



**ENCOUNTERING
JESUS**

2017 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

2017 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

© 2017 SOUTH FELLOWSHIP
All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations are from The ESV Bible
unless otherwise noted.
(The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,)
Used by permission.

You are free to use the 2017 Lenten Devotional in your church or ministry for free, as long as you do not alter or add to the devotional in any way, charge for its distribution, or use for commercial purpose.

INTRODUCTION

ASH WEDNESDAY | MARCH 1

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season in the church calendar known as Lent. Lent is comprised of the 40 days leading up to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead (not counting Sundays). The Church has recognized the season of Lent since 300 AD. While observing Lent is not explicitly commanded by the Scriptures, the practice of Lenten engagement has helped shape followers of Jesus for centuries.

There are three primary focuses of the Lenten season that we hope this book leads you towards. First, we recognize Lent as a time for repentance and confession of sin. This is a season when we say to God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). This can be a painful process, but as the Psalmist points out, it always leads to life. During these 40 days, ask God to show you who you really are – the good, the bad, and the ugly. When you see the bad and the ugly, you can turn from it and run to Jesus. Repent and walk back to the everlasting way he's purchased for you.

The second purpose of Lent and Ash Wednesday specifically, is a recognition of our mortality. As Ash Wednesday begins the Lenten season, we're reminded that "for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). The recognition of our mortality ironically leads to a more full life. There is great wisdom found in recognizing we won't live forever in these bodies, seasons will change, and one day we'll breathe our final breath (Psalm 91:12). Coming to terms with our pending death, leads to an abundant life. When you push into your mortality during this season, you can drink deeply of the life you have presently.

Finally, the Lenten season is marked by a renewed pursuit of Jesus. Sometimes people intentionally give something up during the season of Lent to remind themselves to abide in Jesus. The absence of something is designed to create a desire, that serves as a trigger, leading to an encounter with Jesus. The goal of Lent is Jesus. He's constantly present and longing to meet with you. When you take intentional steps to meet with Jesus, you can build rhythms of abiding with him in your daily life.

Our hope and ardent prayer for you is that this devotional booklet would serve as an on-ramp to encountering the One who longs to meet with you. May this Lenten season be a spiritual milestone for you as you intentionally walk with Jesus and chase the One who pursued you all the way to the cross.

CREATIVE APPROACH

THURSDAY | MARCH 2

by Yvonne Biel

READ LUKE 18:15-17

Creativity is said to be one of the highest levels of learning. Experts in human development find that as learners gain knowledge and understanding, they develop skills and strategies to use information and experience and generally become more reflective, playful, and experimental. Creativity helps us to reimagine new processes and try new ideas, and this is not just true of "creative" fields. Think about professionals and leaders in political science, psychology, and mathematics. You'll notice how the more advanced they get, the more creative they become.

So, let's carry this same thinking into our walk with God. If you've been walking with God for any length of time, you can likely identify times when you grew in knowledge and understanding of him. You may be able to recall times when you learned how to apply the truth or times

**His desire is
to use ALL
of YOU to
encounter
ALL of HIM**

when you reflected deeply on your past woundings, present emotions, and dreams of the future. There are many stages when walking with God and often we go round and round, learning and relearning. In this Lenten devotional, we suggest adding a dose of creativity in your walk with God in hopes you might deepen your relationship with him. Creativity usually indicates a high level of comprehension but the beauty of walking with God is that we don't have to reach some incredibly high level of learning to use

creativity. Even young children imagine. They can place themselves in a storybook and encounter the characters, surroundings and conflicts.

Through this Lenten devotional, you'll be encouraged to engage imagination like a child. If activating your imagination is somewhat difficult for you or you haven't practiced awaking that part of your brain in a while, this process may feel foreign or uncomfortable at first. But, remember that God created your mind and your imagination. His desire is to use all of you to encounter all of him. In one of Jesus' stronger statements to his disciples, he said, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Luke 18:17). Let's set aside some of our adultish desires to meet God in the "right" way and welcome a perhaps new and fresh posture to meet *with* God.

HEART APPROACH

FRIDAY | MARCH 3

by Yvonne Biel

READ DEUTERONOMY 6:4-6

The Apostle Paul describes the inner struggle so well, "For in my inner self, I joyfully agree with God's law. But I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body" (Romans 7:22-23, HCSB). If you've ever experienced the desire to do something and had difficulty carrying it out, you understand the struggle. As human followers of Jesus, we often live in tension when our heads know the truth, but our hearts struggle to agree.

The struggle is real, and then we hear this command. "Love the Lord your God with everything in you - heart, soul, mind and strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is the greatest command, yet it's likely the most difficult to carry out. Technically, our head and our heart are only 18 inches apart, but sometimes bridging that gap feels next to impossible. We might say we desire to love God with the wholeness of our being, but when we try to live it out, we experience the struggle. So, some Christians stick to intellectual love for God, perhaps because it seems safer. Some love him radically with their emotions, yet when he appears different from their expectations, their hearts are crushed. Some love Jesus with all their actions, but if they're honest, it's probably motivated by a desire for accolades.

We're urged to love God with every ounce of our being. But, we can't do that without knowing him and getting to know him. To love requires a relationship. And a relationship requires an exchange of conversation,

participation, and a growing desire for each other. Often we grow in love for others by thinking about them, imagining life with them, and allowing our hearts to miss them. We can get to the same thoughts about God through our imaginations. Imaginative prayer makes the Jesus of the Gospels our Jesus. It helps us develop a unique and personal relationship with him. We watch Jesus' face. We listen to the way he speaks. We notice how people respond to him.

**Imaginative
prayer makes
the Jesus of
the Gospels
OUR Jesus**

These imaginative details bring us to know Jesus as more than a name or a historical figure in a book. He is a living person. Imaginative prayer teaches us things about Jesus in ways scripture study or theological

IGNATIAN APPROACH

SATURDAY | MARCH 4

by Yvonne Biel

READ PSALM 119:97-104

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a fifteenth century Spanish theologian and priest, became well-known for his exploration of *Spiritual Exercises*. This is arguably one of the most influential books on the spiritual life ever written as it suggests various meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices to help people deepen their relationship with God. Even though Ignatius had an advanced degree from one of the finest universities in Europe and was an analytical thinker well-acquainted with the ideas of leading philosophers and theologians, his spiritual life was remarkably driven by an active imagination.

One of his spiritual exercises is called Imaginative Prayer. By placing himself fully in a story from the Gospels, he becomes an onlooker and participant. For instance, when Jesus is speaking to a blind man by the side of the road, he might imagine the hot sun beating down on him, the smell of dust kicked up by those passing by, the feel of itchy clothing, sweat rolling down his brow, or the rumble of hunger inside. He might see the desperation in the blind man's face and he might hear the wail of hope in his words. He might note the irritation of the disciples. But, above all, Ignatius watches Jesus—the way Jesus walks and gestures, the look in his eyes and the expression on his face. Ignatius pays attention to the words Jesus speaks and the things Jesus does.

**Ignatius doesn't
want us to THINK
about Jesus...
He wants us to
EXPERIENCE Jesus**

Ignatius proposes this contemplative exercise with many different scenes from the Gospels. When he does his imaginative work, he typically chooses encounters with Jesus rather than Jesus' teaching because he wants us to see Jesus interacting with others, making decisions, moving about, and ministering. Ignatius doesn't want us to think about Jesus. He wants us to experience Jesus.

He wants Jesus to fill our senses so that we meet him. So, we've included his approach in our Lenten series on Encountering Jesus. For each week of Lent, we will encourage you to try encountering Jesus through a guided imaginative exercise. We've designated Sundays for this spiritual exercise.



ENCOUNTERING JESUS

SUNDAY | MARCH 5

READ LUKE 5:1-11

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

JESUS MOVES FIRST

MONDAY | MARCH 6

by Donna Burns

READ LUKE 15:3-7

Our God is a God who comes to us. He makes the first move. Just think of all the times when God shows up on the scene. He comes to Adam and Eve when they are hiding in the garden after biting into the forbidden fruit. He comes to bless Abraham with an invitation to follow and be his chosen nation. He shows up in the burning bush to ask Moses to help set his people free. He comes running toward the prodigal son to welcome him home. And, he comes as the Good Shepherd to find his lost sheep.

Jesus does the same in Peter's life. He shows up. On ordinary days, Jesus comes to the shore of Peter's life - showing up in his place of business. First, we see a crowd following Jesus to hear what he has to say (Luke).

**Jesus
is ALWAYS
there, he comes
to meet you
wherever you
are, in whatever
condition you
find yourself**

So, Jesus asks to use Peter's boat as a pulpit to save him from the pressing crowd. Peter obliges - happy to help. On another day, Jesus comes to Peter with a command to go fishing in the middle of the day in Peter's favorite fishing grounds. Although tired, hungry, and smelly from a long night's work on the sea, Peter humbly replies, "because you say so, I will." This boat-sinking, miraculous catch transforms Peter's life, and he leaves his business, his boats, and his greatest catch ever to follow Jesus. Again, after the resurrection, Jesus appears to Peter by one of his fishing spots. Peter had just gone out to fish, perhaps to rest from three years of preaching and teaching, and giving his all to following Jesus. In this encounter, Peter still feels the agony of denying he knew Jesus, but he stands

there dripping with water from swimming into shore because he knew Jesus was the only one who could give him what he truly needed. Jesus shows up to offer Peter forgiveness.

Ponder that time when Jesus first came to you - the time when you recognized his Lordship and, like Peter, it transformed your life. The truth is Jesus is always there, he comes to meet you wherever you are, in whatever condition you find yourself. He comes with loving, welcoming arms to forgive you of your sin and usher you into eternal fellowship

RADICAL REQUEST

TUESDAY | MARCH 7

by Ryan Paulson

READ GENESIS 12:1-3

My sister put onions in her socks one night. She had been sick for several weeks and read online that putting raw onions in your socks while you sleep would make you feel better. What the article didn't say was that the smell would be so bad it would distract from the actual illness. Needless to say, it didn't work. If you've spent much time online, you know there are a number of wives tales floating around as cures for sickness. Most of them call the reader to follow some ludicrous instruction in hopes of seeing a miraculous healing. But, how do we know the difference between absurd wives tales and the real deal?

In Luke 5, when Jesus walks along the Sea of Gennesaret, his instruction to Peter must've seemed absurd. He called them to go fishing, during the day, after they had fished the entire night and had come up empty.

Every fisherman knew the best time to go fishing was at night. This was Peter's profession and Peter's father's profession. If there was one thing in the world Peter knew how to do, it was fish! Fishing ran through his blood. When Jesus approaches him, Jesus calls Peter to throw out his knowledge and his accumulated rationale to follow an absurd instruction. It was the same call God gave to Abraham back in Genesis 12:1, when he said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred

and your father's house to the land that I will show you." It's absurd and ambiguous. God called Abraham to leave everything he knew in order to step into the unknown. The promise he had was that God was going to show him what to do and where to go, and God was going to bless Abraham when he did it (Genesis 12:2-3).

**Worldly wisdom
must never
trump DIVINE
CALLING**

This tends to be the way God works. Worldly wisdom is a good thing, but it can never be an ultimate thing. Worldly wisdom must never trump divine calling. As people who follow the way of Jesus, we must be open to hearing the sometimes absurd invitation of God. The ludicrous calling to leave everything and follow him. As we look at God's radical calling in the lives of Abraham and Peter, we're left with a few questions to ask ourselves. Are there any areas of my life that are off limits to God? Are we willing to follow Jesus and hear him. Am I willing to follow God's

DESPITE DOUBT

WEDNESDAY | MARCH 8

by Rich Obrecht

READ LUKE 5:4-5

"You're not the boss of me!" You may have heard this phrase from a child speaking to their older brother or sister or babysitter placed in a position of authority or as children play together at the park. But sometimes, just sometimes, in our adult lives, we'd like to speak this phrase to those who seem intent on telling us something we know won't work or to those who suggest results unknown to us. Perhaps Peter wanted to say this to Jesus when Jesus told him to 'let down the nets.' "Jesus, you're not the boss of me!"

Peter had just spent the night trying to catch fish to provide for his family and wasn't successful. He was probably tired and frustrated and wasn't in the mood for someone to have him go back out into the water, let alone fish. Peter may have been repairing, cleaning, and stowing away his nets for the day. Then the crowds show up. I imagine someone bumps into him, causing him to drop his tools and net, increasing anxiety and frustration. Add to this being hungry and exhausted from tossing nets only to retrieve them empty. Now, we begin to understand how much he didn't want to cast the net, just one more time. We get a hint of this when Peter explains to Jesus they'd tried all night without any fish being caught.

**If we don't ACT
upon what we
hear, we'll soon
forget.**

When we're in this condition – frustrated, tired and exhausted – we don't like to do what we're told. But, Peter complies! His tired legs lift him from kneeling in the boat, and his exhausted arms and hands throw the net out of the boat, fully expecting to draw the net in empty, without fish. In James 1:22-25, James says that being a doer is a facet of hearing. We are to hear...and do. There's a reason doing must closely follow hearing. If we don't act upon what we hear, we'll soon forget. Let's learn from Peter. Even if we really don't feel like doing what we've been told, for one reason or another, or for a dozen reasons, we should do whatever Jesus asks us to do. The result of our acting upon what we hear might just prove fruitful!

UNEXPECTED BLESSING

THURSDAY | MARCH 9

by Ryan Paulson

READ PSALM 1:1-3

I went fishing every day after work in the summer of 2002, but I never caught a single fish. Not one. Oh, to have been on that boat with Jesus and Peter that day. The Scriptures tells us they caught such a large number of fish that their nets were breaking. These nets were designed to be able to haul in large numbers of fish, but God literally gave them more than they could handle. Imagine the scene in your mind – multitudes of live fish, flopping around in a boat. Chaos. Excitement. Astonishment.

We can only surmise that Peter had never experienced a catch like this before. And this was a catch he almost missed. When Jesus first told him to put his nets out, Peter responded, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!" But, Peter's response didn't end there. He continued,

"But at your word, I will let down the nets." Peter's irrational obedience led to this unexpected blessing. His "yes" to God, in the midst of doubt, uncertainty, and fatigue positioned him to receive a blessing only God could deliver. And God never skimps. The boat always overflows.

**Peter's
irrational
OBEDIENCE led
to unexpected
BLESSING**

For Peter, irrational obedience led to unexpected blessing and it all took place on his boat. This was his office – his normal, everyday life. That's the same place God calls for our obedience and delivers his blessing. It might look like continuing

to walk with him faithfully in the midst of a difficult health diagnosis. It might look like praying fervently even when we don't see his hand moving. It might look like living in purity and holiness in a world that says 'anything goes.' It might look like selling everything to follow his call. Whatever it looks like, blessing always follows obedience. It's not always the blessing of fish – or something material. It might be the blessing of joy or friendship or deep meaning and purpose. But every time, the blessing of God is directly attached to steadfast obedience to God. Let's not give up before we see his hand move.

RELINQUISHING FEAR

FRIDAY | MARCH 10

by Aaron Bjorklund

READ GENESIS 3:8-11

I imagine Peter straining his muscles against the weight of the fish they'd just caught. The feeling of ropes in his hands was familiar, but suddenly, the sheer weight of the catch woke him up. It wasn't normal to feel sun on your back while fishing. It wasn't normal to have your nets break under the weight, to fill two boats with one catch, nor to feel too weak to handle it. This was miraculous, this teacher had just done something impossible. As he heaved the last of the flopping fish into the now sinking boat, Peter realized he was in the presence of someone holy. What was a safe familiar fishing trip moments ago, was now a holy temple in the presence of a miraculous man. And, Peter wasn't in his Sunday best.

Peter, realizing his lack of worthiness, does the only thing he knows to do. He falls to his knees, waist deep in fish, before Jesus. Peter's words, "depart from me, for I am a sinful man" show us what he's actually feeling. This action isn't just an appropriate act of worship, it's a desperate attempt at escape. Church isn't supposed to find its way onto fishing boats! He isn't clean, he isn't ready and now he's gripped with fear and shame.

God doesn't draft players for his team in PRISTINE church sanctuaries

What is it about an encounter with God that makes us want to hide? It's exactly what Adam and Eve do in Genesis 3 when they first encounter God after sinning. It's one thing to go to church after dressing up in our best clothes and smiles. But, when we find God in the dark corners of our lives we want to run

and hide. Peter doesn't say, "Lord, you're amazing I want to hang out with you forever!" Peter says, "Go away, I can't handle you seeing my sin." And it's in that moment that Jesus does something so beautifully unexpected. Jesus says, "No!" I'm so glad Jesus doesn't answer Peter's request with a 'yes.' Instead Jesus says, "Don't be afraid." It isn't the miracle of flopping fish that wins Peter's heart that day. It's the miracle of love in spite of sin that wins him over. Jesus sees us even in the fishiest places of our lives and says, "Don't be afraid. I want you on my team." God doesn't draft players for his team in pristine church sanctuaries. It's usually in the presence of our darkness that he meets us and by his grace he wins us over.

THE UNIQUE CALL

SATURDAY | MARCH 11

by Rich Obrecht

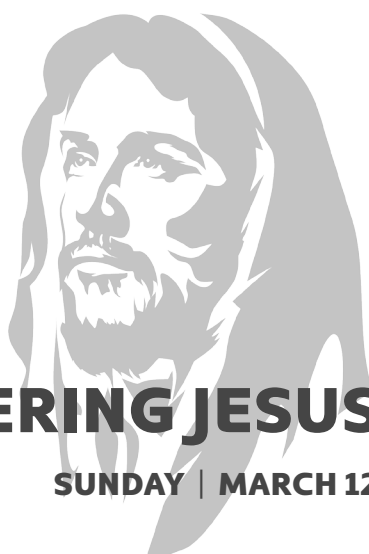
READ MATTHEW 28:18-20

Who doesn't love a good fishing story? Many people at least entertain them, because they know there's a chance it will be a wildly exaggerated story about catching a marlin with a toothpick and dental floss. We've all heard them before. How such a large fish was caught on such a small test line, and how the photographed proof somehow 'got away.' Our faces curl up in a smiling smirk while saying something like 'yeah, right.' But, what the soon-to-be disciples had just witnessed was an unbelievably huge fishing story.

That day, Peter and the others had the most amazing catch, so large it just about sunk a small fleet of boats as it was being hauled in. Imagine trying to tell that story to people who hadn't been there. This is the fishing story above all fishing stories. The difference here is this one was true and was witnessed by a crowd of people! Everyone stood there astonished and still tingling with fear when Jesus gives the unique call to be 'fishers of men.'

**KEEP CASTING
even when it
seems fruitless**

When I heard this story preached as a young boy, I would imagine myself, alone, casting a fishing line to catch folks for Jesus, one at a time. But, this view doesn't match the text. We see many men working together to cast nets wide in water previously barren, catching a quantity of fish almost overwhelming their abilities to bring it in. In addition, we all know fishing isn't always prosperous. This isn't for a lack of trying. We see Peter and his partners fishing all night and catching nothing, only to be participants in the greatest catch at the most unexpected time. Just like the disciples, we're called to be fishers of people, casting our nets wide to bring souls to the Kingdom. It isn't always successful, but, like Peter, we're called to keep casting even when it seems fruitless. Despite our lack of success, the thing to remember is those souls who escape our net could very well be brought to shore by someone downstream. The catch may still come in an unexpected way and where it previously failed.



ENCOUNTERING JESUS

SUNDAY | MARCH 12

READ LUKE 8:22-25

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"

BAD IDEA JESUS

MONDAY | MARCH 13

by Ryan Paulson

READ JAMES 1:2-4

Many of us can think of one friend who was always proposing bad ideas. He was the kid your mom didn't want you hanging around, and you knew his suggestions were going to lead to heartache and pain. I wonder if that's the way the disciples felt about Jesus. There are several times when we read about Jesus telling the disciples to do something only to result in trouble. In Luke 8:22, Jesus tells the disciples to get in the boat and go across the lake at night. During the night, as they're sailing to the other side of the lake, a massive storm came upon them. I wonder if the disciples wondered aloud, "Whose idea was this, anyway? That's right, it was Jesus' idea. Bad idea, Jesus."

In that moment, many questions must have risen in the disciples' minds. First, did Jesus know this was going to happen? Second, why had Jesus put them in a position that evoked such fear and turmoil? Finally, was

**storms that
SHAKE us most
severely,
SHAPE us most
significantly**

Jesus going to do something about it? There are times when we have similar questions for God. The storms in life feel like an unexpected sickness. They feel like a future that's been ripped from us. They feel like uncertainty and vulnerability. The problem with the storm is that we're completely out of control and at the mercy of the wind and the waves – and the God who stands over

it all. We often lament the storm, but God views storms as part of his toolbox and his workshop. The storms that shake us most severely, often shape us most significantly.

Jesus tells the disciples to go across the lake knowing the storm is coming because he wants to teach them something. He designs the trial so that their lives will be refined and their faith will be strengthened. The book of James reiterates this point by saying, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4). Trials and storms are one of the ways God strengthens our faith. However, simply going through trials doesn't shape us. Faithfully walking through trials is what develops and strengthens our faith. Maybe

SLEEPING JESUS

TUESDAY | MARCH 14

by Yvonne Biel

READ PSALM 13:1-6

Stepping onto the boat that day with Jesus seemed like any other day. This was the normal routine around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus set forth the destination and everyone on board set out to sail there together. As they float along, Jesus tucks in for some much needed shut eye and the disciples continue on their Jesus-directed route. It's not until after the storm hits and the boat begins to fill with water that they admit they're in danger. But, when they turn to find Jesus, they find him sleeping.

I wonder how often we navigate our way as disciples of Jesus simply feeling reassured that Jesus is in the boat with us. We trust we're on the Jesus-directed route and we go along like everything is fine. It's not until the next crisis hits when we realize Jesus' voice has been asleep in our lives. Then, when we turn to find Jesus and seek him for help, we find he's still sleeping. He's still silent. We wonder why Jesus is silent. Why

would he go to sleep on us at the most inopportune time?

**CRISIS and SILENCE
draw us back to HIS
bedside - to kneel
down before him and
ask to do life
together again**

This is likely how the Psalmist felt in Psalm 13. He cries out, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" Sometimes Jesus' silence can be painful, especially when we feel we need his help most. We ask questions like, "Why, Lord?" because in his silence, we can feel ignored, rejected, and unloved. But, what if Jesus simply wants us to move toward him? What if

waking Jesus is exactly what he wants us to do? If we've been going along just fine without him, he might just allow crisis and silence to draw us back to his bedside - to kneel down before him and ask to do life together again. Then, when he asks, "Where is your faith?" We can confidently answer, "It's me kneeling at your side seeking you alone for help."

WAKING JESUS

WEDNESDAY | MARCH 15

by Donna Burns

READ MARK 4:37-38

A.W. Tozer said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." I think where we turn in times of trouble is probably the next most important thing about us. Sometimes we find ourselves at the end of our proverbial rope, and we turn to a person, a place, a thing. And, where we turn will have life-changing outcomes.

Peter was an experienced fisherman as were his shipmates. They knew how to handle storms and their boat. They knew how to depend on each other and use their physical strength to hoist ropes all night long while fishing with heavy nets. In this story, one simple action of going to wake up Jesus results in an intense moment in their lives. The account doesn't tell us if the disciples came to the end of their strength and resources. The story doesn't say they stopped struggling against the storm and risked holding onto the rope even for one minute to run to Jesus in a panic. The story doesn't say they were afraid of losing their

boats or their lives. Yet, they made a decision, a choice to arouse the slumbering Jesus - the Master. The disciples called to Jesus through the waves of the howling sea. We don't know what kind of help they were expecting Jesus to give, but it seemed they were out of options and knew they needed help only he could give.

**the disciples
called to Jesus
THROUGH the
waves of the
howling sea**

What kind of storms are churning your boat? Do you find yourself in desperate need, at the end of your resources, with nowhere to go? It's easy to depend on our expertise or our

experience or on other people - especially when God is seemingly slumbering. Perhaps it seems like God hasn't answered, that he's unaware, uncaring, or not interested in your storm. But, God is intensely compassionate about your situation while his answer might not be what you're expecting or wanting. Make your mind up today to take the risk of trusting Jesus in the crisis moments instead of other options.

REBUKING JESUS

THURSDAY | MARCH 16

by Ryan Paulson

READ JOB 38:1-18

It might be hard to believe, but there are times when I yell at my kids. Usually, it's when they're out-of-control, playing and having fun, and completely ignoring my words. So, I'll shout something like, "Hey, no one's listening to me!" Typically, what follows is a hush. An almost eerie stillness – especially in light of the chaos raging only moments before. For my kids, there's an uncomfortable quiet when they realize they're in the presence of authority. I picture the story of Jesus quieting the wind and the waves in the same way. In Luke 8:24, the Scriptures state, "And they went and woke [Jesus], saying, 'Master, Master, we're perishing!' And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm." That calm must have been eerie. It was an unexpected silence and it carried the realization that they were in the presence of power.

When Jesus rebukes the storm, he's doesn't solely quiet the wind and the water. He makes a point. He teaches the disciples that all power had been given to him and that even the wind and the waves obey his voice. Abraham Kuyper, the great Dutch theologian describes this point well, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence

over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" It's all his. Even the wind and the waves. The disciples learn this lesson on the lake that day. Although life is filled with storms, there is a God who stands above them all. Jesus' rebuke and the silence that follows shouts an invitation to believe.

**although life is
filled with storms,
there is a God who
STANDS ABOVE
them all**

Wouldn't it be great if Jesus quieted every storm? It would be, but that's not the promise Jesus makes to the disciples – and it's not the promise he makes to us either.

It's easy to read into this passage and assume that Jesus is going to rebuke every storm that comes into our lives, but we all know that's not true. No, the promise is not that he quiets every storm. The promise is that every storm still knows his name. Jesus invites us to trust him as the storms rage and as they're quieted. Thankfully, the storms bow

PEACEFUL JESUS

FRIDAY | MARCH 17

by Aaron Bjorklund

READ 1 PETER 1:6-7

There have been moments in my life where fear has threatened to explode in my soul. It's not just an image in my mind of a bad outcome. Instead, it's that image accompanied by a cold sweat and a sinking feeling in my gut where there is no way out of my situation. It's usually in those moments my prayer life becomes all important to me. In those seasons of life, when all options are exhausted, I find myself crying out to God for some help beyond me. We all feel that way at moments. It could be the sinking feeling of not knowing how you're going to pay that bill or the long wait for test results from the doctor. The journey of life is riddled with these potholes of fear.

That's where we find the disciples in this story. Storms are threatening and hope is slipping away. I've heard people point out how sad it is that we only feel the need for God when things get really bad. I agree

that it's better to be talking to God in the good and the bad times, but to the disciple's credit, they cried out to the right guy. And, what if the middle of the sea was Jesus' real destination, a lesson in the storm. If you've ever cried out to Jesus in the middle of a dire situation, you didn't do something bad, you cried out to the perfect person.

**JESUS
doesn't always
calm the storm,
but he NEVER joins
our panic**

We often encounter Jesus most clearly in the middle of the stormy seas. I wish it wasn't that way, but before we vent about needing

those encounters look at the personality of Jesus in those moments. When we cry out to Jesus for help, we never find a God who is also panicking. Instead, we find a peaceful Jesus who's not afraid because he knows what to do. He doesn't always choose to calm the storm, but he never joins our panic. A panicking soul may find comfort in seeing Jesus calm in the middle of the storm. So, whatever storm you're facing today, you can try a different kind of prayer about those situations. Try imagining the unhurried peaceful nature of your God in the middle of your particular situation. He has an understanding look on his face - not a fearful one. He is at peace and his peace he offers to you.

ASTONISHING JESUS

SATURDAY | MARCH 18

by Rich Obrecht

READ PSALM 105

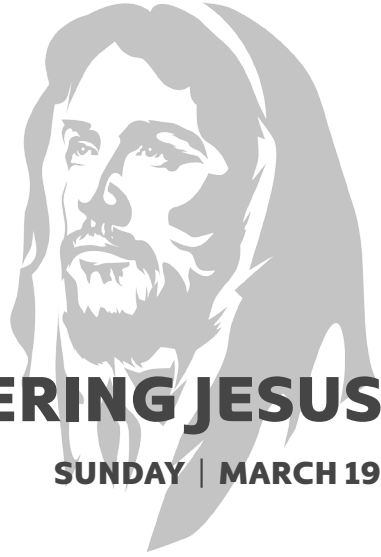
They were frightened. The waves were raging and the wind was howling. As fishermen, familiar with storms on the water, they knew how to get ashore safely. But this time, even their experience failed them and they were panicking. This is where the phrase “all hands on deck” takes on new meaning. They needed everyone awake and working to get to shore, and the more hands, the better. So, they woke up sleeping Jesus. Perhaps with one more man, they could save the boat from the storm.

But, Jesus exceeds their expectations. Rather than putting his hands to the oars, he calms the storm, and returns the peace. This brought both fear and surprise. Interesting enough, not too long before, in Luke 7, Jesus heals the servant of the centurion, raises the widow’s dead son, and forgives the sinful woman of her transgressions. And yet, they’re

amazed and astonished at this miracle. We sometimes behave in the same way. We pray for the healing of a friend, the resolution of relationship issues, for insight into financial struggles, and many others, and when our prayer is answered, we’re shocked!

His desire is to use all of you to encounter all of him

There’s a saying about history where those who don’t learn from it are doomed to repeat it. Perhaps this saying has bearing here. The disciples experienced the miracles of Jesus just a little while before getting into the boat, yet they seemed to have forgotten them and were surprised by Jesus’ command over the natural storm. So, too, we forget the answers we’ve received and the miracles we’ve witnessed over many years. God has been answering prayers of the saints for thousands of years. We remember them, not only to alleviate surprise when God blesses with an answer, but to remember he will answer our prayers and does listen to us amidst the storm.



ENCOUNTERING JESUS

SUNDAY | MARCH 19

READ LUKE 8:40-56

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying. As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me." And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more." But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well." And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise." And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

GLARING NEED

MONDAY | MARCH 20

by Ryan Paulson

READ PSALM 130:1-2

Twelve years of bleeding. The physical torment was one thing, but the social isolation was another thing entirely. It must've felt like being banished in the midst of a multitude of people. It's hard to imagine how alone she must have felt. We know the feeling of being surrounded by people and feeling deserted – that was a reality this woman lived with for 12 years. This woman had a condition that labeled her 'unclean.' That meant that she was not able to participate in religious ceremonies or festivals, nor was anyone - who wanted to remain 'clean' - allowed to touch her. When she walked through a crowd, in order to prevent people from accidentally contacting her, she was forced to shout, "Unclean," so people could clear a path for her. She was lonely, isolated, desperate.

On that day, the day Jesus came to her town, it's clear she broke all the social customs. She wasn't polite. She wasn't respectful. She wasn't playing by the religious games and rituals of the day – she throws all of that out the window for the hope of receiving from Jesus. This woman was at the end of her rope and going for broke. Either, she would obtain a touch from Jesus and receive his healing, or she would be banished from her community even further. She would be restored, or she would get stoned.

**It's the HONEST,
DESPERATE CRY
that gets the
attention and
affection of God**

There are times when we long to encounter Jesus, but play it safe. We need a touch from him, but we're unwilling to walk through the crowd and put our reputation on the line. We need Jesus' healing, but we're not able to cast off the social norms and truthfully, desperately, wholeheartedly cry out. It's the honest, desperate cry that gets the attention and affection of God. It's this woman's brutish act and her dire need that stir the compassion

of her savior. This unfiltered cry to God in light of our need is a theme throughout the Scriptures. The Psalmist in Psalm 130:1-2 echoes the cry of this woman and the plea of our hearts by writing, "Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!" That is a person who knows their

HUMBLE APPROACH

TUESDAY | MARCH 21

by Donna Burns

READ PSALM 68:32

Humility is not popular. When I think of humility, it's being the last one chosen for a team, proven wrong or being embarrassed. But, who wants to be humble, poor, degraded, appear inadequate or feel unworthy in our affluent, power-seeking culture? Life these days often means living for yourself and our culture confronts us with many roadblocks to being humble.

Jarius, in the gospel of Luke, overcame many roadblocks in his quest to find Jesus. Jarius was a rich synagogue ruler. He wasn't even supposed to like Jesus. But, he swallowed his pride and risked his career, his position, his friends, everything, and hurried to Jesus for help. He went a long distance losing precious time in desperation to spare his child's life. He came, not arrogantly or flippantly, but with sincere hope and faith in the Teacher. His posture as a ruler might have made him look proud but inside was a heart humbly surrendered.

The Bible defines humility differently than our contemporary culture. It's a correct estimation of who you are - in light of who God is. Coming to God humbly means recognizing you owe all your natural gifts, personality, attributes, etc., to him. You're the object of undeserved redeeming love. Because, God overcame many roadblocks on your behalf, you can regard yourself as not being your own. Coming to Christ can be costly, but life eternal is priceless. Jesus' desire is for a relationship with you. Yet, like Jarius, there may be roadblocks that have kept you from coming to him with your needs. You can receive mercy and find grace to help you in your time of need, he promises (Hebrews 4:16).

**coming to Christ
can be COSTLY,
but life eternal is
PRICELESS**

BOLD PURSUIT

WEDNESDAY | MARCH 22

by Donna Burns

READ PSALM 121

Every great adventure movie with a pursuit scene sells at the box office - whether it's real life drama or nonfiction. Television recently released a reality show on the theme of being pursued called "Hunted." It's a grown up version of hide and seek. Children love to be pursued in a chase and giggle with delight. The big difference is whether the bold pursuit leads to life or leads to death.

The unnamed woman, in this passage is in a life and death crisis. She boldly pursues Christ through the pressing crowd, in her weakened medical state, in her socially ostracized position, and in her culturally restricted condition. Her issue of blood makes her unclean, unacceptable, and rejected. Yet, the posture of her heart is bold. She is most likely on her knees humbly crawling in the dust of the ground trying to touch the

hem of Jesus' robe. This might be her last chance to be healed by reaching out to Jesus. She could even be killed for being in the crowd and trying to get help. She determines to take the risk and confidently counts the cost.

**Jesus is
READY
to meet
you**

The woman's desperate life makes her bold. Her faith in Jesus makes her bold. Absolutely nothing could stop her at this point in her life getting to Jesus. And Jesus meets her in her suffering. Now, look at your life. You may carry a similar feeling of desperation about an issue. Let it make you bold in pursuing the Master of Life, the compassionate Creator, and sensitive Sustainer above all other options. Choose a bold, risky step toward Jesus and what he has for you. Jesus is ready to meet you with blessing.

AWARE OF THE ONE

THURSDAY | MARCH 23

by Rich Obrecht

READ PSALMS 139:1-5

Two people, surprised in their own situation and surprised by the focused attention Jesus gave that day. One was a leader in the synagogue, most likely seeing Jesus and his followers as rabble, not worthy of his time. The other was a woman who suffered from a bleeding disorder for 12 years, an outcast of her culture, and had spent all her money on doctors. Each came to Jesus while the crowds pressed in on him - hoping to be seen by the One and Only.

Jairus fell at Jesus' feet, along with many others, begging for Jesus to heal his only daughter. Jesus knew this man and his impression of Jesus. And Jesus, even with all these people jostling around him, took notice of the one man kneeling among the many. Despite this, he began to follow him back to his home. Despite all Jairus' thoughts and feelings about Jesus, Jairus walked with Jesus. Together they were on their way home - to find the healing one family desperately needed. In that moment, Jairus was known and loved.

**We are fully
KNOWN and
fully LOVED**

The woman reached out to touch the fringe of Jesus' garment. Despite the unknown result, the woman trusts in Jesus' sufficiency to heal her. Despite the bumping of the crowd, Jesus knew someone touched him with such faith they were healed. Jesus says, 'who touched me.' Looking right at the woman, Jesus recognized her - her condition, her faith, and her desperation. In that moment, this woman was known and loved.

These two individuals were loved, and we are loved, too. We're loved personally and wholly. God loved us enough to send Jesus. And, just as Jesus knew these two in the middle of a large crowd pushing in on him, he knows us. In Psalms 139:1-5, we find a clear view into the deep love God has for us, demonstrated by the depth of his knowing us. Just like Jairus and the woman, we too, are picked out from a crowd. We too, are fully known and fully loved.

HEALING TOUCH

FRIDAY | MARCH 24

by Yvonne Biel

READ MATTHEW 11:28-30

If we're really honest, I'm sure we all could identify something deep inside we'd prefer to keep secret - a hidden sin, a painful wound from a friend, an unpleasant illness. Although we may want to be free of our secret, we prefer to keep things hidden because it seems easiest. It's less awkward than airing our dirty laundry or pulling out the skeleton from our closet. But, our encounter with Jesus this week flies against our desire to keep our ugly secrets hidden and all because one woman reached out to touch Jesus.

Let's imagine what it would've been like for this woman to step into the crowd that day. Literally, a herd of people are pressing in on Jesus. If you're familiar with claustrophobia, I doubt you'd have joined in. And, especially if you had a dirty secret like this woman's - one that's been plaguing you your whole life. What's remarkable about this story is that neither the congestion of the crowds nor the fear of her reputation stopped this woman from getting as close to Jesus as she possibly could. She reaches out in desperation with the foundational belief that Jesus could help her - Jesus could heal her. But, interestingly enough, she's not healed until she gets close enough to touch him.

With just one touch of Jesus' robe, her dirty secret is healed. This moment almost feels suspended in time as Jesus stops to take notice of what just happened. Many people were surrounding Jesus and pressed up against his physical body, so what made her touch distinctly different? Perhaps

**his gentle touch
brings us into the
LIGHT for our
healing and for
his glory**

nothing unique. Who knows how many times Jesus felt power go out from him and didn't say anything. But this time, Jesus stops to draw attention to the healing touch. When he does, the woman finally comes out of hiding. This is no easy thing. She trembles in fear and shame as her story is revealed. Yet, Jesus receives her with tender affection. Jesus calls her, "Daughter" and pronounces peace over her newly healed life.

It's unfortunate how often our shameful secrets hinder us from moving toward Jesus to receive his healing touch. We worry about others hurting us. We even worry Jesus might call attention to our shame by prompting

RESTORED RELATIONSHIP

SATURDAY | MARCH 25

by Rich Obrecht

READ GALATIANS 4:1-7

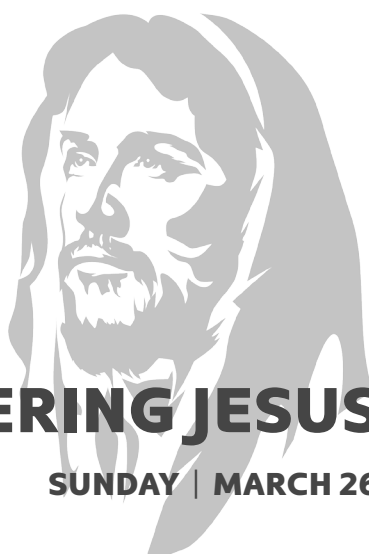
Sometimes relationships with friends and family get overturned or upset for one reason or another. We're emotional creatures and are prone to react poorly when we feel wronged or insulted. When restoration finally comes, all the joyful memories between us return and we realize what we've missed. Our emotional pendulum swings back and we hope to never experience that again.

Both participants in this story are in a strained relationship with those around them. Jairus was a leader in the Synagogue and since Jesus wasn't held in high regard by the leadership of the Jewish faith, it's likely Jairus shared that lack of respect for Jesus. Nevertheless, when his only 12-year old daughter becomes sick to the point of dying, his feelings of disrespect, which were once driven by the influence of others, are dropped. Disrespect vanishes when that person could possibly lead to the cure. So Jairus makes his way to Jesus to seek healing for his daughter. Imagine his desperation.

**our former lives
were ENSLAVED,
but now we're FREE**

The unnamed woman, with information about her life limited to the duration and expense of her illness, had relational issues in her culture of a different sort. The people surrounding her believed she was unclean because of her bleeding. This forced her to shun and be shunned by her culture for almost 12 years. Imagine her loneliness.

Not only does touching Jesus' garment and holding the little girl hand offer a healing encounter for each individual, Jesus begins to restore their fractured relationships, too. The woman is made whole and clean in the eyes of her culture and Jairus' relationship with his daughter is restored through her renewed life. As sons and daughters of God, his heirs, our broken relationship with the triune God has been redeemed. Our former lives were enslaved, but now we're free. Imagine our freedom.



ENCOUNTERING JESUS

SUNDAY | MARCH 26

READ LUKE 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

SUPPER WITH JESUS

MONDAY | MARCH 27

by Donna Burns

READ LUKE 18:15-17

Athletes anticipate the gold. Students anticipate report cards. Families anticipate vacations. All waiting for the reward after putting in the hard work. We all love to anticipate the holidays and times with family and friends. We anticipate and prepare for Jesus birth through Advent and for his death and resurrection through Lent. Anticipating is an action verb of expecting and realizing in advance. The historical Latin of the verb means 'to take care of ahead of time' and the 1809 meaning is the 'action of looking forward to.' Martha is the definition of "anticipation."

Martha was looking forward to Jesus' arrival and her home was ready, every detail taken care of ahead of time. I don't think Martha was caught by surprise when Jesus walked into her town because news of the Teacher has been buzzing across the countryside, throughout the villages and discussed around many supper tables. He was on his way to Jerusalem and it's possible Martha perused the grocery booths daily, in hopes of spotting Jesus ministering in the crowds as he came through the gates (Luke 9:51-53). Since Mary, Martha, and Lazarus spent

time with Jesus on previous visits, they were familiar with his habits and needs (John 11). So, Martha was filled with joyful anticipation and actively seeking another arrival of Jesus. She was expectant, ready to have supper with the Savior and welcome him into her space.

**Anticipation is
expecting God to ACT
in advance and looking
forward to what God will
DO in our lives**

We, like Martha, can be filled with joyful anticipation Jesus, too. We can anticipate uplifting worship to our Father God with fellow believers on Sunday. We can anticipate meeting Jesus when we open our Bible and read his love letters to us. We can anticipate the Holy Spirit guiding and directing us as we spend time in prayer. Anticipation is expecting God to act in advance and looking forward to what God will do in our lives. Anticipation is preparing to meet him, in a ready place, with an expectant heart, an open mind and listening ears.

SITTING WITH JESUS

TUESDAY | MARCH 28

by Ryan Paulson

READ MATTHEW 6:33

The word 'priority' came into the English language around 1400. It meant 'first' or 'primary.' For 500 years, the word was only used in a singular fashion. It wasn't until the 1900's that people started to speak of 'priorities.' Given the definition of the word 'priority,' it's hard to reconcile using it in a plural tense. While we'd love to believe we're capable of extreme multi-tasking, in reality, we can only focus on one thing at a time. Only one thing can be first. Only one thing can be most important. Only one thing can be our priority. Jesus clearly identifies this reality when he says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

When Martha welcomes Jesus into her house, she begins serving Jesus. However, her sister Mary begins sitting with Jesus. Mary listens to his teaching, enjoys his presence, and embraces his message. In Luke 10:42, Jesus commends Mary's priority by saying, "one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Given the reality that we can only have one priority, Jesus affirms Mary's choice to sit at his feet. Certainly, Mary has other options and potential distractions, but she knows what her main priority is – being with Jesus and learning from him.

**EVERYTHING flows
from sitting at his feet
and hearing his voice**

These words of Jesus, "one thing is necessary," give great clarity to the life of faith. The thing Jesus asks of us before he asks anything else, is that we sit at his feet. We must learn to abide in him – as a branch abides in the vine. To be clear, Jesus is not saying that sitting at his feet is the only thing he asks of us. That would diminish the other commands we read

in the Scriptures. What Jesus says is that everything flows from sitting at his feet and hearing his voice. If we get our priorities wrong, we'll view following Jesus as living for him, instead of with him. If we get our priorities wrong, we'll end up killing our joy, dampening our life, and extinguishing our hope.

SERVING JESUS

WEDNESDAY | MARCH 29

by Rich Obrecht

READ MATTHEW 6:25-34

When my wife and I first got married, we had friends and family over for meals and fellowship. It didn't matter who was coming, but as arrival time approached, I would start to get anxious. This anxiety led to questions about how much food we had and whether it would be enough. My wife, bless her heart, would always reassure me we had enough, and we always did. The anxiety I felt in those moments is what I imagine Martha feeling as Jesus arrives.

Martha welcomes Jesus into their home and goes about getting things ready for the meal. Maybe the group was larger than she imagined. The phrase "distracted with much serving" describes what Martha was doing as well as her focus. Her anxiety seems almost palpable as she asks Jesus to intervene with Mary, sitting at his feet. In this moment, Mary

and Martha are at complete ends of the anxiety spectrum. It's possible Martha could hear what Jesus was saying, but, as we've all experienced, listening to something in a calm state is better for understanding than listening while we're "distracted with much serving."

as our perspective becomes more like Jesus' ... the things causing anxiety seem to SHIFT into the background

In Matthew 6:25-34, the words of Jesus speak directly to our anxieties. Our perspective on things happening in life are key. While these words might appear foolish, understanding them from the perspective of Jesus is important. Just as Jesus softly rebukes Martha for her bustling around, Jesus is addressing our focus here. He urges our perspective to be on the Kingdom of God, not the temporary trappings of life, or even what's to happen tomorrow. While there are things in life needing to be done today - such as serving a guest, paying a bill, or going to work - our focus needs to be the Kingdom of Jesus. All else is secondary. Many times as our perspective becomes more like Jesus' and we move our focus to what's truly important, his Kingdom, the things causing anxiety seem to shift into the background.

INTERRUPTING JESUS

THURSDAY | MARCH 30

by Yvonne Biel

READ PSALM 18:1-6

We live in a fast-paced society. We like to get things done quickly and efficiently in order to accomplish as much as possible in as little time as possible. And, when there is a major event coming up, we add even more things to our to-do list. Our heads spin around trying to keep track of all the details so that when the event actually takes place we can be present to enjoy all the work put forth. This was likely the headspace Martha was in the day Jesus came over for dinner.

Martha had a list of things to do before Jesus arrived and likely many expectations of what would happen when he did. She had spent hours planning ahead, going to the market, cleaning, cooking, setting up, and finalizing all the last minute details. All the normal things that must be done for a lovely meal to occur. There would be no meal without

the preparation and there would be no preparation without the planning. So, where did Martha go wrong?

**turn the attitude
of prayer from
SELF - fixation to
JESUS - fixation**

When Jesus arrived, Martha was there - present and ready to greet him. She created a beautiful gathering for her dear friends and her precious Lord. It appeared she was serving with a heart to please God. But, the state of

her soul was exposed when she interrupted Jesus. The conversation with her Lord revealed her overemphasis on all the details spinning around in her head and her distracted soul. Her soul was still fixated on her current activity and couldn't slow down to be present and at peace.

We, like Martha, are easily distracted by life - even good things - like making dinner for friends or serving God at church. But, to evaluate the state of our souls, we need to look at the attitude behind our prayers. Sometimes prayers sound more like interrupting Jesus by asking him if he even cares about our current situation or asking him why he doesn't tell others to help us out immediately. Instead, let's notice the remarkable things about Jesus and tell him about what we love about him. This can help turn the attitude of our prayer from self-fixation to Jesus-fixation.

JESUS' CORRECTION

FRIDAY | MARCH 31

by Donna Burns

READ PSALM 27:4

Multitasking, high-speed internet, and the tyranny of the urgent seem to dominate our lives. To be faster, better, stronger, and having picture perfect lives keeps us rushing on, even to the point of obsession. This frantic pace brings frazzled nerves and fractured lives. In the midst of this pace and energized agenda, no one likes to be interrupted or told what to do. Yet, Martha does both. She interrupts Jesus and tells him what to do.

Notice how this happens in Martha's own home, in the midst of her family dynamics. First Martha questions, "Don't you care that my sister has left me to all the work?" But now, let's look closer at how Jesus responds. Jesus tenderly speaks her name twice which shows his personal care. He sees into her heart and puts his finger on what's going on. He acknowledges her feelings. She is distracted and anxious and

troubled about not one, but many things. Martha also commands Jesus to tell Mary to help. Yet, Jesus sees and gently tells her that "only one thing is necessary."

**We have CONFIDENCE
in moving toward our
Savior no matter how
frazzled our life feels
because we KNOW how
tenderly he will respond**

It's easy to feel the same way as Martha, distracted, frazzled, and controlled by the tyranny of the urgent. It's easy to feel in the midst of our crazy lives that Jesus doesn't care and have a demanding attitude toward him. It's so human nature. But the God-man,

Jesus, knows our troubles and can relate to our need. Jesus sees into our hearts. Jesus always responds with gentleness. It's his kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). We have confidence in moving toward our Savior no matter how frazzled our life feels because we know how tenderly he will respond.

JESUS' PROMISE

SATURDAY | APRIL 1

by Ryan Paulson

READ JOHN 6:27-29

All of life is built around choices. When we choose to do one thing, we choose not to do another. This is true in the way we spend our energy, our time, and our money. When we're thinking clearly, we make decisions based on what adds the greatest value to our lives and to the lives of those around us. That's what makes Jesus' statement at the end of this story about Mary and Martha so fascinating. Jesus affirms Mary's choice to sit at his feet claiming that it will "not be taken from her" (Luke 10:42). Jesus says Mary has chosen the right focus and correct investment because it's something that will last. The food Martha is preparing is essential, but the transformation Mary is experiencing is eternal.

He calls them to exchange 'WORK' that is frivolous for JOY that is endless

Throughout the Scripture, Jesus pleads with people to invest their lives into things that last. In John 6:27-29, Jesus teaches the crowds and he says, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him, God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has

sent." All our work, all our energy, and all our focus, is yielding some sort of food – the question remains, is this food that will last? Jesus teaches his followers to build their lives around the things that will last forever. He calls them to exchange 'work' that is frivolous for joy that is endless.

Jesus claims the only thing that lasts is "believing in him." The reason believing in Jesus lasts is because it leads to our becoming. When we trust Jesus and abide in him, it leads to our transformation. The reality is, the only thing we carry into eternity is the people we've become and the character within us. When Jesus commands us to focus our life on him, he's not being self-absorbed, he's being others-focused. He's challenging his followers to focus on right things because he knows that our eternal joy hangs on the choices we make. Jesus knows that humanity was designed to commune with God and he's beckoning us to walk in our original design by fighting for our everlasting destiny.



ENCOUNTERING JESUS

SUNDAY | APRIL 2

READ LUKE 18:35-19:10

As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God. He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

SEEK/SAVE

MONDAY | APRIL 3

by Aaron Bjorklund

READ LUKE 5:31-32

Does Jesus play favorites? I think he does. Before you write me off as a heretic, let me explain. One of the things that strikes me as I read about Jesus is the way he behaved toward two different groups of people. Jesus seems almost obnoxiously gracious towards the "sinners." Jesus sought out people who were outcasts, broken, overlooked, and altogether rejected by the religious society. On the other hand, Jesus seems to go out of his way to battle against the "religious leaders" of his day.

So, does Jesus play favorites by prioritizing those who were clearly lost? At the end of this week's passage, Jesus says, "for the Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost." In a similar passage Jesus says, "those who are well have no need of a physician, but those were sick.

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). These texts tell us Jesus' personal mission statement. That mission is simple - to seek and to save the lost. Jesus is a shepherd at heart. His eyes pay close attention to the weak or runaway sheep.

**the key to
being found
is asking for
HELP**

So, I guess if you want to be prioritized by Jesus, you must be lost. He seems to focus his ministry on the lost rather than the religious leaders of the day. But, in order to be found one must first admit they're lost. Spiritually speaking, the only difference between someone who is lost and someone who is not, is pride. We're all souls wandering in the dark and the key to being found is asking for help. The religious leaders didn't feel the reality of their need. Bumbling through the dark they emphatically insist that they could see just fine. Not only did they believe that they could see, they also believed that they could lead the rest of the world to safety. Elsewhere Jesus says, "Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:14).

If you feel lost, broken, outcast, rejected, or unloved, Jesus has a special place in his heart for you. Perhaps if you don't feel that way, you're just one genuine confession from being all of those things and finding

OPPRESSOR/OPPRESSED

TUESDAY | APRIL 4

by Rich Obrecht

READ MARK 10:17-27

It seems not a day goes by where we don't hear of people being oppressed somewhere in the world. And their inability to overcome oppression strikes a chord with us as we see the injustice they're experiencing. They didn't ask for it. It was placed on them by those in authority. Just like the blind man in this story. He didn't choose his blindness, it's how he came into this world. And, because the culture at the time required all to work - the rules and laws of today for the disabled didn't exist - he had no choice but to beg for a living, existing at the low end of the financial spectrum.

Then there's Zacchaeus. It doesn't take much cultural reading captured within the Gospels to understand that tax collector were despised. Zacchaeus chose his career, despite the derision he received from doing so. Just like we experience today, taxes were needed for a variety of reasons. However, it was much easier for the tax collectors of the day to pad their numbers and steal from the populace. Zacchaeus lived at the opposite end of financial spectrum. Yet, both the blind man and the tax collector were seen as a drain on society - one begging, the other stealing.

**rich or poor,
oppressed or
oppressor...
we ALL need
Jesus**

These days, when news of oppression comes to us, we tend to sympathize with the oppressed and despise the oppressor. This is in our human nature. But Jesus' reaction is slightly different. His ministry often meets the needs of the oppressed and crosses profound cultural boundaries to do so. He touches lepers and treats women as equals. Here, we observe Jesus speaking to the beggar and restoring his eyesight. We see Jesus setting aside his plans to visit with the tax collector and peeling the scales from his spiritual eyes.

These two encounters show us the breadth of God's Kingdom. We might look at someone and wonder how they could ever be part of it, whether they're oppressed or the oppressor. Nevertheless, following Jesus' conversation with the wealthy young man in Mark 10:17-27, the disciples were perplexed by Jesus' comment about the difficulty of the

CRYING/CLIMBING

WEDNESDAY | APRIL 5

by Donna Burns

READ MATTHEW 16:13-17

If you stop and consider what the people around you are saying about Jesus, you'll find a plethora of philosophies and worldviews competing for your allegiance. Just stand on top of Lookout Mountain and the Denver landscape will reveal the domes of world religions - Buddhist temples, Islamic mosques, Mormon spires, and centers of cultural humanism. Followers of Jesus have to intentionally fight to hold on to a Biblical worldview in a postmodern, post-Christian, post-truth world. Everyone has an opinion, and as much as people try to ignore Jesus, push him off to the margins of life, he still proves himself to be the central figure of humanity and the most controversial person in human history.

Scattered all around Caesarea Philippi were magnificent palaces to Roman governors, temples to Syrian gods, places where Greek gods were believed to be born and Jewish history from the mouth of the Jordan River. In Matthew 16, it's as if Jesus gives his disciples a test of all he'd taught them. He sets himself against the background of world religions and asks them who identify who he is. Peter responds

personally, with a profound confession that has echoed down through the centuries. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus affirms and states that this truth was revealed to Peter by the Father Himself, giving by divine authority.

**if you're
convinced Jesus
is the CHRIST,
you'll be
determined to
find Jesus**

Amidst the competing religions of the day and the personal obstacles that deter people from meeting Jesus, nothing, not the crowd, not his small stature, nor rejection could stop Zaccheus from climbing a

tree to see Jesus personally. Nothing could stop the blind man from crying out for Jesus. Whether climbing or crying, both did whatever was needed, to not only know about Jesus, but to encounter him face-to-face. Now, we all encounter people and ideas of our day competing for our attention and distracting us from encountering Jesus face-to-face. But, no matter what obstacles may be in our way, if you're convinced Jesus is the Christ, you'll be determined to find Jesus, to acknowledge God's work and to confess him as the reigning King and Lord of your life.

RESTORATION/RESPONSE

THURSDAY | APRIL 6

by Ryan Paulson

READ MATTHEW 5:23-34

Two phrases shape the narrative energy of Luke 18:35-19:10. One question, one request. When Jesus encountered the man born blind, he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" It may seem like a silly question, but the man had a choice. He could've asked for money – it was what he'd been asking for every day he sat on that street. Jesus wanted to know if he was willing to change the way he lived. When Jesus spotted Zacchaeus in the tree, he made a similarly audacious statement, "I'm coming to your house." Jesus already told people that he was passing through the town, which would've meant he turned down an invitation to stay at a local's house. And of all the places, he chose to eat at the house of a notorious tax collector.

While both encounters with Jesus offered restoration, they both required a new way of living. The blind man was no longer able to sit along the side of the road begging. He would need to become a productive member of society. After meeting Jesus, Zacchaeus would no longer be able to steal from his tax collector booth. In fact, his intent was to pay back four-fold what he had stolen. Jesus may have wanted to make sure

they were ready for this change by giving them both a chance to back out. But, instead both men had an encounter with Jesus that transformed their lives that day. These encounters altered the way they interacted with everyone they lived with in community. Redemption always brings about restoration – both with God and others.

**our
relationship
with Jesus
is indeed
PERSONAL,
but it's
NOT PRIVATE**

We often speak of wanting Jesus to change us, but we must recognize that when Jesus changes us, it evokes a new response from us. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus illustrates how seriously he takes this restoration. He said, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). When we're in right relationship with God, we're led to right relationship with others. There may be forgiveness that we need to offer, repentance we need to embrace, or peacemaking we need to undertake. Noticing

SAVED/TRANSFORMED

FRIDAY | APRIL 7

by Ryan Paulson

READ TITUS 2:11-14

I can remember the moment it happened to me. After years of being around church and hearing the story of Jesus, I finally met him. It was an experience like no other. Esoteric and spiritual, but there was a very real and concrete change that happened in my life. It was the same change the blind man and Zacchaeus experienced.

Two phrases in this passage of Scripture stand out to me. "Your faith has made you well" and "salvation has come to your house." 'Healed' and 'saved' are the same Greek word. The word 'saved' is a loaded word in our culture. It harkens to images of revivals and televangelists. Sometimes, the stereotype in our mind carries with it the idea of an angry person shouting and beckoning people to avoid the torments of hell by trusting in Jesus. However, when the Scriptures use the word 'saved,' they mean a holistic healing, a restoration, or a redemption. It was something that

both the blind man and Zacchaeus experienced because of their faith in Jesus.

**Salvation
doesn't just
rescue us
from Hell, it
transforms us
on the INSIDE**

When the Apostle Paul writes to Titus, a church leader in Crete, he explains the multifaceted beauty of the salvation God brings. He writes, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave

himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (Titus 2:11-14). Salvation is birthed in God's grace. Salvation trains us to walk with Jesus. Salvation plants hope within us. Salvation redeems us and forms us into the people of God. Salvation doesn't just rescue us from Hell, it transforms us on the inside.

Jesus wants to save – it's why he walked the earth, and it's why he still does it today. However, his salvation isn't just a token handout or cheap grace. It's costly love. To save, Jesus gives his very life. It's his costly love that saves us – and it's that same love that transforms us.

CHEERING/JEERING

SATURDAY | APRIL 8

by Yvonne Biel

READ ISAIAH 55:9

During Jesus' three years of ministry, there were many people watching with a myriad of opinions and perspectives about who he was, what he did, and why he came. Rumors began to spread throughout the land, but this should be no surprise. When influential or celebrity figures come unto the public scene in society, we're bombarded with opinions and perspectives on the news, on the radio, and on social media. Some people cheer in support. Some people jeer in opposition. And many impassioned people want to make their feelings crystal clear.

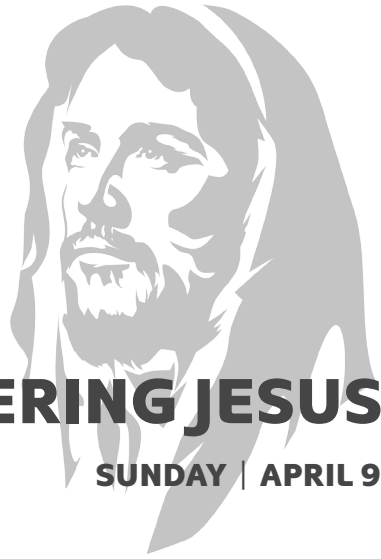
The same thing happens when Jesus shows up amongst the crowds near Jericho. This particular day, Jesus encounters two outcasts of society - the blind beggar and the tax collector. After stopping to respond to the dirty, smelly beggar and restoring his eyesight, Jesus stops to

respond to the high-and-mighty, cheater of a tax collector and sits down to eat with him. Both encounters startle the onlookers - some with eyes twinkling in amazement, some with furrowed brow.

**IMPASSIONED
people want to
make their feelings
crystal clear**

Our hearts respond like the crowds in this story more often than we realize. We cheer when Jesus heals our wounds and we celebrate the times when Jesus opens our eyes to the truth.

But, we also sometimes jeer when Jesus is surprisingly alive and near to those in poverty or in the upper echelons of society. If not because of socio-economic status, we also jeer at the times when Jesus is more gracious than we think he should be or more forgiving than we want him to be. In these times, we'll need to surrender our opinions and perspectives to the One whose "ways [are] higher than our ways and [whose] thoughts [are higher] than our thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).



ENCOUNTERING JESUS

SUNDAY | APRIL 9

READ LUKE 19:28-40

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it." And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

UNTYING THE COLT

MONDAY | APRIL 10

by Donna Burns

READ ZECHARIAH 9:9

Bloopers are usually unexpected, unplanned, spontaneous events. I watch movie bloopers over and over and laugh hysterically. It's entertaining to watch how the movie scene wasn't supposed to go or the mishaps in executing the football play. There's definitely a difference between the intentional and the accidental. But, for the large crowd of people gathered in Jerusalem for Passover watching Jesus on a donkey, they may have been hoping they weren't experiencing a blooper. Their yearly pilgrimage reminded them of a coming redeemer, but the scene before them wasn't quite how they'd imagined their warrior king. It seemed unlikely for their long-awaited Messiah to ride a beast of burden.

It wasn't a blooper, not even one tiny bit. Every detail of Jesus coming into Jerusalem - the timing, the place, an unriden donkey - were all prophesied hundreds of years before. It was planned. It was on purpose.

**perceptions
have ETERNAL
effects**

No surprise. No hesitation. On the most important celebrated day of the year, it was a very deliberate public act claiming deity and declaring Jesus to be king before the multitudes. Nevertheless, many in the crowds were impressionable or misguided. They shouted, "Hosanna, God save us" on the road, but cast their vote against Jesus in Pilate's courtyard when they were disappointed. They

were looking for release from their political bondage, but Jesus came to deliver them from their spiritual bondage. The tragedy is that they never saw Jesus for who He really was.

This triumphal entry was definitely not a blooper but many of us have glaring bloopers in our lives. It's the gap between who we think God is and who He really is. We perceive what God is like, but in reality he's more. We, like the crowds, are easily misguided. We accept misfortune rather than seeing it as a character-shaping discipline of God. We say thank you for God's help rather than offering genuine heartfelt gratitude. We worship as a result of receiving a blessing rather than offering a sacrifice of praise when there seems to be no blessing. Unfortunately, our perceptions have eternal effects. In order to close the gap in your perception and live with Jesus in reality, you might consider making intentional effort to get to know the God of Scripture. Perhaps as you

SPREADING THE CLOAKS

TUESDAY | APRIL 11

by Donna Burns

READ PSALM 118:26-29

Learning to worship God is a journey. I have beautiful memories of hymns played on the pipe organ, singing in the children's choir, and standing to the Hallelujah chorus every Easter morning. This began my journey of worship, but it wasn't until high school when I asked Jesus to be the Lord of my life that worship became more than something around me. On my first mission trip, worship came from the inside of me for the first time. When I realized who I was, who he was, and what he had done for me, I responded in grateful adoration for his authority in my life.

Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." As believers in Jesus, through his final work of forgiving us by his

payment of death on the cross, we have nothing to do with altars of gold or stone. Our worship is spiritual and our hearts have become the altar of worship. Instead of bringing lambs and bulls every morning and evening, we're to bring sacrifices of praise continually - not only in spiritual places, but in every place, not only in a happy frame of mind but also when we're cast down.

**MY CLOAK put before
Jesus demonstrates my
surrender and submission
to HIS KINGSHIP**

Christ's offering was a sacrifice of atonement, ours is the sacrifice of acknowledgement. The Passover crowd acknowledged the Kingship of Jesus by placing their cloaks on the road for him to walk on. This was an act of honor and submission, similar to saying "I am under your feet and under your authority." In my journey of worship, I've found the act of sacrificing continual praise to be the cloak put before Jesus demonstrating my surrender and submission to his Kingship. Worship looks different in my life than when I sang my first praise song years ago. Now, my desire is to keep a song filling the tabernacle of my heart. It's his presence within me and it's what make worship not only corporate, but personal.

SILENCING THE REBUKE

WEDNESDAY | APRIL 12

by Aaron Bjorklund

READ PSALM 19

There seems to be only one group of people Jesus struggles with during his ministry. Here again, we see that group, the Pharisees, rebuking Jesus for letting people worship him. It's easy to dismiss these religious leaders as ignorant but if we're honest, we might've been one of them in their situation. It was their responsibility to protect the religious beliefs of the Israelites. They saw what happened to Israel when they didn't obey God and they felt it was their duty to keep people on track. Now, here comes a man named Jesus letting all people worship him. Although, the Pharisees were waiting for the Messiah, this guy didn't fit their expectations.

All they do is point out how wrong it was for Jesus to allow the people to worship him. They were trying to prevent idolatry. The only problem was, Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was God and he absolutely deserved the praise. Jesus tells them "the rocks would cry out" if the people didn't

worship him. Jesus was not only the king of the Jews, he was a cosmic king worthy of praise from every sector of the universe. Jesus was the God spoken about in Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge." The entire universe sees the glory of Jesus and is willing to worship when these religious leaders completely missed.

**The entire
UNIVERSE
sees the glory
of Jesus
and is
WILLING
to worship**

Throughout scripture we find stories of creation declaring the glory of God while people miss his glory. I don't know about you, but I don't want to miss it. I don't want to let my pride or missed expectations blind me from this incredible person of Jesus. May I never be so religious that I can't see God. Let us be humble enough to declare what the heavens and earth declare every day, that JESUS IS LORD.

WEeping FOR JERUSALEM

THURSDAY | APRIL 12

by Rich Obrecht

READ MATTHEW 23:37-39

Some parents may understand the reason for Jesus' weeping. When first you hold your newborn baby, your heart fills with how precious they are your sight and in the sight of God. You can't help but begin to wonder what your child will become when they grow up. The dreams begin. Then, sometimes, the child you held in your arms so many years ago, begins to make life decisions that lead down dark paths. Parents' hearts fill with hardship and pain as the dreams they once held slip away. Grief sets in and the weeping comes.

As Jesus looks around, his dream for Jerusalem and his call for the Israelites had been lost. They had left their first love and moved to the periphery of worship and obedience. Everything done was external, for everyone to see, with little change being consummated within

their souls. Much like Amos 5:21-24, their feasts, sacrifices, and offerings, seemed to be a means of worshiping God, but they were empty, void of relationship with God. Instead, religious activity became worthless and Jesus knew justice would rolled down on them like a flood.

**Jesus wept for
LOST dreams while
also holding a NEW
dream inside**

There were many times God redeemed the Israelites back to himself after they cried out for forgiveness and deliverance from their lack of obedience. God's heart was for the people of Israel, but their heart ultimately wasn't for God. Now, as Jesus stands looking out toward Jerusalem, this chapter of God's overall plan was closing and another was about to begin. The church, the Body of Christ, was soon to burst upon Earth. Jesus wept for lost dreams while holding a new dream inside. Although the people of Israel may have walked down a dark path and away from God's intended plan, Jesus' dreams didn't stop for them, just like parents' dreams don't stop for their children either.

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

FRIDAY | APRIL 14

by Ryan Paulson

READ HEBREWS 9:12

Jesus walked into the temple. It was a place he had been many times before. As a child, he was found by his parents, sitting at the feet of the Rabbis. It was a place Jesus often found comfort and communion with his Father. However, the corruption in the temple had reached an ultimate high - so much so Jesus referred to it as a "den of robbers." When he entered the temple this time, he did so with a different mission. Instead of coming into the temple to pray or learn, he came to cleanse it! In leading up to his crucifixion, Jesus was redeeming the sacred space that had been designed for people to worship God. He was taking back ground that had been stolen by the Enemy - he was confronting coercion and bringing freedom.

This temple scene foreshadowed the redemption he would purchase on the cross. The week before his death he cleared the temple, but on the cross he would clear away the guilt of humanity. When Jesus cleanses the earthly temple, he braids a whip and forcefully removes the wrong (Matthew 21:12). When he enters the heavenly temple to cleanse our sin, he does so by the shedding of his own blood. Hebrews 9:12 clearly states, "[Jesus] entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." The cleansing Jesus provides

through his blood is not temporary - it's eternal and complete. The sin that had once separated humanity from God is now forever destroyed and completely eliminated.

JESUS marched into the High Temple, stood in our place, defeated our Enemy, and purchased our freedom!

In both stories - the temple and the cross - Jesus is performing a cleansing act. In the temple, he is confronting systemic evil and manipulation, and on the cross he's addressing the deeper issue that stands behind every evil and injustice - sin. In

the temple cleaning, Jesus defeats the powers robbing people of their money. On the cross, Jesus defeats the Enemy who came to "steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10). Both cleanings position people to receive

HANGING ON HIS WORD

SATURDAY | APRIL 15

by Yvonne Biel

READ PSALM 1

Imagine waking up the day after a major crisis. The sounds of life fall silent and your heart feels heavy - as if gravity is pulling extra hard. Only days prior, your heart was full of hope for the future, having confidence in words of truth, words of life, and words of hope. But today, it's as if all that comes crashing down. What happens on those days when your heart is heavy and you're at a loss for words? What happens when one day feels like the longest journey you've ever taken or a never-ending route of despair? What happens when your expectations are shattered and your hopes end in disappointment?

The same weighty emotions would have been stirred up within Jesus' disciples the morning after the gruesome execution. Jesus was gone. Only days prior, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem and their hearts filled with wonder and anticipation. Their months overflowed with praise and blessing. Although religious leaders were out to kill Jesus, Jesus remained alive because his followers "hung on his words" (Luke 19:48).

Perhaps the religious leaders were afraid of the crowds but more likely they feared the power behind Jesus' supremely simple yet revolutionary words.

We WAIT - "hanging onto his WORDS" just like all those who have gone before us

But that day, the disciples realized Jesus was gone. What some didn't realize was that there was still something to cling onto. They've always had his words. We, too, have Jesus' words. We may not be able to live and follow Jesus in a tangible

way like first his disciples. We may not be able to see him face-to-face or sit down with him over coffee, but that was never his intention. Jesus came to do the will of his Father in heaven. He came to die in our place. He came to set us free. Now, in the same way, we cling to his words by faith. And, we wait. We wait - like the disciples on Holy Saturday, for the completed promise of resurrection. We wait - on the good days and the bad days, the ones filled with joy and laughter as well as the ones filled with sorrow and mourning. We wait - "hanging onto his words" just like all those who have gone before us.



ENCOUNTERING JESUS

EASTER SUNDAY | APRIL 16

READ LUKE 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.



SOUTHFELLOWSHIP.*org*

6560 South Broadway
Littleton, CO 80121
303-797-1500