



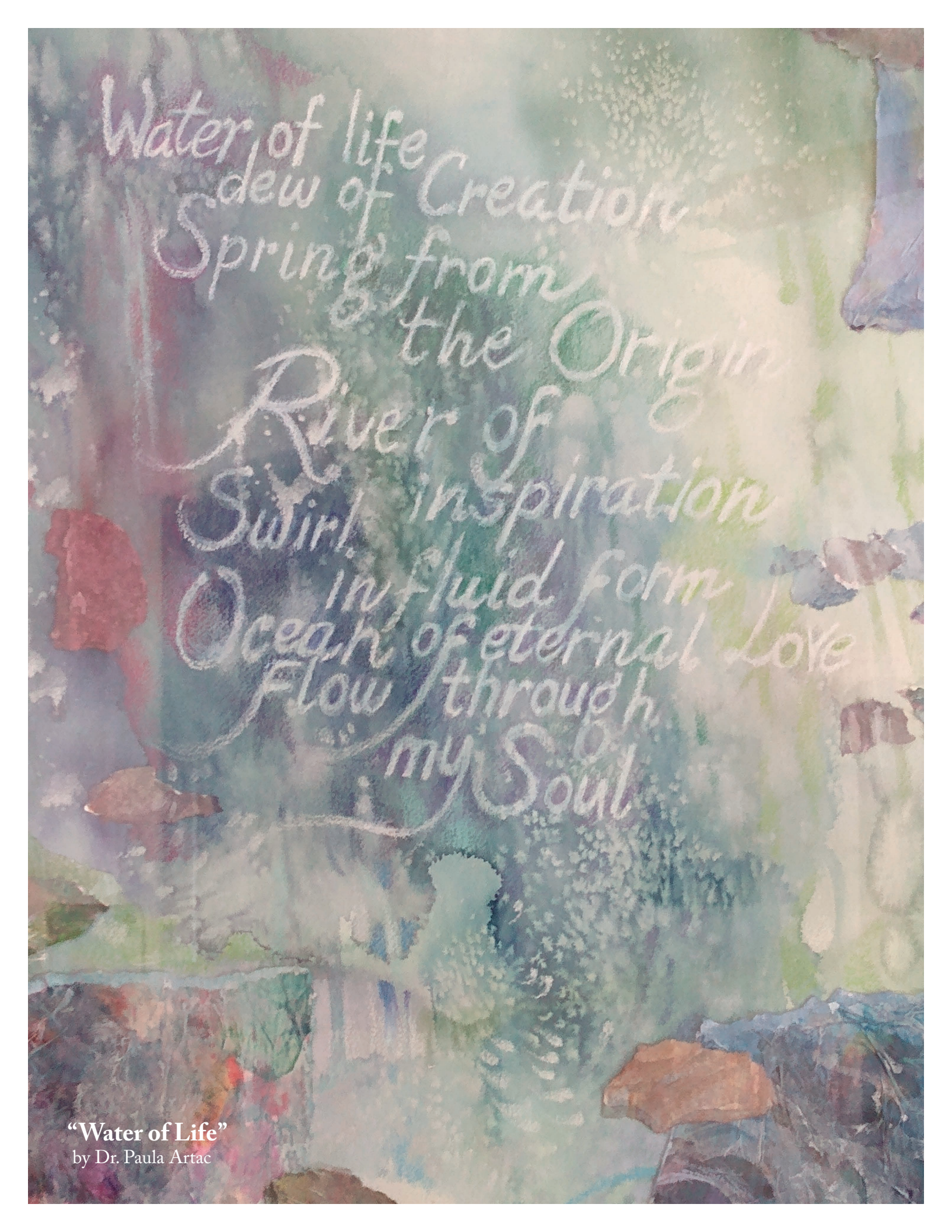
Lent 2021



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Water of life
dew of Creation
Spring from
the Origin
River of
Swirl inspiration
in fluid form
Ocean of eternal Love
Flow through
my Soul

Lent

Lent is a 40-day period beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter. It symbolizes the 40 days that Jesus spent wandering the desert fasting and resisting Satan's temptation. Christians practice Lent to show discipline and penance to God. Though Lent is not mentioned in the Bible, it is a tradition long accepted in the Christian church. Sundays are not counted in Lent since the primary focus of all Sundays in the Christian faith should be the celebration of Christ's resurrection.

Lent remains a prominent part of the Christian faith. It is still characterized by sacrificing something for the Lord and focusing on spiritual growth. This includes not only fasting and prayer but partaking in new practices and acts of service that draw us closer to Christ. It is a time for Christians to repent of sin, renew their faith, and prepare to celebrate the resurrection of their Savior. It is our prayer that the words on these pages will be used by the Holy Spirit to identify changes that need to take place in our lives to draw closer to Christ. If one person's life is opened to God's grace in Jesus Christ then contributors to this devotional will have the greater reward.

Passing a Hearing Test

“Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”
Isaiah 53.1

Isaiah 53 is the greatest chapter in the Old Testament if not the Bible itself. Charles Spurgeon called it “the Bible in miniature, the Gospel at its essence.” The New Testament refers to this passage more than any other when citing prophecy that speaks of the Messiah. Of note, the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from this chapter when Phillip the Evangelist sat down with him and proceeded to share the gospel (Acts 8.32-35).

However powerful this chapter is, the key to accepting it as true is our verse for today. Two simple questions identify those who find the twelve verses in the chapter life changing and those who see no significance in them. Those who believe what is said about God’s Suffering Servant in the chapter are simply those who have faith to do so, for faith is a gift (Ephesians 2.8); the one to whom God reveals himself is the one who wants God to. As R. T. Kendall says in his book *Why Jesus Died*, the answer to the two questions is “Those whom God is seeking” (p. 22).

There is nothing attractive about crucifixion and our natural reaction is to be put off when the topic is raised. But this event is exactly what we are to embrace. Perhaps we need to recall the troubling comment of Paul when he recounted his first visit to the church in Corinth by reminding his readers that “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2.2). What today’s verse teaches is that if anyone desires to take Isaiah 53 to heart, they must accept the offensive truth that the crucifixion of Christ is the only means to salvation. We can’t accept this truth on our own; we are sinful, prideful, and weak. Rather, we come to accept it “because God [is] sovereignly at work”, that is, he is actively seeking us and we accept this pursuit (Kendall, p.24).

So please join me in our look at each verse of Isaiah 53 and remember the challenge of our Lord,
“He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11.15).

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the truths of this great chapter of Isaiah. We seek to be shaped and transformed during this season of Lent by what you wish to share no matter how offensive or painful we find it to be. In the Name of the One whose Word penetrates to the core of our being. Amen.

Love: a Lenten Challenge

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

This passage sets forth clarity and calls us to love, specifying qualities and ways to manifest love, as God has loved us. As a Lenten Challenge, write these words down (or type them, or text them to yourself):

Love
Compassion
Kindness
Humility
Gentleness
Patience
Forgiveness
Thankfulness

Throughout this season, contemplate these words and attempt to write your own definition, or better yet, write down an example of each and go out and **do as it is written**. Share your accomplishments with your loved ones. Follow God’s command to love.

by the Fredrikson Center Team

Prayer

God of Love, you have commanded us to love, this Lenten season manifest in us the spirit and drive to go out into your world and demonstrate your love. In your name we pray, Amen.

Prioritizing our Preparation

“He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place.””

Lent in its most basic form is about the posture of preparation – 40 days of readying yourself because something important is coming our way. Getting prepared in our American culture is not all that profound or earth shattering of a concept. In fact, let's be honest, we are immersed in a world that is dictated by always getting prepared – for many of us it begins the very moment we rise from our slumber and start our day. We prepare for a meeting on zoom, for school, for the kind of healthy breakfast we should be eating. We prepare for another meeting and some more meetings; we prepare for weekend plans; we prepare for a multitude of projects that need fixing, such as house repairs or car maintenance; we prepare our shopping lists and upcoming parties or events. And we know the list just goes on and on.

But here's the thing about lent and preparation – it should remind us of our priorities. You see we prepare all the time, what we don't do in that process very well is prioritize the preparations in order of importance. For many followers of Christ, setting up a zoom meeting with a friend to talk about clothing choices for a party next week is on the same level or higher than contemplating and preparing our hearts and minds to think on what Christ did for us at the Cross. In all our noise of busyness and endless preparing, Lent and its value of spiritually deepening our journey is necessary, so that from Ash Wednesday to Easter the relevance of our relationship to God is put into the proper perspective.

Jesus himself knew the importance of proper preparation – in a multitude of situations he reminded his followers, us, that ordering your prep time spiritually is a major bene in following after him. For example, remember the time Jesus called his disciples to go out two by two with clear instructions on how to prepare for this specific missionary journey (Mark 6:7-13). He wanted to get them mentally prepared to deal with individuals and their acceptance of who he was and his mission.

During this season of Lent we have the opportunity once again to listen to the path of Christ, who he is and his mission, to get ready appropriately to experience the risen Lord at Easter.

Take a moment and think about all you are involved with and how much energy you put forward in preparing for these varied moments. Maybe this Lent, from the onset, you should write down these many preparations and consider prioritizing them in the light of your faith and spiritual walk. I think by doing this you will have a more meaningful outcome at Easter and you may find that the daily journey and the 40 days to get there has opportunities you didn't notice before.

by Pastor Jason Folkerts

Prayer

God bless each and all as we prioritize for our Lenten journey. Amen.

Beauty Is Only Skin Deep

“He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”
Isaiah 53.2

Often when Hollywood makes a film on the life of Christ, the actor cast in the lead role brings a certain attractiveness to the screen. We soon find ourselves unconsciously adopting the idea that those who follow Jesus in the movie are partly inspired by his physical appearance. But our verse for today teaches something far different, something we must reconsider.

“We all like our leaders to ‘look the part’—that is, to give the aura of excellence, dignity and prestige. So what a disappointment Jesus was” (R. T. Kendall, *Why Jesus Died*, p. 43). The term for beauty in 53.2 includes the idea of good looking and is found in 1 Samuel 16.18, where David is described as handsome.

Isaiah is quick to say that Jesus’ attractiveness was not based on shallowness. He didn’t stand out as someone who gained a following that was created by external expectations that were met. Rather, as we continue in Isaiah 53, we will be confronted by a person who is appreciated by only those who accept the cross and discover what he did for them. This can be a painful journey because his attractiveness comes in the form of what he suffered and accomplished for us. David’s one desire was “to gaze on the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27.4). This beauty is an attribute or characteristic of God whereby we see in him all that is good and desirable for us. But we only see and discover this beauty when we accept his work on the cross and place our faith in the one who taught that the way to glory is through suffering. Those who see this beauty are to reflect it in their daily walk. When we sow love and mercy and peace and joy as a result of the cross and resurrection, we prove that what is on the inside is more important than what is on the outside.

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Lord, perhaps some of us are like the root out of dry ground, waiting to surprise onlookers with abundant growth and beauty. May we allow you to produce such transformation. In the Name of the Spirit who changes us. Amen.

– Monday –

Fall

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.
Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.
I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.
He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed.”

“Failing forward” – a term discussed to encourage growth mind-set and progress not perfection. These concepts are not new, though forgotten and left outside our focus. The good person will fall, yet not be utterly cast down; it is similar to the saying, “Give yourself the same grace you would give another.” If we get so lost in the idea of having made a mistake, then we focus on ourselves rather than the opportunity to learn, to be upheld within the Lord’s hand, to be planted and to be blessed.

If you have fallen, seek God’s hand, rest and recover in that grace and merciful love. Return to the steps of good and delight in the Lord.

by Fredrikson Center Team

Prayer

Dear Lord, we come to you having fallen, we seek your hand to uphold and heal us; grant that we might learn and begin anew the path you have set before us. In your name, we pray, Amen.

Walking in the Faith

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” Matthew 14:28-41

Faith is one of those cover-words. One of the words we use that has a vague meaning without any real bearing on our lives. So what is faith? What does it mean to live a life full of faith?

When Peter stepped out on the water, he was acting out of faith. He didn’t know what would happen or how he could possibly manage to stay afloat. Keeping his eyes on Jesus, he suspended his disbelief and stepped out, walking on the water without having any idea how such a thing could be possible.

Only when Peter looked around, saw the storm raging around him, felt the wind and started to think about how deep the lake was, how dangerous the lightning, did he began to sink. Jesus reached out and saved him, taking him gently back to the boat, asking why he had doubted. Peter had everything he needed to continue to walk on the water, but he began to think, let reason and fear get in the way of his faith, and he sank.

To live a life of faith, you have to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. If we can plan and control every bit of our lives, faith becomes irrelevant. It’s only when we take that step out onto the water that faith becomes necessary. Only when we’re able to let go of what we want to happen, let go of what we think should happen, let go of the fear of what could happen, are we living a life of faith.

When you ask the Lord to increase your faith, things may get scary. The wind may begin to rush around you, the storms may rage, but it’s only then that what seems impossible becomes possible.

by Sydney Shrimpton

Prayer

God, help me to realize I have everything I need to live a life of faith. Help me not to become discouraged when things become difficult. Keep my eyes fixed on Jesus, help me not to doubt, and give me the faith to move mountains.

Worst-Case Scenario

“He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.”
Isaiah 53.3

Mother Teresa considered loneliness the greatest problem in the world. Everyone has experienced loneliness to a certain degree. Some of you reading this devotion have been devastated by the death of a spouse, or close friend or family member. There are no words to describe the pain and sorrow of carrying on without the person who made life worth living. When C. S. Lewis lost his wife to cancer he remarked, “The death of a beloved is an amputation.” Something is missing.

At the risk of sounding insensitive, there might be an even more painful loneliness, that which materializes because of rejection. Such loneliness stems from the decisions of others who make known to us that we are no longer welcomed in their lives. This is heartbreaking because it is personal; those we love and consider special people have taken it upon themselves to tell us that we are no longer important to them. Our Lord endured such loneliness because he was rejected by the world as a whole (John 1.10) and his people in particular (1.11).

Our Lord endured the cross even though it “not only meant rejection by his own people but as we shall see, the ultimate rejection, namely by his Father” (R. T. Kendall, *Why Jesus Died*, p. 54). Jesus was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (KJV). When Jesus cried out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27.46), he took the ultimate rejection so we wouldn’t have to. In other words, my sin, which put Jesus on the cross, resulted in the Father rejecting Jesus so he wouldn’t have to reject me. Jesus took the worst-case scenario of God’s wrath so I would not have to live without him forever; Christ endured separation from God, which is hell, and in love and mercy justified me in his sight.

Our Lord knows the pain we feel when we suffer loss, when we are in the midst of numbing loneliness. He comes to us to offer his presence and comfort. He is with us even as we read these words, knowing that life can be difficult. Even more, he is with us when people reject us for our faithfulness to the Gospel, for our Lord faces rejection even today. But because of his death on the cross, we never have to be alone in this world, for Jesus Christ is close to the brokenhearted and the rejected.

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Man of Sorrows! What a name
For the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim.
Hallelujah! what a Savior!

Philip P. Bliss

Plans

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand.” Job 38:4

As a newlywed, I’ve been asked the standard relationship questions more than a few times. For example, when I was dating my husband, it was “when are you getting engaged?” Once we were engaged, it shifted to “when are you getting married?” After we were married, it was “when are you going to have kids?” I’m sure we’ve all heard these questions a million times and are guilty of asking them just as many times. I love that I have people in my life who care enough to ask, but after reflecting, I pondered why do we worry so much about the timeline of our life?

I believe it’s because there’s comfort in feeling in control, but the book of Job is a good reminder that our lives can change in an instant, and we can learn a valuable lesson from that. Near the end of the book when Job had lost his family, his farm, and was diseased he confronted God. He demanded that God give him an answer as to why his life had crumbled. God answered Job by taking him on a journey of his creation in a way he had never seen it before. God showed him the minute details of the creatures of the Earth all the way to the immensity of space. Job was stunned and overwhelmed. God never told him why he had to suffer, but he was trying to give Job perspective as to how much God creates and controls and how many moving parts there in the universe.

God said in chapter 38:4 “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand.” We weren’t there when God created the beautiful earth and the all mind-blowingly details in it and we can’t view it as he does. As much as we try to plan our lives, God knows more and loves more deeply than we could ever comprehend. It’s hard to swallow that we aren’t in control of our lives as much as we’d like to be, but the matter of the fact is God is simply better at it. We have to just breathe and trust in his plan.

by Nicole Hamilton

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

God, you are bigger and greater than we could ever imagine. Help us find comfort in your vast knowledge and love even if it feels like our life is out of control sometimes. Open our eyes to your plan for us and give us the courage to simply go and follow it. Let your peace wash over us today as we release our worry for the future to you.

Amen.

Gratefulness has an ability to Prevent Discouragement over Our Sins and Weaknesses

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
For His loving kindness is everlasting” (Ps. 118:1)

We are in the holy season of Lent during which we are called to reflect upon our sins, vulnerabilities and human aberrations, as well as God’s unconditional love and mercy. The difference between Judas and Peter: Peter got up again. What continual fault, failing or sin do you let discourage and stifle you? When you let it or them discourage you, you’re yielding to the nefarious designs of the devil. The Christian attitude is: It’s not how many times you fumble and fall; it’s how many times you get up to walk in the path of righteousness and holiness.

Remember in situations like the above you are in good company. It was St. Paul who said, “For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want,” (Romans 7:19). As we fall over and over again we have a choice: To be discouraged and subdued or to be grateful. Yes grateful! We can gratefully choose to see that God is creating a deeper level of humility in us. We can also gratefully realize that we cannot make ourselves holy. We can gratefully choose to realize we cannot do anything without His assistance. We realize that God (Love) does not keep a record of our wrongs but a record of our attempts to free us from the clutches of evil. Such realizations can help us to believe God will change us in His time and in His way. Our job is just to keep getting up. Our job is to keep trusting in His undiminished mercy. That’s why God sent Jesus who revealed the Father’s love and mercy to us. Peter, unlike Judas, believed in the Father’s love because of Jesus. Is there anything in our lives from which we need to depart and walk in the path of God’s mercy? Let us pray for the courage to be like Peter who resolved to get up and walk.

by Rev. Justin D. Gnanamuthu, C.S.C.,

Prayer

Lord, thank you for your mercy. Your love for me is real, personal and everlasting. Lord, grant me the grace and the strength to rise from the grip of my sins and return to you forever.

Who's Pulling the Strings?

“Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.”
Isaiah 53.4

As we continue our look at Isaiah 53, you may find yourself thinking that there is something going on which you can't see, someone is moving the pieces around. And in the process, Jesus appears as the victim of all the behind-the-scenes activity. Any honest assessment of what Isaiah is describing in this chapter leads us to choppy waters as we come face to face with the possibility that God was behind all the mistreatment and eventual death of Jesus. It appears that that the earliest Christians believed “that God was ultimately responsible for Jesus’ dying on the cross. It was absolutely, irrevocably and unmistakably predestined” (R. T. Kendall, *Why Jesus Died*, p. 87). At the crucifixion, the Jewish leaders and Pontius Pilate “did what [God’s] power and will had decided beforehand should happen” (Acts 4.28). Could it be that God is the one directing this story?

No matter how we answer the question, we must not forget two important truths. First, we will never know the depth of our sin or how grievous it is to God. Because of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden, we all became natural enemies of God. When we sin, we don’t just break his commandments; we break his heart! But the second truth is we will never comprehend the extent of God’s love for us. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us, showing our infinite worth to him (Romans 5.8). Despite our wrongdoings, he loves us unconditionally.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is helpful here as he reminds us there is no such thing as grace without the cross. To think otherwise cheapens God’s grace, for it is costly; it cost him his Son, as there was no price too dear to pay. This is what we have seen so far in this chapter and there is more to come. Isaiah 53 is not for the faint of heart.

by Rich Menninger

Prayer

Dear Father, may we take to heart the lyrics that read, “Lead me to the cross where Your love poured out.” Walk with us on this painful yet sanctifying path through Isaiah 53. In the Name of the One who gives us everything. Amen.

On High

“Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.
From the ends of the earth I call to you,
I call as my heart grows faint;
lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” Psalm 61:1-2

As Lenten reflections continue, a change in perspective—literally—might offer a chance to chart a path toward Easter. Have you ever taken in a view from a higher perspective? Maybe the only parking spot left is the one on the top floor in the garage, or you look out the window of the top floor at an office or classroom, or even the choir loft at church, or outside, at the top of a hill in your neighborhood?

Take time to change your perspective—physically, even if it is just in a stairwell or looking over the edge of your bed. Do something tangible to change your view. With this change of sight line, reflect in your time of prayer on what shift God might be placing on your path this Lent. What has made your heart grow faint, what has made you weary? Where would God lead you to make a shift? Small changes lead to great heights. As we call to God to hear our prayer, may we listen too and seek new perspectives.

by Fredrikson Center Team

Prayer

God on High, lead us to you, through our prayer and reflection, give us eyes that seek to see your path, help us to quiet ourselves and hear your call. May we seek you, call to you and find you. We look out into this new perspective, we are quiet, we give thanks for our breath and your spirit ever present, in your name, we pray, Amen.

Everyone Gets in Trouble

“Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day’s journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.” And He said to them, “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?”

I find it utterly amusing and incredibly relatable that Jesus, God in human form, had at some point gotten in trouble with his parents. Often overlooked throughout the entirety of scripture is the fact that the men and women recorded were never the most upstanding citizens. In fact, it’s almost part of the point being made that all are imperfect and have faults.

Though that isn’t the case in this instance, where it seems Jesus misbehaves. With him being completely sinless, the misunderstanding is with his parents, not him. Growing up that’s how every situation feels as the child in trouble. Obedience, for us who are faulty and prone to disorder at times, is key and incredibly important in our growth. So important it made one of the “Big Ten”. This has always fascinated me how his law is perfect, and every bit is for our benefit and truly freeing.

by Fredrikson Center Team

Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for keeping us, even though we are sometimes at fault. Please continue to guide us to your virtue, leaving behind the faults, unloading the baggage that we add, and give us clarity as we wash away all that isn’t pleasing to you. Amen.

That Should Have Been Me!

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53.5

Today’s verse clearly teaches the concept of a substitute. This notion was entrenched in the Mosaic law. Animals, such as lambs, were sacrificed as payment for sin against God. The death of the animal was a substitute for the person who deserved punishment and death. The idea of payment or atonement was familiar to Isaiah’s readers as the way to restore the broken relationship between the one offering the sacrifice and God. But what was unique in the prophet’s description here was that the sin offering was actually a person, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. Jesus was our Lamb who takes away our sin (John 1.29).

This wonderful truth can easily roll off our tongues with little or no thought. But a close reading of Isaiah 53.5 should give us reason to pause. The verbs are striking; he was *pierced* and *crushed* in *our* stead. Christ was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. Such a picture reveals the sobering truth that Jesus suffered physical, mental, and spiritual pain on the cross for something he didn’t do! In an action that is beyond human understanding, “God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5.21, NLT).

Even more convicting is the term iniquity. The sacrificial system of Israel recognized two classes of sin. There was the unintentional sin for which sacrifices could be made (Numbers 15.22-29). But there was also intentional sin, the “high-handed” sin, when we deliberately and willfully show our disdain or contempt for God’s commandments; for such sin there was no sacrifice (15.30-31). Jesus was crushed for our intentional sins, our iniquities.

And because of that we have peace, the *shalom* that describes wholeness and completeness, life lived to fullness in Christ. We are now children of a loving Father and not his enemy. Unlike the animal sacrifices that had to be repeated, we now have peace with God on a permanent basis because of Christ’s death (Romans 5.1). Furthermore, we have access to the peace of God (Philippians 4.7), a conviction that “it’s going to be okay” despite circumstances. Christ’s punishment brings us peace and his wounds heal us of the sickness of our transgressions and iniquities. The resurrection of Christ (not yet referred to in Isaiah 53) heals our sinful heart (1 Peter 2.24) and allows us to receive love and comfort as children who have been united to our estranged Father.

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Dear Father, may our prayer be that of Graham Kendrick: “For us he was made sin, Oh, help me take it in.” In the Name of the great Healer. Amen.

God's Providence

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5 ESV

In the Christian faith, we're big on the assertion that we are made for a purpose. We're told we're special, that God designed us for one fantastic adventure, that everything in our lives leads up to this one pinnacle point, this one holy reason for existence. So we search and we seek and we try to find our passions, our callings, the reason we're alive. We become frustrated when we don't feel fulfilled by our jobs, believing a certain career path to be the reason we're on this planet. We drag our weary bodies from day to day, adding in volunteer opportunities, signing up for more meal trains than we can handle, piling on the bible studies, seeking, searching, determined to figure out why we're alive.

However, as time goes on, we find that seeking our one true purpose is fairly limiting. If we're on the lookout for a singular task that we're to do, one pathway we're supposed to travel along, one calling we're supposed to fulfill, are we not missing out on every other good thing?

What if, instead, we're made to fulfill one purpose a million different ways? We're to bear much fruit. Not a singular piece. What if we aren't supposed to do one thing in one area, but are supposed to be on the lookout for a million purposes every single day?

If you believe that the Lord plans out your steps, that He determines your paths, that He is in charge of all creation, then doesn't it make sense that every single thing you do has worth? That every phase of life and every action, no matter how small it feels, no matter how mundane it seems, bears weight. Each thing you do is filled with purpose.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. – Romans 8:28

The next time you look at your life in despair, wondering how you matter, feeling lost and directionless, remember that you are a child of God. You are filled with kingdom purpose—called, ordained, granted a place in heaven with your eternal Father, so long as you've accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

by Sydney Shrimpton

Prayer

Lord, help me live as though each moment of my life holds weight. Help me to believe I am capable of bearing fruit every moment I'm alive. Guide me to fulfill the million small purposes you have for me each day.

The Secret-Sauce for Impossible Victory

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”

Matthew 5:43-47 NRSV

Ironically, if there is any one thing uniting all humans on our planet at the moment we’re living in now, it may be disunity—a feeling of division, separation, isolation. Even attempting to name a cause for our winter of discontent is likely to cause more strife. This isn’t to say that there is no right or wrong, or that there is always moral equivalency in all arguments. Indeed, should I not regard anyone who questions my human value as less of an academic debating partner and more like an existential threat? And who could expect me to respond to such an enemy with anything other than anger and fear, fight or flight? Jesus does, actually—but not in the way most people think.

Most people know that Jesus is the Prince of Peace and assume (with more than a little encouragement from the powerful of this world) that Jesus was all about passivity. Yet according to Walter Wink, Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary, one cannot really read the entirety of Christ’s ministry and conclude that Jesus lived or preached that way. Nor did Jesus preach violent opposition. Rather, Wink concludes, Jesus articulated a third way of militant non-violence.

This was the great truth demonstrated by Martin Luther King, Jr. throughout the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s: Non-violent resistance is actually far more powerful and

effective than acts of violence against an evil such as Jim Crow. Segregation expected a violent response—in fact it counted on it. Segregationist politicians constantly raised the specter of a violent Black uprising to keep the support of poor whites—voters who otherwise might have been lured away by policies favoring a more progressive, pluralistic society. But when voting rights marchers from Selma refused to react violently to the violence perpetuated against them in broad daylight on the Edmond Pettus Bridge, a shocked public quickly shifted its support and the Voting Rights Act was passed and signed into law a mere 5 months after the attack. By refusing to react violently, the battered and beaten marchers exposed the weakness of Segregation.

Some cynics would later try to paint the successes of the Civil Rights Movement as merely proof that a victimhood narrative has the power to move public opinion, but King knew there was something much deeper to the power of what they were accomplishing: When our enemy thinks we are their existential threat, Christ’s commandment to love our enemies is the secret-sauce for an otherwise impossible victory. King preached at length about it in 1957 at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church:

“Now there is a final reason I think,” said King, “that Jesus says, ‘Love your enemies.’ It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. That’s why Jesus says, ‘Love your enemies.’ Because if you hate your enemies, you have no way to redeem and to transform your enemies. But if you love your enemies, you will discover that at the very root of love is the power of redemption.... There’s something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive.”

Of course, nobody claims that loving those who might wish you ill is particularly easy. Very little of discipleship to Christ is. It may take time. You may get hurt. In some cases, like King, you might even get killed. Yet nevertheless there is Christ’s command—unambiguous and clear—to love our enemies. Whether it is one particularly vile individual in our lives or a whole group of people who seem to support and benefit from an oppressive system or trend, the command to love our enemies requires us to recognize their humanity and in so doing force them to recognize our own. Militant non-violence powered by love for our enemies may just be the only way, against all odds, to finally liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor. Indeed, in a moment like the one we’re living in now, wouldn’t that be something of a miracle?

by David J. Grummon

Prayer

O Lord, your call to love my enemies is not easy. In fact, it feels impossible. I don’t have enough wisdom, strength, patience and grace to do it. But you do, Lord. Change my heart, grant me your wisdom, strength, patience and grace to love those who do not love me. Only you, Lord, can transform me and achieve the impossible.



The Grass Isn't Always Greener

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.”

Isaiah 53.6

As I pondered what to say about today's verse, it dawned on me just how often the Bible refers to sheep. There are over 500 references, with most of them referring to the literal animal in the Old Testament, while most in the New Testament are metaphorical. From all these we can learn of God's love for us as well as our tendency to wander away from our Good Shepherd.

We recall that the blood of a Passover lamb shielded the Israelites from death in Egypt (Exodus 12.1-13), just as our Passover Lamb protects us from God's wrath (1 Corinthians 5.7). Lambs appear as the main animal sacrificed for Israel's sin (Exodus 29.38-42); for us it is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29). Furthermore, God's people are seen as his sheep, those whom he lovingly cares for and protects (Ezekiel 34.31). John reminds us that Jesus is our Good Shepherd (John 10.1-30).

However, sheep are prone to wander, simply ignoring their shepherd. While many references to a lamb makes it crystal-clear what God has done for us and how much he loves us, that picture is incomplete without the balance of our sinfulness and lack of submission to our Father. R. T. Kendall considers the words “We all, like sheep, have gone astray” as some of the “most tender, gracious, and moving words that are to be found anywhere in the Bible” (*Why Jesus Died*, p. 109). Yet the end of today's verse— “the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all”—is needed because like sheep we simply follow our own will.

Our iniquity includes those times we ignore the urging of the Holy Spirit to reach out to somebody who needs the touch of God. A simple phone call or text is seen as an interruption as we seek to protect our sacred schedules, all at the price of wandering off the path of discipleship. We fail to appreciate God's grace and that his will is the path we are to follow.

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Dear Good Shepherd, may I never wander too far, and may my prayer at least be that I am willing to allow you to make me willing. Amen.

Held within Protection

“But you, LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.” Psalm 3:3

There are moments when we must build ourselves up- the pep talk we give ourselves as we stare at the reflection in the mirror (“you got this!”). We’ve all been home so much more; the outside world seems a bit more daunting. A practice for Lent might be to imagine the shield around you- the protection of the Lord resting with you. When each step seems to be a challenge, feel that shield. When you are heavy and weighted by the worries of the day, allow your head to be held high in your prayer to the Lord.

As you begin your day, may a prayer wrap you in the shield of the Lord and lift your head to face the service and work of the day. May the Lord be your glory in the good you do for others in your community.

by Fredrikson Center Team

Prayer

God of Protection, be with us as we re-enter the world and with us as we shelter in your strength; keep us safe as we offer our work to you and to our community of brothers and sisters. When we grow tired of being alone, or tired of helping others, help us to wear your shield for your glory, help us to lift our heads high knowing your spirit is with us in this world. In your name we pray, Amen

Lenten Prayer

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

Dear Lord, as we enter this season of self-reflection, we strive to strengthen our relationship with you. Help us set aside the fear and anxiety of this past years medical and political concerns, in order to fully commit ourselves to enhancing a personal relationship with you, our Savior. We must remember that the problems that affect our mortal existence are minimal compared to the rewards that await us in your Kingdom.

Therefore, let us take the time during this sacred season to seek a renewal of our spiritual selves. Through prayer and sacrifice, may we find your forgiveness for our human weaknesses and find the strength to better serve you in the future. It is through your presence in our lives that we will find joy and contentment.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

by Mary Alice Grosser

Prayer

This Lenten season gives us the opportunity to seek that presence more fully. Help us find the willingness to seek your guidance on this journey of renewal. We know your love is ever present if we but take the time to seek and feel it. Amen.

When God's in Charge

“He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.”

Isaiah 53.7

A difficult truth to deal with when reading Isaiah 53 is the realization that the Father's plan to redeem the world required a “lamb that was led to slaughter.” In fact, this was his plan before the creation of the world. Our salvation was bought “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (1 Peter 1.19-20).

We may experience mixed emotions when we contemplate the actions of God as depicted in Isaiah 53, especially in light of the belief that he is in control. Did he have to do it this way? It can be confusing that an all-loving, all-good, and all-powerful God would let his Son be treated shamefully. The idea that God is sovereign—that is, in control—should look more like someone using a bulldozer to clear the landscape in order to build the perfect world. No doubt something to that effect will happen at the end of the world. But for now, to recognize God is in control is never clearer than in Jesus' life and death. Can we find another example of someone who was under the control of God to the extent that Jesus was during his arrest, trial, and crucifixion?

It is astounding that Jesus' life and death are God's way of demonstrating he is in control. And he has left it to us to model our Lord's death so that the world can see that a life lived for him is the one by which he “controls” the world” (See N. T. Wright, *God and the Pandemic*, p.25). In his wisdom “God did not abolish the fact of evil; He transformed it. He did not stop the Crucifixion; He rose from the dead” (Dorothy L. Sayers, “The Greatest Drama Ever Staged”). The one who turns the other cheek is the one who shows what it looks like when God is in charge, and the one who denies self is the one who God controls and uses to change the world.

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Lord, it is great that you trust us. But do you have to trust us so much!? Amen.

God's Ways are Higher than Our Ways

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:8-9

This scripture has been following me around very closely the last month. I see it everywhere I turn. The idea of this scripture is at the same time a little frightening and very reassuring. It is frightening because it reminds me that the ways I imagine things are going to turn out are not usually the way things turn out which makes it clear I am not in control. But it is at the same time reassuring to know God's ways are much higher than my own and if I will allow his ways into my life I will be awed, more than satisfied and extremely grateful.

Sometimes the way this plays out in my life is when I see that my timing is not God's timing. I am presently working as a Care Giver and this morning I was scheduled to leave my client at 9:00 but I was not able to leave until about 9:20 which initially I was not incredibly happy about. But on my way home as I pulled into the parking lot of my local coffee shop one of my favorite baristas was just walking out the door. This barista is moving to a different coffee shop next week and I had been worried that I would not be able to see him and tell him how much I would miss him. Well, God's way provided for me to not only see him but gave us an unhurried moment in the parking lot to catch up and share phone numbers so we can stay in touch. That extra 20 minutes at my client's home which I was not happy about brought me to my knees with tears of joy and thankfulness.

One of the most impactful illustrations of this scripture must be God's way to the resurrection through the cross. Can you imagine Jesus' disciples thinking this cannot be God's way - how in the world can Jesus become our King when he is being crucified? Little did they know that the cross would lead to Jesus becoming not just a king but the King of Kings. God's ways are much higher than our ways!

I love the way Elevation Worship's song "Rattle" describes this:

Saturday was silent... Surely it was through
But since when has impossible ever stopped You
Friday's Disappointment... Is Sunday's empty tomb
Since when has impossible ever stopped You.

by Janice Trigg

Prayer

Thank you, God, that you always have a way and that your way is always much higher than our way.

Lost and Found

I remember when my kids were younger, we were regulars at the school's Lost and Found. Often gloves, hats, lunchboxes and jackets failed to return home until we made that trek to the corner of the classroom where the lost items were kept. There was always a measure of joy and relief when we were reunited with what was lost.

Our church is studying Jesus' stories of losing and finding in Luke during the season of Lent. A man is beaten and robbed of his possessions, left by the side of the road. A shepherd loses a sheep. A woman loses a coin. A man loses a son. A tax collector loses his way. But in each of these stories of losing, there is also the joy of finding! Lost items recovered. A son returns home and is celebrated. One man is returned to health by an unlikely helper...another climbs a tree to find what he had been looking for all along.

This past year, it feels like we have lost so much: family gatherings, graduation and birthday celebrations, economic stability, even the loss of loved ones to a terrible disease. And yet, my hope is that we might also ask what God has restored in us, what blessings we have received, and what it is that have we found. Perhaps we might even celebrate the ways that God has sought and found us! Grieving what is lost and celebrating what is found is an important spiritual activity, often associated with the introspection of Lent. This season, I pray that you will faithfully name your grief, and also find ways to celebrate the joy of finding and being found!

by Rev. Matt Sturtevant

Prayer

God who seeks and searches for us, we name both our grief and our joy, in this season of losing and finding. Amen.

Unmet Expectations

“By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.”
Isaiah 53.8

Isaiah 53 contains three questions. We encountered two of them in the opening verse; in today’s verse we find the third one, “Yet who of his generation protested?” This question is preceded by the description of how Jesus was taken away in the Garden of Gethsemane. We must not fail to appreciate that although Isaiah authored today’s verse 700 years before Jesus’ arrest, he wrote as though the events leading up to Good Friday had already occurred.

The answer to the question should come as no surprise; no one protested. His family was powerless to resist Pontius Pilate, his disciples too frightened and the rest of his generation simply rejected Him. The Messiah was expected to come and free Israel from Rome but Jesus—the so-called Messiah—was turning out to be an impostor, for he was not leading a rebellion against the foreign rulers. But the problem was that the real enemy of Israel was not Rome...but itself! God’s chosen people were led astray by sin. As a result, the rightful king of Israel was considered a criminal, cut off from the land of the living because anyone dying on the cross was cursed by God (Galatians 3.13). Yet he was innocent, for he was suffering for the sins of Israel.

Before we pat ourselves on the back and say that we would have spoken out against this injustice, we must remember that we have the significant advantage of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a result of the resurrection. Rather, we should honestly ask ourselves if we are ready to speak out now for Jesus. Do we show our true colors when his name is insulted and slandered? Do we remain silent as those mentioned above or do we boldly continue living as the salt of the earth and light of the world? Both our actions and our witness should demonstrate that we are his brothers and sisters (Matthew 12.49-50). Moreover, when we become a child of God, we become his descendant. Though he had no physical descendants, yet we are his spiritual descendants, his offspring. When we accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, we “become one of the family!” (R. T. Kendall, *Why Jesus Died*, p. 143). But in doing so we must recognize and accept that his place as Lord is on his terms, not ours. We must see that what he expects of us—and not what we expect of him—determines our walk with him.

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Prayer: Dear Lord, may we share with others that you were cut off because of our sin, and as a result there is hope in this world. Amen.

Just In Case

“Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you.”

The school suggested all students start “hybrid” learning with a plastic tub for their books and other supplies. The week before the return date, we purchased a red and white tub- which was about the size of my daughter. We added a few pencil bags and dividers to help keep it tidy. And then she lugged it to the first day of “in person” classes along with the backpack heavy on her back. I thought for sure she would topple on the stairs up to school. She was steady and determined and made her way, mask and all.

That was in November, and each week on the last “in person” day of the week, she would lug her red and white plastic tub out of school. I kept saying, “Just bring home the books you need, leave the tub at school.” And she would inevitably arrive at pick-up loaded with pack and tub...”Just in case,” she would say.

And indeed, in December – one week before holiday, the principal tested positive, we went to remote-all online classes, for the remainder of the year. She did have her tub at home and did not need to go to school to get anything. So even now, in January, in February, in March-- the lugging back and forth punctuates the start and end of the week, just in case.

We are carrying our cares, heavy laden. There have been so many unexpected required changes. There is some comfort in the things we can be sure of—just in case—if we carry them with us. Yet, we are tired, and what works of hearts and hands have we not lifted, as we are full to brimming, overwhelmed, and wearied by the weight of worry?

by Trish Dowd Kelne

Prayer

God help us to “cast our cares” on you, we know you will sustain us, yet we are human and we see so many ways that the unexpected can leave us without what we think we need. Open our eye to your ways, grant our hearts the trust needed to leave behind the heavy burden and walk in your ways with light hearts and ready hands. In your name, we pray.

I Will Face My Fear

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”

“I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me” – Frank Herbert (Dune Chronicles, #1). I love the book Dune. I think it’s a great mix between sci-fi and realism that transforms the reader into this creative functional environment. This is one of the best quotes from the book and when I read it, I instantly thought of something else. Fear affects more than just when we are faced with life-altering situations. Instead, fear is something that resides with us every day. Sometimes we are afraid to take risks. Maybe you are afraid to speak up about something that is bothering you? Whatever your fear is, it is something that stops you. Fear is something that will never stop, but it can be assisted. Think back in your life to a moment that you were afraid. Did you feel alone? Trapped? Fear causes us to feel every hair on our arms and shocks us to the core. Was there anyone there to assist you?

If you answered no, don’t forget that God’s love never leaves us. Sometimes we feel as if no one can help us overcome our fear. God invites us to pour our fears onto his shoulders. Think of something that you fear and start to decipher it. Can your fear hurt you? What are the consequences of not standing up to your fear? Take some time and do an audit of your fears, and see what you have already overcome. Fear is something that can stop you in your tracks. Don’t let it derail God’s amazing plan for you. You are always in control. God gives us the self-control to make our own decisions. Don’t let fear be your mind-killer. Instead, let your fears inspire you to accomplish more. Let us bring our fears to God in prayer.

by Kurt Hamilton

Prayer

God let us express our fears to you. Comfort us when we are afraid. Let us know that you are always with us when we are at our worst. Lord remind us today that you gave us the power to do anything. This amazing gift of life is one that you shared with us so we can inspire others. Let our fears today transform into amazing memories for the future. Guide our hearts on this wonderful journey of life that you gave us. We say all this in your son’s name, Amen.

Imposter Syndrome

“Then Moses told the Lord, “Please, Lord, I’m not eloquent. I never was in the past nor am I now since you spoke to your servant. In fact, I talk too slowly and I have a speech impediment.” Then God asked him, “Who gives a person a mouth? Who makes him unable to speak, or deaf, or able to see, or blind, or lame? Is it not I, the Lord? Now, go! I myself will help you with your speech and I’ll teach you what you are to say.” Moses said, “Please, Lord, send somebody else.” Exodus 4:10-13

Imposter syndrome is a psychological pattern of doubt in one’s self. This syndrome takes place when an individual constantly feels like a fraud, contributing their accomplishments and characteristics to nothing more than chance, to good luck. They don’t believe they possess any of the qualifications required to carry out a task or to do a job and consistently undersell their value and worth. When God asked Moses to free His people, Moses was hit by a wave of Imposter Syndrome. He immediately threw all of his shortcomings at God, telling him there was no way he could carry out the feat God was asking him to. There was no way Moses was big enough or good enough or qualified enough to do what God intended him to.

Can you picture this? Moses, a transient man, made up of dirt and breath, arguing with the creator God, the one who sculpted Moses, who planned out his every day, who tailored his existence into what He desired? This is similar to a clay pot telling the potter that it wasn’t fit to grow plants, that the potter had better choose someone else because it wasn’t made to carry out the task that was asked of it. God made Moses. And Moses was telling God that he wasn’t fit for the very job God had prepared him for.

It sounds ridiculous. Yet how many times have you done this with yourself? How many times have you felt the tugging on your heart strings, to volunteer somewhere, to become a missionary, to say a certain thing to a loved one, to apply for a particular job, to give more money to a cause, yet have turned away from the calling because you didn’t feel qualified?

Granted, the Lord doesn’t typically speak to us through a burning bush. But he does speak to us from within. Shouldn’t that voice echo even louder? We have the Holy Spirit within us, directing our paths, prodding us, pointing us in the direction that God wants us to go. Shouldn’t God’s direction be louder, more convincing when the voice is coming from within? Somehow, that makes it even easier to turn away from. What action are you rejecting? What desires seem too big? What do you feel led to, yet completely unqualified for? What is stopping you from chasing after that voice in your heart? That prodding in your soul? What is keeping you from following God’s orders?

by Sydney Shrimpton

Prayer

Holy Spirit, please guide me. Let your voice to be louder. Let your prodding to be obvious. And, when I know what I’m supposed to be doing, please help me to just do it. Keep me free from doubt. Increase my faith so I can see that God is pointing me in the direction He wants me to go. Give me faith that He will help me, that He will speak through me. Let me serve as a vessel for the Most High – let it be known that this is what He made me for.

Come and Walk with Me

“And then they shall say, How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that publisheth peace; that bringeth him that bringeth good tidings unto them of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, that God reigneth!” Isaiah 52:7

As people all across the globe are seeking their Creator in this season of Lent, Passover, etc., I am reminded of my young son asking ever so sincerely, how to hear God’s voice. As I prayed and pondered on his question, I reflected on my life. When have I heard God’s voice? Does He seek us as much as we seek Him? Beckoning to His creation, longing for a closer relationship where we walk with Him through life’s journey? Does our Father and Creator call, “Come and walk with me.” How often has He called and I did not recognize it? Did I hear His voice on the first day of school when I felt lost and alone and a kind stranger said, “Hello and welcome to your first day!” Was it when I heard, “STOP!” before pulling out into an intersection only to see a car running the red light and no one was in the car with me? Was it when I prayed for my daughter’s life in the hospital and I heard the words, “I have sent my Son.” Maybe it was the soft breeze that cooled my brow at my Grandmother’s funeral or the gentle cooing of the pair of morning doves that wait for me in the parking lot when I arrive at work.

His voice is everywhere. He is everywhere and woven throughout our lives. I know His voice. His voice brings peace to my soul. This season, this day, let us respond to His call and answer, “Here I am Lord, I am ready to walk with you.”

by Michelle Simpson

Prayer

Oh Lord, Father and Creator. Hear my humble prayer. Let me hear and recognize your voice. Guide me in all I say and do. Let me walk with you today. Amen.

Sound Teaching

“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.” 2 Timothy 4:3

Greetings brothers and sisters in Christ,

I hope this message finds you well and full of the Lord’s spirit. I am hoping that the words that I’ve written will be of some comfort and get one’s mind thinking. As I think of where we are at as a country I listen to all the noise coming at us from every direction and it really has us confused about what is true or false. I read a verse recently that made sense to me but yet was confusing, 2 Timothy 4:3 I encourage you to read it as I did and I hope that after you do this will make some sense to you.

As I pondered, I was very confused about the message. I understood that sound teaching will evade us as it has so many times before. We would like to believe that we have a firm grip on reality and even if we didn’t, why would we admit we didn’t. So therefore, we look somewhere else for the answers of like minded people. This is fine as long as we put things into the context in which they were meant.

Today we find separation in the world because we don’t like what we are hearing. We want to be right, so we look for teachers who are going to tell us right from wrong regardless if we are or not. It makes us feel good when we are on the winning side and today there is no losing.

When we see so many fighting against each other, we believe that we are on the right side and we are not. Satan is winning, he is doing exactly what he wants us to do. He is allowing us to not be more Christ like and divides us for his pleasure. I’m not saying we are all good or all bad, but it is important to keep in mind what our Lord wants us to be. Now in the world if the law was put into place to love your neighbor, can you imagine the debate! God doesn’t want us debating this; he already explained from generation to generation his wishes for us. As we turn the page let’s not follow the teaching of false prophets but the sound scripture he provided for us in his good book. He wants us to follow him and no one else!

by Gene Sharwano

Prayer

Father bless us as we search for peace through our life. May you guide us and we keep you close to our heart. May your word continue to guide our path and may you continue to forgive us always for our sins.

Read the Fine Print

“He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.”
Isaiah 53.9

How often do we skim over what seem to be meaningless or unimportant details, only to discover that they are needed to complete the picture? The opening words of today’s verse appear to be a matter-of-fact description of Jesus’ death and burial. But when we contemplate the significance of our Lord’s death and resurrection, we find them a source to strengthen our faith in God’s Word because we realize that any and all detail—no matter how seemingly insignificant—enables us to grasp the message of God. Along with Isaiah we trust in God’s Word: “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’” (Isaiah 46.10).

Jesus was crucified along with two other criminals, probably insurrectionists. In the minds of those who condemned him, his body would have been assigned to a mass grave along with others who had been executed. It would not have come as a surprise for Jesus’ body to have ended up on a pile of other crucified people.

That Jesus would be buried with the rich is a surprise. Quite astonishing. How could someone who was considered a criminal be afforded some measure of honor in burial? Again, the details speak volumes. We are told in the gospels that Joseph of Arimathea took responsibility to give Jesus’ body a proper burial, for he was a secret disciple of Jesus (John 19.38), a rich man (Matthew 27.57), who placed the body in his own new tomb (27.60).

In all of this we must not forget Jesus’ love for sinners. While Jesus was on the cross, one of the criminals expressed belief in him as having a kingdom. Upon hearing this Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23.43). The criminal got in “under the wire,” and “confessed Jesus when there was still time” (R. T. Kendall, *Why Jesus Died*, p. 155). Perhaps there are some reading our devotional who feel they have waited too long to become a Christian. Now is the time to heed the apostle Paul’s proclamation: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” (Romans 10.9-10). The one assigned a grave with the wicked and buried by a rich man is the one who receives all who believe with open arms.

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for your patience. May we all take advantage of it. In the Name of the One who was “assigned a grave with the wicked” on our behalf. Amen.

– Monday –

Verbs

“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.”

By chance I heard an interview with a native plant ecologist who is also a linguist, she mentioned how her native language is composed of 70% verbs and in comparison the english language is composed of 70% nouns; she spoke of her native language as one that was filled with action, doing, being, creating—the verbs; where as much of our english language focus on the passive nouns.*

It is an interesting interview much more about plants than words, but it struck me that so often the “nouns” of our world keep us stuck, especially all the stuff. It is time for spring, to freshen and lighten and shake off; let us set forth from the weight of winter into the doing of spring.

Give yourself a list of doing words for your spring rebirth; let Easter carry you into the dawn of doing. Just three - freshen, lighten, shake off, those work for me and will take me into the crowded closets, the mucky windows, and the covered garden. What words of action work for you and where will they take you? As Christ again enters our hearts anew, let us make space by letting go and giving away, clear the dust and let the light shine in, plow the ground and plant new seeds. Alleluia.

* “...in Anishinaabemowin it is not possible to speak of that robin or that strawberry as an “it.” It is not possible because we speak with a grammar of animacy.... And it’s a verb-based language. One of my favorite examples is that you hear the wind with an animate verb, but if an airplane went over, we would hear it with an inanimate verb. Most of our language is verbs. About 70 percent of Anishinaabemowin is verbs and 70 percent of English is nouns. It’s this notion of living in a completely different world, a world which is alive and that you are related to.”

Robin Wall Kimmerer, a professor of environmental and forest biology at the State University of New York; She’s also an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, and she draws on Native traditions and the grammar of the Potawatomi language, Anishinaabemowin, to formulate a new way of ecological thinking.

Quote from the interview, “We’ve Forgotten How to Listen to Plants.” December 2020, To the Best of Our Knowledge; ttbook.org

by Trish Dowd Kelne

Prayer

Creator God, let us hear your voice and be moved to action, called to your Easter spring. Amen, amen.

Sharp Words

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12, NIV

Have you ever responded to a comment too quickly? Maybe you have overreacted to a comment that you took out of context? I think the best way to describe this is being human. As we interact with other people, it is common that we are going to run across different opinions. Our words carry more weight than we realize. We share our stories, experiences, thoughts with people but sometimes we do not understand how they affect the other person's day. I could be expressing that I am excited about an upcoming promotion while talking to someone who just lost their job. Or share how thrilled I was to take an exciting getaway when someone has never left the city. These statements are not meant to hurt the other person's feelings; however, they can affect their mood, anxiety, or feelings.

So now let us take the human conversation to the next level. The bible shares stories and experiences for us to enjoy. As we read, we start to learn more about his image, and purpose for coming to Earth. When Jesus talked to his people, if they responded harshly, he did not take it personally. Instead, he spoke in parables to make it easier for them to understand his purpose. Sometimes, I think that we speak in parables to people without even knowing it; we wrap up the meaning of our conversations in this imaginary paper. One thing that we can all do better as human beings is to slow down, think, and then speak. When we are angry or frustrated, I feel as if we use our words as whips to just hit anything in our path. Instead, we can breathe, take a pause in the moment, and realize that the world is not attacking us. Jesus is the perfect example of this as he remained calm and collected no matter who he was talking to. This is impossible for us to attain; however, it is something that we could strive towards. Jesus used his words instead as a tool that equipped him for his faith. He taught us words to pray when we are angry and showed us how to forgive and move on when others have spoken out. Use today as a reminder that our words carry more than just letters on a page. Let us pray.

by Kurt Hamilton

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, we come to you. We say these words not only for ourselves but for the people around us. Let us look at conversation differently today as we speak with a calm, collected presence. Help us understand the weight of our words and remind us that they are being spoken through you. Lead us to your words, as they remind us of your teachings. Remind us that you gave us a path to follow and that we hear your voice each day. We are thankful for your gifts and vision as we start this day. We say this in your son's holy name, Amen.

Embracing a Confident Expectation

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Romans 5:1-5

Our first benefit of justification (right standing with God). I am justified by faith and because of this, I am made whole and I am not at war with God through Jesus. There is nothing missing, lacking, or broken because it is Jesus who fills in the gap. Our second benefit of Justification is our new positioning in grace and enjoying all of whom God is. It is also through Jesus that I have “access by faith” (Greek) *prosagoge*; this phrase implies 2 things:

1. The introduction into a relationship
2. Ongoing access in an already existing relationship

Within this text, it refers to the second implication referring to an already existing relationship. So, in other words, in this already existing relationship, I have ongoing access through Jesus to grace for the glory of God or for God to demonstrate His glory (all of His greatness) within me through Christ. I can stand on this promise and I rejoice in HOPE (hope means having a confident expectation).

We rejoice in our suffering, not necessarily just because it’s happening, but it is in our suffering where we produce the posture and the ability to endure. Endurance is the place that reminds us to keep pushing forward. It allows space to grow as we address/experience hard situations that come by living life.

As we endure the pressures of our sufferings, we develop proven character. Since God has not just called us to be good but to be a transformed, our character must be called into question through testing. The more endurance occurs, the firm and settled we become in our identity and confidence in Christ; thus, we move closer to the eternal purpose of what God has for us to do because we are immovable in who we are in Jesus Christ. This developed character through testing increases our capacity to hope or our confident expectation.

This hope in Jesus does not disappoint us nor does it put us to shame because of the love that God has for us; He pours that love into us and fills our heart by Holy Spirit who is the deposit or down-payment God has put in us to ensure and assure that He will keep His promise. This love not only refers to what Jesus did on the cross or his resurrection alone, but rather a subjective sense of God’s love that we experience personally through Holy Spirit.

by LaMoine Tatum

Prayer

Father, I thank you for who you are, and I always acknowledge you especially during this time of refocusing. Thank you for always hearing me when I pray. Thank you for your living word that as I continually to receive it, it becomes effective in me. Thank you for this ongoing access relationship with you. I praise you for pouring your love into me that causes me to change my world for the better and for your purpose. Help me to stand firm in this hope that does not disappoint me nor puts me to shame. Continue to challenge me with putting my trust in you and I embrace the grace you me when I fall. Help me to embrace and walk in love, hope, and grace even during times of trouble. Amen.

God's Way

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” Genesis 50:20

The story of Joseph is a famous story from the bible, one that is told so often that it's easy for the story to lose its impact. Joseph was a teenager when he was sold into slavery by his brothers. He worked hard and maintained his faith but was thrown into prison after refusing a relationship with his boss's wife. Things seemed to keep getting worse for Joseph, who was forgotten in the prison for many years. He had a pretty rough youth. It would have been easy for Joseph to become angry and bitter, blaming God for all of his problems. Yes, despite everything, he didn't.

Eventually Joseph was released from prison and rose to become one of the most respected officials in Egypt. When his brothers came to ask him for help, Joseph didn't turn them away. He put them through a series of tests and ended up bringing his entire family to Egypt to be protected and cared for. Joseph never questioned his faith. He never looked at his circumstances in anger, never blamed God for the traumatizing events in his life. He never turned his back on God. In fact, after becoming reunited with his family, he responded with a statement of faith – certain that, even though his brothers meant all of these things to be harmful, God used them for good.

Take a moment to reflect on this. Joseph, in his teenage years, had his entire life ripped out from under him, yet never blamed God. How many times have things gone differently than you expected and, instead of believing that God had purpose in it, blamed Him, questioned Him, complained to Him?

If you truly believe that God has your best interest in mind, wouldn't it make sense that even when things are difficult, even when the road seems treacherous and everything seems to be falling apart, God is using it for good?

by Sydney Shrimpton

Prayer

Heavenly Father, keep me from turning on you when circumstances don't go your way. Help me see that you are working for my good. Help me trust in that, give me the strength to put one foot in front of the other, and support me as I keep the faith. Please take my every situation and use it for good. Help me lean on you – I know you hear; I know you know.

Waiting on the Lord

It is snowing outside and colder than it's been in a decade. I must be up early, but I got stuck waiting. The snow was supposed to subside, the temperature bottom out, and so I waited to gauge the accumulation-totals and to check the final low temperature. I waited...waited...on snow that would not stop and temperature that continued to drop. On edge from waiting, I grudgingly decided to give up and shutdown until tomorrow. Now, wakeful in bed, I am keenly aware of the slow pace of the wee hours of the morning. I am decidedly sick and tired of waiting... for the coming of Spring, for my turn for a COVID vaccination, for the world to seem less grumpy, for a swirl of looming, undone things (large and small) that fail to resume or subside. I have lost perspective on priorities and practicalities and am stuck just staring at the ceiling, feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. Covered up, but not snuggled down, I am counting burdens as they pile up and weigh heavy on my heart---my inner world mirroring the snow outside piling on the tree branches and testing their strength.

"I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning."
Psalm 130:5-6

All the drifts of life's drama and worry has slowly overtaken the space I had reserved for God. Not once, in the murky awareness of my waiting state, did I keenly reflect on the coming solemnity of the passion of Christ's suffering and death or the pending celebration of his triumphant resurrection. With the drone and pace of 2020 still set in my heart, I fear I have become neither watchful nor ready. I long for the morning, but not with a sake of longing for my God. My hope has grown overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the undone and unknown. Such then is my Lenten journey this year; a quest for perspective and priorities and a return to waiting on the Lord with my whole being.

by Chaplain John Holzhüter

Prayer

Jesus, I feel weary and worn from the pace of the world. I am covered up; waiting for motivation and perspective. Stuck in rut on my Lenten path, my vision seems narrow and shortsighted. In your mercy and grace, recharge and renew my drooping spirit. Open my eyes and my heart to the power of your plan. Grant me an Easter morning where I clearly see the tangible promises manifested in your sacrifice and commit to better build your kingdom. Amen.

All's Well That Ends Well

“Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.”
Isaiah 53.10

If I had any doubts about who was responsible for Jesus’ death, they were eliminated about five years ago while teaching at Ottawa University. I had read Isaiah 53 numerous times but never had the opening words of today’s verse hit me like they did when preparing to teach a course on the Book of Isaiah. It was like I was reading them for the first time! In fact, I simply stopped when reading them; I was stunned by the thought God was solely responsible for Christ’s death. Not me or you or Pontius Pilate or the Roman soldiers or the Jewish leaders.

My thoughts went quickly to the trial of Jesus when he stood before Pontius Pilate. The Roman governor was irritated that Jesus wouldn’t answer his questions when asked. In his frustration he asked Jesus if he didn’t realize as governor he had the power to release him or have him crucified. To this Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19.11). In light of this reply and the words of today’s verse, I acknowledged that the Father was responsible for the events of Good Friday.

But in the same breath, we notice something new in this chapter. The thought that the Suffering Servant *will survive* all that was placed upon him and all that he was destined to endure is (finally!) introduced. His resurrection and future reign as Lord are also presented as part of God’s will.

He will see us, his spiritual descendants (Isaiah 53.8), because his days are prolonged. His reign will have no end (9.7) and he will be exalted (52.13), as was fulfilled in his ascension (Acts 1.9). He now sits at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1.20-23) and has raised us up with him (2.6). Even greater, “the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand,” for he will continue to walk with us as God marches on to victory; this will be realized by all when the new heavens and new earth become reality (Revelation 21.1-4). “The atonement of Jesus Christ has given us everything we need. God’s will to crush him has been vindicated” (R. T. Kendall, *Why Jesus Died*, p.169). Praise be to God!

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Dear Lord, may we take to heart the lessons of our verse for today. “Have faith in your journey. Everything had to happen exactly as it did to get you where you’re going next” (Mandy Hale). Amen.

Renegotiating Lenten Commitments (One Way to be Redeemed is to Learn From Our Mistakes)

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”(Lk.23:24)

Before we plunge into Holy Week, I want both to encourage and challenge all of us we come into the “home stretch” of our Lenten experiences. The big lesson He taught us on the cross is that inner peace and world peace depend upon our willingness to forgive others, and ourselves, too.

Regarding forgiving ourselves, how has your Lenten experience gone so far? How well have you done with your Lenten sacrifices and commitment? (Even if by chance you did not make a commitment, it does not matter, read on) Whether you have done well or not, the results can be redeemed or augmented. That is, there is great potential for making it a graceful learning experience out of it all. For instance, if you have not done well, God might be calling you to recognize some of the following:

- 1) Maybe I did not try hard enough.
- 2) Maybe I chose something I was incapable of accomplishing.
- 3) Possibly I neglected to consult God when making a decision.
I may be called to renegotiate –even at this late date
- 4) We cannot make ourselves holy; we need God’s grace to become holy.
- 5) There may be something else God is calling me to recognize. What might that be?

If you have done well with your commitment, what are you learning from that?

- 1) Did I choose something too easy?
- 2) Have I become a little too self-satisfied, forgetting that my success is mainly due to God’s grace?
- 3) Have I forgotten to thank God for helping me succeed?

No matter what, the bottom line is that Lent is all about developing a more intimate relationship with God and learning something about oneself, about life and love. God can redeem our worst failures. He can soften the hardest ground as He did with St. Paul. That is the nature of God. What a wonderful God we have!

by Rev. Justin D. Gnanamuthu, C.S.C.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for giving us this season of Lent for our reflection and the evaluation of our commitments. Thank you also for challenging us through your holy word and giving us the courage to rededicate ourselves to you and to the values of your Kingdom.

– Tuesday –

Renew

“Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

The cycle of lent comes toward the end. In Psalm 51, we seek God’s mercy and the gift of renewal. So it is as we near the Passion and the Empty Tomb. How has Lent transformed you? What remains in need of God’s mercy; what must we struggle through? Have you discovered your spirit willing? Are you steadfast, rooted in Christ? Let Psalm 51 give voice to these questions, bring your heart to God and open yourself to God’s renewal.

by Fredrikson Center Team

Prayer

Restoring God, bringer of life, grant us the courage to return to you, to ask your mercy, to seek your renewal; let us rejoice in your salvation with willing spirit, and sustain us as we bravely work to become renewed through this Lenten season. Amen.

– Wednesday –

Reading the Ending First

After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
Isaiah 53.11

The thought that Jesus would resurrect, and reign forever is repeated in today's verse (see 53.10). The Suffering Servant will see the light of life, he will return to the land of the living. Though he was treated brutally and killed, he will defeat death, a death required because of our iniquities.

Furthermore, he will be satisfied; he will have completed the task before him and will receive the fruits of his effort. In John 19.30 we are told that just before he died Jesus declared, "It is finished." This was a cry of victory, a declaration that all had been paid in full: "The travail and anguish of his soul was worth it all! He had dreaded the cross. But in the physical [and spiritual] torture of it all he had inner peace that he pleased the Father" (R. T. Kendall, *Why Jesus Died*, p.176).

Such achievement was undergirded by his knowledge that he was the Son who knew the cross was part of the Father's will. Jesus understood his mission, his Father's love, and his plan to raise his Son to live and rule forever as king (Isaiah 9.7). He acted wisely (52.13), as seen in that many were justified. The doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone means we have ceased being God's enemy and been brought into a loving relationship with him solely because of Christ's death (Romans 5.8). Those who have accepted Christ as the true Savior of the world have been adopted into his family (8.15-17). We don't have to have great faith to receive salvation, for we have a faithful Savior and what is asked of us is that we "simply rely on what Jesus did, not on what [we] have done—and rest [our] case with him!" (R. T. Kendall, *Why Jesus Died*, p.180).

Even greater is the truth that when we are justified and reconciled to God, we are remade and become his masterpiece, "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2.10). We show our gratitude to God by living as his hands and heart and mouth to witness to others and in the process become channels for them to discover God's Righteous Servant. What a great God we serve!

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Dear Savior, we praise you because you, the Righteous One, suffered that we, the unrighteous ones, might be given your righteousness. Amen.

– Thursday –

Ever Flowing Grace

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scriptures said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

John 7:37b-38.

“O Lord,
One tiny bit of water rests on the palm of my hand.
I bring it to you and with it I bring the whole ocean.
This tiny drop has the power to ease the burning thirst of men,
When spread on the earth, to give life to the seed and the future harvest,
When poured on the fire to quench the blaze
A tiny drop of water
Can cleanse the whole of my impurity when blessed by your forgiveness.
But, O Lord,
More than all this, this tiny drop of water passed over my head is the symbol of my birth in You.
- Ishpriya R. S. C. J.

(Sister Ishpriya, R. S. C. J. is an English member of an international Catholic religious congregation, the Society of the Sacred Heart. She left Europe for India in 1971 and since 1974 she has lived in the foothills of the Himalayas, a Christian presence among Hindu Sanyasis, committed to Inter-faith dialogue in a spirit of mutual understanding and common search).

Imagine being there...standing on the banks of the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. What do you see around you? Who do you recognize? What do

you hear? What does the water of the Jordan River feel like running through your fingers? Jesus emerges from the water of the Jordan filled with the Holy Spirit. Do you stand there wondering in amazement?

Water is a rich symbol filled with spiritual meaning. Water is rebirth. Water is life. All living things are dependent upon water for sustaining life. We can go for a few weeks without food, but without water, we will die in a matter of days.

We are all familiar with the use of water in many religious rituals and sacred rites like baptism, because water symbolizes the Giver and Sustainer of Life. In two instances in the Bible, Jesus uses the term “living water.” A Samaritan woman came to draw water at the well, and Jesus asked her for a drink. She was surprised that He had asked her for water, and says that he would give her living water. In the second mention of living water, Jesus is in the temple and exclaims, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scriptures said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” John 7:37b-38.

Jesus can bring us to the water of Life eternal. The reference Jesus makes to Living Water is the grace of the Holy Spirit ever flowing to us and through us with the gifts of precious cleansing, sustaining, reviving, filling and healing life for us.

by Dr. Paula Artac

Prayer

Giver and Sustainer God, we offer our grateful hearts, thirsting for and welcoming your Son. May we make use of the ever flowing grace of your Holy Spirit as we continue our Lenten journey. Amen.

Let Go and Let God Have His Way

“Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.
When I said, My foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In the
multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.”
Psalm 94:17-19 KJV

If we didn't have mountains to climb we would not have victory. We would not have a testimony of the goodness of God. When we become overcomers we realize that we are much stronger than we think we are, but sometimes we forget that we are never alone, we have the Holy Spirit to accompany us through life. As we near the end of the season of Lent, we must always remember, what Jesus did for us and why He did it.

Jesus came to earth with a purpose in mind, reconnecting us with God, the Father. One of the hardest things to understand and accept is: Jesus was born of a virgin, lived without sin, loved us so much that He died in our place for our sins, was buried, rose on the third day and this was what reconnected us with God. This is why we need to let go of control of all our problems and let God be in control of our life. We need to allow God to order our steps in His Word, the Bible. If we are obedient and allow God to lead us we shall have peace, love, hope and joy in the midst of whatever we are going through. Always remember we are going through life this is not our destination. Our destination is Heaven not earth. Now it is up to each of us to personally make a decision to accept what Jesus has done for us and gain eternal life.

by Rev. Dr. Dorothy Smith

Prayer

Let us pray,

Thank you Jesus for what you have done for me, for your life, death and resurrection. I accept all that you have done for me and I accept your salvation. I make you my Savior and my Lord. I wait patiently for your return. Help me to live a life you will be proud of saying, “This is my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” In Jesus name and for His sake I pray,

Amen.

– Saturday –

Saving the Best for Last

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.
Isaiah 53.12

An interesting question to ask when reading Scripture is, *what is the therefore.... there for?* By definition, the term therefore means “as a result.” In today’s verse the therefore alerts readers to significance of the Suffering Servant’s actions of justifying many (see 53.11).

The unpromising root out of dry ground (53.2) is presented as the victorious warrior who overcame all to take his rightful place at the right hand of God. The first eleven verses of Isaiah 53 have been words attributed to the prophet Isaiah. But today’s verse takes on a special quality because it is God speaking about vindicating the one despised and rejected by all, even to point of considering him punished by God. Yet in all of this we discover that his suffering was not because of his guilt and sin but because of ours.

Because Jesus bore our sin, he is our Great High Priest. As Paul tells us Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for us in the presence of the Father, making petitions on our behalf (Romans 8.34), for we are sinful and unworthy to come before the Father on our own. In short, our verse

for today is summed up elegantly by Paul when he says of Christ:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be
used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is
Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2.6-11)

“When we confess that Jesus Christ is ‘Lord’, we are affirming him to have that name which is above every name, namely ‘Yahweh’. That is as high as it gets” (R. T. Kendall, *Why Jesus Died*, p.182).

by Dr. Rich Menninger

Prayer

Dear Servant, you suffered that we might have all that you wanted us to have. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I thank you. Amen.

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May our great God and Savior use these devotionals to minister to one and all.

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