He had not forsaken his “only begotten Son.” Jesus understands our struggles, He died for our sins, and was appointed as the chosen by God to offer us a resurrected life.

Prayer

Our Father, thanks for such deep and powerful salvation, thanks for the compassion and empathy revealed in Jesus, in whom we have understanding of our struggles, forgiveness for our sins, and a new life, released from the power of evil and death. Thanks for your Spirit that resurrected Jesus from the dead and reveals your steadfast love for us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Resurrection Sunday, April 20, 2025

Mark 16:1-8

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.

Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! Happy Easter to you and your loved ones. What an incredible journey this has been together throughout this season of Lent. Forty days and forty nights of prayer and reflection have now led us to this place. The pilgrimage of the soul ends in the joy and assurance of the empty tomb, and the paradigm-breaking awe of Jesus’ resurrection.

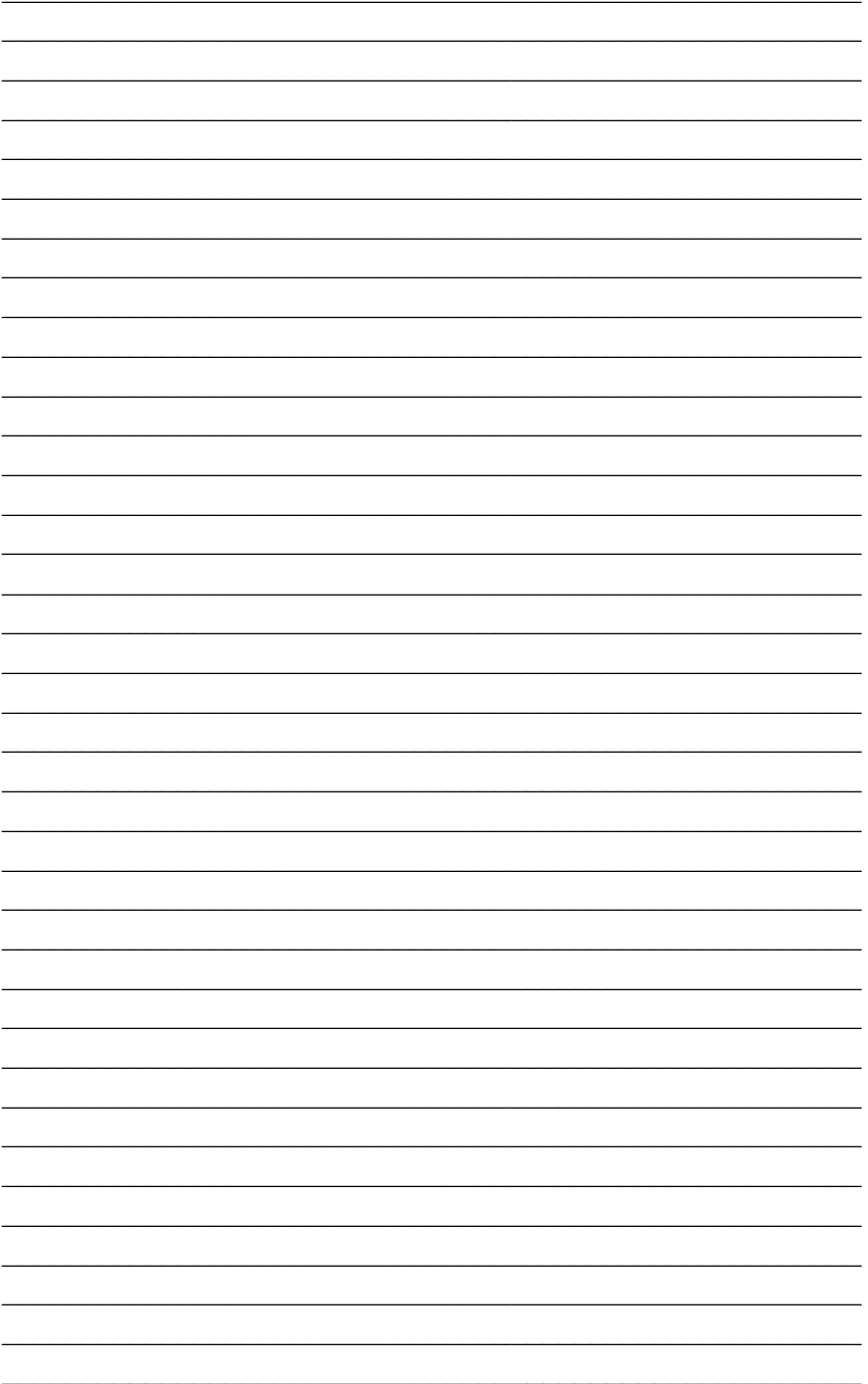
For us today, however, Easter is something we plan for, inviting friends for dinner, rehearsing special music at church, and anticipating with eagerness the joy of the holiday. For the first followers of Jesus who went to the Garden Tomb to anoint Jesus’ body for burial, they only prepared for sadness and sorrow. How overwhelming and confusing that first Easter must have been for Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome!

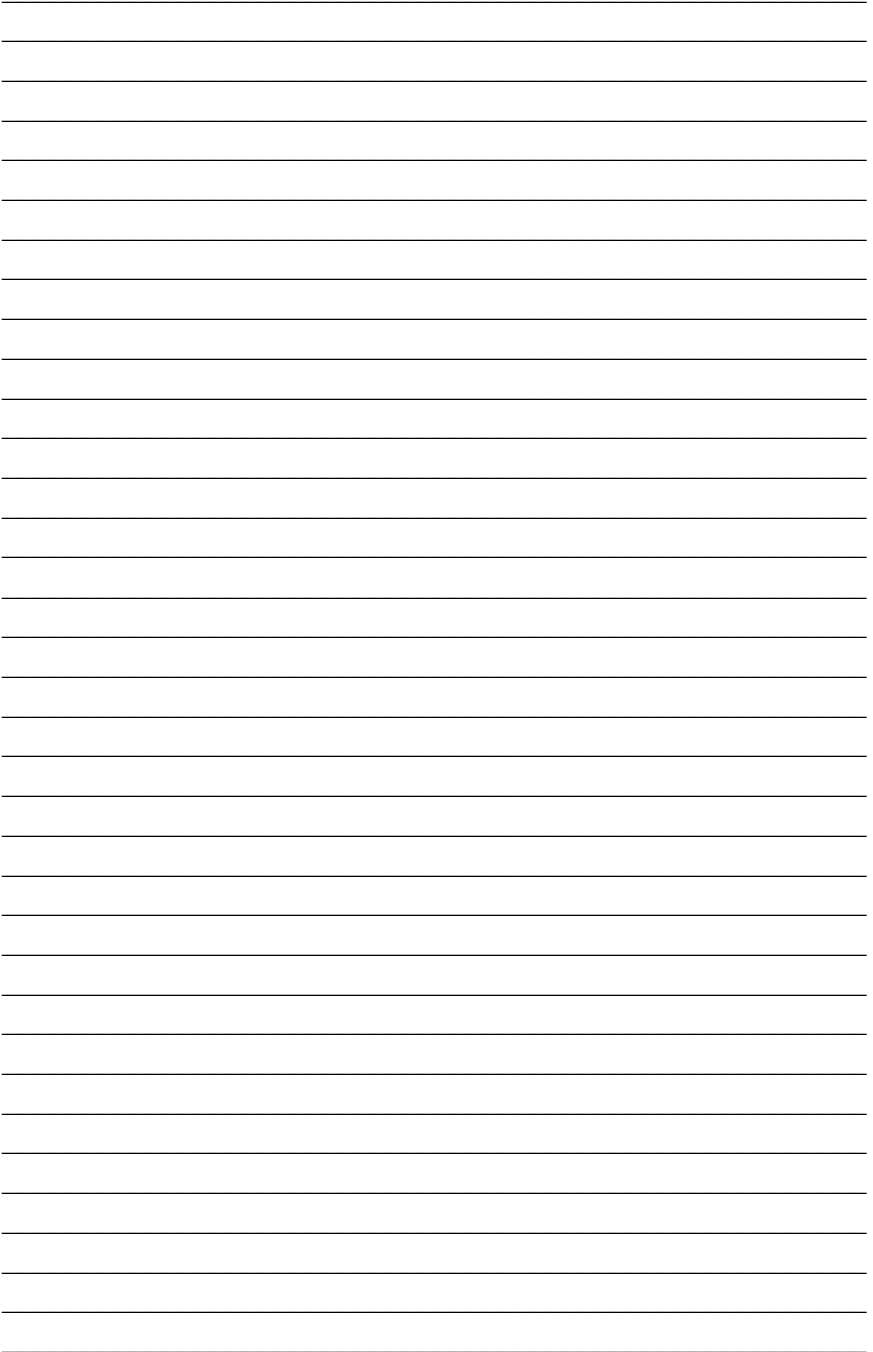
The massive stone was rolled away, the burial chamber exposed and inside an angel of the Lord with news of life beyond death – resurrection joy! No wonder the first witnesses of the resurrection stumbled out of the garden fearful, shaking and uncertain of what to say or do. Not only their lives, but all of human history was turned upside down in the moment. But note this, today as Christ followers we know the truth, beauty and joy of God’s forgiving grace that raised Jesus from the dead! Therefore, their confusion and speechless state did not continue. In fact, the angel commissioned them to be witnesses to the other disciples of what God has accomplished through an empty cross and an empty tomb. They were sent (*missio*) to tell others the good news that the God who created this world, has redeemed it (claimed it back!) in the matchless, marvelous, and magnificent name of Jesus our Lord.

Today, we too have experienced the overwhelming power of the Easter event, that commissions us to be missionary disciples – like those three women at the tomb – and be bold in telling others about God’s love for them in the name of Jesus.

Prayer

*God of resurrection joy, we praise you for the gift of Jesus Christ. For his life and ministry, his suffering and crucifixion, his resurrection and defeat of sin and death. Help us to be bold in our sharing through words and works, of the goodness of the gospel we know through our relationship with Jesus Christ.
Amen.*







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