

Lent Devotionals 2023

**First Presbyterian Church
The Porch
Trinity Church**

Written by Christopher Robins

Wednesday, February 22nd

24 Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. — Isaiah 65:24

What can this mean? Our prayers are anticipated, almost like the picture of an eager friend, someone who knows you well, finishing your sentences for you. Here is the Father, always ready to answer, the desires of your heart already close to His heart. What can this mean except that our prayers are already on His mind, and He only waits to hear us ask? What would you pray about if you believed this? Someone will ask, why should I pray if God knows what I will ask? But what can this verse mean except that there is something more glorious than we expected waiting for us? God is our Father, and He wants to hear what our desires are, despite His abstract knowledge of all our needs and circumstances. He knows the details, but there is so much more to *knowing* than that. He wants to hear your voice. Like a loving Father who loves to know all about His children, He wants to hear from us and know all of our day-to-day needs and desires. What answers will come from a God who wants to know you this way?! Doesn't it make you want to ask?

Thursday, February 23rd

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. — Romans 8:26

There are groans that I cannot put into words, when words just fail. Sometimes it is a response to pain. You don't have or need words when you express terrible pain. Sometimes it is to express powerful longing. You know you want something, but you don't know how to describe your desire. Other times, our desires are so strong that words fail us completely. At times you just have an idea, or a feeling, and you simply cannot express what you mean to say. You don't know how to put it into words that someone could really understand. For the Father, all of this is good conversation! Because of His wisdom and the presence of the Holy Spirit, He knows exactly what we mean every time. He has heard your incoherent ramblings. He will respond. Ramble and groan away. He knows exactly what you mean to say.

Friday, February 24th

59 Let these words of mine, with which I have pleaded before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, and may he maintain the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel, as each day requires. — 1 Kings 8:59

This is such a strange thing Solomon prays. That his words would be before God day and night. I think of the bubbles in cartoons and comics, where the words the character is speaking are in the air above his head. But then it grips me suddenly that this is what this passage implies. That our

words are always, forever before our Father. That because of His promise and love they can never be anything less than this, forever. The blood of Jesus is this powerful, forever. The Son stands at the right hand as your advocate forever. No wonder meaningless repetition is so foolish! No wonder our prayers need to be completed and perfected in the name of Jesus! And now we can pray, for not one word asked by a son or daughter of heaven has ever dropped to the ground unheard. Now as you go to pray imagine this. Not one word spoken by you will ever fail to appear before our God both day and night, even for forever.

Saturday, February 25th

²³ In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. — John 16:23

Pray in His name. Nothing needs to be sophisticated to understand this. Some will object that it can be mechanical, something you just say by habit. So what? Pray in Jesus' name. Some will say that they are wiser than that. That the command to "pray in My name," is really about having Christ in you, and you being in Him. Amen! It surely means that. If anyone pretends that using Jesus' name is a shortcut, or a magic word, then they are surely mistaken. Their mistake is obvious. But you are a child of God. Pray in His name. Live in it, remind yourself, and always call out in Jesus' name. It is simple and it is good. Let us keep praying that our lives would be lived in Jesus' name. How? In Jesus' name. Amen.

Monday, February 27th

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. — Revelation 1:12-16

What are these images for? We have been forbidden, quite explicitly, to worship any image-or to make one for worship. Why? They will all fail. The eternal God cannot be reduced to an image. It demeans Him and deceives the worshipper. The eternal Son cannot be cast into an image for worship either. It obscures Him and the wonder of His flesh. So what are these visions of glory in the Bible for, these glimpses of our God in His glory? It is this. Although we are forbidden the graven image, we are given the imaginative picture for our faith! What is our imagination? It is faith in flight, soaring before the throne. It is faith alive with the images we have been given by the prophets. And it is to just such a place that we go whenever we pray. So pray with these texts before you. Read them and pray. This is the place you have been going, with its throne of sapphire. This is the place you long to be, where the angels cry out and cover their faces. This is

where you are when you pray in Jesus name, where one like a Son of Man shines like molten metal and leans in to hear what you say.

Tuesday, February 28th

37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” — Matthew 9:37-38

Are you going to pray for this or not? I don't know how many things Christ ever explicitly tells us to pray for. The list is not that long. We get general guidelines and examples, and that frees us up to pray about all the things that concern us in life. And that is good! But then the Son tells us to specifically pray, to ask about something that is pressing on Him, that has disturbed Him. There is a harvest, and the fruit is ready and ripe. There are people, like apples waiting to be plucked or plums about to fall off the branch. But few people are truly working in the harvest. Few care, and fewer act on what desire they have. Christ knows it. He is living in it, and is sharp with grief over it. “Pray about this,” He cries. Are you going to or not?

Wednesday, March 1st

4 I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. 7 To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. 8 To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him 10 and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. 11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. — Daniel 9:4-11

Daniel is touted as the ultimate bible good guy. He is it. No one is equal to him, except Christ who is greater. In general the bible is pretty unglamorous about its heroes. It is part of the winsomeness of the book. Abraham is impatient, Jonah is surly, David is lustful, Moses is whiney, Peter is a loudmouth. But not Daniel. Until we get to this point, we might have the squeakiest clean saint of all, but then he prays. And this tells all. He cannot pray without confessing sin, and then he says it. The sin of the people is his sin as well. It is all “we.” Some will hear this and say,

that's just what good man would say. But then you misunderstand goodness. Daniel is so righteous that he cannot finally lie by generalizing. He is not "acting a part." That would demean it all. He knows what and who he is. Every great man and woman of God does. He is a sinner just like everyone else, of the same kind and to the same extent. You cannot lie to God. Confess your sin. Work at it, name it, and specify it. No one else might ever need to know what you did. But the Father, who already knows, asks all of His sons and daughters to come and tell Him what they have done and left undone. Even as we look at our times, and the many sins of our nation and our generation, we must always say "we."

Thursday, March 2nd

²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. — John 16:26-27

No intermediary. No go between. Not since the cross. Even the Son, in whose name we pray, needs to go for us. The door is held open with a doorstep that cannot be moved: the cross. Let us go directly. Sometimes people will come to me and ask me to pray for them, and I get this sense that they think my prayers will be more successful. But they are not. My prayers are no more successful than the least of all the children of my Father. The fact is that so many do not ask, and go on asking and pleading. Every child of our King can walk right up to Him in all of His glory. The angels cannot bear to look, and all of their words are praise. They have their work there at the throne, and we walk right by them in our prayers, plop down next to our Almighty Father and ask what we need. No one can bar us out or keep us from Him. We need not be ashamed of our boldness, our reckless approach toward His glory; we only ought to be ashamed that we have loitered for so long without coming and telling Him what we need and want.

Friday, March 3rd

³² Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." — Genesis 18:32

I cannot get over Abraham. It's the sort of boldness and persistence that I would figure was inappropriate. And I would be wrong. It makes timidity seem downright offensive, if not foolish. God has told him what He is going to do. Abraham seems to figure that if God is telling him this sort of thing, then He must be open to input and negotiation. It's a startlingly different view of God's will than we are used to, and Abraham is brazen about it. He even knows he is being bold as he is speaking. Have you ever dealt with our Father like this? Our Father has told us He is going to judge the world, and it seems like He is on His way to do it. If His sons and daughters will plead for cities and countries, for whole nations and generations, then who knows what He will do? Perhaps He will give us such a blessing that we will not be able to contain it all. Perhaps He will

come as a judge. But the truth here is this: our brazen negotiation will always be heard and considered by our Father in heaven.

Saturday, March 4th

4 The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. 5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. 6 The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. 7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. 8 He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. — 1 Samuel 2:4-8

This is Hanna's prayer of praise. An insignificant woman of rural Palestine over 3,000 years ago. Her problems were infertility and a bad polygamous marriage, dealing with the spite of a hateful second wife who happened to be very fertile. All in all, her problems don't seem to amount to the stuff of princes, but they matter a great deal to her. And then amazingly, they matter even more to her God. Somehow, in an amazing way, her issues matter eternally. Her vindication, which comes as answered prayer for a child, is God's interest in the cause of the downtrodden and despised. Her cause is her heavenly Father's cause, and so is yours. Do not permit yourself to despise yourself. Don't believe all of that garbage that your problems do not matter. Your issues at work, with family and your neighbors; these are the causes that matter to our God-for no other reason than they matter to you. Take up your cause with Him, and let Him take it up for you.

Monday, March 6th

14 And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped[a] and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" — Joshua 5:14

"God is on our side." This mantra, this slogan, is the lie of emperors, kings and presidential hopefuls. Joshua sees this man and asks the question we all do. Are you on my side or not? Are you for me or against me? Here is Joshua, God's clearly appointed leader and servant of God's people. He is the good guy. We deal with a lot of ambiguity in our experience with political leaders. There is none about Joshua. We know he is the hero. But our God makes a point that cannot be overstated. God is not on anyone's side. He is God, not the token of a nation or a political party. Even a good guy like Joshua. "God with us" should be struck from our currency, not merely because it is doubtful in these days, but because it rejects the glory and greatness of our God. We belong to Him. And the commander of the armies of the Living God has now come. His name is Jesus. I am His, and He is mine.

Tuesday, March 7th

¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." — Luke 17:15-19

It is so easy to disconnect our Father's answer to our prayers from thankful praise. Like children who constantly need to be reminded to say thank you, we need a lesson in how to respond to our God. Thanksgiving is the breath of life for the believer. Our faith is not called to be something merely abstract, but something listed with proofs. Not proofs that can appeal to someone who does not believe. They wouldn't work. No, they are reminders of our reason for confidence and joy, listed out for the glory of the Son. Perhaps nine churches out of ten will forget to do this, and perhaps that portion is always the same in the coming of our Savior's kingdom. Let's not let that happen to us. So much has been done for our church it would be all the more shame not to shout our constant thankfulness to our God!

Wednesday, March 8th

¹ I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. — Psalm 116:1

God loves us unconditionally. That final word, that He loves us freely without anything we did to provoke it, is the word of constant hope to often failing Christians. Unconditional love is beautiful. But the truth is that we don't love that way. We can't. We try to love our children that way, our spouses that way, and one another that way, but its terribly difficult. Inevitably we have conditions. It has to be a fruit of the Holy Spirit when we love that freely, because that is the way our God loves. But look how unapologetic the psalmist is. He loves God *because* God hears him. That startled me when it was first pointed out. I had not thought of it that way before, but it makes perfect sense. We can't love our God unconditionally! We don't have to! The truth is that we never would have to. He has met all the conditions for real love in the sacrifice of his Son. And He has heard you cry out, and will hear you when you cry out today.

Thursday, March 9th

²⁷ Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness or their sin, ²⁸ lest the land from which you brought us say, "Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness." ²⁹ For they are your people and your heritage, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.' — Deuteronomy 9:27-29

I do not often like to give someone leverage against me. Nobody does. If you know what makes someone tick, what they truly value, then you can use that to get them to do something. That is why money works so well. It is the leverage that most of us understand, and our employers understand all too well. The amazing thing is how Moses uses leverage against our God. And our God allows it. Moses understands that our God is jealous about His own glory. Very jealous. That is what He truly values. And in this wonderful way, something I can hardly begin to understand, our Father invites us to use this leverage against Him. Moses saves the whole nation by using it. People are going to talk bad about you God. That is the substance of his argument with the Lord. We can go even further than he did, because we have the Son Himself! We have the cross, and the blood of the Savior. But we can go even further than this. He has called us sons and daughters, and told us to call Him Father. We have the Spirit of sonship. What glorious leverage is this! Use it!

Friday, March 10th

¹² Moses said to the Lord, “See, you say to me, ‘Bring up this people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’”¹³ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.”¹⁴ And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”¹⁵ And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.”¹⁶ For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”¹⁷ And the Lord said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.”¹⁸ Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” — Exodus 33:12-18

Moses asks, and the Lord gives it. It is an amazing exchange between them. Moses starts with a sort of complaint, saying “I really don’t have what I need to lead these folks like You have told me to.” God replies that He will be with them. Then Moses says something remarkable. “If you don’t go with us, we’re finished. I’m expecting You to be with us. I need more.” That is the sort of thing that just amazes me. How does a man talk to God like that? And then there’s God’s reply, and the funny thing is that He knows what Moses is *really* asking for. To see His glory. So our Father says, sure I’ll do it. Moses craves something more than what he had experienced. He lays it on the line. I want to come before my Father now, and I want to start this discussion. I don’t have enough of You yet. Give me more. I don’t see You clearly yet, in Your glory. Show me more. I can’t seem to get by with just what I’ve got now. Reveal to me more. King of kings. Lord of lords. Ancient of Days. Christ Jesus. Now show me Your glory.

Saturday, March 11th

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? — John 14:1-2

What an odd thing to say. If the houses were not there, I would have told you. If it was not real estate, I would have let you know. Your dreams that you would have something like that, that you would have a home like the ones you read about in magazines or see on TV, this is the sort of desire he is talking about. It is the stuff of dreams. There are roads here in town that you can drive down and just be amazed at the beauty and architecture, the pure wealth of many mansions all around us. But do not lust after them. It is tempting. In my Father’s house are many such kinds of places. It is wonderful that our Father promises these things. We can have a simple joy, that those desires in us for a beautiful place to live are understood well by our Father. He knows and He tenderly promises a home for each of us. So do not be deceived. These earthly mansions only get termites anyway, and we could not really afford to even pay the taxes or utilities. My mansion in glory is paid for, and I don’t believe it has any pest problems at all. I will not be troubled. I will trust in Him.

Monday, March 13th

⁵ “Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise,” says the Lord; “I will place him in the safety for which he longs.” ⁶ The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times. — Psalm 12:5-6

The psalmist’s view of the word is so concrete, so immediately relevant. He uses this poetic image of refined silver, a picture of just how pure and flawless the word of God truly is. But for him this is not doctrine. It is about a book, but it is not sitting on a dusty shelf. This is not merely a conviction or idea. Far from it! He does not abstract what it means for God’s word to be without error. He is not interested in a debate. It means one simple thing to him right there. God actually does protect the needy and the weak! What is inerrancy, as it is doctrinally called? It means make no mistake, our God has spoken about your need and has seen your weakness, and He will arise, He will get up and do something about it. Alert Him today of your need, call on Him. His word and promise are flawless, seven times over.

Tuesday, March 14th

¹ How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? ³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, ⁴ lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,” lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. ⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in

your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me. — Psalm 13:1-6

I love that David whines. And he really does. When you read his story, and you know about his years on the run, all of the intrigue and delay in his life, you can see why. But it seems like a part of Christian faith and life is missing for us. Here we have it, a holy complaint. What is that? It is not the faithless grumbling and complaining of Israel that is recorded in the book of Numbers. Our God's judgment on them for that sort of thing was severe and quick. It happened more than once. Complaining can easily be sinful, but not necessarily so. What is the difference? It is here in the Psalm. Look at how it ends. His complaining is born out of real faith. He says I trust your love. A holy complaint comes from faith. That is its context. What is next? He praises God's salvation. He rejoices. A holy complaint comes in the context of real worship. It is mixed with joy. What is after that? A resolve. I will praise even more. I will bring my complaint to my God, because He is my God, and I will praise Him for His goodness all the same. If you complain in this manner expect the kind of real life answers that our father David found. He was the apple of our Father's eye.

Wednesday, March 15th

¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. ¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹⁵ And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. ¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. ¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." — 1 Kings 19:12-18

Elijah was a man just like us. That is what James says, and you can see why he says it. Elijah seems like he is feeling very sorry for himself. Just before this, in one of the most amazing displays of God's power in the whole bible, an entire altar on the top of a mountain was burned down by fire from heaven. Thousands saw it, and finally the wicked priests of Baal were routed. It was amazing. But it triggered some real anger toward Elijah and he got frightened and ran. Fire came out of heaven! But here he is, scared and full of self pity. If this is not a picture of me, I do not know what is. You should see me at a staff meeting sometimes! I am a puddle. Poor me. What is our Father's answer to Elijah? To us? To me? He is so gentle. He speaks with a gentle whisper of love. Go back to work. Go back and do what I tell you to do. And by the way, I've got another 7,000 of you back at the ranch. What a good God we worship, and let us never forget,

even as we fight our self pity, isolation, and sense of failure; we are not alone. Our God is with us, and He has work for us to do. We know this, because Elijah was just like us.

Thursday, March 16th

²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. — Job 19:25-26

In the devastation that can come in a man's life, in the loss and grief that some people taste and endure, only the believer can begin to speak clearly of what his real hope could possibly be. This clarity, this insight that Job has, is amazing. Job is arguably the most ancient text of the Scripture, an ancient argument over the problem of suffering and God's justice. Job seems to grow in his understanding, finally brought to humble worship by the words of God Himself. But our God speaks to him, and here speaks through him, so clearly. He knows. He *knows*. The resurrection, our Savior, the final judgment. In the dim, ancient, and murky past of a land called Uz, Job speaks with more conviction and clarity than many of us ever do. His faith is radiant, and it's all he has left. Even his friends are a disappointment. Here is what is only seen and truly known by the power of the Holy Spirit. I want to ring loud, and burn bright with this conviction too. I know that my Redeemer lives, Jesus Christ my Lord!

Friday, March 17th

¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. — 1 Timothy 1: 12-17

Paul cannot keep talking or writing without this burst of praise at the end. He cannot do it. He cannot tell of this matchless grace, proved glorious in the saving of a wretch like him, without praising the King Eternal. And how could he? And how is it that we can do it, that we can speak of such eternal things, that men and women like you and me that have been saved and rescued could think about grace without real praise? I do not know, except to say that we must find out. There must be some way to do it, to rediscover it all with joy, to renew our passion and fire for Christ. Perhaps, like Paul, we need to see it again and say it again. We were awful creatures, full of sin; and we still would be. But our God, out of a desire to show the grace of Jesus Christ can do something with the likes of us, to prove that this grace is greater than the worst there can be in this world, to demonstrate His grace to people who think it is too late for them, showed us grace.

Showed it to St. Paul's, to your pastor, and to our people. Let all theology be dead if it does not spring into the life of praise from our mouth and heart when we know love like that! Now to the King Eternal, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, our Jesus, be praises forever! Amen.

Saturday, March 18th

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them. — Luke 24:36-43

My own flesh seems weak and ugly to me, and it is a wonder to me that this too will be redeemed. All of it. My hunger, my thirst, these too will be redeemed and restored. Jesus is no abstract savior, only interested in my spirit. No, He is a complete savior, a complete rescue of my dust. That is why it is so startling to read the accounts of Jesus after His resurrection from the dead. He is all glorious but cannot be touched by Mary right away. He is somehow completely unnoticeable by friends and yet can somehow transport Himself into locked rooms – suddenly appearing in the middle of them. And then He eats! All glory to the Son! He eats! We are confronted with the strange nature of resurrected flesh. It means so much for us. We hunger now and somehow that hunger itself, for a catfish dinner with friends, is a part of our experience in the new heavens and the new earth. This strange flesh will be mine. I wonder what it can do, or will do, for the glory of the Son in His new kingdom. I can only hope that this body will taste redemption now in the obedience of my senses to the holiness of my God.

Monday, March 20th

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. — John 1:14

How can this be true? How can veins and skin, hair and teeth, or legs and arms contain all of this? John says it. We have seen His glory, we saw it just *looking* at him. Sometimes the Psalmist says something like this when he says the whole earth is full of the glory of the Lord. The angels say that when Isaiah sees them. But that is not what John is saying. It is not a general idea, the way sky and sea or bird and dog declare His glory. This is the glory of His Person, in particular in His Son. I would have supposed this was not really possible. We were forbidden to make any graven image of Him, forbidden to create something we could look at and say, "this is our God." It seems contrary then that we could say that about a man as He was walking by. But then so much comes together as I think about that problem. Man was made in His image to begin with. So man could

image forth God in a way that creation around us cannot. And then the picture becomes clearer. Those old idols of stone and wood, they are not fashioned like we are. There is something here, here in my skin and bone, that *can* bear the image of the invisible God. An idol of wood would obscure that truth, make it less beautiful, and hide that the Eternal Son would come and become a man. He is the God Man, and something is now possible in created things that we might not have seen or suspected before. Now the possibility is open. Look at your hands, your feet. If you have the Son, then you also share in His glory. How much more urgent we must be about holiness, about how we use our bodies! Pray for that glory to be revealed in you, and to you. Amen.

Tuesday, March 21st

²⁹ I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. — Romans 15:29

So how did Paul, our dear father in the faith, finally come to Rome? He speaks here, as he always does, with the authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ and the knowledge of a prophet. And he knows he is headed there, although he does not know how. We know. He arrived a prisoner, in chains, most likely executed sometime in 63 A.D. But it is so sweet to hear him talk about the fullness of the blessing of Christ. For it is in his suffering that Christ's blessing shines brightest. He knew that. I know that we would rather shine like an Olympic champion completing his record lap. But the way of following Christ is not the way the world works. Many men would point to Paul and say he failed. Many have. But they do not know the Scriptures or the power of God! Be careful of men who look strong and successful, beware yourself if that is what you want to become. The road of the cross leads to death here in this world. Turn your back on the path of the world's success. And if you cannot turn your heart, just plead with Father that you would experience the fullness of the blessing of Christ in your life - whatever it is. Let the God of peace and love, who treats you as His dear son, answer your prayers with His best. Amen.

Wednesday, March 22nd

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. — Matthew 5:17

We have never gotten Him big enough. We are familiar enough with passages like this, and if we are not, it still strikes us as a little odd. It is so simply stated. What is so simply stated? His sheer glory. Put it this way. Christ takes the scripture here, and places it in *reference to himself*. We are a self obsessed people, so we do not easily see what this implies. But this is His glory. The bible, as a work, now has a fulfillment in Him! It now has its purpose. It is as if He is saying that it is validated by Him. Who validates God's word in himself? Only His Self. It is as if to say “I am the hinge, and the Scripture are the door. I hold them up.” This is why He is never big enough to us. It is suggested to us here and there, and Christ certainly seems so very different than any other man, but we barely can begin to suspect what is really happening, what He is truly telling us. To get

Him big enough is to begin to worship. To enlarge your mind and thoughts with the magnitude of who He is, Eternal son, very God and very man. This is the extent of His majesty, and with it, this is the extent of His love. What worship and confidence waits for those whose trust is in Him!

Thursday, March 23rd

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.' – Revelation 2:17

Don't you want to know what it is? A treasured name that Jesus has for you, that only you will know? I so want to be renamed, renamed by my God. He knows what my name should be, how His grace has marked me in such a way to reveal His glory. He knows what name will clearly picture who I am, and who I belong to. He will name me for His very own. Again and again in the old covenant He says His people are His treasured possession, His inheritance. That is such a strange thing, for how could our God ever need a treasure, or need an inheritance. But out of His love He treasures us. This is why He gives us His Son. And everyone who has the Son, has the Father. What is more, we belong to the Father as His treasure. And whatever belongs to the Father, belongs to His Son. Here in Revelation Christ is claiming us as that treasure! He names us out of his love. He will put the stone in my hand, and I will know, from my naming, how much He has loved me all along.

Friday, March 24th

23 And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him. – 1 Samuel 16:23

There is an image in our culture that music will tame the savage in us. That there is something soothing about music that will calm a wild beast. I don't really know if it is true or not, but I do not think that is what this passage is saying. Think about it. What would David be singing? He was a songwriter and a rather prolific one. We have his songbook, it is called the Psalms. So what rescued Saul from the torture and manic fury of a demon riding his conscience and heart day in and day out? It was those Psalms, the songs and lyrics of man in love with his God, full of praise, repentance, and love. It is the word that calmed Saul's heart. The word of God. I would make much of this for your own heart and life. Christian music has its place in the life of the Christian, especially when it is the scripture itself in music. Use it, and use it wisely. Find what you like in devotional music and listen to it. Even better sing to yourself. Don't be distracted by the folks who tell you not to listen to music of the world. That is not forbidden. But be wise, because evil spirits are real. Be in the word, memorize the word, soak in the word. Take in the word of God like it was cereal in the morning, or a sandwich at lunch, or pasta at dinner. The word set to music can do all

of this. And when evil comes it will not stay very long. Within earshot of David's songs not a demon can linger to bother the children of God.

Saturday, March 25th

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. — 1 Kings 18:30

The altar is in ruins. It does not take that long to make a ruin. Recently there was documentary on how long it would take the earth to decay after man was gone. It showed the progressive destruction of lack of maintenance and disuse. A part of the show was a tour of Chernobyl, now just over 20 years after the city was abandoned. It is amazing to see how much has already been destroyed. Christian, we must beware. The message is clear. They abandoned the worship of God, and now, in this story, they are under the slavery of evil false gods. Gods that demand child sacrifice and self mutilation. You might ask me, how can our altar be in ruins? Tell me, what is the state of your heart? What is the substance of your life of praise, or the praise of your family? What can it mean today except the neglect of the cross and praise of Jesus Christ, for whom all of those altars were sermons of His redeeming love in the sacrifice of Himself, His blood on the cross. There might be a lot of religion around, and there might be religiosity everywhere. I do not know what sort, or what kind. "Spirituality" is certainly alive today. But what must be preached and kept earnestly from decay is this, the proclaiming of Christ's death on a cross for sinners. Jesus loves sinners with His blood. This altar has been in ruins in the church today. Let us rebuild it in our hearts, in our families, and in our community. The Son of God came in to the world to save the worst sorts of people. Me.

Monday, March 27th

9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." — Revelation 5:9

This seems like an ugly teaching to us. We do not buy things with our blood, or make transactions in a sacrifice, or profit from slaughter. This language of blood is primitive, and reeks of the messiness of an ancient religion, the priest cutting the lambs all day like a butcher, his hands slippery with the blood of animals to pay the price for sinners. But what real value was lambs blood or cow's blood? None. The value was in the meat if it was anywhere, and those sacrifices were used for dinner every day. But this primitive idea of blood is the only way to understand Christ. He is not a moral story of sacrifice, as if to inspire you or me to give up our lives against injustice. It has that element, but it is incidental to the main idea. The lesson of the priest daily butchering of animals, of all of that blood all over the altar, is Jesus paying for us with His blood. Purchasing us with blood. It is elemental. Sinners must pay with their lives for what they do. Our God has made it clear, only blood will pay. So the praise of heaven, here in this text, is this: praise

Him for how He bought us with His blood. Is that your story? Purchased by blood? Is your hope this bloody business, this transaction of His blood for your life? I will become ugly about this, I will preach this ugly truth about Jesus saving sinners with blood, because in it is the truth that makes us beautiful. Rejoice today, you have been made beautiful and holy today before our God. Amen.

Tuesday, March 28th

7 again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." — Hebrews 4:7

Today. There is an urgency here that it is impossible to evade. Procrastination is something we joke about, but it is no laughing matter before a holy God. I do not know where you are today, or where you might be reading this, or what you face in your job, your family, or your marriage. This is simply something I am writing as I worship. It is my "today" before my Father in heaven. But whoever you are, and wherever you are this is also your "today." There is joy and warning in this, isn't there? If it is true, that this message is for you today, then that means that it is not too late for you. I don't care who you are. If you are reading this, then my Father has given you an opportunity to know His love for the very worst and even the very latest! This is your "today" to know that whatever has gone before can be over and covered by the blood of Jesus. That whatever has passed is past, and "today" he would preach His love to you and for you. What a glorious day it is for you! This is the joy, so what is the warning? This is your last day. That sounds frightening, doesn't it? You may say to me, how do you know that? I do not, but I know this: you should be living as though it were. Do not harden your heart about this. I do not doubt that for someone this might be the last day. This is no joking matter about procrastination at all. This might the last day you are offered His love, or this might be the last day you live. I do not know. I only know this. This hour is the day that the Scriptures are telling you about. Lay hold of Him now, while He is still near.

Wednesday, March 29th

19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. — Ephesians 3:19

Paul's prayers are a precious thing to us. They describe the heart of man in love with his God, exuberant and joyful, passionate and full of praise. This is one of them. So what is this knowledge that cannot be known? There is a rule for thinking about God that we often should be reminded of. You have a conception of God. Whatever it is, you have it. An idea of His love, His person, and His greatness. Now, whatever that is, you can know this. It is wrong. Dead wrong. Why? Because He is greater than that conception you just had. This is what the knowledge of God is always like. He is eternal in majesty, eternal in His love, eternal in His goodness. So whatever you think or

imagine, it simply is not enough. This is what Paul is experiencing, and is trying to describe. As you investigate it, as you try to discover what this love of our God is like, you get lost in it. It does not end. As you know more about yourself, and you see ever more clearly who you are, it only increases the wonder at His love. It is like swimming the depths of the sea, or looking into the limitlessness of space. It is like counting grains of sand or snowflakes. Get lost in His love. Pray to be lost in it, amazed by it, and overwhelmed with it. This knowledge that surpasses knowledge is what worship, awe, and joy are born out of. It is what we most need today, and it is my prayer for you and myself.

Thursday, March 30th

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. — Galatians 1:6

It is astonishing, isn't it? One minute I was preaching or praising, and the next I deserted the truth. We so quickly abandon the beauty and truth of the gospel. It feels like all of the truth of God's love written on our hearts is actually scratched on sand. One wave of worry, finances, or entertainment and whoosh. It's gone. Erased from our mind like it was not even there. So often we experience this, and we shake our heads like we were confused by it, or surprised by it. Let's wake up! We are exactly like the Bible describes us. Hard hearted, foolish, and distracted. Let's wake up! Read your bible, pray, go to church, listen to the sermon, praise Him, get communion. Repeat. Read your bible, pray, go to church, listen to the sermon, praise Him, get communion. Repeat. Etcetera. You get the idea? Repetition is the answer to our idiotic spiritual life. It is to mine. I must hear, and I must tell someone, of how great Jesus' love is or I actually seem to forget. Oh, I *know* about it. But I don't know it know it. Dear child of God, live your life in expectation that you will forget spiritual truth all of the time. So repeat all of those good things that you have been given by your Father, and repeat them often. There will not come a time in this world when this is no longer necessary. I repeat, It is astonishing isn't it? One minute I was preaching . . .

Friday, March 31st

4 Then David inquired of the Lord again. And the Lord answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." — 1 Samuel 23:4

This was David's habit. What am I going to do here, or where should I go, or what should I do next. He inquired of the Lord. He asked God. In fact, this statement is conspicuously absent from the story later, when David falls in to terrible sin. But here it is, and it is so wonderful. Now David did have some advantages. He had one of the priests of God who could divine God's will for him. Before some of you say that must have made it easier for him, need I remind you of how little you listen to anything a man of God says today? But be that as it may, I want to live like David. I want to move and go as my Father tells me. And I have such an advantage over David! I have the Son Himself, I have the Holy Spirit, I have scriptures so rich and full! His bible was so small compared

to mine, so why is his faith so much greater? He made this his habit. Go and ask our God what you should be doing. Go ahead and ask. Anytime and anywhere. Go, then and search out the scripture to see what it says. Go ahead and study it. Is what you want to do forbidden anyway? Don't fool yourself about it. Next, he has made us a kingdom of priests. So, your brother and sister have a priestly ministry for you. Go ahead and ask them. If it is too difficult for them, bring it to the elders. If you have no clear answer, then you, as a son or daughter, are free to do what seems best to you. No longer be afraid! But make it all a habit. Go and inquire of the Lord. He loves you.

Saturday, April 1st

⁶ “And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ — Ezekiel 16:6

This is a picture from the delivery room, a scene of blood and birth, which our Father is using to describe His love. In this passage God's people are described as a newborn abandoned in a field, despised by its own mother. How can this describe His love? There is nothing really attractive about a birth. It is a fairly gruesome event. This birth is even worse. But our Father is talking about the way He loves us without any conditions. We were not his children naturally, and He chooses to love us even as He sees where we begin in it all. The poet Herbert wrote “I was born crying, and every day shows why.” This is us, born into the world's misery and ugliness. We are not beautiful. But He sees all that, and He loves us. It is this love that began before the world was made, for in His love he choose us before time was time. He loved, and he loves today. So often in our squalor and guilt we feel helpless. This is what the doctrine of election, of God's choice, is for. It is to give hope to us. If I was loved this way, and chosen this way, I have so much to hope for in His love. I can be bold, I can come to the Father, I can trust in His love. When the Father loves, nothing and no one shall defeat it. Let us come, full of repentance and faith today, remembering that the Father looked on us and saw the whole truth of who we were. And then He decided to set His love on us. How great is His grace!

Monday, April 3rd

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. — Matthew 6:34

I am not going to say planning is a waste of time. Of course it isn't. But guard your heart, because it can be pure disobedience! So often our idea of planning, or even more grandly, our strategic planning, is just another way that we manage to try to worry about tomorrow. There is almost something comic about the way Jesus puts it. You have got enough trouble on a daily basis and Christ is practically promising you that. Here is what I think is the most basic reality of it all. Which of you, by planning anything, has kept yourself from sinning? It is humiliating when you consider it. Not one of us, by any plan that we can forge or implement, can keep ourselves from sinning in the most ordinary and practical ways every day! So when is planning not disobedient?

When it begins out of prayer and faith, with hope in our God; when it is born out of love for Him and is authored by the Holy Spirit present with us. Then our hope is in Him, and not at all in our ridiculous plans. We begin with surrender and no control, and then we are ready to plan, or should I say, submit our requests to our God! I suppose, in a funny sort of way, that good planning is, in the end, just that. A rather detailed form of prayer request. I will tell you this, I will hope for much from such plans. Go now to your Father in heaven about today, tomorrow, and the next day! They all belong to Him.

Tuesday, April 4th

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. — Psalm 22:1-2

I am so very glad that these words are in the scripture. Even more, that they are on Christ's lips as He dies alone on the wood. Otherwise, how should I have had any hope when it has really gotten that bad? Sometimes we have a weak picture of Christ, that somehow, because He was also God, that His suffering was less. As if He was play-acting out some predetermined drama. That would mean these words were lies to me. The truth is, in His innocence, and in the breaking of His relationship with His Father, that all of eternity and time were being shaken. And His grief was like no other. That is what it must mean. When we feel low or depressed, when we are suffering, we often feel alone. And honestly, in some ways we are in that moment. That is why it hurts so much. But we will never be alone like He was. And so we are not alone after all, because He knows what our sadness feels like. And in the end it is "my God." We are people who know grief. This is a part of what it is to be a Christian. But that grief will never be the final word to us. Take your suffering now to Jesus. He understands, and is even now bending His heart to every child of His that is crying out in darkness.

Wednesday, April 5th

³² You shall be careful therefore to do as the Lord your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. — Deuteronomy 5:32

There is a truth to live by. There are so many places to go, so many turns in the road, so many pitfalls around us. Do not go to the left or the right. We all have certain directions our personalities will tend to go towards, certain things that tempt us, loyalties that easily bind us. You know how your car will tend to veer, one way or the other? Your heart is the same way. Do not go the left or to the right. Of what? Dear child of God, make it Jesus and Him crucified. There is so much distraction, and our own hearts are slow and prone to wander. The real trick is not what's on the left or right. That is not what we must worry about first. That is just your immediate context, wherever you are and wherever you live. What is on the left or right will change with the different places you will live in life, and the circumstances you will be in. What remains constant

is Christ and Him crucified. Set your mind on the cross, where your savior was crucified. Set your heart on what love the Father has for sinners, for us His children. Set your hope on the Prince of Glory, who died that you might live. And do not stray from that to the right or to the left.

Thursday, April 6th

³² For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. — Isaiah 37:32

What gets things done? A good plan? More hard work? We will make all sorts of resolutions and we will work together in many ways to see things get done. Sometimes it will, sometimes it won't. I have one good friend who never delegates anything if she can help it. I know why. If she does it, then she knows it will get done. People like that are a great asset at times, but in the end they will just burn out. Our God won't. In a sense that is what this verse says. He will not burn out. The Lord our God is passionate about getting this done. Getting what done? Our deliverance and the coming of His Son. Our salvation from sin. Our hope. What will "git 'er dun?" The passionate desire of the eternal God to save men from sin, to rescue us from judgment. It is this passion that goes to the cross, and has chased me all the days of my life. Our lives are so unfinished all of the time. Our best hopes and hard work are nothing. I will put my trust, my hope, my sons, and my church for His zeal to accomplish all of this.

Friday, April 7th

² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. — 1 Corinthians 2:2

At different times in my life I find I need to simplify everything. I am not sure how it happens, but I seem to get distracted and bogged down. Everyone's opinions are barking in my ear and I cannot tell any longer what I really think about things. There are a bunch of decisions to make, and I keep making them, but I feel uncertain as to whether I am being wise. All of my commitments, each one made for a good reason, now all add up to constant busyness and distraction. I need to cut through it all. I need to simplify everything again and figure out what is basic. That is why Paul made this resolve and stuck to it. It is a desperate move in a sense. It is reducing all of life and ministry to a core commitment. But then you do it, and you suddenly realize how liberating it is, how cleansing. All of the opinions of men shout at you, and then you realize they are just that: opinions of men. For all of the decisions you must make you can now see a guide. What glorifies Christ? What glorifies Him as crucified? All of the commitments I have made, I now submit them to this new resolve. Some will stay, some will go. Let the glory of Christ, and Him crucified be all I know, or need to know, or need to tell others. It a simple and wonderful way, this resolve is a great shout of NO to all of the confusion and options around us. Run today to the blessed simplicity of the love of the Father, in Jesus His Son.

Saturday, April 8th

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. — Isaiah 6:1-4

This scene is amazing, and we encounter it again, with a few differences, in the book of Revelation. Some 700+ years divide these visions, but there they are, the angels of glory each repeating again the holiness of our God! But the truth is, they have not really repeated themselves. Not even once. They are on the brink of the discovery of eternity and time, in the presence of the Almighty, the Eternal God. And they cannot say it, without having to say it again, in order to say it more clearly. As if to say, "Holy, holy, holy" and then, as they are in the Presence, they cry out again because it occurs to them that they have seen it again even more clearly, and their hearts want to shout as the discovery is renewed before our Everlasting King of Love, no "Holy, holy, holy." It is this constant experience that they are trying to articulate, and so they say the same thing again, but they are not repeating themselves. It is always new! What is more, nothing constrains them. These are the seraphim, the fiery angels. They are persons, powerful, intelligent, and wise. I picture them now, praising, knowing that they have nothing else they *want* to do. How I long to want my God like this, and know Him like this. How I long for the praises of His people to be like their praise. Join me together in prayer. Join me in pleading for the kingdom in our church here on earth, to be like it is in heaven. Amen.