THE LIFE OF

JESUS



VOLUME 4

READINGS, DEVOTIONS, POEMS

FISHERS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The life of Jesus has been centermost to Christians for over 2000 years. His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension are central to the faith for believers all around the world. Everything that came before Him is B.C. – Before Christ. All that has come since is A.D. – Anno Domini, a Latin phrase that means, "in the year of our Lord." Indeed, Jesus is the centerpiece of history.

This study of Jesus' life provides a means to slow down and spend a year getting to know Him more deeply, more authentically, more intimately. His life is told in the four Gospels of the Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This study merges them together into one chronological series of 260 readings, at five readings a week. Sometimes an episode from Christ's life is told in only one of the four Gospels. Other times it is told in two, three, or even all four of the Gospels. In those instances, the reference for all of the Gospel occurrences is noted.

Now a little reminder. While this is a chronological study of the life of Jesus, nobody can piece together all of the events in Jesus' life in the exact order they occurred. This study follows a plausible sequence of events. But it is good to remember that the gospel writers weren't overly concerned with these sequential matters. They had a story to tell. There is great merit to reading each Gospel on its own from beginning to end. But that is for another time. Here, we will attempt to look at the overarching story of the life of Jesus in roughly chronological order.

There are several components to this year-long exploration into Jesus' life:
1. Daily Scripture Readings – Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Christ. (In This Booklet)
2. Daily Devotions – These are written by me and correlate with the daily readings to help you think more deeply about what you are reading. (In This Booklet)
3. Daily Poems – These are written by my sister-in-law, Rev. Dr. Martha FrizLanger. They will help you imagine Jesus' story through poetry. (In This Booklet)
4. Weekly Studies – These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum and others, are great tools for small groups and classes.
5. Weekly Sermons – If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always go to fishersumc.org/resources/sermons to view online.
6. Weekly Podcasts – Ben and I will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week's readings.
7. Seasonal Opportunities – There will be varied opportunities for children, youth, and adults to connect with Jesus deeply throughout the year.
Many of these components are available online at fishersumc.org/the-life-of-jesus or in our Fishers UMC app that is available to download free in your app store.

Throughout my devotions, I use capital letters when referring to Jesus: Son, King, Messiah, His, He, Him, etc. This sets Jesus apart from other mere humans. An exception is when talking about His relationships (e.g. "Mary's son"). I do the same for references to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation.

All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

Enjoy the journey!

Rev. Mark A. Ellcessor
Senior Pastor, Fishers United Methodist Church

MONDAY, AUGUST 29TH - WEEK 40, DAY 1

Jesus Speaks about Paying Taxes

☐ Read Matthew 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, Luke 20:20-26

DEVOTIONAL

First, some context. Let's back up a verse to see all the players trying to do away with Jesus. "Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest... But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away. Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words" (Mark 12:12-13).

The chief priests (the in-charge Sadducees) were all about power.
The Herodians (who embraced Greco-Roman culture) were all about pleasure.
The Pharisees (who focused on Jewish Law) were all about purity.

These guys looked at life through completely different perspectives. Actually, they didn't understand and often couldn't stand each other. But they had one thing in common: Jesus was a threat to what they embraced. He had to be eliminated. So they set a trap.

"Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." This statement famously extracted Jesus from the trap the Pharisees and Herodians had set. In it, we learn that Jesus said that He would continue to be part of society, even if the government was oppressive and unwelcome. Still, Jesus didn't advocate being complicit – He called the tax collectors to abandon their post and take up a life of generosity, and He warned us against futilely trying to serve the dual masters of God and money.

To Jesus, money was simply a thing – pay your taxes, buy food, give to the poor. When used properly, it has no greater significance than a rock or a mug or a job. Only God is God. And only God deserves our devotion and dedication, our faith and our hope, our love and our life.

POEM

Life's Questions

Who gets my money?
Who gets my time?
How shall I spend all my
Nickles and dimes?

Who gets allegiance?
To whom do I vow?
Who gets the fruit from my
Hoe and my plow?

Who gets saluted?
Whom do I hail?
Who gets to regulate
Justice's scale?

Who writes the law book?
Who makes the rules?
In which public sector will
I now be schooled?

Who is my master?
To whom shall I bow?
Pay taxes to Caesar or
Choose Jesus now?

Where will that leave me?
What of my fate?
Life's questions before me.
Shoot crooked or straight?

NOTES

TUESDAY, AUGUST 30TH - WEEK 40, DAY 2

Jesus Speaks about the Resurrection

☐ Read Matthew 22:23-33, Mark 12:18-27, Luke 20:27-40

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus had just spoken about paying taxes and tithing to God. This silenced the Herodians (who thought that paying taxes to the Romans was a good exchange for all the luxuries to be enjoyed in the Greco-Roman culture) and the Pharisees (who strictly taught about obedience to God through tithes and offerings).

Now it was the Sadducees turn to take a crack at Jesus. They didn't believe there was an afterlife, while the Pharisees did believe there was a resurrection of the righteous to heaven. Their goal was to trap Jesus, by forcing Him to take a side in their tense disagreement with one another. I love how Jesus responds, telling them that marriage is for people here on earth, but in heaven we will be like angels. Notice the important word "like" angels. We do not become angels.

In the decades that I have been a pastor, I have done countless funerals. People often take comfort in the reunion aspect of death – that Grandpa is with Grandma again – and that he is fishing, or golfing, or I suppose, playing Bingo or Blackjack. We have simply turned heaven into a never-ending version of what we liked about life on earth.

But our reunion is not so much with Grandpa as it is with Gabriel, for we will be "like angels" who have since creation spent every moment serving and praising God. Heaven is not an eternity of self-interests fulfilled; it is an eternity of selflessness submitted to God's holiness.

Indeed, we are co-heirs with Christ, and what we stand to inherit (His gifts, His fruit, His attributes) make us more fit to serve and praise God, not to reunite with our family for a never-ending vacation trip!

Why did Jesus' words so offend the Sadducees?

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POEM

Really?

Have you listened to people
When they talk about heaven?

"Looking forward to that golf game in the sky!"
"Can't wait to strum my harp on a cloud."
"Imagine being able to 'beam up' and about whenever you want."
"Wonder who I'll see and if they made it..."
"Who's going to be my roommate?"
"If I've been divorced, who is my spouse in heaven?"
"Wonder if my pet dog from childhood will greet me..."
"Can you believe it? Streets of gold!"

Really?

Are we really that small in our understanding?
Are we really that limited in our imagining?

For me...

I'm looking forward to being in a place

Where I can see Jesus,
first and foremost
Where my Heavenly Father's power is truly known and secrets of creativity are shared
Where the Holy Spirit is fully present because I can finally be fully present

Only then can I be in heaven, the place

Where tears are gone
Where truth is spoken
Where everyone is healed from all the brokenness
Where curses are canceled
Where work is purposeful and fruitful
Where everyone is loved
Where sin is no more
Where war is not in the vocabulary
Where each is known as they are known...fully
Where praise is continuous
Where everyone is reconciled and all is forgiven
Where faith and hope are no longer needed
Where love is the driving force for Everything

Really!

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31ST - WEEK 40, DAY 3

Jesus Speaks about the Greatest Commandment

☐ Read Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34

DEVOTIONAL

In the last two readings, we saw how Jesus had stymied the Pharisees, the Herodians and the Sadducees. Now a legal expert of the Pharisees was back for another shot at Him. The Pharisees had embraced the hundreds & hundreds of commands in the written Law and Prophets (our Old Testament) and the thousands of commands in the oral Law (which were legalistic details of how to obey the written Law).

Of these thousands and thousands of commands, this guy tried to trap Jesus by asking, "What is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Maybe they could get Jesus to say, "Honor the Sabbath," or "Do not murder," or "Do not commit adultery." Then they could snare Him on ways that He broke Sabbath rules, or compared murder to anger, or let the adulterous woman go free.

Instead Jesus talked about love. The two greatest commandments:

- Love God
- Love people

That's it.
If you completely love God you will completely obey God.
If you completely love people you will completely serve people.

Take a moment and think about how you can fulfill these two great commandments of Jesus.

How are you being called to love God?

POEM

Largeness

Have you ever considered
the Largeness?
Have you even considered the
cost?
Have you considered the
vows you will take
When into a marriage you cross?

Full measure of Humble is needed.
Full measure of Courage
and Strength.
Full measure of Constancy Faithful
To live through a marriage's full
length.

Of course, it is legal to cut it,
To rip and to tear it to shreds,
To stab at the heart of the
covenant
A hard heart smashed,
crumbled in dread

Though "legal,"
a warning is sounding,
Beware! Though provision
is given,
The division will last for a lifetime
A Largeness not easily forgiven.

Full measure of Grace
that's not easy.
Full measure of
God's Healing Oil.
Full measure of
Prayers for the Other
When Hate seems to
constantly boil.

So before you consider
a marriage
Consider the Largeness it needs-
Maturity, Love and Forgiveness-
The Largeness to follow Christ's
lead.

NOTES

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1ST - WEEK 40, DAY 4

Jesus Speaks about the Messiah

☐ Read Matthew 22:41-46, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:41-44

DEVOTIONAL

In this exchange, Jesus silenced the Pharisees by quoting Psalm 110:1, in which King David referred to the Messiah as "Lord." This meant that the Messiah, while being a descendant of David, was also his God. Hebrews 13 uses the same psalm, among others, to prove the deity of Christ.

As a result of this dialogue, the religious leaders, "could not say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask [Jesus] any more questions" (Matthew 22:46). They weren't going to trap Jesus with a war of words. They would have to find another way.

However, "large crowd listened to him with delight" (Mark 12:37). People were beginning to think that Jesus might be the Messiah. Now, Jesus was saying that the Messiah is God. This thrilled the masses and petrified the religious establishment, who were beginning to lose their grip on the people. The religious leaders understood the implications. If Jesus claimed to be God, that was the ultimate blaspheme, worthy of death. If they couldn't get Him to publicly humiliate Himself, they would do it for Him.

Everything hangs on this truth: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God! Take some time to think or talk about Jesus' identity:

"Jesus" – His name literally means, "God saves"
"Messiah" (Hebrew) is the same as "Christ" (Greek), meaning "Anointed One"
"Son of God" – making Jesus equal with God the Father

What do these words mean to you?

POEM

One Day
One day
I will be with you
Naked
Bare
Real
Comforted
Loved
Unveiled
Intimate
I will be with you
One day

NOTES

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 2ND - WEEK 40, DAY 5

Jesus Warns against Religious Hypocrisy

☐ Read Matthew 23:1-12, Mark 12:38-40, Luke 20:45-47

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus really hated hypocrisy. The Pharisees had just decided to stop trying to win a war of words with Jesus. But this didn't stop Jesus from putting them on the spot. He told his disciples and the masses to do what the Pharisees say, but don't do what they do.

This would be the worst commentary I can think of for my ministry. Let me teach about honor, honesty, and humility. But let me live that way too. There is power in teaching by words and power in teaching by example. When one is missing, the message is weakened. But when both are evident, the combination is a force that will change the world as we lead people to have the character of Christ and live the calling of Christ in their lives.

How about you? Do your actions match your words? Does your walk match your talk?

When I think about spiritual growth, it is helpful to delineate between a believer in Jesus and a follower of Jesus. Here are my working definitions:

A believer is someone who has embraced a Biblical, Christian worldview.

A follower is someone who is living a Biblical, Christian lifestyle.

In other words, a believer has the right talk, while a follower has the right walk.

What are some ways in which you need to grow as a believer?

What are some ways in which you need to grow as a follower?

POEM

Credentials

Show me your awards
Show me your trophies
Show me your medals
Show me your degrees

And I will show you

My baptism
My congregation
My ministry
My Savior

You tell me
Who has the greater
Credentials

I already know

NOTES

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5TH - WEEK 41, DAY 1

Jesus Condemns the Religious Leaders

☐ Read Matthew 23:13-36

DEVOTIONAL

Several years ago I did a sermon series on becoming an authentic follower of Jesus. As part of it, I took a video camera to southern Indiana to interview my sister-in-law, Martha FrizLanger (yep, the author of our daily poems). The backdrop of one of those sessions was the local cemetery, filled with people who had died, some with peace, some with turmoil, some with satisfaction, some with regret.

We passed through the tombstones, where people were buried six feet under. We then entered a section of mausoleums, where people were buried six feet above. We dialogued together, wondering whether the deceased had a happy marriage, a content family, a vibrant faith. We speculated about whether they were committed followers of Jesus, or just church-going people, or folks who didn't believe in Jesus at all. Then, Martha connected this with the topic of our series, saying:

"You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean." Jesus said this to point out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Martha quoted it to address the hypocrisy in our own lives.

It is troubling to be compared to a whitewashed tomb, but it is so easy to become one. The outside is what everybody sees, so we spend enormous time and money on it. The inside is what God sees, and too often we neglect it.

Think about it. What are some of the skeletons in the closet of your life? What are some of the ways that are unholy and unclean before a righteous God? In what ways does the stink of the inside not match the polish of the outside? What will you do about it?

POEM

Impressed?
What impresses me?
Tall Towers of Babel?
Flowery Eloquence of Fools?
Great Homes which will Crumble?
Rich Cloth covering Leprosy?
The Power of Deception?
Strong Muscles of a Mortal?
Endurance of the Marathoner?
Degrees and Pedigrees?

What impresses me.
Chief Cornerstone called Jesus.
Simplicity of Truth.
Foundations of Eternity.
White Garment of Righteousness.
Humility of Incarnation.
Strength of God's Promises.
Endurance of God's Love.
Wisdom of the Ages.

NOTES

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH - WEEK 41, DAY 2

Jesus Honors a Poor Woman's Gift

☐ Read Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4

DEVOTIONAL

This passage properly follows Mark 12:38-40, where Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers." Then in today's reading this contrast is lived out before the disciples' eyes.

I like the way the Common English Bible translates Jesus' response: "All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had, even what she needs to live on."

Throughout the study of the life of Jesus, this theme of being all-in comes up again and again. Matthew left his lucrative tax-collecting job, Peter and Andrew left their secure fishing business, James and John left their father in the family fishing boat, and Zacchaeus not only stopped cheating people, but paid them back quadruple what he had swindled from them.

But not everybody was all-in with Jesus. Nicodemus the Pharisee is sort of interested, then sort of helpful, then completely present only after Jesus died. The rich, young ruler walked away when Jesus asked him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. At one point many of Jesus' followers turned away from Him because they couldn't swallow His teachings. And Judas, one of His twelve closest friends, sold out Jesus for a pocketful of cash.

Then this widow, who "from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had, even what she needs to live on." What have you held back from Jesus? Where is He getting only your spare change? In what ways are you, out of your helpless poverty, giving all that you have and all that you are?

POEM

Might a Mite

Might a mite
Once held so tight
Released, excite
Others invite
To share, unite
To bring delight

Might a mite
Relieve a plight
Of one small sprite
A mind ignite
Change ignorance night
To understanding light

Might a mite
Comfort a fright
And raise a knight
To fight the fight
Turn wrong to right
However slight

Might a mite
Give black or white
The power to write
A new insight
To claim birthright
Of future bright

Might a mite
Once held so tight
Released, excite
Other's invite
To share, unite
And birth delight

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7TH - WEEK 41, DAY 3

Jesus Teaches about His Return

☐ Read Matthew 24:1-51, Mark 13:1-37, Luke 21:5-38

DEVOTIONAL

Looking at the Temple, Jesus told His disciples about its pending demolition (it would be destroyed only a handful of years after Jesus ascended into heaven). Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus, "When will this happen?" Jesus talked about a number of things: wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions and more. But most interestingly, Jesus also said,

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

We have no control over war-hungry despots or world-ravaging disasters, but we do have responsibility for taking the gospel of salvation to all people in all nations. Everywhere in the world there are those who don't know the salvation message of Jesus. And there are more people alive today than have ever died. The task seems impossible, yet technology and travel have shrunk the world.

Take a few moments and go to operationworld.org to see some ways to pray for the world. Pick a nation that you have a connection with or that you have heard about in the news or simply the one that is suggested for the day you look it up. Read a little about the physical and spiritual needs of the people of that country. Then spend some time praying for them. Pray that their needs would be met. Pray for local church leaders to be multiplied within that nation. Pray for missionaries to hear and respond to the call to go to that nation. Pray for your own church to find ways to be responsive to some of the people in some of the nations in the world.

Claim the message of Jesus that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations."

POEM

Coming Soon

We sit in the dark
Waiting to be entertained
After all, we've paid our fare
And we have made ourselves
Comfortable
Chosen a seat with a great view
Popcorn and pop
Filling our bellies
Ready for the
Coming Soon
Attractions

We munch in the dark
As the screen fills with
Pictures of Armageddon
Screaming women running
With children hanging on
For dear life
With bombs exploding
And earth being raped
Family killing family
Coming soon
Entertained

We miss in the dark
The fig tree's budding
The churches' steeples falling
The ark being built
The devastation rising
For by now
The sugar spike from the
full belly
Has lulled us into drowsy sleep
Our eyelids droop
Coming soon
Sleep

We stagger in the dark
Groggy from the waiting
Lamps dry, unprepared
Drunk with ease
And like a thief who comes
In the night
We are caught unaware
Robbed of our best treasure
Dusty from non-use
No longer coming soon but
Here

NOTES

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8TH - WEEK 41, DAY 4

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

☐ Read Matthew 25:1-13

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus had just said about the end times, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). At the conclusion of this parable He states, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matthew 25:13). Half of the people in this parable miss out on the kingdom of heaven because they got tired of waiting for the bridegroom to return, and when he did it was at an unexpected time.

When one of my daughters got married, she had something like twelve bridesmaids in her wedding. If one of them had blown off the wedding because she was out shopping for her bridesmaid's dress, it would have been rude to go ahead and show up at the reception.

Jesus tells this parable to remind us to be spiritually ready for His return, whenever that will be. Spiritual unpreparedness leads to locked pearly gates. Now, in this life, is the time to get ready for the bridegroom. In their culture, the reception was a festival that lasted a week. In our faith, it is being present with Jesus in heaven for an eternity.

Recall our working definition of a disciple:

"A disciple is someone who knows, loves, and obeys Jesus Christ,
and is helping others do the same."

Are there any areas of your discipleship in which your lamp is out of oil? What steps can you take to live your life always prepared for Jesus' return, but not obsessed with trying to figure out when?

POEM

Enough

I know, dear Lord, that on my own
Supply will quickly vanish
Just like the widow--
one more meal--
My future causing anguish

The dredges of my oil supply
Deep darkness surely claiming
The wick is frayed becoming stubbed
Too small to hold bright flaming

The miracle of oil supply--
Sustain me through the night
The miracle of steady prayer
To keep me in the Light

Alert, my Soul, and open wide
The portal of your vessel
Receive this night the precious oil
Until Christ cross your threshold

The Bridegroom only
can supply
The strength to pray
and rise up
To greet Him, lamp lit,
burning bright
With His supply--enough

O, give me, Lord, this Holy Oil
Your Spirit flowing in me
Ignite my wick, trimmed by your Word
Until the day of no need

For on that day
Your face will shine
Creation's Light beholding
This earthly vessel made anew
Reflecting, known and knowing

NOTES

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9TH - WEEK 41, DAY 5

The Parable of the Invested Money

☐ Read Matthew 25:14-30

DEVOTIONAL

This parable is similar to the parable of the Ten Minas found in Luke 19:11-27 (see Week 34, Day 3). Here in Matthew, Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven "is like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them." Let's think about this for a moment.

If this story is about God's kingdom, and Jesus is the master, then it stands to reason that His followers are the servants in the story. In our day, that's you and I who are the "servants" in the story. And what does the master entrust to us? Oh, just His entire wealth.

Quick. Name any one of the richest people in the world. Now imagine if that person flew you to their estate, told you they were leaving for a long while, and told you that you were in charge of their entire wealth while they were gone. In fact, you were expected to increase their net worth by a significant amount. When they return at some undesignated time in the future, you will be held accountable for how high they are on the list of the world's wealthiest people.

That is exactly what God has done with us! All of the kingdom of God is available to us... right now. We have at our disposal the riches of His grace, the fruit of His Spirit, the spiritual gifts for ministry, the power of His forgiveness, and much, much more. The Master is going to return at some undesignated time in the future, but in the meantime we are expected to expand His kingdom and enlarge His wealth. When we meet Him, we will be accountable for how famous we have made His name!

Notice that in neither this parable nor the one in Luke is Jesus concerned with people taking a risk and failing. What He doesn't tolerate is someone just holding onto what has been entrusted to them out of fear. We are called to be bold, take risks, and make a difference in the kingdom of God!

POEM

Imagine

Imagine the risk of a great wealthy man
Who leaves all his earnings
in three servants' hands
Who calls each one forward and
doles out a share
Who trusts his whole fortune
then leaves without care

Imagine the weight on the
shoulder of one
Who fearfully holds the incredible sum
Who thinks it is safer
to hide wealth away
Who buries his share,
keeping failure at bay

Imagine the dreams of the
bright other two
Who imagine the possible things
they can do
Who invest, share and lend
with their Master in mind
Who know what they give will come
back many times

Imagine the thoughts of the man
traveling home
Who expects fields full harvested,
hoping shalom
Who calls forth his servants
the good news to hear
Who sees his first servant
trembling in fear

Imagine the anger of the
Great Benefactor
Who stands as the servant speaks with
nervous laughter
Who hears insults blaming his
own generous hand
Who must judge most harshly
this distrustful man

Imagine the joy felt by the
two servants true
Who show the great bounty
investments accrued
Who hear from their Master, "
How faithful! Well done!"
Who know the great bliss their
obedience won

Imagine the place you now have
in this tale
Who now is the model?
The ones who prevail?
Who warns against slothfulness,
caution and fear?
Who issues the judgment that you want
to hear?

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12TH - WEEK 42, DAY 1

The Parable of the Sheep & the Goats

☐ Read Matthew 25:31-46

DEVOTIONAL

Simple acts of compassion that are demanding:

- Feeding the hungry
- Providing water for the thirsty
- Showing hospitality to the stranger
- Clothing the naked
- Caring for the sick
- Visiting the imprisoned

Take a few moments and go to worldvision.org or samaritanspurse.org or compassion.com to explore some of the physical needs of people around the world. What did you discover? What could you do?

Now, think nationally and locally about ministries to the hungry and hurting in our cities, on our streets, in our prisons, and visiting our food pantries. How is God calling you to make a difference?

Finally, come even closer to home. Think about your neighborhood, your extended family, your co-workers, your classmates, and others in your social circle. What needs are you aware of? What will you do about it?

A believer is someone who has embraced a Biblical, Christian worldview.

A follower is someone who is living a Biblical, Christian lifestyle.

Will you be a follower of Jesus?

POEM

The Door

I stand at a door.

I know full well my life.

Scenes flash before me.

Times of challenge.
Times of grace.
Times of triumph.
Times of failure.
Times of duty.
Times of love.
Times of prejudice.
Times of hate.
Times of anger.
Times of understanding.

If honest with myself,

I know full well each moment.

A mixed bag.

Will the door open for me?

I stand at a door.

I cannot know all done for me.

Scenes flash before me.

Times of humility.
Times of courage.
Times of obedience.
Times of wisdom.
Times of healing.
Times of teaching.
Times of power.
Times of suffering.
Times of desertion.
Times of new beginnings.

If honest with myself,

I see full well the loving.

A dearest treasure

The Door has opened for me.

NOTES

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13TH - WEEK 42, DAY 2

The Plot to Kill Jesus

☐ Read Matthew 26:1-5, Mark 14:1-2

DEVOTIONAL

In the last week we have explored Jesus' call for His followers to win the lost through sharing the gospel and to heal the hurting through sharing our resources. The result of His message to love God and love people was for the religious leaders to come up with schemes to arrest Jesus secretly and kill Him.

It seems strange that they had nothing better to do. Certainly they were offended by His critique of them and by His claim to be the Son of God. And yes, the penalty for such things was death. But why not just focus energy on providing great religious leadership?

What is it about Jesus that provokes such strong reactions? These days, people get all upset when schools don't allow Christian conversation, when workplaces frown on Church talk, and when businesses go out of their way to avoid saying, "Merry Christmas." But what do you expect? Jesus told His followers to meet the spiritual and physical needs of others, and they wanted to kill Him.

I wonder if we have created a kinder, gentler Christianity to keep arm's length from risk and repercussion. We know that Jesus died for what He said and what He did. We know that Jesus told us that we might expect struggles or persecution if we adopt the Biblical worldview and live the Biblical lifestyle. So it's easier to play it safe, and safer to play it easy.

Let's make it real. Think about where you live, work, learn, and play. Within each of these four spheres in your life, who are some of the people with whom you come into contact? What are their spiritual and physical needs? Which of them is God calling you to make a difference? Now think about your city, region, nation, and world. Within these four spheres, what are some of the needs that come to mind? What will you do about it?
Take time to pray about all this, acknowledging that it may be both risky and rewarding.

POEM

The Christening

The Great Salvation Vessel
Was ready to be launched
Its mission set
Its body true
It sat upon the dock

Around the Blessed Vessel
The crowd enormous grew
Their hopes were high
Their doubts kept close
Their loyalty construed

Then to the Central Figure
A simple woman came
Her heart was full
Her treasure poured
Her gesture now was blamed

And from the Mighty Vessel
An agonizing groan
The wooden creak
The iron nails
The smite felt with a moan

The Glorious Journey
launched
Its maiden journey destined
Upon its bow
Upon its head
Upon its mission christened

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14TH - WEEK 42, DAY 3

A Third Woman Anoints Jesus

☐ Read Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9

DEVOTIONAL

We have looked at the challenge of knowing whether Jesus was anointed by a woman one, two or three times. Since there are striking differences between the episodes, we will treat them as three separate events:

1. Luke 7:36-50 in Nain at Pharisee's home, Jesus' feet were anointed by a sinful woman, whom Jesus forgave (Week 15, Day 4)
2. John 12:1-11 in Bethany Jesus' feet were anointed by Mary, sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, at their home, six days before the Passover. (Week 37, Day 5)
3. Matt. 26:6-13 & Luke 14:3-9 in Bethany at the home of Simon, a former leper, whom Jesus had healed, two days before the Passover.

In today's Scriptures, Jesus was at the home of Simon the Leper. This skin disease was so contagious that Simon would have been forced out of his home to live out his days in a leper colony in poverty. Apparently, Jesus had healed him, and this dinner at his table back in his home was a way of saying thank you.

In this anointing, the unnamed woman anointed Jesus' head, as compared to His feet in the previous episodes. Here the disciples were unified in saying the expensive perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. The juxtaposition of Simon and the woman is noteworthy. When Simon had leprosy, he would have lived in abject poverty in a leper colony. It might have been reasonable for the money to have been given to his former colony.

But Jesus replied, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me." What did Jesus mean by this? Who is responsible for the poor among us? What happens when we love Jesus, but neglect the world's problems? What happens when we do the opposite?

POEM

The Broken Record

Over and over and over again
The scratch
The broken place
The damage
Doesn't allow
The LP
The DVD
To continue the song
The story
To the end

I'm tired of being stuck
In the rut
In the jumbled pixels
That make no sense
That refuse to show me
The resolution
The finale
The consummation
Of my life

O God,
Lift the needle
And finish the song
Press the fast forward button
On the remote
And move me past this
Meaningless mess
To the neat
And ordered end

Where love conquers all
Where villains die
Where truth wins
Where confusion
is all sorted out
And peace enters in

I don't want to be a
broken record
Replaying, replaying,
replaying
Until I have driven myself
And all around me
Into the pitch of insanity

NOTES

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15TH - WEEK 42, DAY 4

Judas' Plots to Betray Jesus

☐ Read Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11, Luke 22:1-6

DEVOTIONAL

We have already seen how the religious authorities were coming up with schemes to arrest Jesus secretly and kill Him. But they didn't want the mobs to riot and blame them. All they needed was a patsy. They found their man in Judas Iscariot.

Luke tells us that Satan entered Judas (Luke 22:3). John tells us that Judas was a thief and often pilfered money out of the ministry money bag used for Jesus and His team (John 12:6). Maybe small acts of sin led to an openness to allowing Satan have complete control. Who knows?

Whether inspired by demons or greed, Judas went to the religious establishment and bartered away Jesus' life for thirty silver coins. Everybody has a price. The chief priests were delighted, rallying up their temple guard to be on high alert. Judas anxiously agreed, "and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present" (Luke 22:6).

I guess discretion is the better part of valor. This whole episode is sad. It's one thing to get disillusioned and walk away. It's another to stay put and deviously and deceptively look for a way to do away with your leader.

We will never fully know what motivated Judas to betray Jesus. Was it pure greed? Disillusionment with Jesus? An effort to force Jesus' hand to act politically and militarily? Or was he simply Satan's patsy?

In the end, Jesus is undone by the top religious authorities and one of His twelve most trusted followers. Being close to God doesn't insulate us from being influenced by Satan. It is we who should be on high alert!

Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

POEM

Jesus Erased

The sound of his chalk
Upon the black boards of
Their minds
Was so grating to
Their lives
They tried to conceive
A way to
Erase Jesus

But

The message of his word
Was written in the DNA of
Their lives
Playing eternal tapes in
Their minds
Conceived before light
No way to
Erase Jesus

NOTES

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16TH - WEEK 42, DAY 5

Jesus' Disciples Prepare the Passover Meal

☐ Read Matthew 26:17-19, Mark 14:12-16, Luke 22:7-13

DEVOTIONAL

When Jesus first arrived on the scene, John the Baptist said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Now, Jesus sends His disciples to prepare the Passover lamb, commemorating the angel of death passing over the homes of those who had the mark of the blood of the lamb (Exodus 12). The whole Bible is coming together in a single moment – the death of Jesus.

Jesus was preparing to celebrate the Passover meal. We call it the Last Supper. On that Thursday He would eat the Passover lamb. On that Friday, He would become the Passover Lamb, who takes away the sins of the world.

Paul would write, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). And later in that same letter, Paul said that when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, "whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

When Jesus sent Peter and John into the city to find a place for the meal, they seemed clueless, even though Jesus had more than once predicted His death. Their instructions were to find a kataluma (Greek word for guest room / upper room). This is the same word used for the place Jesus was born. Jesus would spend His first day and His last day in someone else's guest room. The man who had "no place to lay His head" would soon bow His head to the will of His Father for the sins of His creation.

Take some time to praise Jesus for His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension for the sake of His creation.

POEM

Elemental

Water
Gushing from womb deep
Falling over mountain crag
Streaming through valley green
Watering plants thirsty
Covering upon believer new
Quenching thirst daily
Baptism

Oil
Rising in trunk rooted
Abiding in branches attached
Forming in fruit olive
Streaming from press crush
Signing upon believer called
Sealing life eternal
Anointing

Grain
Falling into earth good
Rising from Sheol's deep
Forming into seed fruitful
Grinding into flour pure
Transforming in oven fire
Breaking in hands hospitable
Bread

Vine
Pruning off suckers poor
Shading fruit fragile
Bursting orbs red
Crushing grape sacrificed
Waiting for day coming
Overflowing into cup shared
Wine

Lamb
Birthing into flock hundred
Wandering toward valley deep
Surviving due to love search
Learning voice true
Coming when name whistled
Staying by shepherd good
Me

NOTES

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH - WEEK 43, DAY 1

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

☐ Read John 13:1-20

DEVOTIONAL

In gatherings there are always social expectations: who sits where, who stands by whom, who gets served first. But Jesus came proclaiming an upside-down, last-shall-be-first kingdom. Here He demonstrated it, by taking a towel and basin to go from being Lord and Teacher to slave and servant. This would foreshadow His work on the cross, where He was demoted from Omnipotent Creator to Suffering Servant (see Isaiah 52:13-53:12). To really get kingdom living we must understand and embrace this principle.

In the world, membership has its privileges. In the kingdom of God, membership has its obligations. Yes, we do inherit blessings and abundant living and eternal life as a result of believing in Christ. But we also inherit the responsibility that comes with following Christ – risk, sacrifice, suffering.

Jesus humbly washed the feet of Thomas, who would doubt Him. He washed the feet of Philip, who would abandon Him. He knelt down and washed the feet of prideful John, headstrong Peter, and traitorous Judas. Servanthood knows no boundaries.

Then Jesus told His disciples, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

Prayer: Lord, show me how to wash the feet of others…regardless. Show me whose feet to wash. Reveal to me how I may best serve them, whether it is humbling or even humiliating. Give me your heart of sacrificing my own self-interests for the sake of others. Also, show me when and where I should do these acts of humble servanthood in each person's life you are revealing to me. Amen.

++

POEM

I Love You

I loved you the first day I felt you
Moving, flipping the sign of new life
I loved on the day I first saw you
Your squirms and your cries
brought delight

And what a delight I had washing
The blood and the stain from the earth
I loved pouring baptismal waters
From the womb of the Spirit, your birth

Through long nights of tears
I brought comfort
Your first prayers held safe in gold bowls
With first steps of faith I was excited
To envision the places you'd go

When you wandered,
stepped of the Way narrow
When you thought you were far
from my view
When you found yourself eating
in pig sties
Then returned, I came running to you

Daily op'ning the pages of Scripture
And you drank milk then
moved on to steak
I witnessed the movement from hearing
To doing; your soul did awake

I loved watching you in the garden
Sowing broadly the seed that is good
I showed you the great joy of harvest
When others embraced Gospel Word

I love you when bent at the altar
There pleading for ones who are lost
I marvel how fruits of the Spirit
Find expression as you count the cost

I love when you come to the table
You dine with me, sharing my bread
From my cup you drink and remember
Each promise to you I have said

Your life now the dance of true worship
With mouth open singing my praise
When you come to Death's final struggle
I'll be close and love you always

And then, with the veil finally severed
The mystery revealed in full view
You'll see that my death, resurrection
Was all for my great love of you

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20TH - WEEK 43, DAY 2

Jesus & His Disciples Eat the Last Supper

☐ Read Matthew 26:20-30, Mark 14:17-23, Luke 22:14-30, John 13:21-30

DEVOTIONAL

The time had come for Jesus to pay the ultimate penalty for the sins of humanity. Among those at His last meal were His best friends, that is, those who would betray, deny, and abandon Him. Yet Jesus offered them His body and His blood. Jesus never waits for us to get our act in perfect order. It was "while we were still sinners that Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This Dirty Dozen verifies that truth.

Even as Jesus broke the bread and poured the wine, they "began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them." What is it about us that we just don't get it? Why are we so full of ourselves that we filter the call of Christ through the funnel of self-interest?

In response to their "me-first" bickering, Jesus said to them, "I confer on you a kingdom" (Luke 22:29). The Greek word for confer means to arrange and dispose of one's own affairs, possessions, or will. It has the sense of entering into a covenant with those upon whom the person is "conferring" their life's goods. Jesus received everything the Father in heaven possessed. Now, He was transferring His entire estate to His children.

Jesus does the same for us. Think of it. Jesus has conferred on me a kingdom! Inheriting such an estate comes with both rewards and responsibilities. Take a moment and make two lists, one with the rewards and the other with the responsibilities of Jesus conferring the kingdom of God on you! Go ahead, we'll wait…

Now pray that you would live into these blessings and obligations in a way that would honor the One who has conferred them to you!

POEM

Eucharistic Communion

From your beginning
You have been inside of me
I have dreamed of you
I have waited for you

And now as you grow
As you develop and mature
I will feed you
This is my body

Bone of my bone
Flesh of my flesh
Made in my image
Joy of my life

I will sacrifice for you
I will protect you with my life
How I love to feel you moving
Life stirring within you

And one day you will be born
Into a new life
Through the gushing of my water
And the spilling of my blood

Bone of my bone
Flesh of my flesh
Made in my image
Joy of my life

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21ST - WEEK 43, DAY 3

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

☐ Read Matthew 26:31-35, Mark 14:27-31, Luke 22:31-38, John 13:31-38

DEVOTIONAL

Walking toward the place where He would be arrested, Jesus told the Eleven the truth: you will desert me, all of you. And Peter, you will deny even knowing me. They took vows of loyalty, yet within the night it would all be true.

Jesus looked beyond that night to a future yet to come, telling Peter to strengthen the other disciples after he had repented and turned back to Jesus. While they would all fall away, Peter and the others would return to Jesus and spend the rest of their lives serving His purposes and building His Church on earth.

And how they would do it is found in John 13:34-35: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Authentic love. Nothing is more powerful.

Many people think that they are too flawed, too ordinary, too sinful, or too imperfect to make a difference for God. They dwell on their past failures, their current entanglements, and their future desires, figuring they all add up to elimination from being on God's team of world-changers.

But a thorough read of the Bible tells us just the opposite is true. The Jesus-team consists of self-centered, lying, defeated, ordinary people. Romans 2:4 says that "God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance." This kindness, love and forgiveness of God makes us into people of kindness, love and forgiveness.

Just as with the original disciples of Jesus, He looks beyond "that night" and sees in us a future in which we are seen by others to be disciples of Jesus because of the love we have for others! How is Jesus wanting the love of God to shine through your life?

POEM

Tag

How fast now can I say "Not It!"
In this life's game of Tag
How fast can I deny the truth
And not accept the blame
How fast can I just make a plan
How fast can I slip out of hand
How fast can I run from the Man
Who knows all that I am

How slow am I to tell the truth
In everyday I live
How slow am I kneel, repent
And the true answer give
How slow and sneaky can I be
How slow to think of them, not me
How slow the dark, real damage see
Who knows all that I am

How quick the Chaser runs me down
In this real game of Tag
How quick the sprint of Heaven's Hound
Though I avoid, zig-zag
How quick to look me in the eye
How quick to catch me in the lie
How quick to not let me get by
Who knows all that I am

NOTES

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22ND - WEEK 43, DAY 4

Jesus Says, "I Am the Way, Truth & Life"

☐ Read John 14:1-14

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus made some bold statements and promises in this pre-arrest conversation with His disciples. He promised us that there is more than enough room in heaven for all who believe in Him, then made it clear that the only way to the Father is through Him.

It is all the rage these days to claim that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere. But you might be sincerely wrong. If we believe Jesus to be a truth-teller, His words carry a heavy weight: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (verse 6). We have the honor and privilege to help others believe in Jesus for those eternal blessings!

In Jesus' efforts to prepare His disciples for ministry after He departed earth, He was also interested in teaching them how to minister. He even promised that His followers would do even greater things than Jesus had done while on earth! How is that possible? Because Jesus remains ever ready to meet our needs, give us what we ask, and do unimaginable things for Him.

Yesterday we looked at how Jesus sees beyond our failures to call us to change the world. Today, we see how Jesus sees beyond our limitations to equip us to do kingdom-based miraculous ministry in the world. Ministry on earth and eternity in heaven hang in the balance. Will you take up God's call to be used by Him beyond anything you have ever imagined?

Pray this prayer: Jesus, teach me to believe everything you said, to trust everything you are doing, and to act on everything you are desiring. Amen.

POEM

Where Are You Going?

Where are you going?
You're leaving too soon.
I want to go with you
Please stay

Where are you going?
I don't know the way
I want only to follow
Show me

Where are you going?
Don't leave me alone
I'm scared and I'm frightened
Take me

Where are you going?
It's dangerous, I'm told
Better hiding in safety
Don't go

Where are you going?
You sure you'll come back?
I'm trying to trust you
How long?

Where are you going?
You're leaving too soon.
I want to go with you
Please stay

NOTES

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23RD - WEEK 43, DAY 5

Jesus Promises to Give the Holy Spirit

☐ Read John 14:15-31

DEVOTIONAL

A disciple both believes in Jesus and follows Jesus.

To believe in Jesus is to love Him (v. 15), know Him (v. 9), and believe in His name (v. 1). A believer is someone who is aligning their worldview (beliefs, passions and values) with the Word of God, life of Jesus, and leading of the Holy Spirit.

To follow Jesus is to obey His teachings (v. 23), keep His commands (v. 15), and do His works (v. 12). A follower is someone who is aligning their lifestyle (thoughts, words and actions) with the Word of God, life of Jesus, and leading of the Holy Spirit.

To be a disciple of Jesus requires both aspects – a surrender of both the mind and will. For that new way of thinking and living, Jesus gave us His Holy Spirit as an advocate. The Holy Spirit is God living with us and in us who have surrendered our lives to Him. Imagine that! God living in us!

Confused about the meaning of Scripture? The Holy Spirit will teach you all things. Uncertain about whether Jesus would approve? The Holy Spirit will remind you of everything that Jesus said. Troubled and afraid in your heart? The Holy Spirit will bring comfort and peace. Frustrated with your blasé faith? The Holy Spirit will take you to a much deeper place with God than you have ever gone!

Take some time right now to have a conversation with the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to come into your life and fill you to overflowing. Trust Him to remind you of the ways of God and to guide you into right living. Talk to Him as a constant companion. Open your heart and will to Him, to do as He pleases in your life.

POEM

My Comfort

My Comfort is coming
I'll sit and I'll wait
Despite the waves crashing
He'll come on the wake
And bring with Him rescue
He will not forsake
My Comfort is coming
I'll sit and I'll wait

My Comfort is coming
I'll sit and I'll wait
Despite the winds blowing
The chaos they make
In storm's eye I'm holding
My resting place safe
My Comfort is coming
I'll sit and I'll wait

My Comfort is coming
I'll sit and I'll wait
Despite evil mockers
My spirit to break
Though body destroying
My soul they can't take
My Comfort is coming
I'll sit and I'll wait

My Comfort is with me
I live in full peace
No other can give me
This state of release
Where fear is diminished
Where joy is increased
My Comfort is with me
I live in full peace

NOTES

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH - WEEK 44, DAY 1

Jesus Says, "I Am the Vine"

☐ Read John 15:1-17

DEVOTIONAL

A disciple believes and follows Jesus. We see this latter part, a call to obedience again here: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." Remaining in Jesus' love is all about staying close, just as two best friends stay close to one another out of their commitment and friendship. When we do that, Jesus sees us as friends who follow closely and intimately.

Being a disciple is not about believing that there is a God. Even the demons do that (James 2:19). Nor is it about being a casual follower, sometimes obeying, sometimes not. Jesus had harsh things to say about that kind of lukewarm faith (Revelation 3:16). Rather, it is about seeking to live, love and look like Jesus.

And the only way to do that is by remaining in Him. This word "remain" can also be translated abide, dwell, continue, or endure. Go back and read this passage again, substituting one of these alternate meanings for the word remain. Take a moment and do that now.

What did you learn?

Staying connected to Jesus is crucial for our future growth and productivity. Expect Him to prune away some of the deadwood in your life so that you can be more fruitful. In this passage, Jesus uses the metaphor of a branch, which is completely dependent upon the main vine for life, but has no choice about which plant to be connected with. He also uses the metaphor of a friend, who can come close or walk away at any time, but does so at the enhancement or detriment of the relationship.

What does it mean to you that Jesus said you are His branch?

What does it mean to you that Jesus said you are His friend?

POEM

Connected

There are some things I count on in life
When I plug a lamp cord into a socket
I expect it to be
Connected
To the electrical grid
And thus bring power to the light bulb
So I can read my book

There are some things I count on in life
When I turn on the faucet for my morning shower
I expect it to be
Connected
To the plumbing pipes
And thus deliver fresh clean water to my tub
So I can wash my body

There are some things I count on in life
When I flush the toilet in the restroom
I expect it to be
Connected
To the sewage system
And thus transport the human waste away
So I can live in a fresh home

There are some things I count on in life
When I click the icon on my computer
I expect it to be
Connected
To the internet
And thus open up my information grid
So I can do my work and communicate

There are some things I count on in life
When I scroll through the channels on my TV
I expect it to be
Connected
To the satellite dish
And thus receive movies and shows
So I can be entertained and relax

There are some things I count on in life
When I sit around the table with my family and friends
I expect to be
Connected
To their hearts and minds
And thus delight in our conversation
So I can be a part of their lives and share mine

There are some things I count on in life
When I live this life of faith in Jesus Christ
I expect to be
Connected
To the Vine
And thus be enlivened and strengthened
So I can glorify God and enjoy God forever

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27TH - WEEK 44, DAY 2

Jesus Warns about Coming Persecution

☐ Read John 15:18-16:4

DEVOTIONAL

This passage follows the previous, in which Jesus told His disciples that if they kept His commands to love, they would bear much fruit. Now He told them they will be hated, persecuted, kicked out of the synagogue, and even martyred as a misguided service offering to God.

Everyone wants to be a fruitful Christian, but what if that demands being a persecuted Christian? The famous missionary Jim Elliot once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Elliott and four other missionaries were killed in 1956 by the tribal people they were trying to evangelize in the jungles of Ecuador.

Remember that Jesus was teaching His disciples about persecution just hours before His arrest, flogging, torture, and crucifixion. Being an authentic disciple is about seeking to live, love and look like Jesus. That includes potential persecution. When that happens, Jesus remind us, "keep in mind that it hated me first." The path between love and hate gets blurred when following in the footprints of Jesus.

Today, most American Christians will never see the kind of persecution that Jesus is talking about here. Even so, we may face ridicule, hassle, or even loss of relationships when living out our faith in an authentic way. Being faithful means being fruitful even when fearful.

Right now ask the Holy Spirit where He wants you to share your faith. At work? At school? In your neighborhood? Among your family? With your teammates? Among the poor? In the jungles of Ecuador? Talk with another follower of Jesus about what you are hearing.

POEM

If

If you're going to take a strong stand
On an issue which now is at hand
Opposition you'll hear
So be ready to bear
Other's views sounding like reprimands

When a concept's essential to you
Giving thought, plus your values reviewed
Then be ready to take
Other's claims, other's hate
As you live "to thine own self be true"

But before you are willing to risk
The mocking, rejection and fist
Be sure that you're right
Not just in for a fight
As you argue, debate and persist

For justice has never been free
And love can't be gained by decrees
In the midst of the lies
For the truth, some have died
In the end there is no guarantee

For our faith, Christ has told us be ready
To stand firm and not sway but be steady
"You'll be hated like me
Persecution you'll see
But I've conquered this harsh world already

"So do not despair, little flock
'Midst the storms fully cling to the Rock
When the winds full assail
Gently hide in my veil
In my arms let your soul find its dock."

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28TH - WEEK 44, DAY 3

Jesus Teaches about the Holy Spirit

☐ Read John 16:5-15

DEVOTIONAL

In the depth of their worry about losing Jesus and their fear about being persecuted, Jesus promises the disciples that they will receive the Holy Spirit. Here is what Jesus promises:

1. The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus (John 15:26) – It is great that we will know Jesus as we read Scripture, pray, and listen to the Holy Spirit.
2. The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus (John 16:14-15) – The Spirit will relay to us what He receives from Jesus.
3. The Holy Spirit guides us into truth (John 16:13) – Jesus said that the truth will set you free, then provides us the Spirit of truth to show us the truth.
4. The Holy Spirit confronts the world about sin (John 16:9) – If we listen to the Holy Spirit, He will show us our sin and lead us to repentance.
5. The Holy Spirit confronts the world about righteousness (John 16:10) – With Jesus now in heaven, our living role model of righteousness is no longer walking among us. The Spirit of God lights the path.
6. The Holy Spirit confronts the world about judgment (John 16:11) – The Holy Spirit reminds us that Satan has already been defeated.

Prayer: Thank you Holy Spirit, for being with us and in us as we follow Jesus and minister in this world. Come, speak, and show me how to live for Jesus. Amen.

POEM

Dearest, Truest Friend

Come along side me
Dearest, Truest Friend
I need your comfort
When the harshness of
This world
Overwhelms me with
Grief
Despair
Loneliness

Come and reveal to me
Dearest, Truest Friend
I need your wisdom
When the philosophies of
This world
Draw me with
Shame
Pride
Lies

Come and anoint me
Dearest, Truest Friend
I need your call to joy
When the chaos of
This world
Confuses me with
Anger
Rebellion
Meaninglessness

Come and dwell in me
Dearest, Truest Friend
I need your courage
When the temptations of
This world
Distract me with
Selfishness
Apathy
Fear

Come and transform me
Dearest, Truest Friend
I need your gifts
When the tasks of
This world
Confront me with
Scarcity
Authorities
Principalities

Come and create me
Dearest, Truest Friend
I need your truth
When I walk in
This world
Engulf me with
Power
Wind
Fire

NOTES

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29TH - WEEK 44, DAY 4

Jesus Teaches about Praying in His Name

☐ Read John 16:16-33

DEVOTIONAL

When I was growing up, one of my church's favorite choruses was, "Jesus, There's Just Something About that Name." That song echoes this passage, which takes place on the night of Jesus' arrest.

In just hours Jesus would be ripped from the grasp of the disciples, overwhelming them with grief. They would no longer have Jesus to depend upon for the directions and decisions of their faith journey. Instead, they would have direct access to the Father in the name of Jesus!

The knowledge that we have direct access to God the Father through the name of Jesus gives great comfort. Jesus put it like this: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

God so loved the world that He gave Jesus.
The world did not recognize Him.
The world will hate the followers of Jesus.
But Jesus has overcome the world!

Take a moment and sing this old chorus. Don't know it? No worries. Google does.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; there's just something about that name.
Master, Savior, Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain;
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, let all Heaven and earth proclaim
Kings and kingdoms will all pass away,
But there's something about that name.

There's Something About That Name
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POEM

Greatness Observed

He walked in darkness
Upon the stage
With cane in hand
And arm clutching
Love's arm

He spoke in loud
Erratic bursts
Some slurring present
With Love coaching
Unafraid

Love told the truth
Of blindness birth
Of autistic challenge
But music gift
To share

He was guided to sit
At instrument grand
Breath whispered into microphone
Hands placed on keyboard
Anticipation

As fingers moved
And song erupted
Tears formed and fell
Hearts were transformed
Soul change

Miracle shared surprise
The crowd arose
Hands joined in rhythm
Buzzer golden
Greatness

Mouth open wide
Love whispered joy
Beauty covered unrobed
Guided to embrace
Wonder

NOTES

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30TH - WEEK 44, DAY 5

Jesus Prays for Himself

☐ Read John 17:1-5

DEVOTIONAL

These few verses tell us a great deal about Jesus:

- He knew that the hour had come
  Jesus wasn't surprised by the arrest, mocking, torture and crucifixion. He faced it willingly for us, taking upon Himself the penalty for all our sins.
- His purpose is to glorify the Father
  Jesus did this by finishing the work God the Father gave Him to do. He wasn't a helpless son sent to the slaughter. He was the Son of God in the flesh who offered Himself so that we could receive forgiveness.
- He came to bring eternal life
  This is a gift of Jesus, allowing us to actually know God face to face. Heaven is not something we earn or deserve. It is only by His grace that we are saved!
- He is the co-creator of the world
  Jesus was with the Father "before the world began" when He shared the Father's glory. All things were created in Him, through Him, and for Him (see Colossians 1:16).

The Bible teaches us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). This yesterday stretches all the way back before the very creation of the universe. "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son" (Galatians 4:4). Finally, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6).

Jesus is before the beginning, at the center, and forever present in all of time. Stop now and give Jesus praise for who He is!

POEM

The Circle Of Glory

It all started with the Father
An eternal, constant point
Then in embrace
An arc was formed
Circling to the Son

Then to the Son authority
An hour, a pinpointed task
Cost to redeem
A gift of souls
Arcing to the Father

All glory shared between the two
A whirling, spinning orbit
And at the center
Blessed you and me
Surrounded by grace glory

NOTES

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3RD - WEEK 45, DAY 1

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

☐ Read John 17:6-19

DEVOTIONAL

In this continuation of Jesus' prayer just before His arrest, He is praying for His disciples. As a pastor, I have been with many people as they are facing their approaching death. Sometimes they are angry. Often afraid. Usually sad. But once in a while, the person is joyful. They know where they are going. And they want all the prayers to be for their loved ones to come to know Jesus Christ.

In a few moments, Jesus would be arrested, inaugurating His march to the cross. Yet here He poured out His heart to the Father on behalf of His followers. He longed for them to have unity, holiness, and joy. In fact, He prayed that they would have the full measure of Christ's joy within them. What an interesting prayer for a dead man walking.

But Jesus didn't stop there. He prayed that His disciples would be sanctified – to be made holy – by the truthful word of God and the presence of Christ. Though Jesus was praying this to the Father, His disciples overheard the prayer (John even wrote it down in this passage). Imagine their mixed emotions: Confusion. Grief. Joy. Holiness. Ministry. Truth. The Word. Evil. Protection. Sent. Unity.

I suppose we could call this the Great Commission prayer. These disciples were now equipped to launch the Church on earth and extend the ministry of Jesus to the edges of the world. They were no longer normal, uneducated, poor fishermen and tax collectors. They had been sanctified by Jesus Himself.

Romans 8:34 says that Jesus "is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." What is Jesus praying about you right this moment? What does He want for you? What does He desire from you? How does He see you? What does He see in you? When He is interceding for you, what makes Jesus smile?

POEM

Keep Them

Keep them, Father
In Your Word
Your Word of Truth
Unchanging
Keep them, Father
In Your World
The World of Lies
All shifting

Guard them, Father
In Your Truth
The Evil One
Is lurking
Guard them, Father
In the World
My Joy in fullness
Stabling

Grant me, Father
This, my prayer
For those whom you
Have given
Grant me, Father
This, my share
My Name their shield
Til Heaven

NOTES

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4TH - WEEK 45, DAY 2

Jesus Prays for Future Believers

☐ Read John 17:20-26

DEVOTIONAL

In the first part of this prayer which took place just before He was arrested, Jesus prayed for Himself to glorify the Father as He was crucified for our sins. He then continued, praying for His disciples, that they would have unity, holiness, and joy as they ministered to others. Now, He concluded the prayer by lifting up those who would become believers in the future. That's us.

In this portion of the prayer, Jesus is most concerned for our witness to the unbelieving world. He prayed that we would be so intimate with God that the world would have no choice but to believe that God sent Jesus (v. 21). And He prayed that we would have an intense unity, that the world would know that they are loved by God.

Call this Great Commission prayer, part two. No longer is it just a history lesson about how Jesus prepared and sent His personal disciple. Now it's about us. How we live and love matters to a lost and lonely world. How they see us is how they see God.

Let me ask you this: how long has it been since your church class or group or ministry has grown by 50%? When others see you, I hope they say, "I must have some of that unity! I need some of that kind of love! I long to be close to their God!"

The tendency for church groups, like any other group, is to become a close circle that becomes a closed circle. But Jesus wanted something more. He wanted us to be so close, so united, so loving that we couldn't help invite others in and they couldn't help but say yes!

Jesus put it like this: "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

POEM

One

May they all be one
Unified in love
Acting in concert
With you
And me
I
Pray

Consolidate them in strength
Bind them together in love
May they merge in your will
Join forces for justice
Connect your truth in action
Combine their talents in service
Link arms to carry the weak
Have solidarity of purpose
Reconcile all estranged
Harmonize in praise
Be of one accord
Gather for worship
Integrate your truth
Stand together in trials
Agree in prayer
Submit to one another with humility
Rally with courage

May they all be one
Father
As you
And I
Are
One
Please

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5TH - WEEK 45, DAY 3

Jesus Grieves While His Disciples Sleep

☐ Read Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46

DEVOTIONAL

On the Mount of Olives. In the Garden of Gethsemane.

With His disciples. A little farther. With Peter, James and John.

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow." A stone's throw farther.

Alone. Anguish. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Again. Greater anguish. Alone. Not alone. An angel. Strengthening Him.

Deepest anguish. More earnest prayer. Sweat like drops of blood.

Returning to His disciples. Asleep. Warning about temptation. Alert.

Alone. Anguish.

Asleep. Second warning. Alert.

Alone. Anguish. Release. "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

Asleep. Alert. Aware. "Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners."

"Rise! Here comes my betrayer."

Arrest. Alert. Anguish. Abandon. Alone.

POEM

The Millstone

The harvest season was at hand
The olive press was ready
Receiving fruit from ancient trees
Each olive plump and brimming

And the millstone it went 'round
and 'round
Grinding, pressing, crushing
The olive fruit expressed its juice
The oil preserved for healing

The paschal season was at hand
Gethsemane was waiting
The Mount of Olives welcomed Guest
Prepared and perfect coming

And the millstone it went 'round
and 'round
Grinding, pressing, crushing
The olive fruit expressed its juice
The oil preserved for healing

The evening prayer stone
clung to earth
For now all things were ripened
The Savior sweating
drops of blood
His will completely yielding

And the millstone it went 'round
and 'round
Grinding, pressing, crushing
The olive fruit expressed its juice
The oil preserved for healing

The stony hearts of all around
Betraying and denying
The crushing of the
Sacred Heart
With mocking, scourging, lying

And the millstone it went
round and 'round
Grinding, pressing, crushing
The olive fruit expressed its juice
The oil preserved for healing

NOTES

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6TH - WEEK 45, DAY 4

Jesus is Betrayed & Arrested

☐ Read Matthew 26:47-56, Mark 14:43-52, Luke 22:47-53, John 18:1-11

DEVOTIONAL

For three years, Jesus poured His life into the Twelve. On this single night, one would betray Him with a friend's kiss, one would stay somewhat close only to deny knowing Him, and others would flee out of fear they would be arrested with their leader.

They had said that they were ready to fight for Him. Perhaps that is why Judas sold Him out for silver – getting some cash while forcing His hand to act like the real Messiah and overthrow the occupying enemy government.

Judas arrived with the priests' armed guards, which alone is an oxymoron. They were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, to which He replied, "I am He." The very words, "I am He," echoed the name of God given to Moses some 3500 years earlier. These words had so much authority that the weapon-bearing soldiers fell on their backs.

Impetuous Peter then took charge, drawing a sword and slicing off the ear of a high priest's servant. They were ready to fight for Him, but they were not interested in being arrested with Him. An honorable death is one thing; a criminal's imprisonment and execution is another.

If the story stopped here it would seem like a colossal failure. Jesus, abandoned by His followers, arrested by the religious leaders, and to be executed by the occupying Roman forces. Jesus, a name that would have faded into the winds of history like nearly every other. Jesus, alone.

But this is not the end of the story. His death would bring forgiveness. His resurrection would promise life. His commissioning would multiply disciples for millennia to come. True life is found in Him. Jesus Alone!

++

POEM

It Is Time

"It is time," hissed the snake
As he slithered from his hiding place
Mouth opened
Fangs poisoned
Eyes flaming
"Time to strike."

"It is time," snarled the priests
As they plotted in the night
Heavily robed
Fist clenched
Breath rotting
"Time to capture."

"It is time," whispered the betrayer
As he sneaked into the wolves den
Mind set
Lips pursed
Eyes darting
"Time to ambush."

"It is time," roared the guards
As they tromped through the weeds
Swords drawn
Arms raised
Mouths watering
"Time to shackle."

"It is time," cried the denier
As he stood outside the firelight
Emotions confused
Fear heightened
Hands sweating
"Time to lie."

"It is time," panted the criminal
As he was dragged from the prison
Wrists bound
Ankles shackled
Tongue wagging
"Time to bluster."

"It is time," shouted Pilate
As he washed his hands in water
Brow tensed
Mind frustrated
Courage lacking
"Time to sentence."

"It is time," barked the centurion
As he grabbed the spike
Feelings numbed
Hands bloodied
Knees aching
"Time to crucify."

"It is time," prayed the Savior
As he was stretched on the cross
Pain drenched
Sin burdened
All forgiving
"Time to glorify the Father."

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7TH - WEEK 45, DAY 5

Trial #1: Annas Questions Jesus

☐ Read John 18:12-14, 19-24

DEVOTIONAL

In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Moses wrote a provision for what happens when a man divorces his wife, she remarries someone who eventually divorces her or dies, then the first man wants to marry her again. This became the perfect context for the Pharisees to try to trap Jesus.

Jesus referred to Genesis 1 and 2, saying, "at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' [5]and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? [6]So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

That's when the Pharisees tried to trap Him with the Moses reference. But Jesus stood firm, saying, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Matthew 19:8). From Genesis to Jesus, the Bible is clear: marriage between a man and a woman is for life.

Jesus mentions an exception for a person whose spouse commits "sexual immorality." The Greek word here is "porneia" and it refers to any form of sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman. Jesus also speaks of eunuchs – people who do not have sexual relations for a variety of reasons. There is no room for pre-marital sex or extra-marital sex in the teaching of Jesus. Indeed, singleness and celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom are what's best for some.

This teaching on marriage, sexuality, and divorce echoes Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:1-16. All this flies in the face of our culture wars over human sexuality and marriage. Undeniably, there is much to wrestle with here. Let us seek God's wisdom as we navigate these waters in our society with faith and understanding.

POEM

Don't Really Want An Answer

Beware of yeast hypocrisy
Beware of greed and jealousy
For these will ask you questions sure
But don't really want an answer

Be on your guard when bound in court
Be on your guard, mock trial cohort
For these will question what you've done
But don't really want an answer

Take care and put your armor on
Take care when fools ask questions
Don't enter into traps they've set
For they don't want an answer

If long before you've entered in
If long ago decided
That better one should die for all
No answer gi'vn will right it

Though you in open ministered
Though nothing done in secret
In darkness plots of striking blows
Upon you will be meted

Be covered with your armor on
Be sure about your mission
For questions come from lying tongues
Which don't really want an answer

NOTES

MONDAY, OCTOBER 10TH - WEEK 46, DAY 1

Trial #2: Caiaphas Questions Jesus

☐ Read Matthew 26:57-68, Mark 14:53-65, Luke 22:54a, 63-65

DEVOTIONAL

The whole religious establishment was there: the high priest, chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law. This Sanhedrin had great power in their society, retained because they had gotten in bed with the occupying Roman rulers.

However, the Jewish religious establishment did not have the authority to execute Jesus. For that, they needed their Roman occupiers to do their dirty work. This trial was meant to trap Jesus and gain unity so that they could bring their charges before the Roman governor.

Jesus was a threat, not only to their view of proper Jewish beliefs, but more importantly to their acquired power. They needed to eliminate Him. So they asked Him directly, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?" His answers set them on their heels:

"You have said so" (Matthew 26:64).
"If I tell you, you will not believe me" (Luke 22:67)
And very plainly, "I am" (Mark 14:62)

I am. These words themselves were a claim to deity. They were the same words God had used to reveal His name to Moses on the mountain. When Jesus spoke them, He was claiming to be God in the flesh.

For this blasphemy they blindfolded Him, spit in His face, struck Him with fists, slapped Him hard, and condemned Him to death. The abuse would last until daybreak. Jesus' last night began with a walk in the park and ended with torture in the home of the foremost spiritual leader of that time.

POEM

SIlence
Before creation
Silence
A vast unending void
And the God spoke
The Light emerged
And from that spark
Life on earth ignited

Before redemption
Silence
No arguing defense
And then Christ spoke
The Grace emerged
And from that love
Life eternal granted

Before sustainment
Silence
An upper room of fear
And Spirit blew
And from that wind
Life forever gifted

NOTES

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11TH - WEEK 46, DAY 2

Peter Denies Knowing Jesus Three Times

☐ Read Matthew 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:54b-62, John 18:15-18, 25-27

DEVOTIONAL

Somehow, Annas and Caiaphas knew John, and he was allowed to come into the courtyard. With John's influence, he brought Peter into the courtyard, where he joined the servants and officials in warming themselves at a fire. Peter and John would be the first leaders of the Christian Church. This moment gave them opportunity to personally witness what Jesus went through.

It is always darkest just before dawn. As the night bore deeper into darkness, people began to see something familiar in Peter's face, illuminated and shadowed by the flickering firelight. Three times he was given the opportunity to stand strong for Jesus; three times his faith gave way to fear. Who knows what any of us would do.

As dawn's twilight began to silhouette the horizon, a rooster crowed at Peter's third denial. Remembering that Jesus had predicted this, Peter left there and cried like a baby. He had failed the test miserably.

The responses of Peter have rung though history. How could the one designated to be the leader of the Church for Jesus be the one to deny even knowing Jesus at all? Yet when it comes to asking modern-day Christians to stand up for their faith, share the Gospel and make disciples, most shrink back Peter-like:

I cannot.
I don't know enough about the Bible.
I might get made fun of, in trouble, fired...

Today, as always, believers need a strong dose of courage. When human fear trumps holy boldness, the faith stays personalized and impotent to change the world. Praise God that only two months after his denials, Peter stood tall in this same city and proclaimed Jesus the Messiah. The Church was born!

POEM

How Often?

How often, Lord, should I forgive
When those around me stumble?
When with their words friendship forsake
When in their silence, my heart breaks
I ask you, Lord, full seven?

How often, Lord, should I forgive
When those around forget me?
When selfishly they leave me out
When in their pride their ego tout
I ask you, Lord, full seven?

How often, Lord, should I forgive
When enemies are striking?
When bullies mock me, kick my gut
When scorners throw my name in muck
I ask you, Lord, full seven?

How often, child, should I forgive
When you do constant stumble?
When down wrong paths you tend to stray
When you forsake my name, my way
I ask you, child, full mercy?

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12TH - WEEK 46, DAY 3

Trial #3: The Sanhedrin Condemns Jesus

☐ Read Matthew 27:1-2, Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66-71

DEVOTIONAL

This third trial is actually an extension of the previous two. Think of it like when a grand jury decides to send an accused person to an actual trial where that person can be found guilty and sentenced. So, they turned Jesus over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate at the crack of dawn.

While these religious elite had already decided that Jesus had to be put to death, they knew they would have to pressure Pilate to act on their wishes. Jesus had just confessed to them that He was indeed God in the flesh, the Jewish Messiah, the Son of God. This blasphemy made Him deserving of death in their eyes. But that would never move Pilate to action. The Romans had all kinds of gods. Who cares if some backwater peasant thinks He is another one?

So, according to Mark 15:1, these religious leaders devised a plan. Picture the seventy members of the Sanhedrin hatching the plot in their assembly. As rows of them faced one another, they might have had to raise their voices or even shout from time to time, as the sights and sounds of Jesus being abused and tortured by their temple guard was playing out in their midst. This assault only fueled the anger of their fire.

In between the violent slaps, punches, and derisive words launched by the temple guard, Jesus no doubt heard the consensus being arrived at by the Sanhedrin.

He has to be put to death.

Tie His hands behind His back.

Take Him to Governor Pilate.

Be gone with Him!

POEM

The Bullies

For any child who's been left out
Who's last one picked because they're stout
Who never seemed to make the grade
Who sat on bench while others played
Who heard cruel word which broke their souls
Whose fate by others was controlled

For any teen which acned face
Whose parents moved, who felt displaced
Who rushed down halls, quick to avoid
Belongings, ego mass destroyed
Who tried to not let Tweets define
Who lowered head, who dreams resigned

For any woman crushed, abused
Who wore dark glasses covering bruise
Who huddled in a corner cold
Whom others felt they had control
Whose tender heart received foul words
While violations they endured

For any man, when tender found
Was heaped with shame by those around
For those who loved art more than sport
Who stood full naked, bully's court
Whose size or hair or muscles mocked
Who often had their privates socked

For any who have known the pain
Whose vital essence was profaned
You have a friend your torment knows
Who was mocked, scorned,
received full blows
With spit and blood upon his cheek
Who held his tongue,
who did not speak

But now He stands,
full strength by you
The bullies will receive full due
Their anger, evil shall not live
One day they will no longer give
The sorrow, pain and whisper sore
Justice will come forevermore

Then Love will reign, repentance full
Accuser's hate sent to Sheol
The lion with the lamb shall lie
The bear and wolf and calf nearby
Meanness will still,
revenge shall cease
And all the world will know
God's peace

NOTES

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13TH - WEEK 46, DAY 4

Judas Hangs Himself

☐ Read Matthew 27:3-10

DEVOTIONAL

The Bible says that Judas was filled with remorse when he saw that Jesus was condemned to die. What did he expect?

Judas was present when Jesus accepted Peter's declaration that He was the Messiah. Perhaps Judas thought he could bring things to a head, forcing Jesus to lead a rebellion against the occupying Roman forces. If he was a zealot, this makes sense. Maybe the last thing he imagined was Jesus as a Suffering Servant, condemned to die. Whatever the reason, Judas was filled with remorse and admitted, "I have sinned."

Judas had the added guilt of his own greed. In John 12:6, his fellow disciple summed up Judas by saying, "he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it." Put that on your headstone.

Rather than letting his remorse drive him to repentance, Judas chose the easier path of self-rejection, even to the point of taking his own life instead of submitting his brokenness to God. Being in the presence of Jesus is no guarantee that people will make the right decisions. Though one of the Twelve, Judas refused to come to Jesus for forgiveness and restoration. Instead, he took matters, and his life, in his own hands.

This is a warning for all of us. That we will fail to live up to God's perfect standard is a given. But how we respond is the difference-maker. Judas betrayed Jesus, then killed himself. Peter denied Jesus, then allowed Jesus to restore him.

What is your greatest failure before almighty God? What have you done about it? What does God want to do for you?

POEM

How Long?

How long do faithful ones despair
As beloved ones coil enough rope
As foolishly each gathers up
The very means to choke?

How long did Jesus watch and pray
For Judas' heart to soften
For discipline to gain control
O'er stubborn mind more often?

How long the patience of the LORD
When each intention questioned
When every grace was criticized
But gratitude rare mentioned?

How long the moments from betrayal
To anguished sorrow bourning
To fall before the judging priests
With penitential mourning?

How long before the answer came:
"What cause is this to us?"
"What do we care?"
"You're on your own."
"There's nothing to discuss."

How long the stream of
guilty tears
Upon the cheek, death planning
Upon the hands that tied the knot
To hush Satan's demanding?

How long the rope in each
our hands
To bring about our damning
To hang ourselves, call out a
death
A future killed by hanging?

How long the time from death
to life
From mocking on to praising
From frozen hearts to hearts afire
Destruction turned to raising?

How long must God's strong
tether be
To hold on just enough
To let my free will choose to love
But also call my bluff?

NOTES

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14TH - WEEK 46, DAY 5

Trial #4: Pilate Questions Jesus

☐ Read Matthew 27:11-14, Mark 15:2-5, Luke 23:1-7, John 18:28-37

DEVOTIONAL

The shift was subtle. When Jesus came before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the charge was blasphemy: "Are you the Son of God?"

When Jesus was brought before the Roman governor, the charge was sedition: "Are you the King of the Jews?"

His opponents would do whatever they could to rid the world of Jesus. Ask Him questions. Let Him trap Himself. Let Him carry His own cross. Let Him dig His own grave.

And Jesus did. He willingly became our sin. He took the sin of the world on His back. Though innocent, He suffered a criminal's execution – not for crimes against humanity, but for humanity's crimes against God.

Indeed, He is Jesus Christ.
The King of kings.
The Son of God.
The Savior of the world.

Pilate's question is a good one: what is truth? This far into our year-long study of the life of Jesus, we must ask the same question. Is it true? Did Jesus speak the truth? Is He the way and the truth and the life? Your answer to these questions is a matter of life and death.

If Jesus is the truth, then our entire worldview and lifestyle emerges from that truth. What we believe and how we live are intricately tied to what we deem to be true. How then do you answer Pilate's question: what is truth?

POEM

As You Say

With lips we often speak the truth
Not knowing or intending
"Hosanna, Lord and Savior come!"
Our own words be attending

And Jesus replied, "As you say."

"It's better if just one man dies
Than lose entire nation."
The priest as chief has spoken thus
The death a proclamation

And Jesus replied, "As you say."

When crisis comes, we pray and pray
A blessing on our country
"King of the Jews, is this not right?"
We forget when comes the Monday

And Jesus replied, "As you say."

"It's finished!" now, no truer words
Upon parched lips is spoken
Though most think death
has won at last
The life long curse is broken

And Jesus replied, "As you say."

Now people pray within the pews
"Your will be done, O Father."
Then leave unchanged,
pot roasts to claim
And hope their own will prosper

And Jesus replied, "As you say."

NOTES

MONDAY, OCTOBER 17TH - WEEK 47, DAY 1

Trial #5: Herod Questions Jesus

☐ Read Luke 23:8-12

DEVOTIONAL

Herod Antipas had a lot of history with Jesus, though they had apparently never met. It was his father, Herod the Great, who put all the baby boys in Bethlehem to death in an effort to wipe away the threat of baby Jesus, who had been proclaimed by the wise men as the king of the Jews. That Herod died when Jesus was a young boy, leaving his sons Herod Antipas and a bunch of other Herod's in his wake.

Herod Antipas himself was the one who had John the Baptist beheaded for calling out his illegitimate marriage to his brother Herod Philip's wife, Herodias. And it was Herod Antipas that the Pharisees used to try to get Jesus to run away when they told him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you" (Luke 13:31).

Herod Antipas was the guy in charge of the region of Galilee, which is where Jesus was raised (in Nazareth) and where He and the disciples had their home ministry base (in Capernaum). So Pilate, who was the guy in charge down in Judea where all these trials were taking place (in Jerusalem), sent Jesus over to Herod who was in Jerusalem at the time. How disappointed he was when Jesus refused to perform magic tricks for him.

How often do we get disappointed with Jesus when He fails to give us a sign or answer a prayer to our liking? Could Jesus have ended His predicament by simply uttering a prophetic word or performing a simple miracle in front of Herod's eyes? Jesus could have been released from His persecution if He had simply released some of His power. So why didn't He?

Were there no needs? Was nobody in Herod's court ill or disabled? Wasn't there anything available for Jesus to do? Obviously there is always someone who needs God's touch. But doling so in that moment would have taken Jesus off task and out of the Father's will. So Jesus stayed bound, as did anyone with an affliction in Herod's court. Truly, Thy will be done.

POEM

Now Herod

Now Herod guess it is your turn
Now you decide, receive or spurn
Now just what will your answer be
Now what will be your legacy

Now Herod, you seemed filled with joy
To feast your eyes on local boy
Perhaps a miracle, a sign to see
Perhaps discover majesty

Now Herod, he won't take the bait
Poor Herod, can't entrap playmate
Poor Herod, guess true colors show
Poor Herod, guess you'll never know

Now Herod, as you seal your fate
Your ego, pride, and blindness spate
As to the lion's mouth you throw
You don your King in royal robe

Now Herod, was it worth the price
Will Pilate's friendship now suffice
The empty cistern of your soul
Your rotting flesh in graveyard mold?

NOTES

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18TH - WEEK 47, DAY 2

Trial #6: Pilate Condemns Jesus to be Crucified

☐ Read Matthew 27:15-26, Mark 15:6-15, Luke 23:13-25, John 18:38-19:16

DEVOTIONAL

The power of influence. Days earlier, Jesus rode triumphantly into the city. Now, the crowd's cheers turned to jeers. Using their influence, the chief priests and elders "persuaded" and "stirred up" the crowd, who demanded the release of an insurrectionist and the crucifixion of an innocent.

Governor Pilate was not convinced, even declaring no basis for their charges against Jesus. But the same religious leaders shouted, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12). So, ignoring his wife's dreams and his own intuition, Pilate caved to the power of persuasion. Jesus was sentenced for execution.

Pontius Pilate tried to wash his hands of the whole situation. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" But it is his name that we know today, not the people in the crowd, the soldiers, or even the vast majority of the religious leaders. Succumbing to peer pressure and deflecting blame on the influencers doesn't absolve one of responsibility for their actions.

Even today, many Christians sing out loud in worship, offer insights at a Bible study, and bow in prayer with other believers. Yet these same people cower for cover when given the opportunity in public to share their testimony, talk about Jesus, or even pray out loud. Ah, the power of influence.

Like Pilate, we deflect blame toward the separation of church and state, the rules of the classroom and workplace, or the skeptical looks of neighbors and friends. We rationalize that it is not our fault that we internalize and privatize our faith, even though Jesus clearly told us to make disciples. We try to wash our hands of the whole thing.

Maybe it is time to stop washing our hands and start washing others' feet. Perhaps it is time stop deflecting blame and start accepting responsibility. How is Jesus challenging you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him?

POEM

Thorny

Thorny nettle in my way
All my labor day by day
Can't for sin its cost to pay
Rebel's curse is here to stay
Thorny nettle in my way

Thorny branches holding fast
Bleating ram taken and lashed
To the altar throat to slash
Bloody off'ring sin to dash
Thorny branches holding fast

Thorny crown upon the brow
How could God this pain allow?
Lamb of God the payment now
Righteousness his heirs endow
Thorny crown upon the brow

Thorny weeds my garden bears
Prick my finger, heart ensnare
Brings to mind my Savior fair
As I kneel to weed, a prayer
Thorny weeds my garden bears

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19TH - WEEK 47, DAY 3

Jesus is Abused and Led Away to be Crucified

☐ Read Matthew 27:27-32, Mark 15:16-21, Luke 23:26-31, John 19:1-3

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus had just been whipped to within an inch of His life. For this flogging, Jesus would have been tied to a post with His back completely exposed. Professional Roman soldiers would tie sharp objects into multiple lashes at the end of their scourge for maximum pain and suffering. The punishment was so severe that whose receiving the flagellation often died on the spot.

But not Jesus. For Him the abuse continued. They dressed Him up like a mock king, then beat Him over the head with His fake scepter, adding to the blood already pouring from His sham crown of thorns. The hours just prior to the crucifixion were torturous and brutal.

Seven hundred years earlier, Isaiah foresaw this moment. Take in his prophetic words from Isaiah 53, and picture Jesus willingly offering Himself for us:

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 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. 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. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

POEM

The Course

What I've written, I have written
I've ordered, tired and shaken
What is done, yes, now it's done
In what have I partaken?

What's been said, has now been said
I realized too lately
What it is, is what it is
The curse of things done hasty

Who I am is who I am
Resounds the voice from heaven
What will be will truly be
The Course, my will predestined

NOTES

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20TH - WEEK 47, DAY 4

Jesus is Crucified

☐ Read Matthew 27:33-44, Mark 15:22-32, Luke 23:32-43, John 19:17-27

DEVOTIONAL

The place of the Skull. Golgotha. A wooden beam. Long spikes. Soldiers with hammers. A sign in three languages mocking Him: "The king of the Jews."

A weeping mother, watching helplessly.

Grieving disciples, watching fearfully.

Scoffing religious leaders: "Let Him save Himself if He is really God's Messiah."

Derisive soldiers: "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!"

A jeering criminal crucified next to Him: "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself – and us, too, while you are at it!"

A taunting crowd: "Ha! Look at you now! You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross."

What did these leaders, soldiers, criminal, and crowd all have in common? They all challenged Jesus to save Himself. But Jesus was more interested in saving us. So, Jesus simply said, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."

[13]When you were dead in your sins..., God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, [14]having canceled the charge..., which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. [15]And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15)

Take time now to thank Jesus for His work of forgiveness on the cross. If you have never received His offer of forgiveness, confess your sins to Him and ask Him to take them from you.

POEM

Cruciformity

It was for my iniquity
You suffered cruciformity
Because of the great emnity
Between my God and me

I was for your great love divine
You gave your life instead of mine
To enter into your blood line
Reconciling me

There is no gift of gratitude
To equal the great latitude
Of your full grace filled attitude
You've heaped up full on me

And so, my broken heart I bring
To you my Lord and Heav'nly King
For you have rid me of death's sting
You did it all for me

NOTES

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21ST - WEEK 47, DAY 5

Jesus Dies on the Cross

☐ Read Matthew 27:45-56, Mark 15:33-41, Luke 23:44-49, John 19:28-37

DEVOTIONAL

From nine in the morning until noon, Jesus hung in pain with the rising sun He had created.

From noon until three in the afternoon, He suffered in agony as total darkness eclipsed the midday sun.

And at three in the afternoon, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, cried out with a loud voice, breathed for the last time, bowed His head, and gave up His life.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8).

This very moment is the centerpiece of human history. Prior to that, people believed that only the High Priest could pass through the curtain of the temple and enter the Most Holy Place where God dwelled. But at Christ's death, an earthquake ripped that curtain in two, providing access for all to the very presence of God. Jesus made a way.

A pagan Roman centurion who witnessed the power of Jesus' death cried out, "Surely He was the Son of God!" Women watched in awe. Even dead people came to life.

There is a beautiful hymn called "The Power of the Cross" by Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend. Drink in these words as you reflect on Christ's death on the cross for you.

Verse 1
O, to see the dawn of the darkest day
Christ on the road to Calvary
Tried by sinful men, torn and beaten, then
Nailed to a cross of wood.
This the power of the cross:
Christ became sin for us.
Took the blame, bore the wrath;
We stand forgiven at the cross.

Verse 2
O, to see the pain written on Your face,
Bearing the awesome weight of sin.
Every bitter thought, every evil deed
Crowning the bloodstained brow.
This the power of the cross:
Christ became sin for us.
Took the blame, bore the wrath;
We stand forgiven at the cross.

Verse 3
Now the daylight flees; now the ground beneath
Quakes as the Maker bows His head.
Curtain torn in two, dead are raised to life.
"Finished!" the victory cry.
This the power of the cross:
Christ became sin for us.
Took the blame, bore the wrath;
We stand forgiven at the cross.

Verse 4
O, to see my name written in the wounds,
For through Your suffering I am free.
Death is crushed to death, life is mine to live,
Won through Your selfless love!
This the power of the cross:
Son of God slain for us.
What a love! What a cost!
We stand forgiven at the cross.

The Power of the Cross
Keith Getty, Stuart Townend
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POEM

The Source Of Life

The Source of Life took a deep breath
And breathed the Spirit in me
My first gasp sounded
Day of birth
A born-ing song of hope

The Source of Life then set me down
Upon Earth's Eden Garden
The Spirit's breath blew
Through the trees
A morning dawn of joy

The Source of Life felt a deep blow
Within the heart of greatness
As I rebelled
And challenged Love
A mourning wail of pain

The Source of Life then humble bent
Surrendering life's breath final
The darkness came
Earth's heart split; rent
A storming in the throne room

The Source of Life all still
and spent
Lay dormant, seed a dying
Yet in the tomb
Ole Jesse's shoot
A forming, silent, hidden

The Source of Life then burst
from death
All radiant in splendor
Broke through death's rock
And took deep breath
Atoning, heavy fruited

The Source of Life took a
deep breath
And breathed the Spirit in me
My first gasp sounded
Day of birth
A born-ing song of triumph

NOTES

MONDAY, OCTOBER 24TH - WEEK 48, DAY 1

Jesus is Buried in the Tomb

☐ Read Matthew 27:57-61, Mark 15:42-47, Luke 23:50-56, John 19:38-42

DEVOTIONAL

When Jesus died on the cross, His disciples had no plan for His burial. So, a man named Joseph came forward to collect His body for burial.

Joseph was from Arimathea, a town in Judea which was probably not far from where Jesus was crucified. His wealth might have aided him in having such a prominent position in the Sanhedrin. It also afforded him the opportunity to have an unused tomb, being saved for his own burial one day. He offered this as a resting place for the body of Jesus.

Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, which was the religious authoritative body that oversaw Jewish practices and beliefs. Luke 23:50-51 says that Joseph was "a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action" to hand Jesus over for crucifixion. Yet we don't know how vociferously he fought for Jesus, because the Bible also says that he "was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders" (John 19:38). This good and upright man might not have consented to Jesus' death, but he might not have contended for Jesus' life either.

Still, asking Governor Pilate for the body of Jesus, then burying Him in Joseph's own personal tomb in full view of his religious peers was a risky, bold step. The Roman and Jewish authorities could have seen Joseph as a threat to their positions and power. Openly demonstrating his allegiance to Jesus could have landed him in the same tomb that he was opening for the body of Jesus.

One thing is certain. Jesus was dead. Professional soldiers experienced in overseeing crucifixions, Jesus' own grieving mother, and this man named Joseph all attest to the death and burial of Jesus. This truth is a centerpiece to our faith. The Apostles' Creed summarizes it well:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried…

POEM

They Tried

Old Herod tried to kill the babe
By scheming and the sword
But angel warnings
Dreams outpouring
Narrow great escape

His parents tried to tether him
To normalcy of small life
But ancient drawings
Spoke the callings
Father's house and will

The Pharisees, they tried to test
To trick and find a way to silence
But Wisdom's word
And Spirit's sword
Vast healing was accomplished

Disciples, tried, confused
and dense
To reshape Kingdom's focus
But Zion's march
He did embark
True sacrifice, full ransom

The councils, Herod,
Pilate tried
With soldiers at their beckon
To stop the Man
To kill God's plan
Seal tightly in a tomb

They try, you see,
yet none succeed
To dam up Love's full bursting
But Water Living
Can't stop flowing
Quenching parched, dead
hearts

NOTES

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25TH - WEEK 48, DAY 2

Guards Are Posted at the Tomb

☐ Read Matthew 27:62-66

DEVOTIONAL

"This last deception will be worse than the first." Jesus had already been declared dead by professional executioners. A prominent member of the Sanhedrin collected His body and buried it in a tomb. A large stone blocked the entrance to the resting place.

But what if Jesus' disciples managed to steal the body and falsely claim that He had risen from the dead? "This last deception will be worse than the first." Seal the tomb. Post the guard. Take no chances. Keep the dead man dead.

Funny thing about death. It is so final. 1 Corinthians 15:26 calls death an enemy, taking life from us, once and for all. The Sadducees didn't believe in the afterlife; Jesus would stay dead. The Pharisees believed in the afterlife, only for the righteous; Jesus would stay dead. The Roman authorities simply wanted political and social stability; Jesus would stay dead. Call it a conspiracy of convenience.

Friday night armed soldiers guarded the sealed tomb. All day Saturday, a new batch of guards took the post, securing the dead body of Jesus. And Sunday, from midnight to pre-dawn, fresh sentries separated death inside the tomb from life outside. It was as if the Pax Romana depended on the Son of God staying dead.

What they did not know is that Jesus already accomplished the work of God by His death on the cross, "so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

It was they who were deceiving themselves, thinking they could thwart the power of God with a few nails and a dark tomb. They speak for many people down through the ages. Way too many people dismiss the death of Jesus, thinking they can earn their way to heaven by good deeds (see the Pharisees' belief mentioned above). All too often, we keep Jesus in the tomb, figuring we can make our way on our own.

Ahh, "This last deception will be worse than the first."

POEM

Have You Ever Tried?

Have you ever tried
To hold the light
In a glass jar
All sealed up tight
On a bright sunny day
To hide it away
For opening at midnight?

Have you ever tried
To silence joy
In a melody
Voiced now deployed
From psalmantic praise
Already raised
From a heart in song employed?

Have you ever tried
To seal a tomb
And set a guard
A-nesting gloom
To keep Christ down
Within the ground
Which He himself created?

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26TH - WEEK 48, DAY 3

Women Go to the Empty Tomb

☐ Read Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-11, John 20:1-2

DEVOTIONAL

He is risen!

Angels were with Jesus from womb to tomb. As the Holy Spirit was implanting Him in His mother Mary's womb, an angel came and spoke to her. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, angels came and ministered to Him. Now, as He was being raised from the dead, angels came to shock the guards and reassure the women.

Among those women was Mary Magdalene. She had been possessed by seven demons, which Jesus drove out of her. Out of immense gratitude, she became a follower and financial supporter of Jesus and His ministry team. She was present when Jesus was crucified to death, and first on the scene when He was raised to life. She was probably never voted most likely to succeed, but there she was having a conversation with God's angels, and becoming the first to tell the disciples about the resurrection. Nobody is beyond redemption in God's economy.

Another of the women present for the first sunrise service was Joanna, whose husband managed the household of Herod, the man who ordered the decapitation of John the Baptist and who refused to free Jesus when he could have. Recall from Luke 8:3 that Joanna was another woman who followed and financially supported Jesus. She too was there until the bitter end and the sweet beginning. Nobody is beyond redemption in God's economy.

And there were more women at the crack of dawn empty tomb. Mary the mother of James, Salome, and others, whose back stories we don't know. But Jesus did. He ministered to them. He became sin for them. He conquered death for them. He loved them. They were the first eye witnesses of the resurrection, and willingly became the first evangelists for the risen Christ.

He is risen!
He is risen indeed!

POEM

In The Midst

In the midst of the darkest of times
In the midst of the coldest of tombs
In the midst of the grievous of shrouds
God comes
Often unrecognized
To me

As the light starts to peek o'er horizons
As the light starts to melt a sealed tomb
As the light starts to awaken the slumberer
God comes
Often unrecognized
To me

Now new life bursts to roll away stones
Now new life bursts to call out my name
Now new life bursts to transform ways of knowing
God is here
Fully recognized
With me

With great joy I can rise from my mourning
With great joy all my tears are wiped dry
With great joy once parched lips shout wet praises
God is here
Fully recognized
With me

NOTES

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27TH - WEEK 48, DAY 4

Peter & John Run to the Empty Tomb

☐ Read Luke 24:12, John 20:3-10

DEVOTIONAL

In John's gospel, his report of the first Easter morning is as much about himself as it is the risen Jesus. In verse 2, he says that Mary Magdalene "came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple (John himself!), the one Jesus loved."

Verses 3-4 tell us that "Peter and the other disciple (John himself!) started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple (John himself!) outran Peter and reached the tomb first."

And while Peter looked at the empty tomb and just scratched his head, verse 8 says, "Finally the other disciple (John himself!), who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed."

From our perspective 2000 years later, we cannot know for sure what John's motivation was in telling the empty tomb story the way that he did. But it sure looks like he wanted to highlight himself.

I have to admit, so do I. It is flattering when people laud my captivating sermons, brilliant leadership, and successful disciple-making (the trinity of my ministry ego). I'm guessing you are in the same sinking boat. Maybe you long for Affirmations and Accolades and Attagirls – you know, straight A's for your Christian efforts. It's all too easy to forget that we are following Jesus, instead of the other way around.

Maybe we should cut John some slack, because as verse 10 says, "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." But even after the risen Jesus appeared to them over the next month or so, John 21:20 states, "Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved (John himself!) was following them." Old habits die hard.

What about you. In what ways have you made the faith more about yourself than obediently and submissively following Jesus?

POEM

We Just Didn't Expect It

We just didn't expect it
The one who led us
The one who challenged leaders
The one who called us to be leaders
To end up degraded
To end up crucified
To end up crushed
We just didn't expect it

We just didn't expect it
The one who gave life
The one so full of life
The one who restored life
To end up dead
To end up mangled
To end up in a tomb
We just didn't expect it

We just didn't expect it
The one so free
The one who freed others
The one who gave us freedom
To end up barred
To end up buried
To end up closed away behind a stone
We just didn't expect it

We just didn't expect it
The one who was dead
The one who seemed to fail
The one who seemed beaten
To end up alive
To end up resurrected
To end up glorified
We just didn't expect it

We just never expect it
This one who leads the heavens
This one who orders universal life
This one who is the author of freedom
To end up calling us into position
To end up giving us life unimaginable
To end up breaking our familiar chains
We just never expect it

NOTES

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28TH - WEEK 48, DAY 5

Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene

☐ Read John 20:11-18

DEVOTIONAL

Mary Magdalene must have followed Peter and John to the empty tomb, taking Bronze medal in this race to the grave. When they left, she stayed, weeping with grief that someone would steal the body of her friend Jesus. It is interesting that she did not recognize Jesus when she turned around and looked straight at Him. I wonder how many times we miss the power of God, or the presence of the Holy Spirit, or the face of Jesus right in front of our faces.

When Jesus revealed His identity to her, she embraced Him, but He said, "Do not hold onto me… I am ascending…" This seems counter-intuitive. Once He ascended, how would she hold onto Him? Perhaps the answer is the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Christ – who is with us and lives in us. With Him, we are able to hold onto Christ, to abide with Him, to remain, to hold fast.

In this announcement, Jesus said that His Father and God is Mary's Father and God. By extension, the same is true for all who receive Jesus. We can have a personal relationship with God the Father through His Son Jesus. We are now children of God.

John opened his Gospel with this declaration about Jesus: Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12). Indeed, Galatians 3:26 tells us, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

There is a beautiful song by Hillsong Worship that captures this truth well. A portion of it goes like this:

I am chosen, not forsaken
I am who You say I am
You are for me, not against me
I am who You say I am

Who the Son sets free
Oh is free indeed
I'm a child of

Yes I am
In my Father's house
There's a place for me
I'm a child of God
Yes I am
I'm a child of God
Yes I am

Who You Say I Am
Ben Fielding & Reuben Morgan
2017 Hillsong Music Publishing Australia (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)

Take a moment and reflect on the deep truth that God the Father loves you as a precious child of His.

POEM

Who Can Believe It?

Who can believe it?
Wondrous news!
Fear, death destroyed
Life in full view
Tears now are dry
Gulped sobs are ceased
Eyes open now
In disbelief
The gulf is gone
The bridge repaired
Who can believe
The good news shared?

NOTES

MONDAY, OCTOBER 31ST - WEEK 49, DAY 1

Religious Leaders Bribe the Guards

☐ Read Matthew 28:11-15

DEVOTIONAL

Imagine the fear that was present in the Roman soldiers who were given the task of guarding the tomb of Jesus, specifically so that His body wouldn't disappear from the grave. They had one job! And they failed.

I suppose we should cut them some slack. A massive earthquake accompanied the arrival of an angel who was as bright as lightning and powerful enough to roll away the enormous stone covering the tomb. The Bible simply says, "The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men" (Matthew 28:4).

So, imagine their fear as they made their way back into Jerusalem to tell the religious authorities their tall tale. They had to know that if they had reported to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate that they had passed out, i.e., slept on the job, they could be put to death. So they took their chances with the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

And those sly religious leaders assuaged the guards' fears with a pile of money. With this huge sum of cash, they convinced the Roman soldiers to lie and claim that they slept on the job, promising them that they would run interference with Pilate. Money might be the root of all kinds of evil, but who knows, those roots might just grow a money tree. They took the bait, and circulated the lie that the disciples stole the body of Jesus.

The saddest part of this episode is not the greedy guards, but the unbelieving and scrupulous "men of God." Their entire life was dedicated to interpreting the things of God for the people of God. In Jesus' life, they ridiculed His words and works. In His death, they tried to snuff Him out. In His resurrection, they simply made up a false story. How sad, indeed.

Are some people just unable to see the truth, while others embrace it? What was different about Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (also members of the Sanhedrin) who publicly buried the body of Jesus? What was different about the Roman soldier at the cross, who proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God? What about you?

POEM

Have No Doubt!

Quit it!
Just quit it!
Enough, I say!
I won't listen any longer!
You've had your say!

Can you not see?
Is it not enough?
Has not the boulder moved?
Are not the shackles broken?
Do you see the sunlight streaming in?

Have no doubt!
This is real!
Touch, taste, hear!
Christ is risen!
Christ is risen, indeed!

NOTES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1ST - WEEK 49, DAY 2

Jesus Appears to Two Believers Going to Emmaus

☐ Read Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-35

DEVOTIONAL

Cleopas and another follower of Christ were walking and talking about the crucifixion and burial and missing body stories on the seven mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This two-hour walk gave them plenty of time to recognize the risen Jesus, who joined them along the way. But they didn't.

These men were two of the people who were followers of Jesus, and had certainly been with Him many times. Mary Magdalene thought the risen Jesus was a gardener. These guys figured He was an out-of-town stranger, oblivious to the crucifixion scene just days earlier.

Yet Jesus had predicted that He would rise on the third day. Had they thought He was talking metaphorically – that He would rise spiritually but not physically? Were they just too overcome with grief? Did Jesus' body look different? And what was He wearing? Regardless, they just didn't recognize their friend.

This is a recurring theme in the early hours and days following the resurrection. People were so sure that Jesus would stay dead, they simply couldn't "see" Him when He had risen from the dead. And, this is a common problem for those of us who are Christians even today. We just fail to see Jesus, even when He is right there with us.

In today's reading, it was only when Jesus sat at table with them and broke bread that they recognized Him. Perhaps there is something for us in this. In what ways can you sit and be with Jesus? What would it look like for you to stop all that hustling about, and pause your life to dwell with Him? What media habits are giving you bits and bytes of life, when Jesus wants to break bread and feast with you? What will it take for you to truly recognize Jesus?

POEM

A Single Day

When my foot hits the pavement each morn
A future lies open unborn
The direction I'll go
The people who'll show
Possibilities dawning around me

As I talk with my friends on the way
As we chatter about life today
Some questions we hold
The stories retold
Just trying to understand deeply

When a new voice joins in conversation
Giving clarity to things once mistaken
I perk up my ears
Share thoughts, questions, fears
Each step moving toward destination

As sun's rays descend comes time for resting
Confusion tucked into bed, nesting
Eve's lodging appeal
Refreshed by a meal
Awareness dawns invigorating

Feet, no longer plodding, now flying
New truth, panting fresh, no denying
With eyes opened wide
Good news fueling each stride
My feet pound a glorious rhythm

O the change that a single day brings!
Tune the soul, once in sorrow, to sing
Just one conversation
Re-route destination
One-eighty change for life's direction

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2ND - WEEK 49, DAY 3

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

☐ Read Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-23

DEVOTIONAL

The eleven disciples just couldn't buy it. Peter and John had seen the empty tomb. The disciples had heard a report from Mary Magdalene that she had a conversation with the risen Jesus. They heard a similar report from the two travelers to Emmaus, but no one believed any of it.

Fear and doubt kept them behind locked doors, huddled together as they ate dinner. Even when Jesus appeared to their own eyes, they assumed they were seeing a ghost. What was it about the risen Jesus that made Him unrecognizable to Mary Magdalene, the two travelers to Emmaus, and the disciples too? What about His resurrected body that allowed Him to pass through locked doors, travel distances in moments, and disappear from people's presence?

Apparently, they should have overcome all these questions and doubts, for Jesus chastised them for their fear and unbelief, then gently showed them His hands and feet. They watched Him eat a piece of fish. He was no ghost. He was Jesus, raised from the dead!

In this encounter, Jesus reassured them ("Peace be with you"), commissioned them ("I am sending you"), and empowered them ("Receive the Holy Spirit"). Their fears and doubts and grief were not permanent barriers to what Jesus had in mind for them. They were being prepared to share the good news of Jesus with a lost and hurting world.

Take a moment and meditate on these three phrases of Jesus, receiving whatever He has to offer you today:

"Peace be with you"

"I am sending you"

"Receive the Holy Spirit"

POEM

Is It Hard To Believe

Is it hard to believe
That a nut on the ground
With its cap and its shell
Can become a tall tree
With deep roots and tall branches
With green leaves filled with veins
With rough bark and grained core
With sweet nuts and cool shade
To bless its surroundings?
Is it hard to believe?

Is it hard to believe
That power is accessed
With a flip of a switch
Providing energy
To mix and cook breakfast
To cool and heat dwellings
To light up a room
To send a message around the world
Which gives opportunities?
Is it hard to believe?

Is it hard to believe
That gray matter in skull
With the help of a body
Can imagine new thoughts
Which can make sense of data
Which can write a new symphony
Which can dive to the ocean
Which can fly to the moon
With no limits of wonder?
Is it hard to believe?

Is it hard to believe
That love can create
With a sperm and an egg
An entire new person
With lashes and nails
With fingers and toes
With talents and thoughts
With courage and strength
To face what lies ahead?
Is it hard to believe?

Is it hard to believe
That a soul of pure heart
With infusion of love
Can forgive an enemy
Who mocked and rejected
Who betrayed and denied
Who judged and spat
Who beat and brutalized
So seamlessly and freely?
Is it hard to believe?

Is it hard to believe
That a person once dead
With deep faith in his Father
Can be resurrected
With scars from old pains
With peace on his breath
With a new body glorified
With hope for creation
The first fruit of heaven?
Is it hard to believe?

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3RD - WEEK 49, DAY 4

Jesus Appears to Thomas

☐ Read John 20:24-31

DEVOTIONAL

Thomas gets a bad rap. Even today, we call him Doubting Thomas. But before him, there was Doubting Mary, Doubting Cleopas, Doubting Disciples – yep, all of them. For some reason, Thomas was away from the group when Jesus appeared to the other disciples. But there was no way he was going to believe a thing until he saw the physical wounds from the crucifixion. For Thomas, seeing is believing.

There is another nagging question that this passage presents. Where did Jesus go? It had been a week since He appeared to the rest of the disciples. Where did He go for that week? The uproar in Jerusalem was still bad enough for the disciples to stay behind locked doors. Apparently the religious leaders and Roman officials were still looking for the "stolen body" of Jesus.

You wouldn't think that Jesus could just walk around, unnoticed. He did have holes in His hands and feet, exposed by sandals He no doubt wore. Then again, He had to show all of the disciples His crucifixion wounds before they believed it was Him. Who looks at somebody's feet unless prompted?

So, where did Jesus go? Did He visit with family or other followers? Did He blend in with Jerusalem society? Did He find Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, the secret disciples, for some secret discipleship? Did He go away to be with the Father in prayer? Did He travel to other areas and minister to people there?

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born." And in Acts 1:3 we see that Jesus appeared to people "over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

So, where did Jesus go? For forty days He went wherever there were people who were ready to hear about the kingdom of God!

POEM

Bad Rap Thomas

Had they sent you out, Thomas,
To pick up some bread
While they huddled full scared
Did you go ahead
Out into the darkness
Out into the threats?
Brave Thomas
You've had a bad rap!

And did they forget, Tom,
While others did hedge
The way that you stood
Off'ring Christ loyal pledge
"I'll go with you to Zion;
I'll stay with you, Lord."
Faithful Tom
You've had a bad rap!

And were you not one
Who left all behind
To follow the Master
To sleep in all clime
To learn of the Kingdom
Great deeds you performed
Disciple of Jesus
You've had a bad rap!

So now, 'Doubting Thomas,'
Let's put that to rest
It's obvious, Man,
You've stood up to the test
"My Lord and My God."
You knelt while proclaiming
Faithful Thomas
Let's begin this new naming!

NOTES

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4TH - WEEK 49, DAY 5

Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples in Galilee

☐ Read John 21:1-14

DEVOTIONAL

Again, where did Jesus go? If this fishing expedition took place near their home base around Capernaum, they were some 85 miles from Jerusalem. At an average walking speed of 3.1 mph, this was over 27 hours away – at least three to four days with stops for resting and eating and sleeping.

Plus, the story doesn't say how long they were in Galilee before deciding to fish. It simply ends with, "This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead."

And in the end of Luke and beginning of Acts, they are all back in Jerusalem. It's interesting to wonder where Jesus went during these gap times. Even after appearing to them, they seemed astonished to see Him on the shore. Did they assume He would just fade away? Were they waiting for Him? Were they fishing to pass time? Or were they drifting back to their careers prior to their calling?

Before His death, Jesus told them, "But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:32). If they remembered this enough to write it down later, why were they surprised to see Him? When Jesus called to them from the beach, why didn't they recognize His voice?

The biggest question is this: when they experienced this net-breaking amount of fish, did they recall the boat-sinking miraculous catch (see Week 6, Day 3) that took place when Jesus first called them to follow Him three years earlier? Back then, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He told them that He would train them to fish for people. Here, at the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus reminds them of their calling. Stop fishing for fish. Fish for people. Expect miracles.

POEM

The Rut

Have you ever acknowledged
your life in The Rut
Which goes along, goes along,
boring and stuck
Between two high walls named
"familiar" and "safe"
The daily of daily,
the boredom ne'er break
The "going-no-where-ness"
upon the rat wheel
The time clock's a ticking,
the moments to steal?

One day comes along someone
outside of the groove
Who reaches his hand to you,
calls you to move
Who lifts you right out of your safe,
boring way
And shows you a new life all
bright on display
Where nothing's familiar; ideas are fresh
An upside-down straightening defining
success

You live in the wonder and
strangeness of all
This someone, now friend,
consecrates your new call
He sees in you talents,
he opens your eyes
He looks deep inside you,
unmasks your disguise
The Possible endless,
breathtaking the view
And you start to imagine t
his is the true "you"

But The Rut has its own voice and
notices change
It's jealous and hateful, I
t calls you "deranged"
It too reaches hands out,
it grabs and it pulls
It mocks and derides the once half-man
now whole
Its force starts you doubting this new
path you're on
Your faith in the future erodes then is
gone

So once again you find yourself in
The Rut
It's worse now that you know the
wonder of stuff
Of life beyond high walls of "safe"
and "familiar"
You hate yourself,
sinking in curse, and bewilder
Will life ever be the same once you've
been shown
Can you ever find peace once true love
has been known?

"And Peter said, 'I'm going fishing.'"

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7TH - WEEK 50, DAY 1

Jesus Commissions Peter

☐ Read John 21:15-25

DEVOTIONAL

They were still on the shore of the sea, the morning after the fishermen spent the night catching nothing before Jesus provided a huge catch. Here, Jesus changes the metaphor for Peter. At his calling, Jesus asked Peter to become a fisher for people. Now He asks the professional fisherman to become a shepherd of the sheep.

God loves to push us out of our comfort zone into a new place where we are challenged do new things for which we have little experience or training. Fishing for people was about being an evangelist. Shepherding people was about becoming the leader of the newly emerging Christian Church. In both instances, Jesus said, "Follow me."

This passage gives us a glimpse into the past and future of both Peter and John. First, Simon Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times. Now, Jesus asked him to verbalize his love three times even to the point of offending him. Jesus told Peter to be the leader of the Christian movement, making sure the lambs and sheep were cared for. Finally, Jesus reminded Peter that following Him would lead to suffering and a death at the hands of others.

So Peter looked at his old fishing partner John and said, "Lord, what about him?"
John was the self-proclaimed "disciple whom Jesus loved." If Jesus trusted Peter most as a leader, John was more like a best friend to Jesus. Peter's question smacks of rivalry and jealousy. But Jesus wouldn't play the game, saying, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" In other words, mind your own beeswax, Pete.

As for John, he didn't live until Christ's return, but he did live another 70 years, outliving all the disciples. In this Gospel, authored by him, he concluded by writing, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." And at the end of the previous chapter, John stated, "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Prayer: Jesus, I believe in you. I believe you are the Messiah, the Christ. I believe you are the very Son of God. I believe you came to earth, fully God and fully man. I believe you lived a perfect life and became a perfect sacrifice on the cross. I believe you rose from the dead and gave us eternal life if we believe in you. Forgive me, Lord. I repent of my sin and accept your offer of forgiveness and salvation. Give me your Holy Spirit. Guide me to a Godly lifestyle and give me a Holy calling. I will follow you wherever you send. My answer will always be, yes. In the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

POEM

Look

Don't look at me right now
I am very ashamed
I've done something evil
I've sullied my name
I thought I was braver
I thought I was strong
I thought I was someone
I see I was wrong
Don't look at me right now
Your eyes see too deep
There's guilt in me hiding
Self-condemning has heaped

You look at me right now
I'm questioning you
Your eyes keep a-darting
But I will pursue
This friendship, this kinship
This intimate love
This call you've been given
By Father above
You look at me right now
Let me make something clear
Wipe the tears from you eyes
My forgiveness is here

NOTES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8TH - WEEK 50, DAY 2

Jesus Appears to the Disciples in Jerusalem

☐ Read Luke 24:44-49, Acts 1:1-5

DEVOTIONAL

From here to the end of this year-long study of the life of Jesus, we will draw upon some verses in Acts and Revelation where we have the recorded words and activities of Jesus. Today's readings are from the end of the Gospel of Luke and the beginning of the book of Acts, both written by Luke.

This author was a medical doctor, historian, and traveling companion with Paul for much of the events that make up the rest of the New Testament. In the Gospel of Luke, he wrote a "carefully investigated… orderly account" of the life of Jesus (Luke 1:3). In Acts, he authored a historical account of the first thirty years of the Christian Church. These two writings intersect at the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts.

Jesus took this moment to prepare His followers for a life of ministry. Think of them as midwives to the emerging Christian Church birthed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus prepared them in several ways:

1. He explained to them how the entire Old Testament was fulfilled in Him (Luke 24:44).
2. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45).
3. He spoke to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3) and told them that they would proclaim repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus (Luke 24:47).
4. He commissioned them to take the message of Jesus to the entire world, beginning in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:4).
5. He promised them that they would be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:4-5).

How were each of these training moments essential for the launching of the Christian movement? What would happen if just one of them were ignored?

POEM

The Baton

The Great Runner strong
Traversed many miles
He started the race
He sweated the trials
He carried us all
He held the baton
Now standing before us
He passes it on

Who'll run now the dash
Who'll now cover the miles
Who will pant in the Spirit
Who will suffer the trials
Who will carry the message
Who now holds the baton
Who will run alongside
And then pass it along?

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9TH - WEEK 50, DAY 3

Jesus Gives the Great Commission

☐ Read Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-18, Acts 1:6-8

DEVOTIONAL

From Jesus' God-given authority, He gave His followers authority to make disciples of others. His charge demands action:

GO – while there is a time to meditate on the mountain, staying there reaches no one. We must go to where the people are to share the Gospel.

MAKE DISCIPLES – out of the raw material of non-believers we are called to produce dedicated followers of Jesus Christ!

BAPTIZING THEM – this act of faith, in the Holy Trinity's name, is the public declaration that the new disciple will follow Jesus for a lifetime.

TEACHING THEM TO OBEY – just as a baby is not finished growing at birth, so a new disciple is not fully matured at baptism. Following Jesus means obeying!

RECEIVE POWER – it is only by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that we are enabled to take the Gospel to others.

BE MY WITNESSES – we are commissioned to share the good news of Jesus among those like us (Jerusalem & Judea), those different from us (Samaria), and those unknown to us (the ends of the earth).

For these six actions steps above, what is one practical way that you could live into each one of them as you obey the Great Commission of Jesus?

Now, what is the one that you are being prompted to pursue right now in you faithfulness to Christ?

What will you do about it?

POEM

Commencement

There was no arena
No mortar and board
No pomp and no circumstance
No loud cheering hoard
No valedictorian
Diploma nor gown
Just one timeless speech
Of great faith and renown
"Go into the nations
Go tell of God's love
And I will be with you
My presence above
Around and before you
Behind you within
Now go make disciples
No go souls to win."

NOTES

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10TH - WEEK 50, DAY 4

Jesus Ascends into Heaven

☐ Read Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:9-11

DEVOTIONAL

Each of these accounts say Jesus was "taken up" into heaven. Angels told them to stop staring at the empty sky, but promised that Jesus would return the same way. Luke says their response was one of worship and great joy.

They had spent their last three years with the Son of God. They would spend the rest of their lives spreading news about Jesus to the world. As Mark states, "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."

From that moment forward, the disciples would have to carry out their commission without the physical presence of Jesus. The temptation still holds for us to stare at the sky and wait for His return, while Jesus has called us to go to the valley and proclaim His name. But we are never alone.

God promised, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

Jesus said, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20)

And we have the Holy Spirit. Jesus proclaimed, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16)

We are never alone. And absolutely nothing can change that. Paul summed it up well in Romans 8:31-39, when he wrote,

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are never alone. Praise the name of Jesus!

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POEM

Hello And Goodbye And Hello

When I first said hello to earth
Nine months before actual birth
I heard Mama humming
Her prayers, despite shunning
Her courage, obedience and hope

When my eyes first
awakened on straw
I glimpsed up on faces all awed
Bright tears of the shepherds
The magis' wise treasures
The least's and the greatest's
deep love

When greeting the scholars
and town
As I walked among those life
let down
Amazement came o'er me
As many before me
Flung open the portals of faith

As ministry time rambled by
As followers shuffled goodbye
My heart was dejected
As many rejected
The Way and the Truth and the Life

When up to Jerus'lem I trod
To accomplish the great plan of
God
Said goodbye to my Will
To face torture, be still
As My Father forsook me, full sin

As I said my adieu to my breath
And submitted my life unto Death
My crown was laid down
My lips made no sound
I rested in God's Today grace

Then God recalled,
"Let there be Light!"
I burst forth from Death's evil night
Arrayed in full glory
Redeemed Father's story
I greeted Salvation's new dawn

Along roads, behind doors I came
I greeted my loved ones by name
Forgiving the old strife
Displaying the new life
Commissioning work was bestowed

With arms wide I rose into Heav'n
Embraced running Father, love giv'n
Our great plan in action
Salvation's transaction
Accomplished! Well done!
Here's to Life!

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11TH - WEEK 50, DAY 5

Jesus Appears to Saul (Paul)

☐ Read Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-21; 26:8-18

DEVOTIONAL

A man with the Gentile name of Paul (Jewish name of Saul) became the central figure in much of the remainder of the New Testament. He helped spread the Gospel into what is now Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. His missionary journeys recorded in the book of Acts, along with more than a dozen letters which became Epistles in the New Testament, helped launch Christianity around the world.

But he did not begin as Paul the Proclaimer of Christ. Rather, he started off as Saul the Persecutor of all who followed the Way of Jesus. These passages tell the story of how the resurrected and ascended Jesus appeared to him, changed his heart, and commissioned him for his ministry to the non-Jewish Gentiles. Peter and others would continue to reach the Jews for Jesus.

Aren't you grateful that Jesus continues to speak to us even after He ascended back to heaven? Without His voice, Christianity would have remained a small sect of Judaism among Jewish people. While Jesus barely ventured beyond the borders of Israel during His three years of ministry on earth, He had a much grander vision for the movement He had inaugurated. As He said in John 3:16, "For God so loved the WORLD…"

And Jesus still speaks. He continues to change hearts. He has never stopped commissioning those who are ready and willing to go and spread the good news of His salvation. He spoke to Paul, who took the gospel into the teeth of the Roman Empire. He spoke to leaders in the first centuries of Christianity, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Augustine of Hippo. He spoke to Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and other great church reformers. He spoke to Mother Teresa, who ministered to the poorest of Calcutta. He spoke to Billy Graham, whose evangelistic ministry changed the hearts of thousands.

And Jesus speaks to you and me. Our times of prayer should include intentional listening, with an expectation that Jesus still speaks. He still longs to change hearts. He still desires to commission us for ministry work, both great and small. Enter your prayer time with an open heart, a pen in hand, and a willing spirit. Remember, we are never alone!

POEM

Surrounded

My mind sought just for knowledge
I studied years real hard
Yeshiva's finest student
My rabbi, herald bard
My brain was vast expanded
My head grew bigger too
My passion had full fervor
Dark breathing, death threats grew

How little did I realize
My own vain ignorance
My blind spots were all hidden
By pride's own arrogance
Until God's great love knocked me
Right off of my high horse
Surrounded by Christ's true Light
Damascus changed my course

Though physically blinded
I finally could see
The path of my wrong stepping
My foolish willful deeds
Instead, I'm called to service
Submitted now to God
"I'm here, LORD" this my answer
"I'll go where you have trod."

Pressed hard but never all crushed
Bewildered, no despair
Oft smitten, but God's presence
Struck down, but grace repaired
We live for only Jesus
Our Master and our Friend
Though life on earth has perils
Our witness will not end

NOTES

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14TH - WEEK 51, DAY 1

Jesus is the Eternal One

☐ Read Revelation 1:1-20

DEVOTIONAL

In these final two weeks in this year-long study of the life of Jesus, we turn to the last book of the Bible. Revelation contains words and visions from Jesus, written down by the Apostle John over 60 years after Jesus had ascended into heaven. Jesus gave these prophetic words and images to John in a vision, which we know as the book of Revelation.

Here in chapter 1, Jesus tethers the future to the past and present. The book of Revelation is about all of time. In verse 8, Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega... who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Jesus is everything from A to Z.

Jesus continues this thought in verse 17, saying, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last." The author of Revelation also penned the Gospel of John, which begins with these three verses about Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

Since Jesus is the eternal God, there is nothing to fear, not even death! Revelation 1:18 promises us that there is power in the death and resurrection of Jesus, for He said, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." This echoes what Jesus told His disciples when He was with them, saying, "...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18).

The book of Revelation opens with the assurance that God is in control. We have nothing to fear. Military conflicts, economic meltdowns, public persecutions, and global pandemics have nothing on us. Consider the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:7-11,

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

POEM

I See The Lord

No longer hidden
I see the LORD

Freed from sin's chains
I see the LORD

Jesus, the Faithful One
I see the LORD

There! He is coming!
I see the LORD

I hear the trumpet!
I see the LORD

Long robe, gold sash
I see the LORD

Eyes flaming fire
I see the LORD

Loud living water
I see the LORD

Full shining Son
I see the LORD

NOTES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15TH - WEEK 51, DAY 2

Jesus' Message to the Church in Ephesus

☐ Read Revelation 2:1-7

DEVOTIONAL

Some of the earliest people reached in Paul's missionary journeys were people in what is today the nation of Turkey. The Seven Churches that Jesus addresses in the book of Revelation were in that region. There is much that we can learn from them today, if we have ears to hear.

The first message was to the church in Ephesus. Paul spent a significant amount of time in Ephesus, and later wrote to them the letter of Ephesians. Also, Paul sent Timothy to be the pastor of the Ephesian church, and wrote him instructions in the letters of 1 & 2 Timothy. Finally, John probably made his home in Ephesus until he was imprisoned on the island of Patmos where he penned Revelation. Ephesus garnered much attention from the early church leaders!

Yet, this did not keep them from error. In today's reading, Jesus lauded the Ephesian church's perseverance and protection of the faith. But He chastised them, saying, "You have forsaken the love you had at first." Around thirty-five years earlier, Paul had written to the them these encouraging words, "ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:15-16). How sad that they had lost that first love.

They higher you go, the farther you have to fall. From the very beginning of Christianity, we see how easy it is for people to forget whose they are and who they are. Verse 5 serves as a warning to the Ephesian church, and to yours as well, "Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."

Was there a time when you were more madly in love with God than you are today? Were you once more avid about your faith, more diligent about your service, more passionate about your brothers and sisters in Christ? Jesus' words to us are a clarion call: "Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."

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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16TH - WEEK 51, DAY 3

Jesus' Message to the Church in Smyrna

☐ Read Revelation 2:8-11

DEVOTIONAL

Smyrna would have been the next stop for a courier delivering these prophetic words on the road through Asia Minor. Smyrna was an important port city in the Roman Empire, bringing in ships for trade, travel, and athletic games. It contained an imperial temple for emperor worship among the Gentiles, along with synagogues that were opposed to Christianity among the Jews. Being a Christian in Smyrna was tantamount to putting a persecution bullseye on your chest. Listen to Jesus' words to them:

"I know your afflictions and your poverty"

"I know about the slander"

"you are about to suffer"

"Be faithful, even to the point of death"

Jesus wanted them to know that He was filled with empathy for their pain, but also effusive with encouragement about their blessings:

"yet you are rich!"

"Do not be afraid"

"I will give you the victor's crown"

I once heard someone say that Jesus is more interested in our stance than our circumstance. Being a follower of Christ does not mean that everything in this physical world will go as we would choose. But Jesus calls us to be faithful nonetheless.

Take a moment and thank Jesus for His presence, power, and promises in your life, regardless of any other circumstances you may be facing.

POEM

A Life
Integrity
Maintained
Even when no one is watching
A life of truth

Trust
Gained
After years of faithful service
A life of loyalty

Transparency
Sustained
Willing to be vulnerable
A life of trust

False accusations
Pained
Never can recover
A life of shame

Cover
Maintained
God know all
A life of grace

NOTES

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17TH - WEEK 51, DAY 4

Jesus' Message to the Church in Pergamum

☐ Read Revelation 2:12-17

DEVOTIONAL

Next up is the Church in Pergamum, the home of the Roman governor and seat of Roman government in Asia Minor. This city boasted an impressive altar to Zeus, where sacrifices and cultic activity took place around the clock. There, this Greek god was worshipped as "Zeus the Savior," overseen by another god who was depicted as a serpent, an image for Satan himself. Pergamum also had imperial temples for emperor worship, giving the large population plenty of pagan options.

There wasn't much room for the emerging Christian community. Jesus spoke to the Church in Pergamum about their difficult setting, saying, "I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name." Surrounded by a sea of political power, Satan worship and idolatrous cults, the Christians in Pergamum remained steadfast.

Well, almost. At least some of them embraced the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, who promoted idol feasts and sexual immorality, even though the first council of the Apostles expressly forbid both (see Acts 15:20). John Wesley once said, "What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace." The Christians in Pergamum did just that. They were separated from that council in Jerusalem by time and distance, but all those ungodly activities were "right here, right now." So some of them caved into culture.

This is a shot across the bow for all of us. Ephesians 4:14-15 challenges us to spiritual maturity amid the shifting winds of culture. It says, "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."

Jesus' words to the believers in Pergamum are to all of us: "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Confess the areas where you have abandoned the teachings of Scripture for the shifting winds in the swirling sea of culture.

POEM

Covered

The winds of change are swirling
Round and round they go
The shameful things once hidden
Take center stage, proud show
There's evil all around me
Like prison wire barbed
The laws once for protection
All seem to disregard
Amid this wall of hatred
Confusion, evil throned
I'm covered by Love's garment
I'm hidden and atoned

NOTES

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18TH - WEEK 51, DAY 5

Jesus' Message to the Church in Thyatira

☐ Read Revelation 2:18-29

DEVOTIONAL

Unions can be powerful forces. Employees are often pressured to join, pay dues, and promote the party line – whether they agreed or not. This captures the essence of life in Thyatira. The city was known for its trade guilds, made up of craftsmen and merchants for pottery, cloth, and dyeing.

Acts 16:14 tells of an encounter that Paul had in Philippi with one such person from Thyatira: "One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."

Belonging to the trade guilds was a necessity if a craftsman or merchant hoped to stay in business. Talk about cancel culture! This proved to be a problem for converts to Christianity, because the union gatherings often promoted idol feasts, sexual immorality, and emperor worship.

Jesus has strong words for the believers who have caved to the peer pressure of their trade guilds, saying, "I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols... Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds." Ouch!

Yesterday we examined the shifting winds of culture that influence our Christian worldview and lifestyle. Here we are confronted with the pressure of alliances which threaten us to yield or be cut off. We are reminded of the words of Jesus when He said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:23-26).

What alliances in your life are promoting a message that is in conflict with Biblical faith in Jesus Christ?

POEM

Pressure Cooker

The lid is sealed
The heat turned on
The pressure in me building
The water temp
The rising hot
The strength in me is wilting

Remove the bind
Remove the heat
Let Living water cool me
Remove the fear
Remove the lies
Let streams flow all about me

NOTES

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21ST - WEEK 52, DAY 1

Jesus' Message to the Church in Sardis

☐ Read Revelation 3:1-6

DEVOTIONAL

Wake up!

The city of Sardis was known for its great wealth and sophistication. Like most other communities in Asia Minor, the Gentile population had embraced the paganism of the Greco-Roman world. But they were very tolerant of the thriving and growing Jewish community in their midst. The nascent Christian community no doubt blended right in. Most believe that everyone coexisted with one another somewhat peacefully.

Perhaps that is why Jesus said to them, "I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God." It is ever so easy to sleepwalk through our spiritual journey, doing our own thing while everybody else does theirs. Wake up!

Jesus didn't want His followers to simply blend in with their Jewish and pagan neighbors; He wanted them to share the Gospel with them! Indeed, He went on to say, "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" Wake up!

It is one thing to go far away on a mission trip to share the good news of Jesus Christ. It is another thing to do so among those with whom we live, work, learn, and play. While it is a temptation to let everybody do their own thing, Jesus has commanded us to be His witnesses and make disciples of people right where we live. Wake up!

As Paul wrote, "But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'" (Ephesians 5:13-14).

Wake up!

POEM

Lazy Mary, Will You Wake Up?

The bed is soft with pillows warm
The covers cush around me swarm
The night is dark
The bed is snug
This sleeping is delightful!

The call to waken interrupts
The call to Day; the call, "Wake up!"
Yet comfort wins
Roll over, snooze
This dreamland is most tempting

Now come and shake me from my sleep
Expose what laziness will reap
If not exposed
If left in bed
A life all spoiled and wasted

NOTES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 22ND - WEEK 52, DAY 2

Jesus' Message to the Church in Philadelphia

☐ Read Revelation 3:7-13

DEVOTIONAL

Philadelphia was an important commercial gateway city for many years. As such, it served as open door to spread Greek culture, language, and pagan worship to other lands. Now, the emerging Christian community had taken root, with the mission to spread Christ-centered culture, worship, and ministry to the surrounding world. So Jesus told them, "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut."

However a devastating earthquake about eighty years earlier, along with twenty years of severe aftershocks, made the city nearly uninhabitable. By the time John wrote down the book of Revelation, many worried citizens had moved out of the city and lived in the safer surrounding areas, far away from falling city debris. Throughout this period of terror and evacuation, the Roman Caesar was generous to the city Philadelphia, giving tremendous financial aid.

For his efforts, the city leaders had proposed changing the name of the city from Philadelphia ("brotherly love") to Neocaesarea ("Caesar's New City"). This would be their new name. To those followers of Jesus who remained faithful, Jesus promised, "I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name."

These people were living in a city with an open door and a new name. They would have to choose if those were rooted in Caesar or in Christ. Nothing has changed down through the ages. We have to make that same choice today.

What is the open door that Jesus has set before you?

What is the new name that Christ wants to give you?

POEM

What's In A Name?

When choosing names
My parents thought
Should it be "Carla?" "Martha?"
My day of birth
They settled on
The name of "Martha"
Bitter...

A child of joy
With bouncy curls
Should we allow or stifle?
A day of pain
Pity denied
Go to your room
Seek God

A bitter seed
Could cause thick root
Should I give in or press?
"I gave you prayer,
To center you
It's Hebrew name--
A-na."

And so within
My bitterness
"A-na" was front and planted
What's in my name?
Transforms my life?
Mar—a—na—tha!

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 23RD - WEEK 52, DAY 3

Jesus' Message to the Church in Laodicea

☐ Read Revelation 3:14-22

DEVOTIONAL

Laodicea was close to the city of Colossae. Paul concluded his letter to the Colossians by saying, "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea" (Colossians 4:16). Unfortunately, that letter to the Church in Laodicea is lost.

The city of Laodicea had a water problem. Their water supply was lukewarm and laden with minerals, hardly tasty to drink. Nearby Colossae to the southeast was famous for cold, clear drinking water. Nearby Hierapolis to the north had incredible hot springs. Jesus upbraided the Christians in Laodicea with these poignant words, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." The metaphor was clear.

An astonishingly wealthy city, Laodicea produced beautiful and renowned black wool for clothing and had a medical school that made an important eye salve. So Jesus continued His reprimand, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."

Hmm. Sound familiar? Self-sufficient person with lukewarm faith. Sound like anybody you know? (Hint: you might start by looking in the mirror).

Why would Jesus talk so harshly to His people? He gives the answer in this passage: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." Jesus loves us enough to accept us just the way we are, and he loves us enough to never want us to stay just the way we are.

What aspects of self-sufficiency and lukewarmness might Jesus rebuke and discipline in you? How will you be earnest and repent, opening the door to a more profound feast with Him?

POEM

You Make Me Sick

You make me sick
I spit you out
Your bitter ways
Carry no clout
When full forgiveness
Is the path
This canceling must end

You make me sick
I spit you out
Your fence sitting
Disgusts me
You in or out?
Time to decide
This head in sand is falsehood

You make me sick
I spit you out
Your pluralism
Not tolerate
Who do you say
I am? Live out
Your faith plant firm and stand

NOTES

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 24TH - WEEK 52, DAY 4

Jesus Gives a Glimpse of Heaven

☐ Read Revelation 4:1-11

DEVOTIONAL

Chapter four in Revelation begins an apocalyptic vision of heaven, along with the celestial and earthly battles along the way. In John's vision, he saw an open door and heard the voice of Jesus from heaven saying, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." This last book of the Bible is an unfolding of that visionary encounter.

Throughout the book of Revelation, Jesus is the focal point. Here, He is sitting on the throne in heaven, surrounded by the twelve tribes of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles of the New Testament. They represent all of God's redeemed, who will give glory and honor to Him!

The four living creatures are a reference to Ezekiel 1, where the prophet envisioned these animals. Not only all of humanity, but also all wild beasts, tamed animals, and birds of the sky are for God's glory!

Then there is Isaiah 6, in which that prophet said, "I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." God will be praised!

Indeed, Jesus is the One who was, and is, and is to come. He existed before time. Colossians 1:15-20 captures this truth: "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross"

Take time now to thank Jesus for who He is and all He does. When it comes to this captivating vision of heaven, remember that Jesus said, "My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3).

POEM

Where

Where is your head?
All in the clouds?
Are thoughts blurred and foggy?
Or are your feet
Upon the ground
Following Day's Cloud pillar?

Where will you be?
Unsure, behind?
Is faith a mere delusion?
Or are you grounded
In Christ's blood
Firm planted on the Way?

Where is your safety?
Barns of Grain?
Success your motivation?
Or are you armored
For the fight
Prepared for Armageddon?

NOTES

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25TH - WEEK 52, DAY 5

Jesus' Promise to Come Again

☐ Read Revelation 22:7-21

DEVOTIONAL

With this we come to the end of the year-long study of the life of Jesus. But it's not over. Our lives continue in Him, always leaning forward into His calling and purpose. One day He will come again and, if He tarries, all of us will one day die and come face to face with Him.

This is reading #260 in this year-long journey. But never think that you have completed the course, as if to say, "I had some good meals this year; I will never need to eat again." Conversely, feast daily on the Word of God. Make time in Scripture and prayer and other spiritual disciplines a part of your life until you draw your last breath.

And remember that there is a difference between reading the Bible for knowledge and doing so for transformation. Romans 12:1-2 says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

In the very first devotional for this study I wrote:

My prayer is that you will not only know more about Jesus, but you will know Jesus more intimately than ever before and be willing to follow wherever He leads.

That remains my prayer for you. May the Lord bless you on the journey!

POEM

O, Who Will Comprehend My Love?

For days and weeks and months
I've pined
For this awaited time
Each detail, planning,
Purpose, thought
To speak My Love sublime
With each sight,
Will you see My Love?
With each melodic tune?
Will every taste and smell and touch
Declare deep passion true?

With water clean,
Each soul kept pure
Each frame bedecked in white
With prayer and longing,
Counsel strong
For you whom I desire
Each future brighter with each day
This is My Vow to you
The work of faith in each begun
My Glory will display

Is there a space enough
to hold
All I desire for you?
Will wine and joy now
overflow
A miracle full true?
O, who will comprehend
My Love
Of water into wine?
O, who will know The Best
shall come
To mutually consume?

NOTES

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