

Suffering and Salvation

Devotionals for Lent 2019

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by

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Ash Wednesday, March 6, 2019



Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. ~
Philippians 1:27-30

We want all the blessings that come from God, but Paul tells us in this passage (one of many with the same message) that we are to suffer for Christ's sake. Jesus suffered terrible physical torture and death for us. But even more painful was His separation from God. For a brief time that must have seemed like forever, Jesus became sin—our sin, and the Father turned His face away. Nothing we will ever be asked to suffer will be remotely close to the pain Jesus suffered for us. The prosperity preachers may tell us that if we believe in Jesus, we will enjoy a life of health and wealth. However, that is opposite of what Scripture says. We must be prepared to suffer for our faith.

Father God, in my human frailty, I want to avoid suffering. Yet Jesus didn't avoid suffering—He willingly suffered pain, death, and separation from You for my sake. Give me the willingness and strength and endurance to suffer whatever You have for me. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday, March 7, 2019

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,
 you who seek the Lord:
 look to the rock from which you were hewn,
 and to the quarry from which you were dug.
 Look to Abraham your father
 and to Sarah who bore you;
 for he was but one when I called him,
 that I might bless him and multiply him.
 For the Lord comforts Zion;
 he comforts all her waste places
 and makes her wilderness like Eden,
 her desert like the garden of the Lord;
 joy and gladness will be found in her,
 thanksgiving and the voice of song.

“Give attention to me, my people,
and give ear to me, my nation;
for a law will go out from me,
and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.
My righteousness draws near,
my salvation has gone out,
and my arms will judge the peoples;
the coastlands hope for me,
and for my arm they wait.
Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and they who dwell in it will die in like manner;
but my salvation will be forever,
and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

“Listen to me, you who know righteousness,
the people in whose heart is my law;
fear not the reproach of man,
nor be dismayed at their revilings.
For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
and the worm will eat them like wool,
but my righteousness will be forever,
and my salvation to all generations.”

Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the Lord;
awake, as in days of old,
the generations of long ago.
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,
who pierced the dragon?
Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep,
who made the depths of the sea a way
for the redeemed to pass over?
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

“I, I am he who comforts you;
 who are you that you are afraid of man who dies,
 of the son of man who is made like grass,
 and have forgotten the Lord, your Maker,
 who stretched out the heavens
 and laid the foundations of the earth,
 and you fear continually all the day
 because of the wrath of the oppressor,
 when he sets himself to destroy?
 And where is the wrath of the oppressor?
 He who is bowed down shall speedily be released;
 he shall not die and go down to the pit,
 neither shall his bread be lacking.
 I am the Lord your God,
 who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—
 the Lord of hosts is his name.
 And I have put my words in your mouth
 and covered you in the shadow of my hand,
 establishing the heavens
 and laying the foundations of the earth,
 and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people.’” ~ Isaiah 51:1-16

God chose Abraham and his descendants as His people. He provided for them and multiplied them, not because they deserved it, but because He loved them. Today believers in Jesus are God’s people. He provides for us and multiplies us. We may have sorrow and suffering, but we will return with singing and everlasting joy. He comforts us, and we lack nothing. When we judge by earthly standards, we may think we lack because we don’t have the things that the world deems important. However, God provides our every need—not our earthly desires, but our eternal needs.

Thank You, Lord, that You provide for Your people everything we need. I worry and fret about the future, forgetting that it is in Your hand and that You will always provide. Open my heart and my eyes to recognize Your provision with gratitude and without worry. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday, March 8, 2019

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. ~ Jonah 3:1-10

Nineveh was an evil city, and Jonah prophesied its destruction. The Ninevites deserved to be destroyed because they were so sinful. Yet when they heard the Word of the Lord, they repented of their evil, and God did not destroy them. If we read this passage in context, we learn that Jonah ran away from God because he didn't want to prophesy to Nineveh. God pursued him, had him swallowed then spit out by a big fish, and compelled him to prophesy. When the prophecy was effective in leading the people of Nineveh to repentance, Jonah was angry. He didn't want God to show mercy on these evil people. Yet God does not want anyone to perish. Today, all that is required to avoid destruction in hell is to repent of our sins and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. A person can live an evil, selfish, and sinful life, but if he repents, turns to God, and accepts Jesus moments before death, he will be in Heaven with Christians who have been faithful for their entire lives. We can be like Jonah and resent that, or we can rejoice that everyone has a chance to be saved.

Lord God, thank You that those I love who have not accepted You still have a chance to repent and be saved. Draw them to You, Father, before it's too late. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday, March 9, 2019

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today. ~ Deuteronomy 7:6-11

Just as the Lord loved His people Israel, today He loves His people—the Church. He called us to Him, not because of anything we have done, but because of His great love and His grace. He is faithful, even when we aren't. He keeps His promises, even when we don't. We are to obey His commands—love the Lord with all our hearts, minds, and souls and love our neighbors as ourselves. If we love Him and others, we will be more like Him and keep His commands.

Lord God, thank You for loving me with a love beyond comprehension. I can trust You completely in every aspect of my life. All You ask of me is to love You and love others. If I do that, I will keep Your commandments. I want to love You above all, and I want to love my neighbor as myself. But I cannot do either without the Holy Spirit empowering me. Thank You that You give me the help to do what You command. Help me to always follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and love You and those around me. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The First Sunday in Lent, March 10, 2019

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know
how to speak, for I am only a youth.” But the Lord
said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’;
for to all to whom I send you, you shall go,
and whatever I command you, you shall speak.
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
declares the Lord.”

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me,

“Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.
See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.” ~ Jeremiah 1:4-10

Two important things strike me about this passage. First, the Lord knows us before He formed us in the womb. He designed and planned us long before He created us. That means that every baby in the womb is a human life, created by God in His image, known and loved and made by Him for a purpose. Many other passages in Scripture tell us that abortion is wrong, but this is so powerful, how can anyone who identifies as a Christian support the killing of unborn babies? Second, if God gives us something to do, we don't have to do it in our own strength. Just as He told Jeremiah He would be with him to deliver him, God will be us and deliver us in whatever He gives us to do. He put the words in Jeremiah's mouth—He will put words in our mouth and give us strength and power to serve in whatever task He gives us.

Lord, millions of Your precious children are being killed by abortion. Forgive me for not being more active in stopping this abomination. Put the words in my mouth and give me the strength to stand up for these precious babies and help bring an end to legal murder. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Monday after Lent 1, March 11, 2019

“Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but ‘As the Lord lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ Then they shall dwell in their own land.” ~ Jeremiah 23:7-8

Israel was exiled because they turned from worshipping the one true God to worshipping idols, but He promised to return them to their homeland. He promises to forgive us our sins, our worship of idols—money, fame, sex, achievement, family, whatever we put before God. Lent is a time for self-examination and repentance. What is more important to us than the Lord? We can look at how we spend our time and money to see where our values lie. Let us examine ourselves and vow to put God first.

Father God, I want You to be first in my life. You are my Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. No one and no thing is more important—indeed nowhere near as important. Let me listen to the Holy Spirit within me, read and inwardly digest Your Word, and spend time with You in prayer and worship rather than serve the false gods of this world. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday after Lent 1, March 12, 2019

May all kings fall down before him,
all nations serve him!

For he delivers the needy when he calls,
the poor and him who has no helper.
He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy. ~ Psalm 72:11-13

We Americans like to think we’re strong and self-reliant. We don’t like to see ourselves as weak and needy, but that’s exactly what we are without the Lord. When we rely on our own desires and plans, things usually don’t go very well. We find ourselves in trouble when we don’t call upon God, confess our weakness and neediness, and ask for His guidance. The Holy Spirit lives within us, and He will lead us in the paths we should walk. But if we fail to admit our needs and rely on our own wisdom, we are likely to be far away from God’s plan for us and close to falling into Satan’s grasp.

Lord God, even though I want to believe I’m strong and independent, the truth is that I am weak and needy. My own thoughts and plans that seem to good to my flesh, my human nature, lead me away from Your will. Open the eyes and ears of my heart and mind to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Wednesday after Lent 1, March 13, 2019

But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol,
for he will receive me. Selah ~ Psalm 49:15

Sheol was the place of the dead. Centuries before Jesus came to earth, His victory over death was prophesied to His people. Now we have no reason to fear death if we love the Lord and follow Jesus. We can look forward with confidence and joy to living for eternity in Heaven rather than being confined in a place of the dead.

Lord God, I'm so blessed to know that when I die, it will not be the end. It will be a transition to a better place—a place beyond my imagination. I can think of the most amazing place I would want to be, and Heaven will be superlatively better. Thank you that I will be there with all my loved ones that have gone before me and eventually with all those who come after me—if they love You. Help me to be a witness to those who don't know You so they will be there, too. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday after Lent 1, March 14, 2019

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.
~ Ezekiel 34:15-16

Sheep may be the stupidest animals God created. The shepherd has to lead them everywhere, ensure they have food and water, find and return the strays, and take care of them when they are sick or injured. The Lord is telling us in this passage that He does that with His sheep—His people. Although we like to think of ourselves as independent and powerful, we are like sheep who wander and go astray, who need a shepherd to guide in the right paths. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd. If we follow Him, He will lead us.

Lord God, I am in the hands of the Good Shepherd. I will follow where He leads and trust Him to provide for me and care for me. If I go astray, He will bring me back to You. That is where I want to be. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Friday after Lent 1, March 15, 2019

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert. ~ Isaiah 35:5-6

We are now in the wilderness of Lent, wandering in the dry desert. We are blind and deaf and lame and mute. But one day, waters and streams will break forth to refresh us and restore us. We will be healed of all our weaknesses. After the desert of Lent comes the oasis of Easter—an oasis that is as large as all eternity.

Lord, I can look forward with confidence to Easter, but now I am in the season of penitence. I need to suffer the arid heat of the desert before I enjoy the refreshment of the eternal oasis. Cleanse my thoughts, actions, words, and attitudes that are not in alignment with Your will. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday after Lent 1, March 16, 2019

He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young. ~ Isaiah 40:11

Jesus will carry the lambs, the weak and helpless, in his bosom—next to His heart. He wraps His arms around them and holds them against His chest, where His heart beats with love for them. How wonderful to be one of His lambs; Jesus carries even elderly human beings who love Him as a shepherd carries the weakest and tiniest lamb. How amazing that the strong heartbeat that provides comfort to those held snugly against His body is the beat of His love.

Lord God, thank You that Jesus carries me like a shepherd carries a lamb. I am old and overweight, but to Jesus, I am a tiny, helpless lamb. You—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—love me more I can comprehend. Help me to love You as much as humanly possible. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Second Sunday in Lent, March 17, 2019

Thus says the Lord:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.”

Thus says the Lord:

“Keep your voice from weeping,
and your eyes from tears,
for there is a reward for your work,
declares the Lord,
and they shall come back from the land of the enemy.

There is hope for your future,
declares the Lord,

and your children shall come back to their own country. ~ Jeremiah 31:15-17



This prophecy was about God’s people carried off into captivity for their disobedience; parents were separated from their children, and they mourned. During Lent, we are lamenting our sins—not crying because they are no more, but weeping and repenting because our sins are still here. But just as the Lord promised an end to the weeping of His people who would be returned to their homeland, we look forward to Easter when we will rejoice in the resurrection that redeems us from our sins.

Lord God, I look forward to the joy of Easter, but let me never forget to mourn for my sins and to repent. I thank You and praise You that Jesus redeemed me from my sins, but I weep that I caused Him that suffering, the pain that He endured for my sake. Forgive me and lead me in Your holy ways. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Monday after Lent 2, March 18, 2019

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—

to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
 the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
 the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
 that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
 the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. ~ Isaiah 61:1-3

Looking toward Easter, we see the time of the Lord's favor. Through His resurrection, Jesus proclaims liberty to the captives, comforts those who mourn, and gives us a garment of praise instead of a faint spirit. We are in the time of mourning for our sins now during Lent, but the time of rejoicing is coming.

Father God, I mourn for my sins that put Jesus on the cross. I praise You and thank You for His sacrifice that once and for all redeemed me and gave me eternal life. I can be called an oak of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, for Your glory. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday after Lent 2, March 19, 2019

Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. ~ Matthew 27:3-5

As Jesus knew he would, Judas betrayed Jesus to the chief priests and elders for thirty pieces of silver. What was his motive? Did he do it only for the money? Or was he trying to force Jesus to reveal Himself as the Messiah to save Himself? When Jesus was condemned, Judas changed his mind—but it was too late. Unlike Peter, who repented after denying Jesus three times, Judas condemned himself and took his own life. Could he have been forgiven if he had repented and asked for forgiveness? We know that we can always be forgiven when we sin. Instead of condemning ourselves to hopelessness—as we often do, we need to recognize God's grace and mercy, confess, change our ways, and be forgiven.

Lord, sometimes I condemn myself and think I'm not worthy of forgiveness when I sin. And it's true that I'm not worthy of forgiveness—no one is, but You are always ready to forgive me when I truly repent. Give me true repentance for my own sins and the willingness to forgive those who harm me. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Wednesday after Lent 2, March 20, 2019

So they reward me evil for good,
 and hatred for my love.

Appoint a wicked man against him;
 let an accuser stand at his right hand. ~ Psalm 109:5-6

As we read further in this psalm, we hear David calling for all sorts of evil against his enemies. The imprecatory psalms always make us a little uncomfortable. How can we ask God to curse another person? But David is asking for justice to be done and for God to be glorified. As should be the case with us, God's enemies were David's enemies. He wanted the wicked punished because they deserved it. Jesus taught us to love our enemies, but that doesn't mean justice should be ignored. God's justice was served for all who love Him by Jesus taking our punishment on the cross for us. Jesus' sacrifice doesn't cover anyone who refuses to acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior. Elsewhere in the Bible, especially in Revelation, we learn of the terrible punishment that God has in store for those who deny Him. He is a just God and cannot and will not let evil go unpunished. Glory be to Him that if we give ourselves to Him, Jesus suffered everything that we should suffer, and we are made righteous.

Almighty God, You are a gracious, merciful, and loving God, but You are also a just God. Thank You that my sins have been punished—but Jesus took my punishment. I pray for all who are destined for eternal punishment. Open their minds and turn their hearts to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday after Lent 2, March 21, 2019

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. ~ 1 Peter 1:8-17

When we read that we are to be holy as God is holy, most of us wonder how that's possible. We are by nature sinful and corrupt—not holy. But when God calls us to something, He empowers us. We cannot be holy on our own, but we are holy because Jesus made us holy when He washed us in His Blood on the cross. No matter how or how often we sin, every time we repent, we are washed clean and made holy.

Lord God, there is no way I can be holy as You are holy—yet You make me holy. Jesus gave His life and rose again from the dead so I can be pure before You. That is one of those thoughts of Yours that is far above mine, one of those ways that is far above my ways. I am so in awe of Your power, Your love, Your mercy, and Your grace. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friday after Lent 2, March 22, 2019

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. ~ 1 Peter 2:13-25

In our human nature, we don't want to obey unjust masters, bosses, leaders. We generally don't want to suffer at all, but especially not unjustly. But God's Word tells us that we are to follow in Christ's footsteps. He suffered unjustly—He who never sinned was punished for our sins—but he never complained or fought back or stood up for Himself.

Lord God, I don't want to suffer, even when I deserve it and especially when I don't. Please give me the attitude of Jesus—to suffer as He suffered and to forgive those who cause my sufferings. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Saturday after Lent 2, March 23, 2019

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For

“Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. ~ 1 Peter 3:8-18

Suffering again. God's Word says more about suffering—and our need to experience it—than we want to hear. Often unbelievers use the existence of suffering in the world as an argument against the existence or the power or the goodness of God. “If God exists, if He is sovereign, if He is good, He would not allow suffering,” they say. But God's Word says the opposite. Not only should Christians expect suffering, but we should consider it a blessing!

Father God, it's hard for me to consider suffering as a blessing. I want comfort and lack of pain. Instead, You tell me to suffer and to consider myself blessed. Thank You, Father, for the blessing of suffering. Let me experience it without complaint, indeed with thanksgiving, and let me learn from it what You want to teach me. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Third Sunday in Lent, March 24, 2019

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ~ 1 Peter 4:12-16



Fiery trials, insults, suffering. Not only must we expect them, but also we should welcome them. We should rejoice to share the sufferings of our Lord. If we really consider what Jesus suffered for us—He took the punishment we deserved and He didn't—we will consider the sufferings of this world to be minor.

Almighty God, open my eyes and heart to the glory that You have for me and all believers. Let me see the blessing in the suffering and rejoice that I am considered worthy to suffer for Christ. In His name I pray. Amen.

Monday after Lent 3, March 25, 2019

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. ~ 1 Peter 5:6-11

This short passage covers a lot of territory—much of it the opposite of our sinful human nature. We prefer to exalt ourselves rather than humble ourselves. We worry and fret rather than give all our cares to the Lord. Many of us don't take the devil seriously enough, and probably none of us like the idea of suffering. However, there is good—wonderful—news: we can resist the devil, and like our brothers and sisters in faith, God Himself will lead us through our trials to eternal glory.

Thank You, Lord God, that You are with me throughout every difficulty I face. I can lean on You, and You will support and strengthen me. The sufferings I experience in this life cannot compare to the glory that You have in store for me and all believers. Your grace is boundless—may my gratitude and love for You be equally boundless. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday after Lent 3, March 26, 2019

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ~ John 6:35-37

We tend to worry about everything, including what we will eat and drink. We don't want to miss or be late for a meal. But Jesus tells us that He is sufficient for our needs. With Him, we will not hunger or thirst. We never have to worry about missing a meal, because He will never cast us out.

Father God, help me to focus on Jesus and the spiritual food and drink He provides. Take away my worries about my physical needs and material things and turn my heart to Jesus. In His name. Amen.

Wednesday after Lent 3, March 27, 2019

All who see me mock me;
 they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
 "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;
 let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" ~ Psalm 22:7-8

These words apply to Jesus on the cross. He was ridiculed because God did not save Him. The people mocking Him didn't understand that Jesus was there by choice. God could rescue Him any time, but Jesus chose to take our sins on Him and die on the cross so we can live forever. Instead of asking His Father to rescue Him, Jesus, by His willing sacrifice of Himself, rescued us from eternity in hell.

Lord, there are no words adequate to describe what Jesus did for me. He endured more pain and suffering than I can imagine, He suffered mockery and derision from onlookers, and—worst of all—He suffered separation from You, the Father. Both of You suffered more than I can imagine in that moment of separation, but You did it for me, so I don't have to be separated from You forever. Give me a grateful heart and the desire and ability to live for You. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday after Lent 3, March 28, 2019

Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends,
 for the hand of God has touched me!
 Why do you, like God, pursue me?
 Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?

"Oh that my words were written!
 Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
 Oh that with an iron pen and lead
 they were engraved in the rock forever!

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
 and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
 And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
 yet in my flesh I shall see God,
 whom I shall see for myself,
 and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
 My heart faints within me!
 If you say, 'How we will pursue him!'
 and, 'The root of the matter is found in him,'
 be afraid of the sword,
 for wrath brings the punishment of the sword,
 that you may know there is a judgment." ~ Job 19:21-29

This passage never fails to amaze me. Job is probably the first book of the Bible recorded, so Job did not have the written Word of God, and he lived before the Incarnate Word. Yet in spite of losing everything he had, suffering in agony, and being harangued and insulted by his so-called friends, Job still knew and proclaimed that he would see his Redeemer in the flesh one day. How many of us have a hard time believing that when we have the entire Scripture and we know the life and death of our Redeemer? God's Word tells about many great heroes of faith, and Job is one of my favorites.

Lord, give me the faith of Job. No matter what happens to me in this life, I know I will stand before my Redeemer and see Him in the flesh! In His name. Amen.

Friday after Lent 3, March 29, 2019

More in number than the hairs of my head
 are those who hate me without cause;
 mighty are those who would destroy me,
 those who attack me with lies.
 What I did not steal
 must I now restore?
 O God, you know my folly;
 the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me,
 O Lord God of hosts;
 let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me,
 O God of Israel.
 For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
 that dishonor has covered my face.
 I have become a stranger to my brothers,
 an alien to my mother's sons.

For zeal for your house has consumed me,
 and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.
 When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting,
 it became my reproach.
 When I made sackcloth my clothing,
 I became a byword to them.
 I am the talk of those who sit in the gate,
 and the drunkards make songs about me. ~ Psalm 69:4-12

David was being dishonored and reproached because of his love for God. His concern was not that he was being treated badly, but that he would bring shame to those who follow the Lord. Usually when we're attacked unfairly, we want justice. We want to be vindicated. Oh, that we would be like David and seek to honor God rather than defend ourselves.

Lord God, give me willingness to suffer for You, with my only concern that I not lead anyone else astray or cause shame to any of Your followers. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday after Lent 3, March 30, 2019

Many bulls encompass me;
 strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
 they open wide their mouths at me,
 like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water,
 and all my bones are out of joint;
 my heart is like wax;
 it is melted within my breast;
 my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
 and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
 you lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs encompass me;
 a company of evildoers encircles me;
 they have pierced my hands and feet—
 I can count all my bones—
 they stare and gloat over me;
 they divide my garments among them,
 and for my clothing they cast lots. ~ Psalm 22:12-18

Psalm 22 is one of David's prophetic psalms about Jesus. Just reading these words puts us at the feet of the cross, watching Jesus suffer and die—for us! He took the punishment we deserved so we can be forgiven and spend eternity in heaven with Him and the Father. He loves each one of us that much.

Almighty God, You could have saved Jesus from the cross, but You chose to sacrifice Your Son, and He chose to be the sacrifice for my sins. I can't imagine such incredible love, yet I am so thankful for it. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I want to live my life for You. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 31, 2019

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
 incline your ears to the words of my mouth!
 I will open my mouth in a parable;
 I will utter dark sayings from of old,

things that we have heard and known,
 that our fathers have told us.
 We will not hide them from their children,
 but tell to the coming generation
 the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
 and the wonders that he has done.

He established a testimony in Jacob
 and appointed a law in Israel,
 which he commanded our fathers
 to teach to their children,
 that the next generation might know them,
 the children yet unborn,
 and arise and tell them to their children,
 so that they should set their hope in God
 and not forget the works of God,
 but keep his commandments;
 and that they should not be like their fathers,
 a stubborn and rebellious generation,
 a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
 whose spirit was not faithful to God. ~ Psalm 78:1-8



The psalmist reminded the people to tell their children the stories of what the Lord had done for previous generations. The goal was for the children to honor God and keep His commandments, but the people telling the stories had not been faithful to the Lord. Children are more apt to follow examples than to listen to words. If we want future generations to love and honor the Lord, we need to show them rather than tell them.

Father God, let me always be a good example to younger Christians. If they observe me, Lord, I want them to see someone loving You, serving You, and keeping Your commandments. Empower me by the Holy Spirit to be that person. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Monday after Lent 4, April 1, 2019

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.” ~Genesis 22:1-14

It’s hard to imagine Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son. Yet God had promised him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. That promise came in Abraham’s old age, when he was childless far past the time of life in which it would be physically possible for him to father a child. God assured Abraham that he would have a son, a biological child, born to his wife Sarah, and God delivered on that promise. Now God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, that child of promise. Abraham still believed God’s promise to him—if he did what the Lord commanded, God would save Isaac or restore him to life. Having seen God fulfill His promise, Abraham trusted Him.

Lord God, give me the faith of Abraham—the trust that whatever I need, You will provide. Let me put You above everything and everyone in my life, willing to give up whatever You ask me to sacrifice, knowing that You are all I need. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday after Lent 4, April 2, 2019

Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
 he shall be high and lifted up,
 and shall be exalted.

As many were astonished at you—
 his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
 and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—
 so shall he sprinkle many nations.

Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,
 for that which has not been told them they see,
 and that which they have not heard they understand. ~ Isaiah 52:13-15

Centuries before Jesus lived and died, Isaiah prophesied about God's servant being lifted up (crucified on the cross) and marred in appearance (from the torture He endured). He would be exalted and astonish many. It's hard to realize that God knew exactly how man would fall and need to be redeemed, and He planned that redemption from the beginning of the world. The Lord is omniscient, omnipresent, almighty, and sovereign—but more amazingly, He loves each one of us with a passion beyond human understanding.

Lord God, You planned the end from the beginning, and with You there is no beginning or end. You have always been, and You will always be. You are always everywhere, and You see everything throughout eternity. Yet You love me as if I were Your only child. Who am I that You love me so much? Only one of Your billions of children, and You love every one of us equally as much. Open the eyes and hearts of those who do not know You to understand Your great love for them and the opportunity to dwell in eternity with You if only they repent of their sins and follow Jesus. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Wednesday after Lent 4, April 3, 2019

Who has believed what he has heard from us?
 And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
 For he grew up before him like a young plant,
 and like a root out of dry ground;
 he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
 and no beauty that we should desire him.
 He was despised and rejected by men,
 a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
 and as one from whom men hide their faces
 he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs
 and carried our sorrows;
 yet we esteemed him stricken,

smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.
Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors. ~ Isaiah 53:1–12

How can we read this passage and not be overwhelmed with guilt for our part in Jesus' sufferings, gratitude for His sacrifice and our salvation, and love for the Triune God Who loved us so much?

Holy, Triune God, I am overwhelmed at reading the words the prophet spoke seven hundred years before Jesus came to earth. You planned this from before time so I could spend eternity with You. Jesus suffered so that I might live. I cannot fathom such love, and I am not worthy. Thank You, precious Lord, that You are merciful and gracious, abounding in love. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday after Lent 4, March 4, 2019

Many bulls encompass me;
 strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
 they open wide their mouths at me,
 like a ravening and roaring lion. ~ Psalm 22:12-13

In this passage, David was prophesying about the Crucifixion of Jesus. During His torture leading up to the cross and while He was on the cross, Jesus was surrounded by evil men who wanted Him dead. David compared them to strong bulls of Bashan, an area known for its well-fed and strong cattle, and to a roaring lion. The men who killed Jesus were strong, but their strength was weakness compared to the strength and power of God. Yet Jesus gave Himself up and God allowed these evil and cruel men to punish Jesus—for the sake of all sinners who repent and turn to Him.

Almighty God, You are stronger and more powerful than all the evil and cruel men who have ever lived. Jesus did not have to die on the cross—He was not at the mercy of those who thought they were in control. Yet He chose to sacrifice Himself for my sins. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner! In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friday after Lent 4, April 5, 2019

“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.” ~ Ezekiel 34:11-12

The Lord God—the omniscient, omnipresent, almighty, sovereign, holy ruler of the universe; the Alpha and the Omega—seeks His scattered sheep. He doesn't leave this to the angels or heavenly host or to men, but He seeks us, calls our name, and draws us to Him. We may think we found God, but He found us first.

Thank You, Holy Triune God, for calling my name and drawing me to You. Thank You that the Son came to earth and paid the penalty for my sins. Thank You that the Holy Spirit dwells within me. Thank You that the Father loves me beyond my imagination. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday after Lent 4, April 6, 2019

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

~ Romans 3:21-28

It's so easy to compare ourselves to others and think we're not so bad. Yet, God tells us in His Word that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We cannot compensate for our sins by good works. There is nothing we can do to wipe away our iniquities. We are justified only by the Blood of Christ. We cannot boast of our salvation because we received it by grace—we do not deserve to be justified, but God in His great mercy imputes the righteousness of Christ to us through our faith in Him.

Gracious and merciful God, I do not deserve Your forgiveness and Your justification, yet You give them to me through grace. Nothing I can do can compensate for my sins or make me righteous, but my life is Yours to do with as You will. Show me what You want me to do. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Fifth Sunday in Lent (Passion Sunday), April 7, 2019

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. ~ James 5:13-18



The Bible tells us to pray for relief when we are suffering, to pray for healing when we are sick. Do we really believe when we pray that God is going to heal the sick and relieve the suffering? I've seen and experienced miracles in my life, so I know prayer can be very effective. God is not a vending machine that releases healing when we press the right button (say the right prayer). He is sovereign, and He decides, often for reasons unknown to us, whom He will heal now, whom He will heal later on earth, and whom He will heal in heaven.

Lord God, thank You for the miraculous healings I have experienced in my own life and seen in others. Let my prayers always be prayed with faith that You will answer them in the way that is best for me, even when I don't understand. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Monday after Passion Sunday, April 8, 2019

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. ~ Romans 5:1-11

Reconciliation with God—a free gift and cause for great rejoicing. Imagine giving up your own life for someone else. You may sacrifice yourself for your spouse or your child or your parent, but probably not for someone you didn't know—especially for someone evil. Yet Jesus gave up His life so we, the sinners and evil ones, could live. He didn't wait until we repented to die, but He died so we would repent.

Lord, I repent of my sins that led to Jesus' death on the cross. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, empower me to live a life pleasing to You. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday after Passion Sunday, April 9, 2019

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ~ Romans 6:12-18

We don't like to be slaves to anyone or anything. Yet clearly we have been slaves to sin, when we let sin control our lives. Now, through God's grace, we can be slaves to obedience, to righteousness because we let God control our lives. Sin is a terrible taskmaster, but God is a loving and kind father.

Loving and gracious God, I do not want to be the slave of sin. I want You—only You—to be in control of my life. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Wednesday after Passion Sunday, April 10, 2019

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ~ Romans 7:7-14

"You can't legislate morality." People say this to justify not having laws against things that are immoral because they want to live an immoral lifestyle without legal consequences. Paul tells us that God's law produces sin because without the law, we don't know what we ought to do. Instead of doing away with the law, though, let's avoid sin.

Almighty God, I can't say that I don't know right from wrong because Your Word makes that very clear. Lead me in the paths of righteousness and away from sin. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday after Passion Sunday, April 11, 2019

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. ~ Romans 8:18-25

We all have many blessings as children of God, but we all have our share of sufferings, also. None of us gets through life without pain, whether it comes from illness/disability, financial problems, relationship issues, or something else. But Scripture tells us that at the end of the world, we will see glory so magnificent that our earthly sufferings will be insignificant in comparison. As a dear friend and Bible study leader says, "I've read the end of the book (Revelation), and we win!"

Lord God, I live in hope of the glory that will be revealed when Jesus comes again. Maranatha, Lord Jesus!

Friday after Passion Sunday, April 12, 2019

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ~ John 12:1-7

It’s hard to imagine someone using a pound of expensive ointment on a person’s feet. Even more unimaginable is the woman who applied the ointment then using her hair to wipe the person’s feet. How extravagant! How passionate! But that’s the point. Jesus is worthy of the best of everything, including our adoration.

Lord, I want to be like Mary—personally giving the best I have to Jesus. I don’t want to give something “good;” I want to give the best. I want to give my life. I don’t want to give it ritually and formally. I want to give it with my whole heart, body, and soul. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday after Passion Sunday, April 13, 2019

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
 Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
 Behold, your king is coming to you;
 righteous and having salvation is he,
 humble and mounted on a donkey,
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ~ Zechariah 9:9

Our King, the Messiah, the Christ entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on a donkey, the lowliest of mounts. His humble demeanor and simple mode of transportation couldn’t hide his majesty and power and might. The crowds greeted him with praise and worship.

Lord God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords humbled himself. Help me to be humble, for pride goes before a fall. I want to humbly serve others and worship You. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019



Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

"Say to the daughter of Zion,
 'Behold, your king is coming to you,
 humble, and mounted on a donkey,
 on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,

"'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies
 you have prepared praise?'" ~ Matthew 21:1-16

In this passage, we see God's preparation for His plan of salvation: the donkey and colt were tied up and waiting for Jesus, and His prophets had told of this centuries before. We see the people recognizing Jesus as the Son of David, even though He entered the city in great humility. We see Jesus angry and throwing out those who made money from worshippers in the temple, and we see Him healing the sick. It's amazing how much these few short verses tell us about Jesus and about God's plan.

Father God, thank You that You planned for our salvation from the beginning of time. Though we are completely undeserving, You made a way for us to have a relationship with You and to spend eternity with You and Jesus and the Holy Spirit. What an amazing blessing! Help me to love You, worship and adore You, and thank You. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Monday in Holy Week, April 15, 2019

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. ~ Luke 22:39-62

Peter, one of the inner circle of the disciples, chosen and beloved by Jesus, betrayed Jesus. And this happened not long after Peter promised that he would follow Jesus to death. But as soon as Peter realized what he had done, he “wept bitterly.” He repented immediately, just as we are to do when we sin, and Jesus restored him. Jesus loves us and will forgive us when we confess our sins and change our ways.

Lord, I sin so often I would think You would get tired of forgiving me. Yet Your mercies are new every morning, and You forgive me over and over and over again. By the power of the Holy Spirit within me, keep me in Your way. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday in Holy Week, April 16, 2019

Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?” And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, “If you are the Christ, tell us.” But he said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” So they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?” And he said to them, “You say that I am.” Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.

~ Luke 22:63-71

The religious leaders had centuries of prophecy about the coming Messiah, but they didn’t recognize Him when He appeared. He knew they wouldn’t believe Him because they didn’t want to lose any of their power. They accused Him of blasphemy to protect their own positions.

Lord God, let me always believe Jesus and Your Word over man-made rituals and power structures. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—no one comes to You except by Him. In His name. Amen.

Wednesday in Holy Week, April 17, 2019

And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him.”

But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will. ~ Luke 23:11-25

The people demanding Jesus’ death couldn’t give any reason that He deserved to die, nor could they justify releasing Barabbas. But once the crowd had been worked into a frenzy, truth didn’t matter. The religious leaders led the attacks on Jesus, and the crowd followed along. They all thought they were choosing to end the life of Jesus. Little did they know that they were fulfilling God’s plan all along—that Jesus was the One who chose to lay down His life.

Lord God, You are sovereign and omnipotent, but above all You are love. You use Your almighty power to save Your people when every one of us deserves death. Instead of giving us what we deserve, You show us mercy and give us grace. I love You and want to live only for You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Maundy Thursday, April 18, 2019


Maundy
Thursday

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.” But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” And they cried out again, “Crucify him.” And Pilate said to them, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him.” ~ Mark 15:1-14

We can look back at those people calling for the death of Jesus and wonder how they could call for His crucifixion just a few days after He entered the city to shouts of Hosanna. Yet how often do we pierce Him with our sins and hurt Him with our neglect, even after praising and worshipping Him?

Lord God, forgive me for the times I put anything ahead of You in my life. Guide me by the Holy Spirit to put You first in everything I think, say, and do. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Good Friday, April 19, 2019

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." When Pilate

heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but



rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

"They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced." ~ John 19:1-37

This story is so well-known to most of us that we don't really feel the full horror of the Crucifixion because we know the end of the story. We are pained that Jesus suffered so much for us, yet our grief is tempered by the knowledge that He triumphs over death and rises on the third day. But imagine what it was like for the followers of Jesus on that day. They had believed He was coming to save the world, but instead they were watching Him die a cruel and humiliating death. He was beaten until He was near death, mocked by soldiers and onlookers, and executed as a criminal in the most painful way imaginable. His disciples saw the death of their dream along with the death of the One they loved so much. Unlike us, they didn't know the rest of the story.

Thank You, Lord, that the cross was not the end of the story. It was an integral part of the story, a necessary ingredient in God's plan of salvation—but it wasn't the end. It's Friday, but Sunday is coming! In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Holy Saturday, April 20, 2019

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. ~ John 19:38-42

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were both believers, but they held important positions and kept their discipleship secret. They were more concerned about losing power or prestige than making the name of Jesus known. However, that changed after the crucifixion. They publicly asked for and received the body of Jesus, anointed it for burial, and buried it in a new tomb. Even though they must have thought that Jesus' death meant He could not be the long-awaited Messiah, they loved Him enough to ensure that His body was treated properly and with respect. They found their courage in Jesus' time of need.

Lord, I want to be like Joseph and Nicodemus after the crucifixion—ready to attach my name to Jesus, ready to show the world that I am His follower. Guard me from being like Joseph and Nicodemus before the resurrection—too concerned about what others thought to identify themselves with Jesus. In His name. Amen.

Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord" — and that he had said these things to her.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. ~ John 20:1-31

It's hard for us to imagine the impact of the resurrection on the disciples. They had given up hope and buried their dreams of the Messiah with the body of Jesus. Although He had told them He would be put to death, they didn't understand. They had seen Him perform many miracles, yet they didn't expect Him to rise from the dead. Praise God that He did. The resurrection is at the center of our faith. On the cross Jesus became sin to take our punishment. In rising from the tomb, He gave us victory over death.

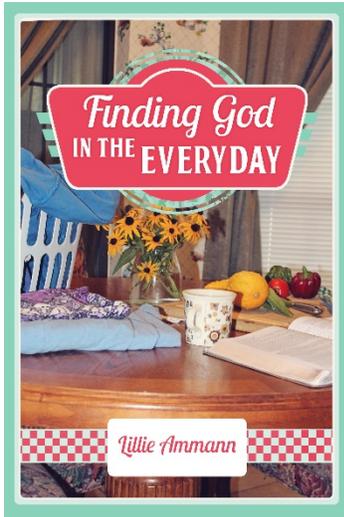
Lord God, we praise You and glorify You and thank You for the resurrection and the promise it gives us. We worship You, we praise You, we glorify You, we give thanks for Your great glory! In the name of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Ghost, now and forever. Amen.

He is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia!



Finding God in the Everyday

by Lillie Ammann, author of *Suffering and Salvation*



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