



LENT

at Second Pres

Devotion & Prayer Booklet 2026





This 2026 Lenten Season we are reading through the Book of John. It is with great joy that I share with you that the people of Second Presbyterian Church have collectively put their time, energy, and heart into the creation of this Lenten Devotion. Keep in mind this was completed by deacons, elders, church leaders, and staff members—people just like you. This devotion is a true collective effort that shares the unique voice of this church.

As you read, my prayer is that these reflections invite you to slow down, listen closely, and encounter Christ in fresh and meaningful ways. May this season be a time of honest reflection, deepened faith, and renewed hope as we journey together toward the cross and the resurrection.

I hope you find it enriching as we walk through these next forty days together.

*In Christ,
Rev. Trey Haddon*

JOHN 1:1-18

¹ *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ² *He was in the beginning with God.* ³ *All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being* ⁴ *in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.* ⁵ *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.*

⁶ *There was a man sent from God whose name was John.* ⁷ *He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.* ⁸ *He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.* ⁹ *The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*

¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him.* ¹¹ *He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.* ¹² *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,* ¹³ *who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*

¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.* ¹⁵ *(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ")*

¹⁶ *From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.* ¹⁷ *The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

¹⁸ *No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*

Today, on this very first day of our Lenten Journey, is Ash Wednesday. A day that we reflect on the fact that we are completely human. We are a people that are broken and flawed and cannot save ourselves. Today we are reminded that there is nothing we can do that will keep us from becoming dust, as we read from Genesis 3 "... you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

I cannot think of a more fitting passage than John 1 for such a season.
¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The writer of the Gospel of John is saying before we ever get into this story of Jesus, before we ever walk down the path with him or eat beside him or witness the many miracles or know of his journey in any fashion, we first must remember that before any of this, there is God. As important as this story we are about to read together is, none of this would be possible without God. John even goes a step further, saying :

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

As we begin on this journey towards Easter, I am wondering what your story holds. John is starting with all things beginning and ending with God. As we begin our Lenten Journey, I would ask you to take a moment and think, what do you want this journey to be about?

We know that life is more than what we can buy or carry or wear. We are all too aware of how quickly our time on earth can end. This is not our final destination; we are on the journey of a lifetime.

What do you want this journey to be about and how can God help you walk these next forty days, as if they are the first days of the rest of your life?

God of light, so often we find ways to hide in the shadows, just beyond your bright lights of grace and love. May this Lenten season give us good reason to call you close, preparing for the rest of our lives to come. Amen.

written by Rev. Trey Haddon

JOHN 1:19-28

¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²² Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³ He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ” as the prophet Isaiah said. ²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, “Why, then, are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.” ²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

After reading this scripture, one question stands out. “Who are you?” John is quite clear on this. He is not the Messiah. He is not Elijah. He is not the prophet. He is the one crying out in the wilderness... guiding us to the Lord. Now I ask you: Who are you?

Do you know what you believe and are you directing your friends and family to Jesus by your thoughts, words and actions? Are you demonstrating Christ’s love through your actions and words, making your faith visible in daily life? You may be the only Bible some people ever read. What are you showing others—friends, family, those who disagree with you, people with different views, or even someone who

cut you off in traffic? Friends, the fact that you are reading this devotion means that your heart is in the right place. Jesus is here with us right now. The Holy Spirit is nudging us to take the next step. I just ask that you take it a step further. Next time it comes up, and someone asks you, “Who are you,” tell them about Jesus. Look them in the eye and share your story about why you trust in Jesus. Tell them how you aren’t worthy to untie the strap of his sandals, but he is always there for you. Tell them how you aren’t perfect but try to share the love of Jesus by ... giving a smile, putting your phone down and having a conversation, saying yes when asked for help, reaching out to your neighbors, praying for others, volunteering, donating and all the things you do. And when, like me, you fail at all these things, remember you can try again tomorrow, and it just might get easier.

Dear Jesus, help me to know who I am in You. Give me the courage to share Your love with those around me—through my words, my actions, and my heart so that they may see you. When I fall short, remind me that I can try again each new day. Amen.

written by Cheryl Chrisman

JOHN 1:29-34

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³² And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One.”

Day after day we are bombarded with news about wars, arguments, people being unkind and communities dealing with hard things. Sometimes it feels like the world is always reacting - angry, divided, filled with anxiety. We are told to look towards politics, cultural trends, personal achievement or even our own strength and wisdom for answers – yet none of these things seem to satisfy or heal the brokenness we see and feel.

In John 1:29-34, John the Baptist sees Jesus approaching and declares, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” With just a few words, John points everyone away from him and directly towards Jesus. He recognizes that Jesus is the One sent by God to bring peace, forgiveness, and hope. Jesus is God’s response to our broken world. John even admits that he doesn’t fully know who Jesus is but trusts God’s promise. Jesus is the answer God sent to this world to take away our sin and offer us new life.

This passage is a reminder that, like John, our role is to point others to Christ at all times. We should live in a way that directs people to Jesus through our words, actions and faith.

Lessons We Can Learn from this passage:

- Jesus brings hope when the world feels scary or confusing.
- We don't have to be famous or important by the world's standards to make a meaningful difference - pointing to Christ often means stepping *out* of the spotlight.
- Our words and actions matter. We can show Jesus' love by being kind, honest, and helpful every day.

Something to Think About This Week:

How can you show Jesus' love at work, school, home and in our community?

Dear God, sometimes the world feels hard to understand. Thank YOU for sending Jesus to bring hope and peace. Help us to trust You and to show Your love to others. Amen.

written by Angie Buckley

JOHN 1:35-42

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

After hearing John the Baptist declare that “Jesus is the Lamb of God” Andrew leaves what he is doing immediately to follow him. Andrew realizes that following Jesus is more important than anything else and he responds with complete surrender. Andrew immediately finds his brother Simon Peter to share the news. Andrew’s actions model how we are called to lead others to Jesus. We are reminded of our calling to do the same.

Who in your lives need to hear about Jesus? Who can we invite to church or share our faith story with?

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the example of Andrew, who faithfully brought others to you. Give us hearts that are willing and attentive to your leading. Use our lives in word and action to bring others closer to your love.

Amen.

written by Terri Peifer

JOHN 1:43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹ And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

In the first verse of this passage, Jesus tells Philip to “follow me”. This is one of the many places in the Bible where Jesus calls us into discipleship. But how do we execute this command for discipleship?

In today’s world, it often feels difficult to be a disciple. We are skeptical. We are predisposed to our own biases just as John describes in verse 45 when Nathanael says “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”. How can we be disciples to people so different from us? From places we’ve never been or whose lifestyles we don’t understand?

As individuals, we may accept Jesus as our Messiah, who died on a cross to save us from our sins. What are we doing, though, to build a community of followers, or disciples? What are we doing in our daily lives to represent what Jesus preached? How are we demonstrating our call to spread the good news without prejudice and judgement?

We don't need a theological degree or type A personality to be a disciple. Merely leading by example can be the very first step. Smiling at a stranger in a grocery aisle; saying hello to someone you pass on a sidewalk; thanking someone for sharing their talents; congratulating achievements. SHOWING people YOUR love of Christ through your actions. Simple acts of kindness could be the beginning of something transformative; the beginning of a community of followers who want to learn more about the love Jesus already has for them.

Dear God, thank you for giving us your Son and believing we have the ability to share His love for the world with those around us. Help us do just that. Give us strength and confidence to lead by Jesus' example. We want the world to know and love Jesus as we do and with your help, we know we can help build the community of followers our world needs. Amen.

written by Sara Palmgren

JOHN 2:1-11

¹ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet.” So they took it. ⁹ When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

This passage in John confirms something we are already beginning to see: Mary understands that Jesus is no ordinary son. She brings a real need to him, trusting in who he is, even before his public ministry has fully unfolded.

Why is this Jesus' first sign? Turning water into wine at a wedding feast may seem small compared to what we might expect. Theologians have many ideas, but one thing is clear:

Jesus sees the potential shame the hosts would face if the wine ran out. What looks like a simple inconvenience carried deep social embarrassment and disgrace in that culture. Jesus cares about that.

John gives us this story as a first glimpse of Jesus' glory. We see his power, but we also see his heart. He enters into an ordinary celebration, into a very human moment, and quietly brings abundance where there would have been lack. We also see his relationships — with his mother, with the servants, and with his disciples who begin to believe in him.

This first sign happens in the middle of everyday life — a meal, a party, a gathering of family and friends. It reminds us that God is not only present in the dramatic or the sacred spaces, but in the ordinary rhythms of our lives. The God revealed in Jesus cares about joy, community, and even the details that feel small to us.

God, may we be a people who seek you not only in the extraordinary, but in the everyday. Teach us to recognize your presence in the ordinary moments of life and to worship you there. Amen.

written by Jamie Kaiser

JOHN 2:13-22

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

JESUS UPSET?....NEVER

Well, almost never... In this passage we learn about Jesus at the temple, a story I learned as a young child, back in Nebraska. Jesus was upset with the money changers in the temple. While I understood it was because of the money exchange, that wasn't the whole story. During Passover, people came to buy and sell their animals for sacrifice to get into God's good grace. While not all of the people were from the area, many had to exchange their money for the local currency. Those exchanging money were also dealing with

buying and selling of the animals and were making a large profit all the way around. In the process, they were excessively gouging those coming to simply make a legitimate transaction. Jesus' contempt was due to the unfairness to all who were coming to make honest exchanges. In reading this scripture over and over, I started wondering if I have ever been unfair and taken advantage of a situation? Have I ever taken advantage of the kindness of a family member, friend, coworker, committee member, my husband or children? Have I ever been upset watching someone I know be taken advantage of? During this Lenten season, let us all try to be more cognizant of being fair and honest in how we treat others in every situation and pray that we are always consciously aware of his presence as we try to walk in his footsteps.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the many gifts you've given us and we ask that you continue to guide us as we try to walk in your footsteps to reflect kindness, fairness, honesty, love and obedience. Fill us with your Spirit during this Lenten season, remembering the gift you gave us with the resurrection of your son. In your name we pray, Amen.

written by Becky Huizer

JOHN 3:1-9

¹ Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”

As we read through John 3:1-9 what we find is that we must accept God to be with us and accept the miracles that he provides us. Without that we cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus questions Jesus and said how can we be reborn from the womb in which we came from? Jesus answered Nicodemus stating, "What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit." We must be born again into the spirit of our Lord and Savior God Almighty, and when the wind blows, we hear the sounds. We may not hear where the wind comes from or where it goes, but through our rebirth into the spirit we accept our Lord

and Savior God unconditionally in our hearts. We must believe in the miracles of God and his spirit, and how the spirit works through us and in us day in and day out.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Help us to accept you without condition and to follow your will wholeheartedly. Work through us each day, that we may witness your grace and your miracles as we walk beside you.

In your Son Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

written by Tom Howes

JOHN 3:10-21

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹ “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Jesus is the Light that exposes and dispels darkness. By embracing Jesus means stepping into the light, where truth and righteousness prevail. Living by the truth of God means aligning our lives with God's Word, and allowing His light to shine through us and reflect His glory.

How many have heard the statement, "You might be the only Bible people read"? It means your actions, character, and way of life are a living testament to your faith. By demonstrating Christian principles (like love, kindness, integrity, joy) to others who may not read the actual Bible, you're making your life an example of scripture in action.

Whom in your life circle of people doesn't know God, that you could introduce them to his love and grace? Many people still think that if they are good enough or do enough good works, that this is their ticket to heaven. I would rather error on the side of telling others of God's salvation than to hear someone say "Why didn't you tell me about your God", and then they miss out on eternal salvation.

God paid dearly with the life of His son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life he bought for us. When we share God's good news, our love must be like Jesus'—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

Who can you share God's love with today?

Prayer--Heavenly Father, help my life to reflect your love and grace. Help me to be a witness through my actions and my life to point others to you. Help me to not be afraid to witness and even lead others to spend eternity with you. In Jesus' name. Amen

written by Ellen Wylie

JOHN 3:25-30

²⁵ Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. ²⁶ They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

This scripture passage reminds me of the motto of a children's program on a Christian television network, 50 years ago. The host began and ended every telecast by proclaiming, "P.G.F.!--Put God First!" When I was a teen at Senior High Camp, I remember hearing and learning the song, "Seek Ye First." God has instructed us to love God with all our "heart, soul, mind and strength" and to offer the "first fruits" of our labor.

Today's scripture reading seems to indicate that John's disciples were perplexed that the one across the river, to whom John testified, "was baptizing and all are going to him." Could it be that those who came to John did not yet realize that the man baptizing was Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God? Were they jealous? Were they concerned that they might have been following the wrong Rabbi?

In an effort to clarify any misunderstanding, John refocused the attention of the followers on Jesus, saying, “I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.” This echoes Isaiah’s prophecy: “I am the voice of him who cries in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:30), and was confirmed by John the Baptist (John 1: 23). John’s reference to the bride and bridegroom parallels the relationship of Jesus as the bridegroom and the church as the bride of Christ: “He who has the bride is the bridegroom.” John showed those followers—and us—that Jesus was the true Messiah, worthy of our full worship and devotion.

Lord, help us to follow you in all we do, living for you and serving you and your people each day, for Your glory. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.



written by Kenneth Davis

JOHN 3:31-36

³¹ The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. ³³ Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true.

³⁴ He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.

³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life but must endure God's wrath.

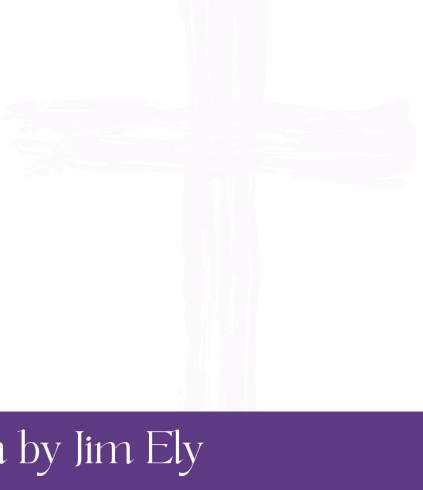
Remember singing the old song “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands”? I bet you’re humming it now. It’s a simple yet profound truth that can bring us peace and confidence. We often place so much pressure on ourselves to get everything right, to fix all our problems, to succeed in every aspect of our life. But this passage reminds us that we don’t have to carry that burden alone. Jesus has it all under control.

One of the most profound statements in this passage is in verse 35: “The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.” This is a powerful reminder of the authority and love Jesus holds. The Father has entrusted everything to the Son. And because of this, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. This is the essence of our faith – the belief that Jesus Christ brings life. Yet, it’s not just about eternal life in the future, it’s about trusting that He holds all things, including our lives, in His hands right now.

Jesus is establishing a fundamental truth: “The one who comes from above is above all.” He is speaking of Himself here, emphasizing His divine origin and authority. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, was sent from the Father and comes from heaven. This is different than us, who naturally speak of earthly things. We have limited understanding, but Jesus, who comes from above, has a heavenly perspective and speaks with divine authority.

Whatever you are facing today, whether it’s a challenging meeting, a difficult conversation, a health issue, or just the stress of daily life, take a moment to breathe. Remember that Jesus knows what you’re going through, and He’s got it all in His hands. You can find confidence, joy, and peace in that truth.

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus, the one from above, who speaks Your true words. We confess our desire to accept His testimony and believe in Him, trusting that whoever believes has eternal life. We ask You to fill us with Your spirit, empowering us to live in the light. Help us to choose faith over disbelief, to love what is right, and to walk in the path of life You’ve provided through Jesus. In His precious name, we pray. Amen.



written by Jim Ely

JOHN 4:1-30

¹ Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John” ²(although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized), ³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well.

It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.”

¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband,’ ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” ¹⁹The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you _{[[ij]} do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

²³But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” ²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him.

Are you dying of thirst?

This passage brings up important characteristics of Christ’s nature. The phrasing of “Give me a drink” actually strikes me as demanding and arrogant. However, the situation was a male talking to a female and a Jew talking to a Samaritan. The context at that time was that the status of males and Jews was higher than females and Samaritans. Jesus was apparently breaking social taboos in both respects.

Jesus offered her “living water”, meaning eternal life. As is often the case in the Gospels, she didn’t initially get it. He says the water he gives will be “a spring gushing eternal life”. She asks him to give her this water so she won’t need to keep coming back to the well. She appears to need more convincing. Jesus knew private details of this random woman he had never met. This began to convince her that he was a prophet. He tells her that Jews and Samaritans will worship the Father in spirit and truth. She knows the Messiah is coming and Jesus tells her that he indeed is the Messiah. She is starting to believe. She goes back to her home and thinks he is the Messiah but still has questions. What will it take to convince us who Jesus is?

Lord,

Just like the woman at the well, we come seeking substance. Thank you for offering me the gift of everlasting life. Thank you for not turning away, even though You know everything about me and all my faults and sins. Help me to listen to Your voice for guidance. And help me to know that You are always here for me; I just need to come to You in prayer. Amen.

written by Scott Hamilton

JOHN 4:31-38

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

The Everlasting Nourishment that Sustains Us

As humans we need nourishment to survive. Without this nourishment, our bodies physically weaken as well as our focus, and our mentality. God is using this message from Jesus to draw our attention to the fact that we need God for our spiritual needs too. God provides us with eternal life. We are the reapers in relation to Jesus Christ who was the sower who labored and provides The Way to eternal life in heaven. It is through our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our redeemer that we might live one day beside him in heaven.

Serving as Sowers to Others

In this recounting, Jesus is also instructing his disciples and us on the importance of our taking on the role of the sower.

God wants us to sow seeds that share how people can obtain daily nourishment from God and receive a life everlasting with God in heaven through our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Savior. We can fulfill this role, by sharing with others how they can learn about God's love for us and how they can enter heaven through acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for loving us so much that you sent Jesus to Earth. May we follow Jesus's teaching to look at the fields around us and see the fields that are ripe for harvesting. Help us to recognize opportunities to share God's message with those we interact with each day.

Amen!

written by Michele Southerd

JOHN 4:46-54

⁴⁶ Then he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” ⁴⁹ The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my little boy dies.” ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. ⁵¹ As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, “Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.” ⁵³ The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he himself believed, along with his whole household. ⁵⁴ Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Green Shoots in the Wilderness

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

Isaiah 43:18-19

We've been in the wilderness a long time. Multiple betrayals, devastating losses, watching our sanctuary empty year by year. Five years ago, we were asking ourselves if we'd still exist in five years. But something happened that I'd like us to notice, because I think it tells us something important about God's faithfulness and what wilderness actually does.

When Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days, he was severely tempted and he came out knowing something he hadn't known before and that was clarity about his actual mission.

I think that may be what's been happening to us.

The wilderness stripped things away from us. Size. Resources. The ability to run programs like we used to.

But here's what I'm noticing: underneath everything that got stripped away, there was a compassionate spiritual foundation and we're starting to see green shoots growing from it.

God guided our decision to stay downtown, where we can now see we're needed the most. Look at what we're actually doing now. On Sunday mornings, we're feeding hungry homeless neighbors. Not as a program we added to attract members but as a core expression of who we are. The Little Free Pantry stands near our building, accessible to anyone who needs it. We're supporting Home Sweet Home Mission, Salvation Army, Little Children of the Philippines, among many others. Concrete missions to actual people in actual need, here and across the world.

And we made the choice that seemed crazy by conventional church-growth wisdom: we stayed downtown. We didn't relocate to where so many young families are, where parking is easier, where we might have rebuilt our numbers. We stayed here, near the people who need us, where they can walk to us, where we can be the church in the neighborhood that needs a church.

That was something deeper than a "strategic plan". We see now that this has clarified our identity.

Five years ago we were asking: Will we exist in five years?

Last month we were asking: Does Martin Hall need a twenty-year roof, a thirty-year roof, or a forty-year roof?

Isaiah says, "I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" And I wonder if we've been so focused on what we lost that we haven't fully perceived what's growing.

What's growing isn't a return to former glory. We're not suddenly 1000 members again. We're not back to multiple programs and staff. The wilderness didn't restore what was stripped away.

But it did something else. It stripped us down to essentials, and the essentials turned out to be: Jesus's call to feed the hungry, serve the poor, love our neighbors, stay close to those who need us, and trust God for tomorrow.

That's not nothing. That's actually everything.

Dear Lord, we have wandered in the wilderness and wondered if we would survive. We also maybe wondered if you were still with us. Now we can see that you were always with us, guiding us to be the church that you want us to be. We thank you for your steadfast love and support. We pray that we will continue on this path of being a church that you want us to be. Please help us to continue to nurture the green shoots you've provided for us. Amen.

written by Mark Ulbrich

JOHN 5:2-9a

²Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes.

³In these lay many ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed people. ⁵One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” ⁷The ill man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me.”

⁸Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.”

⁹At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Jesus's healing of a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem is an event highlighting Jesus's power, compassion, and authority.

Why did Jesus do this healing on the Sabbath, creating conflict with the religious leaders? The story emphasizes healing over suffering and points to Jesus as the true source of life and healing, not rituals like waiting for stirred waters. This man who had been ill a long time, was unable to get into the water by himself, relying on others.

Jesus saw him, and asked “Do you want to get well?” And then commanded, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” The Miracle: the man was instantly cured, picked up his mat and walked. That demonstrates Jesus' direct power. There was a conflict! The miracle happened on the Sabbath, leading religious leaders to confront the healed man and later Jesus

for breaking their strict Sabbath laws, seeing Jesus as a sinner.

Jesus healing on the Sabbath challenged human tradition and showed his authority over religious law, pointing to God's desire or design for healing and wholeness.

Lord Jesus,

You see us, even in places where we feel stuck or weary.

Give us the willingness to be made well, the courage to rise when you call, and the trust to walk forward in your strength.

We receive your grace, not by our effort, but by your Love.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

written by Anne Bliss

JOHN 5:9b-24

⁹ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a Sabbath. ¹⁰ So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” ¹¹ But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’ ” ¹² They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’ ”

¹³ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. ¹⁴ Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶ Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath.

¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” ¹⁸ For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the Sabbath but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished.

²¹ Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. ²² The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.

The Sabbath, the seventh day, a day of rest.

Most of Jesus’ healing miracles were done on the Sabbath. Sabbath-keeping was nearly the most important thing in the world to the Pharisees. The Pharisees did not like Jesus because he was working on the Sabbath. Jesus told them that his Father is always working and he

too is always working. The Pharisees wanted to kill him. He was not only breaking their Sabbath but he was calling God his own Father. Jesus had the closest possible relationship with God. Some of the Pharisees said this man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath. Others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" Some Rabbis insisted God remained active on the Sabbath, giving life in birth but taking it away in death. Other Rabbis thought that God rested from creating but not from judging, ruling or governing. There was lots of division. Jesus asked them which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil; to save a life or destroy it. They hated Jesus for breaking their traditions. They had a list of 39 things a person could not do on the Sabbath and they believed that list had the full authority of Scripture. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath did the religious leaders ever express any compassion for the victims he just healed? No! Instead the healed people were treated as criminals and excommunicated from their fellowship. The Pharisees believed there are six days in which work should be done. So come during those days to get healed, not on the Sabbath. Or another thought: were the Pharisees saying that any Monday-Friday, 9-5, the sick and disabled could drop by his office in the Synagogue and get healed? Jesus, on the other had great compassion. Jesus was saying that it is not wrong for every person to work on the Sabbath. That was the busiest day of the week for priests, and they were not held guilty for violating the Sabbath. We could say the same for pastors, nurses, doctors, soldiers, or institutional cooks today. When people are serving others, they are perfectly justified in not observing the Sabbath rules. When God established the Sabbath, He did not do so with adding one more rule for mankind, it was instead for the benefit of mankind to keep him healthy, make him happy, and render him holy. Things to consider: The early church observed Sunday as the day of worship. Should we have a good reason before overthrowing that strong Christian tradition? The principle of 1 day of rest out of 7 goes all the way back to creation week. Do we need 1 day of rest in 7? The Lord's Day is of great value in building families, fellowshipping with believers, and serving others. The Lord's Day is of great spiritual value in exposure to God's Word and meditating upon his goodness.

When you recognize God as Creator, you will admire him. When you recognize his wisdom, you will learn from him. When you discover his strength, you will rely on him. But only when he saves you will you worship him. Amen.

written by Janet Frankeberger

JOHN 5:25-30

²⁵ *“Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.* ²⁶ *For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself,* ²⁷ *and he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man.* ²⁸ *Do not be astonished at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice* ²⁹ *and will come out: those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.*

³⁰ *“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*

As I read these passages, I am reminded of Matthew 13:3-8 where Jesus tells the disciples the parable of the sower. In this parable, Jesus tells of a farmer that went out to sow his seed (v.3). The seed represents the Word of God and His Kingdom. The birds ate some seeds (v.4) while some seeds fell on rocky places and quickly dried up because they had no roots (v. 5-6). Some seeds fell among thorns and were choked (v.7). But some fell on good soil, where it produced a crop (v.8).

God's Word is for everyone. What we do and how we carry out the Word is based on our love, obedience and faithfulness to God. If we are striving to be followers of Jesus, we will use every ounce of guidance and wisdom that He provides us through the Holy Spirit to carry out His will.

We will all face a day of judgement. Jesus tells the disciples in Matthew 28: 18-20: “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (NIV).

As we walk to the cross this Lenten season, may we continue to give thanks for all that You have provided for us. May we share our witness with others; shepherd those who are lost and plant seeds for those who need to hear Your Word. May we lead by example, seek Your guidance and wisdom, so that we may fulfill Your will to become the people that You want us to be. May we always be focused on You. We pray all this in Your Name, Amen.

written by Bryce Jones

JOHN 5:39-47

³⁹ “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that testify on my behalf. ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. ⁴¹ I do not accept glory from humans. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

Context for the above verse: The book of John is written by John the apostle. Verse 39 begins using quotes, meaning someone else is speaking, in this case Jesus. The book consists of John’s witness of the “Light.” In John 1, we hear these words – ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Reflection on John 5:39-47: Jesus himself gives reference to other scripture and prophets in the verses from John 5. Jesus speaks directly to us today about how we often put our hope and faith in others and not in him. How often do we read a book, or search the WEB for answers to our prayers,

even before we think of praying to Jesus for help, or turning to his word? Have you ever been asked by someone for your help in solving a problem? You accept, do your research, even pray to God for help in helping. You put your heart and soul into trying to be of help, only to have the “ASK” come back to you saying; I didn’t need your help after-all, I took another person’s advice. We can hear the disappointment of Jesus in his voice. Jesus follows this up in verse 44 reminding us, God knows all. In verses 45-47 his light shines down to create humility in our hearts. He will not “accuse us before the father.” Jesus is making reference to many old testament Prophecies like the one found in Deuteronomy 18:15-19: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.”

Conclusion: One of the beliefs in Christ is seeking after a deep humility, which poses a dilemma. We cannot advertise our “goodness.” We cannot actively seek the praise of men, if we want the true glory that can come only from God. Glorify God, even when others take credit, or demand credit, only HIS opinion matters. Finally, Jesus reminds and shows us what is prophesied in the Old Testament comes is truth as it lives and shines the light on words of old. The scripture reminds me of a quote I see every day from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The mind of God is greater than all the minds of men, so let all men leave the gospel just as God has delivered it unto us.” Dailyprayer.us

This verse from Proverbs 3: 5-6 does a good job of summarizing what Jesus has to say in John 5: 39-47; Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”

Father God, suppress my pride, and humble my heart to seek you first and always. Amen.

written by Mike Ireland

JOHN 6:1-15

¹ After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ² A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

¹⁵ When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

This is one of the most well-known bible stories we learn as children. Jesus stands before a massive crowd of hungry followers ready to feed them spiritually; however, their stomachs are empty. Personally, I know that when I am hungry, it is hard to concentrate. Jesus was already aware of this challenge, but the disciples, losing sight of their faith, started to panic. God, always aware of our needs, uses this to teach a lesson. How often do we look at our situations and immediately calculate what we don't have, instead of trusting who He is?

Andrew brings a boy forward who offers five barley loaves and two fishes. It's a small offering compared to the need. The boy's act of giving his meager gift of food reflects his childlike faith. Jesus shows the power of faith that the disciples overlooked. Jesus showed gratitude through his prayer for what must have appeared insufficient. It's hard to picture how his hungry followers felt seeing so little food, but the account does not mention anyone struggling to get food. These followers exhibited a trust in Jesus' power to provide — maybe even more so than the disciples. How often do we underestimate God's ability to provide when we only see what is right before us? We focus on what we are lacking rather than on the power of our God.

This story reminds us that God never asks for what we don't have. He asks us to trust Him with what we do have. He has asked me several times to do things that I believed were WAY outside my areas of strength. It is a terrifying thing to do but when we place our trust in His hands, He will walk us through what seems unreachable. He possesses a deeper understanding of our capabilities than we ourselves do. We need to be like the boy with the basket who believed in God's divine power, not the meagerness of his gift.

Dear Lord,

May we never forget that You see our needs before we are even comfortable putting them into words. Help us to focus on gratitude even when we don't see solutions. We so often see what we lack, instead of trusting You to provide what we need. When we have what feels like it is not enough, may we be reminded of these 5 loaves and 2 fishes. Give us the faith of children and teach us to be thankful and think that our gifts and talents are enough. God can transform the insignificant into compelling demonstrations of faith. Let us keep in mind that our needs are always understood, and even the smallest things can become plentiful. Amen.

written by Jan Harrell

JOHN 6: 25-35

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” ²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰ So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ” ³² Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” ³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Search not for what satisfies the body, but that which satisfies the soul.

Many in the crowds that followed Jesus only followed to satisfy their human desires (food to eat or for a king to free them from oppression). But Jesus tells them not to work for such things, but instead to work for what satisfies the soul and gives eternal life. He further explains that his feeding

the crowd of 5,000 was the same type of miracle as his father God did by providing manna to their ancestors in the wilderness, and that it wasn't of Moses' doing. Jesus further explains that seeking what satisfies the body is temporary, but that he was sent by God as a sacrifice, to satisfy our souls by receiving him as the bread of life.

How often is it that we as believers try to put God in a box and pray for what we think will remedy our earthly situation, instead of seeking his will in all matters? Jesus explains that God's will is that we believe in him who God has sent. To do this, we must exercise faith. The crowds sought signs and works to convince their thinking minds what they should do. We as believers can do nothing on our own to please God. God is well pleased with his Son, and gives the gift of faith to those He has called so that we can believe in the Son for eternal life.

Lord Jesus, help us as believers to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that you will add to us all of our earthly needs for daily life. Lord, help us to understand that many times what we think we need is actually what we want from the world - not a true need. Help us to keep our hearts and minds fixed on the things of heaven above, and not on the things of this fleeting world. Amen.

written by Steve Walsh

JOHN 6:41-56

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”

⁴² They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” ⁴³ Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.

⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, ⁵⁵ for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.

The people doubted Jesus. They knew him as the carpenter's son. He teaches them that he was sent by the Father and Faith will lead to resurrection. What would we think and what would we need to believe if he appeared to us now? It's not likely that we will have to deal with that, but just accepting Jesus as we know him requires our hearts to be open when God reaches out to draw us to Him and Jesus. Isaiah 54:13 predicts that "all thy children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of thy children." God has always been there for us. We only need to let him in to gain that promised peace.

John 6:44

No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day." He then confirms the promise of communion. If someone eats the bread (his body) and drinks from the cup (his blood) they will have eternal life. He says "I am the living bread".

John 6:54

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day.

We need to always remember the Grace we are granted, without earning it, or even believing in it. The everlasting life Jesus promises is a present possession, not a future hope. We have it now, by Grace. But think of the peace we can have if we also have it by belief.

Lord God, teach us to hunger for what truly sustains. Help us to open our hands and hearts to your grace, to believe that you meet us in our need and offer yourself freely for the life of the world. May your presence strengthen us for faithful living, loving service, and quiet trust. Amen.

written by Martha Everman

JOHN 6:57-66

⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray him. ⁶⁵And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

⁶⁶Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

Our first impression upon reading this scripture one might think Jesus is talking about communion. To fully understand these verses one must take the time to read and study the verses before verse 57. You will find that Jesus is talking about spiritual food. In verse 35 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.” And in verse 51 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

These verses are about having our spiritual hunger satisfied, eternal life, which reminds us of Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” If we are satisfied we have responded to the invitation to be in a personal relationship with Him, recognizing that the ultimate source of real righteousness is from God and is through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and knowing the power of His resurrection.

Studying scripture is about spending time with and worshiping the one who said, in John 14:6 “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

So the question is, are we Christians that go through the drive through looking for a quick spiritual meal or do we slow down and stop and go inside and take the time to eat and enjoy the spiritual meal, allowing it to nourish and satisfy our body and soul?

Gracious and Loving Father, I pray that I take the time to be still and to be present with you so that I may hear your words of truth and spirit and life and grow in the knowledge of who you are and receive mercy and grace and find the peace that only you can give. Amen.

written by David Kaeb

JOHN 7:10-18

¹⁰ *But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but, as it were, in secret.*

¹¹ *The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, “Where is he?”* ¹² *And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, “He is a good man,” others were saying, “No, he is deceiving the crowd.”* ¹³ *Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.*

¹⁴ *About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach.* ¹⁵ *The Jews were astonished at it, saying, “How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?”* ¹⁶ *Then Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me.*

¹⁷ *Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.* ¹⁸ *Those who speak on their own seek their own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing unjust in him.*

What these verses demonstrate is how human doubt never ends. We read, we learn and we experience the gospel but doubt always creeps back into our psyche. The lesson of these verses is that faith helps humans respond to the constant of doubt about the existence of God.

Prayer brings peace and helps fight the constant of doubt. Prayer is the building block of faith in God.

Dear Lord, we pray for lasting acceptance of the existence of God and God's strong hand in every aspect of our lives.

written by Peter Brandt

JOHN 7:37-39, 40-52

37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38 and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ ” 39 Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive, for as yet there was no Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified.

40 When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, “This is really the prophet.” 41 Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But some asked, “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? 42 Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” 43 So there was a division in the crowd because of him. 44 Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

45 Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not arrest him?” 46 The police answered, “Never has anyone spoken like this!” 47 Then the Pharisees replied, “Surely you have not been deceived, too, have you? 48 Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49 But this crowd, which does not know the law, they are accursed.” 50 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus ^{before} and who was one of them, asked, 51 “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” 52 They replied, “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

In John 7:37-38 Jesus speaks powerfully to our hearts. “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me”....and “out of the believer’s hearts shall flow rivers of living water”.

Most of us are thirsty for something. Often we don’t know what we’re longing for, striving for....we just feel unsettled. We have no peace. Often we look in all the wrong places.

But Jesus urges us to come to him...BELIEVE IN HIM as Son of God, Messiah. Once we have made that DECISION, and actively seek to know Him better and better, “streams of living water will flow from us.” We will begin a powerful transformation process that can change our focus, our hearts and our spirits for good.

In verses 40-46 many of the listening crowd were moved by Jesus’ words saying “He must be a prophet or Messiah.” Even the temple guards said they’d “never heard anyone speak like this!”

But the Pharisees, in their pride, were closed-minded. They were self-righteously stuck in their understanding and assumptions of the Law. For one thing, they knew from Old Testament prophecies that Messiah would not be from Galilee. Nicodemus defended Jesus, saying that their law did not judge anyone without giving them a hearing. Had they done that, they could have learned that, although Jesus had lived in Nazareth, (in Galilee), he had been born in Bethlehem, the city of David....thus fulfilling that prophecy.

Have you ever gotten stuck on a certain detail in your thought habits or religious assumptions that has become a roadblock to your wholeheartedly making a decision for Jesus? Will you pray, and ask God to remove that roadblock, and increase your faith? Don’t get hung up on the things you don’t understand about Jesus or God. God is way too big for our little bitty brains to fully understand! Go with what you do know. God is love, and tells us to love Him and one another!

Faith is believing God and acting on it.

Lord Jesus,

You stand among us and invite all who are thirsty to come and drink. Pour your Spirit into our hearts, quiet our divisions, and give us courage to recognize you even when others do not. Let living water flow through us for the sake of the world.

Amen.

written by Jeannie Swanson

JOHN 8:1-11

¹while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, ⁴they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

¹⁰Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”]]

Grace is a key attribute of God, and the above scripture is a key testimony of His Grace.

Of course, the religious leaders were only interested in trapping Jesus. As Jesus confronted them, He spoke some of His most favorite words: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” They slowly disappeared, and Jesus met the woman where she was, in the midst of her sin and shame, and offered her Grace.

Jesus didn't excuse her sin. Instead, He did something far more powerful; He forgave it. By extending forgiveness, unconditional love, and Grace, He gave her a fresh start and roadmap to change – by doing His will, not hers. The same holds true for us today!

WHO ARE WE TO JUDGE?

We are all sinners on a level playing field, and we need God's Grace. Instead of judging and criticizing others---because we have very little concept of the shoes in which they have walked—we must pause and examine our own heart . . . acknowledging our own need for GRACE. Perhaps, we could remind ourselves that we cannot be judging anyone in any way, when we are lifting them up in prayer.

Gracious and Loving God, help me to share your love and compassion to all those around me. Give me a heart like yours, so that when a negative thought enters my mind, I can drop the stone. May I live a life that brings you honor and glory, and this is prayed in your Son's precious name. Amen.

written by Stevie Joslin

JOHN 8:31-59

³¹ Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³ They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

³⁷ I know that you are descendants of Abraham, yet you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place in you for my word.

³⁸ I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

³⁹ They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.

⁴¹ You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one Father, God himself.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God, and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. ⁴⁴ You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?

⁴⁷ Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.”

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.

⁵¹ Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” ⁵² The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets, yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’” ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?” ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory

is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, 'He is our God,'⁵⁵ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I keep his word.⁵⁶ Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad."⁵⁷ Then the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Most of us would say we're free. We choose our careers, our opinions, who we spend time with, and decide how to live our lives. So when Jesus tells a group of people that His truth will set them free, their response makes sense. They mention how they are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. In their minds, freedom was about family history, status, and surrounding circumstances. But Jesus shifts the conversation to something much deeper.

He explains that anyone who sins is a slave to sin. That's uncomfortable to His audience, because slavery doesn't feel like the right word for our shortcomings and excuses we make for ourselves. Over time, these things begin to shape our choices and limit our ability to live the life God intends for us. It snowballs from seemingly small excuses we make for ourselves into serious problems where we feel hopeless.

Jesus describes a different kind of freedom. He says that if we continue in His word, we will know the truth and that truth will make us free. This is a daily and ongoing relationship with His words allowing them to challenge us, correct us, and transform us. The freedom Jesus describes isn't found in doing whatever we want, but is found in belonging to Him.

When Jesus says, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed," He's promising more than relief. He's offering a permanent place in God's family and a freedom that is lasting. It isn't conditional and doesn't depend on how well we perform. It relies on who Jesus is.

Question to ponder: Are there areas in your life where you're avoiding Jesus' truth because it feels challenging instead of freeing?

Jesus, thank You for loving us enough to tell us the truth. Help us recognize where sin is present in our lives, and give us the courage to trust Your word. Give us strength to no longer fear and instead trust You. Amen.

written by Noah Blickensderfer

JOHN 9:1-12

¹As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” ¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

John 9:2,3

His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered “Neither this man nor his parents sinned: he was born blind so that God’s work might be revealed in him.”

One of the oldest questions is why is there suffering in this world. According to William Barclay, the New Testament scholar, “Any kind of suffering is an opportunity to

demonstrate the glory of God in our own lives.

Second, by helping those who are in trouble or in pain, we can demonstrate to others the glory of God.” We have all experienced some sort of suffering or loss in our lives. How we deal with it is a testament to our faith. I remember many years ago when my mom, Mary, was dying of Lung Cancer. Although we knew she was in great pain from not only the cancer but the treatments, she tried not to show it. In fact, her last act in this life was to take a deep breath, hold it, and she died. The nurses with her said this showed a great deal of faith in believing there is something beyond this life. I believe Jesus was with mom then, and is with us now if we ask him, no matter what we are experiencing.

This past year I had the honor of spending time with a good friend, Rick Tindall, as he was unfortunately dying. Rick demonstrated his faith in our conversations in many ways. One way was to continue to show interest in others. Rick was also more concerned for his family than himself.

So maybe the question should be not why is there suffering, but who do we turn to when we experience suffering? Hopefully, we all have family and friends (including our church family) who God has put here to help us through these difficult times. More importantly do we turn to God/Jesus in prayer at these times?

As much as I learned from Mary and Rick, they both pointed to Jesus. Jesus who took on our sins by suffering on the cross. Jesus who even while on the cross asked God to forgive others. Jesus who gave us the ultimate gift of forgiving our sins through his suffering.

Dear God,

Help us to always turn to you for guidance in both good times and bad times. Help us to remember your love for us especially thru your son's death on a cross for our sins. Amen.

written by Mark Wylie

JOHN 9:13-23

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

The Blind Sinners “See”

Throughout the ages having illness or disability has been viewed as an individual sin related to some physical, mental, or social condition. Thus, the scripture references the man who was blind as a sinner based on physiological sight and no other condition. Rev. Donna Whitney notes that

“Science and medicine offer alternative explanations, and so does Jesus”. Illness in the time of Jesus was also used to describe dysfunction in the community. Healing referred to restoration to wholeness of oneself and the communities in which one resides. The question becomes “who is the sinner?” Is it the individual’s condition that is the illness or is it the social situation in which individuals or groups find themselves, e.g., when certain groups of people are housed in toxic neighborhoods, who is the sinner? When the Pharisees confront Jesus for healing on the sabbath, they are invited to “see” that the healing of blindness contributes to wholeness for the individual and community. The miracle of healing blindness, in any form, allows us to participate in the process of becoming whole and our authentic selves. The scripture found in John 9: 13-23 begins with physiological blindness and concludes with exposing the ethical and spiritual blindness in which we find ourselves and in community. Question to ponder: With the definition of curing meaning “eliminating all evidence of disease” and healing meaning “becoming whole”, what spiritual practices help you experience healing or wholeness?

All seeing God, help us accept your invitation into healing and wholeness for ourselves and the world. We pray for open and compassionate hearts and minds that we might see one another as you see us. Amen.

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written by Sandy Groves

JOHN 9:24-34

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

I. Don't. Know.

I don't know who He was. I don't know what happened. I told you that, at least twice. All I know is that I'm not the same as I was yesterday. He believed in me like no one else has. Ever. I was born blind, so that He could perform the miracle through me. My parents did not sin. I did not sin before I was born blind. God provided all of this to show you His power.

I am thankful, and I will tell everybody.
Jesus made me whole. Thank You.

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!*

written by Rich Schroeder

JOHN 10:1-10

¹“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Jesus is our Leader. He uses this parable to lead us to God through him. His reference to ‘the sheepfold by the gate’ leads us into the entrance into His kingdom. He is the ‘gatekeeper who ‘opens the gate’ whose voice we hear. He knows the name of all of his sheep and leads them (us) by his voice. Only He can invite us into his presence.

No stranger can lead his sheep since they do not recognize His voice. They will turn from strangers and run from them. Only through Jesus may we become a person of God. Jesus used the figure of speech, but his disciples did not understand. So, he reiterated. He invited his sheep—his

followers-- into the courtyard or sheepfold meaning His kingdom through the gate/door. He loves us All and opens the gate to permit All who believe in him to enter His kingdom. He promises abundant life and blessings. He provides eternal love. Thereby in which we will enjoy a rich, full and joyful life to which we can all look forward. Jesus is the Gate.Through him we will enter his sheepfold so that we may achieve eternal life.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for showing us the way into Your kingdom. We are your sheep. Thank you for being the Gate through which we will be permitted to enter Your sheepfold—Your heavenly presence. Help us to provide others with the vision so that they are able to enter that presence through Him. In Thy name we pray. Amen.



written by John Meek

JOHN 10:11-18

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

I am The Good Shepherd

This passage opens with one of the seven “I am” statements from the Book of John. The “I am” statements made by Jesus are meant to identify Him as God in the flesh, and reveal the virtues He offers those who follow and believe in Him. How do we differentiate Jesus, the “Good Shepherd” from those shepherds who are considered “hired hands”?

Jesus calls himself the “Good Shepherd”, and states, “I know my own and my own know me”. A good shepherd establishes a trusting relationship with his flock, loves, guides and protects them from harm and unselfishly gives his life for them. He came to serve and save His people.

He knows us all by name and salvation will come to all who seek and follow Him.

The “hired hand” shepherds (false gods) are those who don’t know their flock. They will flee when adversity comes and the sheep will not follow them, because they don’t recognize the shepherd’s voice. These shepherds are self-serving and do not have a vested interest in their sheep. They don’t follow Jesus because they are not part of His flock.

Jesus loves his people just as His Father loved him. He wants us to experience His unconditional love and salvation, and share it with others. He also wants us to have a meaningful relationship with Him, and encourage others to open their hearts to God’s love as well.

The message of this passage is clear. God sent Jesus to love, care for, and guide us as a shepherd guides his flock. He teaches us that eternal life in heaven is the ultimate reward for following Him. The choice is ours to make. Who will we believe in and follow?

Jesus, “Good Shepherd”, thank You for Your loving care, Your guidance, and for laying down Your life for us, your sheep. Keep us safe from harm, from straying from You, and continuing to believe and follow Your way.

Amen.

written by LuAnn Batemen

JOHN 10:19-31

¹⁹ Again the Jews were divided because of these words.

²⁰ Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?” ²¹ Others were saying, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

²² At that time the Festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, in regard to what he has given me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one.” ³¹ The Jews took up stones again to stone him.

Can you imagine stirring up your fellow Jews about Jesus and telling them He is demon possessed! The Devil is in him! Do not listen to him! Some say he is a prophet but I tell you he is a madman. Miracles? Bah! It is blasphemy and when we find him we will stone him! And this person grew up knowing the scriptures. Memorized them. Debated and argued about them with friends and family. Knew that Jesus may have met some of the "Christ" criteria, but where was his sword? His promise of ruling the world? A King for all eternity?

You see, he and others had been waiting. Waiting for the Psalmist's words that the Messiah would be born from King David's line. Waiting for the Prophet Ezekiel's words that a Shepherd was coming to "Save my Flock." And now this man - this Jesus of Nazareth (imagine the laughing condemnation of lowly Nazareth) claims to be the Messiah? The Son of God? Ha.

But others listen. Others ask who can make the blind see and the lame walk. Jesus tells them that the miracles he does are done in his Father's name. But many won't listen because they are not his sheep. His sheep will listen and have eternal life and never perish. He tells them that he and the father are one.

And they pick up their stones.

Lord, we pray that we recognize your presence and hear your voice when our inevitable skepticism has us looking for a stone. In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.

written by Brad Secord

JOHN 11:1-16

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” ⁹Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them.” ¹¹After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” ¹²The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.”

¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.

¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.

¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin,^[d] said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

The "Two-Day" Delay

Have you ever sat by your phone, staring at the screen, waiting for a text that just won't come? Maybe you're waiting for results from a doctor, a response to a job application, or even just a "check-in" from someone you love. We've all spent time in that uncomfortable "waiting room" of life, where every minute feels like an hour and silence feels like a lack of care.

In John 11:1-16, Mary and Martha find themselves in the ultimate waiting room. Their brother, Lazarus, is deathly ill. They send word to Jesus, expecting Him to drop everything and rush to their side. But the passage contains a sentence that is honestly a bit jarring:

"Though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was." (vs. 5-6)

Wait – even though He loved them, He stayed put? To our human ears, that doesn't sound right. Usually, love equals urgency. But Jesus wasn't operating on a human clock, He was looking at a divine calendar.

He knew that a quick healing would be wonderful, but a resurrection would be life-changing. He allowed the situation to go from "bad" to "impossible" not because He was indifferent, but because He was preparing to reveal His glory in a way they never could have imagined. His delay wasn't a "no"; it was a "wait and see what I can do."

If you're in a season of waiting today, remember that God's silence is not God's absence. God often uses the "two-day delay" to set the stage for a miracle that only God can perform.

I wonder, is there an area of your life where you feel like God is "two days late"? How would it change your perspective to view that delay as a setup for God's glory rather than a sign of God's indifference?

Please pray with me. Lord, thank You that Your timing is perfect, even when it feels painful to me. Help me to trust Your heart when I cannot see Your hand moving. Give me the peace to wait well, knowing that You are always working for my good and Your glory. Amen.

written by Eric Vinsel

JOHN 11:17-21

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus_[a] had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When I read this passage, I cannot help but reflect on Martha's pain and loss. When we lose a child, a parent, a family member, or a close friend, sometimes the pain almost feels unbearable. It can at times feel as if you cannot even breathe, and you wonder how and if you will be able to move forward. During these times you may begin to question your faith. You may wonder how God could have let this happen. You may feel so alone and betrayed.

As we read further, God and Jesus are always there and by our side. We sometimes get so caught up in finding the faults in others to place blame or the what ifs they could have led to a different outcome, that we forget to turn to God. It is so very difficult but when you turn to God and allow yourself to be wrapped in God's love, you may begin to feel some comfort. The pain will not disappear, but you can breathe again. We can find comfort in knowing that our loved ones are no longer suffering and are surrounded in all of the peace, love and joy that our Father provides us in Heaven.

Finally, as we read further, we are assured that we as Christians will rise again. We will be reunited with all of our family and friends in God's holy kingdom for eternity. I cannot wait for that day! It is so hard to understand here in this world but we were not meant to understand. We just have to have faith in Jesus Christ our savior. I am also hoping and praying there will be place Heaven to reunite with our furry family members as well. Sometimes I believe God gave us pets to give us just the slightest glimpse of purely unconditional love that we will experience in Heaven.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the gift of family, friends and even pets in my life. I am so very blessed to be able to experience the love and joy and fellowship with others in my life. I know that with life there is inevitable loss. Please prepare my heart for the inevitable loss and surround me with your steadfast love so that I may not go astray. I pray all of these things through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, Amen.

written by Joanne Randolph

JOHN 11:28-37

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

How does Jesus help us when we are sad or grieving?

In John 11 we read "Jesus wept", deeply moved by the grieving of Mary and her companions. This is what He does. Jesus meets us, walks with us and weeps with us. He follows us to our pain.

But more so, He takes control of our situation, even though we may not acknowledge it. Some who said "could He not have kept this man from dying" illustrate how we also harbor doubts. Yet even in our doubt, Jesus still walks with us to the tomb; to show us how life can be resumed.

Jesus "asks where have you laid him" and also asks us "where is your pain?" He will follow you to where you can find peace and fulfillment. Jesus walks with you through your pain.

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for your love and companionship. Thank you for following me through life's joys and sorrows and thank you for showing me how to live.

Amen.

written by Bill Cummins

JOHN 11:38-44

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

This is the story of how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. He was called to come to heal Lazarus but Lazarus was dead by the time he arrived. Dead for four days! Jesus reminded the mourners that believers will see the glory of God. He reminds the onlookers that God always listens and that he was sent by God. After that, he asks for the stone to be moved from the opening of the tomb and calls for Lazarus to come out. Lazarus steps out of the tomb.

When I first started to reflect on this passage, I wondered if it was a story about patience. Jesus didn't come immediately when Martha asked him to come. By the time he came, her brother Lazarus had been dead for four days. She wouldn't have been so upset if she had just been patient.

Or, maybe, it is a story about how Jesus was human. Was he sad because his friend was dead and he joined in grieving with Lazarus's sisters? That would be an effective way to show his human side.

But, in verse 40, he says to Martha, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" Then, in verse 41, Jesus talks to God and reminds the onlookers that God always hears us and that he was sent by God. After that, he raises Lazarus from the dead.

More than anything else, this is a story about believing. Martha needed to believe that Jesus could still save Lazarus even though he'd been dead for four days. It's a story about having faith. It's a story about trusting God's timing. Have you ever questioned God's timing?

Dear God, thank you for this reminder that we are to trust you and to trust your timing. By sending Jesus, we will see the glory of God. Thank you for teaching us to be full of faith. In Jesus's name, Amen.

written by Barb Meek

JOHN 11:45-53

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council and said, “What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.” ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. ⁵³ So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

A Closer Look

A closer look after all these years on the Easter story, a story more complicated than I even imagined but not yet finished.

I read the story, with God the father pulling all the string with a number of actors involved. All carefully picked but with their not knowing this happening. Many had chosen, Peter, Caiaphas, Mary, Philip, Judas, etc., locations: Jerusalem, Rome, Bethany,

Like a puzzle with lots of pieces but not yet finished.
Waiting, waiting, more waiting for the last piece to be put in place.

I come to you Holy Spirit with this prayer.

Please help me with my concerns after marveling how God planned all the events the story plays on all our feelings, anger, sorrow, joy, loneliness, lost. Etc.

The promise of a second coming but my thoughts try to be one of happiness. But even one as He still plays a part in my heart. Thoughts like this why God you do not provide us with more assurance. You provided signs, prophets with those living yesteryear(s). Our churches seem to be dwindling in size - our world with problems and more.

But wait a minute, I think I found my answer that the day and hour no one knows, not the angels, nor the seer but only the Father.

So now, I will put on my Easter bonnet, praise the Lord and wait for the day the Lord has made and all God's people say, Amen.

written by Anonymous

JOHN 11:54-57

⁵⁴Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness, and he remained there with the disciples.

⁵⁵Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?” ⁵⁷Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Our society today is filled with controversy based on strong differences in beliefs and what should or should not be done according to those beliefs. This statement can be applied to most societies in the world, past, and present. The verse, “They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think?...Surely, he will not come to the festival, will he,” puts focus on the varying opinions of Jesus and His teaching near the time of His arrest. People who believed Jesus was the Messiah at the time might have found themselves questioning their beliefs based on the influence of the opinion of others, especially, if public opinion appeared to be in opposition of what they believed. The louder the opposition to Jesus became, did this persuade many to change their own belief in Jesus and quietly question, and reduce what they said publicly in support of Jesus?

Have you questioned your own belief in Jesus?

Do you share your belief in God with others?

How much does society's influence impact you?

Lord, God Almighty,

Thank you for loving us and giving us the Holy Bible so that we may learn from the descriptions of events, testaments, and guidance it provides. Guide us and help us to hold strong to our faith and belief in You. Let us be an influence to others of Your Love through our words and actions. Amen.

written by Michele Southerd

JOHN 12:1-11

¹ Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him.

³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

How can we be devoted, faithful followers of Jesus Christ?

This passage in John takes place six days before Passover in the home of Lazarus in Bethany. Jesus had recently raised Lazarus from the dead. There is a feast, probably to celebrate the raising of Lazarus. During the feast, Mary, sister to Lazarus anoints Jesus' feet with expensive oil, which is said to cost 300 denarii (equal to a year's income).

This anointing symbolized Mary's deep love and devotion to Jesus.

Judas, however, in contrast to Mary's act of selfless devotion, criticized her for using such expensive oil to anoint Jesus' feet, saying this was a waste. Judas justified his criticism by saying the oil could have been sold and the money used to help the poor. However, John stated that Judas had no concern for the poor. Instead, Judas, who kept the common money for the disciples, had been known to use the money for himself. Judas was dishonest in that he probably was following Jesus for selfish gains.

Both Mary and Judas had heard Jesus preach and watch the miracles He had performed. Judas did not understand Mary's deep love and devotion to Jesus. Love for Christ should be the motive in all that we do for Him, as shown by Mary. Judas, on the other hand, justified his criticism of Mary by stating his concern for the poor. Even if Judas had given the money to the poor, his action would not have been motivated by love for Christ. God sees the hidden motives of our hearts, instead of our outward actions. This passage teaches us that true devotion involves giving our best to God, not out of obligation, but out of love and gratitude.

Dear God,

Thank you for this example of Mary, who gave selflessly without hesitation. Help us to have a heart that treasures You above everything. Give us faith to trust that what is offered to You is never wasted. Dear Father, during this Lenten season, may we deepen our faith and devotion to Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our sins. Amen.

written by Mary Murphy

JOHN 12:12-19

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!”

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.
Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. ¹⁸ It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹ The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

Kingship. Imagine what it must have been like to see and hear that the King of Israel was entering Jerusalem. The crowd had heard about the miracles of this great teacher, and the excitement and commotion must have been overwhelming. People were rushing to gather palm branches and scurrying to find a good spot along the path, hoping to catch even the briefest glimpse of this King. Had you already heard Jesus’ teachings for yourself, or were you enamored with the stories the crowd was sharing about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead?

And yet, finding yourself watching a King ride into Jerusalem on a donkey? That must have been confusing at best. Maybe even underwhelming. There were no brass orchestra fanfares, no grand parade floats marking this moment. Even Jesus' own disciples didn't fully understand what was happening. What then, marks this occasion as triumphant?

What moments in our lives are we expecting a King entering Jerusalem, and we are met with a man riding on a donkey? When are we more like the Pharisees, powerless in their jealousy for Jesus? Jesus came to fulfill a prophecy, and yet, even Jesus' own disciples missed what was happening right before their eyes. Jesus did not misunderstand the moment—the crowd misunderstood the King. So we are left with a choice: will we shout, “Hosanna,” when Jesus arrives in unexpected ways, or will we keep waiting for someone else?

Lord,

As we welcome you with praise, keep our hearts faithful beyond the moment. Help us follow you not just in celebration, but in trust.

Amen.

written by Brian Tanaka

JOHN 12:20-26

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

Looking at this passage from an agricultural standpoint, it seems that the grain of wheat dies in the ground. This is interesting because the grain of wheat is not dead, as we think of dead when it is put into the ground but rather is dormant waiting for conditions to be optimal so the seed can begin to germinate. It is activated by moisture in the soil. The Biblical passage refers to bearing fruit, doing the Father's work, and growing in faith. Jesus often uses agricultural references in the parables, e.g. the Parable of the Sower. If we stay out of the ground, we stay in the world and our seeds are dormant. If we stay in the world, we can't “die” to the world, germinate and bear fruit. We can't do the work of Jesus that we are supposed to do. It would be like “hiding our light under a basket”. All of us have talents that we can use to do the work of Christ in the world. We aren't useful to God's purpose if we hide our light. How can we follow Christ and not be pulled by the world?

Jesus, please guide us as we struggle to keep the world from pulling us away from you. Take our dormant seeds and help us to germinate so that we can bear fruit for Your Kingdom. In Your name we pray, Amen.

written by Gene Gant

JOHN 12:27-36

²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say: ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”

³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴ The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ Jesus said to them, “The light is in you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

Jesus speaks openly about his troubled soul as he approaches the suffering that lies ahead. Rather than asking to be spared, he submits to God's purpose and prays that the Father's name would be glorified. God responds audibly, much to the confusion, shock, and awe of the crowd. Jesus explains that his coming death will defeat the darkness and draw all people to him. When the crowd wonders how this fits with their views and expectations of him, Jesus urges them to walk in the light while they have it, believing “in the light so they may become children of light.”

This passage reminds us that even Jesus experienced deep inner turmoil. His honesty is comforting to not only his followers of the time, but his followers in the present day. What defines Jesus in this moment is not fear, but trust. This moment reminds us that faith does not mean the absence of struggle, but rather trusting God even when the path feels heavy. Jesus places himself fully in the Father's hands with trust.

We often want clarity before we move forward, but Jesus calls us to trust the light we have now. Faith does not remove the weight of the journey, but gives us direction within it. When the path feels heavy when answers are unclear and the future uncertain, but we are invited to keep walking, one step at a time, believing that God is at work in ways we may not yet understand. Light shines brightest in places we least expect it.

Jesus promises that light overcomes darkness. Trust grows not by avoiding hard moments, but by choosing to believe that God is present within them. Like Christ, we can place our fears before God and still move forward in hope, confident that love and life will have the final word.

God,

When our hearts are troubled, help us trust your purpose and walk in your light. Help us to push past the darkness and fear of unknowing, putting our trust in you. Draw us to your Son, that we may believe and live as children of light.

Amen.

written by Sydney Gyuran

JOHN 12:36-50

³⁶ *While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”*

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them. |

³⁷ *Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah:*

*“Lord, who has believed our message,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”
³⁹ *And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said,*
⁴⁰ *“He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
so that they might not look with their eyes
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.”**

⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. ⁴² Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue, ⁴³ for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried aloud: “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. ⁴⁷ I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world but to save the world.

⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, ⁴⁹ for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak.

⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.”

God has sent his only Son to break through the darkness of the world. Jesus is crying out that He is the light. Jesus is telling all who will hear to believe in Him, to believe in his Father. Jesus has performed miracles. And though it was foretold by Isaiah that people still wouldn't believe, I imagine Jesus is like the teacher struggling to have His students understand (insert image of a teacher pounding their head against the blackboard).

We often don't actually hear the words being spoken to us. We nod our heads and pretend to hear. Others may even believe that you heard and understood, until your actions prove otherwise. Words often fall on deaf ears.

We pray for "eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to be open". We pray so we can trust and believe in God and the Son that He sent to die for our sins, to be the light in the darkness of the world.

During this past year, Second Pres upgraded our sanctuary sound system. I recall a conversation where we were excited that people listening to the message could finally hear the Word of God. While the technology greatly improved the ability to physically hear, I truly believe that having prayed for "eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to be open" allowed us to finally absorb God's word. The words from God, the same God that sent his Son to die on a cross for us, didn't fall on deaf ears.

Jesus, I pray you continue to allow my eyes to see, my ears to hear and my heart to be open. May I know the words I hear are from you. May I continue to listen well and trust. May I then share your words with others so I may also be a light in this world that may often seem dark. In Your name, Amen.

written by Tammy Haggard

JOHN 13

¹ Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The devil had already decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.

¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' ¹⁹I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur you may believe that I am he.

²⁰ Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”

²¹ After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. ²³ One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining close to his heart; ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” ²⁸ Now no one knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival,” or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone 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, “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? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

JOHN 13

Attempting to write a devotional on an entire chapter can feel daunting, especially when that chapter is John 13. This moment marks the beginning of Jesus' final discourse with his disciples. Within these verses, we witness the washing of the disciples' feet, the foretelling of Judas' betrayal, the giving of a new commandment, and the prediction of Peter's denial. So much unfolds in a short span of time.

It would be easy to focus on just one of these moments, but the structure of this chapter matters. There is a kind of "sandwich" here: an act of humble love, followed by betrayal; a new commandment, followed by denial. And yet, John refuses to let betrayal or denial have the final word. The discourse continues beyond this chapter, carrying forward Jesus' message of love, promise, and joy.

Through his actions, Jesus teaches the disciples what true discipleship looks like. By kneeling and washing feet, he redefines power and calls them into a life of service marked by dignity and humility. This posture toward others is not optional; it is central to receiving and reflecting the fullness of God.

Then Jesus gives a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you. This is not an abstract idea. Jesus loves Judas even as betrayal is set in motion. He loves Peter while naming the denial that is coming. Knowing fully what each will do, Jesus still serves them and later offers not condemnation, but redemption.

In many ways, the Gospel of John can be summed up in this commandment: love one another as Christ has loved you—a love that moves first, forgives freely, and believes that grace will always have the final word.

"Who is God inviting us to love this way today?"

God, through Jesus we are called to love one another. Give us soft hearts, so that we may see people the way you do — beloved and worthy of love. Grant us the humility to love one another in ways that show them your great love, even if only in a small glimpse through our obedience to you. Amen.

written by Jamie Kaiser

JOHN 19:1-6, 16-30

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ² And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³ They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face. ⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” ⁵ So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” ⁶ When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.”

So they took Jesus, ¹⁷ and carrying the cross by himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” ²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴ So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

²⁵ And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

This passage in scripture is about the single most important event in human history. It is tragic and joyful at the same time. Jesus endured our sins on the cross – he bore the weight of all sin on his shoulders and was sacrificed so we may have eternal life.

Jesus was accused of crimes he didn't commit. He was accused of being a king – he never said he was. He was mocked and a crown of thorns was dug into his head. A purple robe was thrown on his already broken body. Pilate knew that Jesus was blameless. The crowd, on the other hand, didn't understand this. They shouted again to crucify him.

When we contemplate the crucifixion and the brutality of it, we should also feel the love that Jesus had for us. He prayed that this event would be taken from him. He knew what his body would be going through, yet he went through with it. He was human until the end, even thinking of his mother. When he could no longer stand the pain of the crucifixion and he knew the end was near, he bowed his head and said, "It is finished". This is the ultimate sacrifice. He gave his life so we may live. Nothing more needs to be said.

Our Father God,

In this season of Lent may we come to know Jesus more fully. May we never forget the sacrifice that was made so we may have eternal life.

In His name we pray.

Amen

written by Kim Pare

JOHN 19:31-40

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, especially because that Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³² Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵ (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows_[a] that he tells the truth, so that you also may continue_[b] to believe.) ³⁶ These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” ³⁷ And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

³⁸ After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and removed his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰ They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

What does it take for me to believe? In John 19:35 it states that the testimony is true so that the scripture will be fulfilled from the books of Exodus and Zechariah so that I may continue to believe. With 300+ prophecies that point to Jesus in the Old Testament books these two are a few of the hardest to face. Such a heart wrenching scene of sacrifice that our Savior endured for those who witnessed it firsthand.

It was at this time when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus came forward and identified themselves as being with Jesus after having distanced themselves from others knowing of their relationship with Him up to this most critical time. Was this then when they fully believed?

As it was in my life it was not until extreme circumstances and a critical event took place that I looked upon God and was put in a place to begin to believe. Even with all the evidence and the compelling of the Holy Spirit, I can still find myself continuing to question the depth of my belief.

Then as the Lenten season goes along I am reminded of the extent that God the Father has gone to get my attention to His redeeming of myself and all of humanity. I so wish it had not taken so much, yet recognize that my hardened heart most certainly needed to be humbled. That I need to step forward as did Joseph and Nicodemus and not distance myself from my Lord but go to great lengths to commune with Christ and His people. That I may be ever growing in my belief and strengthening of my faith. What does it take for us to believe?

Father we pray that all glory be to you for all you have done for us. May we come with open hearts and minds to receive the understanding and knowledge that leads us to believe. That your wisdom guide our faith to everlasting love and that we may dwell in your eternal presence. Amen.

written by Jason Jennings

JOHN 20:1-18

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² 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.” ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, ¹² and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” 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.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not touch me, because 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.’ ” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.

I think the hardest part to believe about the entire Christian Faith experience is Resurrection. It is absolutely foundational to our understanding of life everlasting and the bedrock of how we claim God's power. Yet, even some Christians have a problem believing that Jesus was fully Resurrected. I mean, if there is one thing we can be assured of in this life, it's that the dead stay dead.

One of the hardest ideas to break is that Resurrection beats death. Even the fundamental belief that the dead stay dead is no longer true with God. That power—when face to face with it for the first time—can be so overwhelming that you might miss it entirely.

I think that's what happened to the disciples that showed up that morning at the tomb. They were so taken by everything happening around them. The fact that Jesus was just killed on a cross and buried, the power of fear in their hearts, the confusion of what was going on, the knowledge of their own betrayal, and now Jesus body was missing. They were so taken by it all that they missed Resurrection entirely. They let the worries of their heart, the tears in their eyes, the fear that surrounded them, the distractions of the crowds, they let it all get to them and they missed Resurrection completely.

I am hoping that we can all take a lesson from Mary this morning. I am praying that as individuals and collectively, we can all take a moment and feel the heaviness of the world and still keep our ears and hearts open to the voice of Jesus calling our name. That was the difference between Mary and the others, she remained. Mary didn't run home to never look back. Mary remained, with her heart fully engaged and her ears and eyes waiting to hear and see Jesus calling her by name.

God of Resurrection, even in the hardest moments of life when things seem bleak and full of death, remind us that you still call us by name. Steady our hearts and open our ears so that we can hear you calling us now and always. Amen.

written by Rev. Trey Haddon

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