



February 22, 2023
What is Lent?
Jessica Kuncaitis -In Spirit

“That is why the LORD says, ‘Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don’t tear your clothing in your grief but tear your hearts instead.’”

Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish. Who knows? Perhaps he will give you a reprieve, sending you a blessing instead of this curse. Perhaps you will be able to offer grain and wine to the LORD your God as before.” Joel 2:12-14

As we approach the Lenten season some of you may be wondering what Lent is. Why is Lent important and more so, what does this have to do with me and my relationship with Jesus Christ? Lent is meant to be this time of personal self-reflection many times done through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, or fasting. As we approach Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent, we see that Lent takes place over the forty days before Easter and is traditionally a time of repentance and preparation for the celebration of Easter as we remember and reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The goal of the Lenten season is to draw closer to God. There are many traditions surrounding this season, but whatever you do, it’s great to start by reflecting on your life, and the parts of your life where you feel disconnected from God and his people. You may have heard about people giving something up for Lent and often these are things that bring pleasure, like sweets, TV, pop, etc.

When I was in college, I tried to give up coffee for Lent. It didn’t last long and one of the reasons I did it was simply because I knew caffeine wasn’t good for me. It didn’t have much of anything to do with my relationship to Jesus. If you plan to give up something, I encourage you to take a different approach. If you are giving something up, do it as an intentional act of worship and sacrifice to God. This year, I am going to take social media off my phone and choose to be more intentional with my time. Giving something up is just one way to observe Lent. Maybe you hope to add something into your life such as a time of prayer, or Bible reading.

Another way of observing Lent is through the sacrifice of time, money, or talents. Your goal should be to see this as an act of worship and sacrifice, not just as a good thing to do. What is it that God is calling you to give up so that you can live a more intentional life for the sake of the kingdom?

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, for this time of preparation as we look forward to celebrating your resurrection on Easter. Help us to stay focused on you and the sacrifices you made on our behalf. Amen.

February 23, 2023

Why?

In memory of David DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”

Jer. 31: 3

Ever consider how much of our life is devoted to asking why? Little children, with their seemingly insatiable curiosity about the natural world, constantly pose this question. “Why is the sky blue? Why is that hole there? Why can’t penguins fly?” Soon the questions become more personal. “Why is my hair red? Why do I have to go to bed so early?” Sometimes our questions manifest deep disappointment or rejection. “Why don’t I have more friends? Why didn’t I make the team? Why did I lose my job? Why can’t I ever get ahead financially?” Some people even dedicate their lives to asking why. Consider scientists who constantly pose questions and then seek answers by experiment and deduction. Or psychologists and sociologists who inquire about human behavior, or parents (why did you do that?), or engineers, or lawyers, or policemen. The list is long. Inquiry seems to be a natural human attribute. It extends the mind, satisfies our curiosity, promotes understanding, solves problems, and gives expression to one of God’s gifts.

In this Lenten season, we continue to ask why. “Why do we do this? Why did the almighty God, the creator of an enormous, majestic, complex universe that we only feebly begin to comprehend, send his son to redeem me? Why did Christ die for me, a seemingly insignificant creature in a world populated by billions?” Then God answers our questions with the words of Jeremiah, revealing that in his deep and everlasting love he reached out to us with loving-kindness and saved us. Even more, Paul explains “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved” (Eph. 2: 4,5). God answered our questions even before we asked them. He loved us and by grace gave us life through Christ. These are likely the greatest and most profound answers we will ever receive.

Prayer:

Lord, bless us with faith to believe so we may eternally express our gratitude for raising us with Christ. Amen

February 24, 2023
God is Able
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” 2 Corinthians 9:8

In the third chapter of the first book of the Bible we read these profoundly sad words, “... they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” Sin had entered the world and the perfect communion of God, and his creatures was severed. But in His grace God had a plan to provide a way back into fellowship and only God is able to make that happen. A sacrifice had to be made and the One sacrificed had to be human yet without sin. God’s only Son, Jesus Christ was the only one who fit those parameters. During Lent we reflect on the final steps that Jesus had to take to make that plan complete. God was indeed able to restore fellowship.

Not only did He restore fellowship, but He continues to equip and empower us in every and all situations. Consider some of the ways the enabling power of God blesses our lives:

- God is able to enfold us in love when we are overwhelmed with loneliness
- God is able to meet all our physical needs – housing, food, transportation, insurance, etc.
- God is able to calm our spirit when we are stressed
- God is able to comfort us when our hearts are broken by harsh words or rejection
- God is able to heal our body and keep us healthy
- God is able to give us strength to persevere when the way seems too tough to carry on
- God is able to forgive us when we mess up
- God is able assure us of a place in eternity as His beloved children
- God is able....
- GOD IS ABLE!!!!!!

Prayer:

Lord God, we worship you in all your power and glory. We are profoundly grateful that you are able to meet our every need as well as able to make all grace abound in our lives. Thank you! Amen.

February 25, 2023
Receiving
Jamie Ballast – Covenant CRC

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:16

Have you ever received a gift or invitation to an event that you were surprised about? Maybe you didn’t feel “special enough”. Maybe the thought of accepting that invitation overwhelmed you in a way that stopped you in your tracks and made you consider your worthiness for such an invitation.

Jesus invites you this Lent season to intentionally focus on Christ’s life, ministry, sacrifice, and resurrection. It’s easy to think we are too busy to adjust our day to go deeper with the Lord in prayer, fasting, or reflective reading/journaling, but the Savior of the universe is inviting YOU to open the door of your heart a little wider and meet with your Lord a little longer. What if you accept this invitation and receive what He has to offer you?

Hebrews 4:16 says “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” WOW! That invitation deserves a “yes” R.S.V.P. especially as we consider Lent. Lent is a time to reflect and examine our lives and how we align with the self-sacrificing gospel. God promises grace and mercy as we approach His throne! Lord, may we not be those who John refers to in John 1:11 “He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him.” Rather, may we be those who John refers to that did receive him, “Yet to all who did receive Him, to all who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” Lord, as your children, may we receive that invitation to be close to you. May we trust that a growing and deepening relationship with you will prepare our hearts to receive the overflowing grace and mercy you offer us this Good Friday and Easter.

Prayer: Dear Lord, our Savior, and King, may we receive with open hands and open hearts your amazing love this season! We love you, Jesus, and we thank you for loving us! In Jesus’ name, Amen.

For the next three Sundays of Lent, we will pause from our devotionals and meditate on Bible verses that help us appreciate anew the gift of grace that is God’s love for us.

SUNDAY
February 26, 2023

God's constant, unshakable, unfailing love

“Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.” Isaiah 54:10

February 27, 2023
The Fulfillment
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

Read Isaiah 53:3-5

The prophet Isaiah had much to say about who the Messiah would be. Take this opportunity to reflect on how Jesus fulfilled each of those prophecies. Then spend time in prayer and worship of the One who was the Fulfillment.

“He was despised and rejected by men,” “And they all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists.” Mark 14:64b

“...a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.” “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” Mark 14:34a

“Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, we esteemed him not.” “What should I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. ‘Crucify him!’ they shouted.” Mark 15:12-13

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,” “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for you souls.” Matthew 11:28-29

“He was pierced for our transgressions,” “Instead one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.” John 19:34

“He was crushed for our iniquities.” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Mark 15:34b

“The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promises. He alone is our hope and our salvation. Praise be to God for the sacrificial Lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for the promise of a Savior. Thank you, Jesus, for being the fulfillment of that promise. Amen.

February 28, 2023
First, It Has to Get Ugly
Gayle Boss – Monroe Community

“From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering ... and be killed and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’ But Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but of men.’” Matthew 16:21-23

Before it's beautiful and blooming, spring is an ugly, even violent season. Snow goes gritty. Melting, it exposes the wreckage of winter: the crushed bodies of plants, animal remnants decomposing, detritus of human life lost or abandoned. One March I found, lying beside plastic grocery bags, the soggy body of a fox. A friend surmised that if we could hear crocuses pushing up through still-frozen ground we'd hear them groaning like a woman giving birth. It's true of every renewal project. Before the kitchen shines with new cabinets, appliances, and tile, the old have to be ripped out.

On the way to a replaced heart valve or repaired ACL, the body has to be cut open; it bleeds and swells, pained. Of course, we resist. In Lent, or anytime, we'd like to sit in the gallery seats and watch Jesus walk the road of suffering alone. He did it for us, didn't he?

For every living thing, the way to new life routes through loss, usually painful. Hard husks have formed around our hearts; they need to be stripped off for the seeds inside to germinate. Our ground is frozen and littered with trash. Asleep in the late-winter dark like many other mammals, we're weak, depleted.

Jesus wants companions on the way to Jerusalem. His scathing retort to Peter is meant to startle his friend awake, to strip him of the protective husk around his heart that resists suffering and of the scales that blind him to the sacred pattern: new life rises out of loss. Always. Awake, scoured clean, we'll have the courage to accompany Jesus to Jerusalem, and, like the women, to stay with him at the cross. We'll go with them to the tomb—but we'll go expecting resurrection.

Prayer: Ever-loving God, in your mercy, wake us. Strip us of our fear and its illusions so that we can walk with you wherever life takes us, expecting, because of your faithfulness, resurrection.

March 1, 2023
Loneliness
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.” Isaiah 53:3

The dictionary defines loneliness as “being without company...producing a feeling of bleakness or desolation.” Most, if not all of us, have experienced loneliness to some degree at some time in our lives. It can be a very dark place and a difficult emotion to bear. But no matter what we have been through, it can’t begin to capture the loneliness Jesus endured the last hours of His life on earth. He went from one degree of abandonment, rejection, and betrayal to the next: abandonment of disciples who were too tired to stay awake and pray, the betrayal of Judas with a kiss, everyone deserting Him and fleeing as

He was arrested, betrayal of those who lied about Him before the Sanhedrin, the rejection of the crowd yelling, “Crucify him!” and Peter denying he even knew Him. He marches alone up to Golgotha and is surrounded by a mocking, jeering crowd – no supports to help Him, no prayer group to pray for Him – alone.

Then the worst loneliness of all as the sins of humanity were placed upon Jesus and God had to separate Himself from His sin-filled Son and forsake Him. This had to be the worst torment of all that Jesus endured. He and the Father were one and now He was truly alone.

When you are going through the dark night of the soul, when loneliness lies heavy on you like a shroud and it feels like no one understands the pain of abandonment and rejection or the depth of your loneliness, remember you know one who has walked the road before you and understands completely. He will never leave you alone. He will enable you to endure and will eventually bring you into the light so that your soul is filled with hope and joy once more.

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, for enduring suffering that is beyond our comprehension so that we can be assured that we are loved unconditionally and will never be alone. Amen.

March 2, 2023
Time and Eternity
Dave Arndt – Community CRC

“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!’ But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’” Matthew 16:21-23

Just a few verses earlier in Matthew 16 Peter received divine insight that Jesus was not just a godly teacher or prophet, but in fact He was the Christ, God’s Messiah. How did he get it so wrong this time? The works Jesus did in front of Peter pointed to God as the healer, the restorer, the giver of life to the dead and this is all true! Today we who know God’s goodness and mercy may also go there first in our thoughts.

When a friend or loved one is in need, what is our first prayer? Lord, make it better. Jesus’ talk of suffering and death must have sounded to Peter’s ears, and perhaps to some of our ears as well, like wrong keys hit on the piano during a song. They just didn’t fit. Peter was likely thinking about the deliverance and well-being of the people and time immediately around him.

Jesus was thinking much bigger and much more long term than Peter. Jesus was thinking about all humanity and all of eternity. God is a truly the Father of mercies and God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3). When we pray for ourselves or one-another, we pray in hope. Not just hope for our desired outcome but hope for God to be glorified in all things.

Prayer:

Father in heaven, every good and perfect gift comes down from you. Be glorified in our lives, whether by healing and deliverance or by patience and faithful endurance. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, we ask that all the experiences of our lives will point others to you. Amen.

March 3, 2023
Dangerous Faith
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain” Philippians 1:21

It takes faith and courage to say Philippians 1:21 and mean it. We must cast aside fear and doubt and walk where Jesus walked. We need more than a safe faith that is comfortable and self-satisfied. We need a “dangerous faith” passionate in its love for the Father and totally submitted to His leading. The cross reminds us daily that Jesus modeled dangerous faith. He persistently and willingly took the road of obedience no matter how dangerous it seemed. Jesus embraced life with a passionate, dangerous faith and we must do the same.

I must confess I don't like doing anything dangerous in any area of my life, except my faith. I WANT to have dangerous faith. I will NOT settle for mediocrity, apathy, or complacency! I will not do just enough to get by or choose to believe I have “arrived.” I want to live boldly, passionately, totally sold out for Christ! I want to have a faith that enables me to face the unknown with confidence and hope. I want a faith that doesn't think about me first but puts the needs of others ahead of mine. I want a faith that is so totally submitted to God's will, so trusting in God's plan, so reliant on God's power that no matter what happens I will be able to give God the glory and praise. I want a faith that shines through me so powerfully that those who don't know Jesus are drawn like moths to a flame. I want a faith that believes the impossible, that is content with any circumstance, that is able to rest in God in the midst of uncertainty and difficulty. I want a faith that is not afraid to stand up to injustice and fight for righteousness. I want a faith that brings me to my knees in humility and gratitude for what my Lord has done for me. I want a faith that focuses on God's faithfulness in the past, celebrates His grace in the present, and trusts Him with the future. I want a dangerous faith!

Prayer:

Forgive us, Lord, when we settle for “safe” faith. Help us to live boldly and passionately for you. Amen.

March 4, 2023
Finding Rest
Matt Brinks – Covenant CRC

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in here, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. – Matthew 11:28-30

Is there something in your life that you struggle with? Maybe it's an addiction - to alcohol, pornography, food, or something else. Or perhaps it's a behavior, like a short temper or impatience with others. Do you ever vow to do better, to work hard at changing, and then inevitably fall short of that promise and quickly fall back into the prior behavior, sometimes worse than ever before?

We all have areas in our lives where we struggle, where it's difficult for us to let go. We trust in ourselves, believing that with just a little more will power, trying just a little bit harder, we can overcome whatever obstacle is in our way. And over and over again, we fail. So, what then? If it's not about trying harder, if it's not about simply being better, how do we overcome that obstacle?

The answer is we don't. We can't. We need to give up trying to do it by ourselves. We need to recognize that we're too broken and sinful to do it alone. Until we come to the end of ourselves – recognizing our weakness, admitting that we can't do it ourselves, and begging God to take the burden from us – we'll never find peace from our struggle.

But the good news is that where we are weak, God is strong. The One who overcame sin and death is there waiting to take on our burden, we just have to let Him. And then, and only then, will we find rest for our souls.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to recognize our own weakness and fallibility. Help us to give up our burden and strife and rely on you, and you alone. You took up the cross, so we didn't have to. May we repent and find forgiveness in your grace and mercy, may we be filled with your spirit so that we find strength, and may we rest in you. In your name we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY
March 5, 2023

God's merciful, redeeming love.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”
Ephesians 2:4-5

March 6, 2023
Fiery Furnace of Adversity
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Romans 5:3-5

As I reflect on the cross of Christ, I am reminded of an opportunity I had to watch a professional glass blower at work. I marveled as he took a shapeless, ordinary-looking piece of glass and transformed it into a work of art. What struck me most about this process was that for this transformation to take place, the glass first had to be subjected to the intense heat of a fiery furnace. I couldn’t help but see God as the Master glassblower and me as that shapeless blob of glass who is in need of the continuing process of being transformed.

This memory has helps me when I go through seasons of testing and trials which we all endure. Even through we don’t like it, perhaps during these times we need to ascertain if God is giving us an opportunity to become even more beautiful through the adversity. Like the master glassblower, He knows we “ordinary blobs of glass” need to go through the “fire” so the Master can mold and make us into the beautiful work of art He designed us to be. This is certainly not a pleasant way to be transformed. In fact, if we are honest, it is profoundly painful.

But during this season of Lent, we are reminded that there is One who has endured the fiery furnace of adversity in a way we never will. He was already beautifully formed and complete, but He went into the “fire” of betrayal, abandonment, physical beatings, humiliation, lying, rejection, crucifixion, and death. He understands what it is like, and He goes into the “fire” with us when we face adversity. So when we face those trials, we need to draw close to Him, open ourselves up to be strengthened and comforted by His presence, and know that this season, while painful and difficult, is shaping us into a more beautiful image of our Father.

Prayer:

Loving Father, we are so grateful that even in our times of adversity, you are there molding and making us into beautiful vessels that will bless others and glorify you. Amen.

March 7, 2023
The Scandal of the Cross
Kristy Manion – LaGrave CRC

“Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:22-24

When walking with Jesus is part and parcel of our lives, it's incredibly difficult to conceive of salvation as coming in any way *except* through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. But for the young Corinthian church, apparently even among believers, the message of a crucified Messiah was a "stumbling block"—or, even better, a “scandal”. The Jews--Gods chosen people, who knew his works and his ways—were *scandalized* by this kind of Savior.

Wasn't the Messiah expected to rule and reign with power? Wouldn't he demonstrate the same signs and wonders that God had when he led his people out of Egypt? God's Anointed couldn't *possibly* be someone whose ministry ended with an execution in the common criminal way, could he?

And for the Gentiles, the idea of a crucified Christ was madness. What kind of God gets himself killed by his enemies? How foolish. But scandalous as a Suffering Savior was, unpopular as it may have been, incomprehensible as it seemed even to those who were living out their Christian faith, Paul doesn't back away from it. “We preach Christ crucified.” Paul doesn't craft a clever marketing strategy to persuade the "wise" Greeks that God's plan was wise in human terms. He doesn't try to show to the Jews that the suffering of the cross was truly powerful in the way of those signs and wonders of old. No, this idea of a suffering savior, a God-Man who died a nasty death at the hands of unclean people is something Paul is eager to establish as up-front as an essential. “We preach Christ crucified.” And Christ crucified according to the wisdom and power of God is the reason for the Corinthians'—and our--very great hope.

Prayer: Crucified Christ, when familiarity blinds us to the astonishing power and wisdom of your cross, open our eyes to see you again in a new way. Amen.

March 8, 2023
Do You Understand?
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

Read John 13:1-12

I have tried to imagine what it would be like to have Jesus bend down before me like the lowliest of servants, gently lift my sin-encrusted foot, and wash it with the water of grace. I am breathless as His gentle nail-scarred hands touch me. Part of me wants to draw back because I feel so unworthy. Another part of me is like Peter wanting to be fully immersed in His cleansing love. Do I understand what He has done for me? No, I don't. I try, but it's too much for this finite mind to comprehend.

The full extent of His love compelled Him:

- To empty Himself and take on human form and come to earth as a baby.
- To live a sinless life in a world contaminated with sin, surrounded by people who didn't understand Him.
- To Gethsemane where He was betrayed, abandoned and arrested.
- To endure the mocking voices of the Sanhedrin, the lies of the people, the condemnation, the blows of angry fists, and people spitting on Him.
- To stand before an angry crowd that demanded He be crucified.
- To suffer a flogging that left Him raw and bleeding.
- To tolerate the mocking derision of the Roman soldiers and the pain of thorns pressed into His skull, as other soldiers struck him in the head with a staff and spit on Him.
- To persevere as He carried the heavy cross through a jeering crowd that had just days before sang His praises.
- To travel the road to Golgotha where He hung on a cross like a common thief.
- To accept in His person all the sins of humanity and provide atonement, forgiveness, redemption, restoration, and freedom.

Can I understand what He has done for me? No. His love is too deep. It fills me with awe and wonder. It makes me want to fall on my knees in full surrender and worship. It leaves me breathless with gratitude. It inspires me to live boldly and passionately for Him – the way He lived for us.

Prayer: Thank you for all you have done. Though we don't fully understand, help us to live gratefully as servants of the Most High God. Amen.

March 9, 2023
Watch and Pray
Jacque Bolt - Kellogsville Church

“They came to an olive grove called Gethsemane and Jesus said, ‘Sit here while I go and pray’...He took Peter, James and John... and he began to be filled with horror and deep distress...Then he returned and found the disciples asleep...Then Jesus left them again and prayed...Again he returned to them and found them sleeping for they just couldn’t keep their eyes open. And they didn’t know what to say.” Mark 14:32-37 [Excerpts]

We are sometimes critical of Peter, James, and John for their failure in the garden. They FELL ASLEEP at a time when Jesus was “filled with horror and deep distress.” Jesus had even asked them to stay awake and pray. How could they be so irresponsible? Perhaps it would be helpful to put ourselves into the story. This had been a tense, exhausting week for the disciples. They had been traveling for days with Jesus. They had been with him when he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, when he caused a raucous in the temple, and when he was repeatedly confronted by those plotting to kill him.

Even that day they had been busy with preparations for the Passover meal which was no small effort. A traditional Passover gathering involved a large meal with many courses and four cups of wine. It began at sunset and continued well past midnight. We read that when the meal was over, they sang a hymn and headed for Gethsemane. The disciples intended to serve their Rabbi’s requests. They intended to be present with him, but by midnight they were likely ready for bed.

Then Jesus says, “Watch and pray.” Their intentions were high; but their spirits were weary, and they were not “present” with Jesus in his trauma.

I wonder how often my good intentions to “be with Jesus” have failed. How often is my spirit willing but my weariness and distractions cause me to fall asleep? How many opportunities do I miss to worship and adore my Savior? In this Lenten season I pray that I will hear Jesus say, “Watch and pray.” May I be alert and “present with Jesus” as I meditate and remember his sacrifice for me.

Prayer:

“I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You, Oh, my soul, rejoice! Take joy, my King, in what You hear. Let it be a sweet, sweet sound In Your ear.” Amen

March 10, 2023
It's All Possible
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave

“Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Matthew 19:26b

As we reflect on the life of Christ and especially on what He endured and accomplished as He journeyed to the cross, one can't help but to realize anew what a high and holy calling it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. When we read scripture to understand what that calling entails, we are overwhelmed with the scope of the task before us and with an acute awareness of our inability to carry out that task.

Even though the task is daunting, and our natural talents and abilities are wanting, there is one assurance we can hold onto...the comfort that we are not doing this in our own power, but with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit within us. Our job is to submit and surrender our will to God's will and then humbly follow where He leads. He will provide what is needed and use us to bless others.

As we reflect this Lent season on how we can live more obediently for Christ, let's look to His word for encouragement; remembering that God is able to do more than we can ask or imagine. God is able to make all grace abound so we can have all we need at all times and in all ways. When we need wisdom, all we need to do is ask and God will provide.

When we open ourselves to receive the lavish love God longs to give us, we become full to overflowing so we can love others lavishly. We need to remember that God makes it possible for groups of people who look and think differently to be unified and to serve Him together...if we let Him.

So, in addition to being overwhelmed with the scope of the task and our inabilities, may we all also be overwhelmed with God's gifts of grace and His ability to do the impossible.

Prayer:

Gracious God, we claim all these promises in the mighty name of Jesus and pray them over each delegate as they faithfully serve you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

March 11, 2023
Scrambling
Bob Ritzema – Monroe Community

*“Then the Man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”
(Genesis 3:8)*

Old Testament scholar Richard E. Averbeck suggests that Adam and Eve’s disobedience in the garden produced shame and fear, which in turn led to scrambling, that is, “scurrying about trying desperately to handle themselves, each other, God, and the world.” They scrambled to cover their nakedness, then scrambled to hide from God, then scrambled to excuse themselves. I know full well what scrambling is like. My tendency to scramble becomes especially apparent to me in Lent, during times of self-examination. Why am I rushing around, trying to cover a fault over here, shading the way I present myself over there? Why did I once again rely on such troubled ways of coping? Sometimes, as with my forebearers in the garden, the answer is that I want to hide my sin—from God and others, but also from myself. I acted out of pride, envy, or greed; I ignored someone else’s needs or failed to respect and honor them. Sinfulness isn’t the only thing that motivates shame, fear, and subsequent scrambling, though. Shame and fear can stem from sin, but can also come about in other ways, as with the abused child who fearfully hides wounds caused by someone else’s misdeeds.

Whatever the source, scrambling needs to be dealt with. When I notice my scrambling, it’s helpful to remember that Christ came to take away its causes. By his sacrifice on the cross, he removes both my guilt AND my shame. Dr. Averbeck suggests that the opposite of scrambling is rest. This points me to Christ’s invitation, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) The Son of God who died for my sins is also the one who offers rest. As such, he is the culmination of the law and the prophets, all of which point to the rest that God promised his people from the foundation of the world. As of old, the voice of God comes to us in our scrambling, “enter my rest.”

Prayer:

God, I find myself scrambling. I bring my sin, shame, and fear to you. I accept your offer of rest. Amen.

SUNDAY
March 12, 2023

God's abiding, ever-present love.

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” 1 John 4:16

March 13, 2023
Redemptive Suffering
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Romans 8:18

No one likes to suffer. Our culture is rife with substances, activities, and philosophies to keep us from suffering. Nor do people like to see others suffer. But as we begin this journey through Holy Week, we will once again have a front row seat to the suffering of Jesus Christ. What makes His suffering so efficacious is the redemptive nature of His emotional, physical, and spiritual suffering. He walked the road of a suffering servant so He has a unique insight into any suffering we might endure. His death and resurrection provided redemption for our souls, strength to endure, atonement for our salvation, and He brought us into God’s presence. That is redemptive suffering!

While we don’t choose suffering, we must admit that it is at our weakest, most hopeless moments, that we experience the power of God’s grace most acutely. When our suffering brings us to the end of our resources and strength, we can more fully grasp that God’s resources and strength are not just enough, they are more than we can ask or imagine. In our suffering we can find unknown strength to persevere on a path filled with pain and uncertainty. As we walk with Christ, we learn more about His character: His faithfulness, love, mercy, righteousness, and power! We can also experience Him helping to build those characteristics in us...if we let Him. And as we grow more like Christ, our hearts begin to be filled with the power and hope of the Holy Spirit. That is redemptive suffering!

Enduring suffering can open opportunities to be a purveyor of hope for others. We can share with them the hope of God’s presence, understanding, love, power, grace, strength, sufficiency. God is able to redeem our struggles and turn them into acts of mercy and love. That is redemptive suffering!

Prayer:

Thank you, God, for the redeeming sacrifice of Christ. Redeem our suffering by making us more like Christ and then use us to help others. Amen

March 14, 2023
“Why Did We Follow This Guy?”
Clay Lubbers – Covenant CRC

“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask.’ ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked. They replied, ‘Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.’” Mark 10:35-37

I grew up wondering how the Jews could turn on Jesus so quickly. I wondered how wrong they had to be to shout “crucify him” on Good Friday- I mean who were these people? By reading the scripture and really diving into God’s Word as an adult, I think I have a better understanding. Let’s take some time and put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples and Jews. We need to start by remembering who the disciples (and people) thought the Messiah would be. It was shortly before the Triumphal Entry that we this exchange with James and John recorded in the verses above took place.

They seem to be looking at Jesus as an earthly Savior, not a spiritual one. It’s clear to see that the people did the same. They surely thought he was the Messiah, from his answers to the chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees and Sadducees as well as at the Triumphal Entry. Jesus fulfills scripture in Zechariah 9:9 by coming in on a colt: “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” He enters and the people shout “Hosanna!” and lay their clothes on the road and wave branches. They are seeing him as the coming Messiah to save them from the Romans. Jesus recognizes this in Luke 19:41-44: “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

We see this most clearly in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus is betrayed. I think the disciples were ready for the revolution to begin- Peter pulls his sword and attacks but misses. From John 18: 10-11; “Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’ I’d imagine that at this point the disciples were confused, and eventually frustrated. They had followed the Messiah for a long time- they had given up family and career to follow him, and when the rebellion begins, what does Jesus do? He surrenders. All the disciples flee. The only one we see following is Peter, and he vehemently denies Jesus three times in the court of the priest while Jesus is on trial. I can imagine thoughts that were going on among the people. *(continued >>)*

They had followed Jesus, had listened to him, and had watched him rebuke those in authority over the Jews. They had welcomed him as the king that would save them! But when time came to begin the fight, they thought was coming, Jesus caved. Jesus gave up. The fact that a couple days later people were shouting, “Crucify him!” is no surprise. I truly think I would have been one of them in the crowd. I think I would have been hurt, having been deceived by this man that was going to free us from the Romans. But friends, Sunday is coming. And then we see the real victory - the one that saves us all.

Prayer:

Our Father, help us to have faith in the larger plan you have, and thank you not only for the Great Sunday, but thank you also for the Sundays we all have in our own lives. Amen.

March 15, 2023
You are What You Drive
Amy Schenkel – Covenant CRC

“As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. ‘Go into the village over there,’ he said. ‘As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will immediately let you take them.’” Matthew 21:1-3

BBC News recently reported on Anne Marie Squeo, a 55-year-old marketing and communications professional whose fiery red Tesla sports utility vehicle made her feel like she had joined a special "club" of people who were doing something to help the environment, while still driving with style. However, her feelings changed after recent news articles about Tesla's founder, Elon Musk. "I wondered if people were making a judgment about me that I wasn't looking for," she wrote. Our cars do tend to say something about us, right?

Suburban neighborhoods are full of minivans, but a high-level executive is unlikely to pick up his client from the airport in one. My grandparents drove a Taurus for decades, which represented their values of practicality and comfort without being too flashy.

In this Scripture passage, Jesus chooses a very interesting form of transportation for his entry into Jerusalem: a DONKEY! This is not a trivial choice, for the donkey was saying something about who Jesus is. Matthew reminds his audience of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9, which says: “Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey's colt.”

Although an earthly king would ride through town on his battle horse following a victory, Jesus chose to ride a simple donkey. He is the King of all kings, and he is both righteous and victorious. But he knew the nationalistic tendencies of the people to want a king that would make their nation stand above the rest. So, he chose to ride a donkey, a symbol of humility and peace, indicative of the kind of kingdom this King would bring.

Prayer:

King of kings, help us to long for the eternal kingdom you ushered in on this journey into Jerusalem. Help us to be people of humility and peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

March 16, 2023
Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus
David Arndt – Community CRC

“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul.’” Matthew 16:24-25

There is a common truism about death and possessions: “You can’t take it with you.” This is true for more than just estate planning. If we want the resurrection power of Jesus in our lives now, then we have to die to our old lives and our old selves now, too.

Perhaps you have heard stories of persecuted believers in other parts of the world who lose status, friends, jobs, family or freedom because of following Jesus. It’s easy to admire these saints from afar and perhaps silently wonder if we could do the same. The words of Jesus in this passage tell us it is not just for others far away: the call to the cross is for us, too. That call is for all who follow after him.

Our possessions may not be taken away by force, but we must no longer be possessed by our possessions. We must live as if they are the Lord’s and not ours any longer. The same is true for anything else we cling to for worth, safety or significance. You can’t take it with you.

“Wait a minute, though. Let’s not be unreasonable. Surely no one would expect me to _____.” Do you really think so?

What did Jesus hang on to in his journey to and on the cross? We all say we want to go heaven to be with God forever, right? What is it that will give us joy, meaning and security in heaven? Is that available here and now? It is but there is a cross in the road to it.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, I want above all else to follow you. Cleanse my secret faults and show me where I am clinging to things of this world and this life instead of to you. Let me see your face and be transformed into your likeness. Lord Jesus Christ, I am yours. Amen.

March 17, 2023
Stop and Consider
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“Stop and consider God’s wonders.” Job 37:14b

Life can be hectic. Spouses, children, extended family, jobs, committees, and other obligations all demand a portion of our time. We try to find space for God in our lives, but the tyranny of the immediate claims our attention. Too soon we begin to run on empty emotionally and spiritually.

During this Lenten season, I invite you to find time to get spiritually filled. Stop and consider God’s wonders.

Consider the wonder of God’s love for us. Stop and think about this: “God loves you so much He gave His only Son to die for you.” When you allow yourself to meditate on the simple yet profound truth of God’s incredible, mind-boggling love, it takes your breath away. His love is so astonishing, so exquisite, so amazing! How can it be that God would love us so much that He would let His only Son die?

Allow yourself to be overwhelmed with a true sense of wonder this Lenten season as you consider the scope of God’s love. Respond with awe and adoration.

Consider the wonder of forgiveness. Stop and let your imagination take you back to the cross. Hear the sound of the nails being pounded into Jesus’ hands and feet. Hear His agonizing groans as metal rips flesh. Realize that the burden of our sin was far more painful than Roman nails. Remember that without His death there would be no redemption, no atonement, and no hope.

In true repentance and with deep gratitude, respond to the wonder of God’s forgiveness. Weep for your sins and wonder at the grace that flows from that cross and removes your sins as far as the east is from the west.

Consider the wonder of a living Savior. For those who were there when the Romans took Jesus down from the cross it must have felt like all was lost, but the grave could not hold Him. He defeated Satan, canceled our debt of sin, and now is sitting at His Father’s right hand. What compelling reasons to be filled with extreme joy – a joy that begins in the core of our being and spills over in songs and words of praise – a joy that makes us want to dance like David did before the ark – a joy that is full of hope and assurance.

Consider the wonder of a living Christ. Respond with joy and become like a child. Let down your guard and rejoice – JESUS LIVES!!

Prayer: Loving Lord, forgive me for taking your sacrifice for granted. Fill me again every day with renewed wonder at the cost you paid so your grace could wash us clean and give us eternal life. Amen.

March 18, 2023
As You Will
Ryan Phan - In Spirit

“Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’” Matthew 26:39

Moments after finishing the Last Supper, Jesus asked Peter, James and John to join Him in the Garden of Gethsemane where He would pray. Jesus knew what would soon transpire so with His humanity on full display, Jesus bared His soul to the Father. “Let this cup be taken from Me.” Jesus, begging, “If there is any possible way out then please let it be done!” in this moment, is feeling everything that you and I would feel.

Yes, Jesus is still fully God but in His full humanness, He can empathize with our weaknesses. But Jesus would finish His prayer with “Not as I will, but as You will.” Again, Jesus knew the plan. He knew what was coming and He knew the reason. But amidst His deep, intense agony, He is able to say, “As You will.”

How often in our lives do we seek to cling to control? We think we know better and if things get done our way, things would be perfect. But then how often do we find ourselves doing things our way, just to find ourselves having fallen flat on our faces?

We are called to trust God in all circumstances. Certainly not easy but modelled to us perfectly through Christ. The only One who was perfect in obedience even to the point of the most gruesome, torturous death.

Sometimes God’s plan doesn’t need to make sense to us. Jesus’ death on a cross probably wouldn’t have been how we drew it up, but it was God’s perfect plan that would rescue us from our sin and separation from Him. It was out of love that He would do that, and it ought to be out of love that we trust Him. For His ways will always be higher than our ways and praise God for that!

Prayer:

Father, help us to give up trying to control our lives and send your Spirit to enable us to totally submit to your will. Amen.

For the next three Sundays of Lent, we will pause from our devotionals and meditate on Bible verses that remind us now that we have received grace of God's love, we are called to love God and others.

**SUNDAY
March 19, 2023**

Love God by walking in obedience to Him and serving Him wholeheartedly.

“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?” Deuteronomy 10:12-13

March 20, 2023
"I AM"
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

"Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am,' said Jesus..." Read Mark 14:57-62

Have you ever had someone lie about you? It is a profoundly frustrating and extremely unfair experience. One's natural inclination is to refute the lie as loudly and to as many people as possible. But no matter how much you counter the lies, your reputation and credibility are damaged. Jesus understands what it is like. He has "walked in those shoes."

The reading today takes place shortly after Jesus was falsely arrested. His friends have abandoned him and he is standing in front of a large crowd gathered at the Sanhedrin. The Chief Priests are plotting his death and looking for reasons to kill him. There are many people in the crowd – maybe even some who Jesus fed, taught, or healed. But instead of standing up for Jesus, they tell lies about him. Resisting the urge to indignantly refute the lies, Jesus remains silent until the high priests asks, with scorn in his voice, "Are you the Christ, Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus simply, quietly, and confidently answers, "I am." What a beautiful response, "I am." No shouting, no recrimination, no anger – just the truth.

What hope that simple truth brings us today! No matter where you find yourself on your spiritual journey this Lenten season, Jesus is what you need because he **IS** the Christ, the promised Messiah sent to set us free from the bondage of sin and death. He **IS** the Son of the Blessed One – full of power and might; true God and true man; source of all love, joy, and peace. He **IS** coming back in glory. We can be confident in the hope that we will see him face-to-face and live with him forever! Praise God, Jesus lives!!

Prayer:

Dear I AM, thank you for being all we need. Thank you for the hope of your second coming and eternity with you. Help us to rely more on you and less on ourselves. Help us to speak the truth, live the truth, and know The Truth. Amen.

March 21, 2023
More Than a Bad Afternoon
Don Westhouse - Moline CRC

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Psalm 22:1a

During this season of Lent, we do well to spend much time in deep reflection of God's miraculous rescue mission of his sheep. Our inclination is to take the jagged edges off his path to our redemption and humanize it to an understandable level, even if it is still excruciating. But to truly "survey the wondrous cross" we must stretch even further to imagine Christ's divine experience on the cross, which is so much more than his human physical torture or psychological pain.

We can begin by considering the sin debt his love set out to settle. For Him to reconcile us to himself his pure righteous justice needed to be satisfied (Isaiah 53:11). As John Stott expresses in *The Cross of Christ*, "To say that he must "satisfy himself" means that he must be himself, and act according to the perfection of his (just) nature."

Something very complicated and divine is happening on the cross with the God/Man Jesus that we cannot fathom. We have some sense of what transpires humanly; but the weight of punishment the Triune God exacts on himself so that he is satisfied with taking us to himself, holy and blameless, is so amazing and so divine that we will need eternity to unpack it.

We can rightfully expect that the price of justice for our sin that God took upon himself was no less than if we had individually carried it ourselves. He didn't cut himself a cut-rate deal. He is just. But how could so great a payment be made for so many of his elect on a cross in a single afternoon?

Could the answer be in Christ's words, quoting from Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In some divine way was the God-man Jesus in a suspension of time in his payment for sin so that God could be truly "satisfied"? Something truly complex and supernatural happened on a scale too great for us to fully comprehend.

But we must begin now what will require eternity to fathom. Calvary was so much more complex than an excruciatingly torturous afternoon for our Jesus. Still, we grow deeper in love with our redeemer the deeper we dig into this complex human and divine act of love.

We must "survey the wondrous cross" and resist the inclination to make it an easily understood human event. Let our prayer this season be that we reach the inescapable conclusion, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all". Press on!

Prayer: Lord, it is difficult for our finite minds to comprehend the depth of your suffering, pain, and sacrifice. Fill our hearts and lives with a passion to live gratefully and obediently for you. Amen.

March 22, 2023
Worthy is the Lamb
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Revelation 5:12

I love the reflective nature of this season of Lent. Taking time to stop and meditate on scriptures makes me aware to two things: my great need for a savior and what Jesus endured so that could happen. Recently I encountered God’s overwhelming grace in Revelation 5. As I studied it, I was once again moved to my knees in worship with tears of repentance, gratitude, and joy streaming down my face.

In Revelation 5:2 the mighty angel asked, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” It is devastating to realize no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. At this point all is so hopeless and desolate. But in verse 5 the elder encourages John (and us) to, “See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” I can just imagine John looking for a strong, powerful lion like Aslan, but instead what he records is this, “Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain...” I wonder if John was puzzled. Not only was this a helpless, innocent lamb, but it also was a lamb looking as if it had been sacrificed. How could a mortally injured lamb be found worthy? Where was the Lion of Judah?

But then the twenty-four elders begin singing the new song in verses 9-10. They were then joined by hundreds of thousands of angels in verse 12 and together they sang more songs of praise and worship. They were joined by “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’” What glory, beauty, love, hope, splendor, and majesty are captured in that moment!!

John was assured that Someone was found who was worthy to break the seals and open the scroll – the Lamb of God: Our Lord, Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten son, the first born from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth....the one who was slain for our sins and punished for our iniquities, who redeemed our lives from the pit. HE is worthy!!! Glory! Glory to God most High!!!

Prayer:

Oh, praise you, Lamb of God. You are worthy of our thanksgiving! You are worthy of our worship! You are worthy of our love! You are worthy of our praise! You are worthy of our commitment! You are worthy of our trust! Amen.

March 23, 2023
The Blessing of Rebuke
Bob Boersma – Providence CRC

“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” Mark 8:35-37

Have you ever been rebuked? It never feels good. Jesus just told his disciples about his suffering and Peter rebuked him. Jesus rebuked Peter and called him Satan because his concerns were merely human. Ouch! Then Jesus talked to his disciples about losing their lives to save their lives and about the importance and value of their souls. He warned them about being ashamed of what mattered most. I wrestle with this. I wonder if Jesus would rebuke us. Our present lives matter—a lot! It is why we are so concerned for them. It is why COVID, poverty, racism, sexuality, hunger, abortion, refugees, and a lot of other present life issues matter. They matter to God too. He calls for us to love people and seek justice. But he also makes it clear all those things don’t begin to compare to the importance of our souls. We could fix all our world’s problems and if people don’t come to know Jesus as their Savior and Lord, we have solved merely human, temporary concerns. I wrestle with this because it seems so much of the church’s energy gets focused on human concerns. Important concerns but according to Jesus not the most important. I wrestle with this because it seems we are often ashamed or maybe afraid to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Let’s face it; it is easier, more applauded, and it feels better to focus on human concerns. But I wonder if Jesus might rebuke us. I wonder if when we stand before him, will he be ashamed of us? Rebuke never feels good. But when it comes from Jesus it is always good. What do you think? Might he rebuke us today? Lord Jesus, help us listen for your voice. Help us to keep our focus on the concerns of God and to lose our lives for what matters most. Help us not be ashamed but bold with your good news.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to understand the depth of your love for us that prompts you to gently rebuke us when we go astray. May you Spirit give us the ability to accept humbly and gratefully everything you say to us...even rebuke. Amen.

March 24, 2023
But God
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

A minister friend of mine told me of a sermon he preached about six letters that spell hope: “u-g-b-o-t-d.” That may not look like anything to you, but when you rearrange them, they spell, “But God.” Those words continue to inspire me as I think about the events surrounding Easter.

The people of Israel were living in hopeful expectation of a Messiah. At the right time, God sent His sinless son who ministered to the needy, taught many, and empowered the disciples. His incarnation brought hope to a hopeless humanity. This angered the evil one who caused the leadership to hate and despise Christ. He encouraged others to lie about and abandon Him. He reveled in the cruelty of the Roman soldiers who beat Jesus and in the sentence of crucifixion.

The evil one must have been rejoicing as he witnessed Jesus’ suffering on the cross. What he didn’t reckon with was six little letters: “BUT GOD!” That death was where the justice of God met the love of God so that the grace of God could be poured out on humanity and hope could live in the hearts of all who love the Son. The evil one may have held onto his own sliver of hope when they put Jesus in a tomb...” BUT GOD raised Him from the dead” (Acts 3:15b) so death no longer has it’s sting and sin no long has a choke hold on God’s children.

In this time in history, we need hope: for ourselves, our families, our church, and our country. I don’t know what you are going through right now – if you are filled with hope or if you are traveling a difficult road of hopelessness. But I do know six little letters that can bring you hope: “BUT GOD...” Whatever you need, He is enough: enough love, grace, mercy, joy, assurance, strength, and power. He is the healer of bodies, relationships, emotions, divisions – He is enough. So, when you feel like giving up, hold on tight to those six letters – BUT GOD – and have hope!

Prayer:

Merciful God, thank you for loving us while we were yet sinners and sending Christ to die so we could have hope. Amen.

March 25, 2023
Modeling
Kim DeVries – Covenant CRC

“Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:1-2

When I was around the age of ten, I remember how I looked up to an older cousin of mine. It was the 80’s and big hair, big earrings, bright colors, and Bon Jovi were all the rage.

During those formative years I remember being at my grandmas when my cousin brought over a photo album of her modeling portfolio. I was enamored, she was beautiful, and I aspired to be like her. In my mind she was the next Miss America and I wanted to be just like her. So much so, I remember a teacher of mine asking me what I wanted to be when I grew up and I said, “a model, just like my cousin.”

Guess what, my cousin’s modeling career never took off and mine never started. As I think about how I aspired to be like her, it’s quite laughable. I spent a lot of time in my elementary years and beyond tempted by the trappings of this world, thinking if I looked, acted, or did the things other people were doing...I would have arrived. How short sighted those thoughts were.

But as I think of who my life is modeling now, I wonder if I’m still missing the mark. And if I’m honest with myself, most days I do miss the mark in this pseudo-modeling career. According to Paul in Ephesians 5:1-2 above we are to model Christ.

During this season of lent what, or who do you find yourself modeling? What consumes your thoughts or fills up the moments in your day? Do you have margin in your life that allows you to reflect on and act out the promptings of the Holy Spirit? Or are you too busy modeling the worlds behaviors to imitate your Savior? In this season of reflection, check yourself. Are you a counterfeit image of Christ or are you doing your best to imitate and reflect the One who gave himself up for you?

Prayer:

Dear Father, you have called us to be imitators of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Forgive us Lord when we confess your truth but skew your image. Help us Lord during this season of lent to reflect on your sufferings and your faithfulness. Help us to become more like you and may others see your true reflection in us. Amen.

SUNDAY
March 26, 2020

Stay close to the heart and love of God by building faith and praying in the Holy Spirit.

“But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.” Jude 20-21

March 27, 2023
The Lamb and the High Priest
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

*“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29b
“Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.” Hebrews 7:24*

Do you struggle with learning how to multitask? Teenagers and young mothers are experts at it. Teens do it because they can, and mothers do it because they must. As good as these two groups of people are at doing two things at once, they don't begin to compare to Jesus Christ. As He hung on the cross, true God and true man, He was both the sacrifice and the high priest. This fact is almost too much for our finite minds to comprehend; yet that is exactly what Jesus did because it was what we needed.

We needed a perfect sacrifice to take away our sins, so God gave us His Son, Jesus Christ, holy, pure, and sinless – the perfect sacrificial Lamb. As you look at the cross this Lent, hear these words, “Behold, the Lamb of God who took away YOUR sin!” The blood of the Lamb completely atones for your sin and makes you holy in God's sight. May we never become so complacent about that fact that we cease to fall on our knees in gratitude and thanksgiving.

Because we continue to sin, we need a high priest to intercede for us with the Father. In Jesus we have a High Priest who lives forever and is continually interceding on our behalf. You can bring your concerns, hurts, and sorrows along with your joys, praises and thanksgiving to the great High Priest in prayer. He lives to intercede for YOU. In His presence you will find freedom, release, redemption, and renewal.

Prayer:

Dear Lamb of God, our great High Priest, Thank you! We join with angels in heaven saying, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Revelation 5:12) Amen.

March 28, 2023
Where is Your Treasure
Ken Boersma – Providence CRC

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

I do not remember hearing about the practice of Lent in my family or in my church when I was growing up. I was not introduced to the concept of giving something up for Lent until I was an adult. As a consequence, I have not adopted this practice, although I recognize the value of spiritual preparation leading up to Easter and the celebration of the resurrection of Christ.

While reflecting on what it might mean to prepare so that I might properly celebrate the resurrection, I was drawn to Matthew 6:19-21, which says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” I understand these verses to direct my preparation away from a desire for material things and toward the consequence of Christ conquering sin and death and freeing me up to live my life to treasure the victorious life of a new creation in Christ.

Lent, then, provides an opportunity to particularly focus on my ongoing need to remove the store of earthly treasures in my life that interfere with the celebration of the new life in all its fullness I am promised as member of the victorious body of Christ, his church. I am challenged to search my heart to recognize those “treasures” which are preventing me from fully seeing God’s work of salvation in Christ and to reorient my heart to a life that more fully celebrates God’s offering of heavenly abundance.

Prayer: Father, I ask for the guidance of your Spirit as I seek to remove an over reliance on earthly treasure in my life. I pray that you may prepare my heart to treasure the celebration of new life I have in Jesus Christ and to live my life in accord with that treasure. Amen.

March 29, 2023
Story of Two Gardens
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” Luke 22:42

The first garden was filled with the glory of new creation. The Garden of Eden was a place of overwhelming beauty, intimacy, and love. Here two humans enjoyed cherished, unrestricted fellowship with God. Unfortunately, this divine intimacy was broken when Adam and Eve decided they wanted to do their own will and chose to disobey God. What began as life, harmony, and splendor ended in banishment and death. But God immediately put a plan into effect to bring humanity back into intimate fellowship with Him. This plan leads us to the second garden.

The beauty of the second garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, is encapsulated in the human form of Jesus Christ. The intimacy and love are not just between humans and their Creator, but between Father and Son. The temptation for disobedience had to be more than we can imagine. Because he was divine Jesus had the power not to go forward with God’s plan of redemption, but He chose to submit Himself to His Father’s will and He resolutely choose obedience and the way of the cross. His choice to say, “Not my will, but your will be done,” brought life, forgiveness, redemption, freedom and hope to an alienated and broken humanity.

As I think about those two gardens, I ask myself (and you), “In which garden am I choosing to live?” Am I in the garden of “my will be done” or have I chosen to fully submit in the garden of “your will be done.” Am I able to totally relinquish my rights, hopes, dreams, agendas, doubts, insecurities, pain, fears, and sorrow? Am I able to say, “Your will be done,” and actually live that out or do I take back parts of my life to handle myself? My heart-felt prayer for all of us is that as we grow spiritually, we will spend more and more time in the garden of “your will be done.”

Prayer:

“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.” (Psalm 143:10) Amen.

March 30, 2023
More Than I Can Bear
Nancy Vander Meer - Alger Park Church

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:5

Many of us learned this familiar verse as children. Sometimes I wonder if the words are so familiar, they have lost their impact. Pierced. Crushed. Punishment. Wounds. Our transgressions. Our iniquities. Do these words still pierce my heart when I think of what Christ bore? For me. For all of us. Matthew 27:26-31 describes the actual event in Jesus' life. The reality of His suffering. Flogged. Stripped. Crown of thorns beaten into His head. Mocked. Crucified.

In verse 25, Matthew reports the response of the people. “His blood is on us and on our children!” I consider myself a child of God, but most often I simply gloss over the description of Christ's suffering. The reality of Jesus' unfathomable suffering doesn't permeate beyond the surface of my life, and consequently, I gloss over my sin that caused His deep pain.

The first time I watched the movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” I hid my eyes, blocked my ears, and buried my face. I couldn't stand to watch the ongoing bloody flogging, using whips imbedded with sharp bone and metal spikes, tearing Jesus' skin raw. And then I was ashamed. Those wounds were for my healing. His blood cleansed me from my sin. The cruelty I couldn't even bear to witness, Jesus willingly bore for me. For us, so we would never have to bear the incomprehensible suffering for our own sins.

Prayer:

Merciful God, when I think of the profound love given by Your Son, may I never again take lightly what my sin cost Jesus. Thank you for your grace that brought forgiveness and peace. Stir my heart to love and serve you faithfully. Amen.

March 31, 2023
Alleluia?
Aaron Meckes – Covenant CRC

“We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Romans 5: 3-5

In the Christian tradition in which I grew up, there are two things I remember most vividly about Lent as a young child: giving up something for Lent, and the entire church refraining from using the word alleluia during the Lenten season. As a young child, these practices were easily explained; we gave something up as a reminder that God gave up his own son to die for our sins. We didn’t use the word alleluia as we looked ahead toward Holy Week with a somber posture.

Recently, I learned that in the Orthodox tradition, they do the opposite and actually increase their use of the word alleluia during the Lenten season. They do this to recognize and signify their joy in suffering. There is something about this perspective I really appreciate: not only are we reminded that there is a real cost and sacrifice in following Jesus, but also that suffering ultimately produces hope (Romans 5) and for that reason we should embrace suffering joyfully.

In this Lenten season – whether you choose to eliminate or increase your alleluias – may you recognize that following Jesus is worth the cost, and that suffering produces hope. This sure hope is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus through which we are given the promise of eternal life with Him.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for the promise of eternal life that we have in Christ Jesus. Fill us with your Spirit so that we may rejoice in our sufferings as we seek to follow you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

April 1, 2023
What is Truth?
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“What is truth?” Pilate asked?” John 18:38a

We can understand Pilate’s question and confusion. Like Pilate, we hear conflicting claims of truth. We live in a world inundated with false advertisement, political spin, broken campaign promises, relativism, cynicism and religious tolerance. Lies, half-truths, and rationalizations are the norm. We hear intellectual arguments that Jesus was not the Messiah, that he didn’t really rise from the dead, and that the Bible isn’t infallible, so we ask, “What is truth? Where can we go to find truth?” Perhaps the answer is found in the presence of God as we listen to Him speak words of truth from His living word and through His chosen servants.

The truth is that....

We are born sinners and there is nothing we can do to alter that state.

God demands a blood sacrifice in atonement for our sins.

We are loved by God so much He provided a way to be right with Him again – that way is Jesus.

Jesus is God’s only begotten Son – true God and true man.

His blood sacrifice was enough to once-and-for-all totally atone for all our sins and make us right with God.

We are God’s chosen children, holy and dearly loved.

We are no longer condemned so we can leave guilt and shame behind and embrace the freedom of the cross.

Nothing in all creation can separate us from God or stop Him from loving us.

His grace is sufficient, and His power is perfected in our brokenness and weakness.

He is able to make all grace abound in our lives in all situations.

Our lives have worth and significance because we are called to be His ministers of reconciliation, His ambassadors, and His righteousness.

THIS IS TRUTH! Knowing the truth is essential and important if we are to be set free from our bondage to sin and live victoriously. So during this Lenten time of reflection, let’s consider, “what is truth?” Let’s turn to the One who is The Truth and listen to Him speak to us from His word of truth.

Prayer: Praise you, Father, that you are a God of truth and that you make the truth known to us through Christ and your living word. Amen.

SUNDAY

April 2, 2023

Love as Christ sacrificially loved us.

“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:1-2

April 3, 2023
The Lord Turned and Looked
Peter Jonker – LaGrave CRC

“Peter replied, ‘Man, I don’t know what you are talking about!’ Just as he was speaking the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.” Luke 22:60-61

It’s the low point of Peter’s life. Peter had always been proud of his faith: the first disciple to call Jesus the Messiah, and the first man out of the boat to walk on the water. Not everyone would leave everything to follow a Rabbi for three years! That pride had recently burst forth when Jesus had talked about people deserting him, Peter said, “Not me, Lord! I will go with you to prison and death!” Peter believed his own words! He thought his faith was pure and strong.

But now Peter’s confidence was gone. He had denied his Lord. It hadn’t taken the threat of death and prison; all it took were a couple of fireside questions. As Jesus looked at him, Peter knew the truth. Peter thought his faith was made from courage and love; but it turned out that his faith was really made from a lot of pride, ambition, and desire for reward. Jesus’ gaze went down through Peter’s self-deception, and it showed him the truth of his ragged heart.

Jesus’ gaze does the same to us. When Jesus looks at me, and when Jesus looks at you, he can see down through our big talk to the truth of our ragged hearts. Lent is a season of penitence. That means it’s a season when we ask Jesus to look at us. We open ourselves and, we say, “Search me, God, and know my heart!” Are we ready for His look? What will Jesus see under our surface? What unpleasant things will he expose?

Don’t be afraid. His gaze might knock you to your knees, but ultimately it will lift you up to heaven. Jesus’ look confronts Peter, but that look isn’t all confrontation; at its center it’s a look of love. How much love? Enough love that, despite his failure, Jesus dies for Peter and his ragged heart. He does the same for my heart and yours. So, this lent, open your hearts to Jesus and let him look.

Prayer:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen. (from Psalm 139:23)

April 4, 2023
Remember Me
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:42-43

Have you ever wondered what was going through the mind of the thief who asked for mercy as he hung beside Jesus? *“It won’t be long now. My lungs are filling with fluid and the effort to pull myself up to breath is increasingly more difficult. My life passes before my eyes, and I am repulsed and shamed by all the horrible things I have done to others and myself. I deserve this death, yet I dread what lies beyond.*

What’s strange is that one of the guys next to me seems to have no fear at all but is surrounded by an unearthly peace. It’s like he knows exactly what lies beyond and welcomes it. Could it be that he really is the Son of God he claims to be?

Even in his suffering, he speaks of forgiveness to those who are taunting and mocking him. That makes no sense to me, but I know that forgiveness is exactly what I need before the end comes. Could he ever forgive me? I don’t deserve his mercy. I am too far gone. But what do I have to lose? I am going to ask him to remember me when he goes into his glory.

Here goes nothing....! He said yes! So, this is what peace and hope feel like.”

We are more like that thief than we care to admit. We have all done and said things that have hurt others and ourselves. God would be justified if He chose to punish us. We don’t deserve His grace or mercy. But the story of the repentant thief should fill our souls with profound hope.

We are never too far gone that God’s grace and love can’t find and enfold us. It is never too late to genuinely repent and confess. We need to believe Jesus is who He claims to be, and His death atoned for all our sins. His blood washes us clean. His resurrection gives us assurance of eternity with God.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that your love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness are greater than our greatest sin. Amen.

April 5, 2023
The Man in the Middle
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left.” Mark 15:25-27

There were three crosses on Golgotha that day. On the two outside crosses hung men being justly punished for crimes. Between them hung a man identified by a sign reading “King of the Jews.” He had committed no crime. He had spent the last three years preaching, teaching, healing, restoring, feeding, and blessing all who came to Him in faith asking for help. He also challenged religious Jewish leaders about their judgmental self-righteous thinking and that led Him to this place of suffering and torment. A place He does not deserve to be.

But it is a place He chose to go because He knows He must obey the will of His Father who demands that a sacrifice be made to atone for sins. The sacrifice of animals wasn’t enough. The sacrifice needed to be fully human and yet without spot, blemish, or sin. He was humanity’s only hope.

So, there they were three men on three crosses. As time passed, one of the criminals stopped mocking and taunting the man in the middle. In his agony, he asked for the man in the middle to remember him when He came into his glory. How would the man in the middle respond to the request of such a sinner? Would he ignore, berate, or lash out at him? No.

He lovingly promised the unworthy sinner that he would be with Him in paradise that day. When the criminal finally died, he found himself transported into glory because the man in the middle had paid the price. His blood covered all the sins. He had paid the price and made atonement. Fellowship with God was now possible.

That man in the middle looks down from the cross into your eyes and says, “You are worth it. Join me in paradise.” All we must do is believe in faith...He has done the rest. The atonement has been made and we are redeemed by the sacrifice of the man in the middle! Praise be to God.

Prayer:

Atoning Savior, we are profoundly humbled and grateful by such a great sacrifice! Thank you! Help us to live boldly, passionately, and obediently in response for the gift of salvation you purchased for us. Amen.

April 6, 2023
Endings and Beginnings
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“It is finished.” John 19:30
Read Hebrews 9:24-28

Remember the wonderful feeling of accomplishment when you successfully come to the end of a project or assignment? The only thing I like better than making a list of things to do is crossing off things from that list. It feels good to declare that you are finished. It clears the way for new beginnings, projects, opportunities, or seasons of life.

In the last moments of Jesus’ life, He was able to declare, “It is finished!” Jesus’ list of “things to do” was completely fulfilled:

- The perfect sacrifice was made through his body and blood.
- Humanity’s sin debt was paid in full; the atonement was made.
- Separation between God and man was ended as the temple curtain tore in two.
- Death has lost its sting as eternal life was assured to all who believe.
- Satan was defeated.

When Jesus said, “It is finished,” that statement opened the door for a host of new beginnings:

- Salvation for all who believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and accept him as Lord.
- Complete forgiveness of sins – condemnation, shame, and guilt no longer enslave us.
- Redemption and a chance to start life as a new creation as we are daily sanctified.
- Opened the door for the Holy Spirit to dwell within to empower, comfort, teach and guide us.
- Made possible the opportunity for an intimate relationship with the One True King.
- Assured us that He will never leave us or forsake us and that one day we will be with Him and His Father for all eternity.

He began His ministry by declaring “The Kingdom of God is at hand,” and He ushered that kingdom in with power and might. Now we get to be a part of this new beginning.... All because Jesus finished what God called Him to do. May that fact fill us with such awe and wonder that we daily offer God sacrifices of obedience, gratitude, and praise for the completed work of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord, we are filled with awe and wonder when we stop to think how perfectly you completed the work the Father sent you to do. Thank you for your faithfulness. May you find us faithful! Amen

April 7, 2023
Surely
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“Surely this man was the Son of God!” Mark 15:39b NIV

The last few days have been crazy! Passover was an unruly time with all the Jews in town, but in all my years as a centurion I have not witnessed anything like this year. A few days ago, my unit was ordered to arrest this Jesus everyone is talking about. I watched as one of Jesus’ friends betrayed him with a kiss. And when one of Jesus’s followers cut off the servant’s ear, Jesus healed it. Some band of followers! They ran away and abandoned Jesus as we led their leader away. What kind of a man chooses followers like that?

Then there was that trial with Pilate. I was pretty sure Pilate didn’t think Jesus should be crucified like the religious leaders demanded. Pilate tried to let Jesus off by offering the crowd a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. I was surprised when the crowd demanded Barabbas’ release and Jesus’ crucifixion. In the midst of all of this Jesus didn’t yell, curse, or even try to defend himself. What kind of man reacts like that? Didn’t he know they were going to flog him? It was one of the worst floggings I had seen, and Jesus didn’t fight back. It just didn’t make sense.

If that wasn’t bad enough, I came into the Praetorium and found Jesus with a crown of thorns on his head and a dirty old purple robe on his wounded, bleeding back. Some of my friends were mocking and hitting Jesus....and Jesus took it! Why didn’t he fight back? I followed the wounded, beaten Jesus through the streets, up to Golgotha. Jesus was weak from the flogging, but he didn’t complain. He kept marching up that hill.

There were three of them that were to be crucified that day. I can still hear the sound of the hammer hitting the nails, the screams of pain as the crosses were raised high, and the curses of the other two men. What came out of Jesus’ mouth confused and astounded me. Jesus asked for water, for his mother’s care, for forgiveness of those who were crucifying him, and assurance to one of the thieves who hung beside him. But what really got to me was when Jesus called out asking why his Father had forsaken him. I will never forget the darkness covering the earth in the middle of the day. You just KNEW something really big was happening...and then it did. Jesus said two last things: “It is finished!” and “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” It was as if he knew he had completed a job he was sent to do, and it appeared as if Jesus chose to die. I was breathless, filled with awe and wonder and finally I understood what kind of a man Jesus was. All I could say was, “Surely, this man was the Son of God!”

Prayer:

Father, may this be our testimony as well and may we proclaim it with boldness and conviction. Amen.

April 8, 2023
Saturday Life
Jolene DeHeer – LaGrave CRC

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” 1 Peter 5:10

It’s Saturday! Yesterday, Jesus, their master, friend, rabbi, and hope was crucified. Today He lies in a borrowed tomb, wrapped in grave clothes. Confusion, disappointment, grief, and disbelief consume the apostles. How could this have happened? Why didn’t Jesus stop it? How could they go on without Him? All hope seems gone. The future is dark and uncertain. Jesus is dead!

I wonder how many times you have experienced the “Saturday emotions” of the disciples when your hopes are dashed, the future is scary, and grief and disappointment abound. How do you react to these “Saturday emotions?” Do you give up, get angry with God? Or do you draw close to God, allow yourself to grieve in His presence as you choose to wait on Him and trust in His promises and providential care? These “Saturday experiences” are some of the most difficult journeys we are asked to endure. But the good news is...our God is able and willing to turn all tragedy into triumph. Our part is to wait, watch and remember that Sunday did come, and Jesus walked out of that grave defeating sin and death. The disciples were transformed into powerful men who changed the world with the gospel of the risen Lord.

We are now living “Sunday lives.” Lives of promise, hope, power, and significance all because Jesus lives!! All our hopes, dreams, and promises, find their “yes and amen” in the risen Lord! So, when you are in the middle of a “Saturday experience,” hold on, wait, watch, believe, and trust because Sunday has come!

Prayer: Father, may our difficult experiences draw us closer to your heart so you can transform our sorrow into joy, our fear into fearlessness, and our disappointment into hope. Amen



















































