

# From Christmas to the Cross

Lenten Devotions 2022

By Janice Bauer

Our Lenten devotions for this year will take us from Christmas to the Cross. At Christmas, we sing Joy to the World and declare “the wonders of His love.” On Good Friday, we sing “What Wondrous Love is This” and remind ourselves that it was His love that “caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.”

As we journey through Lent from Christmas to the Cross, we will look at events in Christ’s life that demonstrate His wondrous love. When Jesus walked, talked, and laughed with His friends, when He welcomed little children, when He spoke of the Kingdom, when He healed the sick, even when He confronted His enemies, He was expressing a love that desires all lost sheep to be found and safely brought into the fold.

Join us each weekday from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday as we reflect upon the love of our Savior in His life and ultimately in His death.

*Note: Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the English Standard Version.*

## March 2, 2022, Ash Wednesday

Today's Reading: Matthew 1:18-21

*You will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*

*Matthew 1:2*

### Joy and Sorrow

As Lent begins once again, I think back to the year 2001, when my father changed his address from earth to heaven at about this time of year. And bittersweet is the word that comes to my mind. The grief was bitter, but the joy of knowing he was in the presence of Jesus was sweet. As we ponder the path from Christmas to the Cross, we are reminded that joy and sorrow are often interwoven.

The beauty of Christmas lights and carols and trees is joyful, but the compelling reason for the Christ Child's birth goes far beyond our holiday celebrations. One year during Advent I heard a pastor say, "If you worship the Babe in the manger but ignore the blood of the cross, Christ will always be a stranger to you." It's true. The joy of Christmas must combine with the sorrow of Good Friday for Matthew 1:21 to be fulfilled: *You will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*

God knew that our greatest need is not for a life without sorrow but for the forgiveness of our sins, a restored relationship with our heavenly Father, and an eternal home in heaven.

As long as we live in the space between the incarnation and the second coming, we are surrounded by the paradox that joy and sorrow coexist. Perhaps this is a reality for you right now. If so, may you remember that the Savior who comes to offer Himself for you also walks with you and holds you securely in His love.

**For Reflection: Where is there joy in your life right now? Where is there sorrow? Will you welcome Jesus into both?**

## March 3, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 3:1-6

*And they were baptized by him [John] in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

*Matthew 3:6*

### **The Gift of Confession**

I always wonder if I'm picturing this scene accurately. John the Baptist is in the wilderness, wearing wild clothing and living off the land. He's drawing quite a crowd, even though his message is direct and piercing: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matthew 3:2).

But he's not some random crazy preacher. He is the very person the prophet Isaiah said would come to be a voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord. Many heard the cry and came, confessing their sins and being baptized. I wonder how they confessed. Did each person speak privately with John the Baptist? Did they confess publicly to all who were present? Or did their coming for baptism in itself signify their confession?

We speak words of confession each time we gather for worship. Sometimes this is a somber or serious part of the service, and appropriately so. But have you ever considered that confession is a gift? As we confess our general condition as fallen people, we remember we are unworthy sinners and gain a fresh appreciation for God's marvelous grace. As we confess specific sins, we become aware of areas in our lives we need to surrender more fully to God's control. As we confess daily, the Holy Spirit changes us and empowers us to live as redeemed children of God.

**For Reflection:** In the book of Acts, the apostles proclaimed all that Jesus had accomplished by His death and resurrection, and they urged their listeners: *repent and return to God, so that your sins may be wiped away and that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord* (Acts 3:19 NASB). Do you need the reassurance of forgiveness for some sin? Do you need refreshing? Take advantage of the gift of confession now.

## March 4, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.*

*Matthew 3:13-15*

### **John Consented**

We can understand John the Baptist's reluctance. Filled with the Holy Spirit, sent specifically to prepare the way for the Messiah, John knew that Jesus was the spotless Lamb of God. Of course, he felt unworthy to baptize Jesus. John didn't want to draw attention to himself in any way or to divert attention away from Jesus. But when Jesus explained to John that His baptism was necessary, John agreed.

In his gospel account, Luke tells us: *One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized* (Luke 3:21 NLT). When we see artwork depicting Jesus' baptism, it often looks like He's all alone in the water. The crowd, if present at all, stands at a respectful distance. But no! Jesus joins sinners in the Jordan. Though He has no sin to confess, He comes and stands among them, stands among us. He demonstrates His love by identifying with us in this way as He begins His journey to the cross.

And what happened next? *After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said: "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy"* (Matthew 3:16-17 NLT). What a gift of love this was from the Heavenly Father to His Son! It must have given Jesus great comfort, reassurance, and strength that day and as He remembered it in all the days that followed.

**For Reflection: Take time to thank Jesus for love that envelopes sinners like you and me. Then stand in awe knowing that, because of Jesus, God the Father calls you a dearly loved son or daughter who brings Him great joy!**

## March 7, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 4:12-22

*And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

*Matthew 4:21b-22*

### **Following**

When James and John heard the call of Jesus, they followed immediately. No hesitation, no excuses, no "first let me go and ...." The same was true for Peter and Andrew. When Jesus called them, they left their nets immediately and followed Him. It wasn't necessarily the first time they had ever seen or heard of Jesus, but it was the first time for this direct, personal call to them to be His disciples. And they followed.

But although their following was immediate when they were called, the changes in their lives were not. Their early steps with the Master were faltering. Throughout His ministry, they misunderstood much of what He said. They tried to keep children and needy people away from Him. They jockeyed for position and even attempted to dissuade Him from going to the cross.

But Jesus' love for His followers was deep and strong. He was patient with their wavering faith and continued to teach them, to explain the things of God to them, to draw them closer to Himself. Jesus was confident they would grow into mature believers and effective witnesses.

Jesus demonstrates that same great love and patience with us. Though our following of Him is often with hesitation and our faith is sometimes shaky, He sees beyond all that to the faithful followers we will one day become. His love sees us redeemed by His blood and pleasing to the Father. He rejoices at each step of faith we take as we learn to walk with Him and to grow as children who reflect His glory.

**For Reflection: When did you begin following Jesus? How have you experienced Jesus' patience with you as you have grown in faith?**

## March 8, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 5:38-48

*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

*Matthew 5:48*

### **Perfection**

Perfection is a gift. Jesus, Himself, is perfect. And when we are in Him, the Father sees us as perfect, too. What a gift of love! Paul expressed it clearly in Romans 4:24-25 (NLT): *God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God.*

But there's more to it than the amazing gift of right standing with God. Jesus spoke the words, *You are to be perfect*, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount – the same sermon in which He said we are to go above and beyond what is required, to not resist those who steal from us, to love our enemies, to pay back evil with kindness. Perfection, Christ's goodness, is not given to us so we can enjoy it in a sort of holy vacuum, but so we can act on it in the arena of life, especially in our relationships.

The Revised English Bible translates verse 48 this way: *There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds.* This helps us understand that the perfection Jesus speaks of is both something we are, by God's grace, and something we do, by God's Spirit.

Christ has imparted His perfection to us. May we never cease to praise Him. And may we have the grace to live it out in our relationships with others.

**For Reflection: Who in your life is easy to love and serve? Who in your life is harder to love and serve? Pray about how God would have you love and serve them both this week.**

## March 9, 2022

Reading: Matthew 7:24-29

*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*

*Matthew 7:24*

### **Loving Wisdom**

When teachers correct a student's homework, it is done out of concern for the student. Teachers know that future academic success depends upon learning correctly the times tables or basic grammar or spelling. When coaches instruct athletes on the skills of a particular sport, they do so with good intentions. They want their team members to be as effective on the field as possible. When parents set boundaries and model appropriate behavior, they do it because they want their children to grow up into kind and responsible adults. In all these situations, the wisdom that is imparted comes out of genuine love.

The same is true in today's teaching from Jesus. He carefully explains that there are two ways to live. One is wise and the other is foolish. One heeds God's words, the other ignores them. One brings stability, the other is bound for disaster.

The wisdom our Lord gives us comes from His heart of love. Because He wants what is best for us, He tells us where the path of true wisdom lies – in hearing His teaching and obeying what He says. This means that wisdom is actually very practical. It starts with reverence for the Lord and builds, day by day, step by step, on the sure foundation of Christ. Let's keep our feet on the right path by listening to and following our Savior!

**For Reflection: Psalm 111:10 says: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!* What practices could you incorporate into your daily life this week that would help you grow in the fear of the Lord and in wisdom? (For example, time in Scripture each morning, pausing to pray before making a decision, singing or reading a hymn/song of praise before bedtime, etc.)**

## March 10, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 9:9-13

*But when he [Jesus] heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick .... For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*

*Matthew 9:12-13*

### **Spiritual Check-up**

Even though most health insurances will cover a yearly medical check-up, many people don't go to a doctor unless they feel sick. Even then, some folks try to ignore the symptoms, hoping the pain or the stiffness or the fatigue will simply go away. And sometimes, while the doctor is being avoided, the illness develops into something extremely serious, or even fatal. Then it's too late to visit the doctor for a check-up.

There's a check-up that's vital for our spiritual health. It's called confession. In last week's devotions, we talked about how confession is a gift. In light of Jesus' words about sick people and the reason He came, we can see the value of daily, personal confession. Simply put, confession keeps sinners such as you and me in touch with our Savior and prevents us from taking grace too lightly.

Christians who follow the A-C-T-S (Adoration-Confession-Thanksgiving-Supplication) acronym for prayer, make confession a part of their regular prayer life. They pause to ask the Lord to examine their hearts, to reveal specific sins of which they need to repent, and to shed His light on their lives and expose anything that displeases Him.

**For Reflection: Make Psalm 139:23-24 part of your prayer life and benefit from this spiritual check-up: *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!***



## March 11, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 11:25-30

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

*Matthew 11:29*

### **The Gift of Rest**

Rest. The dictionary defines rest as sleep or repose; ease or inactivity after exertion; relief from anything distressing or tiring. The world offers rest in many different forms, from vacations to happy hours to binge-watching movies or TV shows.

But true rest for our souls comes only from Jesus. It is a gift that flows out of our relationship with Him. We can experience rest, not because life treats us well or we have a large reserve of energy, but because we know Him – His grace and love, His concern and compassion, His wisdom and omnipotence.

Resting in Jesus is something we learn to do more and more over time. Resting in Jesus is praying about everything. Resting in Jesus is rejoicing in trials. Resting in Jesus is trusting His care for us even in times of distress and welcoming into our hearts the peace that passes understanding.

Are you tired, distressed, worried, or afraid? Is your heart restless or empty? Jesus has a word just for you: *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28).

**For Reflection: As you put your head on the pillow tonight, think about how Jesus provides rest for your body and for your soul. Ask Him to fill your mind with thoughts of His love and to watch over you while you sleep.**

## March 14, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 7:1-10

*And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.*

*Luke 7:6-7*

### **Unworthy, But Loved**

There is so much love in this story! The Roman officer loved his slave, who was sick and dying. The Jewish elders who came to Jesus on behalf of the Roman officer told Jesus that the man loved the Jewish people. Jesus loved both the Roman officer and the slave, for He willingly headed for the man's house to intervene in this dire situation.

But notice two different approaches to those who are relying on Christ's love and compassion. The Jewish elders say that the Roman officer deserves the help Jesus can offer because he cares for the Jews and has built them a synagogue. The Roman officer, by contrast, doesn't think he deserves anything. He simply says: *Say the word ... and my servant will be healed.* Luke doesn't record what words Jesus spoke, but he does say emphatically that the slave was completely healed.

Some worship liturgies include this prayer in their communion rite: **Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.** What a humble mindset with which to approach the Lord's Supper, and what an appropriate truth to ponder during Lent! We are not worthy, but we are loved. Our Savior's sacrifice of His body and blood reassures us this is so – now and forever.

**For Reflection: Read Luke 7:1-10 again, imagining yourself in the place of the Roman officer. What might you have experienced as this story unfolds? How might you express your thanks at the end?**

## March 15, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 7:11-17

*And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."*

*Luke 7:13*

### **Overflowing Love**

In yesterday's reading, we saw how the Roman officer sent Jewish friends to Jesus to entreat His help. We see the same thing in many of the miracles – people seek Jesus out for healing. Consider the blind man who sat by the roadside and cried out for mercy when he learned that Jesus was passing by or the four men who brought their paralytic friend to Jesus. And then there's the hemorrhaging woman who touched Jesus' robe and the ten lepers who called to Jesus to help them. You could probably think of many other examples.

But today's story is different. The widow whose son has died didn't ask for help. Perhaps she didn't know who Jesus is. No doubt she was overwhelmed by her grief, weighed down with the deep sorrow only known to a parent who has had to bury a child. Perhaps she was also fearful of the future. How would she be provided for? To whose household would she now belong?

But before she even saw Jesus, He saw her. And His heart overflowed with compassion. He went to her. He spoke tenderly. He touched the coffin. He told the son to get up. He gave the risen boy back to his mother.

Jesus' overflowing love moves Him to action. He takes the initiative. He comes to us. He brings us the healing we hardly know we need. *When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:6-8 NLT).*

**For Reflection: Read Romans 5:6-8 slowly several times. What demonstrations of overflowing love do you see? Spend time praising your Savior for His overflowing love.**

## March 16, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 8:41-42 & 49-56

*And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying.*

*Luke 8:41-42*

### What If

This is a compelling story in the Gospels. Our hearts go out to Jairus. His little girl, his only daughter, is dying. He seeks out Jesus for help, and Jesus agrees to go to Jairus' home. Hope must have welled up in Jairus' heart.

But the journey to his home was not a smooth one. All along the way, crowds are surrounding them, tagging along to be near the Teacher. Then a strange thing happens. An ill woman who has suffered desperately for many years touches Jesus' robe. Jesus senses it and stops (see Luke 8:43-48). Jesus seems not to be in a hurry, but Jairus must have been full of anxious tension at this unexpected delay. And just when it seems they will start on their way again, a messenger comes with bad news: his daughter has already died. It's too late.

What if that were the end of the story? What if Jairus continued home in grief and Jesus went off in another direction? Thankfully, there is more to tell. Jesus encouraged Jairus to put aside his fear and continue to believe. Then, when they arrived at the home, Jesus went to the girl's bedside, took her by the hand and said, "Arise!" Another miracle of love from our Savior!

But back to the question: What if that were the end of the story? What about the times when Jesus doesn't heal? When our loved one does die? When our deepest pleas seem to go unanswered? There is no easy answer to these mysteries, except to ponder a greater mystery: Why would the God of the universe offer up His Son to save rebellious people? Why would the Son lay down His life as a ransom for you and me? That mystery is another miracle of love from our Savior!

**For Reflection: Recall times God has answered your prayers and provided the deliverance or healing you sought. Recall times when that has not happened or perhaps not happened in the way or time you would have liked. How might the mystery of Jesus' loving sacrifice make a difference for you?**

## March 17, 2022

Today's Reading: Mark 1:29-38

*Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

*Mark 1:30-31*

### **Restored**

It was the Sabbath. Jesus, along with some of His disciples, went to the synagogue where Jesus taught. Mark's gospel notes that Jesus' teaching had an air of authority the people had never heard before. And then Jesus put that authority into action by casting an evil spirit out of a man. I'm sure the disciples were as amazed as the onlookers.

When they left the synagogue, they headed for the home of brothers Andrew and Simon Peter. When they got there, they discovered that Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. What should they do? With the teaching and miracle of that Sabbath day fresh in their minds, they turn to Jesus. They tell Jesus about her immediately!

And Jesus responds immediately, too. He touches the woman, her fever departs, she gets up and prepares a meal! The loving and healing touch of Jesus restores her, and she joyfully serves her guests.

There are two simple lessons for us today. First, when we have a need (big or small), let's tell it to Jesus right away. Let's go directly to the One who can help us. And second, when Jesus touches us in whatever way He chooses, may the restoration He brings lead us to serve others right where we are.

**For Reflection: What could help remind you to go immediately to Jesus with your needs? What could help you respond with a servant's heart when Jesus' loving, healing touch has restored you?**

## March 18, 2022

Today's Reading: Mark 1:40-45

*And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean."*

*Mark 1:40*

### **Willing**

Word was spreading! Jesus was working miracles and changing people's lives. It's only natural that more and more needy people sought Him out. That's what happened in our reading for today. A man with leprosy came to Jesus, knowing that he was taking a big risk in doing so. Because of his disease, this man would not have been allowed to mingle on the streets or in people's homes. His courage to approach Jesus anyway tells us that he was both desperate for someone to help him and hopeful that Jesus was the one.

He comes and kneels. He places himself in the posture of a beggar. But his words are not those of a beggar, who may have implored, "Please, please, please, help me!" No, this man says something different: *If you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean* (Matthew 1:40 NLT). He believes that Jesus is indeed the One who can help him; the One who is powerful and able, sovereign and kind.

How right this man was! For look at Jesus' response: *Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" Instantly the leprosy disappeared, and the man was healed* (Matthew 1:41-42 NLT).

Jesus' love for the leper moves Him to touch the man with compassion and with healing. Later, Jesus' love would move Him to endure crucifixion to secure forgiveness for this man and for all people. We don't have to wonder if He cares enough to give His life for us. He is willing.

**For Reflection: Whether your need today is for forgiveness or strength, peace or comfort, wisdom, or guidance, how does it help to remember that Jesus is always willing to come to your aid?**

## March 21, 2022

Today's Reading: John 3:1-17

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night.*

*John 3:1-2a*

### **Divine Opportunity**

Nicodemus was an important person. He held a position of both civil power and religious influence. He was accustomed to the honors afforded to members of the Jewish ruling council. So, what is he doing darting about after dark visiting an upstart rabbi?

Nicodemus, it seems, sensed there was something unique about Jesus. Although this was early in Jesus' ministry, Nicodemus had heard and seen enough to convince him that Jesus was, at the very least, *a teacher come from God.* (John 3:2b)

So, Nicodemus sought out Jesus for a private conversation. Perhaps he thought they would discuss Old Testament prophecies or some finer points of the law. But Jesus knows this isn't just a nighttime visit; it is a divine opportunity. So, He goes right to the heart of the matter: *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God* (John 3:3). Then Jesus goes on to explain how this rebirth happens, how it is birth not to physical life but to spiritual life, and how it is a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. It's all a bit confusing to Nicodemus. Then Jesus explains it further in the familiar words of John 3:16: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

In love, Jesus is offering Nicodemus an open door to the Kingdom through faith in Him. Now Nicodemus has a divine opportunity, an opportunity to believe in Jesus and receive eternal life through God's grace.

**For Reflection: We often read or recite John 3:16 as a stand-alone verse. What additional insights might you have from seeing this verse in the context of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus? How does it apply to all people, perhaps those who you find difficult to love? How does it apply to you?**

## March 22, 2022

Today's Reading: John 4:4-14

*Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well.  
John 4:6*

### Divine Encounter

A casual reading of this story makes it appear that the meeting of Jesus and the woman at Jacob's well was coincidental. Jesus sat down to rest because He was tired – a very ordinary response to traveling. The woman came to the well at an unusual time of day, not in the early morning when she might have met other townswomen but later, when she might not expect to meet anyone.

Each had their reasons for being at Jacob's well, but it wasn't a coincidence; the scene was being set for a divine encounter. The woman had an appointment with Jesus that wasn't on her calendar. And Jesus had something important to tell the woman.

Jesus initiated a conversation with her, something that was outside the cultural norms of the day. He asked her for a drink. She was so surprised that she questioned Him about it. Then He seized the opportunity to tell her: *If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water* (John 4:10). The woman is confused. Living water? What is this about? Does it come from a well in the ground? So, Jesus explained: *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).

As the divine encounter unfolds in the rest of John 4, Jesus reveals to the woman that He knows everything about her. And then He tells her something that most people did not yet understand about Him. *I who speak to you am he [the Messiah]* (John 4:26). The woman's faith was ignited; she shared her divine encounter with Jesus with those in her town, and others believed, too. In yesterday's reading, we saw how Nicodemus sought out Jesus. In today's story, we see Jesus seeking out someone who is not particularly looking for Him. What love Jesus has that draws this woman – and us – to Himself!

**For Reflection: Jesus is still offering Living Water to a thirsty world. What divine encounters might God have planned for you so that you can share about His love, forgiveness, and eternal life?**



## March 23, 2022

Today's Reading: John 6:1-14

*Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.*

*John 6:11*

### **Meeting Needs**

This well-known account of the feeding of the 5,000 might never have happened! The verses that precede this story in all four Gospels tell us why. Jesus had been teaching and preaching, healing, and casting out demons all around Galilee. The constant press of the crowds and the demands of ministry, combined with the news of John the Baptist's tragic death, took a toll on our Lord. He needed a respite from it all and withdrew with His closest disciples to a lonely place where they could rest.

But the people saw them leaving and followed them. This wasn't going to be the time for rest after all. Jesus, weary though He was, responded with compassion because He knew they were like sheep without a shepherd. And so, the 5,000 gathered and needed to be fed.

There are so many details in the feeding of the 5,000. Perhaps you've heard sermons on some of them:

- The way Jesus tested the disciples' faith.
- The little boy with five barley loaves and two fishes.
- The amazing way the meager provisions were multiplied.
- The fact that Jesus blessed the bread and gave thanks before distributing it.
- The orderly fashion of the meal and the fact that nothing was wasted.

Each of the details lends itself to a corresponding spiritual lesson, and you've probably heard sermons to that effect as well. But for today, let's simply note that the feeding of the 5,000 begins with the crowds hanging on Jesus' every word and deed and ends with an important conclusion: *When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"* (John 6:14).

Jesus cares about our physical needs, as the feeding of the 5,000 shows. But He cares even more about our spiritual needs – that we understand He is the Messiah who has come to set us free from sin and death.

**For Reflection:** Recall a few times when Jesus has provided for your physical or practical needs. Then recall times He has met your spiritual needs and enfolded you in His love.

## March 24, 2022

Today's Reading: John 6:16-21

*When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they were glad to take him into the boat.*

*John 6:19-21a*

### **The Storms of Life**

Like the feeding of the 5,000, this story of Jesus walking on the water is familiar. Besides John's account, it is also recorded in Matthew and Mark, with some very interesting details. Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead without Him. Then Jesus, still seeking a time of rest, went up on a mountain by Himself to pray. Mark also tells us that Jesus saw the disciples struggling against the wind and the waves of the storm.

So, it seems Jesus deliberately sent His disciples into a troublesome, even dangerous, situation. That's not a very comforting thought! The consoling part, though, is that Jesus saw them in their trouble and came to them in the storm. He calmed the sea and brought peace to their fearful hearts.

God does, indeed, permit difficulties in our lives. Sometimes these come in the form of trials, sometimes as the natural result of a choice we make or someone else makes. From this side of eternity, we can't necessarily see the source of the storms in our lives, but we know that Jesus sees us as we struggle with them.

A friend of mine always refers to difficulties as "opportunities to trust God." And they are. The storms in our lives teach us to rely on God, to focus on eternal realities, to open our hearts to peace that passes understanding. In times of trials, God helps our faith grow and instills compassion in us for others who suffer.

If you are in a storm today or sense that one is approaching, listen to these loving words of Jesus:  
*It is I; do not be afraid.*

**For Reflection: What storm are you facing? Will you ask God for faith to see it as an opportunity to trust your Lord?**

## March 25, 2022

Today's Reading: John 6:22-40

*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*

*John 6:35*

### **What We Really Need**

The feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all four Gospels. The vivid account of the disciples caught in the storm at sea is recorded in three Gospels. But today's reading is only in the Gospel of John. This perhaps should not surprise us since John especially wants his readers to understand that the miracles of Jesus (which John calls "signs") point us to spiritual truths.

It's interesting to see the progression from the feeding of the 5,000 with physical food to Jesus revealing their need for spiritual food. The people who had feasted well on a few loaves and fish had a deeper need – a need with eternal consequences – and many of them weren't even aware of it. Jesus told them: *Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you* (John 6:26-27).

We could think of this statement from Jesus as a rebuke; the first part especially sounds rather harsh. But I think Jesus speaks these words in love. He is opening their eyes to their spiritual need, and He is offering Himself as the means by which that need can be satisfied.

That's what Jesus does for us, too. He helps us become aware of our deep need for Him. Yes, we need Him! It's a simple fact. We need Him for forgiveness and salvation, for strength when times are tough, for hope when things seem hopeless. There is a hunger only Jesus can fill, and He is eager to do so!

**For Reflection: Read John 6:28-29, John 6:35, and John 6:40. What concept do you see in these verses that explains in one word how to receive the spiritual food Jesus has for us?**

## March 28, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 7:36-48

*And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.*

*Luke 7:37-38*

### **What Kind of Tears?**

Tears. They may come when we least expect them. People cry when they are sad, mad, afraid, relieved, uproariously happy, or deeply moved. People cry at weddings, funerals, and Hallmark commercials.

My favorite Bible story about tears is this one in Luke 7 – the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears. Such a display was shocking, of course, and the Pharisees couldn't believe He allowed it. But Jesus knew her tears were tears of repentance and faith and love. He explained it like this: *[When] I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven (Luke 7:44b-47a).*

Jesus didn't deny that the woman was a sinner; everyone knew her checkered past. The difference is that the Pharisees thought that sinners, certain sinners, in particular, were beyond redemption when, in fact, Jesus had come for the likes of these.

Perhaps like this woman you have a past you are not proud of or regrets you carry secretly in your heart. Here is hope for you and me. Whatever kind of tears we cry, Jesus sees each one. For tears of sorrow, He has comfort. For tears of despair, He gives hope. For tears of repentance, He offers forgiveness full and free.

**For Reflection: What kind of tears have you cried lately? Can you see God's love and grace at work, even through your tears?**

## March 29, 2022

Today's Reading: Mark 8:14-21

*They began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand?"*

*Mark 8:16-17*

### **Clueless**

I sometimes feel sorry for Jesus' disciples. It's true that they had the privilege of being eyewitnesses of Christ's ministry. They walked with Him, talked with Him, ate with Him. Yet they vacillated between faith and unbelief, between grasping the truth of God Incarnate come as the promised Messiah and being absolutely clueless.

In today's reading, Jesus uses bread for a spiritual lesson. He warns His followers to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, of sin's influence, and the danger of substituting religious forms for true faith. But the poor guys don't get it! "We only brought one loaf of bread," they exclaim. And how does Jesus respond? With a chastisement, it seems at first. He even asks them if they are hard-hearted!

But look closely. He continues: Do you not remember? Jesus encourages the disciples to remember how He fed the 5,000 with five little loaves and the 4,000 with seven. He asks them to recall the care and provision He has shown to the crowds that follow Him. As they do this, their minds may go back to the compassion and power He displayed each time He healed or forgave. And perhaps they will recall that their own lives were forever changed when He called them to follow Him.

No, they don't have to be clueless. And neither do we. Each time we open God's Word, we can remember His redeeming love. (More on this tomorrow!)

**For Reflection: Recall the many things God has done for you in the past. How can that encourage your faith today?**

## March 30, 2022

Today's Reading: Mark 8:27-38

*And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?"*

*Mark 8:27b-29a*

### **Who Do You Say I Am?**

We ask – and answer – many questions each day. But it's not every day God asks us: *Who do you say that I am?* Or is it?

Every time we open our Bibles, God is revealing Himself in some way. Through historical accounts, through prophecy and poetry, through the life of Christ, God gives us glimpses of who He is. For example, as we read about the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14, we learn that our God is a powerful deliverer. When we remember David's words in Psalm 23, we experience that God is our shepherd, provider, and comforter. When we reflect on the crucifixion and resurrection, we match Peter's confession with our own: *You are the Christ.*

As the conversation between Jesus and His disciples continues in Mark 8, it takes some strange twists and turns. First of all, Jesus tells them to keep His identity a secret. And then, when He explains that He is headed toward suffering and death, Peter rebukes Him. So, Jesus explains the paradox that saving one's life means losing it, and losing it means saving it. Very soon Jesus will demonstrate that paradoxical truth as He dies to bear the sins of the world and, thus, brings life eternal to all who will believe.

If you want to discover what God is like, the place to look is God's Word where He has revealed Himself and His purposes. Everything we need to know about God is there. That doesn't mean everything in the Bible is easy to understand, but from Genesis to Revelation the story is the same. God loves His creation. He grieves when we turn away from Him. He made the ultimate sacrifice to redeem us.

**For Reflection: Who do you say Jesus is?**

## March 31, 2022

Today's Reading: John 9:1-11 & 35-38

*So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight.*

*John 9:10-11*

### **Believe and Worship**

It's amazing how one event can have long-lasting repercussions. A crime can be committed in a minute, but it takes years to complete the investigation, trial and sentencing. That's a bit like today's story. In just a few minutes, Jesus mixed spit with mud and put it on the eyes of a blind man. When the man washed in the pool of Siloam, as Jesus had instructed him, he could see!

End of the story, right? No, it was just the beginning. It ignited a sequence of events, all focused on one question: Who is this man Jesus? The neighbors of the formerly blind man asked him how this amazing miracle happened. The Pharisees questioned the man and his parents. Who healed you? How did he do it? Is this man from God? Is he a prophet, a sinner, or what?

The Pharisees were locked in hot debate about Jesus' identity. Even the man who had felt the healing touch of Jesus was unsure. But when Jesus heard that the Pharisees had cast the man out of the synagogue, He went and found him. Jesus spoke to him plainly, revealing His identity as God's Son. Then the man boldly confessed: *Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him* (John 9:38).

*And he worshiped.* Worship is the appropriate response when we encounter the living Christ. Have you been touched by the hand of the Savior? Have you experienced healing? Peace of mind? Renewed strength? Comfort and joy?

If so, take a moment now to worship.

**For Reflection: Lord God, my Savior, and King, I worship you because...**

## April 1, 2022

Today's Reading: John 11:1-45

*When he [Jesus] had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

*John 11:33-34*

### **Come Out!**

All it took was a word. No trumpet fanfare. No drum roll. Just a word from Jesus and Lazarus was raised from the dead. Dramatic as the story is, there's really nothing surprising about it. After all, Jesus is God, the same God who spoke the world into being with His words – *let there be*.

When Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus that their brother was sick, Jesus purposely delayed coming to help them. He had reasons of His own, reasons they didn't understand. The sisters were actually perturbed when He finally showed up. "If you had been here," they said, "things could have been different."

Jesus didn't defend or explain Himself. He simply called them to faith: *I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?* (John 11:25-26). The whole episode is a loving call to faith. Woven within the drama of the resurrection of Lazarus is this question: Do you believe? Do you believe that Jesus is the Savior? Do you believe that He can set you free?

Perhaps you sometimes feel you are in a tomb, waiting. Waiting to see if all this God stuff is really true. Waiting to see if you can finally cast-off fear, insecurity, and destructive habits. Waiting for the burden of guilt and shame to be removed. Surely the Lord of Life, who called Lazarus out of the tomb, calls to us, too. "Janice ... Sandra ... Michael ... Jennifer ... Jason ... [insert your name] ... Come out! The stone is rolled away. I have set you free!"

**For Reflection: Remember how Jesus called Mary and Martha to faith. In what circumstances of your life is God calling you to trust that He is in control and is holding you in His love?**



## April 4, 2022

Today's Reading: John 8:31-39

*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

*John 8:33*

### **Free Indeed**

I remember a bumper sticker I saw in 1976, the year of our nation's bicentennial. It read: "Be really free – declare your dependence on Jesus." Wait a minute! Freedom means independence; you can't be free by declaring dependence. Or can you?

Christians down through the centuries have experienced the truth behind this seeming contradiction. Freedom comes through complete dependence on Jesus for forgiveness and salvation, strength and courage, the willingness and the power to walk in His ways. In today's reading, John also tells us that freedom comes from knowing the truth and obeying it.

Hey, wait a minute again! Freedom through obedience? This really rubs our old nature the wrong way because we think of obedience as something that restricts us, that hems us in, and cramps our style. But when we cast aside God's instructions and do whatever we want whenever we feel like it, we end up enslaved to the very things we thought would bring fulfillment and pleasure.

The divine paradox is that we are free not when we disregard God's ways but when we love and obey them. A little further in his Gospel, John connects obedience and love. *Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him"* (John 14:23). Obeying God is a way of loving God.

Our Savior knew this. Jesus dwells in a relationship of perfect love with His Father, and He expressed that love through obedience to the Father as He willingly fulfilled God's plan of salvation by offering Himself as the sacrifice for sin. As we continue through our Lenten journey, let's remember that Jesus' love for the Father and for each of us shines clearly at the cross.

**For Reflection: How is God calling you to express your love for Him through obedience?**

## April 5, 2022

Today's Reading: John 14:8-14

*If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*

*John 14:14*

### **His Name, His Will**

Michael had been selected to receive an award but was unable to attend the ceremony, so he asked his friend Kevin to attend and accept the award on his behalf. Michael is a soft-spoken, gentle man. He thinks before he speaks and usually has a timely and appropriate word. Kevin is different. He tends to speak first and think later. His inclination toward sarcasm has landed him in trouble many times. So, when Kevin went forward to accept the award, he suppressed the urge to crack a joke and expressed simple gratitude in the way he thought Michael would have. After all, he was speaking "in Michael's name."

Jesus invited believers to pray in His name, but what this means can be confusing. Perhaps you've heard "in Jesus' name" added to a prayer as a rote closing sentence or even as a hoped-for way to increase the likelihood of the prayer being answered. But praying in Jesus' name means something else. It means keeping our requests within the nature and character of our Lord, praying the things He would pray. To discover what these things are, we look to Scripture where we see Jesus' heart of compassion, His welcome to the outcasts, His desire to bring healing and forgiveness and wholeness to all people. Jesus' prayers in Scripture also help us understand His nature. For example:

- He thanked the Father for revealing spiritual truths to those with childlike faith (Matt. 11:25).
- He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail (Luke 22:32).
- He thanked the Father for always hearing Him (John 11:41).
- He asked the Father to send us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17).

As Holy Week approaches, we especially remember Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane: *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will* (Matthew 26:39).

So, perhaps praying "in Jesus' name" is closely tied to praying "Thy will be done" and trusting God to do what is right and best.

**For Reflection: Think back on your prayers of recent days. Have they reflected the heart of Jesus? About what would you like to pray, "Thy will be done"?**

## April 6, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 10:1-21

*Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*

*Luke 10:20*

### **Rejoice in This**

Let's try to picture the scene as the 70 itinerant preachers Jesus had sent out returned. Where do you suppose they gathered? In someone's house or at an outdoor meeting place? Wherever they were, the place must have been buzzing as they all excitedly shared their stories. They were on a spiritual high. They had experienced the power of God working through them to heal and cast out demons!

Drawing upon today's reading, I can set my imagination to work here. I picture one bold disciple rushing up to Jesus, perhaps interrupting as Jesus talks with some of the others. "Lord," he says, "even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And Jesus casually replies, "Oh, I know," and goes on visiting.

"No, no, You don't understand," the disciple interrupts again. "Even the demons do what we say!"

"Yes, I know," comes Jesus' reply. Then He turns back to His original conversation.

Finally, the excited disciple grabs Jesus by the shoulders. "Did You hear what I said?" he nearly shouts. "Do You know what happened to us out there?"

Jesus turns to give the man His full attention, looking at this frazzled follower with tenderness. "Yes, I know. And I know you're excited. But let Me tell you something to really be excited about. Your name is written in heaven. Rejoice in this."

Reading stories from the Gospels as we journey through Lent, we may become excited about the miracles – the water turned to wine, the healing of the paralytic and the blind man and the leper, the feedings of vast crowds, and on and on. These are amazing, and they move us to praise God. But they are not the most important thing or the source of our greatest joy. The greatest reason to rejoice is this: by His grace our names are written in heaven.

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1a NIV).*

**For Reflection: Meditate on 1 John 3:1 and write or speak a prayer of response.**

## April 7, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 12:22-31

*And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on."*

*Luke 12:22*

### **No Need to Worry**

What do sparrows, flowers, and little children have in common? They do not worry.

Jesus tells His children – you and me – not to worry, not to be preoccupied with earthly concerns. This doesn't mean don't make any plans. Planning and worrying are not the same things. A plan responds to a situation in the best way possible and then moves on. Worry frets over (and over and over) every "what if," but never gets past them. Corrie Ten Boom put it succinctly: "Worry is like a rocking chair; it keeps you moving, but it doesn't get you anywhere."

Why shouldn't we worry? A look at today's reading gives us a whole bunch of reasons. Here are a few that stand out to me:

- Because our Heavenly Father knows what we need and cares for each of us personally.
- Because real life consists of so much more than food and clothing.
- Because worry accomplishes nothing.
- Because there are more worthwhile things to think about.
- Because Jesus, in love, has already taken care of our greatest need and tells us: *Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* (Luke 12:32).

And Jesus has given us a better way to occupy our thoughts and energies: seek His kingdom. When we're seeking God's kingdom, we don't have time to worry. When we're seeking God's kingdom, there's no need to.

**For Reflection: Read Luke 12-22-31 again slowly. Let these words of Jesus be directed toward your concerns for this day. Then choose a verse or phrase that encourages you and memorize it.**

## April 8, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 15:1-10

*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable.*

*Luke 15:1-3*

### **Lost and Found**

While I was growing up, listening to my dad's stories was one of my favorite parts were about spending time with him. Most of his stories were extemporaneous – he made them up as he went along. My husband did the same thing for our sons when they were small. He narrated the adventures of a daredevil, motorcycle-riding hero he invented named Dangerous Duke.

Jesus told stories, too, but they weren't tall tales. He always had a point to make, as today's reading shows us. The Pharisees were complaining about the company Jesus kept – a bunch of low-down, good-for-nothing sinners. Jesus could have responded by lecturing the Pharisees about the mission of the Messiah or confronting them directly with their own hypocrisy; instead, He told stories about sheep and pennies and prodigals.

Parables can be confusing. Sometimes we try to read too much into a parable and miss the main point. Here Jesus eliminates any misinterpretation by clearly stating the moral of the story: *There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance* (Luke 15:7).

Parables are powerful. They put us right in the middle of the action. Even if you don't know much about tending sheep, you can imagine the shepherd searching high and low, exploring every nook and cranny. Night comes, but he doesn't stop looking. The wind turns chilly; still, he continues. He searches and searches and searches ... until he finds the lost little lamb.

What a wonderful picture of our Good Shepherd. He searches and searches and searches ... until He finds you and me and brings us home.

**For Reflection: As we celebrate Palm Sunday this weekend, keep the Good Shepherd image in mind as you sing "Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."**

# Holy Week

## April 11, 2022

Today's Reading: John 12:20-33

*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

*John 12:32-22*

### Lifted Up

"Cross my heart and hope to die," children declare as they swear to keep a secret or to tell the truth. It's an interesting expression, isn't it? I suspect most children say it without a thought of what it might mean.

Could it be that Christians sometimes speak of the cross without thinking about all it entails? When Christ was crucified, the cross was a shameful thing. It meant only death, an ignoble one at that, and an excruciatingly painful end. Yet we speak of the cross as something glorious and sing about the wonderful cross. What do we mean? For believers, the cross is more than a symbol of death; it is a paradox that means both death and life. Jesus spoke of this paradox when He said: *Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit* (John 12:24). Jesus is that grain of wheat, dying under the weight of our sins and falling into a cold, lonely grave.

The cross becomes glorious because it, and the tomb, are now empty! They have served their purpose in God's plan of redemption. Now our Redeemer lives! As we enter Holy Week and hear again the story of Christ's passion and crucifixion, we do so as people who know the end of the story. We behold our Savior lifted up on the cross. We see His love for us and for all people. And our hearts anticipate the cry of Easter, "He is risen, indeed!"

**For Reflection: What do you think of when you think of the cross? How could you summarize the meaning of the cross if someone should ask you about it?**

## April 12, 2022

Today's Reading: John 16:16-33

*Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.*

*John 16:32*

### All Alone

*You will leave me all alone.* What haunting words for Jesus to speak to His friends! Did the disciples have any idea what He was talking about? I don't think so. Although Jesus spoke plainly, they couldn't imagine a situation so desperate or frightening that it would cause them to leave their Lord.

*You will leave me all alone.* What a sad reality for Jesus, who understood perfectly what was going to happen. No pain cuts quite so deep as abandonment by someone we love, and Jesus would be forsaken by all His followers. And yet, He said, I am not alone, for the Father is with me.

Alone, yet not alone? What kind of talk is this? It sounds like nonsense, but it's just the kind of statement Jesus liked to make. Remember when He told the disciples: *A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me* (John 16:16)? That sounded like gibberish to the disciples until Jesus explained it to them. He compared it to a woman in childbirth. During labor she suffers intense pain, but when the baby is born the agony is eclipsed by joy. Jesus walked a similar road. *For the joy that was set before him*, Hebrews 12:2 tells us, *Jesus endured the cross.*

At the end of today's reading, Jesus encourages believers with these words: *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world* (John 16:33).

During Holy Week we remember the tribulation Christ bore on our behalf. And we also celebrate that He has overcome the world, sin and Satan so that we can be free.

**For Reflection: How do you think the human side of Jesus felt as He faced His passion? How was He able to endure?**

## April 13, 2022

Today's Reading: John 17:6-21

*I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.*

*John 17:9*

### **Praying for You**

How often has someone said, "I'm praying for you?" How often have you said it? I remember telling a friend one Sunday morning at church that I would pray for him because he needed a job. By Tuesday night he was on the phone telling me that God answered and to thank me for praying. I rejoiced with him, but when I hung up the phone, I felt ashamed – I had forgotten to pray.

What a comfort to know that when Jesus says He is praying for us, He is! John 17 is an incredible prayer for the disciples of Jesus' day and the disciples of all ages, including you and me. Review John 17 and see what is on Jesus' heart right before His hour of suffering. He prays that His followers would be kept safe and close to the Father. He prays that they would be protected from the evil one. He prays that they would be full of joy, grounded in the truth, and united in love.

Here is a prayer partner on whom we can depend – Jesus, our faithful High Priest. He took upon Himself the stain of our sin so that we could be washed clean. He understands our frailties and our needs. He is able to come to our aid. *Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:14-16).

**For Reflection: What do you learn about Jesus through His prayer in John 17? What do you learn about yourself? For whom do you wish to pray today?**



## April 14, 2022, Maundy Thursday

Today's Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

*Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?*

*Matthew 18:33*

### **Forgiveness**

This rhetorical question in Matthew 18:33 is really an answer. And what is the question? It is Peter's query: *Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?* (Matt. 18:21).

In response, Jesus told a story. A servant owed a debt to his master, a debt so great it could never really be paid. So, the servant fell down before his master, begged for more time, and promised to pay the debt in full. The master had compassion upon the servant. He didn't just give him more time; he completely forgave the debt! The servant then went out and came across a fellow servant who owed him a debt, a remarkably smaller debt than the first servant had owed. Did he extend the same mercy he had just received? No way! He had the guy thrown in prison until he could pay up.

Can't you just imagine Peter's indignation when Jesus came to the part of the story where the unforgiving servant was so cruel to his fellow servant? But then, perhaps, the truth struck Peter, "I am the wicked servant. I have been looking for an excuse not to forgive when my Master forgives me so much!"

As you come to the Lord's Supper this evening, remember that the Master's forgiveness is there for you. Your debt has been paid. You can lay down your burdens at the cross as you hear these words: *Jesus took bread, and after blessing, it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins* (Matthew 26:26-28).

**For Reflection: Is there someone you are having difficulty forgiving, even yourself? Ask God to let the full forgiveness you have received from Him overflow and bring peace.**

## April 15, 2022, Good Friday

Today's Reading: John 13:1-17

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

*John 13:3-5*

### **Love Serving**

Cathy stepped up to the line. "Love serving fifteen," she said, and fired the neon-yellow tennis ball over the net. I watched from the sidelines. I don't know much about tennis, but I've always been intrigued with the way it is scored. The person with zero points has, not a big fat goose egg, but love.

"Love serving twelve," Jesus might have said on the night He washed His disciples' feet. But He didn't say anything at all. He silently rose from the table, made sure He had the appropriate garments and the basin and began this humble act of service. The disciples were too bewildered to speak. Except for Peter, of course: *You shall never wash my feet!* (John 13:8a). Jesus explained to Peter that he needed this cleansing. Later Peter and the others would understand that the foot-washing had been a picture of their sin being washed away in the blood of the Lamb.

Before John tells us about the foot washing itself, he offers some important insights about our Lord. Jesus knew it was almost time for Him to leave this world. He knew Judas would soon betray Him. He knew suffering and death were just hours away. He knew He had come from God and would return to God.

Because His identity, purpose and future were secure, Jesus did not hesitate to take a servant's role. He didn't try to hold on to some status as leader or teacher. He didn't seek His own will but that of His Father. He had nothing to prove – except His love.

**For Reflection: Think of Good Friday as the day that Love served you. Meditate on that as you worship today and as you prepare for Easter Sunday.**