

Devotional by:

TRACY OWENS

FOR FEBRUARY 18TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Jonah 3: 1-10

The Message:

Setting the scene: Jonah has just been spat out of a whale onto the shore after first avoiding God's direction to announce His judgment against the city of Nineveh, because its people were wicked.

Now, Read: Jonah 3:1-10.

A couple of things stand out to me from this passage, especially during this Lenten Season.

Be the Messenger.

"This time Jonah obeyed the Lord's command..." and "The people of Nineveh believed God's message..." God gave Jonah a second chance to be His messenger. Without Jonah's obedience (albeit the second time), the people of Nineveh would not have received God's message and wouldn't have had the opportunity to change their evil ways, mourn, and pray to God, which is ultimately what changed God's mind and resulted in them not being destroyed. Can you think of a time when God called on you to deliver a message? A message so important it may save their lives? We are beginning this Lenten season, which ends with Christ dying on a cross for our sins, and ultimately raising from the dead and living again. Through Christ, we are saved. Through Christ, all are saved. Maybe this is a message worth delivering to the world. If that's too daunting of an idea, begin with sharing this message with a friend, a neighbor, or a family member – this message could save their life.

The Message:

Be the Receiver: "When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, He changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction He had threatened." God's love for humankind is so great that He is willing to change His mind and not destroy us when we turn to Him, believe in Him, and receive Him. How awesome is that? I look at the world we're living in, today, and frankly, we're not lookin' too good. There's definitely good happening around us, but I see a lot of the bad. I see a lot of Nineveh in us (the collective us, humankind). That's why God sent Jesus. He knows that we will fail on our own. Out of His love for us, He provided the ultimate sacrifice to cover our sins. He gave us Jesus. Throughout this Lenten season, I encourage you to acknowledge and receive God's love and forgiveness – it's the greatest!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for sending and sacrificing your son, Jesus, to pay the ultimate price for my sins. Help me, every day, to turn from my sinful ways and turn my heart toward you, God, to receive the hope You have given to me in Jesus. And give me the courage to deliver your message, the good news, to any who need to hear it. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.



Eyes Wide Open, an image that I think about when I read Matthew 18: 1-7. Children begin their journey in the world with a sense of wonderment, looking about to see all they can to learn and absorb everything around them. At their first encounter, there is no preconceived notion or judgement. Children are humble, inquisitive, happy. The “greatest” in God’s Kingdom is the person who lives with childlike humility.

Eyes Wide Open, as a participant in one of the Bible studies this past year, we talked about the wonderment in the eyes of a child. I thought about how we are tolerant, forgiving, supportive of a child as they learn. As adults, we smile, we encourage, we figure out how to help the child learn and grow. We do not expect a child to be perfect. Mistakes are “learning experiences”. We comfort, hug, smile, encourage.

Eyes Wide Open. I remind myself we are all “children in the eyes of God”. As I look around my community, I now try to see with the wonderment of a child. My perspective on the homeless has changed; I look upon them as a child loved by God-not with judgement and preconceived notions. Instead, how do I help support, encourage, and care?

Eyes Wide Open. The second part of this passage refers to temptation in our world, and not despising those who succumb to it. Do not cast them out, do not judge. Instead, forgive. That is being Christian, that is following the path of Jesus. I stumble, I fall; I keep the mental picture of a child's eyes in my head; I get up and keep trying.

Prayer: God, please be with us as we journey through this Advent season. Help us to see our world with *Eyes Wide Open*, looking at our community through the eyes of a child. May we find ways to help those in need. Work through us to be your helping hand. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Devotional by:
KATIE DAUGHERTY
FOR FEBRUARY 22ND, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Matthew 18:1-7

The Message:

Sin can often feel heavy. It can live in your heart and on your conscience until you feel yourself start to fold and crumble under its weight. How often do we live with that burden? How often do we hide behind our sins and trudge through the thick guilt that surrounds them? We read that David was silent, holding in his sin until his bones wasted away and his strength was sapped. We read this psalm to be reminded of the gift in confession. By giving our imperfections to our God, we can be free of the guilt we carry and feel the weightlessness of trusting in His protection.

Prayer

Loving and forgiving God,
May we find the courage to confess our wrongdoings and be lifted into your loving arms of protection. Guide us in trusting your forgiveness and sing your praise for the gift of confession. Amen.

Devotional by:

MELISSA BOYLE

FOR FEBRUARY 23RD, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

The Message:

In Hebrews Chapter 4 Verse 4, we are told that "through Jesus we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses"...for this I am grateful.

As a mother, wife, and daughter I am often struggling with how to be more gentle in my dealings with family members. I often feel I fail at this pursuit.

Of course, there have been many times in my life when I have missed the mark, when I have made mistakes, when I have been far from proud of my behavior. It is during the hardest of these times that I, like Jesus, have 'cried and appealed' to God, seeking mercy. When I allow myself to be truly faithful, I am then able to feel God's grace, and with such a gentleness that complete humility follows.

The Message:

Chief among the many gifts I receive in an experience like this is the reminder of how powerful true tenderness and compassion are, as felt through Christ Jesus. Again, I am filled with the supreme need to pass it on to husband, child, and mother.

Prayer

Dear Lord,

I offer to you the mistakes I have made as a mother, wife, and daughter, and ask for your mercy. I ask for the gentle hand of Jesus in dealing with my wrongdoings. Hear my cries to you, Lord, in the same way you heard the cries of your Son. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Devotional by:

REV. DR. RICHARD EVANS
FOR FEBRUARY 25TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Exodus 34:1-9, 27-8

The Message:

“No. Try not. Do or do not. There is no try.” Yoda

The older I become, the more the Bible surprises me. And encourages me. And scares me. In this passage, The LORD (YHWH)—the creative power of the universe—renews the Covenant with Moses and Israel, which was sealed with a sacrifice. Instead of signing a piece of paper as we might today, the sacrifice, usually with an animal, was a way to ratify and enact the covenant. For the Israelites, the Covenant was literally a matter of life or death.

Moses' sacrifice was a fast. Twice a week I do an intermittent fast, basically 16 hours. It's supposed to be good for you, but 16 or so hours is enough for me. Like Jesus in the wilderness for forty days, Moses, “neither ate bread nor drank water” for forty days and nights.

The Message:

That's impossible, of course. This is a literary device meaning, "as long as it takes," "completion," "all in." That's what the Covenant requires. "There is no try."

Lent invites us to reflect on how much we are "all in." That is scary.

Prayer

Dear God, during these forty days, help us to . . . to what? To choose life as a part of your Covenant, as scary as that may be.

The Message:

Chief among the many gifts I receive in an experience like this is the reminder of how powerful true tenderness and compassion are, as felt through Christ Jesus. Again, I am filled with the supreme need to pass it on to husband, child, and mother.

Prayer

Dear Lord,

I offer to you the mistakes I have made as a mother, wife, and daughter, and ask for your mercy. I ask for the gentle hand of Jesus in dealing with my wrongdoings. Hear my cries to you, Lord, in the same way you heard the cries of your Son. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Devotional by:

ANNA HAEMER
FOR MARCH 1ST, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Psalm 128

The Message:

This Psalm says that if you love and respect God, then you will be blessed. You will see the products of your hard work, and be happy. Your house will be blessed with healthy children and you will grow old and see your grandchildren.

The message of this Psalm is that if you are faithful to God then you will live a happy and fruitful life. Following and respecting God is how to find true happiness. Looking out for God's blessings helps you live a positive life. Don't forget to look out for God's blessing in the little things around you. Maybe you, your grandparents, or parents have been vaccinated. Maybe you got to call a friend you haven't talked to in a while. Whatever it is be sure to count your blessings and stay positive.

Prayer

Dear Lord,

Thank you for all your blessings big or small, and help us to walk in your ways help us to stay positive. Amen

Devotional by:

CAROLINE CHRISTENSEN
FOR MARCH 2ND, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Isaiah 65: 17-25

The Message:

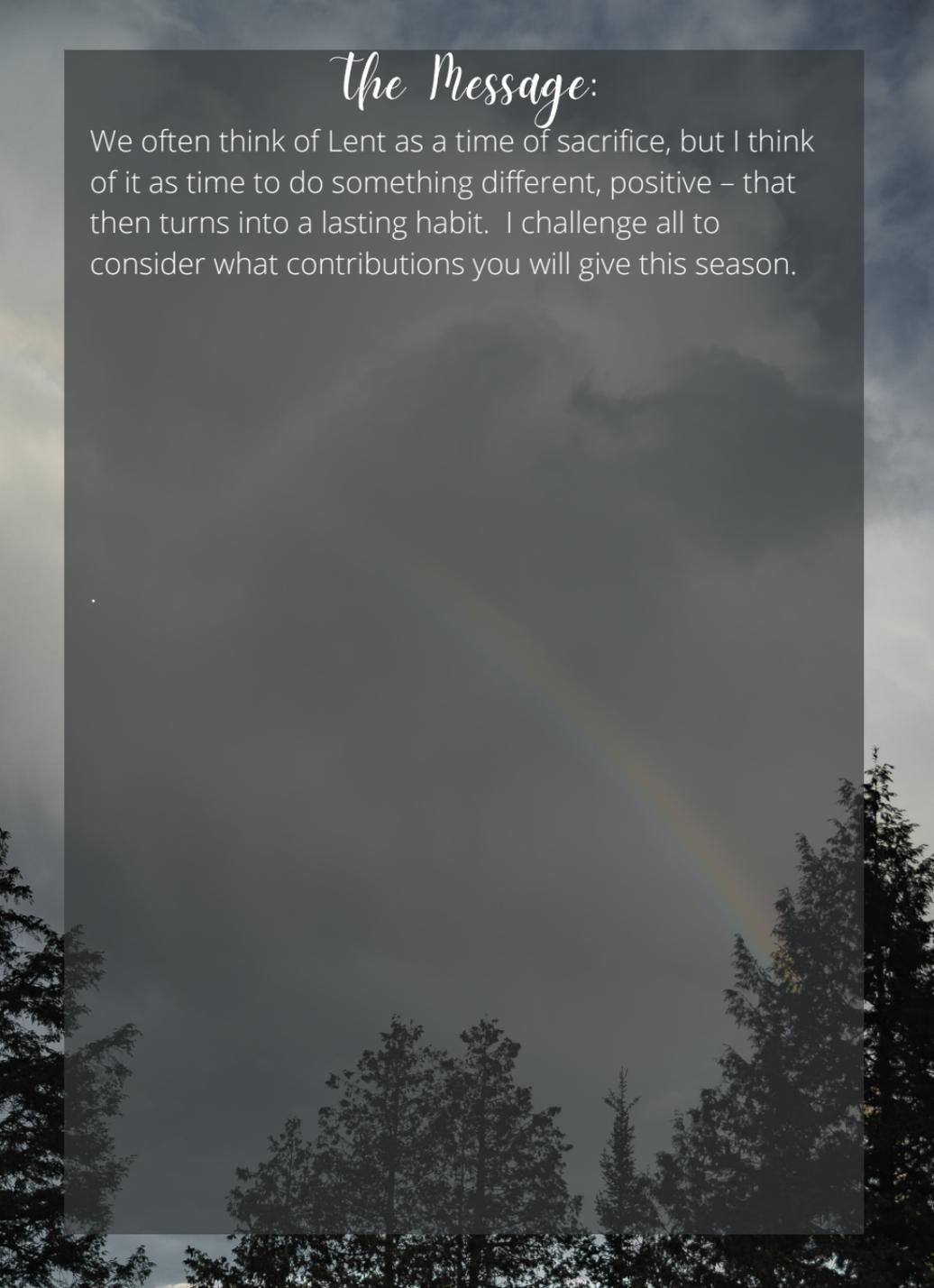
This passage from Isaiah promises that all trouble, burdens, hardships are forgotten ... God is forgiving all sins and offering us a world of bountifulness.

This verse reminds of the movie Lost Horizon where life for the inhabitants is a Shangri la ... a remote, beautiful, imaginary place where life approaches perfection – where those dealing with internal demons can find peace and contentment.

Imagine your existence today and consider what would change for you if God erased all the bad and you were given a second chance for greener pastures. When considering this verse, what would you do differently ... How would you seize the moment to take advantage of this blessing? Will you treat people differently? Will you cherish your wealth in all things that surround your life ... your spouse, your children, your shelter, your talents and gifts?

The Message:

We often think of Lent as a time of sacrifice, but I think of it as time to do something different, positive – that then turns into a lasting habit. I challenge all to consider what contributions you will give this season.



Devotional by:

JORDAN ZITTERKOPF
FOR MARCH 4TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

John 7: 53-8:11

The Message:

The Bible never ceases to confound me. Every time I start to think I have something figured out, I find a different perspective jumping out at me from around a corner.

When I read it from front to back, I find myself starting to think I've got everything all figured out about the time I hit the end of the Old Testament. Love God. Do what God says. That's it. I mean, Deuteronomy 6:5 is one of my life verses! I thought for a long time that's what most of Christianity really boiled down to. Simple, straight forward, pocket sized logic.

I grew up in a conservative Pentecostal household, we prayed together every day, several times a day. Before meals, before drives, before bed, before school, after school, before and after pretty much anything you can think of, and it was a great thing!

The Message:

I always knew that whatever happened that God and Gods laws always came first in my house, and that was enough. My dad is a pastor, as most of you know, this meant that I have been surrounded by a faith community for literally the entirety of my life. I have been privy to some of the most profoundly beautiful expressions of faith and community because of it, I've also gotten to see uglier sides of church folk.

When I went through my time of rebellion and wanderings in my late teens and early 20s, perhaps my biggest complaint with Christians was how often I saw faith used as a means of justifying some of the most selfish and judgmental behavior I've ever seen. Standing in protest lines screaming murderer at young women... because we love God. Praying the gay away... because we love God. Snubbing people who don't love God... because we love god. I'm pretty sure we can all come up with a personal example of at least one time we have been condemned by someone who "loves god".

In the scripture today, the scribes and Pharisees would definitely tell you that they love God. In fact, they love God so much that they are prepared to kill this woman because she did something that God doesn't like. So, thinking themselves terribly clever, they bring her to Jesus, wanting to trap him.

The Message:

To help put this into some context, the Jews were not legally allowed to put anyone to death at this time without approval from Roman authorities (see John 18:30-31). I have always thought the trap they set for Jesus was that if he did not condemn the woman to die, they could dismiss him as a false teacher who didn't follow God's law. If, however, he did condemn her, they would report him to the Romans and have him arrested for breaking Roman law. Terribly clever. But wait! My man Jesus has everything under control, as usual. He reminds them that loving God does not put you in the seat of judgment over your neighbor. We get to watch as this realization came home for each of them, and they leave. In the end not a single one doubled down on their scheme. They left the woman at the feet of Jesus, at the feet of the judge, and he did not condemn her.

While the first thing I see when I read this story is that no one is perfect, I think one of the quieter lessons is that God's love is perfect. No matter what you do, what you say, or who you are, God's love is not designed to condemn you. It's designed to free you. Jesus shows the woman in this story that she is valuable. She's not valuable because she has anything to offer, but because she is loved by God.

The Message:

I like to think that God loves all of us.

So, if nobody has told you yet today, you are valuable. You are loved. The next step is to show that love to every person you come across because they are valuable and loved too. If you find reason to condemn or hate someone, start with love, and leave the rest of it at the feet of the judge.

Devotional by:

RYAN HOSKINS
FOR MARCH 5TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Exodus 16: 9-21

The Message:

I like this passage because it talks about the fact that when we face hardships, sometimes all we can do is pray and hope. In many ways, I feel like my life during this pandemic is relevant to this passage. Going to school virtually has been a major challenge for me. Not being able to see my peers or interact with my teachers has been hard.

While it was tough at first, I have found myself adapting to these unique circumstances and becoming more independent. While these challenges were daunting at first, when I look at them from a different perspective, I find that these challenges have given me skills that I would have never had.

Just like me, the Israelites were facing many challenges and prayed and prayed for a solution. When they woke up to the frost on the desert floor, they didn't know what it was but it turned out to be bread.

The Message:

. To me, this demonstrated that sometimes God's gifts aren't obvious at first. It is easy to look at the case numbers and think that things are not getting better, but this pandemic has also brought around a lot of good. Essentially, God's gifts are everywhere, sometimes you just need to be looking for them.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for helping us adapt to this new and unique lifestyle over the last year. Allow us to continue to be optimistic in the most challenging situations and allow us to continue to thrive in these odd times. Amen

Devotional by:

DENISE WEED
FOR MARCH 8TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Psalm 81

The Message:

Most people water their gardens too little. Our natural inclination is to give plants a refreshing shower, leaving drops of water on their leaves as the plants start to perk up looking happier and refreshed.

But the truth is that plants don't care much one way or the other about water on their leaves. They take up water through their roots, which are, though this seems almost too basic to mention, under the ground. Getting water down to the roots is the single most important thing you can do to keep your plants alive. And so, it is with our faith, we must go deeper to our very roots to strengthen us for the difficult times.

Try this: When you think you've watered your garden enough, take a trowel and dig down into the ground four inches. Because most of us don't water thoroughly the first time, the soil will probably still be dry.

The Message:

This can be a humbling and useful revelation for a new gardener. As we develop our relationship with God it's good to remember this too. Watering plants too shallow make them lazy and ill-prepared to go deep in case of drought. And we too need to develop deep roots for when times are the most trying.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, your word says that you will be by my side and will always guide me. I am never alone with you in my heart. You will satisfy my needs when I feel frustrated and you will lift me up and strengthen me when life makes me weary. Help me to remain mindful and to follow your ways as you lead me into a life of truth, kindness, and joy. Help me to be like the well-watered garden that thrives because the roots are firmly planted in your love. Amen.

Devotional by:

REV. JAMIELEE DEMSKE
FOR MARCH 9TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Gen 29: 1-14

The Message:

As far as warm welcomes go, the welcome Jacob receives from Rachel and Laban is pretty profound. If you read the story of Jacob and his life thus far, we read that it has been quite eventful, and I imagine that finding his family in the desert would be a moment of immense relief. As I wander through this season of Lent, every year I try to adjust my daily life to be more reflective and more in touch with God. Sometimes that means picking up new habits, sometimes it means removing things from my life. I usually make it about half way through when things start to get tricky. A specific event will come up that tests my practice, or temptation will rear its ugly head on a particularly exhausting day. There are a million ways our Lenten practices become impractical or difficult as we make our way towards the warm embrace of Easter. At this midway point, I encourage you to consider where your practices have led you thus far.

The Message:

Do you still feel like you're wandering in the desert? Do you see hope on a distant horizon? Wherever you are, know that the road to Easter is beautiful because of the winding way it leads you back to Christ. May you be blessed in the journey and know that the warm welcome of Easter is waiting for you.

Prayer

Creator, thank you for the journey you have offered us in this season of Lent. Create in us a spirit of persistence as we travel, knowing you are our ultimate destination. Amen.

Devotional by:

ROS WARREN

FOR MARCH 11TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Jeremiah 2: 4-13

The Message:

This passage is from Jeremiah, who as a child, was chosen by God to be a prophet. Jeremiah's charge to speak against the governors, priests and people of the kingdom of Judah (south of the kingdom of Israel), who had fallen away from God and to return them to the true God.

The Lord led his people through the rough journey out of Egypt to Israel, His chosen land. Initially, they followed with enthusiasm but once arrive in Israel and then Judah, they abused the bountiful land. They forgot whose land it was and whose promise had led them there; replacing God with Baal and laws of their own creation.

This is an old and ongoing story in which humans have changed their beliefs from real truth (that of God) to truths which they perceive are true.

The Message:

The analogy is made that people spurn freshwater (God's word) to stored water to be available instantly, but which is neither fresh nor healthy. The land and life offered by God can be self-sustaining when managed well, but when treated with disdain as something to be owned and used for human's wishes, it will fail.

Comfort and control as perceived by many humans, replace the satisfaction of sustained lives and positive ways of living as taught by God.

In our days on earth, may we not forget what underlies our lives: God's will and kindness. The earth belongs to God and us humans are transitory entities who can ruin God's land and intent for use by future generations.

May we return to our faith's roots of reciprocity and live lives which sustain us by working with God who alone is omnipotent.

Devotional by:
CHAZ STRICKLAND
FOR MARCH 15TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:
Psalm 46

The Message:

To watch this message, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFxyrR9ahgQ>

Psalm 46, verse 10 God is speaking (God is still speaking) tells us to “Be still, and know that I am God.” Apparently, the “be still” message struck me strongly enough 30 years ago, when the Old Testament part of my daily Bible reading once again presented it to me; that its words and theme might be put to music, which, being a songwriter, is what I did.

Usually a song is credited with “words by” and “music by”. Often, both are the same person. This song’s credits should read: “words by God, and adapted by Chaz,” and “music by” me.

Over the past three decades I have discovered that other Christian songwriters and artists have used the same theme. Each is very distinct.

The Message:

TBut back to its message: God is speaking, (and God is still speaking), not only “be still” – how many times does that not improve and attitude or circumstance?

“Be still” – including its implied trust and faith that God is “in it,” whatever the circumstance is. Sometimes I feel that god is saying to me, scoldingly, “What part of ‘be still’ do you not understand?”

The video shows an empty cross. During this Lenten season with our eyes toward the empty cross (is it the “before” empty cross or the “after” empty cross?) and the empty tomb (is it the “before” empty tomb or the “after empty tomb?”), our eyes are watching in the right direction: toward Jesus. For you and for me. Makes the think of the famous hymn, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” The answer is yes.

Devotional by:

REV. SANDI DILLON
FOR MARCH 16TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Colossians 1: 9-14

The Message:

I find Paul's letter to the Colossians interesting in that Paul had never met any of the people he's writing to.

Usually, Paul writes to communities of people that he's met, and known, and worked and prayed and worshipped with before. Not so with the Colossians – he hears about this young community of faith through their leader, who visited Paul in jail. So, from his cell, Paul writes this letter to strangers, and it's full of care, encouragement and resources of hope for a people that crave connection and guidance.

I love that, even though there is distance and unfamiliarity between Paul and these people, a connection is still made through faith in Jesus Christ.

This letter brought to mind the fact that we've had people join our pandemic virtual worship that we've never met face to face! And even though we don't all gather under the same roof during these days, we continue to worship together, prayer for one another, and offer hope and encouragement in a tough time.

The Message:

. Paul pioneered the long-distance church experience – and we continue the tradition.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that we are able to connect with one another in so many ways. We crave connection with one another and with other people of faith, and are grateful that it's possible to worship with one another, even if we cannot face to face right now. Amen.

Devotional by:

ERIC OLSON

FOR MARCH 19TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Luke 24: 44-53

The Message:

In times of uncertainty and struggle we can, often find it difficult to believe unless we bear witness ourselves. And even when we see it can be a struggle to believe what we're seeing. In times like these, if we turn to the Gospel, we can find clarity without clear vision. Jesus shares with us that what is written in Scripture must be. We can trust in that truth. And, in seeking truth in the Word, with an open mind, open heart, and open eyes, the truth will be our guide. With this, we become His witness. God's grace is ours. We are blessed.

Prayer:

Dear God let us keep open minds and open hearts so that we may have in your word and through that find joy. AMEN

Devotional by:

MONICA SMITH ACUNA
FOR MARCH 22ND, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Psalm 143

The Message:

In the text a word that stands out to me is "Selah" which in Hebrew has many meanings, one of them being "to pause and reflect." Although this may sound simple, I believe this is one of the hardest practices to master, as it is so tempting to act on our feelings. When we are in a heated debate with our partner or involved in a showdown with one of our children, how often do we pause our emotional outpours and take a moment to consider them? Or when our friend or family member is in pain, how often do we rush to problem solve or soothe the negative feelings, instead of sitting in the hurt? We are so quick to turn on the lights, rather than sit in the dark with those who need it. These verses also teach us that God doesn't always respond immediately, and that is okay. Uncertainty is uncomfortable and the unknown is terrifying, and it is our human nature to want answers and immediate gratification. However, in this passage God teaches us that Love Is Patient, and although it might not feel this way, uncertainty is tolerable and temporary.

The Message:

Prayer

God, grant us the patience to sit with uncertainty and the grace required to pause and reflect, before taking action. Allow us to feel the excitement, joy and spontaneity that come from the unknown. Amen.

Devotional by:

DAVID TRICKETT
FOR MARCH 23RD, 2021

Our Scripture today:

II Kings 4.8-37

The Message:

The text for our meditation today, II Kings 4.8-37, is part of the Elisha story cycle. Elisha was the successor to Elijah, taking over as Elijah was transported to the heavens by a fiery chariot...an indicator of his standing of eminence among the prophets. This section of our Bible was probably written during the Babylonian exile (~ 550 BCE), when God's people were dealing with their having fallen away from authentic faithfulness and the judgment that came as a consequence (the captivity itself being one sign of God's displeasure with them). This was a time of desperate hope and expectation, and Elisha had big shoes to fill!

An interesting fact about Elisha is that, even today, he is venerated as a very important figure not only within Judaism and Christianity, but also Islam. We can learn a great deal about human promise and limitation by studying his witness and its importance for all three faith traditions.

The Message:

In the text for today, we find a setting that eerily echoes our own right now: we live close to death (COVID-19 is but one of the indicators of societal trauma, but it is perhaps first in the minds of many); an historic culture of civility among nations of the world is at risk; global environmental and climate challenges abound; rising generations of children are in far too many instances left rudderless, for adult role models with character worthy of emulation seem often to be absent or sidelined by glitter and loud noises; and the list goes on. Reading our text for today is not just to observe an historical artifact; it is an engagement with our own lives!

Other than Elisha himself, one might say that the lead character in this section of II Kings is the Shunammite woman, characterized as “a woman of influence” (4.8). She knew Elisha to be “a holy man of God” (4.9), so she began a practice of inviting him to dinner when he was passing through Shunem...and, over time, that expanded to her setting up almost a bed and breakfast room on the roof of her family’s home so that Elisha could spend nights with them.

The Message:

. In this whole story, the husband is a rather passive figure; perhaps one reason he doesn't have a more prominent role in this story is that he is past his shelf life, as it were ("her husband is old" [4.14]), or maybe it's because his wife just surely wears the metaphorical pants in the family. So, Elisha deals directly with the woman, who in any case was the clearly hospitable and forceful one in her home.

After some time of coming and going and staying with the Shunammite couple, Elisha decides he wants to thank her. After asking her what might be an appropriate form of appreciation, he's a bit puzzled in that she doesn't give a clear answer. So, Elisha asks his servant, Gehazi, what might be best; together, they determine that promising her a son would be good (you will recall that this is not the only time a woman in the Bible is promised a child). The woman is a bit skittish, though; does Elisha really mean it? Don't get my hopes up and then dash them, she tells him. But things proceeded as promised: "the woman conceived, and by the same time the following year she had given birth to a son..." (4.17).

The Message:

Now it gets really interesting. Though the boy has grown up healthy, one day while heading out to be with his father “among the reapers” in the fields (4.18), he is stricken—with exactly what we don’t know, but it was serious, and shortly after being taken home (and stretched out on Elisha’s bed!), he died. Talk about what must have been his mother’s feeling of dashed hope!

The boy’s mother loses no time, however; she immediately thinks of Elisha, and heads out to find him...strangely uttering these words to her husband on her way out the door: “it is all right” (4.23). Talk about hope and trust in the goodness of God! She has a dead son, she’s heading out to find the holy man Elisha, and she asserts that “it is all right!”

She really must have placed deep trust in Elisha, for when she is within sight of, and almost reaches, him, he sends Gehazi out to meet her and inquire what’s going on, and—even though her only child has just died—she replies to the servant that “everything is all right” (4.26). When she comes face to face with Elisha, however, she pours out her anguish, clasping Elisha’s feet and crying out about her hopes having been dashed, and reminding Elisha that she’d said earlier on “do not mislead me” (by making a promise that won’t bear fruit), and also reminding him that she had believed him. 4.28

The Message:

Following the woman's continued imprecations, Elisha decides to head to Shunem, but sends the younger Gehazi on ahead of him with Elisha's staff (a sign of prophetic office and power), instructing Gehazi to put the staff on the dead boy's body. But this act doesn't accomplish anything (4.31-32). So, Elisha has to muster all the grace and power he's been given, head upstairs to the guest room, and upon seeing the dead boy's body lying on the guest room bed, prays...and then lies on top of the child and basically, after a bit of effort, resurrects the dead boy. Elisha then summons the mother, who is appropriately grateful, and after a little bit, she "took her son and left" (4.37).

An enduring message of this text for us in 2021 is that, even in the valleys of danger and sometimes also death through which we must tread in life, God's life-renewing grace and love will not abandon us. However dreadful circumstances may sometimes be, we are led to step forward in faith and trust to see that new life can indeed come from death and pain. Hope is not in the end dashed; so, our expectations and our hopes, as we now look forward to Easter and its message of new life, can indeed bear fruit...if we just hold on, however challenging it may be to do so. New life actually does come from death.

Devotional by:

REV. JAMIELEE DEMSKE
FOR MARCH 25TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Matt 22: 23-33

The Message:

What a tangled story this is! I remember listening to this scripture being read as a child thinking I wanted to only marry an only child so I didn't have to deal with all those extra husbands. It's an interesting question asked by the Sadducees, one meant to confound Jesus but instead it offers him the opportunity to say what is, in my humble opinion, one of Christ's most enigmatic sayings. 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is God not of the dead, but of the living." Personally, I'm drawn to the wit expressed in The Message, Eugene Peterson's idiomatic translation, "And regarding your speculation on whether the dead are raised or not, don't you read your Bibles? The grammar is clear: God says, 'I am—not was—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.' The living God defines himself not as the God of dead men, but of the living."

The Message:

While the grammar might be clear, the meaning isn't. But during this season, I consider what it might mean to be alive. As we enter this season, we are reminded of our eventual, ultimate demise but in between then and now we have the mysterious and sometimes questionable gift of time. Time is truly our most precious resource because once it is spent, it can never be recalled. Are we truly living, or are we ghosts, floating through? Spend some time today reviving your spirit. What makes you feel alive?

Prayer

Living God, the grammar is clear: you love us to life. Help us to discover the life you desire for us, and may we light up the world by living it. Amen.

Devotional by:

REV. SANDI DILLON
FOR MARCH 26TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Philippians 1: 21-30

The Message:

Paul encourages the hearers of this epistle to “live a life worthy of the gospel Christ.” This is no flippant thing that Paul shares- he is writing this from jail, where his life is in danger because of his own sharing of the good news. As he writes, he says that his execution wouldn't be a sacrifice, because he would end up with Christ.

But he does know that if he lives, that his work is to continue to share the love of Jesus with the world. Proclaiming the radical love of God has always been dangerous. While most of us probably don't risk our lives in doing so, some of us might have stories of relationships lost or connections severed because our own commitment to the gospel. I'm reminded of a young man I spoke with once who was ostracized from his family, not for his own sexuality, but because he supported the LGBTQIA+ community.

The Message:

A hefty price to pay for living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. I invite you to consider what you're willing to do, and pray to God for the courage and strength to do it, for the sake of Christ, who gave everything he had.

Prayer

Dear Giving God, when sharing your love and good news seems too risky, too pricey, and too much, give us strength and courage. We give our lives to you, remembering that you gave all so that we might live. Amen.

Devotional by:

NANCY LEONARD
FOR MARCH 29TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

John 12: 1-11

The Message:

In these verses we see some of the best and the worse traits in human nature. The pure love and devotion of a woman, identified in these verses as Mary, and the pure greed and disdain for others on the part of Judas. A number of years ago I sang a song based on these verses. It described how the woman, despite the scorn of others in the room, poured out a valuable perfume on Jesus' feet and that fragrance filled the room. Much like that fragrance, her love and devotion for Jesus filled the room because she understood He was here on earth to share the love that God has for us. She recognized that because Jesus sacrificed himself for all of us, our calling should be to do whatever we can to share God's love with others in this time and place and not allow greed or disdain for anyone to occupy any part of our lives.

The Message:

Find a time during the coming Holy Week to light a fragrant candle or touch a favorite fragrance to your hand and remember that Jesus wants us to be a fragrance of love in the world.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, please help us not be spilled out and leave a fragrance of love wherever we walk and to live out your calling to us to make the world a better place. Amen.

Devotional by:

JULIANA DICKSON
FOR MARCH 30TH, 2021

Our Scripture today:

John 12: 20-36

The Message:

In American culture, it seems like we always end up thinking of and portraying death as a bad thing, with no exceptions. It was always so devastating in movies and TV shows when your favorite character died and it seemed like there was nothing good about it. While death is almost always saddening and upsetting, it's not just someone's life being taken away. It's the end of something amazing, something beautiful, something that has influenced the lives of so many others.

In John 12: 24, Jesus compares life to a seed. He says, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." In some ways, death can inspire others and lead to necessary change or action. But in order for a death to have positive aspects, the life before that death has to be a full and meaningful life. Jesus teaches us to make the most of our lives before it's too late

Devotional by:

REV. SANDI & REV. JAMIELEE
FOR MARCH 31ST, 2021

Our Scripture today:

Matthew 28: 1-10

The Message:

Recently seen on a Facebook post (from Megan Westra)- "How to faithfully celebrate Easter this year: Only women on the Zoom call. Call is scheduled before dawn. We speak only of impossible things that would topple the empire."

We realize that we're skipping ahead a bit in the Biblical story, and during this and any Holy Week, as pastors, we recognize that the tension between Palm/Passion Sunday and Easter is to be held and lived through. At the same time, we were struck that for whatever reason—our devotion writers this week are all women. It makes us remember that the most important news of our faith (that Jesus is no longer dead!) was entrusted to the women who came to Christ's tomb early in the morning.

The Message:

Of course, during those days, women's words didn't carry much weight, and most of the gospels have the men running to the tomb to see for themselves. But as female pastors, we believe in the power of lost voices and often overlooked messages—in many denominations, we wouldn't be allowed to speak today.

So today, celebrate the voices from the margins, the stories that aren't mainstream, and the people who are usually disregarded. They might just be voicing the good news that will change the world.

Prayer:

Holy One, give us ears to hear and hearts to love, so that we might not pass over your story of good news. Amen.

Devotional by:

ESTHER CHO
FOR APRIL 2ND, 2021

Our Scripture today:

John 18: 1-19:37

The Message:

There is a place in Genesee Park outside of Golden that is like a personal sanctuary. Though the place has no actual superpower I have gone there, alone mostly, during the most difficult times in my life. Since childhood I have gone there to pray as a refuge. Maybe because being there reminds me of other times, other burdens, past anguish I have managed to live through even when it seemed impossible, the place itself feels as if it is protected by a supernatural forcefield, though I know it is not. Actually, I only imagine the forcefield when I am there to reminisce. When I have been there seeking sanctuary, it was because I was at the end of my rope with no other hope, nowhere else to turn. In those desperate moments I could not feel any superpower there, only a last-ditch effort to hang on to a thread of faith.

The Message:

Jesus has a similar place, it seems. A garden where he went to pray, often alone. In John 18 the Garden is not named, but in other accountings the place has been called Gethsemane. (Mark 14:32) This time he went with a band of brothers to be with him in his hour of distress. Maybe the worst hour of his life. But they fell asleep leaving him alone. He was terrified, physically breaking down. He prayed in anguish, feeling like he was dying inside. (Mark 14:34) He was so stressed he literally began to sweat blood. (Luke 22:44) Then, the worst happened. His garden wasn't a forcefield either. One he loved as a brother, Judas, betrayed him in the worst way. Right there. I can imagine the kick to the gut knocking the wind out of him as Jesus faced one he loved accusing him and condemning him to a swift and grotesque death.

In this moment all is lost. Our worst fears have come to be, there is no just-in-time rescue, and all we have counted on has failed us. We cannot pray that away. The only thread of faith is... the story does not end here. Not for Jesus, not for us.

The Message:

Prayer

God of the ages, God of our lives, help us to remember that you are our all in all. Be with us always, especially when we hang on by only threads of faith. When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, though we may even die in that valley, help us to know that all things and all stories end only in You, who are Love. In the name of Jesus who shows us what it is to walk by faith, we pray, Amen.