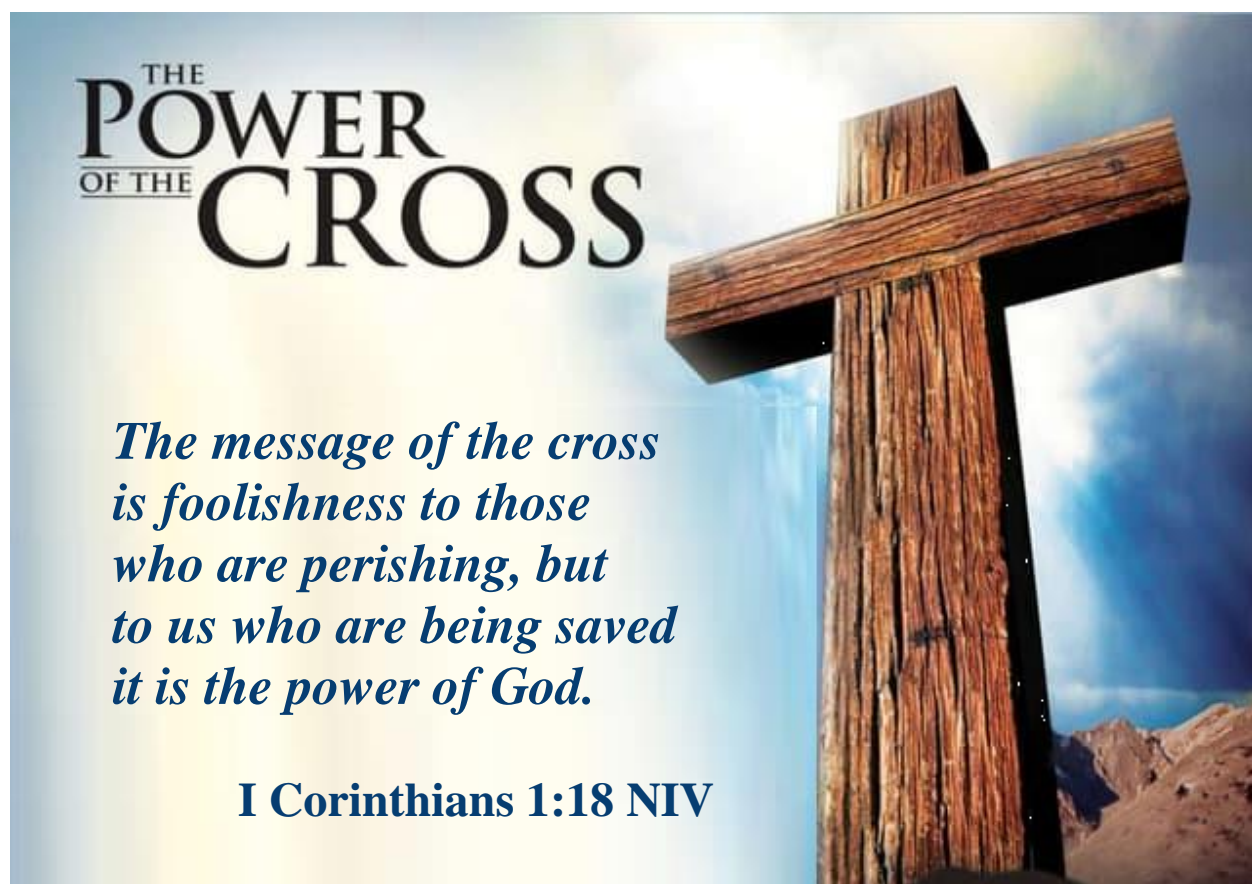


“The Power of the Cross”

HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL GUIDE 2024



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 different generations of members of our church family, are reflections of this year's theme, "*The Power of the Cross*". 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 not only through the reading of these devotionals and daily Bible readings, but also by participating in our worship services of this week. We hope you will let this devotional guide be a part of your daily personal and/or family worship as you immerse yourself in His Word.

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!



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Joanna Wright, Supply Organist 239-0316

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

SUNDAY, MARCH 24: PALM SUNDAY

- 10:45 a.m.** We remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and into our lives. The children's processional will remind us of that day when the shouts of "Hosanna" rang through the streets. Join us for worship in our sanctuary or online by going to www.ferncreekbaptist.org and clicking the red Worship Livestream button.
- 7:00 p.m.** The Lenten Reflections will be led by readers and musicians who will present musical offerings that will focus on this season's theme, "The Power of the Cross". The service will, also, be livestreamed.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28: MAUNDY THURSDAY

- 7:00 p.m.** The Youth Choir and Deacons will lead in "*Remember His Love*". We will partake in the Lord's Supper as we remember Christ's work on the cross and His salvation plan for us. We are reminded to share His love with others. The service will, also, be livestreamed.

FRIDAY, MARCH 29: GOOD FRIDAY

- 7:00 p.m.** The Adult Choir and Narrators will present "*Tenebrae: A Service of Darkness*" by Hal Hopson which follows the Tenebrae tradition beginning in the eighth century of the early church. In an atmosphere of darkness and candles, music and scripture, we will remember the final hours of Christ's life on earth as He prepared for and suffered death on the cross. The service will, also, be livestreamed.

SUNDAY, MARCH 31: EASTER CELEBRATION

- 9:00 a.m.** We celebrate the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ! God's Word will be spoken through proclamation and music mainly from our church staff.
- 10:45 a.m.** We continue the celebration of Christ's resurrection as God's Word is spoken through proclamation and music by the Adult Choir. Come and fill His house as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection! This service will, also, be livestreamed.



DAILY BIBLE READINGS

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

Sunday, March 24	Matthew 21:1-11 Mark 11:1-11 Luke 19:29-44 John 12:12-19
Monday, March 25	Matthew 21:12-20 Mark 11:12-19 Luke 19:45-46
Tuesday, March 26	Matthew 21:21 - 23:39 Mark 11:27 - 12:44 Luke 20:1 - 21:4 John 12:20-50
Wednesday, March 27	Matthew 24:1 - 26:16 Mark 13:1 - 14:11 Luke 21:5 - 22:6
Thursday, March 28	Matthew 26:17-56 Mark 14:12-52 Luke 22:7-53 John 13:1 - 18:13
Friday, March 29	Matthew 26:57 - 27:61 Mark 14:53 - 15:47 Luke 22:54 - 23:55 John 18:14 - 19:42
Saturday, March 30	Matthew 27:62-65 Luke 23:56
Sunday, March 31	Matthew 28:1-15 Mark 16:1-13 Luke 24:1-49 John 20:1-25



Palm Sunday Morning, March 24, 2024

AND JESUS WEPT

Luke 19:41-44

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.

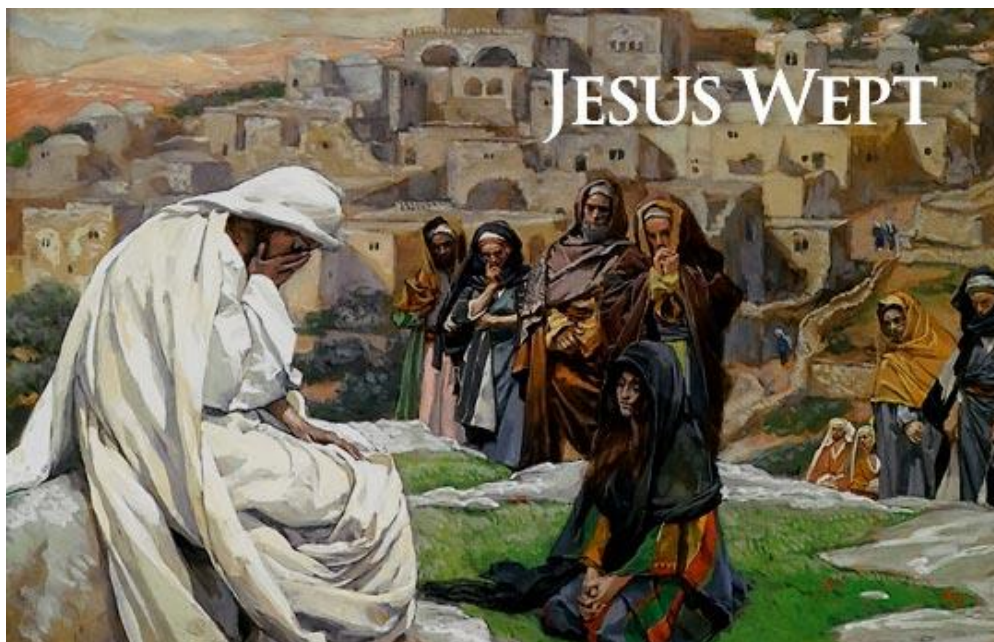
As we have often read through the scriptures relating to this holy season, we sometimes tend to go from the Hosannas of the Triumphal Entry and jump to the Resurrection. We overlook those times where God wept for our sin, our attitudes, and lack of action. We ignore that He suffered for us on the cross and jump to the joy of Resurrection. In Luke’s gospel, just after His Triumphal Entry and all the praise and hosannas, Jesus has come to this place – a place where He is looking over the city and weeping for their blindness. The people did not recognize God even though He was with them.

There are three times in Scripture where it is recorded that Jesus wept: John 11:35; Luke 19:41; Hebrews 5:7-9. Each is near the end of His life and each scripture reveals what matters most to our loving God. He truly is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities”- SIN (Hebrews 4:15). God truly loves and cares for us enough to die on the cross for our sins even before we were born. If Jesus grieved our sin, how much more should we! When was the last time you wept over sin?

How often do we not recognize God in our daily lives? Are we blinded to our sin, attitudes, the sin of the world, or our lack of action?

During this Holy Week take time to reflect on His goodness, grace, mercy, and suffering for you and me. Let us not jump from the Hosannas to the Resurrection. Let us, also, weep with Him!

Renee Bryant



LEADING UP TO THE POWER OF THE CROSS

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! Praise the Lord! God bless the king of Israel!"

This scripture takes us to the time when Jesus is preparing for His journey to the cross.

He has His disciples get a donkey for Him to ride into Jerusalem.

The people are excited to see Him. They are singing praises and throwing their cloaks in His path.

It's a glorious day filled with excitement.

Think of how you feel around the celebration of a birthday party or wedding. Everything else is forgotten and you are in that moment. Then the next day, you hear of someone's death. All the fun leaves you like air leaving a balloon when it pops. You feel deflated.

That is what happened. Suddenly the party was over. Dark skies loomed over the land.

One day Jesus is walking among the crowd teaching and healing with everyone following Him.

The next day He is accused of crimes and sentenced to death on the cross.

That is not the end of the story...

You will read in the following devotionals that the cross has the power to lead us to eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Glenda Coddington



Monday Morning, March 25, 2024

OVERTURNED

Matthew 21:12-20

Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus went directly into the temple area and drove away all the merchants who were buying and selling their goods. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the stands of those selling doves. And He said to them, "My dwelling place will be known as a house of prayer, but you have made it into a hangout for thieves." Matthew 21:12-13 The Message

I signed up for this date. When I got home and saw the Scripture for the day, I quickly realized I had done this one some years ago for the Devotional Book. My first impulse was to switch dates, but God reminded me that His Word is alive and there are unending treasures in it waiting for us.

Jesus had just entered Jerusalem...His Triumphant Entry. The crowds absolutely overwhelmed Him with their praises. He was their "all in all". The whole city was in an uproar. Don't think for a second that the religious leaders were unaware of it.

Most people, after receiving such accolades, would want to relish the moment; continue the celebration. That wasn't our Lord's way, though. Jesus knew that His days were numbered, and He had to make them count. He didn't hesitate for a moment but walked straight to the Temple – His Father's House.

The money changers had an overwhelming crowd, and with it they could earn droves of extra profit. There was currency from all over. Their customers weren't going to question their counting. They just wanted it done. They needed to purchase an animal to sacrifice for their Passover celebration.

Then Jesus addressed the dove sellers. As always, He was looking out for the poor and lowly. The doves cost the least of all the animals. Only the very poor would choose one of them for their sacrifice. Do you think the sellers gave them a fair deal? Maybe the widow was even in line.

We read what transpired. Jesus rebuked all those profiteering from the Passover. He turned their tables over and His life was shortly going to be turned over. He could already see the end coming, but He wanted to follow His Father every step of the way.

He was trying to purify the Temple and make it holy as His Father intended. Today He is working to make His children holy, because He lives in us. What tables is He trying to overturn in your life and in mine? Perhaps we can take a closer look this week and examine our comings and our goings. What doesn't look like Jesus in our lives? What needs to be turned over, turned around, or turned upside down?

Karen Love



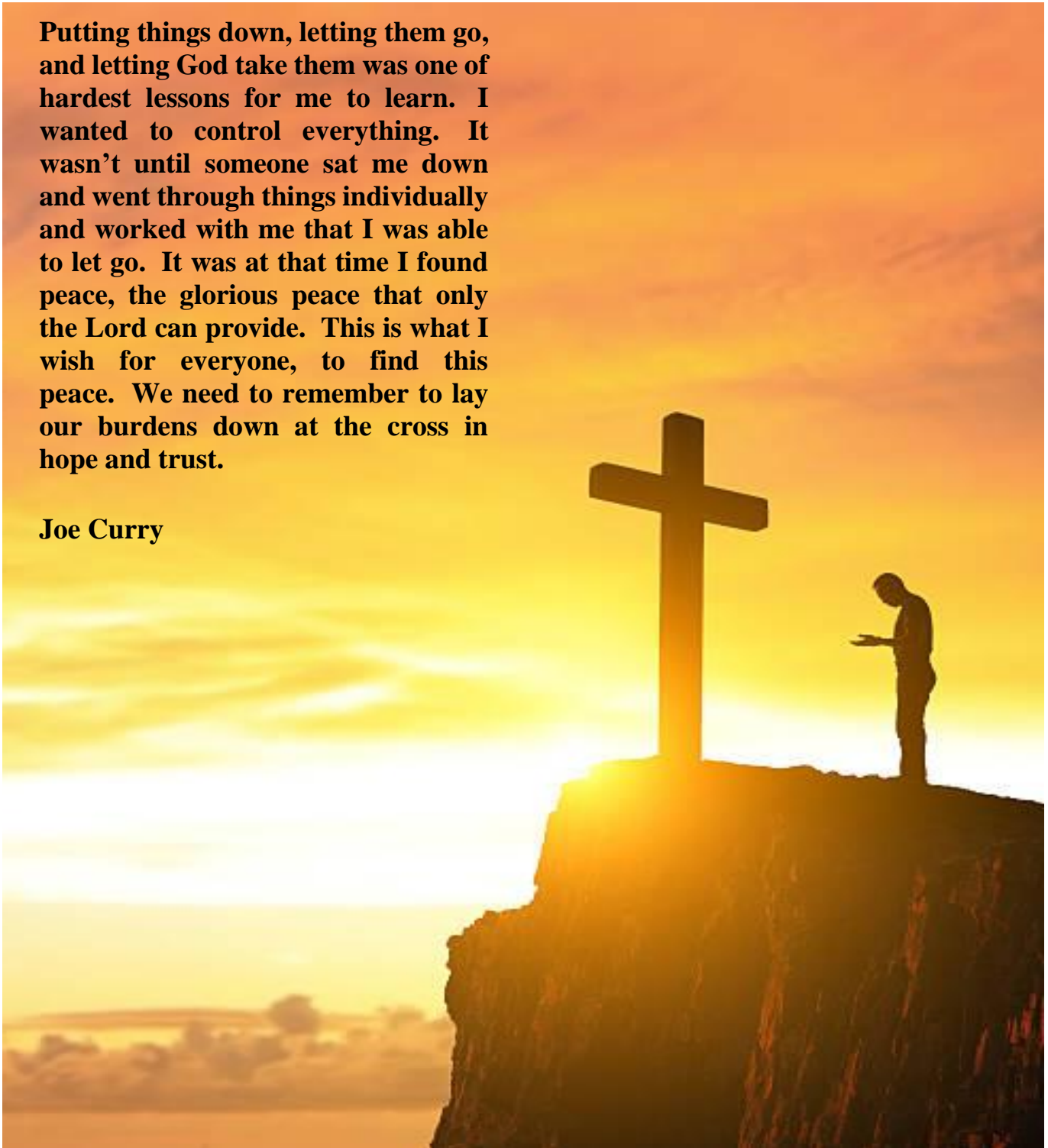
AT THE CROSS

Matthew 11:28

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”

Putting things down, letting them go, and letting God take them was one of hardest lessons for me to learn. I wanted to control everything. It wasn't until someone sat me down and went through things individually and worked with me that I was able to let go. It was at that time I found peace, the glorious peace that only the Lord can provide. This is what I wish for everyone, to find this peace. We need to remember to lay our burdens down at the cross in hope and trust.

Joe Curry



Tuesday Morning, March 26, 2024

JESUS EXPLAINS WHY HE MUST DIE

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. John 12:23 NIV

On Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus and His disciples returned to Jerusalem from Bethany. The crowd was waiting for them. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah-King who would save them from Rome's oppression. With parables and warnings, Jesus beat the Pharisees at their own game. He exposed them as hypocrites; but no one believed Him to be the Son of God, the true Messiah. Jesus spoke, *"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?"*

"No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:27-28 NIV)

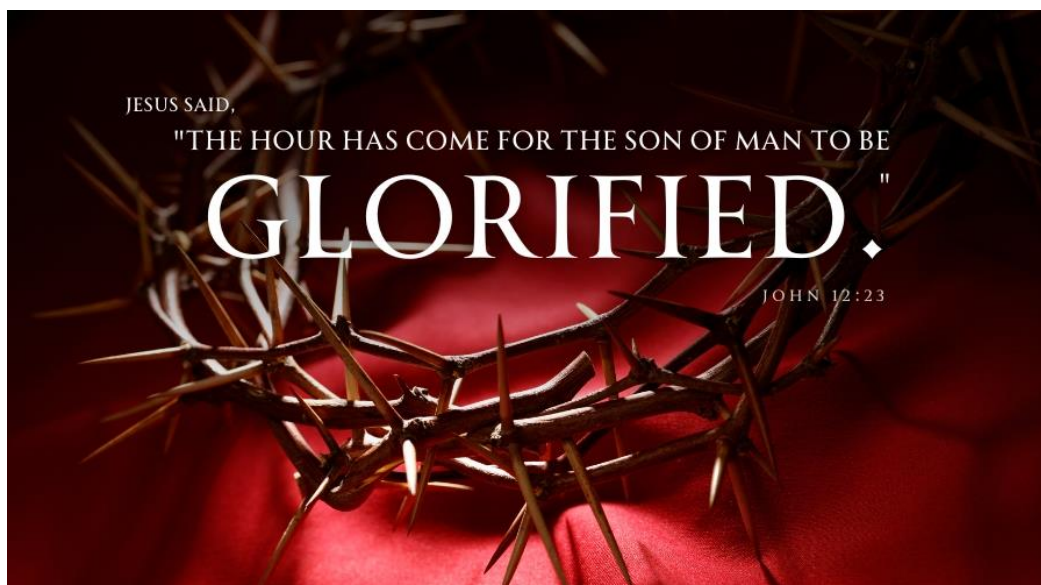
Jesus had to die - to fulfill prophecies, to glorify God, to show God's love, and to give redemption for the sins of those who believe. What happened to Jesus after this day would glorify the name of the Father. A voice from heaven assured the crowd that His name was glorified by His Son. Jesus said to the crowd, *"This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."* (John 12:30-32 NIV) To the very end, people are given the chance to believe in Him.

Believing in the message of Jesus redeems our sin-debt; we become children of God. As the Apostle Peter wrote, *"In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you."* (1 Peter 1:3-4 NIV)

It took most of my life to finally accept this wondrous message. By the grace of God and my statement of belief - Jesus Christ is Lord! - I am saved. My sins are forgiven and forgotten when I repent. This is the Power of the Cross: Jesus lives!

Happy Easter!

Kathy Fraley



JESUS OUR TEACHER

Mark 11:27-12:44

Jesus taught many lessons while walking on this earth. He wanted us to understand God's purpose and plan for His children. He wanted to help us understand that only through His shed blood and death could we receive forgiveness of our sins. He taught us we must love the Lord with all our heart and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. It is my prayer as I write this devotional that I can share with you how very much our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ loves each of us. God's perfect only Son was given on that cruel cross so that we may have forgiveness of our sins, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and have assurance that we will spend eternity in Heaven with Jesus. There is no price we could ever pay to purchase this gift. There is no work we could ever do that would be enough to purchase our place in Heaven. It is a free gift. We need only ask in faith.

My Jesus willingly lay down His life for me. No one took His life from Him. He was arrested, beaten, spit upon, jeered, denied, deserted by His beloved disciples, and nailed to a cruel cross. He suffered and died an unimaginable death for me. He did this that I might be forgiven of my sins and know that He will never leave me nor forsake me. His death assured my forgiveness and His resurrection guaranteed that my eternal life would be spent in Heaven with Him. There is no greater gift we could ever receive than the one given to us by Jesus Christ. When He gave His life on the cross that day so many years ago, He was thinking of ME. He was thinking of YOU. As we read and study the verses listed above we see the story of perfect love unfolding. My heart hurts with the cruelty of it all. His love is freely given because He loves and cherishes each one of us and wants to come into our hearts and share every moment of our lives, today, tomorrow, and always. We can't buy this precious gift. We can't earn it. I don't think we can comprehend all He went through on our behalf to purchase this priceless gift with His own blood, His own life.

The day I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior my life was changed forever. Not one moment of my life have I spent alone since that day. Jesus did not promise we would never have trials or that we would never feel pain or shed tears. This world can be hard and very cruel. What He does promise is that He will be with us through it all. Jesus hears my every prayer. He is my Comforter, my friend, my Savior. His love is the greatest, most precious gift I have ever been given. His love is greater than the love of our family or friends. Greater than any earthly treasure we may possess! I know when I breathe my last breath on this earth, I will see His face and His outstretched arms of love. His love is perfect, and I thank Him for Calvary.

As we think about Easter and its true meaning, I try always to make it a time of reflection. As a Christian I want to spend time thinking about my Savior's love for me. It's difficult to even think about the cruelty of His death, the horrible pain He endured for me so that I might be forgiven of my sins. I think of the wonder of the empty tomb and the fact death has no power over our Savior. Thank You, God, for Your Son. Thank You, Jesus, for giving Your life for me. Thank You that I know I will spend all of eternity in Heaven with you. Thank You for the greatest blessing, the greatest gift anyone could ever have.

This Easter if you have never asked Jesus to come into your heart and forgive you of your sins, I pray with all my heart you will ask Him this moment to be your Lord and Savior. There is no more important decision you will ever make. You can KNOW your sins are forgiven and that because of His precious gift He will be with you every day of your life. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will never leave you comfortless. You can have the assurance you will spend eternity in Heaven with Him. It is really so simple. Tell God you know He sent His Son Jesus to give His life for your sins. Ask Him to forgive you and to come into your heart. Tell Jesus you know His death on the cross was for you. Tell Him you believe God raised Him from the dead and that He is seated at the right hand of God for all eternity. It is a gift freely given, we need only to ask. You never have to be alone or face life alone again. You can experience the perfect love of our Lord and Savior. He is as close as your prayer today.

Wednesday Morning, March 27, 2024

THE ANOINTING AND THE BETRAYAL OF JESUS

Matthew 26:1-5, Mark 14:10, Luke 22:1-6

For some Christians, it's known as "Spy Wednesday" as it is the day that Jesus was betrayed by **His disciple Judas Iscariot**. The day is also known by other names depending on the division of Christianity.

The Wednesday night of Passover is detailed in various Gospels. Reading these books together builds a more detailed story of this event as told by multiple authors. In Bethany, Jesus was reclining in the home of Simon the Leper (also identified by some as Lazarus of Bethany), where a woman (in **Matthew 26:6**, **Mark 14:3-9**, and **Luke 7:36-50**) is unidentified and pours the perfume on His head and feet; but in **John 12:1-8**, she's identified as **Lazarus' sister Mary** who anoints Jesus' feet with the expensive nard/perfume from an alabaster jar. The act was an act of love. She even breaks the nice jar almost as a form of worship. She proceeds weeping, kissing, and wiping the perfume with her hair on His feet. *She showed great love for Jesus like she would no longer have him, just like Jesus predicted.*

She is taunted by the disciples, particularly Judas, as being wasteful of the expensive perfume. **Matthew 26:8-13** *When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

Following the dinner, Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests who were already conspiring against Jesus. **Luke 22:3-6** *"Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present. They gave him 30 pieces of silver."* The plot was set. Judas would betray Jesus with a kiss.

The two people portrayed here were very different in how they treated Jesus. Mary showed her love for Jesus with humility by anointing Him from His head even to His feet. She had "done a beautiful thing". However, Judas betrayed his master for just 30 pieces of silver. When we think of how we treat Jesus, are we looking at Him and the power of the cross? By His love and humility, He came down from Heaven to save us from our sins. Are we loving Him like Mary, or betraying Him like Judas?

Chris Towles



Holy Wednesday

**Spy Wednesday
Jesus Anointed**



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 let His followers know 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 at all times. When He comes, will you be ready? God wants us to live each day on guard, alert, awake, prepared, 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? Do you need to begin living in the power of His Holy Spirit?

The choice is yours today. You may exist powerless in your own might, or you may live in the power of the cross – the cross on which Christ became sin for us. You may live an abundant life in the power of His resurrection. If you choose to give your life completely to Jesus and live in the power of the cross and His resurrection, then you will be ready for His coming!

Linda Barnes Popham

Maundy Thursday Morning, March 28, 2024

THE POWER OF THE BLOOD-STAINED CROSS

Matthew 27:50

When I think of the cross, that iconic symbol of the Christian faith, my mind zeros in on its blood stains from the veins of Jesus Christ who was God in human form. Without His blood, the cross would be no more than a pendant hanging from a necklace, a visual image painted by an artist's brush, or an artistic expression carved out by a sculptor.

There is an old song called "There is Power in the Blood." When I was about seventeen years old my Dad Marion Carlisle, my Uncle Louis Carlisle, my Uncle Cliff Carlisle, my Uncle Milton Carlisle, my Brother Jerry Carlisle, my Cousin Ronnie Carlisle, and I recorded this song along with others in Lexington, Kentucky. Although "power" is usually a two-syllable word, we sang it as "par."

The song "There is Power in the Blood" has been enjoyed and used as a tool of evangelism ever since its words were written and its melody composed by Lewis E. Jones in 1899. It's now in public domain.

Truly "The Power of the Cross" is in its blood stains. Darkness was present when Jesus in physical and mental agony cried out to the Father God. Matthew 27:50 tells us "*And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.*" The Holy Bible, New International Version

There is Power in the Blood

Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Refrain:

There is pow'r, pow'r, wonder-working pow'r
In the blood of the Lamb;
There is pow'r, pow'r, wonder-working pow'r
In the precious blood of the Lamb.

Would you be free from your passion and pride?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Come for a cleansing to Calvary's tide;
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood.
Sin-stains are lost in its life-giving flow;
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Would you do service for Jesus your King?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Would you live daily His praises to sing?
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Connie Carlisle Polley, 2024
ConnieCarlislePolley.com
NonnyDay.com



MAUNDY THURSDAY

John 13:1-18:13

Today we celebrate the last day before Good Friday. The Thursday before Easter is Maundy Thursday. Maundy being short for Mandatum (Latin) for Christ's mandate or command.

We find Jesus and the disciples in the upper room. The Passover meal has already begun. *"Then Jesus got up from the table, took off His robe, wrapped a towel around His waist, and poured water into a basin. Then He began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel He had around him."* John 13:4-5 (NLT) When He had finished washing their feet, He put on his clothes and returned to His place. *"Do you understand what I have done for you? He asked them. You call me Teacher and Lord and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."* John 13:12-15 (NIV). Jesus graciously shows us what true service and humility looks like and tells us to do likewise.

After Jesus had predicted His betrayal by Judas Iscariot and He predicted the denial of His disciple Peter, Jesus gave us a new mandate, a new command. *"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other, just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."* John 13:34-35 (NLT) Here too is the Maundy, the mandate, the new commandment. Jesus wasn't just telling us about love. He was telling us and showing us what love looks like. Jesus did this through His life and His actions. This is evident throughout scripture. He wasn't just the embodiment of love; He was and still is – Love.

Jesus departed the meal and made His way to the Mount of Olives in Gethsemane in the Kidron Valley, just northeast of Jerusalem to pray for three hours. *"He walked away from His disciples about a stone's throw and knelt down and prayed. 'Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.' Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened Him. He prayed more fervently, and He was in such agony of spirit that His sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood."* Luke 22:41-44 (NLT). Jesus models through His extreme agony His sacrificial love for the Father and obedience even to death. He traded His will for that of the Father. Jesus continued to teach the disciples throughout the night up until His arrest.

Maundy Thursday came to an end, and Good Friday was beginning.

Danny Hass



Good Friday Morning, March 29, 2024

THE HEART OF GOD

Matthew 27:45-54; John 19:1-24

There are certain instances in each of our lives that are so momentous that they call us to something greater and change us in a sure way that we are never the same afterward. Two such moments for me are the day that I got married and the birth of my children. I will never forget the feeling of falling in love with my wife, being baffled when I found out that she dipped her steak in ketchup, or seeing the pure joy that fills up in her eyes when I would do something unexpected, but romantic. In the days leading up to our wedding, I took time to meditate on the vows that I was about to take and what it truly meant to be a husband. I even wrestled with the idea of what if I didn't give her the life that she deserves, what if I failed financially or in some other aspect; however, when the day came, I looked into her eyes and saw her overwhelming joy and willingness to trust me as her husband. I knew at that moment that I would go to the end of the world and back for her, that I would never abandon or forsake her; and in that moment that we became one I was changed forever.

As much as our wedding day changed me and my life, another momentous day had already happened on November 30, 2010, when I held my newborn son in my arms for the first time. At that moment my heart could have hopped right out of my chest as I completely gave it over to him. My life was no longer about me, it was about him and to the point that I would lay down my life for him. The Lord has blessed me with three children and at the birth of each of my children, this same feeling washes back over me.

As I read the Bible, I often call upon these deep intimate feelings of my life and try to apply them to how God loves and feels about us. As it is written, we are made in God's image and likeness and at the core of that, I can't help but believe that our most raw feelings of love and longing to do for someone other than ourselves is a part of the likeness in which God made us. Through the Bible, God calls us to be His children; He refers to us as a bride for which He is preparing a place for; and He is continuously displaying His unchanging love for us. Beginning in Genesis 3:15 when God promises us that salvation for fall into sin will come ultimately through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and finishing at the crucifixion in which God the Father was pleased to send the heart of Heaven, Jesus Christ, to take on not only all the sin of the world, but to take on the full wrath of God so that we might become the righteousness of God.

It breaks my heart each time I read of the death of Jesus, and it brings a living fire inside me when I read of His resurrection. So much could be said regarding the salvation that we have been given through the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior, but I believe that when we read chapters of the Bible such as John 19 and Matthew 27, it should be a call to action on our part to truly realize how much the Lord loves us. It should be a call to repentance, not just a small prayer or half-felt *I'm sorry God*, but should call us to wholeheartedly turn away from our sins and the wickedness of this world and chase after the heart of the Lord with all our mind, soul, and strength.

Joseph Schult



HOW DO WE GET TO HEAVEN?

John 3:16

On this black Friday many years ago, it went down as the saddest day in history. Today is the day that Jesus gave up His life for us as most of us know. We can become clean from our sins.

When we die, we either go to heaven or hell. But how do we get to heaven? During this Holy Week we have been approaching the crucifixion. We know Jesus gave His life up for us that one day we can go to heaven. When I was six years old, I became a Christian. I understood what it meant to be a Christian and where I was to go when I die. As a 14-year-old, I still know that reality. This is sadly not the case for many people out there. This is the is one of the most important things to know, and it's actually very simple.

First you gotta understand who God is, by reading the Bible, praying, and building a relationship with Him; it's like a friendship. By doing this you are learning, and you'll never stop doing that till the day you pass. John 14:6-7 says, *"Jesus answered, 'I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father, as well. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.'"* Jesus already answered us; we only get to God through Jesus.

We get to heaven through Jesus by becoming a Christian. As you get to know God, you will likely get a conviction to become a Christian by committing your life to Him. That might not be true for everyone, but it was for me. God will call you and you will have your heart open to answer the calling. By then accepting His calling, you will become a Christian. That is how you get to heaven. It is really that simple. Then the exciting journey begins. Being a Christian is even more thrilling because then you get to go tell people about God and show them what He has done in your life. You can show them the way to salvation; and that's what it's all about. Jesus saved you so that one day you will be able to see God's kingdom.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him, shall not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Emma Towles



Saturday Morning, March 30, 2024

SILENT SATURDAY

Luke 23:50-56; Matthew 27:62-66

Scripture does not tell us very much about what happened on Saturday of Holy Week, that Sabbath Day in between Jesus' death and His resurrection. But what it does reveal is a stark contrast between the actions of those who followed Jesus and those who had Jesus crucified. I find it interesting that those who followed Jesus took great care to properly care for Jesus' body to the best of their ability and abided by the Jewish law. But the Pharisees, the keepers of the law, disregarded it in order to protect themselves from any further threats to their power.

For the Jews, each day ended and the next began at sundown, not at the stroke of midnight. Therefore, the Sabbath Day began at sundown on Good Friday. According to Jewish Law, there were strict rules about not doing any kind of work on the Sabbath, which explains the sense of urgency that Joseph of Arimathea appears to have in taking care of Jesus' body. He and the women who observed him (*see Luke 23:55*) made sure Jesus had a proper burial while still observing the Sabbath. In contrast, the chief priests and Pharisees, "the next day, the one after Preparation Day (Matthew 27:62)," broke the Sabbath law by approaching Pilate (a Gentile), asking for the means to make sure Jesus' followers had no way to further 'deceive' the people. With Pilate's permission they proceeded to do the work of sealing the tomb and setting a Roman guard. They did this on the Sabbath when, according to their own law, they were not to do any work.

These were the same people who accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath by healing people on the Sabbath. How ironic! What hypocrites! At least that's the thinking that my human nature defaults to first. But God's Word and the Holy Spirit remind me how often I am like those Pharisees. Have I acted in ways that appear holy on the outside, but deep inside I am just trying to impress? Have I ever tried to remove the speck out of someone's eye when there is a log in my own? Have I ever prayed like the Pharisee did to himself saying, "Thank you, Lord, that I am not like that sinful tax collector over there. I follow the rules!" (*see Luke 18:9-14*) A wise person once told me that it is easy to spot a particular sin in others when that same sin is rearing its ugly head in your own life.

On this Silent Saturday between Crucifixion and Resurrection, let us take time to think and pray, confessing our sin and asking the Lord to help us see with His eyes of love. He died for all, even our enemies, even the chief priests and Pharisees who thought they were doing God's work by sending Jesus to the cross. Another irony because they were unknowingly executing the plan of salvation God laid out in Scripture to the tee.

Lord, forgive us when we see others as less than we are. Give us eyes to see all people as You see them. Help us to love and sacrifice as you have. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Debbie Gorbandt



ARE YOU PREPARED?

Matthew 27:62-65 NIV

The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' 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."

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."

Luke 23:56 NIV

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

Preparation Day...in the Jewish culture of the time, it was the day before their Sabbath. Their Sabbath being Saturday, it was a synonym for Friday. As the Fourth Commandment instructed no work be performed on the Sabbath, Friday was spent cooking, washing, cleaning, laying in extra food in the animal stalls, so nothing that could be considered work would happen on the Sabbath.

Jesus Christ was crucified on preparation day. Friday. What came to be commemorated in modern times as Good Friday.

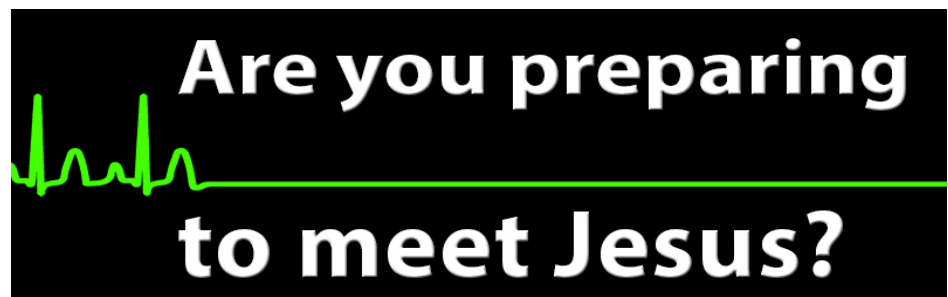
The women who accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem followed the law. After Jesus was laid in the tomb, they went home to prepare burial spices, but were unable to anoint Jesus in the tomb because the Sabbath - beginning at sundown - arrived. Anointing would have to wait. The Priests and Pharisees, however, didn't worry as much about the Sabbath. They went to Pilate on their Sabbath and asked him to make secure the tomb, which was done.

Of course, we know what the women found when the day after Sabbath they went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. The tomb was open, and Jesus had arisen!

Jesus, who had been mocked, spit upon, despised, beaten, and nailed to a cross to die is alive! His death on the cross and resurrection means forgiveness and eternal life to you and me.

My question to you is "are YOU prepared?" Have you accepted the unspeakable gift God has for you? Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? I have. And it is my prayer that when the roll is called up yonder...I'll see you there too!

Phil Shewmaker



Easter Sunday Morning, March 31, 2024

***CELEBRATE THE VICTORIES**

It's Sunday Morning and the two Marys have just seen the Angel at the tomb. The news is out, and Jesus is "*Risen, just as He said*" (Matthew 28:6).

Time to celebrate!! And celebrate we should. It's Sunday morning, Christ is risen, and it is a new day in the world. But if you think about it, there are a few things that have come together to make this final victory of the battle for life that took place in the very domain of Satan. Jesus won, the fight for life is over, and the promise is fulfilled.

But there are other victories involved in the celebration:

One is the victory of obedience that happened in the Garden at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36). It is not well understood that obedience is the most visible and sincere evidence of Love. Think about it, what better way to show your respect and appreciation than to just do what is asked of you by a parent? Just do what is asked. No refusal, no debate, no hesitation, just a joyful, loving, act as requested.

Two is the victory of endurance in the time between Jesus telling the Father, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Matthew 26:39). It was truly a victory enduring the incredible suffering of the ensuing torture, between the Garden and the Cross.

Three was the victory of completion. Three days of battle for the very life of the world. And the victories are complete!!

As we worship this Easter Sunday morning, definitely focus on celebrating the wonderful victory of a "Risen" Savior who conquered death and has earned the right to offer us the gift of life, if we will only accept the offer from a loving God who wants "ye, who are weary" to "come home". (Hymn: "Softly and Tenderly")

But also remember the other victories that make the entire Easter Sunday morning celebration complete.

Because the entire point is: CHRIST IS RISEN, INDEED!!!!!!!

Rick Pryor † Deceased February 3, 2024

*Rick wrote this for last year's devotional book. We celebrated His life yesterday in a Memorial Service. Even though we miss him greatly on this earth, we rejoice with Rick and those other Christians who have gone home and are truly celebrating victory in Jesus!



WALKING WITH POWER

Luke 24:13-35

Two friends were on a powerwalk, only they didn't know it. It was the evening of the Sunday on which Jesus rose from the dead, and they were on their way from Jerusalem to a little town not far from there called Emmaus.

The two friends were followers of Jesus. They had heard Him preach, watched Him heal the sick and drive out demons. They had also watched Him die. They weren't two of the twelve men closest to Jesus, but they had spent a lot of time with Him and had come to believe He was a true prophet of God, and the one through whom God would redeem Israel.

Because their hearts were heavy, the pace of the walk was slow. It was also slow because they were trying to sort out the strange events of the day. That morning some of the women in their group had gone to the tomb where Jesus was buried and had seen an angel. The angel told them Jesus was alive! How could that be, and what did it mean?

As they went along a stranger joined them. He asked them what they were talking about, and after they told him, he proceeded to explain the whole Biblical plan of salvation to them starting with Genesis. It all began to make sense to them, and the pace of the walk quickened as they soaked up what the stranger had to say.

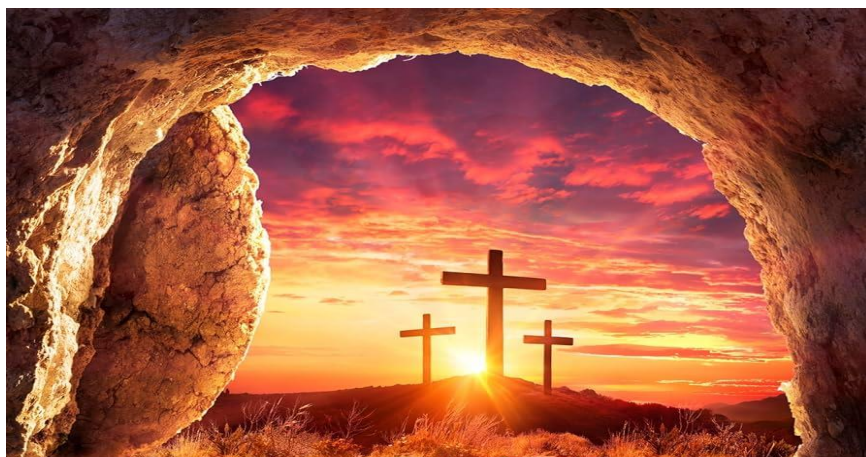
The two men got where they were going sooner than they expected. It was late in the day, so they asked the stranger to stay for a meal. After they sat down together the stranger picked up a loaf of bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave them some of it. In that moment they realized the stranger was Jesus, and instantly He vanished.

The two friends had walked with power that evening, but the power didn't come from walking faster. It came from who walked with them.

The wonderful news that Jesus is alive --- and alive forevermore --- means that He can walk with us, too. Anytime, anywhere, when we least expect it, but always when we need Him the most, we can turn and find Jesus walking along with us: explaining this or that, or sitting down at our table with us at the end of our day.

The power of the cross is Jesus risen from the dead. On this Easter evening, let's remember that Jesus still walks with His friends; and let's be the kind of friends who enjoy His company.

Karen Purnell





Happy Easter