



Lent

A SEASON OF
RENEWAL



2018 Devotional



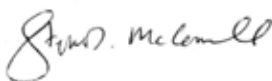
“FROM DUST YOU COME AND UNTO DUST YOU WILL RETURN,” are the sobering words we hear when the ashes are spread across our foreheads on Ash Wednesday. Those words are not bound to make it into any motivational manual or Ted Talk on the power of positive thinking. But they are real. Life starts and life ends and there is not a lot we can do about it. It’s not the topic people want to talk about. In fact, it is the subject we mostly try to avoid.

But is there something we miss when we fail to acknowledge our mortality? Perhaps we miss the whole point. At the very least we perhaps miss the chance to see two significant things: First, we lose the chance to understand each day as a precious gift. No day is guaranteed and no day should be taken for granted. It’s not that we have to walk around every day wondering if this day is going to be the last – but it’s a pretty good practice to regularly ponder the fact that we only get a limited number of sunrises -- and it’s best to eke out as much life from each day as possible.

The second thing we might not look for while denying our small time on this earth is what lies before the beginning and what lies after the ending of life. This is the great invitation of Lent. The forty days of Lent invite us into a season of wondering about the love that created us and the love that awaits us. And then to ask the question – what is my love in return? Isn’t it possible that the very purpose of our little time on this earth is to have the chance to return our love to the love that made us and receives us? Wouldn’t that be a great exercise to spend a few moments each day with this devotional and read these great reflections and then to quietly ponder God’s love and your response? Can you think of a better way to spend a part of each precious day you’ve been given the chance to live?

I look forward to sharing the journey with you.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Steve McConnell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve McConnell

February 14: John 10:1-18

by Carolyn Wilson

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The Old Testament prophet Micah said that, from the land of Judah, a ruler would come that would shepherd God's people (Micah 5:2). Micah was talking about Jesus. Jesus said of himself, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep," (John 10:11). A shepherd's job is to care for his sheep, to make sure they have enough food and water, to protect them from wild animals who would otherwise destroy them, and to lead them where they need to go. A good shepherd knows every one of his sheep and knows if any has wandered off or is missing. Today you can take comfort in the fact that Jesus knows you and loves you exactly as you are. He knows your name and he is the shepherd and guardian of your soul (1 Peter 2:25).

February 15: John 6:35-59

by Marie Bonifield

BREAD OF LIFE

When Jesus said he was the bread of life, he was using a metaphor that the crowds could certainly relate to. He had recently fed thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and most certainly many in the crowd were expecting a repeat. They were hopeful for free bread and now Jesus was promising they would not be hungry again. Hunger is a harsh reality, but Jesus was talking about spiritual nourishment for the soul's hunger. Free and endless.

Bread nourishes the body but eventually it runs out. Jesus is to the soul what earthly bread is to the body. And there's no running out. Our soul needs nourishment. Fame, success, food do not satisfy that inner craving.

Let's continue our walk with Jesus by daily digesting this Bread of Life. Bon Appetit

February 16: John 6:60-71

by Cindy Lanoue-Foster

WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE

In previous verses, Jesus Christ fed over 5000 followers with a few fish and loaves. He proclaims He is the bread of life and the Son of God, that salvation is a matter of faith, and, apart from God's intervention, we cannot believe. Then and today, some people don't understand what Christ meant, aren't willing to accept it, or just blind to the truth, unable to see. Some just want the worldly touchy feely experience or need signs . They want to serve God, not out of gratitude for all He has given but, for what they get out of it. The Lord sees our hearts. As I read this passage I ask myself, when God sees my heart, whether He sees a life that wants the religious experience but lacks commitment to Christ. Does He see the love of Christ in my heart? Does He see a person who serves because their faith in Christ creates such love and gratitude; there's no choice but to want to please our Father, for the precious gift of Jesus Christ. Christ explains in no uncertain terms that we cannot attain eternal life by our own efforts. Only through the Spirit and our Faith in Christ can we come to the Father . After many of His followers have left in disbelief, Jesus asks His disciples, "Will Ye also go away?"

My question is "Can you handle the truth?" Or will you also leave?

February 17: John 7:1-9

by Eric Homeister

THE UNBELIEF OF JESUS' BROTHERS

Jesus' brothers seem to paint a compelling picture for Him to go to Jerusalem and the Feast. But Jesus see's things from a different perspective. When pressured, he holds steadfast in the understanding of his Father's plan. He knows it is not yet time for Him to go to Jerusalem. So instead, Jesus tells his brothers to go ahead to the Feast without him. Jesus will go to Jerusalem in time...God's time.

I think John is asking us to use this passage to get a perspective on the impatient and therefore selfish nature of our human heart. When we allow things to make sense to us, it is so easily in the context of worldly ways. That's when we most need to pause and allow God's wisdom to speak to us. Jesus wasn't deterred by those urging him to go. We need to follow Jesus' example to not follow the worldly ways, but to turn to Him.

February 18: John 11:1-44

by Jim & Nola Saltsman

JESUS RAISES LAZARUS

We all know the story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection to be our risen Lord. There is another resurrection in the Bible presented in the Gospel of John chapter 11 where Lazarus, a friend of Jesus and believer, is raised from the dead. John presents this story to show Jesus is there for us in our most troubled times. Mary and Martha were grieving the loss of Lazarus, their brother, and turned to Jesus for help. Jesus responds by saving Lazarus to the glory of God, and showing the Jewish people what faith can do.

In today's world, as it was 2000 years ago, God works the most in our lives during our darkest hours. When we accept God's love, we overcome obstacles in our life and grow in faith. God uses our faith to do His work bringing others to believe in Him.

February 19: John 7:10-24

by Jonathan Spivey

FESTIVAL OF BOOTHS

“He went...secretly, staying out of the public eye. Then...Jesus preached openly.” One of the most important lessons Jesus taught us is the importance of a secret time with God. Whether he faced 40 days without food, or temptation, or even death, Jesus made sure first to seek the face of God. And what a beautiful phrase that is! Seeking God's face means that we are able to view firsthand not only His glory, but His tenderness, His infinite grace.

In an email we may misunderstand a friend's comment, and only by meeting face-to-face are we able to restore understanding. Similarly, God reveals Himself to us best when we look directly at Him, with the open trusting eyes of a child. Only then can we hope to express to others what God is saying to us and through us. As Moses' face shone after his encounter on Sinai, may our secret communion with God leave us glowing, brilliant, radiant. “This little light of mine...”

February 20: John 7:22-31

by Jack Reynolds

IS THIS THE CHRIST?

Yes, this is the Christ. In addition to His total devotion to good and helping others, Jesus was a very bright person. He knew of his planned ultimate demise and he chose not to bring attention to himself, nor to engage in negative thoughts. To this we pray:

Dear Lord: We thank-you for the opportunity to feast together and for the teaching you have offered to your son. Let us eat and enjoy the food that has been prepared and reflect upon His teaching. Amen

February 21: John 7:32-36

by Marcia Quattlebaum

OFFICERS ARE SENT TO ARREST JESUS

During the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus taught in the temple. His wise words made the people talk up the possibility that He was the Messiah. Because of this, the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest Him. Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me: and where I am, you cannot come" in John 7:33-34. This confused and dismayed them as they tried to understand His meaning.

We know He was predicting His death and resurrection. What peace fills the hearts of us Christians now! We know where Jesus is.

February 22: John 7:37-39

by Laurie Haas

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

When was the last time you were thirsty? On a hot summer day, or after a long workout, it is normal to be really thirsty. Can you remember the sensation and satisfaction of taking a long drink from an ice-cold glass of water? This odorless, tasteless liquid is the essence of life. Not surprising that Jesus uses a water analogy to describe our lives as Christ's believers. Streams of living water-aka the Spirit of God-- will flow out of us and onto the earth and onto every person we meet in creation! Friends, just believe and let the living water flow! Praise be to God, from whom all blessing flow.

February 23: John 7:40-44

by Bob Baarson

DIVISION AMONG THE PEOPLE

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translates this passage as: "Those in the crowd who heard these words were saying, 'This has to be the Prophet.' Others said, 'He is the Messiah!' But others were saying, 'The Messiah doesn't come from Galilee, does he? Don't the Scriptures tell us that the Messiah comes from David's line and from Bethlehem, David's village?' So there was a split in the crowd over him. Some went so far as wanting to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him."

You don't have to be an expert on Old Testament prophesy to understand that people question, "who is this Jesus?" This question divides us today as much as it did 2,000 years ago. Some people today attack Christianity in the media and books. Fighting with

these people will not close the divide and may further drive us apart. So how do we help others understand the truth of Jesus' divinity?

We who believe that we will have eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus will help close this divide by sharing the love God has instilled in us with our neighbors.

February 24: John 7:45-52

by Marty Guice

THE UNBELIEF OF THOSE IN AUTHORITY

Often, those in authority form their beliefs about a person based upon from whence they come. In the case of Jesus, after teaching at the Temple courts Feast of Tabernacles.

Many in the crowd who heard Jesus teaching believed that he was who he said he was. While the chief priests and Pharisees did not believe Jesus as he was from Galilee. Their thinking was based upon the Scripture saying that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived. Based upon this, the chief priests sent the temple guards to seize him but they did not do so.

Nicodemus asked the Pharisees if their law condemns anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing. They replied, "Are you from Galilee too?" And then challenged Nicodemus to look into it, saying that he too would find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.

February 25: John 13:1-17

by June Wilson

JESUS WASHES FEET

Every year, in memory of God's liberation of the Jewish people from slavery, a Passover Celebration was held. John tells the story of the last Jewish Passover Jesus attended. Jesus had come from his father, God, and the time had come for him to return. He loved his followers on earth as well. Sadly he also knew that one of them would betray him. After supper, Jesus removed his robe, tied a towel around himself, and began washing his disciples' feet. Peter objected. Jesus said Peter did not understand why this must be done, but would comprehend later.

In those days only sandals were worn, and feet became dirty walking dusty roads. Washing others feet was something a master might expect a servant to do for him. Jesus later explained: "If I then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you."

February 26: John 8:1-11

by Hmingi Browne

THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY.

Jesus was in the temple when they brought to him an adulterous woman to be condemned. Instead Jesus said, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' They went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.

This is a very self-explanatory passage. Jesus wants us not to judge others as we too are sinners who make mistakes everyday just like the woman in this story. Jesus also wants us to know that God forgives our sins and more importantly he wants us to quit the sin, repent and live a new life in him. We are ever and always invited to accept the Love and Grace of God and start our lives over in his forgiving mercy. Thanks be to God!

February 27: John 8:12-20

by Anne Owens

JESUS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of Life."

The event in this passage occurred while Jesus was speaking in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles. Large lamp torches were burning around the temple courtyard as a reminder of the pillar of fire which had guided the Israelites throughout their wilderness journey.

Jesus was teaching words of light and life to His people, but the challenge and questions from the Pharisees showed their lack of understanding. They misinterpreted both who Jesus was and the message he proclaimed.

For Jesus came from the Father as the Light and Life in order to free the world from spiritual darkness and the bondage of sin. He did not require any earthly witness or testimony in order to illuminate or define Him. Not in accordance with human standards, Jesus identified and declared the truth.

And so this Lenten morn, we pause to wonder from where is our light dawning. Will we dwell faithfully within the Light and allow our light to shine as a worthy witness pleasing to God?

February 28: John 8:21-30

by John Sego

JESUS FORETELLS HIS DEATH

“Even as He spoke, Mary believed in Him” (John 8:30). Others, who did not receive Jesus, would betray Him and be subsumed by their sins.

God shows us the path He has laid out as part of His plan for us. This path and plan are His Word in scripture, the Bible. This plan, following Jesus, pleases God. Our sin, the choice to not follow Him, sets us apart, separating us from God. Believing in Him is an obvious path that many follow, yet others choose not to do so. Why?

Lord, grant us the wisdom to follow your Son, to find peace and joy doing so, and abide in you. Amen.

March 1: John 8:31-38

by Julia Boeger

TRUE DISCIPLES

In John 8:31-37 Jesus speaks to the sons of Abraham who think they are true believers in God, but want to kill him because they have no room left in their hearts for His word. He tells the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They don’t see, as we all tend not to, that we are all slaves to sin. He warns them that a slave does not remain, but a son remains forever.

For me this means you can be living among the faithful and practicing their rituals, but if you are not living the life of a follower and believer, thinking that attendance or lineage is all that is required, you deceive yourself. Jesus offers an eye opening opportunity to see that he offers a way out of the bondage of sin and evil. They aren’t ready to appreciate or understand his offer and choose to stone him instead. The sad part to me is the joy that is lost when one makes the choice to do worldly sinful things versus Godly things. There is so much joy found when you believe and trust in God’s love and grace. It frees your spirit to be made sufficient yet humble in your own skin, able and willing to show that love to everyone you meet. You become a living witness for and reflection of God’s love. There is no more powerful offering for the Holy Spirit to use to gather souls to Christ. Joy comes to the heart of the disciple who abides in God’s word.

March 2: John 8:39-59

by Sandy Snyder

JESUS & ABRAHAM

The Jews in these verses claimed to be the children of Abraham. Although they may have been his children in a physical sense there was no spiritual likeness. These men, who claimed Abraham to be their father, were merciless, barbarous and a cruel generation. On the other hand, Abraham was a merciful, charitable and hospitable man, as well as a man of strict justice and piety. Jesus explained to them that if they were Abraham's children they would do the things Abraham did. They would not want to kill Jesus. Jesus went on to explain to them that if God were their Father, they would love him because he came from God. He also told them that the reason they do not hear God is that they do not belong to God. Jesus exclaimed that before Abraham was born, "I am." This indicated that he was preexisting. The Jews considered this blasphemy, punishable by death.

March 3: John 10:19-42

by John McQueen

THE UNBELIEF OF THE PEOPLE

Everyone's journey of faith endures numerous peaks and valleys. We are first taught to believe, then strive to believe through life's triumphs and tragedies, and ultimately bear witness as a true believer that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our salvation, and our pathway to eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The seemingly ever increasing chaos and endless challenges to our faithfulness in this modern world does at first appear to be overwhelming and an unfair and unbalanced assault on the followers of Jesus Christ unlike those endured in the centuries that precede ours. A journey through John 10: 19-42 will go a long way to dispel these feelings of woe and dismay and reinforce that through Jesus, God is always with us, just as he was with the Jews in Jerusalem during the feast of the Dedication.

"If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." "How long will you keep us in suspense?" cried the Jews. Jesus answered, "I told you and you do not believe." "I and the Father are one." "If you do not believe me, believe the works of the Father that you see in and through me". Just as the Jews were dissuaded from tossing stones in the portico of Solomon, so should we resist the distractions and detours challenging our journey of faith.

March 4: John 18:12-27

PETER'S DENIAL

March 5: John 11:45-57

by Will Browne

THE PLOT TO KILL JESUS

“What are we to do” is the question the leaders ask and their answer is the most draconian possible to imagine – death!

There were other possible actions like arrest, imprisonment or banishment. But the leaders go straight to the most extreme solution. Why? - Because it is so permanent? so quick? Isn't the only thing horrific enough to balance their horrific fears? Those who study conflicts tell us that conflicts grow in intensity from disagreement over ideas, to a conflict for power, to a conflict requiring the absolute elimination of the other. The more personal it becomes the more the removal of the other side seems the answer.

This tells us the leaders are intensely engaged at a deeply personal level. The threat they fear blinds them to less extreme options.

Fear does the same to us. Let us pray that we are led to the least extreme answer when seeking to answer our fear.

March 6: John 12:1-8

by Sarah Soboleski

MARY ANOINTS JESUS

In this passage, we find Mary pouring expensive oil on Jesus' feet and then wiping his feet with her hair while Judas Iscariot (who is about to betray Jesus) judges her actions as wasteful. It's such a touching and tender moment in spite of his interruption. Mary loves Jesus so. Jesus the Messiah. Jesus her friend. It's easy to simply condemn Judas, especially when we know what's coming, but I wonder if we don't make the same sort of sweeping moral pronouncements all of the time. Judging how people spend their time and their money in leisure and celebration with those closest to them instead of dedicating those resources to the least of these. And yet, Jesus' response makes the touching pronouncement that when he says to love others as we love ourselves, he is most principally including those dearest to us. That giving, and generosity should start with our own family and friends. How might we extravagantly love those closest us in unexpected and holy ways?

March 7: John 12:9-11

by Fee Mercer

THE PLOT TO KILL LAZARUS

A Plan to destroy the evidence: “Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.”

The crowds of Jews wishing to see Jesus first hand were getting larger and larger. The Sadducees ruling places in the government was being jeopardized as more and more Jews became followers of Jesus. They saw Jesus as a possible leader of rebellion and they needed to put an end to this. Lazarus also proved a threat to them because he was now a living witness to Jesus’ power. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, so now they were confronted with Lazarus who was raised from the dead in front of many witnesses.

The Sadducees, under Roman rule, would be severely dealt with at the slightest outbreak of civil disorder. They were therefore willing to do anything so as not to lose their power and their influences over the Jews and therefore needed to “destroy the evidence” by doing away with Lazarus. The Sadducees were prepared to suppress the truth to further their own gain.

What is the most powerful motive in your life? Does self interest and higher prestige dictate your life? A small “innocent” white lie will fester and grow. Bending the truth just a bit to make oneself look better and feel more important will eventually break you. As we stand beneath the cross this Lenten season, let us examine our thoughts and our motives and ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance to redirect our purpose and transform our hearts. Then let us thank him for the grace to “Start Over” again.

March 8: John 12:12-19

by Peg Tonn

JESUS’ TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Miracles draw crowds. Word of Lazarus’ resurrection at the hands of Jesus drew the existing Passover crowd to witness the entrance of This Man into Jerusalem on what we now refer to as Palm Sunday. Unfortunately for the scheming Pharisees, whose power and influence were being threatened by Jesus’ presence and growing fame, the gathered crowd lauded the foretold entrance of This donkey-riding Man with praise, adoration, and Palm fronds. In the ancient East, the palm was a symbol of victory, peace, and eternal life, while the donkey represented Jesus’ entrance-claim as the “Prince of Peace” rather than that of a warring lord entering on a horse. Yet, as we read in Luke 19:41, even in the midst of what seems such celebration, Jesus wept approaching the city, His heart broken by the knowledge of the suffering to come.

March 9: John 12:20-26

by John Kennedy

SOME GREEKS WISH TO SEE JESUS

Jesus knew that his time was coming so he spoke in parables to his disciples as a way of teaching them. He used the example of a grain of wheat to tell us that our life is not something that we should only do well for one thing, ourselves. The grain of wheat is meant to be planted to produce many grains of wheat just as we are meant to be there for others and help many, not just ourselves.

Our lives are meaningless if we live only for ourselves. We should follow God's word and believe in him and our good works to help others will be like the gain of wheat that becomes meaningful and feeds many. God will honor those who follow him and our reward will be when our time comes to meet him in heaven.

As we enter into this Lenten season, we can refocus on what is important in our lives and make some changes in our thinking. Some people give something up for Lent, others prefer to redirect some of their energy to do good and help others. Whatever it is you decide to do, ask God to help you to be a dispenser of his will and a help to those in need.

March 10: John 12:27-35

by Bill Reynolds

JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT HIS DEATH

Reasons. We have reasons for much of what we do, places we go, people we see, resources we expend. We usually have reasons for the larger efforts of our lives, such as working. On a higher level, we certainly have a reason for life, or as the Westminster catechism puts it, "the chief end of man," which is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. However, Jesus had a far greater reason for life. In this passage, verse 27 reads: "...what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour" (NIV). Jesus was speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem shortly before his death, and he was telling them the reason for his life: To provide salvation for mankind through his death and resurrection. He continues to speak that message to us today.

March 11: John 18: 28-40

by Linda Getzen

JESUS & PILATE

In the film, *A Few Good Men*, two Marines are tried for murdering a fellow Marine who had become a morale problem. Their Guantanamo Commander (Jack Nicholson) is questioned by the defense attorney (Tom Cruise). During examination, under pressure from Cruise, Nicholson bellows “You want answers?” Cruise responds, “I want the truth.” Nicholson roars “You can’t handle the truth!” An enraged Nicholson then extols his and the military’s importance to national security, while maintaining that the recalcitrant Marine’s death “saved lives.” When finally cornered, Nicholson admits to issuing the illegal “code red” punishment order that resulted in the Marine’s death.

As Jesus stands before Pilate, “truth” is sought – for a time. Roman Pilate asks Jesus if he is the King of the Jews. Jesus answers, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate dismissively replies, “What is truth?” Pilate then addresses the enraged Jewish leaders, telling them that he finds no case against Jesus, but that, as is the custom, he will release one prisoner at Passover. The mob chooses the criminal Barabbas over Jesus.

Weak-willed Pilate gives in to those who want Jesus killed. He does the politically expedient. Jesus is the Truth that Pilate and the jealous Jewish leaders can’t handle. Jesus’ “code red” punishment becomes necessary to protect their chains of command and preserve the ponderous religious laws that rule the people. They turn their backs on Jesus, rather than pursue the Truth shining in the darkness. Jesus is not on trial here. Pilate and the Jewish leaders are – and they fail the examination, before God.

March 12: John 12:36-43

by Jason Morton

JESUS IS REJECTED BY THE JEWS

We all like sharing the gospel of our favorite sports teams, a recent political pundit or even the latest celebrity fad. Rarely are we worried what our friends or family think about our opinions and beliefs. Of course this goes out the window when we ponder talking about our religious beliefs. Talk about Jesus and we risk the chance of being ostracized by our parents, ridiculed by our friends or being “that guy” in any social conversation. This isn’t compatible with how we’re told to live according to the Bible (Mathew 28:19-20).

Sharing our story doesn’t mean we need to talk about Jesus all the time, to everyone we meet. What it means is that we need to, better yet, what we are commanded to do; tell others about our walk with Christ. Only we can testify as to how our life has changed for the better since we came to know Jesus. The best part about this privilege is that we get

to change the lives of others. Think about how our lives changed when we first heard the good news. Isn't this something one would want other people to experience?

Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. I believe we owe it to Him, others and ourselves to let everyone know how much Jesus loves every one of us. Everyone needs to know that eternal life awaits us all. How can we stay quiet about that?

March 13: John 12:44-50

by Norb Capistrant

SUMMARY OF JESUS' TEACHING

As Jesus is preparing to be taken from this earth to be back with God, he is telling the people that what he says and what he does while on earth are not of His own authority, but of the Lord God's. Jesus tells us that He is only the messenger of God. If we believe in Jesus, we are really believing in God the Father.

In our lives we are often told what is right or wrong by a number of different sources, parents, teachers, pastors, politicians and news media to name a few. But like Jesus they are only messengers sometimes with their own message. We must always remember what Jesus told us that the only truth comes from God and we must listen for His word as the only authority in our lives.

March 14: John 13:18-30

JESUS FORETELLS HIS BETRAYAL

March 15: John 13:31-35

by Anne McColgan

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

Jesus did not merely speak of God's love. He showed the world God's love for us on the cross. This is his glory. This was the way he explained God's love to us. This was the perfect love and was the example he expected us to follow.

Love is the best way we can teach others. The way we treat others speaks of our faith and invites others to join us. Love, even in the most minute, is the best way to spread the glory of God. We are called to love by example through our prayers, words, deeds, and loving service.

March 16: John 13:36-38

by Roger Grimshaw

JESUS FORETELLS PETER'S DENIAL

Jesus knows all our weakness. He even knows when we would deny him in our everyday lives, but he still loves us and came to die for our salvation. He promised us that we cannot follow him home to heaven now, but we can later. In the meantime, we know that we can follow him by loving God, loving one another and love our neighbors. We can serve those in need by helping them, by listening to their stories, by praying with them, or by praying for them. When we deny Jesus by being unkind to ourselves or others, we also can remember that God's love for us is sure now and always. And, in the end we will be welcomed home to be with God.

March 17: John 14:1-14

by Robert Ruse

JESUS THE WAY TO THE FATHER

Since Christmas we have been reflecting on the many ways that the birth of Jesus can change our lives. During our worship we have been urged to consider new and more positive directions in our living and decision making. As we continue our journey through this Lenten Season, we have more opportunities to be assured of God's unconditional love for all people.

The 14th chapter of the Gospel of John contain some of the most important truths in all Scripture! If we have any remaining questions about God's unconditional love and grace this chapter is required reading! In response to Thomas, Jesus said; "I am the way the truth and the life." For Christians it is only through Jesus that we can truly find God.

These verses also assure us that we have the path to eternal life and can secure that promise through Jesus. He told us not to let our hearts be troubled because there is a place in God's house already prepared for us. There is only one requirement: We must believe! Let each of us use this Lenten Season to strengthen our faith and belief!

March 18: John 19:1-16a

by Jan & Ron Brandt

JESUS CONDEMNED

The trial of Jesus before Pilot is a study in the moral acquiescence of a man who had the power to stand firm. Pilot is in Jerusalem with his soldiers. There is usually trouble on the high holy days as the Jewish people remember their history as a free and chosen people under God.

Pilot's caution has proven wise and now the carefully-led rabble is shouting outside his gate. He is supposed to stand for Roman peace and justice, process and order. Yet, mostly what he wants is to get through the holy days with the minimum fuss and without harm to his reputation. His want overcomes his role and in that process the leaders have manipulated him into condemning to death a man he knows is innocent. It is an expedient, if unjust, solution in a dangerous situation. Let us beware of expediency and pray for the courage to stand firm.

March 19: John 14:15-31

by Judy Colvin

PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

God Speaks to us in a way called the Holy Spirit. It is the very presence of God within us and all believers, it helps us live as God wants us to. By Faith we can live our life with the Spirit's power in us each day. Sometimes we are not listening when God is speaking, for he has his own certain way of speaking to us, we must pay attention. We must take time out of our daily routines and listen for his message. This is why it is so important to make time for God in our lives. Spending time reflecting on God each day. Deep and lasting peace can be the results of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

March 20: John 15:1-17

by Phyllis Baskett

JESUS THE TRUE VINE

We have often heard the phrase "He comes from a good family". Currently, I am reading a biography of Winston Churchill. Now if anyone was born into a good family it was him, except that his father didn't like him. He was ignored by him his entire life.

No matter what earthly family we are born into, we don't have to worry about being accepted by our Heavenly Father! He created us, cares for us and watches over our steps.

In this chapter, Jesus uses the metaphor of Himself as a vine and His Father as the gardener. The gardener prunes the branches that do not bear fruit. The disciples are warned that barren branches are pruned by the vinedresser. They must abide in Him to bear fruit. By this they will be known as His disciples.

Here we see the close relationship of Jesus and His disciples. He reminds the disciples of the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the disciples. Jesus says "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: To lay down one's life for one's friends. If you do what I command, I no longer call you servants but friends for everything I learned from My Father I have made known to you.

March 21: John 15:18-6:4a

THE WORLD'S HATRED

This passage begins with the conjunction 'if.' "If the world hates you ..." I wonder if Jesus really means 'when' - for he fully expects his followers to be hated as he was hated. This daunting expectation is the improbable beginning of a passage of deep comfort. The 'if' lets us decide. when we experience the world's hatred, to claim this comfort for our own.

The first comfort is that we are experiencing what Jesus has already experienced and over which he has already triumphed. That triumph is the base of our salvation. The second comfort is that our experience is the sign that we belong to God. Remember this gospel begins with The Prologue and its promise that in Jesus' incarnation God has acted so that we can become 'children of God.'

Perhaps it is this sort of comfort that leads Paul to urge us (Phil 2:12) to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." "May God give us the grace to accept this hard comfort.

March 22: John 16:4b-15

by Katherine Anderson

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

To me, this passage is the essence of the good news of the Bible. Jesus is explaining how the Trinity operates: how God the Father is connected to his Son Jesus, to the Holy Spirit, and to me and you. The Holy Spirit is called the Counselor who guides us into all truth. Jesus tells us the Counselor will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears (from Jesus, who has all that belongs to the Father).

The Trinity is divine. When the Holy Spirit is living in us, we experience the divine. Life suddenly takes on a thrilling dimension as we honor God through our thoughts, words and deeds. As Jesus said in verse 12: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can bear." I believe it! Jesus is spoon-feeding me through the Holy Spirit. He knows me better than I know myself. Jesus knows how much I can bear, moment by moment.

Help me, Jesus! I don't want to ignore this precious gift...an ongoing relationship with you, until the day when we feast face-to-face! From that day forward I will not need to be spoon-fed anymore.

March 23: John 16:16-24

by Barb Shaal

SORROW WILL TURN TO JOY

As we continue on our Lenten journey, John shares the story of Jesus preparing his disciples for his upcoming death on the cross. When he tells them that he will be leaving them in a little while, but then they will see him again, they become anxious and question among themselves about what does he mean.

Jesus responds to their anxiety by sharing that he knows they will be very sad when he leaves them, but then their sadness will turn to joy when he returns. He assures them that at that time they will understand what he means, and that they then can pray in his name to the Father for anything. We too share in this sorrow on our Lenten path when we realize that God sent Jesus to die for our sins, but our sorrow turns to joy on Easter morning when we see the tomb is empty and Jesus has risen from the dead.

March 24: John 16:25-33

by Maxine Perry

PEACE FOR THE DISCIPLES

Our text contains Jesus' final teaching, before his arrest, to His disciples, all of whom are about to fail spiritually. To overcome spiritual failure, be encouraged by God's love and grace that is found in Jesus Christ.

We can be encouraged by five aspects of God's love and grace that our Lord outlines in this text:

1. To overcome spiritual failure, be encouraged that there is always hope in Christ for future spiritual growth.
2. To overcome spiritual failure, be encouraged by our privilege in prayer.
3. To overcome spiritual failure, be encouraged by the Father's special love and grace.
4. To overcome spiritual failure, be encouraged by God's sovereign plan of salvation.
5. To overcome spiritual failure, be encouraged that ultimately our peace is in Christ, not in our performance.

We can be encouraged by our Lord's pardon, His presence, and His peace.

March 25: John 19:16-22

by Vince Olsen

THE CRUCIFIED MESSIAH

Jesus is standing before Pilate and the angry crowd. Pilate allows the crowd and the religious leaders to have Jesus crucified. While the government leader and the jealous religious leaders were arguing, Jesus remained focused on his inner self, God's presence within Him. Not what was going on around him nor His flogging or crown of thorns. His faith would comfort Him knowing that the outcome would be victorious.

Jesus' ordeal does not compare with our troubles, but what an example for us here. When we are confronted with difficult situations, do we faithfully follow our God inspired, "inner self", or are we controlled by what is happening around us.

March 26: John 17:1-19

by Dotti Tyle

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES

"Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You." (17:1). The prayer reveals that the Lord has already glorified the Father by His earthly life and ministry (17:4) and now He prays that He might do the same in His death. The Lord accomplished His earthly tasks of revealing the Father to the disciples (17:6-8) and spoke to them from the perspective of the other side of the cross when the disciples would be fully assured concerning all Jesus said and did to reveal the Father to them. The Lord prayed "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as we are." (17:11) The disciples were believers because they belonged to the Father and were given to the Son (17:6, 9-10). They were believers also because they came to faith in the person of Jesus Christ as the One sent from God (17:8).

March 27: John 17:20-26

by Frances Patterson

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES

This prayer was given by Jesus for all believers who embrace Him as Their Savior. He prays for believers to become “one” with He and the Father just as He and the Father are one. Jesus invites all, present and future believers into the intimate circle of the Trinity.

As I thought about this I noticed that Jesus also prays for believers to be “one” with each other. Immediately I recalled an event. When shopping at Costco’s on a busy day right before Thanksgiving I noticed a man and woman in front of me. She had just returned to deliver a food tasting to the man she was with. I commented that looked like a very nice sample. She responded by offering to get me a sample also. Even though I didn’t want to put her out she insisted on doing it for me. She spoke in a heavy foreign accent and it appeared the man with her did not speak much English.

She soon returned with a sample and mentioned that she very much liked the cross around my neck stating the symbol was important to her. I thanked her for getting the sample and wished her a blessed day. She immediately responded with a smile and wished me the same. Instantly we were “one” in the faith even without being from the same country. Maybe this is what Jesus prayed for!

March 28: John 18:1-11

by Dick Thompson

THE BETRAYAL AND ARREST OF JESUS

Would any one of us, if wrongly accused of a capital crime, knowingly approach the arresting party and confirm that we are the wanted person? I doubt it. But that is exactly what Jesus did at the Garden of Gethsemane on the night Judas betrayed him.

In spite of his earlier human anguish over what he knew lay ahead for him he stuck to God’s “Plan A.” He brushed back Peter’s effort to fight them off, and urged the authorities to leave the disciples unmolested.

Plan A was to show all what real love was: a willingness to die for his friends and for US. The arresting party was taken aback!! Normally, the hunted follow “Plan B”: fight or flight. That’s why the Roman soldiers came with the temple police.

So, here we are 2,000 years later and Christ is still saying to us “Take up your cross and follow me.” Or, at least to risk it by standing up for Jesus and what we believe. The world needs more to follow Plan A. Are you ready?

March 29: John 19:23-30

JESUS' LAST WORDS

“Woman, here is your son.”

“Here is your mother.”

“I am thirsty.”

“It is finished.”

Jesus' last words reflect the shrinking world of Jesus' dying awareness. He has gone from facing the world's greatest power in Pilate, to the walk to execution, to the suffocation of crucifixion. As death comes close, Jesus focuses on his responsibility for his mother. It is often important for us to tell those who are headed home to God that we will be alright and they should go when Jesus calls their name. Here, Jesus takes the initiative to make sure his mother (and the beloved disciple) will be alright. As his world shrinks further, he focuses on his physical experience and talks of his thirst.

Finally, he lets go to death. Evil has shrunk his world and snuffed out his life Only to find that these words are far from his last and that he will again live as Word and expand life for us all. Thanks be to God.

March 30: John 19:31-37

by Doris Nocera

JESUS THE PASSOVER LAMB

In the Old Testament the Israelites sacrificed an unblemished lamb as restitution for their sins. These sacrifices occurred every morning and evening in the Temple in Jerusalem. The sacrifice of the Passover lamb took place when blood was applied to door posts to save the boy children from death. Old Testament prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah foretold of the coming of One who would be brought “like a lamb to the slaughter” and whose suffering and sacrifice would provide redemption for Israel. Of course, that person was none other than Jesus Christ, “the lamb of God.” John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

It is through Jesus' death on the cross that made atonement for sin and to pay the penalty of the sins of all who believe in Him. Jesus precious blood enables us to spend eternity with God.

March 31: John 19 38-42

by Eric Jason

PASSOVER LAMB

Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us – that is the plea John 19 shows us in great detail, the preparation of the body of Jesus for entombment. According to Jewish tradition, It was the day of preparation for the Passover holiday (the celebration of the exodus from Egypt), and no work could be done

The sacrificial lamb figured importantly for ages past in this celebration. It is a striking contrast between the physical details of the preparation of the body and the idea of the pascal (Passover and Easter) lamb that is sacrificed for us.

We think of the sacrificial lamb but are presented with very real description of human tragedy, death and burial. We are dealing with the son of God who shortly would be resurrected.

April 1: John 20:1-18

by Robert Patterson

RESURRECTION

As the new day dawned Mary Magdalene made her way to the tomb to prepare the body of Jesus for burial. But all she finds is an empty tomb. After calling John and Peter she sat outside the tomb weeping while they went inside and found only the grave linens and the face cloth neatly folded in place.

After they left she bent down to look in and saw two angels one at the foot and one at the head. As she turned to leave she saw what appeared to be the gardener. He calls her by name and she realizes it is Jesus. He is alive but must ascend soon to His Father . He tells her to report this to His brothers. Mary delivers the “First Easter Message”

She was the most unlikely to preach the “Easter Message “ full of forgiveness and love. Her culture believed a woman could not be a reliable witness. God had used the most unlikely to bring the message carried down through all the ages.

John20:31 concludes with “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and believing you may have life in His name.”

celebrate Easter

He is not here, but has risen.

- Matthew 28:6

Easter Egg Hunt (March 24 • 9:30 - 11:30 am • Courtyard)

Holy Week

Palm Sunday (March 25 • 9, 10 & 11 am)

Maundy Thursday (March 29 • 6:30 pm • Sanctuary)

Join us at Jesus' feast of love and grace.

Good Friday (March 30 • 6:30 pm • Sanctuary)

Come walk, reflect, and pray through experiential Stations of the Cross. Together we shall deepen our gratitude for Christ's sacrifice and renew our commitment to follow him. Family friendly.

Easter Sunday Services

Sunrise Service @ Lido Beach (6:30 am • Near the pavilion)

All are welcome. Dress casually. Some chairs will be provided but it is suggested that you bring a chair or blanket.

Traditional & Contemporary Services

9 & 11 am Traditional • Sanctuary

10 am Contemporary • Campus Center

Includes a special time for children in all services.