

Lenten Sermon Series and Devotional Book



Lessons From The Last Supper

40 Day Devotional
Lent 2023

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Preface

Back in the early days of 2022, John Juhlman asked me what my plans were for Lent, as he had an idea for a Lenten Devotional. At that time, I had already planned on our working through the Prayer Covenant for Lent, so I had to decline for that year.

“Out of curiosity,” I said, “what is your idea?”

“The Last Supper conversation in John 13-17.”

In that moment, I knew that the Holy Spirit was stirring something in our midst. I had already made plans to start preaching through the gospel of John after we got through Easter. I had already been thinking about those very chapters for this year’s Lent. I asked John to send me what he had.

As I read over his material, the Lord began to nudge me to make the project bigger. Invite more people to submit devotionals. We have a lot of writers in our congregation – surely some of them would be willing to submit reflections. We reached out to staff, leaders, and missionaries too. Pretty soon, we had expanded from a devotional featuring weekly reflections to a devotional featuring daily reflections from 20 different authors.

Interestingly, Mary Beth Davis was telling me about the Living Last Supper drama that the church had presented a few years ago, and she was wondering if it might be something we should do again. Once more, I knew the Holy Spirit was stirring. What a great coming together of opportunities and events, all around the theme of the Last Supper. We agreed that we would produce the Living Last Supper as our Maundy Thursday worship service on April 6 at 7:00PM.

I believe the Holy Spirit has been working in us all to pull together a great Lenten experience working through the Lessons of the Last Supper. May this Lenten Devotional inspire you and lead you deeper into relationship with Jesus. I hope you’ll join us each week in worship as we reflect on Lessons of the Last Supper. And of course, be sure to join us on Maundy Thursday for our Living Last Supper presentation, which will also include an opportunity partake in the sacrament of communion.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Russell

Introduction

By John Juhlman

Lent (Latin: Quadragesima or 'Fortieth') is the period of 40 days which comes before Easter in the Christian calendar. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is a season of reflection and preparation before the celebrations of Easter. By observing the 40 days of Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days which He spent fasting and endured temptation by Satan, according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, before beginning his public ministry. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends at Easter.

Jesus had gone 40 days without nourishment and then was tempted by the devil. "*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,* ² *where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.* ³ *The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'* ⁴ *Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone."'*" (Luke 4:1-4). Customarily, we try to follow Jesus' practice of fasting during Lent.

What do we give up for Lent? We survey the things we eat and say, "I'll not eat sweets" or "I'll not eat my favorite food." But Jesus had *nothing* to eat and became hungry. Do we stop eating until we become hungry? Now this is not the major teaching from this story, that is, not to eat something for forty days. The key thought is "*Man shall not live on bread alone*" and the remainder of the Scripture that Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3; "*but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*" So, did Jesus do nothing at all during those forty days in the desert? Although Scripture does not say, besides not eating, He was obviously listening for "*every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*" He was listening to what His Father would be teaching Him before He went out on His public ministry. So, Lent is not about our physical nourishment but about our spiritual nourishment. Yes, we fast from some dietary items, but the emphasis of Lent is to intensify the feeding of our Spirit by attending to God's word.

What should we *not* give up for Lent? That's easy. If we are to feed our Spirits, then we should be practicing some basic disciplines: reading the Scriptures, having daily prayer, and listening for "*every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*" as Jesus did. Jesus went without food each and every day for the forty days. Therefore, shouldn't we, out of remembrance of our Lord's sacrifice, also feed our spirits each and every day. This practice is like a doctor's prescription: take a dose every day, and don't try to take a double dose the next day if you miss a day - the spiritual medicine does not work that way; it's not as effective.

This devotional can be used as a dose of discipleship to be taken daily. On Sunday, read the scripture for that week and set your minds on that subject. Then, each day, read the small portion of that scripture, ponder the reflections offered by our fellow congregation members, and pray for a better understanding of what God wants His Word to mean in your life. All through the days of Lent, listen for "*every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*" as Jesus did.

To prepare ourselves for remembering Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday and celebrating His resurrection at Easter, let us look at what Jesus taught His disciples at the Last Supper during His final moments with them. Each week take Christ's teaching and make it a part of your thinking, your heart, and your mind.

Week of Ash Wednesday February 22

John 13:1-38

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ 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, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ 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. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' ¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

²¹ After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side, ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

³⁶ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.” ³⁷ Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸ Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

February 22

Reflection by Russell Smith

Read John 13:1-17

The scene is iconic. The Master washes his disciples' feet as an expression of love. Peter tries to say "no," but Jesus bids him to submit to the washing. Peter yields to Christ's cleansing touch. It is an enacted drama of his new commandment "love one another, as I have loved you." (v 34).

I cannot help but think of this passage through the lens of Michael Card's lovely song "The Basin and the Towel." The song came out in the mid-90s, right when I was out of college and earnestly seeking to apply the truths of Christ to my life; the time in my life was right for this particular song to teach me. I offer a selection of the lyrics here, but I invite you to give it a listen.

In an upstairs room, a parable is just about to come alive.
And while they bicker about who's best, with a painful glance, He'll silently rise.
Their Savior Servant must show them how through the will of the water
And the tenderness of the towel.

And the call is to community, the impoverished power that sets the soul free.
In humility, to take the vow that day after day we must take up the basin and the towel.

In any ordinary place on any ordinary day,
The parable can live again when one will kneel and one will yield.
Our Savior Servant must show us how through the will of the water
And the tenderness of the towel.

And the space between ourselves sometimes is more than the distance between the stars.
By the fragile bridge of the Servant's bow, we take up the basin and the towel.

And the call is to community, the impoverished power that sets the soul free.
In humility, to take the vow that day after day we must take up the basin and the towel.

Reflect:

How hard is it for you to allow others to serve you? How hard is it to receive the gracious service of Christ?

What does Jesus washing of his disciples' feet teach us about the way we are called to serve those around us?

Pray:

Lord, help me to recognize my need to yield to your grace more and more each day. Give me a special awareness of opportunities I can lovingly serve those around me this week.

Thursday, February 23

Reflection by Ken Wegenhart

Read John 13:18-30

When we read this passage, our tendency is to vilify Judas. Judas the betrayer, but Jesus did not vilify him. He simply said this has to happen in order to fulfill what the prophets had said. He then told Judas to do what he had to do quickly.

If we look back to yesterday's devotion, verse 13:1 reads: "It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Jesus knew what was going to happen, but he still loved Judas. When Jesus revealed to Judas that He knew the role that Judas had to play, Jesus didn't strike out in anger; He didn't rebuke Satan and drive him out of Judas. He simply said do what you must do.

We all have a role to play in God's perfect plan. We are each called to fulfill our part. When we are faced with difficulties or challenges, we need to remember this passage and ask ourselves, what is the bigger picture? I suspect that Jesus had a great deal of sympathy for Judas. After all, Judas was one of Jesus's chosen twelve. Judas was called upon to do a job that we cannot imagine, but it had to be done. We like to think that Judas was the bad guy, but God had to use Satan, the evil one to make Judas do what was needed of him.

Reflect:

When you read this passage, what were your first thoughts of Judas?

Consider possible outcomes. What if Judas had not fulfilled his role?

Put yourself in Judas's position. How do you think you would respond?

Pray:

Father God, thank you for Your word and for your teaching. Thank you for reminding us that not all jobs that we do for Your glory are attractive and fun. Sometimes we may be called on to do things that we don't want to do. Help us to realize the importance of those jobs, and help us to understand how undesirable tasks fit into Your plan. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Now take a few minutes to meditate. "You think about that."

Friday February 24

Reflection by Ken Wegenhart

Read John 13:31-35

Why did John put things in the order that he chose? As you recall, yesterday we read how Judas betrayed Jesus. That passage ended with Jesus telling his disciples to love each other. When we move to today's passage, Jesus is telling the disciples that He is leaving them. He will no longer be with them. They probably didn't understand even though they may have thought they did. After all Jesus frequently talked in parables and riddles.

Reading this passage, most people will naturally gravitate to the new command to love one another. But what about the first three verses? Jesus knew what was coming. He knew that His time was short. It was time to pass the job of furthering the ministry that He started to the eleven remaining disciples.

Read verses 34 and 35 again. This was more than just a new command. After all, Jesus had been talking about love throughout His ministry. This was a graduation ceremony. This was how Jesus told the eleven that they were ready to take over and to grow the faith.

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

We are called to demonstrate our faith, not by wearing a sign or banner. Not by shouting our faith from the rooftops, but by our actions toward others. These were Jesus's instructions on how to move forward without Him.

Reflect:

When you read this passage, how does the New Command make you feel?

Think about what the disciples were likely thinking when Jesus told them that He was leaving them. How do you think you would react if you heard such a statement from the man who had led you for the past three years?

Are you ready to accept your diploma from Jesus and to show you are His by loving one another?

Pray:

Heavenly Father, You have blessed us in more ways than we can count. Help us to glorify You through our actions. Help us to let others know we are Yours by the way we love. Give us the wisdom to grow the Christian faith through the way we treat others. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. Amen

Now you have something new to ponder, so "You think about that."

Saturday February 25

Reflection by John Juhlman

Read John 13:36-38

Peter was Jesus' "Rock" upon which the future church would be built. And the "Rock" was so confident in his faith that he was willing to follow Jesus wherever He went and even to die for Jesus. Yet, we know that later when Peter was confronted, he denied Christ, not once but three times.

There are times in our lives when we may be looked upon as a "Rock;" maybe as the head of a family, the captain of a sports team, a team leader at work, a church committee head. Being a "Rock" brings with it special recognition from others, but it also brings certain responsibilities. One in this position is looked up to for leadership abilities; one who others are willing to follow. Thus, we must beware of the confidence in our abilities we might feel in such a position. Peter had earlier confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, therefore it was expected that Peter would be willing to serve the Messiah to the end, whatever that may be.

But it is in times of difficulty and problems that the true strength of a "Rock" will be tested; that's what we look to a "Rock" to be, someone solid who can be depended upon when the going gets tough. Jesus knew Peter's good intentions, Peter's true desire when he made such a proclamation, but Jesus also knew Peter's weakness to be overconfident in his own faith.

We may feel confident in our faith, that we can handle whatever life throws at us, but there will come a time when our faith will be tested. Whether it be illness, a death, economic problems, personal relationships gone wrong, there will always be something in our future for us to confront that with faith will help get us through. But, once tested and having held firm, that faith will only be stronger for the next testing. So, do not be confident in your current level of faith, but continue to work to make it stronger through study and prayer as you prepare for the next testing.

Reflect:

In what ways do others look to you as a "Rock" for their lives, as someone they can always depend upon?

How are you strengthening your faith for life's next testing?

Pray:

Dear Lord, you know I want to be a faithful follower of Yours, so help me to be bold enough to speak out for You in love and guide me in strengthening my faith and trust in You as my one true Rock that is always with me. Amen.

Week of Sunday February 26

John 14:1-31

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹²“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. ¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” ²²Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³Jesus 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. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.

²⁵“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

Monday February 27

Reflection by Sherri Ellington

Read John 14:1-7

“Don’t worry, you can’t miss it!” Have you ever had someone tell you that? Too often this assurance comes right at the point where road directions have gotten vague. The person directing you can’t tell you the street address or GPS coordinates, but it’s easy: it’s the big brown building slightly to the right of the T-junction – you can’t miss it. They believe this because they could never miss it, having been there before.

In today’s passage, Thomas, who is generally unashamed to pinpoint his hesitations and express them aloud, asks Jesus for some clarification. Jesus is talking about things like leaving His followers and having them join him later at His Father’s house, which has many rooms in it. Thomas, with the rest of the disciples, can’t picture where this is. He doesn’t know what the home looks like, he certainly doesn’t have the GPS coordinates, and he doesn’t want to get lost meeting up with Jesus in a new place.

After a few confusing statements in a row from Jesus, Thomas gets hung up on the last one: “You know the way to the place where I am going.”

No, Thomas protests. He really does not.

But, actually, he does! The place’s location may be an utter mystery, but Thomas does know the way to it: Jesus himself. For in the midst of tricky information being thrown at him, Thomas had simply missed the core of the sentence right before this: “I will come back and take you...”(v.3). That phrase changes everything!

We, likewise, don’t need to find our own way to where Jesus is. We need to let Him be our way. He’s our ride, He’s our guide, He’s our path, and He’s our destination.

I love how relational this passage is, on many levels – Jesus is preparing a place for us. He’s coming back to personally take us there. He wants to be with us and for us to be with Him. He Himself is the way there.

As long as we watch for Him and stick to Him – and, more importantly, He sticks to us – we’ll get there. We actually really *can’t* miss it!

Reflect:

What was the last new location you visited? How did you know you had successfully arrived?

Is there a “new place” God might be calling you to right now in your life? If you don’t know exactly what it will be, can you still embark on the journey?

How is Jesus these days letting you know he wants to be with you, and you with him?

Pray:

Thank you, Jesus, that you are the way, the truth, and the life. Help us stick closely to You each and every day, that we can know You, know Your Father, and be where You are. Amen.

Tuesday February 28

Reflection by Rachel DeGuia

Read John 14:8-11

As you read and meditate on the whole of John 14, savor it and picture what it might have been like to have been there. What were the emotions and personal dynamics between those in the room. Use some holy imagination!

Here Phillip enters the conversation in verse 8 with the imperative, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” This is just after Jesus declared the only way to the Father is through him. I see Phillip leaning in and speaking those words in verse 8 with the same eagerness, confidence and hunger he displayed after first meeting Jesus in John 1:43, where he declared to Nathaniel “We have found the Messiah!—the very person Moses and the prophets told about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth!”. Phillip saw Jesus as the Messiah from the start. He has journeyed with Jesus for 3 years, learning from him with a front seat view and even participating in his ministry. Yet Phillip still saw as in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12). Jesus’s response is quite strong. “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?” Jesus clearly shows Phillip still hadn’t quite grasped it- the unity and oneness of Jesus and the Father. As Jesus responds to Phillip’s imperative it could be easy to read it with the lens of scolding, that Phillip still didn’t get it. It certainly is corrective, but I hear it with the grace of a loving teacher, shedding light on a concept the student hadn’t quite grasped, and with a compelling urgency of wanting Phillip to get it. This is seen as Jesus gives Phillip the charge in verse 11 to believe! He uses it twice in the same sentence. In Jesus’s response to Phillip there is great invitation and a charge to mature and grow in his understanding of the Godhead. Perhaps that is also our invitation, regardless of how long you have journeyed with Jesus, to know him, to believe him and ultimately trust our Lord more.

Take a minute or more to chew on and reflect on the scripture. Invite the Holy Spirit to bring the word alive to you.

Reflect:

What are some insights to Jesus, and his relationship with the Father you took away from our reflection on this passage.

Is there an area in which the Lord could say to you “Don’t you know me, even after you have been walking for me for a long time?”

Where might Jesus be inviting you to believe and trust in Him?

Pray:

Lord, we thank you that you are patient and gracious with us as you were with Phillip, and that you also challenge us to see you more fully, and that we might believe and put the full weight of our trust in you in all things.

Wednesday March 1

Reflection by Gabe DeGuia

Read John 14:12-14

Astounding! Jesus claims that whoever believes in him will do the works he has been doing and even do GREATER THINGS? How can that be possible? And then Jesus promises, “You may ask anything in my name, and I will do it.” Anything? Really? What’s the catch?

These words of Jesus trigger a whole range of emotions. Wonder, hope, and excitement on one side, but on the other confusion, doubt, and even anger. Jesus gave sight to the blind, made the lame walk, and raised the dead to life. Can we do that and what could be greater? The possibilities are endless. But, have you ever prayed in Jesus' name and had those prayers go unanswered? Prayed for a loved one's healing, only to watch them succumb to their illness or injuries? These statements from our Lord have been abused and misused by scores of people over time. Name-it-claim-it, gospel toters have propped these words up as a way to promise riches, healing, and a cushy life. But one quick look at the state of the world reveals the hollowness and even danger in that belief. Praying a prayer and ending it, “in Jesus name,” doesn't result in your fill-in-the-blank desires. So what does Jesus mean?

The verses before and after provide the context and conditions. Jesus says in verses 10 and 11 that he and the Father are one, that he does not speak on his own authority, but that the Father who dwells in him does his works. Verse 15 says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” So the context and conditions to the promises of Jesus to do “whatever you ask,” are within the confines of the commandments, the works, and the authority of God the Father which form a narrow path in a single direction — His Mission. And what is that mission? That all may know Him, be restored and redeemed. That the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

So how do we, his followers do “greater things?” By extending the knowledge of the Lord further throughout the earth. *At the time of his birth, the earth's entire population was just 300 million, smaller than the U.S. by itself today. Many scholars estimate Jesus had a peak of 500-1000 followers of his earthly life and ministry. After he ascends to heaven as reported in Acts 2, over 3,000 become followers of Jesus at the preaching of Peter on a single day. Today there are an estimated 2.38 billion Christians.*

While 5 billion people don't follow Christ, and 3 billion have no access to the gospel, God's mission is still great, but Jesus has certainly delivered on his promise that his followers would “do greater” as aligned to the will and work of God the Father and praying toward that end.

Reflect:

What works of Jesus are you doing or would like to do today?

How does knowing God's mission shape how you pray in Jesus' name?

Pray:

Dear Lord, increase my love and belief in you today that I may do the works you are doing and by your grace even do greater things in helping lead many to follow you. Teach me to pray according to your will and in your name. Amen.

Thursday March 2

Reflection by John Juhlman

Read John 14:15-17

As John had written earlier, Jesus said *"A new command I give you: Love one another."* This was not a suggestion for living, but a command, something we must always do. If you have a love for Christ then you will want to obey His commands. And His number one command is to love one another.

It is not always easy to love one another. If we try to do this using our own will power, our own desire, it can be a struggle at times to love one another. Jesus knew his disciples would need help in obeying His command. Because Jesus would no longer be able to be with his disciples after He had returned to His Father, Jesus would send them a Helper, the Holy Spirit. This is a unique characteristic that Christians have. We often ask, "Why can't everyone just love one another?" If everyone believed in Jesus Christ, they would be filled with the Holy Spirit and that would make this possible. Therefore, it is up to Christians to obey Jesus in the world and love one another.

This Holy Spirit was given to live within you; not beside you or above you, but within you. Therefore, your bodies become a holy temple because it is home to the Holy Spirit. Paul realized this when he said, *"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own"* (I Cor. 6:19). Being a home for the Holy Spirit means we should treat our bodies accordingly. Know that our bodies are no longer ours to do with as we please for our own pleasure. You should eat what is nourishing and helpful; keeping your body physically fit; not partaking of drugs or alcohol that can cause damage to that temple which you are; and feed your mind with things that will strengthen the Spirit within. You could think of yourself as a landlord that should keep the property, which is your mind and body, in excellent condition for the One who lives there. The Holy Spirit is the One who will be your Helper day-to-day, so make your body a fitting place He can call home.

Reflect:

Are there things you need to change in your life to have a body that is a home, a temple for the Holy Spirit?

When you find it difficult to love someone, do you first turn to the Holy Spirit within you for help?

Pray:

Dear Lord, I thank you for your Spirit that you have placed within me. Give me guidance on how I need to keep my body a proper place for that Holy Spirit to be his temple. Help me to listen for guidance from Your Spirit as I seek to obey Your command to love one another. Amen.

Friday March 3

Reflection by Roy Swanson

Read John 14:18-24

The words of Jesus reassure us that we are not alone, and we will not be alone. Because we have been born into new life with Christ, we can believe his promise. Picture this scenario: a child loses both of his parents and feels empty and alone in the world. Without the knowledge that Jesus is with him and in him, he will most certainly feel alone, and many times resentful. This resentfulness is manifested when the child goes to school and appears angry all of the time. The child sees other children in the school with two loving parents, a nice home, and a stable life. It is manifested also in his actions. The child gets in trouble when his anger, resentment, and depression result in aggressive behavior that hurts others. Without someone to love him and for him to love, the child has an emptiness that God wants to fill.

Consider also the elderly person who is placed in a nursing home to live out her final days. Because she has no more living friends, and her family is too busy to see her, she also feels alone and desolate. The nursing home employees do not care for her as needed. She is left in a room alone, often without basic necessities. And yet her faith gives her comfort that God is with her. Peter teaches us to rejoice in our suffering so that we may be *overjoyed* when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:13)

In today's passage, Jesus shows us the importance of allowing Him to be one with us. We were made in God's image (Gen. 1:26), and that should be the catalyst for our invitation to be one with Him. As the song says, "God is so good," and when others see us, Jesus wants us to see Him. When we are one with him, we are true disciples, following and obeying his teaching, and sharing with others to good news and the goodness that comes from not just having His outward identity, but his identity within.

Reflect:

What are ways that you sense that you have an identity with God that tells you that you have achieved true discipleship?

What are ways that you could help others who may be feeling alone and desolate, like an orphan, to experience the joy of living in oneness with Jesus?

Pray:

Lord Jesus, be with me and in me. Allow me to feel your presence always so that others may sense you when they are in my presence. In your name, Amen.

Saturday March 4

Reflection by Laura Cook Kroeger

Read John 14:25-31

As we venture toward the conclusion of the 14th chapter of John, we've had a lot leading up to this point. The betrayal by Judas has been revealed and the Last Supper has occurred. John opens the chapter with Jesus comforting his disciples by saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me," thus setting the tone for what is to soon transpire. "Doubting Thomas" asks what the heck Jesus is talking about. There's a place with many rooms awaiting them? Knowing that the cross awaits him, Jesus seems much more concerned about his disciples than himself—a great lesson for all of us to take in as Christians. Make no mistake. Jesus is the way to the Father.

Of course, he drops a bombshell by introducing and explaining the role of the Holy Spirit. "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever –the Spirit of Truth."

So as we enter John 14:25-31 the first thing Jesus does is to reassure his followers, in a fatherly way, that the Holy Spirit will help them remember everything he has taught them.

Second, he reiterates that living in the Holy Spirit promotes a feeling of peace. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you." This reassurance is well-planned since he knows what turmoil awaits him.

Next, Jesus zeroes in closer to his expectations for the disciples. "You heard me say I am going away and I am coming back to you. If you love me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now, before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe." Jesus seems very calculated in how he is laying out the plan for the disciples to comprehend their future roles.

He concludes with "but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me." Jesus has his teaching hat on, explaining that it will be up to the disciples to spread the Gospel.

Reflect:

Why do you think Jesus talks so much about having peace when he is gone?

Why do some Christians feel no peace?

Why is it so important for the disciples (and Christians) to understand the Holy Spirit?

How is Jesus laying the groundwork for the future of the church in this particular scripture?

What is the role of obedience in these passages?

Pray:

Dear Lord, help us to know your peace and guidance through the Holy Spirit. May we learn obedience as Jesus taught the disciples so that we may spread the Gospel to those who need to know that God has a place for us in Heaven.

Week of Sunday March 5

John 15:1-17

¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Monday March 6

Reflection by Laura Cook Kroeger

Read John 15:1-3

At the end of the 14th chapter of John, Jesus discusses his leaving the disciples, assuring them that the Divine Counselor, the Holy Spirit, would continue to be with them.

Chapter 15 continues with the ideas of guidance and cleansing of sin as Jesus further mentors the Disciples to spread the Word. Jesus uses a gardening/pruning analogy for the disciples to understand how Christ cleanses the world through obedience to his Word.

He first establishes the context of the relationship: "I am the true Vine and my Father is the Gardener." (John 15:1) Here Jesus confirms that he is the lifeline to God. Interestingly, He also emphasizes that He is the "true" vine, noting that there will always be false prophets and others who speak contrary to the Gospel.

Then Jesus further uses this example to show how Christians will continue to abide in the true word of God: "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." (John 15:2)

Anyone who gardens knows that for your plant to flourish, you must prune the bad leaves and useless parts of the plant. For the disciples, Jesus is making a grand statement. Christians must look toward pruning/cleansing of sin so that we may be pure and ready for growth as directed by the Gardner in Heaven. We are created to be connected to God and to each other. It is through His care that we flourish and grow.

He verifies this when he next says: "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." (John 15:3)

Bible scholars agree that cleanliness means being pure, and spotless without blemish. This is through the handiwork of the Supreme Gardner who looks for our obedience to his Word. God provides the nourishment and sustenance so that we may bear fruit—goodness and growth. We are purified and worthy to lead a life worthy of Christ.

Reflect:

What are some ways we can be active on the vine?

How do you think God prunes the vine?

Are there ways we can better understand how we have been cleansed by Christ? Do you have any personal examples?

Pray:

Dear Lord, you are the supreme gardener who knows what parts of us need to grow in faith and knowledge. Lead us to flourish and grow so that we may continue to connect with one another and remain strong in order to serve you better.

Tuesday March 7

Reflection by John Juhlman

Read John 15:4-6

We had an apple tree in our yard that every spring would have beautiful white blossoms appear. Our daughter plucked a blossom from the tree and placed it in water. Later, the blossom in the water could not fulfill its purpose and withered while the blossoms still on the tree yielded delicious red apples.

In the same way we must keep our connection with Jesus so that our lives do not wither and lose their purpose for living. Jesus will remain in you through His Holy Spirit which was given to teach and guide you through life so that your life might be full; but He says that you must also remain in Him. We cannot be faithful followers in every moment of our lives without the ever presence of Christ. Like the fruit on a vine, life grows from a blossom and continues to grow to maturity and fruitfulness as it remains connected to the vine. Remove the fruit from the vine and it withers and dies.

Jesus is saying that we need to do our part in keeping that connection with Him in a healthy condition. The strength of our connection with Him determines the strength of our faith for living for Him in the world. We must always “remain” - not just when we feel like it or need Jesus, but remain connected, in constant communication with Christ.

So, how does this communication take place? Pray! As the Psalmist says, *“I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer”* (Psalm 17:6). We need to pray with full confidence that Jesus will hear and answer.

To bear fruit, to be faithful witnesses we need that inner strength and courage to live our lives in obedience to His command to love one another and to reach out to others as His ambassadors. An ambassador is a representative of the one who sends him. To be a fully accredited ambassador the ambassador must know fully whom he represents. This requires constant communication between those individuals. The ambassador is ineffective unless this communication is taking place on a regular basis. Jesus is telling His disciples that they also must be in communication with Him if they want to be effective in bearing fruit, in obeying His command to love others.

Reflect:

When do you find it best to be in communication, in prayer with Jesus?

Prayer is two-way communication, so is there a certain time of day and conditions that make it best for you to listen for His voice to speak to you?

Pray:

I thank you O Lord for the strength, encouragement, and guidance you give me so that I may fully obey your command to bear fruit, to love others. Help me to have a time of silence that I might listen for Your words for my life as I seek to remain in You. Amen.

Wednesday March 8

Reflection by John Juhlman

Read John 15:7-10

"Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." Did Jesus really mean this? Ask for anything?

But Jesus did begin this saying with a big "IF". If we as branches are connected to Jesus the vine, then we will only ask, and Jesus will give us what we need to bear fruit for Him to the glory of His Father. Abiding in Jesus means abiding in His words, and having His words live in us. We should not overlook the importance of the reference to *"and my words remain in you."* The teachings of Christ are important to the life of a disciple. And where do we find Jesus' words but in the Holy Scriptures. The daily reading and meditation upon the Word of God is the life-blood of a Christian. The Word of God taken into a believer's heart will inspire and strengthen him to bear fruit, to show God's love, to bring glory to God.

You may have read and studied the Parable of the Vine and Branches many times. The basic theme is we should remain connected to the vine, to bear fruit, be witnesses, let others know whose we are, be an example of Jesus' love in the world so that people will know that we are His disciples. In the end it brings glory to God the Father, not to ourselves.

During Lent, let us minute by minute be mindful of our words and actions so that others may see and know that we are Christians by our love. Sing to yourself that old song "They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love." As the song says, *"We will work with each other, we will work side by side; And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride. We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand; And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land."*

The fruit or end-result of our love shown to others will be that people will know that God is still alive in our land and will give him all praise and glory.

Reflect:

Should we expect God to answer prayer that asks for anything we think we need?

How do you approach the reading of God's Word each day? Do you follow the guide to read the Bible in a year; select a particular book; search for verses related to a theme, etc.?

Pray:

Dear Lord, your Word is the power for my life, to give me direction, to give me hope, to help me live my life to its fullest. For this I can only say, "Thanks be to God." I ask that you bring to my mind a true desire to search Your Word each day for what You would have me learn that day. Amen.

Thursday March 9

Reflection by Missy Hardy

Read John 15:11

I remember running with one of my running partners on the path around Lunken Airport fourteen years ago, telling her about how my then-toddler son wakes up every morning happy and energetic. He would grab the crib rails, pull himself up, and bounce and laugh and cheerfully seek Todd's and my attention to get him up for the day. I told my friend about this and remarked that it must be nice to wake up happy every day. Her insightful and accurate response to me was, "Doesn't it make you happy every morning to see that?" Max's delight with waking up daily became a source of joy for me. Now that he is a teenager, my heart still aches when his feelings get hurt, and I feel a lightness in my spirit when I hear him laughing with his older brother or his friends.

Experiencing someone else's joy or other emotion as your own is empathy and comes easily between people who love and trust one another. In this verse, Jesus encourages us to enjoy this relationship with Him, so that we might be able to experience His joy as our own. Do you already have this kind of relationship with Jesus? How might you come to love and trust Jesus more than your most important person here on Earth?

To truly feel Christ's joy as our own takes a deep daily dependence on Him. The verses leading up to today's verse describe how Jesus loves us just as the Father loves Him. By dwelling in Jesus' love for us, we can learn to rely on that love to help us through life's circumstances, both positive and negative. We can trust that the challenges we experience are going to not only pass, but they will teach us and bear fruit if we open our hearts to that possibility. When we submit ourselves to this lifestyle, we will be able to experience an empathetic relationship with Jesus and be able to feel His complete joy in us.

Reflect:

Under what circumstances have you experienced another person's joy or pain as your own?

How will you create those circumstances to be able to allow yourself to experience God's joy and be made full?

Pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and for teaching us how to accept and feel your love and joy every day. Help us remember that we are made in Your image, and we should walk with you every day of our lives.

Friday March 10

Reflection by Missy Hardy

Read John 15:12-15

How do we characterize friendship today? Facebookers might notice their accumulated friend count or the average number of likes their posts garner to measure friendships. Some even challenge their Facebook friends to post the same thing they posted to get a better idea of which of those Facebook friends are *really* their friends. Is this what Jesus is talking about in verse 14: “*You are my friends if you do what I command*”? Must we obey our friends to fulfill the directives in this passage? I think so!

When Jesus talks about friends, he seems to be talking about the innermost circle of people who are important to you. Regarding the people you trust the most, you absolutely will practice a sacrificial love, and you will obey their commands. “I need your help.” “Please don’t tell anyone what we were discussing.” “Can you pray for my child/parent/spouse.” “Help me with this task I cannot do myself.” Who in your life can you command this way? Who can speak to you this way with confidence that you will comply?

Jesus says, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” He also states, “You are my friends if you do what I command.” Logically, if we love each other as Jesus loves us, then we will be Jesus’ friends. Developing friendships in which the participants love each other sacrificially and obediently brings us into friendship with Jesus. We should be spending as much energy and time as we can to cultivate these relationships, whether we find them within our own families, in the church, at our workplace, at school, or wherever else we find our people.

Finally, I want to point out what jumped out at me first about this passage. The conditional statement Jesus makes in verse 14 states “*You are my friends if you do what I command*”. “Doing what I command” is a sufficient condition for being Jesus’ friend, not a necessary condition due to the omission of the words “*and only if . . .*” This opens the door for other ways of entering a relationship with our living Lord beyond being perfectly obedient. I find that both curious and comforting, knowing that even though I might fall short of Jesus’ commands from time to time, I can still be His friend.

Reflect:

Do you have any friends who will drop everything to be there for you?

Is there anybody for whom you will give significantly of yourself?

What does it take to have relationships like this, and are you willing to do those things?

Pray:

Heavenly Father, give me the courage to become humble and to recognize that my energy and skills and treasure are more useful to others than they are to myself. Make me willing to use what you have given me to be a good friend. Amen.

Saturday March 11

Reflection by Roy Swanson

Read John 15:16-17

“And God saw that it was good.” These words from the creation story (Gen. 1) are slightly altered in verse 31: “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was *very good*.” It became *very good* after the creation of man and woman, because now man and woman can go and bear the fruit of love that God desires for the earth.

Jesus explains, “I and the Father are One,” (John 10:30) referring to his words when the Pharisees asked him who he was: “Before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58) We, as creations that came later in the creation story, could not possibly have chosen God, but God has invited us to participate with Him in bearing fruit. The fact that God is on our minds and in our hearts serves as an invitation to us to be in daily and constant prayer (2 Thessalonians 1:3) with Him. Through this action the fruit that we are asked to bear will last.

We have the opportunity to share the fruits of the Spirit with others so that they too might go and bear fruit. In this way we can see the majesty of God’s creation of the world and our place in it. God created the trees and the birds and the fish and the animals and made it so that they would replenish themselves. And God saw that it was good. In the same way He planted the fruits of his goodness in us so that we may replenish it in others, and while being in constant prayer with Him, he will replenish it in us. *Very simply, love each other.*

Have you ever driven down the road on a nice sunny day, and noticed the trees gently swaying in the wind? They seem to be smiling because they are part of God’s creation. They seem to be happy to be swaying, even dancing with each other. Bathed in the glory of God’s sunlight, the trees convey a message to the rest of creation, including us, that God is with us, and we are with Him. The trees bear fruit for others in creation, and they seem to exude happiness in so doing. And God saw that it was good.

It is our responsibility to love each other, even in the face of troubles; to joyfully bear fruit, because God chose us to do this on earth. And God saw that it was *very good*!

Reflect:

Have you seen others bearing fruit, and can you identify it as such? Who are they?

God will place you in situations to love others. How will you prepare yourself to show his love in those times?

Pray:

What, Lord, will you have me do to further your kingdom on earth?

Week of Sunday March 12

John 15:18 –16:4

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’

²⁶ “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

¹⁶ “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

Monday March 13

Reflection by Mike Braunlin

Read John 15:18-19

In 320 AD, Licinius, an anti-Christian pagan, ruled the eastern Roman Empire. During his rule, the 12th Roman Legion in Sebaste (present-day Sivas, Turkey) was ordered to offer sacrifice to the emperor as a test of political loyalty. A company of forty Christian soldiers from Cappadocia refused, saying "We will not sacrifice. To do so is to betray our faith."

The Provincial Governor had the soldiers flogged but not one wavered. As it was winter, the commander of the 12th Legion ordered that the soldiers be stripped and sent into the frozen lake until they either recanted or died of exposure.

St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (329-379 AD) is the first to have recorded their martyrdom in a homily he delivered on their feast day. Basil wrote: "The martyrs, on hearing their sentence, ran joyfully to the place and without waiting to be stripped, undressed themselves, encouraging one another in the same manner as is usual among soldiers in military expeditions attended with hardships and dangers, saying that one bad night would purchase them a happy eternity...."

"The commander posted guards to prevent their escape from the icy water. He also arranged a fire and a warm bath on the shore to tempt the unyielding soldiers to surrender. Encouraging one another to stand firm, the Christian soldiers prayed, 'Lord, we are forty engaged in this contest. Grant that forty may receive crowns of glory.'

"During the night, one man broke and left his companions. However, when the man entered the hot bath, the sudden heat was too great a shock to his frozen body, and he died. A guard named Aglaius was so moved by the martyrs' faith, that he removed his uniform and joined the remaining thirty-nine martyrs in the lake.

In centuries to come the story of the 40 Martyrs would inspire generations of eastern Christians to persevere in their walk of faith.

Reflect:

Have you faced peer pressure to back off from your convictions in various situations? How have you handled it?

During times of temptation, have you been strengthened by fellow believers or felt the presence of God's spirit supporting you?

Pray:

Heavenly Father, as we experience persecution for our faith, let our witness be such as to bring glory to Your Name, and even blessings to our persecutors, like that Roman guard Aglaius, who placed his trust in You on seeing the conviction of the 39 faithful Christian soldiers on that frozen lake in Sebaste.

Tuesday March 14

Reflection by Mike Braunlin

Read John 15:20-21

Helmut Gollwitzer (1908 – 1993) was a German pastor, author, and theologian. During the National Socialist regime in Germany (1933-1945), Gollwitzer refused to join the pro-Nazi German Evangelical Church, instead becoming a well-known member of the Confessing Church, which resisted the government's attempts to unify all German protestant churches into a single pro-Nazi church.

A determined pacifist, Gollwitzer fulfilled his military duty in WW II as a Wehrmacht medic on the Eastern Front. In 1945 Gollwitzer was captured by the Soviets. Although his faithfulness to his Lord branded him in the eyes of his captors as an enemy of Socialism, resulting in ever more brutal treatment, nonetheless he continued to encourage his fellow POWs and even reached out to his Soviet guards with the love of his Savior.

He wrote a book about his experience of being a POW which became a bestseller in Germany in 1951. An English translation (1953) exists with title: Unwilling Journey: A Diary from Russia and is well worth the read.

Gollwitzer's faithfulness to Christ caused him to be labelled as a pariah in his native Germany during the Nazi period. The Nazis' attempt to force German Christians into a single pro-government church turned those who refused to abandon their allegiance to Jesus into "enemies of the people." After Hitler's defeat, one might be excused for naively supposing that Gollwitzer's embracing of socialist ideals would have put him in good stead with his Soviet captors, but there, too, his refusal to deny his allegiance to Jesus, and moreover, to continue to share his faith with his fellow POWs and even with his Soviet captors, caused him to be again labelled an enemy of the state, for which he suffered greatly until his final release from captivity in 1949.

We can expect that as Christians, we, too will be hated by the world, and will come under opposition, perhaps even suffering and persecution, for our allegiance to Jesus. As the world rejected the Author of our faith, so will it also stand in opposition to His followers.

Reflect:

Have you come under criticism or opposition because of your Christian faith?

Whether it has come from friends, family, or coworkers how did you react to it?

Pray:

Father in Heaven, you have forewarned us that our reliance on You will set us in opposition to the world, which has rejected Your message of reconciliation through the cross of Christ and Your forgiveness of our sins. When trials come, please bless us with Your inspiration, that we might turn such troubles to Your glory, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Wednesday March 15

Reflection by Todd Powers

Read John 15:22-25

This scripture provides a stark warning of the challenges we will face as Christians as well as a condemnation of those who reject Christianity.

However, while the verses are certainly an indictment of those who reject and persecute Christians, these verses are also a prelude to the promise contained in the following verses: that Christ has not left us alone to face these challenges. We are reminded Christ himself felt the sting of rejection. In fact, his rejection and willing sacrifice is central to his ministry and our salvation.

While persecution and hardship are to be expected, we are not asked to endure it alone. This scripture should not be read as an us versus them call to arms. It seems to me, the point is not to make us hate those who reject our faith, but to help us understand that such behavior is to be expected and endured.

If we can succeed in meeting this rejection with love, patience and understanding, we will exemplify the role that Christ himself demonstrated for us through his ministry.

Reflect:

What challenges/rejection have you faced or witnessed others face in following your faith?

How can our response to such behavior be a counter point to those who reject Christ?

Pray:

Lord, give us the courage to stand up for our faith and the wisdom to do so with the love and empathy you demonstrated in your ministry. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Thursday March 16

Reflection by Todd Powers

Read John 15:26-27

Jesus spoke these words to comfort and console the disciples in anticipation of his death and resurrection. The words were meant to encourage the disciples and assure them that the cross was not a travesty or failure of God's plan, but the fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation.

Similarly, contemporary believers should be encouraged by these words. The passage underscores the oneness of the Trinity both in origin and purpose. God sent Jesus to be sacrificed for our salvation and then sent the Advocate or Spirit to work through the disciples and all believers to complete the salvation of the world. Through this Spirit of Truth, God empowers we mortals to take part in his divine plan.

These words continue to be a beacon of hope and consolation in a world filled with sin and death. They are also a call to action. We as Christians must embrace the Spirit and become God's advocates on earth.

How this translates into each individual's life will be as varied as our personal characteristics. Whether it is through teaching, performing missions, supporting others, or simply providing a living example of how a Christian should conduct his/her life, we all have a role to fulfill in this great mission.

Reflect:

What examples can you think of where the spirit has made its presence known in your life?

What person(s) has/have been an example to you of someone who has embraced the spirit?
What has that person said or done that illustrates this?

Pray:

Lord, we thank you for our salvation through Jesus and for sending the spirit to us after his resurrection. Help us to embrace the spirit and further your mission. In Christ name we pray.
Amen.

Friday March 17

Reflection by Mary Beth Davis-Hawk

Read John 16:1-3

It was a typical day at school with my friends as we waited on the stairs in a line that would eventually start moving again down to the cafeteria for lunch. Each of us stood on our own step and we talked noisily while waiting. Suddenly, an arm from someone behind me reached around and pushed the boy standing on the step below me so hard that he fell forward knocking several others down as he went. Several of us gasped - it happened so fast. As I reached out instinctively to try and help, someone behind me yelled to the approaching teacher 'she did it!'. I was horrified - they were pointing at me.

John 16: 1 -3 tells us that Jesus warned his disciples of what was to come whether being thrown out of the synagogue or being persecuted. He did not want them to be surprised. He further warned them that 'the things that will be done to you will be because they have not known the Father or me'. Many things happen which seem senseless even though we may seek to do our best by others. We can realize just how fragile situations can be due to misunderstandings or simply not knowing the truth. We know that Jesus loved His disciples enough to prepare them just as the teachers in our lives, God, our parents, or others do.

The school incident taught me the importance of being consistently kind in character which although can cause others to be mean, to others who knew me and those in authority they knew a kind person could not be so mean. The boy causing the issue was punished. In quite a stark contrast and seriousness to this, the disciples had much more that was to come ahead of them.

Reflect:

Can you recall a situation in which something happened that did not seem fair?

Was there a warning?

Was the situation resolved with an understanding or teaching?

Pray:

Father, we know you love us dearly and that you have promised to watch over us even as we navigate what we may or may not know is ahead of us. We accept your promise that you will watch over and care for us.

Saturday March 18

Reflection by Mary Beth Davis-Hawk

Read John 16:4

I remember too well the day when I became a partial orphan – the moment I lost my dad.

We knew this moment was coming along with the powerlessness of not being able to stop it. Being carried along unwillingly towards something that you know will change the rest of your life forever is a moment we know we will be called upon to 'be strong'. And that is what our family did and with grace we did the best we could – as everyone does. In the last days we were 'loaded up' with reminders from dad that would serve us well once we would get through this time including reminders that connected us to wonderful memories.

In John 16:4, Jesus prepares his disciples for what he knows is coming 'when the time shall come, you may remember the things that I told you'. Although Jesus may not have told them this in the beginning because he was with them, he knew he would be going away from them in a way they had not yet known or possibly could have even imagined. We can only imagine that the days they had known as fellowship with Jesus, learning from him and witnessing His miracles would gladly have continued on had the disciples had the choice or power.

I look back now and remember those last moments with my dad as easily the most stressful days of my life. Yet, his words, reminders and teachings reminded me of God's plan for my life and that moving forward is what we have to do just as he and his father and grandfathers before him had already done. To be strong is to just do our very best – as best we can.

Reflect:

Have you had a time of needing to rely on what you had learned or experienced in order to be strong in a moment --- or stronger the next time?

Did you seek or receive a message that let you know God cares for you?

Pray:

Dear Jesus, How wonderful that by your grace we make it through and that even in this moment as I am reading this you have brought me through by your strength because YOU LOVE ME. As many times as I read this you have brought me through. Thank you Jesus.

Week of Sunday March 19

John 16:5-15

⁵But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹²"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Monday March 20

Reflection by Krista Ramsey

Read John 16:5-6

Years ago, I read this quote from Anne Morrow Lindbergh as she watched her husband, the great aviator Charles Lindbergh, take off: *"I am so worried watching his wheels leave the ground (one is on much longer than the other) that I forget to wave, and mind very much."*

At the time it struck me how little our worry does to help someone we love. Meanwhile, it distracts us from those small acts of support or interest – like Mrs. Lindbergh's wave – that could provide the very encouragement our friend or family member needs to take on a daunting task or accomplish something remarkable.

Perhaps the same is true of Jesus' words to his downcast, anxious, already sorrowful disciples on the eve of his crucifixion. While understandable, their sorrow was at heart about themselves, not about him. It was about what they were about to lose, while Jesus was aware of all they were about to gain.

He could have told them, if they had asked. He clearly would have explained, if they had been ready to listen.

Did Jesus need his friends' intense interest, their confidence in him – their 'wave' – as he prepared for Golgotha? Throughout his earthly ministry, Christ made clear that his focus, his center, his strength, his source was God the Father. But he paid his disciples, and all of us who believe on him, the ultimate compliment by letting us know that he notices and appreciates each act of faith or exhibition of courage that we perform in his name or for his sake.

What a beautiful and glistening gift – a bowing of the divine to elevate the human. God is still at work on earth. Let us meet his work, not with doubt or anxiety, but with a quiet confidence that he still knows, and is, the Way.

Reflect:

How do you, as a follower of Christ, show him that you believe him capable of miraculous and world-changing things?

Where in your life can you replace anxiety or doubt with deliberate courage and faith?

Pray:

Father God, please give us a hunger to really know you, a genuine interest in your will for our lives and for our world, and faith that you work all things for our good. In Jesus' name, amen.

Tuesday March 21

Reflection by Krista Ramsey

Read John 16:7

Years ago as a novice and utterly hopeless-looking skier, I stumbled upon a trick. If I skied immediately behind my much more accomplished husband, I could make it down the slopes upright and alive. The trick was to utterly suspend thinking and to simply do what he did.

It worked, and rather miraculously so. Every trip down the hill -- and there were many -- gave me slightly better balance, an inner understanding of how to handle a mogul, a sense of when to crouch and when to open up the throttle and enjoy the ride.

But at some point, to actually be a skier and not a shadow-skier, I had to take my eyes off my guide and listen to what was now at least purportedly inside me.

Don't we all wish that we had Jesus to walk behind daily, to listen to first-hand so we could actually see What Would Jesus Do? With our Guide right in front of us, surely we would never doubt, surely we would never revert back to our selfish and petty selves. We'd manage the moguls in our lives. We'd avoid the spills.

But the Christian life is not a life of simple imitation. It is not a life of suspending thought, or mindlessly gliding downhill. Christ came as the perfect Guide, and he taught and spoke as the eternal Word. But for us to mature as Christians, we need the power of God to reside inside us. We need to believe when we do not see. We need to follow when the course is not clearly laid out before us.

As Jesus tells his disciples later in this chapter, "In just a little while, I will be gone, and you will see me no more; but just a little while after that, and you will see me again!" Jesus' 'going' did not mean permanently leaving, and the coming of the Holy Spirit ensured that his disciples – and all of us who follow him today – can see Christ more clearly, and navigate the course he lays out for each one of us.

Reflect:

What evidence do you see that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life?

How can you invite the Holy Spirit to be more at home?

Pray:

Thank you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the way you surround us with your love and powerful, special gifts. Help us grow into mature Christians who relish the mystery, complexity and also the simplicity of your presence in our lives and our world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday March 22

Reflection by Ken Wegenhart

Read John 16:8-11

When I read passages such as this, I find it fun. Jesus just told his disciples that he is leaving them. Nothing fun about that. What is fun is the fact that this passage is so full of information that it is hard to take it all in. It requires us to study what is actually happening. When I read this passage, I turn to a variety of different translations. It's also good to turn to your study Bible and to read the foot notes and commentaries on the passage. By taking that deep dive into God's word, we will realize things that we may have missed with a quick casual reading.

What is happening in this passage? Jesus tells the disciples that He is leaving and that He will be sending the Holy Spirit, but the more important part is what the Holy Spirit is going to do. The Spirit is going to convict the world of its sins and call us to repentance. The Spirit is going to reveal God's standard of righteousness since Jesus will no longer be with us as a living example. The Spirit will help us understand Christ's judgement over Satan. "The Prince of the World now stands condemned."

Jesus also tells the disciples that He knows they are grieving and He knows that they aren't really listening beyond their own human suffering. We are all like that. We all tend to shut down and hear just what we want to hear. When we find passages so full of information that we just shut down, view it as an opportunity to go deeper. Perhaps our confusion is the Holy Spirit telling us that we need to work harder. Maybe we shouldn't look at passages that are so full of information as confusing, but as an opportunity to grow. Let that sink in and marinate for a while.

Reflection:

How do you like to approach passages of the Bible that seem difficult to understand?

Do you find a particular translation of the Bible to be more meaningful to you than others? Which translation do you prefer, and why?

Think of a time when the Holy Spirit spoke to you. How did you "hear" the Holy Spirit's message?

Pray:

Father God, You are truly awesome and we can't imagine the magnitude of Your love for us. Thank You for opening our eyes through Your word. Thank You for the challenging our thinking and helping us grow in our understanding. Guide us Lord, with Your Holy Spirit as we seek to know and understand you better. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Thursday March 23

Reflection by John Juhlman

Read John 16:12-13

“You can’t teach an old dog new tricks” or so they say. You might say that at my age my learning days are over, I graduated from school many years ago, what more can I learn now? So, your life is just great the way you are today, it can’t get better? Well, Jesus is never done with helping you to live a better, more complete life no matter what your age.

Jeremiah the prophet said, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* God has plans for each of us for a wonderful lifetime. The question is, “How can I know what God’s plan is for my life?” This is where the Holy Spirit enters the picture. Jesus is unable to be with us physically to tell us, so He sends His Holy Spirit to be within us, to teach and guide us, telling us what Jesus says.

Most teachers use a textbook for you to read to learn something new. After reading you may not totally understand what you have just read. So, the teacher is there to help you understand what you have read. Our Christian textbook is the Holy Bible, the Word of God. When reading the Bible, we don’t just read written words on a page, but words that were written by those who were inspired by God. God has preserved these words through the ages so that we might have them today. Therefore, God has provided our textbook for living, all we have to do is study it.

Often, we may read some verses from the Bible and then ask, “What did I just read; how is this important for my life?” Here is when the Holy Spirit will help you to open your mind and understand; that is when the Holy Spirit will begin to teach you. Remember, “Seek and ye will find.” Want to know what God’s plan is for your life and what he wants you to understand from your reading, then stop and seek that understanding through the Holy Spirit within you.

So, don’t be an old dog that can’t learn anything new, take advantage of God’s tutor, the Holy Spirit that is available night and day; and it’s free for the asking.

Reflect:

Is there something you would like to know more about, something you think is not answered in the Bible?

Do you believe God’s plan is at work in your life? Is it giving you hope for the future?

Pray:

Lord, I realize my life is not perfect and I want to grow in my faith, for it is only by trusting You to guide me day-by-day that my life will be full of wonderful blessings. Help me as I read Your Word to see the message it has for me. Help me to open my heart and mind to make it part of my life as the Holy Spirit teaches me. Amen.

Friday March 24

Reflection by Stephen Eyre

Read John 16:14

Glory is one of those big Bible words throughout the Bible, used over 100 times in both the Old and New Testament. One definition is the fame and admiration that you gain by doing something impressive. That seems to be the meaning when the word is first used in the Bible, “. . . But I will gain **glory** for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.” (Exodus 14:4). It seems that God wants to make his presence known in power. He is a being to be respected and obeyed.

Another meaning of glory is associated with radiance and light. We see this meaning in Exodus 24:17 “To the Israelites the **glory** of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.” We see the same idea of seeing radiance and light when the angels appeared to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus. “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the **glory** of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.” (Luke 2:9).

What do these two ways of using the word have in common? “To see”, I think is at the heart of it. When can we use the word to “see” literally and metaphorically. When both the Israelites and the shepherds encounter glory, they are literally seeing something with their eyes—a radiance, a shining. When God confronts Pharaoh by the miracles accomplished through the hand of Moses, then Pharaoh will metaphorically “see”, i.e., know something real about the power and presence of God.

As Jesus is preparing the disciples for his death on the cross and for his resurrection, he wants them to know who he is and what he is about. The heart of Jesus’ glory is that he will die for our sins. What is glorious about this that he shows the truest depth of his character. He loves us so much that he is willing to die for us. That is the depth of pain! It hardly seems glorious—not so much radiance and light. But it is, indeed, his glory.

During Lent we are actually savoring his glory even as we mourn our own sin and the sin of the world.

Reflect:

How do you “see” the glory of God in your own life experience?

How do you “see” the glory of God in our world today?

Pray:

Open our eyes to see glory of Jesus in my struggles as well as in my joys.

Saturday March 25

Reflection by Stephen Eyre

Read John 16:15

The Christian Faith is mysterious. No matter how much we talk about God and study the Bible, we can never plumb its' depths. As the disciples are with Jesus on the night before his crucifixion they are in the depth of this mystery. Can you image how their heads were spinning? Jesus was talking about himself, the Father, and the Spirit. There is this "three-ness" about God—there are three "persons". But there is a oneness, a unity. What is of the Father belongs to Jesus. They are one. And it is another Person, the Spirit, who takes what the Father and Son have in common and reveals to his disciples. We call this the Trinity.

I don't pretend to understand this. I have found that every explanation of the Trinity that seeks to make it understandable falls short. And this doesn't bother me at all. In fact, if I could understand and explain it, I would be suspicious. How can anyone think that an eternal, infinite being could be comprehended by our limited brains!

While I can't understand it, I can enjoy, savor, and be blessed by God as Trinity. We can have a personal, even intimate relation both with God as One and with each distinct person of the Godhead. This is what I think Jesus wants the disciples get. The Father is the source of love and all that he is. The Son is the manifestation of God's character and love. The Spirit is the One who works inside us to enlighten our minds to know/experience God and his love.

The early Christians used to drive the Romans crazy when to preached. They proclaimed that unlike the paganism of the classical world, that there was only one God. And then they proclaimed that God was God the Father. Then they proclaimed that Jesus was God too. Huh?!

Don't worry about explaining God. Enjoy God in his mystery. Be awestruck. Adore. Ponder. Puzzle. And above all, savor. God the Father, Son, and Spirit love us, and by means of the Easter events have done everything possible and necessary to enrich us.

Reflect:

How do you experience differently each of the Persons of the Trinity?

How would speak of God as Trinity to someone who was curious about the Christian Faith?

Pray:

Gracious Father, I come to you today in the love Your Son Jesus and in the power of your Holy Spirit.

Week of Sunday March 26

John 16:16-33

¹⁶ “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” ¹⁷ So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father?’” ¹⁸ So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’? ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. ²³ In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

²⁵ “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

²⁹ His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² 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. ³³ 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.”

Monday March 27

Reflection by Brian Green

Read John 16:16-18

When I read the passage from John 16:16-18, it brings to me several feelings. The first thing I think of is how the disciples here seem very clueless. When we think of the disciples, it is easy to see them as “otherly” people chosen by Jesus and are the holy patriarchs of the church. I love that here they appear as normal people. It reminds us that all throughout the Bible, normal people are used to perform extraordinary things. This makes it seem as though maybe I too can be used by Christ since I too often seem clueless as to what is going on around me.

Another look at it and you can see how Jesus is working as the shepherd here. He is letting them know that he is going away, but he is setting the expectations of the disciples prior to his departure. This is something a parent does with the kids, so they don't worry or feel abandoned.

When my wife and I first started date night, while leaving them with the sitter, we would let them know that we are going out for the night but would be there when they woke up in the morning. These disciples had given up everything they knew to follow Jesus. They had been with Jesus long enough to know that when he said they would see him again, that he would keep his word and he would be back.

What does this mean for us today? We know that he has come back and is here with us. It is okay to not always know the exact answer, but we can grow and learn through Jesus' teaching and with the help of the Holy Spirit. God meets us where we are and knows that we are ordinary people. He knows our gifts and we can be used as ordinary people to do his extraordinary will.

Reflect:

Are there times when you read the Bible where you ask yourself “What does this mean, what is this trying to say”?

Are there times when you feel left behind by God, what can give you comfort to know that he is there?

Pray:

Your amazing power is like none other, forever changing me and allowing me to do your will. Guide me through your word and through the Holy Spirit to grow spiritually and grow closer to you.

Tuesday March 28

Reflection by Maurice Mitchell

Read John 16:19-22

“...weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” Psalm 30:5b

As I was reading this passage, I was taken back almost 5 years ago. We were making plans for my retirement, and because we lived in the church owned manse (referred to as a parsonage by most denominations), we had to find a place to live. We found a house that had all the must-haves, and was in a good location. It was only listed on the market for one day, and the owner received three offers. Needless to say, the owner didn't accept our offer.

We were sorely disappointed. At that time, the housing market was brisk. Homes didn't stay on the market very long. As in our case, most nicer homes, sold in only one or two days.

But God had another plan for us. About a month later, a house was placed on the market, and we viewed the house that very evening and put in an offer. And praise God, it was accepted! And it was an even better house than the first one we liked. And we have enjoyed our house for also five years.

King David wrote in the 30th Psalm that “*weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning*” (verse 5b). We never know what God has planned for us. We only need to remain faithful, which isn't easy.

In today's reading from the Gospel of John, we find the disciples expressing their concern that Jesus wasn't going to remain with them very long. They thought the earthly kingdom would be established and they would have a blessed life.

The day Jesus was crucified, the disciples were devastated. They thought the world had come to an end, but on that Sunday morning the world, and eternity changed. We only need to be faithful and wait, expectantly, for God.

Reflect:

When have you felt abandoned by God?

Is your faith strong enough for you to lean on God?

Pray:

Thank you, Lord, for putting up with my impatience. Help me to lean on you, always.

Wednesday March 29

Reflection by Brian Green

Read John 16:23-34

When read literally, the passage from John 16:23 can seem like a “golden ticket”. Should we use this verse to treat Jesus like a genie who has unlimited wishes to grant as long as we do some name dropping??? This is not the intent. God deals with spiritual wealth, not earthly wealth. The earthly desires of our heart are fleeting and temporary, but the spiritual desires endure. If we are truly asking for something in Jesus’ name, we will be asking for something that aligns with God’s will and not the needs of man.

Verse 23 starts with the statement of “In that day” which takes us to the time after Jesus has been resurrected and ascended. He is showing us that we are not alone even though he may no longer be walking beside us in the flesh. There is a certain comfort in these verses that Jesus is with us and watching out for our interest and through him, the Holy Spirit is interceding for our spiritual needs.

Verse 24 goes on to say that they have not yet asked for anything in Jesus’ name. When they prayed prior, they were not praying using Jesus’ name. Truly asking for something in Jesus’ name shows that you have put your faith and trust in the name of Jesus, and not in the things that we know of here on earth. This also becomes a sign of spiritual maturity. It shows that your heart’s desires are aligning with that of God’s will.

As we grow spiritually, these verses are something we can use as an indicator of where we are in our spiritual journey. When we pray, are we asking for the things in Jesus’ name that align to God’s will?

Reflect:

What are ways to know how to ask for things in Jesus' name?

What do we do when God’s answer to our prayers is no, or the prayer is not answered? How can we grow from that?

Pray:

Your will and ways are perfect. Thank you that the holy spirit intercedes for me in my prayers. Help me to grow spiritually as a servant to your will.

Thursday March 30

Reflection by Maurice Mitchell

Read John 16:25-28

“No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God” (John 16:27).

As I am writing this devotion, we recently turned over the calendar, to not only a new month, but also a new year. We don't know what the year will bring, let alone what this day will bring. We have hopes and dreams, but the future is uncertain.

As I was reading today's scripture lesson, I was taken back to this past summer. I received word that a dear friend of mine, passed away suddenly with a heart attack. He was only 53. He was a dedicated Christian, sharing God's love in many ways. He was the county's Municipal Judge, served on many non-profit boards, and was known as the county's Santa Claus. A witness to his fairness could be seen by the number of individuals, who attended the visitation and/or funeral service, who had stood before his court bench.

On that day, I felt the need to visit the widow and their children. They were in shock and felt lost. All I could do was be present and let them know that they were not alone. I couldn't fix anything, but I could be there for them.

Why this happened, we may never know in this world, but I firmly believe that God can use difficult situations, to bless us. The family is doing well, considering. The first year is always difficult, but their faith is strong and always lean on the love of God.

We don't know the “why”, but be assured, God is still present, and God still loves us. In fact, God walks with us through every difficult, and every good, day. We are never alone.

Reflect:

When have you asked, “where are you God?”

When have you felt overwhelmed by trials? How has God sustained and reassured you?

Pray:

Lord of all, there are times when my burdens become too much to carry. Thank you for continuously reaching out to me, lifting me up and granting me Your peace and strength to face each day.

Friday March 31

Reflection by Sherri Ellington

Read John 16:29-32

“Tell all the truth but tell it slant,” Emily Dickinson wrote, hinting at how some truths are too dazzling to reveal all at once, lest they overwhelm the hearer.

Knowing humanity as He did, Jesus, too, understood that Truth was too big for our minds to comprehend head-on. Rather, He taught from various angles – through His actions, His love, His healing care, His miracles. And when He used words, He relied heavily on figures of speech – parables, analogies, similes and metaphors – each communicating pieces of important truths. Jesus’ style was no accident. He was very intentional about using figures of speech. He’s even recorded introducing a short parable after first musing, “What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?” (Mark 4:30)

Yet in today’s scripture Jesus’ disciples celebrate that He is finally speaking to them “plainly and without figures of speech” and even say, “This makes us believe that You came from God.” The disciples voice that their belief comes from Jesus’ straightforward talk, and not from His figures of speech. Does this mean His image-rich teaching style of the past was useless?

Not at all. Jesus’ figures of speech had gradually prepared the disciples to understand big concepts. For something so stunning – like that He had come from the Father and entered the world, and now was leaving the world and going back to the Father (v.28) – it wouldn’t have been wise or helpful to say things like these directly from the beginning of his ministry! It took time, trust, care, and creativity to gently massage the concepts into their brains. Even on this final night with Him they believed, yes, but they didn’t *fully* understand yet.

Jesus had persistently helped His disciples start to understand the truth about His identity through analogies (I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world), but He had also been cryptic about stating His identity directly. Maybe by this point the disciples thought they *almost* understood; yet they wanted it confirmed. They needed the extraordinary things He was saying to just be tied together plainly, straightforwardly, so they could be sure.

When Jesus finally stated plainly where He had come from and where He was going, they accepted it plainly. He had prepared them to understand. Apparently, they needed to actually hear it stated, too.

Reflect:

What is one truth about Jesus you couldn’t or didn’t understand the first time you heard it, but that needed to sink in gradually to your heart and/or your mind?

In your family or other relationships, is there anyone you’ve perhaps been showing love to in various ways but who might need you to confirm it with straightforward words of appreciation?

Pray:

Jesus, the truth of who You are is dazzling, too much to wrap our minds around. Give us ears to really hear You, in whatever ways You may be speaking. Amen.

Saturday April 1

Reflection by Sarah Grace Smith

Read John 16:33

It seems like there's so much going on in our lives. It's always one thing after the other with hardly any time for breaks. Work, chores, social life, church, family—it all adds up. Maybe you feel weighed down by the news, watching as international crises unfold, people die from preventable causes, and sin percolates through the world. Or maybe it's personal one tragedy after another, with little time for emotional release.

Jesus says to find peace in Him. Sometimes we think “Just the one last thing, and then I'll be less stressed” or “I just need to get through this week.” But Jesus knows the struggle never ends. He was well aware that we would face trouble. And yet He instructs us to find peace in this very moment. Not after you finish that task, or after this week, but now.

Jesus isn't calling for an external peace, that you put your life on hold and go on a retreat in the mountains. He is talking about the internal peace that can only come from putting your trust in Him. My ESV study Bible explains that “The expression peace (*shalom*) had a much richer connotation than the English word does since it conveyed not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God.”

So, when we look for internal peace, we should set our sights on Jesus and on having an intimate relationship with God. And we need to remind ourselves as often as possible that Jesus has overcome the world, not the other way around. The world has no hold on us; it is not our end goal. As Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.” Only by doing so will we find that peace.

Reflect:

Where are you looking for peace in your life?

How can you remind yourself that Jesus has already overcome the world?

Pray:

Dear Lord, help me to place my peace in Jesus and his resurrection. Remind me to set my eyes on you, rather than on my earthly troubles. Amen

Week of Sunday April 2

John 17:1-26

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

⁶ "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

²⁰ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Monday April 3

Reflection by Bettilee Perkins

Read John 17:1-8

Jesus is in prayer with his Father-God. He knows that God will hear his prayers as He has done so many times before. Jesus knows his time on earth is growing short.

In these passages, Jesus is praying for himself. He expresses that he has nearly completed the mission God has given him to do. He has taught many people who have gathered in large groups to hear him, as well as his disciples about the love God has for them, always honoring and praising his Father. Many have become believers.

Jesus asks God to set these believers apart and keep them safe from Satan's power and grant to those who believe to receive Eternal Life: using Jesus as the gate or way to obtain this personal relationship. (Matthew 7:13-14)

When we admit our sin and vow to turn away from it, the love of Jesus enters us by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is teaching believers how to pray to God, knowing that God longs to hear from His precious children. God wants us to experience the love he has for each of His creation. He wants to help us realize our full potential, when ask or pray. He will direct our path.

Before Jesus came to earth, He was one with God. As he prepares to return to Heaven, He asks God to restore him to his original place of honor and authority.

Over many years I have learned to enjoy and count on the comfort from conversation or prayer with God. Many times, I am directed to the right words by the Holy Spirit. This connection I have with God has been a process or journey. I have had to earn some lessons the hard way, in my own strength, then being led back to the correct idea; Praying to God, in Jesus' name and asking for help from the Holy Spirit, guides me to many helpful answers to my concerns.

This "formula" given to us by Jesus has blessed me over and over. I have no doubt knowing this is the way for me.

Reflect:

What do you know about God that inspires you to want a deeper relationship with him?

How do you think knowing more about Jesus could help you?

Pray:

Dear Lord, I am so grateful for your promise to me. "Never will I leave you; Never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Tuesday April 4

Reflection by Elizabeth Moore

Read John 17:9-19

In 2015, the red number 100, with two lines included underneath for emphasis, was added to emoji usage to indicate general agreement with an idea through digital communication. Previously used as a marker for probability or test scores, 100% has since become a common slang phrase response to indicate agreement, support, and perfection.

It is written that Jesus prays for his disciples in John 17: 6-19, asking God the Father to protect them in this present world. He is fully aware that, like Him, they are hated, yet faithful, questioning, yet obedient. Jesus does not implore God to relieve the disciples of their struggles, choosing instead to petition God to guard them from the prince of this world, so that they may receive his “full measure” of joy for their enduring perseverance and sanctification. Jesus’ prayer affirms God’s sovereignty while simultaneously asking for this protection to be bestowed upon them by the triune power of His name. The disciples may not yet understand what tumult is to come leading up to the death on the cross; however, scripture acknowledges they wholeheartedly accept Christ’s authority, obey his word with diligence, and believe with 100% certainty that He is indeed who He says He is: the Son of God.

Reflect:

In what practice, spiritual discipline, volunteer work, or hobby might you share Jesus’ “full measure of joy” with 100%, “all-in,” mentality in your own life?

A common practice for making a resolution is one in which a single word is chosen to represent focused intention, spiritual discipline, or arranged goals for the year. Reread the scripture noted above, asking God to draw your attention to one specific word for revelation as it pertains to your spiritual journey this Lenten season. Meditate on or discuss this word with others.

Pray:

Heavenly Father, we count your joy as our eternal strength and accept the favor of your protection from the evil one as we prepare for Jesus’ return. Help us to conduct our lives in accordance with your will and granted purpose. Bestow on us a courageous spirit to spread the gospel with the same surety as the disciples, thus displaying our conviction plainly to the world, the church, our community, and our family. We humbly ask these things in your great name.

Wednesday April 5

Reflection by Cheryl Weiss

Read John 17:20-26

Do you know what heaven will be like? Revelation 7:9-10 says that there will be people from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshipping God together, living in the joy of his love.

This unity is to begin on earth. This is what Jesus was praying for when he prayed 2000 years ago that our unity would be a sign to the world that God sent him and that this unity is a sign of God's love of us and of God's love at work in us. This is what we pray for when we pray in the Lord's Prayer "May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In our fallen, human, unredeemed state, our default behavior is tribalism and selfishness. We only want to be around people who look and talk like us, and we are uncomfortable around anyone who is different. Our comfort level is more important than God's will but when we are captured by God's love and are filled with the Spirit of God, we reject these preferences and ask God to sanctify us and fill us with his divine Love. At first, our obedience might feel forced, but as we press through in obeying, the Holy Spirit comes in and makes it genuine. We become overcomers of our sinful nature through God's power. Then, when we see someone who is different, we can rejoice that God's love is powerful and transforming. When we see brothers or sisters going through times of trouble and need, our hearts are touched by God and we cannot rest unless we share in their troubles and help in meeting their needs.

When we have children of God from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshipping in our church, we can rejoice that we are reflecting a heavenly reality and that God, through his Spirit is at work among us.

Reflect:

Jesus has told us "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."(John 14:23) What first step can you take in order to be obedient to Jesus' prayer of unity trusting that God will come and live in you more fully?

Prayer:

Dear God, fill me with your transforming, unifying love so that I may be part of your kingdom here on earth and may show the world how delightful it is to know you. Show me when I need to repent of things in my heart that prevent unity. May your kingdom come in me and your will be done in me as it is in heaven. Have your way in me. Amen

