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Devotional **2022**

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

WHAT IS LENT ?

The word “Lent” comes from the Old English word “lengten,” which simply means “spring”—when the days lengthen and new life springs forth. It is a time in which we anticipate the victory of the light and life of Christ over the darkness of sin and death. It is, to borrow a phrase from C.S. Lewis, a season of a kind of “happiness and wonder that makes you serious.” It is our prayer that as you journey with us from Ash Wednesday to Easter, you would be reminded of the reality of our broken humanity, but as days grow brighter, you would experience with greater abundance the reality of God’s redeeming grace. And so, just as we carefully prepare for big events in our personal lives, such as a wedding or commencement, Lent invites us to make our hearts ready for remembering Jesus’ death and resurrection.

This devotional is originally created and compiled by Redeemer Presbyterian Church staff as daily content sent to congregants during the 40 Days of Lent. Daily readings begin in Genesis and journey through the entire Scriptures, from the law to the prophets to the New Testament, showing that all Scripture is about Jesus and culminates in his life, death and resurrection.

As you make this annual Lent pilgrimage, may these daily readings provide timely refreshment and renewed hope.

<https://gospelinlife.com/lent-devotional>

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 1

THE DUST

READ: GENESIS 3:14-19

When we come to Genesis 3, we encounter a God who curses! He responds to Adam and Eve's disobedience and the serpent's treachery decisively. With the pronouncement of each curse and judgment, there is an undoing or reversal of God's gracious creative works. Adam, who was created from the dust, is now destined to return back to it. Eve, who was created out of Adam, has now become dominated by him. The serpent, who was more crafty than any of the wild animals, is now humiliated, groveling on its belly, eating dust. In this chapter we see that sin has affected all of creation.

This text speaks to our desire to overlook our sins. God does not respond lightly to sin. Death entered the world with sin, and all manner of sorrow, suffering and despair. But the worst of the curse would fall upon a different man many millennia later as Paul said in Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" Jesus would take upon himself a curse in order to redeem humanity's status.

PRAYER

Dear Father, I know you cannot take lightly the sins that I commit because you are a God of holiness who loves justice and does not allow evil to go unpunished. But I thank you for your wisdom and mercy in devising a plan that would allow the curse that was rightfully mine to fall upon your Son. In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 2

THE BOW

READ: GENESIS 9:8-17

The Lenten season has historically been a time of solemn reflection on the human condition. Ash Wednesday reminded us that human life is fragile—for dust we are, and to dust we shall return.

But we learn quickly that the human condition is marked not merely by fragility, but by depravity. In fact, by the time of Noah, human corruption and violence had become so pervasive that God was said to be grieved to his heart and filled with regret. That the all-powerful God could be portrayed as regretting the creation of man powerfully conveys the sinfulness of sin.

Yet what pierces is that the Bible is not speaking about the human heart abstractly. No, it is speaking specifically about my heart, the sinfulness of my sin and, indeed, the divine regret as to how I have lived.

Yet, in the midst of the gloom and in the aftermath of the storm of God's judgment, we see hope shine through. Noah looks up and sees against the gray clouds the dazzling glory of the rainbow emerging where sun and storm meet. And there in the clouds he sees the bow of God's wrath laid aside in the promise of peace.

And that great promise is that no matter how dark our sin might grow, God will not turn his face against us again. Instead, God would sooner point the bow of his wrath upward, towards heaven, at his own Son, than unleash his wrath upon us again. And on the cross, where the sun of God's love and the storm of God's wrath would meet again, Jesus would die in darkness so that the brilliance of the glory of God's saving plan would shine forth into our hearts. All this without a hint of divine regret.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to share your sorrow and grief at our sin. During this season, grant us the courage to look honestly into the gloom of our sin so that we might see anew the brilliance of your glorious promise and grace to us in Christ. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 3

THE DARKNESS

READ: GENESIS 15:7-12, 17-21

Genesis 15 presents one of the most remarkable if not macabre episodes in the life of Abraham. For a nomad, the promise of a land to possess would have been both comforting as well as difficult to believe, so it is only natural that Abraham would respond to God's promise (v. 7: "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess") with a request for assurance (v. 8: "How am I to know that I shall possess it?"). What is surprising is not the request, but the sign that God provides.

Animals are brought before God, split in two, and then arrayed before him. The writer makes clear that as the sun goes down, Abram does not merely fall asleep, but experiences a "dreadful and great darkness." In the thick darkness, a smoking fire pot and flaming torch pass between the pieces and the episode ends with the statement, "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram" (v. 18).

What is going on?!? In the Ancient Near East, when parties entered a covenant it was often dramatized by a sacrifice or some other enactment of the penalty that would fall on the party who did not keep up their end of the bargain. This signified that both parties were willing to honor the arrangement at the possible expense of their lives — their fate would be the same as that of the animals. In the darkness Abraham witnesses God (represented as a fire pot and torch) passing through the pieces, and yet he himself is not required to!

The gospel writers note that when Jesus died, darkness fell over the land, and in that moment, we see the sacrifice God made in order to honor his promises to us. It is a reminder that he went to the grave to give us the skies, became alienated to give us a home, and experienced deep darkness to bring us into the light. In fact, this vision is what comforted Abraham's fear in Genesis 15:1 ("Fear not, Abram, I am your shield."). Is this your comfort too?

PRAYER

Father, remind me that because Jesus experienced the darkness, you have shown me your light; because he experienced alienation, you have promised me a home; because he experienced the grave, you have given me the skies. And help me not to be afraid, because you are my shield and very great reward. In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 4

THE TEST

READ: GENESIS 22:1-14

This is one of the most well known and difficult passages in the Bible. Abraham is introduced in Genesis 12 as the one through whom “all the peoples on the earth” will be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). And so as we arrive at the scene above we find that what started as God’s call to Abraham to leave his home has now reached a dramatic climax. God has now included in that call the ultimate sacrifice and test of Abraham’s faith — the willingness to sacrifice his only son. The pain and poignancy of this moment is heightened by the fact that Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had waited years without seeing the fulfillment of God’s promise of a son. God’s promise that a nation would come through their family seemed impossible to Abraham and Sarah, given their inability to have a child.

So now having answered their prayers and given them a son, God has asked Abraham to do something that seems completely cruel and irrational. How will God create a people through the sacrifice of Abraham’s

only heir? How will this death lead to the blessings promised in Genesis 12? The answer comes as we move from the events of Abraham’s life to the events of the life of Jesus

As you reflect on this story of faith and sacrifice in light of this season leading up to Holy Week, take the time to reflect on the way it foreshadows the faith and sacrifice of Jesus. Abraham’s declaration that God himself will provide the lamb (Genesis 22:8) reminds us of God’s gift of the Lamb to save the world (Mark 10:45; John 1:29, 36). God’s provision of the ram on Mount Moriah foreshadows his sacrifice of his only son, Jesus Christ—the true Lamb without blemish who died in our place on the cross. Like Isaac, Christ is the lamb led to the slaughter, yet unlike Isaac, Jesus didn’t open his mouth. Just as Isaac carried his own wood for the altar, Christ carried his own wooden cross (John 19:17). Go back and re-read the passage with eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith (Hebrews 12:2).

PRAYER

Holy Father, I thank and praise you for sending your only Son into the world. Give me eyes to see the beauty and perfection of Jesus, the spotless Lamb who willingly sacrificed himself so that I might receive forgiveness and new life. And in light of your grace may I live a life of faith, trusting in your goodness and laying down my life for others. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

Day 5

THE LION

READ: GENESIS 49:8-12

On his deathbed Jacob prophesied the future of each of his twelve children, foreseeing their future ascendancy or demise, prosperity or impoverishment. For some, the future would be full of violence and heartache. But for others, theirs would be a future of prominence and victory.

For Judah, the fourth among Jacob's sons, his was a future of distinction. He would be held in esteem by his brothers (v. 8, "your brothers shall praise you") and receive tribute from all nations (v. 10, "to him shall be the obedience of the peoples"). His reign would be enduring and unchallenged (v. 10, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah") and a time of overwhelming abundance. Because grapevines require attention and care, wine was a luxury for nomadic people in the ancient world. Yet under the reign of Judah, there would be such an abundance of vines that one could tie his donkey to one without fear that it would be

damaged, wash his garments in wine without depleting the supply, and even drink until his eyes took on the color of wine itself (vv. 11-12). Judah's reign would be a glorious one indeed and it is no wonder that Judah himself would be called a lion (v. 9).

In Revelation 5, John has a vision of the enthroned Lion of Judah, and yet this vision is juxtaposed with a Lamb who was slain. Why? The Gospels show us that Jesus demonstrates his greatest power through weakness, his lordship through service, and his sovereign reign through self-sacrifice. In other words, Jesus was slain because he was the Lion and enthroned because he is the Lamb. In your moments of brokenness, heartache and hardship, do you see that Jesus Christ experienced brokenness for you so that you might experience the abundance of his reign over your life?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we are amazed that you reign not through a demonstration of power, but of service; not through exaltation, but humiliation; not through might, but sacrifice. Help me to see that you were the Lion who was slain like a lamb, so that in my humiliation I might experience your exaltation. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 6

THE PASSOVER

READ: EXODUS 12:1-13

The account of the Passover with which Israel begins its exit out of Egypt and slavery is in many ways the central story of the Old Testament. It is meant to speak profoundly to God's people. On the one hand, it is a reminder that unless God intervenes and covers us, we are in the same condition as everyone else: part of a rebel creation that stands under God's judgment and condemnation. That is always part of our identity as human beings and without it we cannot walk in humility either before God or others.

On the other hand, it is a reminder that the primary thing God wants from us is trust. He wants us to trust that he is merciful and that he cares for us. He wants us to trust that he desires to save and not condemn us. That is why he became incarnate in the person of Jesus. And he wants our lives to issue in the acts of obedience that manifest our trust in him – whether that is putting blood on our doorposts and eating the Passover meal as was the case for the Israelites, or remembering Jesus' death which saved us when we celebrate the Lord's Supper and then living lives of forgiveness and generosity. Is your life being characterized by this kind of humility and trust? If not, why not?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, grant me to so deeply feel my need for your mercy and to know your provision of it that humility and obedient trust might be profoundly manifest in my life. In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 7

THE PRAYER

READ: 1 SAMUEL 2:1-10

Within these ten verses there are two stories. The first is Hannah's, a barren woman who desired to have a child and a life with meaning and who was rescued from herself by God's mercy. The second is a story of the people of God traveling each year to "worship and sacrifice to the Lord at Shiloh." These two narratives intertwine in 1 Samuel 1 and in the midst of the two accounts we see what is known as "Hannah's prayer."

One condition of a man or woman that demonstrates a broken world (particularly in ancient cultures) was that of being "barren". The pressures to produce an heir and insure an inheritance in Israel were so tremendous that "barrenness" might describe not only the physical but also the spiritual and social condition of someone's affliction. After years of this, Hannah recognized that her grief had become sin and her mourning had become an "affliction" (1 Samuel 1:11), so at Shiloh she

sacrificed that which enslaved her to the Lord. Upon repenting, she vowed that if she were ever to have a child, she would dedicate him to the Lord—rather than using her child as proof of her worth to those who had been judging her. She soon conceived and later returned with her son, who she gave as an apprentice to Eli the priest. This boy was Samuel, the first of the great Old Testament prophets.

If any parent thought their child was precious, it was Hannah. Still, she must have known her role in his life was a temporary one. When we see Hannah "exult in the Lord" from her heart, and "find strength" in him (v. 1), she is being restored by the one thing permanent and true in the world (v. 2). Hannah understood then that behind every condition, physical or spiritual, the Lord's creative power is at work, and not hers. (vv. 6-8). She rejoiced in that knowledge and was liberated.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, though we may not all desire the same things that Hannah desired, we too suffer from trying to make temporary and fleeting things in life permanent. Help us to recognize and repent of our sin and put our strength in the Rock, your son, Jesus Christ. In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 8

THE PRIEST

READ: 1 SAMUEL 2:27-36

Do you want the wrongs of this world to be righted? In this text, we learn in v. 28 that the role of priests was 1) “to go up to my altar”—they should have been going before God on behalf of the people to intercede and plead for them, 2) “to burn incense”—which was a religious duty and ritual that honored God (Leviticus 16:13), and 3) “to wear the ephod”—which would mark the priests as those who counseled the people with wisdom from God. In v. 29, we see that Eli’s sons, who were the priests at the time—the very ones who should have been caring for the people—were in fact “fattening” themselves on the labor of others wrongfully. Not only was this injustice, but the very people who should have been caring for others were in fact harming them. How would God right these wrongs

When we look at our own lives and the lives of those around us, we often ask the same question. How will God right the wrongs of the world? It becomes

a traumatic question when we realize that we are guilty of wronging others as well. The very people we know we should love and serve are often the victims of our selfish focusing on our own interests and priorities.

We are told God does see this injustice and that he must stop it (vv. 30-31) as well as administer just consequences to the offending parties (v. 34). We need the wrongs to be stopped, but we also need someone to go before God and plead for us, as we too are offenders. Who will this be? Verse 35 says, “And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest ... my anointed forever.” The Hebrew word for “faithful” also means “enduring,” so this priesthood will last forever, but the fact that he is “my anointed forever” means my “king” in this context. Who is both a faithful and enduring priest who is also the king forever? Only one person history could be both—Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, enduring great high priest and king, you have opened a way for us to approach you even though we are often guilty in our thoughts, words and deeds. Give us your grace that restores, preserves, leads, guards and supplies our hope. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

Day 9

THE HOUSE

READ: 2 SAMUEL 7:1-5, 11-17

King David, finally settled in his cedar home, desired a house for the ark of God. However, the word of the Lord came to Nathan, telling David that instead of allowing him to build a temple, the Lord would establish the House of David, culminating in one who would “sit on the throne forever.”

Obviously God is not simply promising that he will ensure the continuation of David’s lineage as a sort of memorial to him — the common belief of many religions that we only live on in our descendants. He is promising to raise up his own Son from among the descendants of David, one who will bear our stripes and our iniquity.

How like God this is! We offer to him some grandiose plan of how we plan to honor him, and he counters with a completely counterintuitive plan, one in which he is glorified by becoming both king and substitute.

Thankfully, God reads our hearts and edits our plans and our prayers so that they are far more than we would have dared to ask or imagine. Pray, pray and pray, to the limit of your vision and faith, and then be prepared for God to do something even better.

PRAYER

O Lord, you are mighty and faithful. Let your righteousness and justice, steadfast love and faithfulness go before us. Allow us to walk in the light of your face and to exult your name all the day. Remind us of your covenant with David, how you built your throne for all generations with the wood of the cross. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

Day 10

THE KING

READ: PSALM 110

People think of Jesus in many ways. Perhaps two of the most common is that he is a wise teacher or a great example. But this passage, which is the most cited in the New Testament, tells us of two of Jesus' roles — priest and king.

The king in Psalm 110 is unequalled in power and might. He sits at God's right hand in the place of highest authority. He is guaranteed victory over his adversaries and he rules his people in such a way that they freely follow him. He crushes opposing kings and executes judgment among the nations. He is exalted and has sure victory over all his enemies.

When Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, God restored him to his original place at his

right hand. His resurrection was both a vindication of his status as the Son of God and his enthronement as the rightful king over creation. He defeated the power of sin and death and he presently reigns as king. This means that Jesus has the power and authority to protect us from all evil and wickedness and that he deserves our complete allegiance and loyalty.

This psalm also tells us that Jesus is a priestly king. Priests offer sacrifices and prayers on behalf of their people. But Jesus is a permanent priest in the order of Melchizedek, who was greater than all other priests. Jesus offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sin and he continually intercedes for us. He clothes us in holy garments, so that through him, we can draw near to God.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you have raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at your right hand, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. Help us to trust in him daily as our priest and king. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 11

THE SON

READ: PSALM 2

Lent is a season of repentance and humility, a time where we are called to consider our human sin and frailty in light of the splendor and perfection of God our King. Psalm 2 is the first of many so-called “royal Psalms,” focusing on God’s kingly character. The psalm opens with a question that answers itself, establishing rebellion and the throwing off of God’s yoke as the desire of the nations and kings who conspire against the true King.

The reaction of “He who sits in the heavens” is scornful laughter, highlighting the ridicule of one who will not be mocked. The reaction is not only derision, but action. The Lord refers to his Son, the real and true king, who will come and accomplish everything that was originally expected from David and his entire lineage. All is his and his reign over all false kings and nations

betrays the attitude of rebels as not only foolish, but dangerous. In a jarring and ironic poetic image, the “potter” (Isaiah 45:9) will smash their lives like broken pottery, which becomes trampled underfoot and ultimately insignificant — trash on the ground.

While this psalm is sobering in its judgment, it also offers great hope. It points forward to the true divine Son who came to be the final and only truly righteous king, the one who obeyed his Father perfectly and broke the yoke of sin to set us free. Because Christ accomplished his mission on earth, he could definitively say: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). He is the one the scriptures call “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” (Hebrews 1:3).

PRAYER

Our King and Father, where you are there is majesty and perfection. Thank you for giving us your Son, who reflects your glory and intercedes for us, advocates for us, and sends us the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 12

THE STONE

READ: PSALM 118:22-24

In the parable of the tenants, the owner of a vineyard leases his property to others and travels abroad. While away, he sends his servants to collect his share of the fruit from the land, but the tenants beat his servants and then kill them. Finally, he sends his son to collect the fruit, reasoning, “They will respect my son” (Mark 12:6). But he is wrong. They kill his son too.

Jesus explained what the parable meant by quoting Psalm 118: “Have you not read this Scripture: ‘This stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” (Mark 12:10-11, cf. Matthew 21:42). In other words, God is the owner of the vineyard. The tenants are his people. They were supposed to give him the fruit of their lives through

worship and obedience. But they rejected his prophets and messengers. Finally, he sent his Son. But they rejected him too. In rebellion, they would not respect or honor him as the Son of God. Instead, they killed him.

Yet Jesus was not swept away by a storm of angry and uncontrolled men. His rejection was according to the intentional plan of God — “the Lord’s doing.” This is “marvelous in our eyes” because the death of Christ defeated death itself. We rejoice because God picked up Jesus from the grave and made him the cornerstone of salvation for everyone who believes. In him, therefore, we will live and never die (John. 11:25-27).

By The Park Forum (Bethany Jenkins)

PRAYER

Lord, you work everything according to your good will. Although Christ’s death seemed like defeat, you vindicated him by raising him from the dead. In him, therefore, we sing, “We shall not die, but we shall live” (Psalm 118:17). He is our salvation. It is marvelous in our eyes. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 13

THE SCORN

READ: PSALM 69:1-12

David is drowning in his troubles (vv. 1-3). He is crying out in solitary agony, cast aside by his friends and family (v. 4) and set upon by his foes (v. 8). His reputation is under attack. The champion whose name was once celebrated in the streets is now being mocked in the taverns (v. 12). Israel's savior is crying for salvation and he hears no reply (v. 3).

The pain we feel when our reputation is under attack is uniquely excruciating. No matter whether we come from cultural backgrounds that prize the family name or are individualists who seek to make a name for ourselves, that name is our resumé. Kill it and we are in danger of a full-blown identity crisis. How are we tempted to respond when it is our reputation that is being assaulted? Do we cover up our flaws? Do we succumb to despair? Do we drive ourselves (and others) crazy in a hopeless quest for perfection? David is on a different track.

Even in his distress, David's mind is not on himself. He is not preoccupied with his own honor. His zeal is for the Lord's house. This is what consumes him (v. 9). Honestly confessing his faults, he prays there would be no collateral damage from his own folly that would defame the God of Israel or those who look to him (vv. 5-6). David makes his appeal, boldly staking his claim upon the steadfast love and faithfulness of his just and omniscient Lord (v. 13). In short, he locates himself in God's own reputation.

Many years later, the one called the Son of David entered the temple in Jerusalem at Passover, driving out the merchants and money-changers. His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house has consumed me" (John 2:17). This confrontation sparked the events that would culminate in the greatest loss of dignity imaginable. The creator of the universe, humiliated as a criminal on a cross, prayed for his enemies, offering them all the benefits of his good name. In Jesus, we inherit an eternal reputation that can never be tarnished.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of God, we confess that we have sought too much to make a name for ourselves, and have considered too little the name you have given us. You, whose name is above all names, made yourself of no reputation. You humbled yourself, taking the form of a servant, and endured the violent scorn of those to whom you offered your title. Through the ultimate exchange, you have written your name on our foreheads, and written our names, indelibly, in your Book of Life. Give us the wisdom and faith necessary to humbly receive your exaltation. Teach us by the Spirit and the word to grow together into that name, and thereby to begin to reflect the traits associated with it. For your kingdom, by your power, for your glory, Amen.

Day 14

THE APPEAL

READ: PSALM 109:21-31

In a world that is broken, the psalmist appeals to God to deal with his false accusers. The idea of such a plea (“May my accusers be clothed with dishonor”) can be uncomfortable to those of us who are not exposed to the injustices of war, genocide and sex trafficking as others throughout the world are. And yet, at some point we have all chosen to repay evil for evil. But instead of addressing injustice on his own, the psalmist takes this injustice to God and appeals to him to act on his behalf. He chooses to allow a just and holy God to deal with those who have wronged him instead of seeking retribution himself.

If God were only forgiving but not just, there would be nowhere for us to go when we are sinned against. But God’s holiness will not tolerate injustice. As comforting as that sounds at first, we also are unjust, so unless there is some remedy for us, we will be judged with the same judgment as our oppressors. The only reason the psalmist (or we) can appeal to God is because Christ has already spoken on our behalf. When Christ cried out to God from the cross, he was rejected and scorned because he was taking the place of a sinful humanity. Now we can appeal to God because he looks at us through the sinless Christ who spoke on our behalf.

PRAYER

God, our Father, we praise you for sending Christ to cover our own acts of injustice towards you so that we can have a relationship with you, who are perfect in holiness. We thank you that you listen to our appeals when we have been wronged and that you will hear us in your compassion and mercy. Help us to bring our pleas to you instead of seeking our retribution when we are sinned against. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 15

THE FORSAKEN

READ: PSALM 22:1-11, 29-31

Psalm 22 is the first in a cluster of psalms that describe the suffering of someone which seems to echo the accounts in Isaiah of the suffering servant of the Lord. The first line of this psalm is likely to be familiar to us because Jesus cried out these exact words when he was being crucified on the cross. Yet this psalm was written by David, many generations before that. Whatever suffering of his own that David was recounting, he was also prophetically describing the redemptive suffering of Christ on the cross thousands of years later.

Jesus would have read this psalm many times in his life during worship at the temple. He no doubt had it memorized, for it to come so readily to his mind when he was on the cross.

Knowing what he was going to face, Jesus could have spent his life in fear or dread. Instead, he, like David before him, clung on to what he knew was true: God

is holy, God is his God, and God has been trustworthy throughout his life. And then, based on these truths, David appeals to God to stay close to him. Jesus knew, though, that the greatest suffering he would face would be abandonment by God, so that God would never abandon his people.

The psalm ends with praise and a note of triumph at the end: “for he has done it.” Jesus stayed to the end, bore our sins, and purchased our reconciliation with God. The messianic nature of the psalm becomes clear as David declares that past generations that have died as well as future generations not yet born will all come to know that his God is a God who delivers his people from suffering. After all because Jesus really was completely forsaken by God (for us!), we can be confident that we never will be abandoned, even if, in our suffering, God seems far away or silent when we call out.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we glorify you that because Jesus knew what it meant to be utterly separated from you, we will never have to experience that. Strengthen our faith to truly believe this especially when we think we have reasons to doubt it. In Christ's Name, Amen. Gracious God, we glorify you that because Jesus knew what it meant to be utterly separated from you, we will never have to experience that. Strengthen our faith to truly believe this especially when we think we have reasons to doubt it. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 16

THE CHAMPION

READ: PSALM 68: 7-18

Psalm 68:7-18 is a song of praise for the power of God as seen in salvation. There are three movements in this passage. Verses 7-10 describe the power of God in delivering the people of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. Then, verses 11-14 recount the power of God in the present to preserve his people as they lived amongst their enemies. Finally, verses 15-18 rejoice in the power of God that will safely bring his people home to the mountain of God.

These three movements describe the life of a Christian. We are those who have been brought out from the bondage of sin and death, are being preserved in our present journey, and have been given a promise that we shall arrive safely home. How are all these wonderful truths possible? These benefits are secured for us because of our champion.

Psalm 68:18 refers to one who ascended on high, leading forth a host of captives in his train. According to St. Paul, this passage is describing Christ Jesus,

particularly the victory accomplished by him through his resurrection from the dead (Ephesians 4:8).

In Hebrews 12:2 we are told to keep our eyes on Jesus, the archegos of our faith. Although it has been variously translated as “author” or “pioneer,” the best translation would be “champion.” In other words, Jesus went toe-to-toe with sin and death and won! He fought the battle on our behalf with death and secured the victory. Now, we can rest in him, knowing that the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead is also at work in us (1 Corinthians 6:14).

Do you find yourself anxious today, maybe fearful of what the future holds? Let the truth of these verses be a reminder that the power of God is present in your life because of the work of our champion. Because of him we have been brought out of bondage, are being preserved day by day, and through his grace we shall arrive safely home.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the power present in our lives because of our champion, Christ Jesus, and would ask that today we would find ourselves equipped with courage and joy because of him who ascended on high. In Christ's Name, Amen..

Day 17

THE NAME

READ: PSALM 72: 12-19

At the inauguration of a king of Israel, the Israelites would offer a prayer like Psalm 72. This prayer was not only an acknowledgement of the king, but also expressed a set of expectations and criteria for their leader. The king was viewed as the means by whom blessings came to the people from God and he was expected to uphold divine standards of justice and righteousness. Looking to the king for compassion and deliverance for the weak was not naive or wishful thinking, but a hope rooted in the character of the one who had anointed him. The God of Israel is by nature a rescuer and helper to the helpless, so must the king be. Prayers for the endurance of the king's name were based on that expectant hope, that the king would fulfill his commitment to the weak, so prayers for him meant safety and happiness for all.

From then until now, however, no king or leader has ever been able to fulfill these divine standards. Today many have lost faith in our leaders and distrust them all, while others spend their lives and money promoting this name or that name as the one who will finally save us. As followers of Christ, we can know that God has given us the One in whose name the needy, poor and helpless will truly find deliverance. We can know that in Christ, we have a king who is not only concerned with our needs and suffering, but compassionately identifies with them. We can know that in Christ, prayers for the flourishing of his name and reign will mean peace and blessing for all. Do you know that the King truly cares for you and all of your needs? Have you called on his name?

PRAYER

Almighty God, we praise you that your Son is the king we all want and need; that his compassion far outweighs anything we have ever seen. Help us to trust and obey you as our righteous king, and may your name be forever praised. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 18

THE CHOSEN SERVANT

READ: ISAIAH 42: 1-9

In previous chapters, God through the prophet Isaiah has been building a case; he says that though we pursue false idols, they continue to delude, enslave and ultimately fail us. In this passage, God's chosen "servant" is called to bring about justice and free those bound in "the dungeons" (v. 7). This was the lesson for Israel and remains the lesson for us today.

The nature of idolatry is that we worship and serve that which does not deserve it. At the heart of the Christian message, however, is that Jesus Christ "the Chosen One," who truly deserves worship, has served us first.

How can we know God's pleasure in such a way that we begin to replace the idols in our lives with true

worship? In verses 1-4, we are taught to "Behold" the one in whom God himself "delights." To behold means to both see and consider. Isaiah calls Israel to see and consider the Lord through his servant; appointed by God, and supported by his Spirit. In beholding this servant we are able to clearly distinguish what is real from what is counterfeit, a "metal image" full of "empty wind" (Isaiah 41) to a Spirit-filled servant who has come in the flesh (John 1). This servant, who has from afar long beheld us, knows that we are wounded and always on the verge of losing hope and will complete his task with the gentleness of a friend (v. 3). Behold the pleasure the Son found in serving the Father even unto death, for you. Then, "delight" in Jesus and be free.

PRAYER

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we praise you that the fullness of the Godhead is at work and in full view here in this passage to bring an end to idolatry and the suffering that comes from it. We thank you for your word that we may gaze into it and ponder how you covenant with your people. We delight in you for sending a servant-king, Jesus Christ, who truly has "set the captives free" (Luke 18:4). In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 19

THE SERVANT ISRAEL

READ: ISAIAH 49:1-6

How do we know God is good? Isaiah 49 begins as a letter sent out to all nations (v. 1, “the coastlands ... and peoples from afar”), but it is being read and heard by the people of Israel. Therefore, the writer is essentially talking to everybody. The Jews had been taken into exile and longed to be brought back and they wondered where that salvation would come from. Isaiah makes the wondrous claim that “the servant” (v. 3), who has been prepared for this very hour, will be the one who brings the people back, but the manner would not be through military might, but through the power of his mouth (v. 2). That is, what he says and does will bring real salvation, not just physical deliverance.

The twist comes in the fact that this mysterious servant is named Israel (v. 3)—and while he is a person, he is the ideal person who embodies all the characteristics

the nation of Israel should have had. For this text we need to remember that the nation of Israel was meant to have been a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12), a command they never fulfilled. Who will do so? This man would have to be perfect to be the ideal version of Israel, and then save not just the Jews—for God to be really glorified (v. 3), he will also have to be “a light to all nations” (v. 6).

We know God is good because he saw his own wayward people and all the rest of the world and brought them back into relationship with him (v. 5). How? Our translation says in v. 6, “that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth,” but the Hebrew grammar reads more plainly, “to be my salvation to the ends of the earth.” Jesus as the servant is not merely the means to God’s salvation but he is that salvation—through his death and life.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, suffering servant and Redeemer, you have brought us back into relationship with you by being our salvation, purchasing us with your life, ransoming us from certain death. Give us hearts of flesh, warmed by the truths of your goodness found in the certainty of your love for us through your death and resurrection. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

Day 20

THE SINLESS SERVANT

READ: ISAIAH 50:4-9

In these verses we observe the contrast between the obedient servant of the Lord and those who persecuted and abused him. Astonishingly, it is the obedient servant who is called to suffer on behalf of the disobedient people – to be struck, spat upon, and mocked. And yet, he “sets his face like flint” toward the road of suffering and will “not be put to shame.” He knows that his suffering is not in vain because by it his people shall be redeemed.

The writers of the New Testament recognized that the servant of the Lord, referenced in this passage, is none other than Jesus Christ. He “set his face” toward Jerusalem, knowing the pain that awaited him there (Luke 9:51). He was struck, mocked, and spat upon (Mark 15:19-20). He suffered, not because of his sin but

because of ours, and his life was marked by perfect obedience, even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-9).

Through all of this, Jesus remained the sinless servant (Hebrews 12:2). How was Jesus able to endure such treatment and yet be confident that ultimately he would not be put to shame? The answer, in a word, is joy: for “the joy set before him, he endured the cross.” The joy that motivated Jesus was the fact that by his suffering his people would be redeemed.

We too have a great joy set before us today. Certainly there is pain and suffering on our journey, but being united to Christ by faith, we will not be put to shame! Let us take up our cross and follow Christ, the sinless servant.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, our sinless servant. May this good news bring strength to us as we pursue joy in the midst of our pain and suffering. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 21

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

READ: ISAIAH 53:1-6

Jesus was extraordinary in many ways. But if you were to judge his life by the standards of the world, by most accounts he would be considered a failure. He was poor, rejected, and died a difficult and shameful death. In the ways that others pursue comfort, power, and recognition, he did not.

Even in his outward appearance, there was no indication whatsoever that he was the creator and sustainer of the universe. He had no beauty or majesty that would have caused others to envy him, even though he was the very source of all beauty. More than that, he was utterly rejected and despised, a man of sorrows, to the point that people turned away and

hid their faces from him. He was stricken, afflicted, pierced, chastised, crushed and suffered beyond all comprehension. All this and he was the most innocent and righteous person who ever lived.

Jesus went through all these things in order that we would never have to. He experienced sorrow and grief in a way that we ourselves could never have endured. He was punished for sin, though he himself never sinned. The last verse tells us that we are all like sheep—foolish, helpless and desiring to go our own way, but the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. Though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that we by his poverty might become rich.

PRAYER

Father, we marvel at the humility and compassion of your Son. It is only through his wounds that we are healed. Renew us daily in the joy of our salvation and help us to live in light of even greater things to come. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 22

THE WATERS

READ: ISAIAH 55:1-7

In these verses, the Holy One of Israel is crying out through Isaiah, pleading with his people on the eve of destruction to return to the true fountain of life. It is an emphatic call to come without barrier to the eternal spring of living waters. Verses 2 and 3 make clear that this water is the word of God. The invitation is to drink deeply: to receive the word, reason with it, delight in it, to listen to it like they had never listened before. “Listen diligently” (v. 2) is literally, “Listen-listen!” a call for undivided and sustained attention. Ultimately, this word is meant to save them (v. 3), transform them (v. 7), and make them a blessing to the entire world (v. 5). They are being called into communion with their compassionate God (v. 7). But they refuse to hear him (6:9).

Lent is a time for us to admit the same tendencies displayed by Isaiah’s audience. For reasons conscious and less conscious, we are prone to neglect God’s word, and ultimately, God himself. Given enough time apart from the Scriptures, a kind of spiritual amnesia sets in, where we forget the taste that is sweeter than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb (Psalm 19:10). Lent is an invitation to see Christ as the woman at the well came to see him — as the pure, limitless satisfaction for our thirsty souls. It is our invitation to return to that well and drink deeply. Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 4:14).

PRAYER

Gracious Lord, in compassion you call us. By your mercy, open our ears to hear your voice, and hearing you, to return. Remove the scales from our eyes and unveil for us the wonders of your word. Your glories are revealed there. Be our delight. Be our satisfaction. Awaken in us a new sense of expectancy, as those who put their trust in you will never be put to shame. Glorious LORD, we are yours. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 23

THE SPIRIT

READ: ISAIAH 61:1-3

In the last of our Isaiah texts we end with a hope-giving passage about Spirit-led transformation. The Lord's anointed, who has been described in previous chapters as both a king and a servant, has come to announce good news for the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives and the imprisoned. This anointed one is both a servant who is filled with compassion for those in need and also a king who has the power to enact this transformation.

It's hard not to read this passage without a sense of yearning, joy and hope. Our hearts are drawn to the hope that our mourning can turn into beauty, gladness, praise, righteousness and glory. Our lives are far different from the world of the exiled Jews, yet this passage speaks into the deep recesses of our disillusioned hearts. We resonate with the sense that we too are impoverished, brokenhearted, alienated

and trapped by prisons of our own making. We are searching for something or someone who can rescue us from the predicaments in which we often find ourselves because life is beyond our ability to control with our intelligence, money or sheer willpower. Who is this anointed one who leads us to believe that we are not alone, abandoned to our own pathetic and impotent devices?

Of all the Old Testament passages that he could have used to begin his public ministry, Jesus reads from this Isaiah passage and concludes with the audacious declaration, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). As you consider the things that lead you to feel alone and powerless, remember that the hope of transformation presented in Isaiah has been accomplished, and Jesus is the long-awaited fulfillment of the yearnings of our hearts.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you have accomplished through Christ, the anointed one, what I could never do in my own abilities. Yet, in the course of my day-to-day life I turn back to myself, instinctively putting my hope for change in almost everything but you. Help me to see more of the fullness of what Christ has accomplished so that I might place my hope in him and experience the greater healing, freedom and comfort that he graciously gives. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 24

THE BRANCH

READ: JEREMIAH 33:14-18

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that God's love and concern for us rise and fall according to how well we are doing in living the Christian life. After all, we ourselves frequently give and withdraw our love from others depending on whether they are living in a way that is pleasing to us. Thankfully, even though we are marked by inconsistency, God is marked by constancy.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, he reminds his people that they can count on his promises and that he will always be there for them. He promises his constancy and faithfulness: "David will never fail to have someone sit on the throne ... nor will the priests ever fail to have

someone offering sacrifices" (vv. 17-18). Ultimately, Jesus is the king who remains on the throne and who has offered himself as a sacrifice once and for all. Jesus is the righteous Branch who offers us his righteousness so that we never fear being rejected by God. Because of that we can bring our own failures and faithlessness to God. Jesus will not turn his back on us. Each day we can bring our repentance and know he will receive it. We can count on God giving us a fresh start because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We all need that fresh start each day. If you come to him asking for it, God will be faithful to give it to you.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I thank you that your mercies are new every morning and your faithfulness is great. Give me grace to repent today of those things which are displeasing to you, counting on the fact that you will never leave me nor forsake me as I seek to walk in your ways. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 25

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

READ: EZEKIEL 34:23-31

The image of the people of God as a flock of sheep occurs several times throughout the Bible. In the earlier part of Ezekiel 34, the current shepherds (rulers of Israel) are rebuked for their abuse of power (34: 1-22). The prophet describes a situation where they had grown fat and wealthy at the expense of the very people they were supposed to care for. We are told that because of that, God would bring judgment on them. The chapter changes in its focus as the warning turns into a promise for the future in the verses above. Not only will the Lord save his sheep, he will also appoint a king who, like David, will shepherd them in such a way as to bring lasting peace (v. 25). It was peace and rest which humanity lost through sin (Genesis 3:15; 4:8) and which prophets like Ezekiel had been pointing to ever since (Isaiah 9:6-7). This is where we lift our eyes to see Jesus, who is God's ideal shepherd-king and the opposite of the corrupt leadership described in the earlier part of the chapter.

The gospel writers tell us that Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind (Luke 4:18). It is Jesus who weeps over Jerusalem because they didn't know what would bring them peace (Luke 19:41). It is Jesus who lays down his life for his sheep so that we might have peace with God and one another. And it is Jesus who will one day bring everlasting peace to the world through his return (Revelation 21). In the meantime, there are seasons of disappointment and suffering that can sometimes make us lose hope that God will fulfill his promise. The injustice of the world around us can make us cynical. It is at those times that we must reflect on Jesus as our good shepherd and remember that because he laid down his life for his sheep, we will one day "dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for your love and care for your sheep. Thank you for laying down your life on the cross so that I might know your peace and be adopted into your family. During this season of reflection, in light of your love for me, help me to find ways to seek peace in my relationships and lay down my life for others. In Christ's Name, Amen

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 26

THE TREASURE OF THE NATIONS

READ: HAGGAI 2:6-9

The book of Haggai was written to those who had returned from Babylonian to rebuild the destroyed temple of God. It was an encouragement and a call to rebuild amidst rubble, hope despite desolation, and believe even during times of hardship and disappointment.

In verses 6 to 9, Haggai spoke of a time to come when the world would be shaken up as it had never been shaken before. Ironically, this was intended to be a comfort for people who were standing in rubble! While this may seem difficult to understand at first glance, the writer of Hebrews took comfort in the shaking of this world, as it “indicates the removal of things that are shaken ... in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain ... a kingdom” (Hebrews 12:26-28).

At the heart of Haggai’s declaration that all of creation (v. 6) and all nations (v. 7) would be shaken, there is the promise that “the treasures of all nations shall come in.” “Treasures” is a Hebrew word that can function as a singular or plural noun. In other words, not only will the treasures of the nations be brought to the house of God in tribute, but there will also be One, the true treasure, who fills the house and is to be prized above all the wealth of the world. For Haggai, it was only when the world was shaken that we could see what really will stand and which treasures will endure.

When your world shakes, are you shaken with it, or are you unshakable in spite of it? When the treasures of your heart disappoint you, does your heart fail, or does it take hold of the treasure of all nations?

PRAYER

Father, help me to hold onto your unshakable kingdom when my world is being shaken; to remember that Jesus Christ experienced the earthquake of the cross, so I would not be moved; and to remember that while treasures in the world may fail, you are the treasure of all nations. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

Day 27

THE COMING KING

READ: ZECHARIAH 9:9-10

In the Ancient Near East, a king entered cities riding on a warhorse in order to convey his military power, particularly when he was entering into newly conquered cities where his rule may have been regarded as illegitimate or met with suspicion or outright rejection. The exception to this custom was when a beloved king entered his own capital city. There he would ride in on a donkey—the benevolent king.

The prophet Zechariah speaks of a day when Jerusalem would see her king return. He would conquer the enemy once and for all, secure a lasting salvation and establish a new reign of peace for all. This hope of the true king, riding on a donkey, led the crowd to shout: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” when they saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem, yes, on a donkey.

And yet this crowd soon became the angry mob that cried for blood: “Crucify Him!” Jesus, who was once welcomed as the returning king, would be met with the violent rejection of a hostile people. The true king returned to his capital city to find that it had betrayed him. Yet still, he mounted a donkey, not a warhorse, and entered in peace. And he won the ultimate victory for his treacherous people by submitting himself to their violence—our violence—confirming our guilt and achieving our forgiveness in one decisive victory. The enemy this king would conquer turned out to be us, and the cost of the victory we longed for was the death of our beloved king. And he did it. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

PRAYER

Lord, we rejoice and shout aloud that you would give your life to pay the price for our treachery. We praise you as our beloved king we have been waiting for. Come reign in our heart, our lives and our city. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Day 28

THE MOURNING

READ: ZECHARIAH 12:10-14

Although Zechariah spoke these words, they were the words of the Lord. Yet how could this be? How could God say, “They look on me, on him whom they have pierced?” Could God be wounded? Even more puzzling, could God be “pierced” – which indicated a killing? In other words, could God die?

Jesus Christ fulfilled this prophecy. Not only was he fully God, he was also fully man. Moreover, as the prophecy predicted, Jesus was the “only child” and “firstborn” Son of the Father (John 3:16). He died and, on the cross, he was pierced: “One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water” (John 19:34).

The prophecy, however, said more. It said that those who pierced him would mourn because God would

pour out on them “a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy.” In other words, the Spirit would open their eyes to see what they had done and how grievous their sin had been. This mourning would be widespread yet intimate – “the land shall mourn, each family by itself.”

In part, this prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost. Peter said to his listeners, “You crucified and killed [Jesus] by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). Then, upon hearing the gospel, they were “cut to the heart” and 3,000 were saved that day (Acts 2:37-41). Today, this prophecy is still being fulfilled. As the Spirit fills us with grace, we mourn over Christ’s death because we know that “he was wounded for our transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5). In our sorrow, however, we also rejoice because his death “brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

By The Park Forum

PRAYER

Lord, we confess that our sin pierced Jesus. Thus, we mourn and ask you to pour out your Spirit of grace and mercy. In humility, we rejoice that your lovingkindness never fails – while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). In Christ’s Name, Amen.

Day 29

THE LAMB

READ: JOHN 1:29-34

In Genesis 22, Abraham took his only son Isaac to Moriah because God had commanded him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. Isaac questioned his father, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham responded to his child that “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” As Abraham was about to sacrifice his own son on the altar, God stopped him and provided a ram to take the place of Isaac.

Jesus is the Lamb that God provided to take away all sins. Abraham did not have to sacrifice his only son,

because God chose to sacrifice his son to atone for our sins. Because of this, God views us in the way he viewed his son when John saw the Spirit descend from heaven upon him. He calls us, both men and women, his beloved sons, with whom he is well pleased (Matthew 3:17).

We no longer have to live in anxiety laboring to justify our existence. Our justification is in Christ, the perfect, spotless Lamb of God who took away our sins and the sins of the world.

PRAYER

God, our Father, we thank you that we are your beloved sons with whom you are well pleased. We pray that you will work deep into our being the truth that we no longer have to labor for our salvation, but we can find rest knowing our identity is in the Lamb of God. Give us an understanding of the depth of the sacrifice that was made to atone for our sin so we may fall more in love with you to grasp who we are and who we shall become. In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 30

THE FAST

READ: MATTHEW 4:1-11

Here, we learn about three specific ways that Satan sought to tempt Jesus, each one more significant, by challenging his desire for food, urging him to display power sensationally, and encouraging him to use political power to establish God's kingdom. In this third instance, he was tempting Jesus to bypass the cross. The devil was more than willing to give us all back to Jesus, if only Jesus would worship him instead of God. Skip the suffering, save the people, deny God, do it the easy way. For each response, Jesus relied on Scripture, the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17), to resist.

These temptations occurred following Jesus' baptism. Right after Jesus was anointed for ministry, the Spirit led him into the wilderness for 40 days and nights of fasting "to be tempted by the devil." Jesus' time in the desert reminds us of Moses fasting for the same period on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28). After Moses' 40 days and nights, God gave him the Ten Commandments for the Israelites. Thus, here we see that Jesus is the new Moses come to fulfill the law that Moses was given.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we praise you that you know what it is like to be tempted in every way, as we are. Thank you for showing us how to resist temptation and thank you for enduring the cross and for fulfilling the law, for our sakes, on our behalf. In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 31

THE LEPER

READ: MARK 1:40-45

Contracting leprosy was one of the most tragic things that could have happened to an individual in the ancient world. Whenever a leper was around other people, he was required to shout “unclean, unclean,” so passersby would know to keep their distance. A leper was required to live “alone, outside the camp,” so as to reduce the risk of transmitting his disease to others (Leviticus 13:45-46). To be a leper was to be isolated and humiliated perpetually.

And then Jesus came and changed everything. One of the great beauties of the Gospels is how frequently they record Jesus’ interactions with lepers. He approached them and was approached by them. He treated them with respect and kindness. He even did the unthinkable: he touched them, and his touch made them clean. Jesus healed the lepers.

Many biblical scholars have pointed out that there is an analogy between the physical condition of leprosy and the spiritual condition of sin. Sin in our hearts isolates us, both from God and from other people. Try as we might to hide it or remove it, the stain of sin remains present. Like Lady Macbeth, we try to wash away the stain of sin crying, “out damn’d spot,” all to no avail. We are unclean, and we know it.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is the contagiously clean man. When he touched a leper, Jesus did not contract leprosy. Rather, the leper became clean. Those trying in vain to remove their sin must allow themselves to be touched by the contagiously clean man. And, like the leper in the story, may we who have experienced that touch possess an uncontainable gratitude, talking freely about our encounter with the contagiously clean man.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Son who makes clean everything he touches. By his grace may our hearts and our actions be touched by him this day and everyday. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

Day 32

THE ADULTERESS

READ: JOHN 8:1-11

The Law was clear — adultery was a capital offense with two guilty parties: “If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die” (Deuteronomy 22:22). In accordance with the Law, therefore, the scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus with an adulterous woman to be stoned. Where was the man? They didn’t care. After all, their concern wasn’t really with the Law. Their concern was with testing Jesus.

But Jesus wasn’t fooled. He said, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” Of course, Jesus wasn’t making a recommendation for a new judicial system; no criminals would be held accountable if judges had to be without sin. Jesus was making a point — a point he frequently made to the Pharisees. He often said things to them like, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire

mercy, and not sacrifice’” (Matthew 9:13; c.f., Matthew 12:1-8; John 7:21-23). In other words, he was telling them that they were missing the most important part of the Law — that its foundation was love (Matthew 22:34-40; Matthew 7:12; Galatians 5:14). Thus, although they appeared interested in upholding the Law, they were actually breaking it because they weren’t acting on the basis of love, grace, humility and compassion.

So they went away. And Jesus told the woman, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” He didn’t say, “It doesn’t matter whether you sin.” Instead, he said, in effect, “I myself am establishing your righteousness on the foundation of love and grace. Therefore, don’t sin — not because you fear its punishment, but because you have met me and have been saved by grace.”

By The Park Forum

PRAYER

Lord, We exalt the name of Jesus because his righteousness has been imputed to us through grace alone! Therefore, even as we seek to sin no more, let us long for holiness and righteousness out of a deep recognition that we have been saved by grace. In Christ’s Name, Amen

Day 33

THE CALL

READ: LUKE 9:18-27

After spending days and nights with Jesus, witnessing his words and works first hand, Peter could make an absolute confession that Jesus was the Christ, the promised one of God. Those further from Jesus were less resolute in their faiths, often believing him to be a prophet, but those who followed him regularly knew that he was not simply a messenger, but the message itself. After Peter's confession, Jesus tried to help them understand his mission and what it looked like to follow him, but Jesus was not the kind of Messiah they were expecting, and following him was not what they thought it was going to be like.

Jesus issues a clear call to those who might follow him, that allegiance to him requires denying yourself, taking up your cross daily and following him. Then and now his words are difficult. We live in a culture that teaches us to glorify ourselves and to pursue comfort, control and the satisfaction of our desires above all else. To deny oneself and pursue the things of God can feel like death, but that is what Jesus calls us to. He tells us that to follow him we will have to relinquish all control and endure suffering and rejection, but he also promises that this will make us like him. In him, triumph will come through suffering. Jesus is calling us to lose our lives as we know them, but only so that he might give us real and eternal life in him. Do you hear him calling you? Are you willing to deny yourself and take up your cross in order to follow him? Do you trust that he will lead you to life?

PRAYER

Gracious God, we thank you that you have revealed your Son to us, that Jesus is the Christ, the deliverer we all need. Please give us the grace we need to follow you. You alone are worthy and we want to give you our lives, but need your help to do so. In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 34

THE PREDICTION

READ: JOHN 12:20-33

John devotes much of his Gospel to the last six days of Jesus' life. In John 12, Jesus predicts "what kind of death he was going to die"—one that would loosen Satan's death grip on the world, raise Jesus in victory from the horrors of the crucifixion and grave, and draw people from all over the world to him (v. 32). But here he also reiterates his sobering template for all who would follow after him and be known as his disciples.

From the early days of his ministry in John, Jesus has been alluding to his "hour"—the appointed time when he would undergo suffering and death for the sins of the world. But through this humiliation Jesus also strangely radiates the "glory" of God to humanity. God "glorifies his name" not only through the earthly ministry of Christ but also his death. John foreshadows this reality early on by concluding "we have seen (or 'beheld') his glory ... full of grace and truth" (1:14).

Equally striking is the very human Jesus we encounter here, honest enough to admit "now is my soul

troubled" (v. 27) as he starts to feel the agony he is about to undergo. It is an amazing picture of a person completely abandoned to God in the face of unspeakable pain, knowing that God's glory ultimately is the only thing that matters. And it becomes a teaching moment for the disciples as well.

Seeds are living things that must die in order to reproduce; they carry the promise of future life. On the surface, Christ's death looks to the world like a disaster, but by falling "into the earth" (v. 24), he is able to raise up followers and bring "many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10). However, following Christ carries a cost: many of the original disciples were to die excruciating deaths themselves, leading Tertullian to conclude that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Christ's disciples must always "die" to themselves to find "living hope" (1 Peter 1:3-5) in Christ. Here Dietrich Bonhoeffer's observation on discipleship rings true: "when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

PRAYER

Risen Lord, you loved us so much that you died to save us from sin. We pray that this reality gives us humility, leads us to praise you always, and gives us a boldness to live fully abandoned to your loving will. In your mercy make these things so, for we pray them in your name. Amen.

Day 35

THE ANOINTING

READ: MARK 14:3-9

“What a waste!” That is the complaint made regarding the woman’s use of her expensive perfume to anoint Jesus. Jesus will have none of it. He finds a purely cost-benefit analysis of our actions to be inadequate and bankrupt. Even though the money from the sale of the perfume could have been used to do a lot of good things, Jesus considers her act to be completely appropriate. Why? Because it is an act of worship. And he knows that life begins with what you worship.

Worship the wrong things and nothing else will come out quite right. But worship the living God who has given himself for us in the sacrifice of Jesus and you have a new sense of what matters and you will

prioritize your life accordingly. Suddenly you find yourself “wasting” your life on Jesus by giving your life to his agenda rather than your own. That will include caring about justice for the poor.

Contrary to what is sometimes assumed, Jesus is not minimizing our responsibility to the poor in this passage. He actually is quoting from Deuteronomy 15, which encourages radical generosity to the poor. However, such generosity flows from worshiping God. First things first! Put God ahead of all else as the only one worthy of your worship and you will find you are pouring yourself out in all sorts of beautiful ways in service to the world.

PRAYER

Lord, too often I worship the wrong things. Help me to see that my life is to be “wasted” on you and only then will it become something beautiful for you to use in your world. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

Day 36

THE CLEANSING

READ: MARK 11:15-19

Every year at Passover thousands of Jews came from all over Israel and Judea to offer sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. Since many traveled long distances, they often purchased their animal sacrifices in Jerusalem rather than hauling them from home and risking an injury or a blemish that would make them an unworthy sacrifice. It was a convenience for Jewish worshippers to purchase their sacrifices once they arrived. However, the market for these transactions had been set up in the Court of the Gentiles, where non-Jewish seekers of God came to worship. Thus, at Passover, the temple courtyard was filled with livestock, sellers of livestock and money-changers, who exchanged regional currencies for Jewish money.

When Jesus saw this, he was angry—so angry that he overturned tables and placed an embargo on merchandise. But why? Weren't the merchants just trying to help the travelers worship God? Perhaps. But they were doing it at the expense of those from "all nations" who were seeking God, counting their worship as insignificant. In calling them "robbers"

Jesus may have been referring to their greedy financial transactions and the way they were robbing Gentiles of their place of worship.

Yet something else is going on. In a similar account of his cleansing the temple, Jesus was asked for a sign of his authority. He replied, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). But he wasn't speaking about the building; "he was speaking about the temple of his body" (John 2:21). In other words, when he died, the temple and its entire system—the priesthood, the sacrifices, the glory—died with him because he himself was the Passover Lamb, high priest and Shekinah glory. Thus, when the temple curtain split at the death of Christ (Mark 15:38), the barrier between God and humanity came down for everyone. Jesus became the "house of prayer for all nations." Today there is no need to travel to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. Nor is there any distinction between Jewish and Gentile worshippers. Worship is no longer attached to a place, but a person. Jesus is the temple. He is where we meet God.

By The Park Forum

PRAYER

Lord, we worship Jesus as the final sacrifice, priest, glory and temple. Therefore, let us join ourselves to him so that we may love his name and be his servants (Isaiah 56:6). In Christ, may all nations — those near and far — come to you in prayer (Isaiah 56:8). In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 37

THE PLOT

READ: MATTHEW 26:1-5, 14-25

Even when Jesus' life was slipping away from him, he remained remarkably in control. He predicted his arrest and crucifixion before the religious leaders met to conspire against him. He knew that Judas, one of his trusted apostles, would betray him. How disturbing that must have been to Judas to know that Jesus could see right through his charade. Though humans have their plots and schemes, it is God's plan that always prevails. Nothing can interfere with what he has purposed to do. And nothing is more central to God's eternal plan than that Jesus, the Son of Man, would be delivered up to be crucified. His final meal, the Passover, carried symbolic import and pointed to the purpose for Jesus' death. The Passover was an annual celebration of Israel's exodus from slavery in Egypt. Jesus' death would be the new Passover. Those who trust in him experience the ultimate Exodus—

deliverance from the slavery of sin. As a result, they enjoy the privilege of living in the freedom of his love forevermore.

When life seems chaotic, when things seem not to cohere, great comfort may be found in remembering Jesus' own experience at the end of his life. Though humans plotted against him and succeeded in executing their plan, nevertheless they could not thwart the plan of God. What comfort there is in knowing that nothing can interfere with the plan of him who is in control! He is at work in all the particulars for his good purposes. By looking to Jesus, particularly his death for us, we discover what is central to God's plan for us: through Jesus' death we find life, through his blood shed for us, we experience the exodus from enslaving sin and the freedom of living in his love.

PRAYER

Gracious Father, thank you for being in control of our lives, especially when we feel desperately out of control. Center us in the one who is central to your plan for the ages. Enable us, Holy Spirit, to trust in Christ that we might experience the true Exodus. And having experienced the forgiveness of sin, may we live daily in the freedom of your love, wholeheartedly devoted to you. In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 38

THE WASHING

READ: JOHN 13:1-15

The NIV translates verse 1: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.” In this unexpected act of foot washing, Jesus was communicating something profound about the nature of divine love. Love is not simply what Jesus does, but love is who he is.

Often when we consider loving someone, we think in terms of actions and behaviors. We ask ourselves, “What’s the loving thing to do?” But Jesus’ unexpected, self-effacing act of service leads us to ask the antecedent question, “Who am I?” Without first asking this question, we can unknowingly place limits on our love because we are not operating out of a gospel-transformed identity. For example, if we functionally see ourselves as orphans needing to look out for ourselves instead of as God’s beloved children, we will limit our generosity towards others

out of fear of not having enough. Likewise, if we think we are righteous by our own hard work, there will be boundaries to the way we are willing to serve others because our pride keeps us from serving those who “aren’t deserving.”

When we look to Christ we find a beautiful freedom to serve others, arising from the security of his identity: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ...” (Phil 2:6-7, NIV). Jesus was able to serve in a way that no one expected because he knew the Father’s love intimately. The same heart that led him to wash the disciples’ feet would lead him to the cross. Because of Christ we have the same privileged status and security with the Father, and so we become free to serve in the radical, loving ways in which he has served us.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I forget each day who I am in Christ and the grace that envelops my life. My love has limits because I don’t embrace the truth of who you have made me to be. Help me to live out the reality of being your beloved child so that my love for others flows out of this new identity. Let me be a bewildering servant to those around me as you dismantle the limits I have placed on my love. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

Day 39 THE CROSS

READ: JOHN 19:1-37

Re-read that again slowly and prayerfully, engaging your imagination as each scene unfolds. What do you see, hear, feel, smell, in each scene? What is all this meant to mean to you? Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the story of Christ's death for you today.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, it was our sins that sent you to the cross. There we beheld our king. There you finished the work of our redemption. There we looked upon you, whom we had pierced. There redemption was accomplished. Thank you for your astonishing love. In Christ's Name, Amen.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

Day 40 THE GRAVE

READ: MATTHEW 27:57-66

The central claim of the historic Christian message is that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Tempting though it may be for us to jump quickly from Friday to Sunday, from cross to resurrection, Matthew pauses and brings us through the silence and stillness of the grave.

Many have tried to dismantle the hope of Christianity, suggesting that Jesus had not really died or that eager disciples had stolen his body to substantiate their claims of a risen Savior. Yet Matthew's interlude between final breath and first appearance speaks unequivocally of a death that was real, a grave that was silent, and a situation that appeared beyond hope.

Romans were thorough in carrying out capital sentences, particularly for those accused of treason. That Joseph was able to retrieve Jesus' body meant

the executioners were satisfied with their handiwork. Jews, throughout the Old Testament, would heap rocks on the vilest of criminals to represent that for some, there would be no life beyond the grave. That a great stone would cover the entrance of the tomb meant that there was no expectation of life beyond this grave. The tomb is still, dark, silent.

This is the fate that should have been ours and the destiny of humanity. And yet, our hope is that through the one who went into the tomb before us, there is a way through and out into a new world of God's creating. It is the hope that because one transcended the grave itself, we too may experience new life with him. Matthew's description of the grave is a reminder that the tomb was silent and yet the silence would only last one more day.

PRAYER

Our Father, remind us that the darkness of the grave will soon be overcome by the brightness of the third day. In Christ's Name, Amen.