

“Shadows of Holy Week”

HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL GUIDE 2020



**FERN CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH
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THE HOLY SEASON: LENT / EASTER

In early days Lent was a time of preparation of candidates for baptism on Easter Sunday. During the season of Lent these candidates prepared for this initiation into the Christian life. Lent for us is not only a time of preparation; it is also a time of prayer, repentance, sacrifice, soul-searching, self-denial, and service. Sundays, which are days for commemorating the resurrection, are omitted in counting the forty days of reflection and repentance. The color purple is used during this time to symbolize repentance and solemnity.

The forty weekdays in the season of Lent symbolize the forty-day fasts of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. The focus of Lent is for Christians to imitate Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for forty days. The sacred season of Lent concludes with Holy Week. Holy Week is a time of reflection upon the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Holy Week leads us to the joyous and glorious season of Easter.

These Holy Week devotionals, written by members and friends of our church family, are reflections of this year's theme, "Shadows of Holy Week". There are two devotionals for each day – one for morning and one for evening. You will find it helpful to read the daily Bible readings included in this book which trace the events of Jesus' last week on earth.

We hope that you will find inspiration, encouragement, and renewal through the reading of these devotionals, daily Bible readings, and our worship services of the week. We hope you will let this devotional guide be a part of your daily personal and/or family worship.

Thanks to those of you who have received this devotional book as a gift from our church family. Thanks to those who compiled, edited, and proofed this devotional book. Thanks to all of you devotional writers for allowing God to use you to challenge and inspire us. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift of Jesus...His Son...the Risen Christ!



CHURCH STAFF

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Joy Stelly, Office Coordinator 239-0316 ext. 100
Jodie Towles, Bookkeeper 239-0316 ext. 102
Leonard Westmorland, Director of Facilities 239-0316 ext. 104

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

SUNDAY, APRIL 5: PALM SUNDAY:

- 10:45 a.m.** We remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and into our lives. Join us for a Drive-In Worship Service. Come to the church parking lot (playground side) and tune in to 87.7 FM when you get parked. More instructions will be given in the worship bulletin and by our ushers.
- 7:00 p.m.** We will focus on the hymns and songs that remind us of the events of Holy Week during this Lenten Reflection. Join Pastor Steve in singing wherever you are as he leads from the piano. To join us, please go to www.ferncreekbaptist.org and click the red *Worship Service Livestream* button.

THURSDAY, APRIL 9: MAUNDY THURSDAY

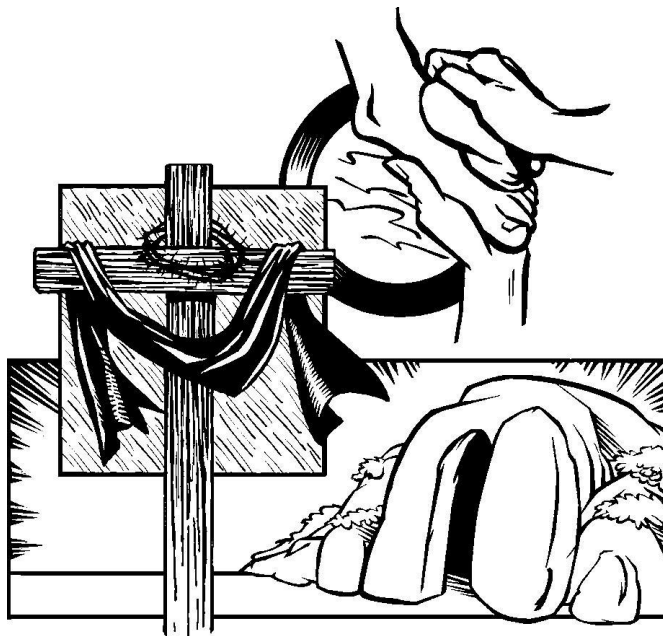
- 7:00 p.m.** We will partake of the Bread and the Cup as we remember God's amazing love for us and reflect upon Jesus' mandate to share His love with others. Connect with us wherever you are. To join us, please go to www.ferncreekbaptist.org and click the red *Worship Service Livestream* button.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10: GOOD FRIDAY

- 7:00 p.m.** We will join together in spirit as Pastor Linda reads the events of Christ's journey to the cross from the book of Matthew. These readings will be interspersed with beloved hymns and songs that accentuate the texts. Several of our many talented church members will share in song through voices and instruments. To join us, please go to www.ferncreekbaptist.org and click the red *Worship Service Livestream* button.

SUNDAY, APRIL 12: EASTER CELEBRATION

- 10:45 a.m.** We celebrate the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ! God's Word will be spoken through proclamation and music. Alleluia!! (The specifics of this service will be announced soon.)



DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These Bible readings correspond with the events during the last week of Jesus' life on earth.

Sunday, April 5	Matthew 21:1-11 Mark 11:1-11 Luke 19:29-44 John 12:12-19
Monday, April 6	Matthew 21:12-20 Mark 11:12-19 Luke 19:45-46
Tuesday, April 7	Matthew 21:21 - 23:39 Mark 11:27 - 12:44 Luke 20:1 - 21:4 John 12:20-50
Wednesday, April 8	Matthew 24:1 - 26:16 Mark 13:1 - 14:11 Luke 21:5 - 22:6
Thursday, April 9	Matthew 26:17-56 Mark 14:12-52 Luke 22:7-53 John 13:1 - 18:13
Friday, April 10	Matthew 26:57 - 27:61 Mark 14:53 - 15:47 Luke 22:54 - 23:55 John 18:14 - 19:42
Saturday, April 11	Matthew 27:62-66 Luke 23:56
Sunday, April 12	Matthew 28:1-15 Mark 16:1-13 Luke 24:1-49 John 20:1-25



Palm Sunday Morning, April 5, 2020

PALM SUNDAY

On this day, the first in our devotionals, we turn our thoughts toward Easter Sunday and what it represents. This year has brought challenges. As I write this devotional on March 17th, I wonder what Easter week will be like. Will we be confined to our homes; will the Covid-19 virus be widespread; or will we be seeing an improvement? The uncertainty of the future is hard to accept. For Jesus, there was no uncertainty. He knew what was coming and this is how it began to unfold.

John 12:12-13

The next day, the large crowd that had come to the Passover Festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, shouting, Praise God! God bless Him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the King of Israel!

Luke 19:29-31

As he came near Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead with these instructions: Go to the village ahead of you; as you go in, you will find a colt tied up that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If someone asks you why you are untying it, tell him that the Master needs it.

Luke 19:35

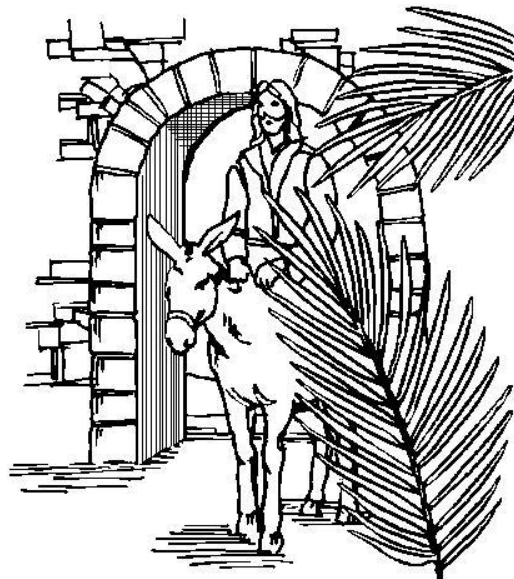
...and they took the colt to Jesus. Then they threw their cloaks over the animal and helped Jesus get on. As He rode on, people spread their cloaks on the road.

Mark 11:8-9

Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches in the field and spread them on the road. The people who were in front and those who followed began to shout, Praise God! God bless Him who comes in the name of the Lord!

This day started in celebration but, as we learn, there are dark times ahead. As in our life we have joy and sorrow, but we have faith to carry us to a better tomorrow.

Glenda Coddington



JESUS IS COMING

John 12:12-19

Jesus is coming! Jesus is coming! Imagine the excitement of the people when they realized Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem. The king was coming! The man who had raised Lazarus from the dead! Jesus, the man who had performed many, many miracles, witnessed by hundreds, was coming to Jerusalem! The man who claimed to be equal with God! Oh, the excitement the people must have felt as the crowds grew larger and larger. In their excitement they took palm branches and they praised Him, “Hosanna!”, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”, “Blessed is the king of Israel!”

Jesus entered Jerusalem that day on the back of a lowly donkey to the cheering and praises of the crowd. This same cheering crowd would do nothing to stop His crucifixion a short time later. You see these crowds were looking for a political leader, someone who would overthrow the Roman government and set up a new earthly kingdom. When they realized this would not happen they became angry and turned against Jesus. They did not realize Jesus had come to offer Himself for the forgiveness of our sins and to share with us eternal life in a spiritual kingdom. They did not realize His kingdom is not of this world. This same adoring crowd became the same crowd that would chant, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Jesus entered Jerusalem knowing He would willingly give His life on Calvary’s Cross for them, for you and for me.

As a Christian I have accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I know His shed blood on Calvary’s cross cleanses me from all unrighteousness. I know that I will dwell in the house of my Lord forever. I know that He will never leave me nor forsake me now or for all eternity. I know whatever I may face in this life my Lord and Savior will walk with me through each trial and each joy, every step of the way. I know one day I will see Him face to face and on that day, I will forever more know only joy and peace. What a comfort it is to experience God’s love and forgiveness. How wonderful to know I can take anything to the Lord in prayer and to know He hears my prayers. How wonderful it is to experience His love each and every day.

I want to say today to anyone who may not know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior that becoming a Christian is the most important decision you will ever make. It is so very simple. Acknowledge Jesus as God’s Son. Ask Him to come into your heart and forgive you of your sin. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” You see you cannot earn salvation. You cannot be good enough. No one can pray for you and assure your salvation. You can’t buy salvation. Jesus is the way, the only way, you can be saved. (John 14:6) Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Won’t you give your heart and your life to Jesus? He loved you enough to give His life for you. Seek Him today. He is waiting with open arms for you.

During this Easter season I pray that we as Christians will share the good news. Jesus is coming! Jesus is coming! I pray that our hearts and minds may be renewed as we rededicate our lives to serving our risen Savior. I pray we will share His love with a broken world so that all may look for His return with joyful anticipation. Thank you Lord that we know Jesus is coming!

Nancy Shewmaker



Monday Morning, April 6, 2020

TEMPLES OF PRAYER

Matthew 21:12-13

Jesus went to the Temple on Monday and “cleaned house”. It was the season of Passover, the Jewish holiday that called the people to remember the passing over of the death angel in Egypt. The Jews came together at the Temple in Jerusalem to thank God for their ancestors’ deliverance from slavery.

When Jesus entered the Temple court He saw that it had become similar to a shopping mall. The Outer Court of the Gentiles had been turned into a bazaar for selling sacrificial animals and taxing worshippers. Pens of sheep, goats, doves, and other sacrificial animals were everywhere. Moneychangers operated other tables. In one sense, all of these merchants provided a needed service. Faithful Jews were expected to offer animal sacrifices and financial gifts at the Temple. Pilgrims from far away found it more convenient to buy their animals in Jerusalem rather than transport them across the country. In order to pay their Temple taxes and to buy animals for their Passover sacrifices, the people had to have the correct currency. The Temple moneychangers were obviously making dishonest profits off of these innocent people during currency exchanges.

The priests and/or other local politicians maintained strict control over the franchises for these temple businesses, often demanding a kickback. Once a limited number of merchants had a corner on the market, they were free to do as they pleased. The moneychangers would charge exorbitant fees. Similarly, the animal sellers would mark up their prices. Just in case someone got the wise idea to set up a competing market elsewhere and undercut the temple sellers, the priests had that covered, too. Before an animal could be sacrificed it had to pass a temple inspection. The priests who were getting a kickback would simply reject any animal that did not come from their licensed merchants. The whole system was filled with greed and corruption.

Jesus was furious about all of this exploitation of the pilgrims. He was angry at the desecration of God’s Holy Place. Jesus drove the animals, their keepers, and the moneychangers out of the Temple. He overturned the moneychangers’ tables and the merchants’ benches. Jesus rebuked them by saying, “Stop making My Father’s house a den of robbers! My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations”. The Temple was far from being a house of prayer. In the uproar of buying, selling, and bargaining, prayer was only a fleeting thought.

Is Fern Creek Baptist Church (or, the church of which you are a part) a house of prayer? Do we pray for those who need to know Jesus as personal Lord and Savior? Do we pray for those who are sick, hurting, and searching? Do we pray for our community, city, and our world? Do we pray for missionaries, government leaders, and community service leaders? Do we pray for the Lord to pour out His grace by sending a great revival? Do we pray for each other? Do we pray for our church? What needs to be cleaned out of our “Temple” (church) in order to truly be a house of prayer?

Let us take even a closer look into the personal “Temples” in which we live. Is there anything which needs to be cleaned out of your life because it is taking away your time with and for God? What needs to be removed that is robbing you of personal communication with God? What has “set up tables” in your life? What needs to be cleaned out so you can hear God? Is your “Temple” a house of prayer?

Please join me in praying for God to heal our land – to heal our world. The words that our Lord spoke to Solomon in II Chronicles 7:14 say, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” God has called us to be a praying people! The most tragic of all things going on today is that many people are facing our current pandemic without the hope of Jesus Christ. WE MUST PRAY! WE MUST REPENT! What prayer do you need to pray right now? Do you need to give your life to Him? Do you need to put your total trust in Him during this difficult time? Will you pray?

Linda Barnes Popham

Monday Evening, April 6, 2020

SUNSHINE OF THE RESURRECTION

As we anticipate the birth of a child, we look forward with joy and love. Will our baby be a boy or a girl? Who will he look like? Will she be a happy or grumpy baby? We are full of dreams and plans. We can hardly wait to hold this baby in our arms. These were Mary's dreams for her baby.

But sometimes a baby brings shadows. The shadow of an illness or a handicap. What kind of shadow did Jesus bring?

JESUS brought the shadow of the cross, the reason for His birth. We have all seen the picture of the manger with the shadow of the cross overlaid on it. Jesus was born under the shadow of the cross and lived His whole life in the image of that darkness.

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and you are to give Him the name of Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."
Luke 1:30-33

Mary saw Gabriel. Mary talked with Gabriel. But these things did not bring peace to Mary who remembered the passage she had been taught as a child: the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52-53. She remembered the predictions of the Suffering Son.

As Mary watched Jesus grow physically, mentally, and emotionally, she also watched the shadow grow over His head. The shadow that would eventually grow and lead to His death. The shadow that would be fulfilled from Isaiah. Her little boy playing in the mud would become the Savior of our world.

Mary's little boy would fulfill the predictions in Luke 21:12-17... "but before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you...But make up your mind beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you word and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to contradict."

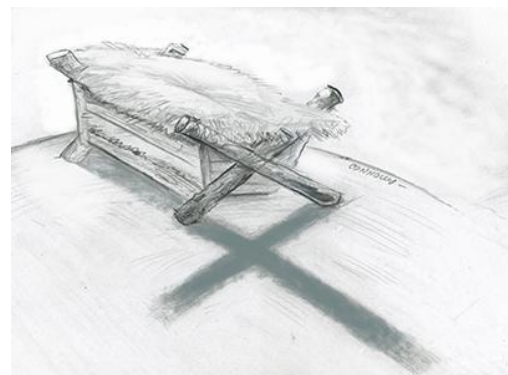
Mary faced the shadows in Jesus' life, His persecution and death, because she believed the message God sent her through Gabriel. She accepted the TRUTH of the Son given for our sins! The Son who died freely for us! The Son who loved us unconditionally. The gift given to us by God, our Salvation.

I ask you to spend the three days between the crucifixion of Jesus and His resurrection in earnest consideration of His gift of Salvation and what that gift cost Him.

May the sunshine of resurrection brighten your life!

Share the resurrection with others!

Happy Easter,
Carolyn Simpson



Tuesday Morning, April 7, 2020

DARKNESS TO LIGHT

John 12:20-50

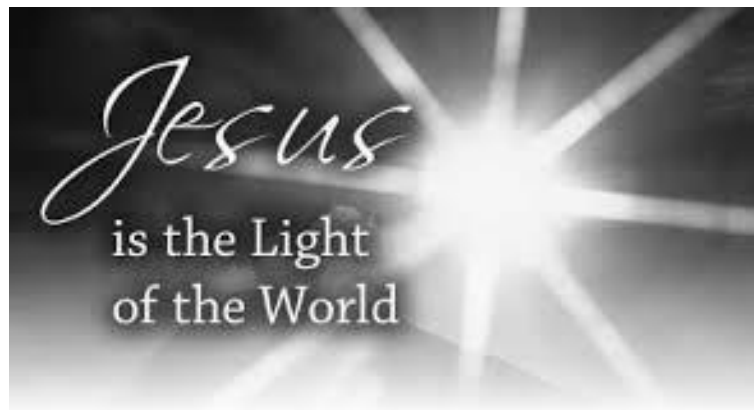
In the week leading to the cross, there were many people seeking the Lord. Some were already followers, some were curious, and others wanted to trip Him up with questions designed to get Him arrested. Jesus answered them all. Then He told them about His impending death. They said they understood from the Scripture that the Messiah would live forever.

Verses 35-36: But Jesus said to them, “My light will shine for you just a little longer. Walk in the light while you still can, so the darkness will not overtake you. Those who walk in the darkness cannot see where they are going. Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light.” Then He left and was hidden from them. Many people did believe in Him. This included some of the Jewish leaders. But because they feared losing their status, they would not admit it out loud.

Verses 44-46: Another time Jesus cried out to the crowd, “If you trust me you are trusting not only me, but God who sent me. For when you see me, you are seeing the one who sent me. I have come as a light in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark.”

How many times are we in the darkness, but seeking to find the light? We hear the word, but we question the answer we receive. Is it because we still hold onto the darkness? Is it because we are afraid of total commitment? Jesus had a heavy heart when He was speaking to these crowds. He was committed to the cross to redeem our sins. We need to commit with all of our heart to Him. He is the light of this dark world and leads us to everlasting life with the Father. He begs us to come out of the darkness and into His light!!!

May you find His peace and light!
Becky Frizzell



ONE SHINING MOMENT

My prayer is that my simple earthly sports-related story will illustrate to you a great spiritual lesson – the change that Jesus can make in our lives. May this story lead you to a deeper understanding of the gospel message:

The season ended abruptly. Disbelief initially kept the people silent, but stunned crowds found their voices, crying out in anger and in loss. How could this happen? The promise of spring, in the blue, somewhat cloudless sky, could not erase the despair written on so many faces. Believing things would get better, the people continued their life journeys with faithful hearts. Little did they know a new season's bright shiny moment would change everything.

He realized this day would come, but how quickly it was upon Him. Gathering his closest friends, he tried to explain the events that would take place in the coming days. Most scoffed at the idea this team was about to lose its captain. No way he was leaving them just as they were winning over thousands of fans. And so, they went about the business of celebrating the Passover holiday, eating and drinking.

Not long after all had eaten, he asked his three closest friends to come with him as he spoke to the team's owner. They were to watch for scouts and agents looking to take him away. Falling to his knees, he begged the owner to please let him stay with his teammates. He knew what the answer would be, had known for quite a while, and so accepted what awaited him, painful as it would be. When he returned to his three now sleeping friends, he told them the agents and scouts had arrived to take him. He reassured them he would be back for a short visit before his new contract was ready and that they were to remain faithful to their team after he was gone. Never would they leave the hearts of each other – he would always be there for the team and for them. Things were going to be okay. Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done." Matthew 21:21

Dark days followed his departure, but true to his word, he came back to see them. They were overjoyed and wanted him to stay longer, knowing all the while he could not. "For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.'" Matthew 23:39

He promised he would be back again when it was time. Then he not only would take them along with him but all their friends and families, the fans who had remained loyal and true, and those who now believed in him. They questioned him as to where they would be taken. He answered that they should simply have faith and believe him when he said it was heavenly. It was to be the world's one shining moment.

And the radiance of his smile, the warmth of his touch, and the truth in his eyes convinced all that this man was indeed THE superstar the world awaited!

Dear Lord: We thank You for all You have given us, most especially the gift of Your life, Your death and then Your resurrection, everlasting life, that will reserve all believers a place with You in heaven. Help us quiet our hearts and minds as we deal with the viruses sickening our world. Protect us, Lord, and please be with those who have already become infected and comfort those who have lost loved ones. Wrap in Your arms all those fighting against this and keep them safe. Help us remember we can come to You in prayer at any time and for whatever reason.

Thank You, Jesus,
Ann Abney



Wednesday Morning, April 8, 2020

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

Matthew 25:14-30

For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. Matthew 25:29

Even that focal verse contains what seems to be blessing and cursing. Just like life, even in times of greatest blessing, the shadows of doubt and fear lurk just around the corner.

The parable begins talking about the first two servants “putting the money to work.” Reading it in March 2020 our minds go to people who put their money to work in the Stock Market. What seemed a good thing at the time has turned into at least a momentary time of doubt and shadows.

Our lives are all full of unknowns (shadows from the coronavirus). Yet God calls us this day, and every day to use what He’s gifted us with...what He’s given us. We are not to be envious of what someone else has been given, but focus on what we’ve been given.

I’ve had to guard my heart not to be discouraged by things I’ve been told NOT to do with a compromised immune system...good things, church things! Instead to look at what I could do.....gifts I could use! God has allowed me to make phone calls, write emails, texts, make and send cards for residents at a skilled care facility, etc. He has allowed me to share some staples I had, and returned the giving “with interest”.

The shadows are surrounding us heavily these days. Our God is unchangeable, invincible, and in control through it all. He calls us to use whatever we’ve been given, no matter how great or how small. Nothing more, nothing less. He created each of us carefully and uniquely. Let’s make His Name known and give glory to His Name with whatever He has given us. The world is waiting.

Karen Love



“BE ON GUARD”: PREPARING FOR HOLY WEEK

Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man. Luke 21:34-36 (NRSV)

Several years ago Steve was pastoring a church 40 minutes away from where we lived. He decided he would have the church open very early in the morning during each day of Holy Week for the members to be able to stop in and pray and read a short devotion for the day on their way to work. I did not think many members would stop in so early in the morning, but would get started on their way to a busy day as usual.

Steve left early every morning so energetic and enthusiastic about people spending quiet time with God in prayer. On Tuesday morning of that week I decided I would make the drive to church myself even though I wasn't in the best mood. It was April 15, tax day (never my favorite day), plus it was a very cold morning with snow flurries.

I arrived at the church stilling feeling a little grumpy but went in, picked up a prayer guide, and sat in a front pew. Immediately, the unusual silence in the empty sanctuary had a positive effect on me. After reading the devotion for the day, I bowed my head and talked to God.

I loved my time I spent with Him that day. I could hear sounds of a few people coming in, but I was not distracted from my personal time with God. I realized that I needed to prepare for Holy Week. As I left the church I thought of all the preparations Jesus had made as He journeyed to the cross where He would give Himself for my salvation.

It was still cold outside and flurries continued to fall upon the green pasture fields of early spring. All of God's creation looked so beautiful! I cried all the way home as I realized my day--my week--had been changed by spending some quiet time with God.

In the scripture passage above Jesus is telling us to “be on guard.” My translation titled this section, “Exhortation to Watch.” Luke's narration in verse 37 tells us that Jesus spent each night on the Mount of Olives after teaching in the temple. “And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to Him in the temple,” Luke wrote in verse 38.

The cares of life such as the annually occurring tax day or an unknown threat like the coronavirus can be more than frustrating. But Jesus reminds us, even in the toughest of times, that He is the source of our strength. Spending time with Him is never wasted!

Shirley Skaggs



Maundy Thursday Morning, April 9, 2020

MAUNDY THURSDAY: MOVING CLOSER TO THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

This supper of Jesus with his twelve disciples which we call The Last Supper, as it is recorded in the Gospels, was going to be a meal unlike others they had shared. Jesus would reveal what was about to happen in the days ahead. And He was going to institute the observance of Communion or The Lord's Supper among believers.

The supper Jesus was having with His disciples was part of a religious celebration in observance of the Jewish Passover. The Passover meal commemorated the time the Angel of Death "passed over" or in other words "spared" the Israelites when they were slaves in Egypt.

During the Hebrews' bondage, Moses, the palace Princess' adopted son, but in actuality an Israelite himself, implored Pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. God repeatedly sent plagues over the land to influence him to set the Hebrews free, but it took a tenth and final plague to get Pharaoh's attention. Moses' pronouncement to Pharaoh was that unless he let God's people go, the first born son of each family would die.

God made a way of escape for the Israelites from this plague through their obedience to His command to spread blood from a sacrificial lamb over the top and sides of their door frames. Those homes not covered by the lamb's blood suffered the death of their first born son. The Hebrews did as they were commanded. When Pharaoh's son died during the night he relented to Moses' demand. Thus the Jews were spared and set free, and from then on, the Jewish Passover was celebrated as a festival to the Lord and a lasting ordinance.

Jesus' and the disciples' observance of Passover was under the ever-expanding shadow of the cross, that destiny for which Christ came into the world. That destiny was imminent when Jesus during the meal said, "*Take and eat; this is my body*" (Matthew 26:26 NIV) as He broke into pieces the loaf of bread to share with His disciples. This broken bread, symbolizing a broken body, foreshadowed events to come:

- Jesus' back lacerated by flogging,
- Jesus' brow pierced by thorns twisted into a crown and pressed down on his head
- Jesus' hands and feet nailed to a wooden cross,
- and Jesus' side slashed open to be sure He was dead by the spear of a Roman soldier.



That destiny was also symbolized by the cup of wine Jesus offered His disciples to drink, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin" (Matthew 26:27-28 NIV). Blood was spilled from God Incarnate, or in other words from God in the flesh, who saw fit to come from heaven to earth, being born as a Baby Boy to the teenage girl Mary who was still a virgin. Her Baby Boy Jesus would grow up to become the Redeemer Christ on the cross.

Jesus' flesh bore the indignity of a cruel crucifixion and death so He might identify with every person's suffering and every person's succumbing to death of the physical body. Up to the time of Jesus, Jews sacrificed animals, including lambs without blemish as required for the forgiveness of their sins. With Jesus' death, He became the Spotless Sacrificial Lamb and under the New Covenant which is salvation by grace on God's part and faith on our part, not salvation through obeying the Law as laid out in the first five books of the Old Testament of the Bible.

In addition to Jesus' discourse on how the bread and wine symbolized his imminent death, the second way this supper shared by this Rabbi, or Teacher, and His followers, or students was different from their other suppers was the abrupt exit of Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve. Jesus had told the disciples that one of them was going to betray Him. Mark 14:19 NIV says, "They were saddened, and one by one they said to Him, 'Surely not I?'" The disciple John asked Jesus, "Lord, who is it?" (John 13:25 NIV). Jesus answered by saying, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish" (Matthew 26:23 NIV). Then, dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon.

In Matthew 26:14-16 we learn that sometime prior to the meal, Judas had already made a deal with the chief priests to hand Jesus over to them. For 30 pieces of silver he would identify Jesus to them and now he was just looking for the best opportunity. So, after Jesus pointed out Judas as the disciple who would betray Him, Judas left the group.

Judas would not be with Jesus and the other eleven disciples as they sang a hymn and left the dining table to go to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. But, as is narrated in Matthew 26:47-50, he would come to the garden later, accompanied by a large crowd armed with swords and clubs and sent there on behalf of the chief priests and elders. As had been predetermined with the religious leaders, Judas greeted Jesus and placed on His cheek what would turn out to be a kiss of death. Thus the events of Holy Week were pushed closer to the foot of the cross whose shadow had been looming—looming even over Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem only days before.

HUMBLE YOURSELF

So He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, He poured water in a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with a towel that was wrapped around him. John 13:4-5

Walking in Jesus' time was done on filthy roads, which made it important to wash your feet, especially at communal meals when people would recline at low tables. When Jesus got up from the meal and started washing His disciples' feet, He was doing the work of the lowliest servant. The disciples must have been in complete shock that Jesus, their teacher, their Lord, the Messiah, was washing their feet, when it should have been them washing Jesus' feet. But Jesus didn't come to be a King or a conqueror, but a servant. (Matthew 20:28)

He humbled Himself in a show of love that would lead Him all the way to the cross to die for us. Humble yourself as Jesus did. It's our mission to be like Christ, and what better way to show Christ-like love than in humbling yourself and serving others.

Warren Grumbley



Good Friday Morning, April 10, 2020

NOT A WORD

Matthew 26:57-63a (NIV): *Those who had arrested Jesus took Him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. But Peter followed Him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"* **But Jesus remained silent.**

African-American spirituals are perhaps the best-loved sub-genre of all American folk songs. They are sung and performed throughout the world by soloists, ensembles, bands, and symphonies in a wide variety of styles. As with most all true folk songs, the original author and composer are unknown. Each song was sung by the African slaves of the American South and, as they were shared, each community would perform the songs in the manner that would allow them to express their feelings in a personal way.

One of the best-known spirituals for this time of year is "Were You There," a song that focuses on the cross of Christ and challenges the hearer or singer to ask himself that question. But a sister spiritual often titled, "He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word," also appropriate for use during Holy Week, focuses not only on the cross, but Jesus' journey from the court of the high priest to Golgotha's hill and His response to those who interrogated, tortured, and killed Him. Here are the words to the verses as they usually appear:

"They whipped Him up the hill."
"They nailed Him to the tree."
"They pierced Him in the side."
"His blood came trickling down."
"He hung His head and died."

After each statement, the refrain "and He never said a mumbalin' word", is sung. This thought comes from Matthew 26:63a which tells us that Jesus remained silent in the face of His false accusers-- "He never said a mumbalin' word".

Scripture tells us that Jesus did speak both at His trial (Matthew 26:64) and seven times while on the cross. Yet the author of this spiritual chose to focus the poignant and sorrowful refrain on the Biblical verse that tells us, "But Jesus remained silent." No doubt the slaves could relate to the treatment Jesus received and how He had no one to speak for Him. But the song goes further and addresses our need of a Savior and tells us of Jesus' journey as a suffering servant and sacrificial Lamb prophesied in Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 53:7, as well as the events described in our passages for today (Matthew 26:57-27:61).

*He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet He did not open His mouth;
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so He did not open His mouth.*

Or, as the spiritual puts it, "He never said a mumbalin' word."

Steve Skaggs



THE SHADOW OF GOOD FRIDAY - “WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) Matthew 27:45-46

Black Friday. To most people, this is that ever-popular day of shopping, fighting the mayhem, and getting the best deals around. I consider the real Black Friday to be the day that Jesus Christ went to the cross. There is not a gift or a deal out there that even compares to the gift we received that day. Because of the great sacrifice Jesus made, we have the gift of eternal life.

Jesus became fully human when He came to earth. He felt everything we feel today. He experienced hunger, thirst, pain, anger, and sadness. He also experienced joy! There is nothing we face today that Jesus didn't face during His time on earth. Knowing this, it is beyond humbling to envision Jesus hanging on the cross. The faultless, blameless, perfect Son of God was enduring the most excruciating death imaginable to pay the price for our sins. And He did it willingly.

As Jesus hung on the cross, He cried out with everything in Him, “Why have you forsaken me?” He had known all along what would happen, and yet in His most desperate hour, He asked “why?”

We have all felt pain, maybe even despair at some point in our lives. As Christians, we know that God will never really leave us or forsake us, but we feel betrayed, abandoned, and forsaken by those we love. We might question where God is in the midst of our pain, or we might find ourselves asking God “why?” We ask ourselves, “What good can come of this suffering?”

We were never promised an easy life. Jesus Christ, Himself, didn't have it easy on this earth. Why should we? When we go through those difficult times, we need to lean on Jesus, and let Him carry us through it. The cross was not the end of the story, and praise be to God for that! Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, suffered the worst evil imaginable, and yet out of that, God brought about the greatest good ever known! Because Jesus Christ was forsaken, we will see our loved ones in Christ again one day. Because Jesus Christ was forsaken, we will get answers to all of our questions one day. Because Jesus Christ was forsaken, we will meet Him face to face one glorious day!

The promise that Easter is coming reminds us that God's perspective is infinitely greater than ours. Much of what is happening remains unseen. It may often seem otherwise, but Satan will ultimately never be victorious, and God will always have the last word. What Satan means for evil, God means for good.

In those moments when we feel forsaken, we must trust that God is using every struggle to mold, shape, and deepen us. When we feel as though we can't go on, we must cry out to Him with everything in us. Most importantly, we must remember that Jesus Christ also felt forsaken, and because He was forsaken, we have the hope of eternal life.

Kristin Jones



Saturday Morning, April 11, 2020

TODAY IS SATURDAY...SUNDAY IS COMING!

Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment. Luke 23:56

Today is Saturday of Holy Week. The crucifixion is over and the glorious resurrection is not yet here. We are stuck in the middle between tragedy and triumph. And, it certainly feels more like tragedy right now with the shadow of COVID-19 hovering over us. How do we live in such a place? Where do we go? What do we do? How do we endure?

Luke tells us that on Friday the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee had followed Joseph of Arimathea and had seen the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid. That evening they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But on Saturday they rested in obedience to the Sabbath commandment.

Matthew's gospel tells us that the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate on Saturday and reminded him that Jesus said that He would rise again in three days. (They were actually breaking the Sabbath Law – their own law – by doing this on the Sabbath.) The Pharisees said that they were afraid that the disciples may come and steal the body and say that Jesus had been raised from the dead. So with Pilate's permission the chief priests and the Pharisees went and sealed the tomb and posted a guard there.

Do you see the contrast? The women were confident that Sunday would come! They knew that Jesus would rise again! The chief priests and the Pharisees were afraid that Sunday might really come and that the resurrection could possibly be a reality.

Where do you find yourself today? I hope that you find yourself like those women who were living in hope and grace as they waited expectantly for the Risen Lord! Yes, they were grieving! Yes, they were living through a difficult period in their lives! Yes, they were uncertain of exactly what the future would bring! But, they knew that Jesus would rise again! They lived with great hope and certainty in the reality of God's grace.

The Saturday between Good Friday and Easter only comes once a year; however, we often find ourselves living there. Sometimes Saturday seems to last for days; and sometimes it does last for months or years. No matter how dark, dreary, unsettling, confusing, difficult, or tragic your Saturday is, there is hope!

Saturday comes in many forms. Saturdays are those days when we think we cannot stand one more day of isolation in our own home. Saturdays are those days that we sit by the death bed of a loved one or when we see the coffin slip into the ground. Saturdays are those days when we have to postpone the wedding, the memorial service, the recital, the graduation, the trip, or the visits because of current restrictions. Saturdays are those days when we realize that we live in an increasingly evil world. Saturdays are those days when we notice how we are aging and cannot do what we used to do. Saturdays are those days when our minds are spinning wondering how we will get through another day. Saturdays are those days when decisions are weighing heavily on our minds. On Saturdays we often walk through dark valleys, difficult circumstances, or horrific situations. On Saturdays we repeatedly deal with unreasonable people, self-centered personalities, and negative spirits. We cannot play leap-frog from Friday to Sunday, because Saturday is real and we must live in it. Saturdays can even be intensely demanding, burdensome, and exhausting.

But, the good news is that tomorrow is Sunday!! Because of God's grace, Sunday will come! Grace is the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners like you and me. Sunday only comes to those who have accepted His grace. If you have not done so, today is the day to accept His grace...to accept Him as your Lord and Savior! Because of His grace, we who are Christians know that Jesus is present, that He will never leave us or forsake us, and that His grace is sufficient for whatever we are facing. Jesus is with us even on the Saturdays of our life's journey.

Hallelujah! Tomorrow is Sunday!
Linda Barnes Popham

HIS SEVEN LAST WORDS ON THE CROSS

What does Easter mean to you? New clothes, new hat, chocolate bunnies and jelly beans, Easter egg hunts, and family dinners with grandparents. When some people celebrate Easter they only know of these things. All these are fun, but have nothing to do with the real meaning of Easter. Easter is truly a very serious acknowledgement of God's sacrifice of His beloved Son for our salvation. It is a time to reflect about Jesus' death and resurrection to save us all from our sin and prepare us for eternal life with Him and those who have gone before us. Some people only come to church on Easter Sunday and that is why we must clearly get the message to them because we may not have another chance until next year, or never.

As Jesus suffered on the cross, He made seven statements that define His message to us.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34 (FORGIVENESS) Jesus forgave those who turned against Him and asked God to do the same.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Matt. 27:46 (ABANDONMENT) At this point Jesus had not only been forsaken by his twelve loyal followers, but He was forsaken by His Father. God had to briefly turn away from Jesus because He could not look upon our sin.

Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. Luke 23:43 (SALVATION) This was Jesus' gift of forgiveness and salvation to the thief next to Him who repented of his sin. His reward was to be with Jesus in Heaven.

Woman, behold your Son; Son, behold your mother. John 19:26-27 (RELATIONSHIP) Jesus said this to Mary, His mother, and to John the disciple He loved. He was asking them to care for each other like family after He was gone.

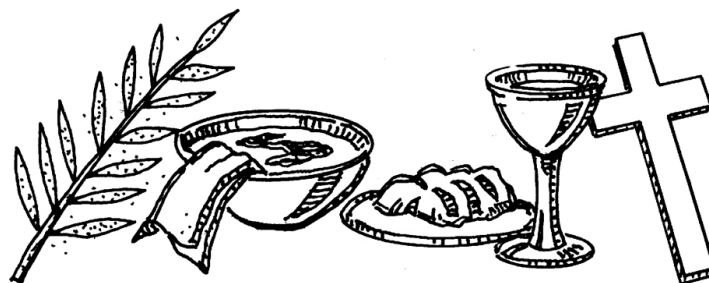
I thirst. John 19:28 (DISTRESS) This human need for water represents our need for a Savior – accepting the living water so we thirst no more.

It is finished. John 19:30 (TRIUMPH) God accepted Jesus' death as redemption for our sins.

Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. Luke 23:46 (REUNION) This is Jesus' reunion with His Father.

Jesus accepted the pain, suffering, and crucifixion because He loves us and wants salvation for us all. As you celebrate the truth this Easter (that Jesus came to earth to redeem you), please reflect on His sacrifice in order to understand His pure love and hope for our eternal life. Please give your life to Jesus today. This is the Good News for mankind.

Sharon Thompson



Easter Sunday Morning, April 12, 2020

BEING A FAITHFUL WITNESS

Matthew 28:1-15

Well, here it is, Sunday Morning. Two of the women who have been faithfully at the side of Jesus, through His ministry and at the crucifixion, are now at the tomb where they believe it all ends.

But as they arrive they get a startling surprise. The tomb is open, and empty! There is an angel sitting on the stone that had previously sealed the tomb, and the women are not the only ones who are witnesses to this event. The soldiers placed on guard after the tomb was sealed have also seen what happened and are so frightened they are frozen in their places like dead men. As the scene continues to unfold, the angel offers some comforting words to the women, as he invites them to view the empty tomb and see that Christ is risen! They are then told to “Go quickly and tell His disciples.”

Who would think the day could get any more amazing! But it did. As they were on the way to the disciples it happened. They were filled with both fear and joy at what they had learned. Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings”, He said; and for encouragement He added, “Do not be afraid, go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

The women were not the only ones who were on their way to testify to what had happened. The guards had decided to report the event also, and chose to first tell the chief priests. But by doing so they placed themselves in a bad situation. The religious leaders had no desire for these witnesses to share the truth with anyone else, so they bribed the guards to give a false testimony to the governor, and promised the guards they would keep them out of trouble.

There is a saying that if one tells a lie convincingly and continuously, for a long enough time, it will eventually be accepted as true. It may apply in this case, as we are told that the lie was widely circulated even years later.

There is a pledge, or oath, that is asked when one is called to testify in court. They are asked if they swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In the scripture Jesus tells us that we will be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). He asks no more from us than what is asked in a courtroom today. Just share the information you have, truthfully, to the best of your ability.

There are four testimonies given in this passage. First is the angel who testified to the women. Second is the women’s testimony to the disciples. Third is the guards’ testimony to the religious leaders. And fourth is the testimony of the guards to the governor. Three of the testimonies were true. Two of them have become a part of the greatest story ever told, the Gospel Message. But sadly one was false. We do not know how much damage that has caused.

A witness is simply one who shares what she or he has personally seen or heard, openly and honestly. So, when you read or hear that Jesus expects you to be a witness for Him (Acts 1:8), remember, it is not something difficult and it certainly should not be frightening. Simply share what you know to be true, openly and honestly. Give Jesus the opportunity to use your life experience to reach and help those in need. In the process Jesus has promised to be with you “always, even to the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).



The Lord is Risen!

Rick Pryor

THE VICTOR'S CROWN

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. John 16:33

During Holy Week, we reflected upon Christ's last days on earth. We re-visited His triumphal entry into Jerusalem; we studied His teachings; we remembered His last moments with His disciples...His betrayal...the scorn and suffering He endured...and His cruel death on that rugged cross.

Three days later, everything changed. Darkness turned to light. Tragedy turned to triumph. Hopelessness turned to great joy! When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb early that morning, an angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said." All their fears and sadness were replaced at that moment with sheer delight – Jesus was alive!

It's Easter Sunday once again. Today, we celebrate the vital completion of God's plan. Without Easter, Christmas would only be a festive holiday. Without Easter, there would be no hope...no promise. Without Easter, there would be no eternal home for us after this life is over. But because He lives, we have a heavenly home awaiting us. No matter what we face on earth, we have a Savior who has rescued us from the depths of hopelessness. Jesus overcame the world – and trusting in The Resurrected Christ allows us victory over death through Him. Just as those who loved Him rejoiced on that first Easter morning, we can rejoice in the Light of the World and His promises! He was victorious...and so are we, as described so eloquently in the words from the song "Victor's Crown":

*You are always fighting for us,
Heaven's angels all around,
My delight is found in knowing that You wear the Victor's crown.
You're my help and my defender,
You're my Savior and my friend,
By Your grace I live and breathe to worship You.
Hallelujah!
You have overcome – You have overcome,
Hallelujah!
Jesus, You have overcome the world.*

Rejoice! He is alive!

Nettie Hale



