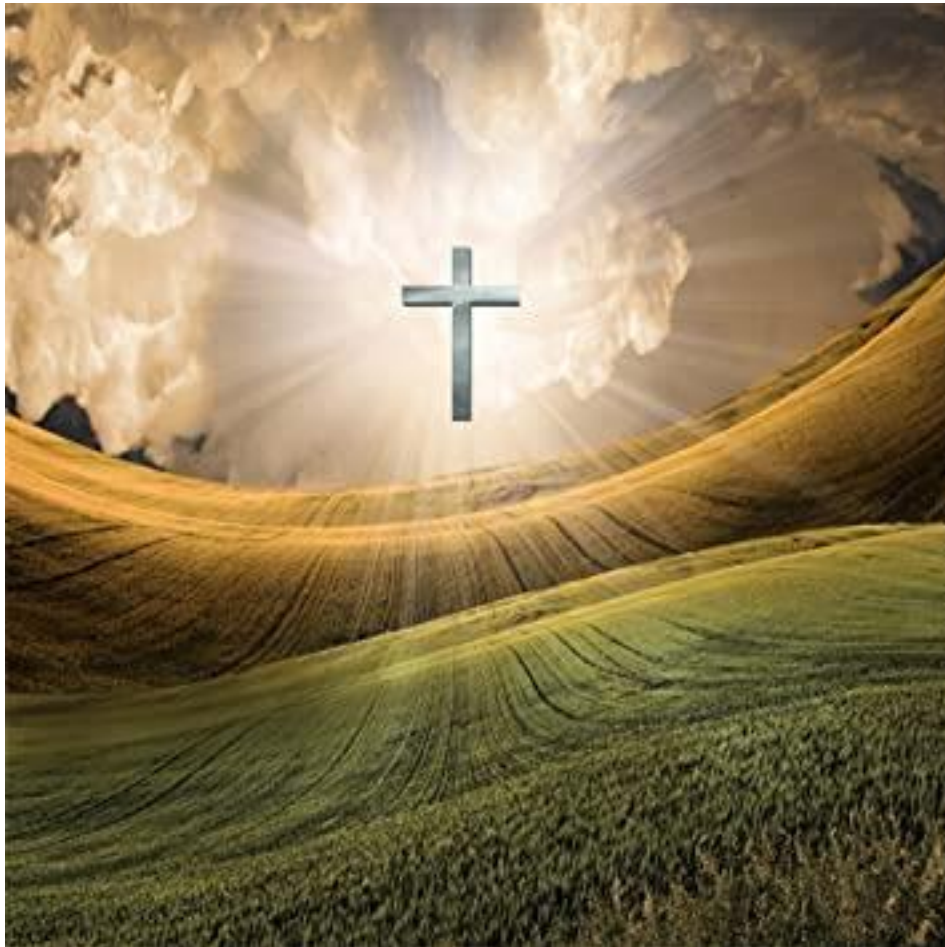


“Journey With Jesus”

**HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
2021**



**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, "Journey With Jesus". There are two devotionals for each day – one for morning and one for evening. We end with a "bonus" devotional from one of our fifth graders. 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

Rev. Linda Barnes Popham, Pastor 239-0316 ext. 103
Rev. Steve Skaggs, Interim Minister of Music 239-0316 ext. 111
Terri Bosermer, CDC Director 239-8952 ext. 108
Joellen Johnston, Organist 239-0316
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Donna Grimes, Interim Office Coordinator 239-0316 ext. 100
Jodie Towles, Bookkeeper 239-0316 ext. 102
Sherese Caldwell, Director of Facilities 239-0316 ext. 104
Cassie Schitter, Director of Facilities 239-0316 ext. 104

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

SUNDAY, MARCH 28: PALM SUNDAY

10:45 a.m. We remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and into our lives. Join us for worship in our sanctuary or online by going to www.ferncreekbaptist.org and clicking the red *Worship Livestream* button. The service will also be transmitted to our parking lot by turning your ignition to accessory and tuning in to 97.7 FM.

7:00 p.m. We will focus on music that reminds us of the events of Holy Week during this Lenten Reflection. Join us in singing wherever you are. This is only an online service. To join us, please go to www.ferncreekbaptist.org and click the red *Worship Service Livestream* button.

MONDAY, MARCH 29

6:00 a.m. The sanctuary will be open until 8:00 a.m. each morning this week for Morning Prayers. You may come anytime during these two hours. A personal worship guide will be offered. Hear God speak to you in the beauty of His holiness.

TUESDAY, MARCH 30

6:00 a.m. Morning Prayers (See Monday for details.)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31

6:00 a.m. Morning Prayers (See Monday for details.)

THURSDAY, APRIL 1: MAUNDY THURSDAY

6:00 a.m. Morning Prayers (See Monday for details.)

6:00 p.m. The sanctuary will be open until 8:00 p.m. for prayer and meditation. You may come anytime during these two hours. You will receive a personal worship guide and have the opportunity to partake of the Bread and the Cup as we remember God's love for us and reflect upon Jesus' mandate to share His love with others.

FRIDAY, APRIL 2: GOOD FRIDAY

6:00 a.m. Morning Prayers (See Monday for details.)

7:00 p.m. We will join together in the sanctuary as we focus on the events of Christ's journey to the cross from Luke's gospel. These readings will be interspersed with beloved hymns and songs that accentuate the texts. Several of our talented church members will share in song through voices and instruments. The service will also be livestreamed and transmitted to the parking lot.

SATURDAY, APRIL 3

6:00 a.m. Morning Prayers (See Monday for details.)

SUNDAY, APRIL 4: EASTER CELEBRATION

7:30 a.m. We will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ through a Sunrise Service in the backyard of the church. The service will also be on Facebook Live. In case of inclement weather the service will be moved to the Christian Life Center.

9:00 a.m. We celebrate the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ! God's Word will be spoken through proclamation and music from the Vocal Ensemble.

10:45 a.m. We continue the celebration of Christ's resurrection as God's Word is proclaimed through His Word and music by the Adult Choir. This service will also be livestreamed and transmitted to the parking lot.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

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

Sunday, March 28	Matthew 21:1-11 Mark 11:1-11 Luke 19:29-44 John 12:12-19
Monday, March 29	Matthew 21:12-20 Mark 11:12-19 Luke 19:45-46
Tuesday, March 30	Matthew 21:21 - 23:39 Mark 11:27 - 12:44 Luke 20:1 - 21:4 John 12:20-50
Wednesday, March 31	Matthew 24:1 - 26:16 Mark 13:1 - 14:11 Luke 21:5 - 22:6
Thursday, April 1	Matthew 26:17-56 Mark 14:12-52 Luke 22:7-53 John 13:1 - 18:13
Friday, April 2	Matthew 26:57 - 27:61 Mark 14:53 - 15:47 Luke 22:54 - 23:55 John 18:14 - 19:42
Saturday, April 3	Matthew 27:62-66 Luke 23:56
Sunday, April 4	Matthew 28:1-15 Mark 16:1-13 Luke 24:1-49 John 20:1-25



THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

It seems such a short time ago that we journeyed with Jesus to Bethlehem and beyond in our Advent / Christmas Devotional Book. Now we find ourselves approaching the shadow of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. Connie Polley's poem encapsulates the real meaning of this pilgrimage on earth. Thank you for continuing the journey with us!



LOVE LIES IN A MANGER BENEATH THE SHADOW OF A CROSS

Tiptoe to the manger,
See the Holy Baby sleep,
While angels raise a great amen
And shepherds watch their sheep.
“Please read that story one more time,”
I hear the children say,
So we open up God’s Word to find
The Love of Christmas Day.

“Did He get any presents?”
Says a tiny voice to me,
This child so full of wond’ring eyes
Who tugs upon my sleeve.
“Yes, wise men brought Him precious gifts,”
I say with a smile,
“But there’s something special you can give:
It’s the heart of a child.”

“Where’s the Baby Jesus?”
The children want to know
As I turn through God’s Story Book
To Calv’ry long ago:
A cross, a hill, a child grown up
Who soon would have to die.
But He flees the tomb and He still lives!
His love is still alive!

Love lies in a manger
Beneath the shadow of a cross
And we must come as children
To Him who seeks the lost.

By Connie Carlisle Polley
2016-2021

Scripture References: Luke 2:7, Matthew 2:11, Luke 24:1-7, Matthew 18:3, Luke 19:10

THE PARADE

You've heard the expression, "It's all fun and games until..."
That's how this story begins. Today would be preparation for a parade.

As they approached Jerusalem and came to the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples ahead to prepare the float. A donkey that they put cloaks over for Jesus to ride.
(*Mark 11:1-7, Matthew 21:2-7*)

On the parade route, people who lined the path threw the branches and cloaks on the ground to make it smoother and dryer.
(*Matthew 21:8, Mark 11:8*)

The people marching in front and back of Jesus created a musical sound by shouting praises to Him.
(*Matthew 21:9, Mark 11:9*)

It was a joyous occasion. Everyone praised Jesus. They wanted to be near Him, to see Him, to jump on the band wagon. They were caught up in the excitement. It was like seeing a big star.

"When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown into an uproar. 'Who is he?' the people asked."
"This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee', the crowds answered."
(*Mark 21:10-11*)

They had heard word of His miracles and I'm sure many doubted. Many wanted to see for themselves this man who was the talk of the town. It was a festive day, but it was going to soon change.

"The Pharisees then said to one another, 'you see, we are not succeeding at all! Look, the whole world is following him.'"
(*John 12:19*)

Yes, it's all fun and games until someone feels threatened.

Glenda Coddington



Palm Sunday Evening, March 28, 2021

STARTING MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY WITH JESUS

The disciples of Jesus had been with Him for about three years as they prepared to enter Jerusalem to observe the Jewish Feast of the Passover. Even though Jesus had been teaching them and readying them for the last hours of His earthly life, they could not imagine the sorrowful events that were going to take place during the next week. This is the week many Christians now commemorate as Holy Week.

Mark chapter eleven tells us the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples as they were approaching Jerusalem: “Go to the village ahead of you . . . you will find a colt . . . Untie it . . . If anyone asks ‘Why’ . . . tell him, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly’ . . . they brought the colt to Jesus and . . . He sat on it.” Mark 11:1-7 NIV (New International Version)

The twelfth chapter of John says, “Jesus . . . sat upon it, as it is written, ‘Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion [meaning Jerusalem]; see your King is coming . . .’” John 12:14-15 NIV

As the 21st chapter of Matthew relates this same story, these men of varied backgrounds and their Master entered the city to a festive crowd spreading palm branches and their cloaks on the road as they shouted praises to Jesus: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” Matthew 21:9 NIV

All twelve of Jesus’ disciples had been invited to follow Him. They accepted His invitation leaving homes and occupations to start their journey with the One they saw as their Jewish Messiah and King.

My journey with Jesus began when I was a child. My earliest memories of the influence of the church and adults on the faith in my life go back to when I lived in the neighborhood of the old 9th and O Baptist Church near Churchill Downs.

I don’t remember my parents being the first persons to take me to church, but rather my Grammaw Carlisle. I had two cousins on my mother’s side of the family, Beverly, and Carolyn, who lived only a couple of blocks from my Grammaw’s. They would walk over to meet me there and we would walk about five city blocks to church together on Sunday mornings to be present for Sunday School and Church Worship.

There was also a two-week-long summer daytime Vacation Bible School that I attended when I was nine-years-old. Toward the end of the second week all the children and leaders came together in the church sanctuary for a special service. A guest preacher gave a children’s sermon which included the Gospel of accepting Jesus as our personal Savior. During the singing of the hymn of invitation “Just as I Am” with a child’s heart and understanding, I left the pew where I was sitting and went to the front of the sanctuary.

I don’t recall what the minister said to me after I walked down the aisle to the front of the church, but a lady wrote down my name and other information. And it was my understanding that someone would contact my parents about my being baptized into the membership of the church.

My information must have gotten lost because the summer went by and no one reached out to my parents. I continued to go to church with my grandmother and on or around October 24th which would have been my 10th birthday, I decided I would again answer a preacher’s invitation. This time it was Brother John Haggai, the pastor of the church, who extended the call to make known publicly that I believed in Jesus as my Savior.

With the Bible story knowledge that I had learned in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School and still with my child's heart and understanding, I walked forward to the front of the church and was met by Brother Haggai. He counseled me one-on-one as the standing congregation continued to sing multiple verses of the invitation hymn. I was baptized soon thereafter. From then on, my whole family—my brother, Mom, Dad, and I—attended church and worshipped together. But my journey with Jesus had started with the faithfulness of my grandmother.

I pray that during this Easter Season we all may follow the example of my grandmother and witness in word and deed so our children and children's children may continue in the heritage of faith.

At our family gathering for Christmas 2019, I shared the testimony of my early spiritual journey with Jesus at the dinner table and sent everyone home (children and adults alike) with a written copy. None of us knew then that a coronavirus half-way around the world would soon become pandemic. COVID-19 would change our habits of being with one another, bringing unimaginable pain, suffering, and sorrow.

We *will* get to the end of this earthly path that the coronavirus has put us on. It may be through mass vaccinations and stringent health measures. Or, it may be through the appearance and second coming of our Lord to set up a new heaven and a new earth.

Be sure you are walking with the Lord in faith, repentance, and service. If in doubt, contact one of the ministers of your church. Then share your spiritual journey with family, friends, and whomever you can *right now*. Share it so your legacy of faith will not be lost.

Connie Carlisle Polley, 2021

ConnieCarlislePolley.com

NonnyDay.com



Monday Morning, March 29, 2021

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

“Is it not written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’?” Jesus asked, quoting Isaiah 56:7, before answering His question with Jeremiah 7:11, “But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” The Gospel of Mark notes that Jesus said this “as He taught them.”

Everything that Jesus did and said throughout His ministry was meant to teach His disciples and to challenge those who were not His followers. On Monday of Holy Week, one of His actions was to drive the money changers out of the temple area. This is often called “The Cleansing of the Temple.” One commentary I have on this passage says this designation leaves a wrong impression of what Jesus was doing with this action. “Jesus’ purpose was not to reform the temple. But to abolish it.” (James A. Brooks in *The New American Commentary*)

Brooks also wrote, “The church soon came to be recognized as the new temple, and Mark may have wanted to suggest this.” Indeed, the Apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 3:16-17: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” [NIV]

As we journey with Jesus from Bethany to Jerusalem and back to Bethany on this Monday of Holy Week, let us be open to cleansing and reformation by the Holy Spirit.

God, our Heavenly Father, we humbly confess our sinfulness to You and ask You to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, realizing that You would build us into a holy priesthood. May our sacrifices of praise and worship be acceptable in Your sight, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Steve Skaggs



TOXINS

Take a look into your life. What is it filled with? What makes you happy? What makes you feel at peace? What makes you upset? Frustrated? How do you spend your free time? Really take time and think about these questions.

With this day and age, we often pack so much into our lives that there is barely time to breathe (even during a pandemic). We are constantly on the run – from work, to school, to the store, to the movies, to restaurants – and if you have a family at home, it's twice as many places!

Sometimes, I think that we are too focused on how people perceive us. We need to have the picture-perfect life; we need to have the most likes on Facebook; we strive to look better than our friends. We even go out of our way to make sure that the world knows that we are in complete bliss even though our hearts are broken.

It's toxic. All of those superficial things are toxins. They are toxins that ruin our lives.

Take a look at Mark 11:15-17:

And they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And He would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And He was teaching them saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

I would consider the people buying and selling in God's temple a toxic situation. Jesus said "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?" Shouldn't our lives also reflect that?

I challenge you to take a look at your life through these lenses. What toxins are tainting your heart? What toxins are allowing you to be a den of robbers instead of a house of prayer?

Loren Been Pascua



Tuesday Morning, March 30, 2021

FROM DEATH TO NEW LIFE

Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” John 12:23-24

In light of His quickly approaching death, Jesus told His disciples that the time had come for Him to be glorified. The disciples still did not understand. Yes, the time had come for Christ to be glorified, but not in the way they understood. Their perception was of a powerful earthly kingdom, instead of a spiritual kingdom.

As Jesus talked about the spiritual kingdom, He used the image of a seed to illustrate that there can be no fruitful life without death. Of itself, a seed is weak and useless; when it is planted it dies and becomes fruitful and useful. When a seed dies it fulfills its purpose and produces great beauty.

We are like seeds. When we yield ourselves to God and let Him “plant us”, we too fulfill our purpose and produce the fruit He has called us to bear. I like what Rich and Ann Abney once put on the sign on the front lawn of our church: “It’s spring! Plant your feet in God’s church!” Yes, God’s church needs you in order to grow and produce the fruit He has called us to bear. Are you planted in His church?

As seeds must die in order to live, we must, also, die to self so that we may live unto God. If we die to self we cannot be self-centered. That’s just not possible. There are many people who are not growing spiritually because they have never completely died to self. Countless people think that life is all about them and that the whole world must revolve around their self-centered wants and selfish desires. Rick Warren reminds us in the first sentence of his book, [The Purpose Driven Life](#): “It’s not about you.” Do you think that life is all about you? Or, do you think that life is all about Him?

We must stop gazing into the mirror of self; we must die to self so that we can live. To crucify self and to focus our gaze upon Christ is what a true Christ follower does. The Apostle Paul wrote: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Is Christ living in you?

For the grain of wheat to bear fruit, it must die. It begins when the grain is planted in the depths of the earth, buried in the barren grave of the soil. Paul also wrote: “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4). Have you buried the grain of self in the barren grave? Are you living the new life?

During this season and at all times, let us celebrate the new life found in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord!

Linda Barnes Popham



LOVING GOD! LOVING OTHERS!

Mark 12:29-31, 41-44 (New Century Version)

Jesus answered, "The most important command is this: 'Listen, people of Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second command is this: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' There are no commands more important than these."

Jesus sat near the Temple money box and watched the people put in their money. Many rich people gave large sums of money. Then a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which were only worth a few cents.

Calling his followers to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people. They gave only what they did not need. This woman is very poor, but she gave all she had; she gave all she had to live on".

Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength? The widow who gave all she had personifies this type of love. Though she had nothing, two small copper coins, she gave it all. I can imagine that when she put those few cents into the offering that she did it with a glad heart. Not because she thought everything would be okay or that she had everything in the world according to worldly standards, but she did have everything in the world. She understood the true meaning of love. She knew that with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength that God would take care of her. That is the only way that someone can give everything they have. She understood that two small coins were not what this life is about. Knowing Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior is what this life is about.

The second thing is what we find in verse 31, "*Love your neighbor as you love yourself.*" Because we love the Lord we want others to know that love as well. We are commanded to love them, but because of our love for God we should also choose to love them. We should choose to share with them His love, whether in word or deed. The love we show towards others is a direct reflection of how Jesus loves us. Because we love Him with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we should also love others in the same way. Are you loving others as we are commanded to do?

As we prepare our hearts and minds for Easter, think about these questions regarding your love for God and for others. What changes do you need to make? How can you grow deeper in your love for God and for others? How can you show that love?

Melissa Logsdon-Young



Wednesday Morning, March 31, 2021

ARE YOU READY FOR HIS COMING?

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. Mark 13:32-33

On this Wednesday, of what we now call Holy Week, Jesus told His disciples not only about His impending death and resurrection, but also about the time that He would come again. The promise that Jesus will one day return is not something we have to fear if we are awake, prepared, and ready. That promise is one of the greatest sources of hope for Christians.

Jesus told a parable of the fig tree. He explained to His followers that when the leafy, tender branches of the fig tree began to sprout and grow, this new life was a sign of the coming of summer. As surely as the maturing of the fig tree predicts summer, certainly the signs of Jesus' predictions will be a sign of His second coming. He said that these signs would be: people claiming to be Christ, wars and rumors of war, signs and wonders, earthquakes, famines, storms, pestilences, fearful events, and natural disasters. You may be thinking, "That sounds like today!"

The signs of Jesus' coming are sure, but the timing is not. Jesus said that His second coming could be compared to a homeowner who took an extended vacation, leaving his property, his authority, and his work in the hands of his servants. The servants each had assigned tasks and were to make sure the ones at the door kept watch. If they were caught sleeping, they would betray their trust to the master. The master could come back at any time, so the servants should remain awake and alert.

Jesus says to us, "*Watch; stay awake!*" We are not to be sleeping at our posts, but to be awake, alert, and on duty. When He comes, will you be ready? God wants us to live each day on guard, prepared, alert, awake, working, watching, and looking forward to His return. Are you watching? Are you awake? Are you ready?

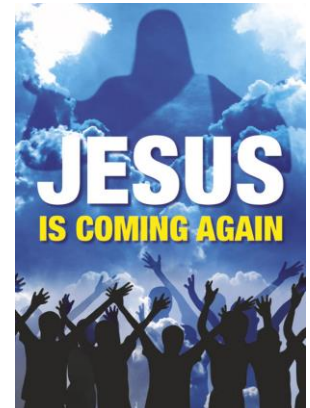
The Scottish theologian William Barclay once said: "*We are like people who know that their master will come, but do not know when. We live in the shadow of eternity. That is no reason for fearful expectation. But it means that day by day our work must be completed. It means that we must so live that it does not matter when He comes. It gives us a great task of making every day fit for Him to see and being at any moment ready to meet Him face to face. All life becomes a preparation to meet the King.*"

What do you need to do to prepare and be ready for the day when Jesus comes again? Do you need to accept Him as your Savior? Do you need to repent from a particular sin? Do you need to get your priorities in order? Do you need to make any relationships right as far as it depends on you? Do you need to trust Him in every area of your life? Do you need to be in His Word on a consistent basis? Do you need to take better care of your temple? Do you need to renew your commitment to His church? Do you need to love Him with your whole being?

The choice is yours. You may exist in the barren desert of your sin or you may walk in the new life which He gives to those who are His followers.

If you choose to be a faithful follower, you will be ready for His coming!

Linda Barnes Popham



KEEP YOUR LAMP TRIMMED AND BURNING

Matthew 25:1-13: “The Parable of the Ten Virgins”

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus taught some hard and serious lessons about true disciples on the Wednesday of the last week of His life. The book of Revelation is often thought of as containing scary prophecies but Jesus, in Matthew chapters 23-25, is teaching some memorable things that should get our attention just as much as the prophecies of Revelation.

Here are the section headings in my NIV Bible: “Seven Woes”; “Signs of the End of the Age”; “The Day and Hour Unknown”; and, “The Sheep and the Goats.”

Jesus began this section speaking to “the crowds and to His disciples,” but, migrated away from the temple to the Mount of Olives where He taught His disciples privately. You see, they had asked, “When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” (24:3). Using blunt language and parables, He would answer their questions such as the words that follow.

“Watch out that no one deceives you” (24:4).

“You will be...persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me” (24:9).

“He who stands firm to the end will be saved” (24:13).

“They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call...” (24:30b-31a).

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (24:35).

“No one knows about that day or hour...” (24:36).

“Therefore keep watch” (24:42).

“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” are the words of Jesus that end chapter 24. Then, in chapter 25, He illustrates that with “The Parable of the Ten Virgins.” You probably know the story. There were five foolish and five wise virgins going out to meet the bridegroom. The wise virgins, realizing that they did not know when the bridegroom would arrive, kept the wicks of their lamps trimmed properly and had brought extra oil just in case they would have to wait a long time. The foolish virgins did neither.

“At midnight, the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’” (25:6). The foolish virgins, having wasted the oil in their lamps by inefficiently failing to keep the wicks trimmed, had to go to the market to buy more oil. While away, they missed the bridegroom’s arrival and were shut out of the wedding banquet. Their cry of “Open the door for us” was met with, “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you” from the bridegroom (25:11-12).

Here is how Jesus wrapped up this teach in verse 13: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

There’s an old gospel/blues song that helps me remember this teaching. “Keep your lamps trimmed and burning/keep your lamps trimmed and burning/keep your lamps trimmed and burning/the time is drawing nigh.”

We may ask someone, “Do you know Jesus?” But Matthew tells us here and in 7:23 that it is equally important that He knows us.

Father, may we be disciplined by Your word and follow your teachings faithfully with the great expectation that You are always nearby. Amen

Maundy Thursday Morning, April 1, 2021

WILL YOU DENY JESUS? **Matthew 26:17-56/Mark 14:12-52**

The two passages above include Jesus' journey to the Cross with Peter. Peter's true name was Simon, but Jesus renamed Simon "the Rock" or "Petros". The Greek's translation was Peter. Peter was bold and assertive and often was the spokesperson for the disciples. Many times, he acted/spoke before he thought. Although Peter was quick to speak/act, he was beloved by Jesus and was included in the inner circle.

As the disciples and Jesus ate the Passover supper, Jesus said, "Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." The disciples all began to question Jesus if they were the one who would be the betrayer. Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you." After the Passover supper, Jesus and the disciples went out to the Mount of Olives. Jesus told the disciples "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." "I tell you the truth, Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

We know that just as Jesus had said, Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. Peter wept bitterly when he recalled what Jesus had told him. Rather than react to his betrayal as Judas had done by hanging himself, Peter sought forgiveness. God forgave his denials and Peter began the great work of spreading Christianity throughout the world.

I wonder if I am ever in a hostile environment like Peter, where Christianity and Jesus are not part of that environment, would I deny Jesus. If confronted with the same situation as Peter, would I deny Jesus or speak up for my Savior. I pray with God's help, I will meet the challenge and not deny Jesus whatever that cost would be. I pray the same for you.

Holy Week is the Christian's week of many emotions. Sorrow that Jesus was tortured and crucified on the cross, but great JOY when the tomb was found empty, and Jesus was alive. The greatest gift was that He died for my sins and your sins and rose again on the third day to later ascend into Heaven to prepare a place for those who seek Him.

Mary Kleber



MAUNDY THURSDAY

Today we observe Maundy Thursday which commemorates the Last Supper and Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. Maundy is derived from the Latin word for “command” and refers to Jesus’ commandment to the disciples to “love one another as I have loved you.”

Maundy commemorates the Last Supper, which Christians consider the Lord’s Supper or communion. As described in Luke, chapter 22, Jesus breaks bread with the disciples saying “this is my body”, and pours the wine and says “this is my blood”. He then asked the disciples to “do this in remembrance of me.”

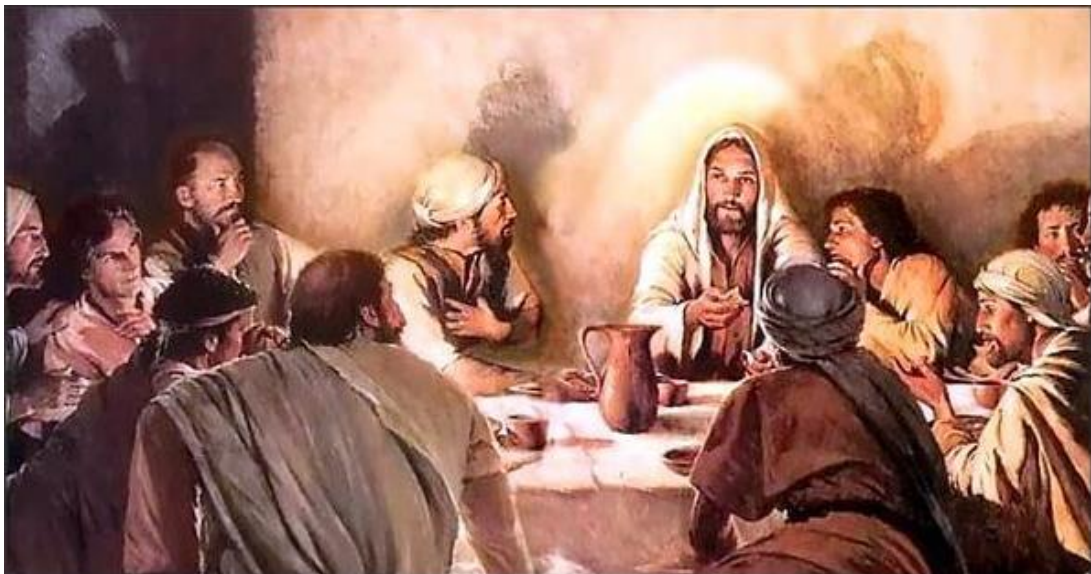
The Last Supper is derived from Jesus’ Jewish heritage and His observance of a Jewish holiday. The last supper was a Passover Seder, the feast of unleavened bread. Passover is the Jewish festival commemorating the exodus of the Jews from Egypt when they left so quickly that there was no time for the bread to rise.

Maundy Thursday is also associated with foot washing. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples as the ultimate act of “servant leadership”. Jesus instructs His followers to love and to serve one another. This is an extraordinary display of humility.

Salvation is not only a wonderful gift that protects us from the penalty that we deserve; the work of Christ also imbues us with new life, grants us spiritual strength, and motivates godly actions in those who believe.

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all weakness and to purify for himself they that are his own eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:11-14

Neal Tingle



Good Friday Morning, April 2, 2021

FORGIVENESS

Luke 23:26-34

The first recorded phrase that we have of Jesus on Friday from the cross is a prayer to His Father to forgive those who put Him there. Jesus was perfectly aware of His pain and suffering; He was totally aware of the ones who were inflicting the pain upon Him. As He was enduring the horrific pain of the nails through His flesh and as He listened to the hateful words from the jeering crowd, He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”.

That forgiveness was not only meant for the Roman soldiers, the criminals, and all of those who contributed to His death on Good Friday. That same forgiveness is offered to all who will accept it. The Bible says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” and that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 3:23; 6:23). But the Bible also says that “God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). The verse that sums it up the best is John 3:16: “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.” God, through Jesus Christ, provided the way for us to be forgiven and saved. Have you accepted His forgiveness? Have you repented and asked Jesus Christ to come and live in your heart...in your life?

This forgiveness is not just about Jesus forgiving us. It is about us forgiving other people. Jesus was willing to die for you and me so that we might be forgiven. Therefore, we (as the Bible often tells us) are to forgive one another. If we do not forgive others, we block God’s grace and forgiveness from flowing into our own lives. Jesus said, “If you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others of their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

Pastor Robertson McQuilkin says, “The sin of unforgiveness is a cancer that destroys relationships, eats away at one’s own psyche, and worst of all – shuts us off from God’s grace.” Are there people in your life whom you need to forgive? Are you living with difficult or broken relationships because of unforgiveness? Will you forgive those who have wronged you? Who should you forgive today? Who will you forgive today? My prayer is that you will experience His forgiveness and grace anew as you extend that forgiveness and grace to others!

Linda Barnes Popham



PERFECT LOVE
Matthew 26:57-27:61

We use the word love so easily. We love certain foods, certain activities, special vacation spots; we have favorite books or movies that we love to read or watch over and over. We love our pets, our family and friends. Love is a wonderful, easy thing... until it's hard. How do we react when love becomes hard? How do we react when those we love don't love us back? How do we feel when they say unkind and untrue things about us? Would we continue to love them if they physically harmed us perhaps to the point of death? Have we personally ever experienced a love so perfect and so complete that absolutely nothing could ever change that love? There is one perfect, pure love that is offered to each one of us, a love so great that it cost the life of Jesus Christ in a horribly, cruel, and painful way. No one took His life. No one could, for He is God's perfect Son and all power is His. He freely lay down His life in payment for our sins. When we accept this gift of perfect love we can know that He will never leave us and we will live with Him in Heaven for all eternity. We can come to understand what true love means when we look at Jesus.

Jesus' last days on earth before His crucifixion and resurrection were filled with anguish, sorrow, and pain. He was taken prisoner violently in the night, betrayed with a kiss by a beloved disciple named Judas for thirty pieces of silver. That same disciple later hung himself because he knew he had betrayed an innocent man. Jesus was mocked, spit upon, and beaten. He was told by the crowd that he could not be the Son of God or He would have the power to save himself. Another beloved disciple denied ever knowing Him on three separate occasions, just as Jesus had told Peter he would do. He was stripped of His clothing and they put on Him a scarlet robe. They placed a crown of thorns upon His head and a reed in His right hand and then bowed before Him mockingly saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" His own Jewish brothers and sisters asked the court for a criminal to be released and for Jesus to be crucified. He was taken to a place called Golgotha and nailed to a cross. He was buried in a borrowed tomb and a stone was rolled across the entrance. But, death had no power to hold Him. In three days He arose fulfilling His promise that after three days He would rise again.

This Easter season is a reminder of God's perfect love. It is given freely. It is for all eternity. I am so thankful that I can say Jesus has forgiven me of my sins and that I know He will walk with me every day of my life on this earth and that when the times comes for me to leave this earth I will be with Him in Heaven forever. If you have never accepted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior won't you invite Him into your heart today? In dying on the cross Jesus paid the price for our sin and purchased eternal life in Heaven for all who believe He is the Son of God. We can't buy salvation and we can't be good enough to earn it, only the death of Jesus could pay the price of salvation. This gift of love is so easy to receive. Won't you tell Him you love Him today, that you believe He is God's Son? Will you ask Him to forgive your sins? Will you try to serve Him every day knowing He is our risen savior? At this special time of year do we as Christians need to rededicate our lives to Jesus? Do we need to find a place of service in His church? Do we need to try harder to tell others of His perfect love? Jesus taught us the true meaning of selfless, perfect love. *Thank You, Lord, for loving me.*

Nancy Shewmaker



Saturday Morning, April 3, 2021

SECURE THE TOMB **Matthew 27:62-65 (New International Version)**

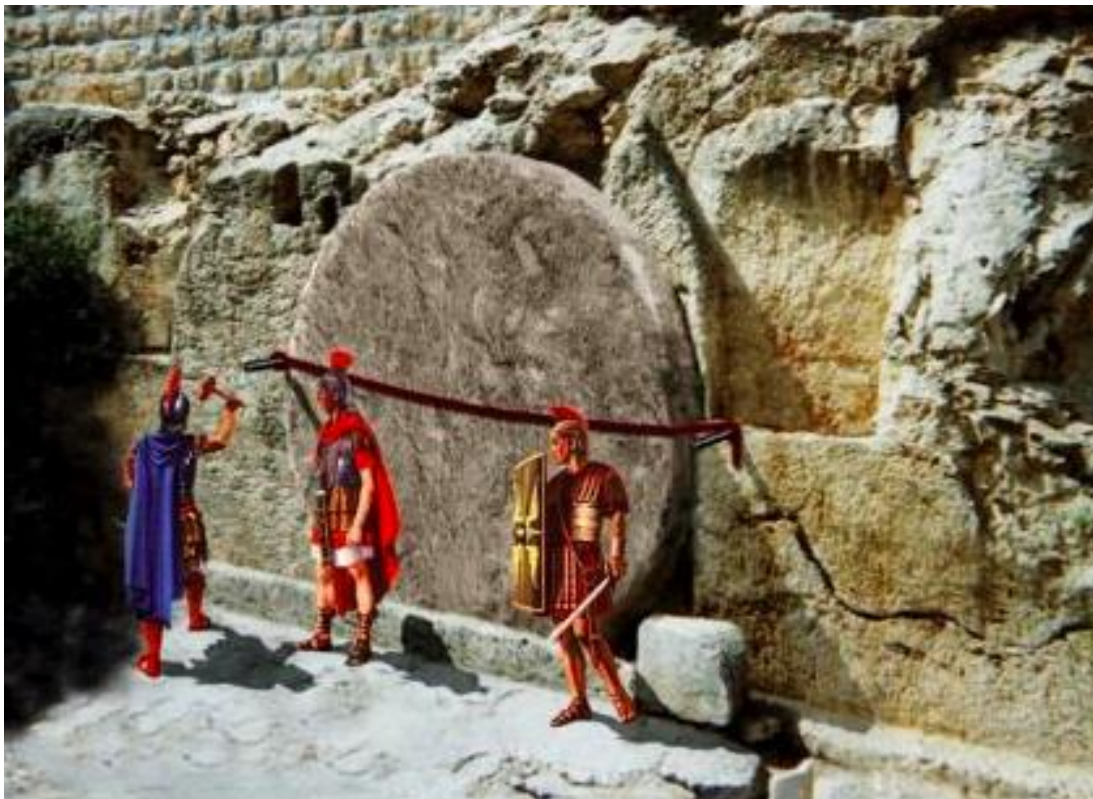
62 *The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63 “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64 So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.” 65 “Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.”*

Do you think the priests and Pharisees were nervous - about the disciples’ potential theft of the “King of the Jews” they had just crucified?

This was all the religious leaders’ idea, not Pilate’s. But he took hold of it! The opposition had taken note of every word Jesus told His disciples...at least when they were in earshot, or had privy to an informant. Pilate seized upon the religious leaders’ suggestion. The crucifixion was meant to be the end of this man. It was meant to dispel His group of followers forever. If they robbed the grave, the rebels would think their insurrection could continue! Pilate was ready to go to any lengths to make Jesus’ tomb inescapable and impenetrable. In doing so, He gave God’s power an even stronger showing that Sunday!

Tomorrow we’ll see who wins the battle. (Spoiler: Love always wins!)

Karen Love



THEIR LABOR OF LOVE

Luke 23:56

“Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandments.”

What a painful day it had been as Jesus had been crucified. No, the word painful doesn't begin to describe it. It was gut-wrenching agony. The women never pictured this happening to their Jesus, their hope, their Master, their everything.

Perhaps you, like I, have experienced such a moment of absolute bewilderment and stunning grief. The moment you realized it was too late to talk to the departed ever again.

Who else would prepare the spices for Jesus' mangled body? He was just being put in a borrowed grave. They had to prepare all the spices before the Sabbath, in order to keep the commandments of the Law. Somehow they managed to do the unimaginable that night after they watched Jesus' horrific death.

It kept their hands busy. It didn't take much mental energy and was a necessary, needed task to do for the body of their beloved Jesus which was now lifeless. It was their final act of love for Him, or so they thought.

They were overcome by the sting of death and simply did what they saw was needed. To obey the commandments meant preparing the spices before the Sabbath arrived and waiting until early the next morning to take them to His grave. If only they knew what joy would await them!

When we are overwhelmed by life or death, we can:

- hang on to the commandments and teachings that have carried us to this point.
- stick with the basics. Do what needs to be done right then...not in a week, or a month.

The women prepared for their Sunday morning journey to Jesus' tomb. May we follow our Father on whatever journey He leads us!

Karen Love



Easter Sunday Morning, April 4, 2021

IF...THEN
I Corinthians 15:12-19

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the Christian faith. The gospel revolves around the facts of Christ's birth, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and second coming. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the heart of Christian witness. Paul testifies, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20 NIV). The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is crucial to the ministry of the church. Consider these:

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then...

Our preaching is useless (v.14)
Our faith is useless and futile (vs.14, 17)
We are false witnesses misrepresenting God (v.15)
We are still in our sins (v.17)
Those who died in Christ have perished (v.18)
We are of all people most pitied (v.19)

But Christ has risen from the dead, therefore...

Our preaching is powerful (Romans 1:16)
Our faith is established and firm (Romans 1:17)
We truly represent Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20)
We are redeemed (1 Peter 1:18)
Our hope is secured in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)
We are most blessed among humans!

Let us be bold and confident in facing today's concerns and challenges. Because Jesus overcame, we too, shall overcome!

George Payocong III



IT IS FINISHED

“It is finished.”

“With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” John 19:30

The word “finished” usually signals the end. The end of a book, a journey, a movie, a conversation, an illness, a marriage, a life. The word “finished” brings different emotions depending on the event that is ending. There is finality to the word and to the feeling.

Certainly, the feelings on the evening of the crucifixion were those of an ending and a loss. Even though the ending was predicted all along, the sense of finality was heavy.

But, as we all know, the ending was actually the beginning. The journey was far from over. Those who had physically walked with Jesus during his life on earth were surprised and overjoyed to be reunited with the one they had watched die only days before. The travelers on the way to Emmaus were amazed to find themselves once again walking with Jesus.

The thirty-three year journey of Jesus did not end when they took His body and placed it in the tomb. The journey with Jesus was not finished when He ascended into the Heavens. He gave His disciples and His followers and all of us clear instruction to continue the journey.

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

When the physical aspect of Jesus’ journey was ended he left behind a guide for us. The Holy Spirit continues to walk with us and lead us so that we can carry on and finish the work that He started.

Martha Blansette



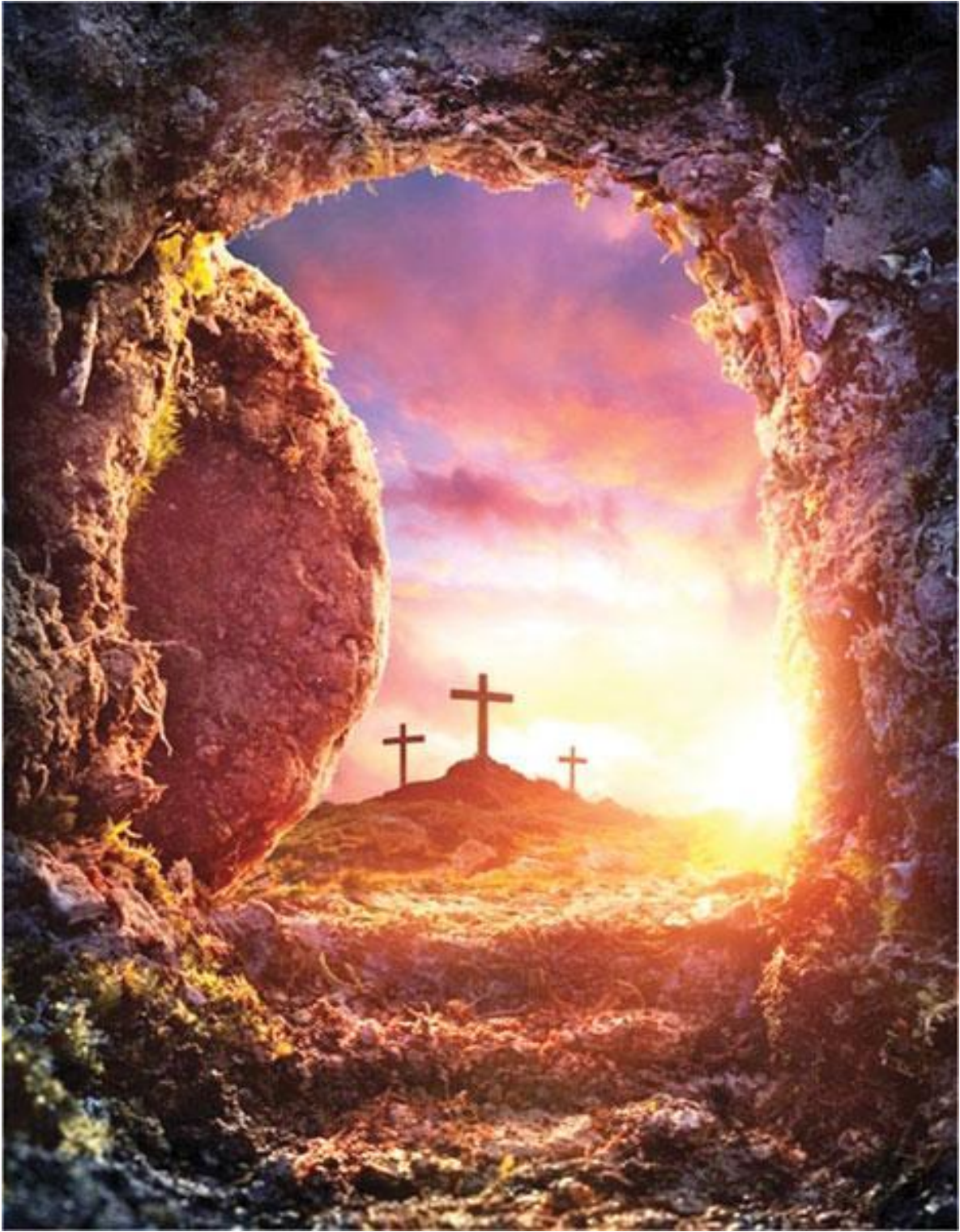
Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

JESUS HAS RISEN

Today is the day that Jesus is raised from the dead. Matthew 28:1-15, Mark 16:1-16, Luke 24:1-49, and John 20:1-25 all share the same message, but in different ways. Has anyone ever wondered what it would be like if Jesus never died for us? If Jesus never died on the cross for us then we would have a body full of sins. God always knows what He is doing; He has a plan for everyone even His own Son that He let die on the cross just for us sinners. God loves us that much to let Mary and Joseph raise God's only Son and then let Jesus die. That is what love is, being selfless, not thinking about ourselves, but thinking about others, and that is what God wants us to do every single day. Even though we sin every day we always can ask for forgiveness because God knows we are not perfect. We will never be perfect, but God loves us so much. Like 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 everlasting life." This proves God loves us and had a reason for Jesus dying on the cross for us. This proves the resurrection.

Sincerely,
Emma Towles







*Happy
Easter!*