



*40 Days of
Following Jesus
Part 2*

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH

40 Days of Following Jesus

Part 2

Lent Devotional from
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
2022

Written by
Pastor Joe Meyer



Day Twenty One - March 25th

“Close-Knit Family”

Read John 17:20-26

The other day my daughter was over at our house and was looking at some pictures of our family and her siblings that we had recently put up on the wall in our basement. As she went from frame to frame she was reliving some of the really cool memories that were pictured on the wall in front of her. After getting nostalgic about what she'd experienced as chronicled there, particularly those pictures that showed her with her three brothers, she exclaimed “I love our family!” Needless to say, it genuinely does a parent's heart good to hear one of their children make such a wonderful proclamation! Our daughter was effectively proclaiming in the moment that in her experience, we have what is called “a close-knit family” and we certainly do! Of course even if we didn't (or you don't) have a close-knit family within the walls of our (your) home, as followers of Jesus, we nonetheless have a close-knit family within the walls of God's house and with our “siblings” in Christ...our brothers and sisters in the faith! In fact, this segment of John chapter seventeen gets at that very thing. First and foremost these words of Jesus are a reminder that our God, within Himself, has a “close-knit family”! As odd as that sounds, it's true. Read closely what Jesus says here: *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me”* John 17:20,21. Make sure you see the depth of Christ's proclamation here. We know that the Father loves the Son and that the Son loves the Father...and by the way, that's not even including the Holy Spirit in the mix! As odd as it can sound it's true, God Father, Son and Holy Spirit indeed love each other! But Jesus says something much stronger than just the love relationship that He and the Father

(and the Spirit) have. Jesus said that the Father is in Him and He in the Father. In fact, in John 10 Jesus said it even stronger *“I and the Father are one”*! Indeed, our God Himself is a “close-knit family”! And I make the point because when we are called to become part and parcel of His family of faith, when we become His sons and daughters, we are then drawn by Him into that very same closeness as well! Notice how Jesus phrases it: *“...that they also may be in us...so that the world may believe that you have sent me”* John 17:21. What an amazing truth this is! Jesus said about us... *“...that they also may be in us...”*! Jesus is saying here that Christians are absolutely and completely one with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through the presence of God’s Spirit in our bodies of course. Amazing, yes? But hang on a second, that unity with God, that one-ness with the Trinity, then brings about unity and one-ness with our brothers and sisters in Christ! Jesus said this in verse twenty of our section of Scripture *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...”*. Two thousand years ago Jesus was praying for us! We are the ones *“who will believe”* in Jesus through the Apostle’s words! And what did He pray for? None other than that we’d be a close-knit family, or as Jesus said it, *“...that they may all be one...”*. Christ’s desire is that we are unified, that we are one, that we are the closest-knit family on the face of the planet! By His Holy Spirit, He not only creates that unity, but maintains it through us every day. As we step into the second half of Lent and continue to follow Jesus every day... we are called to do so hand-in-hand and side-by-side of every other Christian so that the world can see our close-knit family and, as Jesus prayed it, *“...the world may believe”* in Jesus and join His close-knit family too!

Day Twenty One - March 25th Questions

“Close-Knit Family”

Read John 17:20-26

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Twenty Two - March 26th

“Being In Love”

Re-read John 17:20-26

One of the more amazing experiences and/or emotions we human beings go through is not only “falling in love” as we say it, but “being in love” as well. *Falling* in love is considered the earlier stages of a relationship but *being* in love is when your heart beats with that person and the thought of them never leaves you. The truth is however, even when we’re “in love”, there is an element of separation between us and the one we’re “in love” with. Though we’re in love we go our separate ways in the morning as we go to work. Though we’re in love we often spend our day away from each other. Though we’re in love we have our own friends and interests. Though we’re in love we even sometimes travel separately. While the person we’re in love with is always on our hearts and on our minds, nevertheless we are not always with the one we’re in love with...it’s just impossible. Unless you’re talking about Jesus that is! Jesus reminds us of a truth that is more important than ever for Christians to remember every day, hold tight to every moment, and cherish all their lives. Jesus said it this way: *“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one...I in them...and you in me...” John 17:22,23.* Notice that Jesus, speaking about His absolute and inextricable unity with the Father, then speaks of His absolute and inextricable unity with us! *“I in them”* Jesus says! Such an amazing truth! Jesus, the Lord of Glory, lives inside your body! Jesus, the King of kings, lives inside your body! Jesus, the God and Creator of the Universe, lives inside your body! Better said for our purposes today? Jesus, your one, true love, lives inside your body and is therefore with you all day every day. In fact, as a Christian and in reference to your relationship to Jesus, you can say that you are “in love” all day every day because the One you’re “in love”

with never leaves you, never forsakes you, and is never away from you! Actually, you are literally “in...love”. The best part about that besides the obvious? What I just said about your earthly relationship with Jesus carries on into heaven itself! When we cross from this life to the next, we will experience Christ’s presence in a way that we cannot in this fallen world! When we die or the Second Coming happens, we will be “in love” in the greatest sense of that terminology! But remember that our “in love” status in heaven will not only be with our one, true love, God Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but will also be with every other Christian that has gone from this life to the next! We will finally all be one, just as Christ prayed for so many years ago! The truth is, the best definition of our life in Christ now and of our life in heaven itself is, “being in love” and being in love forever!

Day Twenty Two - March 26th Questions

“Being In Love”

Re-read John 17:20-26

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Sunday Devotion—March 27th—Sundays in Lent are celebrations of the Resurrection and as such are not included in the devotions for Lent. Our theme for this weekend is “Follow Me to Compassion” and our theme is driven from...Psalm 103:8-14 and Mark 6:30-44. Consider the theme and read ahead to further bless your worship experience!

Day Twenty Three - March 28th

“Lord, Have Mercy!”

Read Psalm 51:1-12

Growing up in a “Southern” household...mom and dad being from the South that is...I heard the above phrase often. “*Lord, have mercy!*” was spoken in our home but also said by “yours truly”. If dinner was particularly tasty, you might just hear “*Lord, have mercy!*” as we pushed back from the table. If something amazing happened in our lives, we might just hear “*Lord, have mercy!*” spoken out of intense joy over the moment. Personally, if I hit a golf ball well and right up the pipe, you might just hear me say “*Lord, have mercy!*” as I admired...well, admired, myself... insert sheepish grin. Normally, it was an expression reserved for something very, very positive happening in our lives! But not so when it is written in Psalm fifty-one. When David was moved to write in Psalm fifty-one “*Lord, have mercy!*”, he didn’t do so because of something good, but because of something abjectly evil! Of course David was confronted by the Prophet of God known as Nathan and in a sense driven by God to recognize the evil (see 2Samuel 12), but David was confronted by Nathan because in this case, David was the perpetrator of the evil! David had committed adultery by stealing Uriah’s wife and furthered his sin by attempting to cover it up, having Uriah murdered. Here enters Nathan and here enters God’s finger of judgment pointed at and leveled against David’s horrible sin. And so, feeling the weight of what he had done to the Lord, David exclaims “*Lord, have mercy!*” In other words, “Don’t condemn me Lord” “Don’t forsake me Lord!” and instead, “*Lord, have mercy!*” Now, hearing again what David did and remembering the depth of his sin, it would be easy to point our fingers at David for his terribly wicked behavior which brought on this cry for mercy. It would be easy to pridefully say about ourselves then “I haven’t committed adultery and had someone killed...I don’t have any reason to cry out ‘*Lord, have mercy!*’” And I’d be with you on that...if it weren’t for verse five. By the Holy

Spirit's direction David writes those famous words that apply to all people, and all people, for all time: "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*" Psalm 51:5. While you and I might not have sinned in the same way that David did, all of us, together, stand with the finger of judgment leveled at us. We are sinners...sinners from birth... sinners from the moment of conception in fact. As such we must cry out to God "*Lord, have mercy!*" and receive His mercy or we'll stand convicted of our sinful human nature and the subsequent judgment from God. The beautiful thing about our God however, is that He often acts before we ask. If you read closely what is said about David in 2Samuel 12, you'll see that the Lord actually forgave David before he even asked for forgiveness or cried out "*Lord, have mercy!*" And so the Lord has done for us as well! Romans three reminds us "*...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...*" Romans 3:23,24. Before we could even utter the words, before we were even born, before the foundation of the world for that matter... God planned to act, planned to come to us, planned to send Jesus so that He could have mercy on us! Our God and Father knew our need, knew our sin, and spoke into our sin by sending mercy in the flesh...sending mercy in and through the Lord Jesus who was given by God for all human beings of all times to trust and be saved from their sin. If indeed we cried out "*Lord, have mercy!*" the Lord would say back to us, "I have had mercy...I've given you mercy through my Son!" Or as Paul would write it in Romans 10: "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" Thank you Lord for your mercy! Thank you Jesus for providing your mercy! To which my southern family would likely exclaim in absolute delight "*Lord, have mercy!*" Amen?

Day Twenty Three - March 28th

“Lord, Have Mercy!”

Read Psalm 51:1-12

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Twenty Four - March 29th

“Whiter than Snow?”

Re-read Psalm 51:1-12

We received about six inches of snow the day before I sat down to write this devotion. The six inch layer of brilliant-white-stuff that the Lord laid down really does look so beautiful! Yeah, I’m one of those twisted individuals that actually loves snow. I’ve spent a lot of time in snow. Been a skier all my life and so I’ve seen lots and lots of snow. For that matter, lived in the midwest for fifteen years now and...seen lots, lots more snow...way more than my days on the slopes. And while I’m about to be “Captain Obvious” here for a second, I’ll say it nonetheless: In my opinion, nothing, not one thing on this planet, is whiter than snow. Snow is blazingly, brilliantly white! It’s so white that when I went outside after the snow fell and the sun was shining, I had to wear sunglasses to block its blazing-brilliance from hurting my eyes! I think I’m on safe ground here in saying, snow is whiter than any other thing that the Lord gives to us or does for us! With one exception...of course...one important exception. Snow is the whitest, purest thing we know with the exception of our beautifully brilliant, white-shining hearts! I’ll say it again, nothing, not one thing is whiter than snow...unless you’re speaking of what God does for the hearts of Christian people. The Holy Spirit moved David to write about what God does for us in the words of verse seven *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be...whiter than snow!” Psalm 51:7.* Did you catch that? Our hearts through God’s forgiveness are “whiter than snow!” Of course we who are Christians know the truth of this verse as we relish the Lord’s forgiveness and mercy given to us through baptism into Jesus. We also know the truth of this verse as

we receive the Lord's Body and Blood in, with and under the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of our sins! We cherish confession of sins and being absolved or forgiven of those sins! We know that in God's sight, we are "whiter than snow"! But sometimes it's hard to believe the truth of it. You see, we know what David wrote here in Psalm 51, but we also know the reality of our sin-saturated-hearts. We know what we can be like. We know what we think, say and do. Our hearts can be as dark as the shadows of sin we try to hide in. We know that we have a habit of loving self more than others and loving self even more than God and we prove it by our actions. Jesus put it this way about our sin-darkened hearts in Matthew 15: *"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."* (Matthew 15:18-20). We know what Jesus says here is true, don't we? Brilliant? Hardly. Blameless? Nope. Bright white? Sin darkened more like. But that truth about our sinful human nature actually makes what God does for us all the more wonderful, all the more amazing! God sees your heart Christian. God knows what you think, say and do. God knows everything about you. He sees your heart and knows you're anything but pure and clean and white. But... He comes to you anyway. He hears your cry for mercy. He hears you as you cry out with David *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."* And when we cry to Him for forgiveness, He answers our darkness again and again with the brilliance of His love, forgiving us, washing us clean, making us... you guessed it... "whiter than snow!" So indeed, there is something whiter than snow and in and through Christ, that something is you!

Day Twenty Four - March 29th Questions

“Whiter than Snow?”

Re-read Psalm 51:1-12

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Twenty Five - March 30th

“Proving Yourself”

Read Galatians 2:17-21

In just about every endeavor in life, you have to “prove yourself” or as it is also said, “show what you’re made of”. *In school*: Do you want good grades and ultimately scholarships and a degree? Prove yourself! *At work*: Do you want acknowledgements and raises and promotions? Prove yourself! In other words, whatever it is, your actions will speak into who you are; your actions will speak far louder than anything your words can convey. And so it is with our sinful humanity, our sinful human-nature. Truth is however, in school and in your career, you really have to work at proving yourself, but when it comes to your sinful human nature or proving yourself to be a sinner, you don’t have to work hard at all! Paul writes this in our text: *“But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down...I prove myself to be a transgressor” Galatians 2:17,18.* The misnomer that the Holy Spirit is attempting to dispel in writing this text is that somehow our connection to Christ, alongside our connection to our sin, makes Christ an agent of or as Paul writes it here, *“...a servant of sin”*. You are indeed connected to Christ, and we’ll move towards that truth shortly, but your connection to Christ doesn’t change your connection to yourself and your sin. Even though we’re connected to Christ and one with Him, we nonetheless prove ourselves to be sinners every single day by the things that we do and think and say that are far afield of what God wants for our lives. In fact, I heard a story years ago of a president at a Christian university. This particular president claimed that he had completely overcome his sin and sinfulness and that he indeed gotten to the place where he “no longer sinned.” Boy, that’s a big (and very unbiblical) claim, and frankly, one that is very easily proven to be a false claim. Indeed, it was proven wrong, by the president himself! Some of the students who were suspicious of his claims, perhaps because they knew themselves and their own sinfulness, poured buckets of horse manure on the desk of the president. Not nice, not right, and definitely disrespectful...but it sure proved

a point by proving that the prez hadn't stopped sinning whatsoever! When he came into his office the next day and found the piled-high, stinking-foul-mess and the president began a vitriolic tirade, spewing vulgarities and inappropriate words! In this instance, the students knew better than their teacher and the prez needed to be taught a lesson about the reality of Christianity. We.Are.Sinners. No getting around it, no debating the point...the Bible is clear, the whole of your Christian life here on earth is lived in tension between my human-nature and my Christ-nature. But I have a feeling you knew that, because you know yourself and what you've thought, said and done this past week, better said, the things you've thought, said and done this past twenty-four hours, right? We're a broken mess and a cesspool of sin and we regularly prove ourselves to be the sinners we know ourselves to be! But that's what makes the Gospel expressed here so incredibly amazing! God knows even better than you do that you are a sinner...and that the whole of your life you'll prove yourself to be. He knows the sins you'll commit years before you commit them. In truth, He knew all of your sins, every single one of them, even before the foundation of the world and universe! Yep, even before He ever sent the Lord Jesus into this world to redeem you, He knew you were a stinking-steaming-heap-of-sin...and yet, He sent the Lord Jesus for you anyway! More than that, Paul reminds us here that He not only sent the Lord Jesus to us but sent the Lord Jesus into us. Paul writes those famous words *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* Galatians 2:20. Wait, Christ lives inside this "stinking-steaming-heap-of-sin"? Yep. Christ made Himself one with me even though I sin all the time? Yes. Christ, the holy and righteous, pure and perfect Son of God, lives inside this imperfect, impure, unrighteous son/daughter of God? Isn't it amazing this amazing grace? Ya-sure-you-betcha it is! We proved ourselves to be sinners and still do, and yet, our wonderful God and Father proved Himself to be the loving Lord He's always claimed to be! Indeed, if we said to our Lord God "If you truly love us...prove yourself!" He'd simply point at Jesus and the cross and the grave and say "I already did!" Thank you Jesus for proving yourself by proving your love for us!

Day Twenty Five - March 30th Questions

“Proving Yourself”

Read Galatians 2:17-21

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Twenty Six - March 31st

“What Difference Does it Make?”

Re-read Galatians 2:17-21

In our day and time, if there's something people expect, it is that any claim or philosophy you espouse about anything is backed up by meaningful action regarding the claim you're making. We are rightly challenged about anything we espouse with “What difference does your idea, your philosophy, or your claim make?” I know that's where I'm at. I hear people barking about this societal-ill or that societal-ill and yet, really, all the person is doing is barking...there's no action backing up their bark...no action backing up their words. Are you opposed to hunger and homelessness? Don't just yammer about it, go do something about it! Are you opposed to minority or immigrant groups being suppressed and oppressed? Don't just talk, go do something about it! Are you concerned about single, pregnant women or human-trafficking? Go do something about it! Talk is cheap...and often, on social media, talk is not only cheap but it's also angry, hateful, hurtful, detrimental, unproductive and frankly, not what Christianity is about at all. To be sure, Christianity is a faith that relies heavily on words spoken, we proclaim the Gospel message and we do so loud and long. But though the Gospel proclamation is central to our faith, Christianity is a faith that is far more than that..Christianity is about our words being put into action! Paul writes here *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God...who loved me and gave himself for me” Galatians 2:20.* Notice what Paul doesn't write: *“The talk I now talk I talk by faith in the Son of God...”* no... Paul wrote, by the power of the Holy Spirit, *“The life*

I now live...I live by faith in the Son of God.” Christianity is about living your and living your faith through your action, or again, as Paul was moved to write: *“The life I now live”*. Okay then...what does that look like? Or, said according to the title of this devotion, what difference does your faith make in your world? What difference does the fact that you’re a Christian make on the world around you? To begin with, remember that we can *“live by faith in the Son of God”* simply by the way that we approach our lives. If you’re married with family, you’re not just a husband and father, you’re a Christian husband and father. You’re not just a wife and mother but a Christian wife and mother. You’re a Christian employee or employer. You’re a Christian student and friend. You’re Christian by yourself and when you’re with others. And how you approach your life and live your life really can make a huge difference in our world looking for the reality of Christianity lived in real life. But you also have a calling to reach into people’s lives in tangible ways! Don’t just be concerned about but strive to do something about hunger and homelessness. Don’t just be concerned about injustices done to any group, immigrant, minority, or not...do something about injustice on the whole. Don’t just be concerned about single, pregnant mothers or human-trafficking...do something about it. And you insert your philosophy or concerns... whatever it is...through your faith in the living, loving Lord Jesus, don’t just talk the talk, but walk the walk, so that people can see that Christianity indeed “makes a difference” in our world!

Day Twenty Six - March 31st Questions

“What Difference Does it Make?”

Re-read Galatians 2:17-21

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Twenty Seven - April 1st

“Polar Opposites”

Read Galatians 5:16-26

When two people hold radically differing views about things they are said to be “polar opposites”. I’ve met a few of these interesting duos in my life...more than a few actually. *Siblings*: One is hard-core, right-wing and the other is, well, the polar opposite of that. *Friends*: One is living a main-stream and an upwardly mobile life and lifestyle and the other is happy as a clam to live paycheck to paycheck...in other words, again, polar opposites. I bring it up because every Christian has a polar opposite situation in their lives. Every Christian experiences this very thing every single day. In fact, all Christians are in and of themselves a living example of a polar opposites and is so within their own bodies. Paul writes about that in our text: *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” Galatians 5:17*. In reading that verse you may say “Well, we’re the polar opposite of our Lord but not a living polar opposite within our own persons!” And indeed, that’s true too. There’s a reason why the Bible tells us that no person, man, woman or child can look on the face of God and live. Isaiah reminds us *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty” (Isaiah 6)*...and we’re then the exact opposite of who He is. We’re not righteous. We’re not pure. We’re not even one holy, let alone three holies. We are indeed the polar opposite to the Lord our God! But this idea is much bigger than that and I’ll say it again, it exists within your body. You see, the holy, righteous, pure and perfect Son of God has chosen to take up residence in your body through His indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus said it this way *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” John 14:16,17*. We talk about this all the time but it’s an amazing truth worth repeating: The Holy Spirit of God, the very presence of our Lord and Savior, lives within your body!

You are a temple of the Holy Spirit whom you have from God! What that means is that you are His! You are His child, His son or His daughter! But it also means you are in and of yourself, a polar opposite. In fact, theologically we say that Christians are, in the Latin language, “simul justus et peccator”. What that means is that a Christian is “simultaneously righteous and sinful”. Within your body is an intense fight and polar opposite situation every day! The struggle is real. The Holy Spirit calls us to love others and our sinful human nature says “love yourself”. The Holy Spirit calls us to live generously and our sinful human nature says “be a Scrooge”. The Holy Spirit calls us to live in peace and joy and our sinful human nature says “I’d rather be anxious and angry”. The whole of our lives are lived in this polar opposite tension! And yet, we remember this truth from Scripture too: “*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*” *1John 4:4*. While this verse is speaking about spiritual warfare, the principle can be applied to our sinful human nature as well. “*Greater is He that is in you*” applies to overcoming your sinful humanity as well! When you submit to the Holy Spirit’s leadership in your life, He will bring those things He wants to see happening into your life and through your life as well. As Paul writes it: “*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law*” *Galatians 5:22,23*. Notice whose fruit it is! Is it yours? Well, technically. But it all is derived from and driven by the One who is in you, or as Paul reminds us there that all those things are indeed “*the fruit of the Spirit*”! While you and I, in and of ourselves, are the polar opposite of our Lord and Savior, He comes to us by His Spirit that we might be able to live for Him and live through Him everyday. He comes to us that we might be one with Him and be able to display His “love, joy, peace...etc.” every day and most importantly, show the world who He is and what He’s all about. When we do that, our world will stand up and take notice! When we submit to the Holy Spirit’s rule and reign, the world will notice that our Lord Jesus in us because the “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*” of God the Holy Spirit will be displayed before them. And they will pay close attention because these marvelous attributes of God are in fact, the polar opposite of what they experience every day!

Day Twenty Seven - April 1st Questions

“Polar Opposites”

Read Galatians 5:16-26

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Twenty Eight - April 2nd

“Keeping Up”

Re-read Galatians 5:16-26

Our kiddos, our “babies”, who were once little, are all grown up now. Our youngest is going to be twenty-three years old this year, so along with her brothers they are still our “kiddos” but they are no longer our “babies”! Having said that, while it was a long time ago that they were our babies, I do remember with fondness the days when our kiddos were little. Those were good days...actually... they were genuinely great days! I think I remember the simple things most of all: Things like laying on the driveway and staring at the stars. Things like playing frisbee with what I consider to be four of the best frisbee throwers ever. But what I’m thinking of as I write this today is the times we’d go on walks together. Sometimes it was in the neighborhood; sometimes on vacation and on a beach or a trail; sometimes through the forest at Robin’s parent’s house in the mountains. One thing was clearly evident back then, no matter where we were walking, the kiddos couldn’t keep up with me. One of my strides was generally about four or five of theirs so that was tough duty for them. I’d take five steps and they’d have to take twenty to twenty five of them just to stay up with me. And sometimes, it wasn’t really about the stride differential because they weren’t even trying to keep up. They were distracted by chasing butterflies, throwing rocks and sticks, picking and smelling the flowers. Here enters our text for today’s devotion. Paul writes these amazing words: *“If we live by the Spirit let us also...keep in step with the Spirit” Galatians 5:25.* We know the first part is true of us, namely, that we “live by the Spirit” as Paul writes it. You can see the previous devotion for that status with God but you can also check out what Paul wrote in Romans 8:15-16 *“...you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”* So because we’re Christians we know that we are His children and therefore *“we live by the Spirit”* as Paul writes it in Galatians five. However, because that’s true we are then called to *“...keep in step with the Spirit.”* Keeping in step with the Spirit is both an amazing tour of duty and a very difficult thing to do!

You see, not only is our “stride significantly shorter” than our Lord’s, but worse yet, we’re often distracted by the things of the world. The Lord is often striding forward in our lives and we’re lagging behind Him and ultimately “chasing butterflies, throwing rocks and sticks, picking and smelling the flowers”. Said more clearly, God has a plan and a purpose for our days, one that glorifies Him and shows others what it means to be a Christian. We struggle to keep up with Him and worse yet, we are constantly distracted by the things of our lives and the things of the world. But we’re called to “*keep in step with the Spirit*”...so...how in this world do we do that? How to we match His stride? How to we keep from being distracted? Well, I could tell you a lot of things, but let me tell you this: When my kids got distracted or had trouble keeping up, one of the things I’d do is go to them and pick them up and carry them in my arms or on my back. The stride was no longer an issue...they were in my arms or on my back...right, there, with me! The distractions were no longer an issue as I picked them up they were focused up close on my smiling face and my deep love for them! And so it is with the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives. He calls us to “keep up”...more than that, He commands us to “keep up”! But as you’ve heard me say a time or two, what God commands, God also provides. To use another passage to help you, consider these words: “*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*” *Ephesians 2:10*. Notice who is doing all the work in that verse! We are His workmanship and we are re-created by Him in Christ and furthermore simply doing works that He foreordained! Who is doing all the work? Our Lord and God is! And while indeed, keeping in step with the Spirit means living for Jesus every day, living for Jesus every day is generated from and provided by our loving Lord who “picks us up” and also molds and shapes us into the Christians He wants us to be. In other words, every day, He “picks us up” and walks with us through this world and into the good-works-mission He has for us every day, every week, every month and every year!

Day Twenty Eight - April 2nd Questions

“Keeping Up”

Re-read Galatians 5:16-26

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Sunday Devotion—April 3rd—Sundays in Lent are celebrations of the Resurrection and as such are not included in the devotions for Lent. Our theme for this weekend is “Follow Me to Faithfulness” and our theme is driven from...2Timothy 2:1-15 and Matthew 5:13-16. Consider the theme and read ahead to further bless your worship experience!

Day Twenty Nine - April 4th

“No One is Good”

Read Mark 10:17-27

I am always amazed by the incredibly complex people I encounter day after day. This is especially prominent for me because I'm in the "people business", therefore, I see all kinds of human-beings and experience all sorts of differences and nuances in the lives of the folks I'm privileged to serve. Honestly, it really is amazing to see what I call, "the calico cat of humanity" through the variety of human-beings the Lord has made and has brought together in any given spot. We have differing family traditions, differing life expectations, differing careers and lifestyles. We have differing wants and needs and pains and problems. But I've noticed that for all of our differences and nuances, there's something that brings us together and puts us all in the exact same place. Now, I know you're thinking that as a preacher in the "people business" I'm going to say that the thing that brings us together is "sin"...and okay...yes, sin is indeed a great equalizer. Our Lord tersely reminds the young ruler in our text of that very thing: *"...no one is good but God alone!"* In effect, Jesus was saying what the Apostle Paul would later record in Romans chapter three: *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" Romans 3:10-12.* So, yes, we are all the same because of our shared sin and sinfulness. But the reason I mention our "sameness" actually stems from the very reason Jesus said to the young ruler *"... no one is good but God alone!"* To be sure, Jesus was saying that if the young man saw "goodness" in Jesus, and he certainly did, he knelt before him after all, that goodness was because He was God. While the comment is veiled, it seems evident that the Lord was making a statement about who He was as God in the flesh. But

He was also making a statement about the rich fella too. If you read between the lines of this text about the rich dude you'll come face to face with a young man who thought he *was good*...hence Jesus' comment... "*no one is good except God alone*". And I bring it all up because I've noticed that the people I encounter more often than not also think they are good, or perhaps better said, they think they're "good enough" for the Lord to willingly receive them into heaven. Some months back I had two different people, faithful Christian people mind you, come into my office on two different days and yet both of them told me that while they understood that Jesus is the only way to heaven, they felt that the Lord would look kindly on them because they were... "good enough". I hear that all the time actually. I think all of us have some sediments of that sentiment and believe it to be true to one degree or another. Something akin to: "I'm not that bad!" or "I'm better than most!" And of course, we can in fact delude ourselves into thinking such things even if they're not said outloud. But regardless of where you are today on this, let me remind you of the truly good news... "*no one is good except God alone*". While that sounds like bad news rather than good truth... "*no one is good*"... but it's actually the best truth of all! Let me write it out for you just a little differently: "*While no one is good we recognize and remember that God is good, God is very good! God is good, and His goodness, as seen in Jesus, moves Him to love, and forgive, and redeem and and ultimately resurrect people who are not good!*" In other words, the truth is, you're not good enough...you're nowhere close to being good enough and never will be! But that's exactly who the good Lord is looking for, those who can and who will rely on Him for everything, especially their salvation!

Day Twenty Nine - April 4th Questions

“No One is Good”

Read Mark 10:17-27

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Thirty - April 5th

“The Impossible Made Possible!”

Re-read Mark 10:17-27

I don't know how many times I've heard the phrase "That's impossible!" Usually it's said fairly aggressively, something like, "I'm going to straighten you out here...that's impossible!" Reality is? We all fully recognize that there are things in our lives that are simply impossible and we don't really need to be schooled on that! I could have aspirations for making the PGA and making a living hitting the little-dimpled-white-ball around the green grass for prize money, but I think we all know I'd starve...because in my life, that's impossible! I could practice and practice and practice-some-more, but we'd all collectively say, that's impossible! Truth is, to begin with, at my age, it's an "old dog-new tricks" situation. Let me say it this way, I'm not physically capable of playing on the PGA at my age. Far more importantly, I don't have the skill-set or abundant talent needed in order to be able to play professional golf. And of course, ask anyone who has played golf with me "Could Joe make it on the PGA?" and I guarantee you they'll give you a resounding "Yeah...No...Not happening!" And all of that is just me and my particular life and my particular limitations. You know that all of us could make a list of things that are simply, impossible for us to do. Jesus gets at this very subject in our text, but He gets at spiritual impossibilities and spiritual impossibilities for every man, woman and child. Of course, now that you have read this text twice you know why the subject of "impossibilities" came up. Our "rich young man" gave a parting performance that moved Jesus to say "'How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, '*Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!*'" *Mark 10:23,24*. Jesus reminds us of the spiritual status of rich young man by reminding us that those that "have wealth" are sometimes better said to be "had by their wealth." Jesus reminds us that the rich young man was more in love with

his riches than he was with the Lord of his riches. Notice however, here in Mark, we're told that Jesus added something else to the lament about the wealthy. Jesus also said, "*Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!*" Jesus definitely ups-the-ante on the discussion of the "impossibility" of salvation! He moves from those human beings who are overtaken by their wealth, to every single human being period. Notice what Jesus said again "*Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!*" Please hear that statement my friend. When it comes to salvation we can say unequivocally that for every single human being, salvation is in fact not just difficult, but impossible! By yourself you'll never be saved...not now, not ever! And when you hear that, it can make the stoutest Christian take pause and wonder about their salvation... "If it's impossible... am I in or not?" But we all need to recognize that Jesus makes an important qualifier to this "impossible" discussion. We're told: "*Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God'*" Mark 10:27. How wonderful are those words? "*For all things are possible with God.*" And as I think you understand, that sentence gets at the heart of salvation and at the soul and center of the Gospel message itself! Get yourself into heaven? Impossible! God getting you into heaven? Absolutely possible... because, as Jesus said it, "*all things are possible with God!*" And the proof of that statement is found in the Lord who spoke those words! Jesus knew all too well the impossibility of getting into heaven on your own and He came into our world for that very reason! Jesus came into our world in order that the "impossible" could be "made possible" through He who is God! His life, death and resurrection were certainly the seemingly "impossible" things that God provided in order that our "impossible" salvation might be secured! We know that our impossible salvation was made possible by the God who can do anything and chooses to love and forgive us through Christ. We therefore remember and rejoice that through Jesus the impossible becomes possible!

Day Thirty - April 5th Questions

“The Impossible Made Possible!”

Re-read Mark 10:17-27

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Thirty One - April 6th

“When it’s Okay to Hate”

Read Romans 12:9-21

I’m old enough to remember the days when saying that you “hate” something, or someone, would be quickly stopped and strongly corrected by our elders. Mama would in no way allow us to say those painful words “I hate you!”...that was met with swift and severe punishment in our household! In my Mama’s house, we’d never, ever get away with saying that we “hated” another human-being! But I recall Mama not even liking us to say the word “hate” at all. We weren’t allowed to say “I hate broccoli!” though more often with Mama it would have been “I hate liver!” since we were given liver once a week, like it, or not! We couldn’t say “I hate school” or “I hate practice” or for that matter, we couldn’t say “I hate...” anything! Hate was effectively a dirty word in our household. And while I have a whole lot to say about how we should adopt my Mama’s attitude about hate in 2022, I know there’s one thing Mama would have allowed us to hate and would’ve also allow us to say it outloud, namely, “I hate evil!” Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to write about the Christian faith this way: *“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” Romans 12:9.* “Abhor” as it is used here is actually a much stronger word than “hate” is. Granted, they basically mean the same thing but even in English you can tell the force of it, you can tell the intense-intent of it. To “abhor” something brings to mind something that tastes so bad that if you put it in your mouth, you’d spit it out immediately! To “abhor” something makes me think of a caustic odor that comes across your field-of-smell and causes you to quickly turn your head and cover your nose! Those are apt illustrations of what it means to “hate” or as the text actually reads, “abhor” evil. But my question for all of us is, “Do Christians in 2022 abhor evil like that?” We’d have to admit, and *unfortunately admit*, that for us as human beings, if you get used to a terrible tasting thing you’re actually able to tolerate putting it in your mouth. If you get used to a caustic smell,

you'll be far less inclined to turn your head or block your nose. And you know why I'm bringing that up, don't you? Let me not only remind you of our wicked, wicked world, but more to the point, remind you of the fact that we are accosted by it's foul taste and unbelievable stench so often that we've gotten used to it and aren't so likely to "abhor" it when it comes our way. We as Christian people need to regain our intolerance for the evil in our world! But in saying that, let me remind you of something else: Abhorring evil doesn't mean, more than that, never, ever means, abhorring or hating people. Remember what is perhaps the most famous biblical verse, one that both Christians and non-Christians alike know well: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*" *John 3:16*. Let me write that verse a little differently: "*God loved this evil, wicked, hateful, hurtful world so much... He sent His Son to love, forgive and bring mercy.*" We are called to "abhor" evil, but we're also called to remember that at one time we were "evil" in God's sight and yet, received mercy and grace and forgiveness through Jesus! In fact, one of the most amazing verses in the Bible reads this way: "*For our sake God made Him who knew no sin to be sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*" *2Corinthians 5:21*. Notice that the Lord God placed on the shoulders of Jesus all of the evil and wickedness of our world. On the cross Jesus didn't just die for our sins, He took in His body the penalty for our sins and as Paul writes it, became "sin" or per Romans 12, became "evil". God had to turn His face from Jesus, as Jesus would say it from Psalm 22, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" But in turning His face away from Jesus, He in fact turned His face towards us! Christ was forsaken and we were forgiven! Jesus took our "evil" and gave us His "righteousness!" Said another way: God hated our evil but loved us nonetheless and He proved His love for us in Christ. And that my Christian friend is what we're also called to do in this world...hate and love. We are called to hate sin and evil...but also called to love God by loving people every day!

Day Thirty One - April 6th Questions

“When it’s Okay to Hate”

Read Romans 12:9-21

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Thirty Two - April 7th
“Harmony is the Best Policy”
Re-read Romans 12:9-21

Over the course of my life and as a part of my ministry, I have been very fortunate to listen to some of the best musicians anywhere. I’ve had the privilege of hearing some amazingly talented people perform with either their voice or their given instrument and do so to the upper limits of their God given gift...some of the best of the best in the musical world, both in church and in other venues as well. I could tell you of amazing soloists who have made a song sound better than the original did. I could tell you of insanely talented instrumentalists who have single-handedly made a song come to life. Having said that, while those “soloist” moments are fantastic and inspiring, what I truly love, and I think most of us would agree, is when instrumentalists and/or vocalists are brought into sync to perform deep and rich music by blending together in what we would call “perfect harmony”. There’s just something about listening to voices or instruments, or both, together in lock-step. The blending of the sounds, the mixing of gifts, and the musicians working as one unit, all come together to make sweet sounding harmony. And so it is with our lives lived together...let me say that again...lived together...as Christian people. In fact, it could be said, that in the Church, “Harmony is the best policy!” although admittedly in the Church, honesty is also the best policy! Paul writes this about Christian harmony in our text: *“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight” Romans 12:16.* I realize that this sentence from Romans 12 seems bland on first look...almost like Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh is saying it: “live in harmony...oohh bother”. While the sentence seems benign at best, *“Live in harmony with one another”* is in fact absolutely crucial for us as Christian people and for our witness in this world. Living in harmony with other Christians needs to be taken seriously and lived furiously by every single Christian person because it is in fact, God’s will for us. Harmony, or Christians living in harmony, is at the heart and soul and center of Christ’s desires for His Church.

And more to the point, when Christians live in harmony with one another, it's an amazingly lovely "sound" that easily rivals the most beautifully harmonious music ever made! To begin with, Paul reminds us here that in order to live in harmony with one another we need to respect and honor the other Christian people God brings into our lives. Paul reminds us "do not be haughty", which simply means, "*do not be prideful*". And he writes that because prideful people refuse to live in harmony since they believe they are a "one-man-band" and somehow perform by themselves, above all the rest, rather than seeking to be part and parcel of the harmonious whole. In fact, Paul writes "*never be wise in your own sight*"...something prideful people actually excel at. Thankfully, Paul not only calls us to avoid prideful living but also gives an example of what setting aside your pride looks like. He quite simply writes: "associate with the lowly". Prideful people are focused on their solo-performance in life and care little for others. True Christians however, seek to live in relationship to God and in relationship with all of God's children. Christians live lives that are not only humble, but also prove that humility by linking with all the other people claiming Christ as their Lord and Savior. When we live that way, the "music" that we make is not only amazing to behold for the Church, but the world around us will see the Gospel message through the harmony we bring. Jesus said it this way in John 17: "*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me*" John 17:20,21. Notice that Jesus associates harmonious Christian living with our witness in this world. Think of it this way: In the same way we are attracted to beautifully harmonious music, the world will be attracted to the beautiful harmonious music shown through our lives lived together in Christ. Consider it today Christian, how are you living this verse? How are you living this truth in the Church? As you consider those questions, remember, in the Church, "Harmony is the Best Policy!"

Day Thirty Two - April 7th Questions

“Harmony is the Best Policy”

Re-read Romans 12:9-21

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Thirty Three - April 8th

“Eyes in the back of...”

Re-read Romans 12:9-21

Growing up in a large family was a wonderful experience for me and my sibs. While it had its challenges, there were so many positives to having almost a dozen brothers and sisters! We certainly had our fights and our difficulties, but we loved and watched over one another all the same. Having enough siblings to make up a football team would however, on first thought, seem to have been a major challenge for my mom as she managed our household day to day. Don't get me wrong, when you have a child that's almost twenty and one that's brand new out of the womb, and nine others in between those two, well, I think you know how hard that was for my mother! But though there are many things I admire about my mama, one of the more amazing things about her was that she was never, ever out of control. Overwhelmed? How could she not be? Out of control? Nope, not my mama, she always had a handle on what was going on. It seemed as though she had, as the saying goes, “eyes in the back of her head.” No one got away with anything. No one went undisciplined if they needed to be straightened out. She saw it all and she handled it all. And I think about her seemingly ubiquitous nature when I think about what the Lord wrote for us with these words: *“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’”* Romans 12:9. Because of the rampant evil in our world, we can sometimes think, and so we've also come to believe, that God is not even watching let alone in control. Since the wicked go from bad to worse and seem as though they are never disciplined or held to account, we can sometimes think to ourselves “God clearly isn't paying attention”. And so, with that sentiment, when someone does something to us that is

out-of-bounds, we feel like we have to take matters into our own hands and deal out the recompense ourselves. When we look around the wicked-world and begin to believe that the Lord is out of control, we think we need to take matters into our own hands when someone does us wrong. But the Lord is clear here. The Lord never allows us nor gives us permission to take matters into our own hands. He reminds us here that He's got a handle on the situation...all situations! He's got a handle on what's going on in the world and let's face it, it issues forth from the fact that He has "eyes in the back of His head" like no one else. He sees you....let me say that again...even though situations in our world make it seem contrary...He does see you! In saying that I'm also saying that He sees those that have hurt you by the way. He is indeed fully in control and He is also the one and only one allowed to bring judgment and discipline to people who are out of control (see James 4:11,12). So, what then are we called to do? How are we to handle evil people in our lives then? Well, we rest in His ubiquitous nature and rest in the fact that He sees you and sees it all. But with the judgment and the discipline being placed firmly in His capable hands, you then have the opportunity to simply forgive and love even enemies. Paul finishes out our reading this way: "*To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.'* Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" *Romans 12:20,21*. Leave it to the Lord and just let it go? Absolutely. Love my enemy instead of hating them? Yes. Overcome evil with good and not with more evil? Yes...plain and simple...yes. This is the way we are to live every single day as we follow Jesus into this world and love them in spite of themselves, just as Jesus did.

Day Thirty Three - April 8th Questions

“Eyes in the back of...”

Re-read Romans 12:9-21

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Thirty Four - April 9th

“Wise Fools”

Read 1Corinthians 1:18-31

One of the more hilarious designations for high school students comes in the name chosen for second year high school students. I'd like to meet whoever it was that decided the name because it fits so well. The name? A second year high school student gets the thoughtfully prepared title of “sophomore”. Growing up I never thought a thing about it...they're just “sophomores”, what we've always called them. Even when I was a sophomore I didn't think about the title at all, I just was one. But looking back on those days I think the title is aptly chosen. What does the word “sophomore” mean? It means “wise-fool”. The first half of the word or “sopho” is from the Greek word “sophos” which means wise or clever and the second half is also Greek but from the word “moros” from which we get “moron”...nice term. Is a sophomore a “wise-fool” or both “wise” and “foolish”? Yeppers...they generally are! But before we have a good laugh at their expense, let me remind you, “sophomore” describes every single Christian. We're “sophomores” because of our faith and faith-lives lived in this world! Paul writes it this way in our text: *“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” 1Corinthians 1:21-24.* We are certainly considered to be “foolish” when our faith is judged by the so-called “wisdom” of this world. We're thought foolish because we have the audacity to believe in God period...right? In our day and time it's not thought of well to be a person of absolute faith and trust in the existence of the God of the Universe. More than that however, we believe that God came to earth in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ! We believe Jesus died for our sins in a grueling six hour period as He not only was beaten senseless and murdered cruelly, but also received in His person the due penalty for our sin from

God the Father. We believe the Bible is the word of God and gives us what we need most, the Gospel message and salvation in Jesus' name. So indeed, many people will consider us "foolish" and "foolish" at the very core of our existence! Fortunately, popular opinion about who we are and what we believe doesn't win the day. We are indeed not just "moros" or "morons" as the world would portray us, but we are also "sophos" or wise as well. Better said we are "sophomores" in and through our faith! While we aren't defined by what the world thinks of us but rather what God thinks of us...our faith is foolish because the Gospel is so contrary to the way human beings think. God did it all for me? I don't have to pay the debt I owe to Him? I'm forgiven and I'm free? Yes, we are! And because of our faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God considers us very wise indeed! Paul writes it this way: *"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong"* 1 Corinthians 1:26, 27. We have not only found the one, true faith on earth, but when the Holy Spirit pressed the Gospel on our hearts through His indwelling presence, we submitted to His will and willingly received Him, gladly believing in Jesus! That's the true definition of wisdom indeed...trusting in God to be sure, but trusting in God for our eternity through His free gift given in and through the Lord Jesus! We trust in God, even though the Gospel is sometimes thought foolishness, and as we do, we are indeed also very wise, and therefore the textbook definition of a "wise fool". Thank you Jesus for making me a "sophomore", and I'll be a "wise fool" for you all the days of my life! Amen?

Day Thirty Four - April 9th Questions

“Wise Fools”

Read 1Corinthians 1:18-31

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Sunday Devotion—April 10th—Sundays in Lent are celebrations of the Resurrection and as such are not included in the devotions for Lent. Our theme for this weekend is “Follow Me to Humility” and our theme is driven from...Philippians 2:1-11 and Luke 19:28-40. Consider the theme and read ahead to further bless your worship experience!

Day Thirty Five - April 11th

“Where’s the Boasting?”

Re-read 1Corinthians 1:18-31

The other night I was leading a section of the Stephen’s Ministry Training, which is a system for raising up lay women and men to come alongside our members and be a caring person and a listening ear. Stephen’s Ministry is fantastic because it assists the pastors in ministering to the congregation and in a congregation our size, we pastors need all the help we can get. That night I came in to speak about the import of keeping confidentiality, but part of the exercise was to talk about the “first visit” they would experience with their care receivers. I reminded the caregivers in the room of a principle of counseling that they could apply to the listening-ear-ministry they bring, namely, people love to talk about themselves. Of course it’s what we in the “helping professions” want to do, getting people to talk about themselves that is, but talking about ourselves is also a part of our sinful human nature too. Regardless of who we are: extrovert or introvert; popular or wall-flower; employer or employee; no matter what your role, life, or experience...we all have a habit of wanting people to pay attention to us. The way that we often get that attention is to boast about who we are and what we’ve done. Sometimes the boasting is in fact, inflated reality. Sometimes the boasting is straight fact and based in reality. Either way however, it’s an attempt to get people to give us credit for whatever it is. And so here enters our Christian faith and a different way of doing things. Paul writes this in our text: *“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” 1Corinthians 1:31*. This sentence from the Bible is truth but it is also so contra to how we think. We want to talk about ourselves and point to ourselves and highlight ourselves but in our text Paul says, “Yeah, no...sorry...you didn’t bring anything to the table, it’s all God from the first to the last.” And I would suggest that what is true about our salvation is also true about every

aspect of our lives. Clearly, I don't know any Christian that would say "I know that Jesus lived, died and rose again for me...but I think I had something to do with being forgiven and being allowed into heaven!" No true-Christian would claim any part of Christ's finished work at the cross and the grave as done by themselves and not solely and wholly by Him. No true-Christian would believe that in any way heaven was theirs because of who they were or what they've done. But I'd suggest that while that's the plain reading of our 1Corinthians text, we can extend this "no boast zone" much farther! Let me give you an illustration of this from my own life. Every year about this time I put in my flowers, in late April that is. I put them in the front and in the back, in pots and in the ground. By mid-summer I have an amazing array of incredibly healthy and drop-dead-beautiful flowers in my yard. Ask anyone who has seen my garden, they will attest to the "green thumb" rule in my case. But when asked about my garden and flowers...my response? Every year I say something like this: "Oh please, I water and fertilize them but the Lord gave me the water and gave me the fertilizer too...and the dirt...and the flowers...and the sunlight...and the bees...and the butterflies...and, to the point, He also gave me the growth!" I rattle that speech pretty much every year. I can't take credit for what anyone has done, let alone what God has done for me. I won't take credit, I won't boast. You see Christian, He indeed gave me everlasting, never-ending life in Jesus...therefore, I will boast in the Lord and not in myself! But He also gave me life and breath and work and career and family and food and shelter and...and...and...right? Therefore, I will boast in the Lord in everything! Who I am as a Christian screams "All glory to God!" Who I am as a human-being also screams out "All glory to God!" Where is the boasting? Paul gave us the best answer of all: *"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" 1Corinthians 1:31. Amen?*

Day Thirty Five - April 11th Questions

“Where’s the Boasting?”

Re-read 1Corinthians 1:18-31

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Thirty Six - April 12th

“You’re Weak!”

Read 1Corinthians 2:1-5/Ephesians 6:10

I grew up in a family that valued strength and athleticism. I was one among a cadre of very strong, very athletic brothers. Being an athlete was a treasured part of our family’s identity, particularly for the boys. In fact, in our family, we generally all participated every season, in football, wrestling and track when we were in high school. Some of us also played sports outside of school. We played baseball and participated in other sports like fishing, hunting, archery, downhill skiing and golf. We not only valued athletics themselves, but as mentioned, we also valued what it took to participate in three to eight sports every year. We valued strength, and so weakness was seen as, well, weak. As you’ve likely heard me say, I’m the runt of the litter, the smallest boy of the multitude of brothers in my family, and I think you know, I’m no small guy. Said again: We valued strength. Of course all this started at the top because my strapping father was the generator of our size, athletic abilities and strength. He was a giant of a man and was both a football player and boxer in the Air Force during the Korean War. And I tell you all of that to say, we were a group of very big, very strong males and along with our father, we valued strength but on the flip-side were repulsed by weakness. Knowing what I now know about our Christian faith...I wish I had my childhood back in order to speak some truth about “weakness” into our gang of very “strong” men. Let me say it this way: Knowing what I know about our Christian faith today, if my brothers would have chided me back then saying “You’re weak!” I would have simply responded “Why thank you! That’s the goal!” You heard me right...weakness is the goal of Christianity. Oh, don’t get me wrong, in our Christian existence the Lord does equip

us to be strong in this world. He's come to us, made His dwelling inside us, and given us the strength we need to go about our lives as Christians living in the world in order that we can remain strong for Him and His Kingdom. In fact, Paul writes those in Ephesians six: *"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might"* Ephesians 6:10. But that verse reminds us where our strength lies. That verse reminds us that our strength lies in the Lord and not in ourselves. The opposite is then true about how we view ourselves, and our faith-lives lived in this world. Paul writes in our text: *"I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling..."* 1Corinthians 2:3. What human being, what man, admits to being weak, fearful, and trembling? Christian men do! Christian women and children do too! We come to the Lord with empty hands, starving, and naked. We don't come to Him with our strength and in the power of our own hands, but we come to Him recognizing that when it comes to our faith, we don't bring anything to the table whatsoever! Let me remind again of the words of Ephesians 6:10 *"Be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might!"* We bring weakness and He gives us His strength. We come to Him with empty hands and He fills them up! We come to Him starving and He fixes us up! We come to Him in nakedness and He dresses us up! We come in weakness and yes, in turn, He provides us His strength! And remember, His strength is given to us every day, not just when we are saved. Every day we come to Him and recognizing our weaknesses, sins, doubts and difficulties, He honors our humility and gives us exactly what we need in Him. It's all about Him and all given through Him as well. So, let me remind you *"You're Weak!"* ...and you can now respond to me, "Well thank you! Yes, yes I am! I am weak...but He is strong!"

Day Thirty Six - April 12th Questions

“You’re Weak!”

Read 1Corinthians 2:1-5/Ephesians 6:10

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Thirty Seven - April 13th

“Rags to Riches”

Read 2Corinthians 8:9/Revelation 21:19-21

We love to hear of stories where a person has gone from being poor to becoming wealthy. We love it when someone makes it big and is able to move past the poverty they were born into or brought into by circumstance. Maybe a wind-fall comes their way. Maybe a family inheritance is given to them. Maybe they get promoted big or hit the lottery large. Whatever it is, we are glad to hear that someone is doing well and has been, in whatever way, been pulled out of financial stressors and concerns. Of course, we secretly, and sometimes not so secretly, wish it were us making it big; wishing we could go past hearing about others being so blessed and personally experience a “rags to riches” story of our own! And yet, as a Christian man or woman, you need to remember that you have experienced that very thing in and through the Lord Jesus! Blessed? You are. Inheritance? It’s yours. “Rags to riches”? That is, in fact, your story! Consider for a moment, the amazing inheritance that awaits us in heaven itself! We might be struggling financially, we might be doing just fine, or we might be living somewhere in between, but all of us have an extraordinarily “wealthy” future ahead of us through our faith in Jesus! In Revelation 21 Heaven is described in amazing terms...very priceless terms mind you. Heaven is sketched out as what can best be described as “bejeweled”. John writes it this way: *“The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chryso-prase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent*

*glass” Revelation 21:19-21. Amazing, right? Beyond all possible thought, right? We of course know those words are only illustrative-images to help us understand how amazing heaven is. We know the scenic look into heaven that John was given simply reminds us of how precious and “valuable” heaven is for us. Nonetheless, we also know that in Christ, though we may be wearing the “rags” of sin, we’ve also been given the “riches” of heaven! We are indeed living Paul’s words from 2Corinthians 8:9: *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”* By God’s grace and through our Lord Jesus, you and I have been made “rich” and become inheritors of heaven itself! We are living a “rags to riches” story in and through Jesus! In saying that, we do need to open our eyes to the price that was paid for the riches of heaven to be brought our way. Notice not just what Paul says about you here, but also what he writes about Jesus. Notice what Jesus did. Notice what Jesus did... for you. Paul reminds us that He took on our rags so that we could have His riches! He took on the poverty of our sin so that we could be given the wealth of heaven! Said according to our theme, Christ went from “riches to rags”, coming from heaven to earth, so that we could inherit and be blessed with a “rags to riches” story in His name! A fact and a truth, that we cannot fully understand but we can indeed genuinely celebrate every day! A fact and a truth that we can celebrate this week as we remember, in detail, what Christ has done for us. This Holy Week you should listen closely to hear with fresh ears just how much the Lord loved you! This Holy Week you should tune in closely to the amazing truth of Christ’s sacrifice for you! And as you do, remember and celebrate again and again, that this “rags to riches” story is yours, as well as, yours to tell, every single day, until that day you see Jesus face to face!*

Day Thirty Seven - April 13th Questions

“Rags to Riches”

Read 2Corinthians 8:9/Revelation 21:19-21

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

Day Thirty Eight - April 14th
“Maundy Thursday”
Read John 13:1-17

On this solemn and holy day, in preparation for attending worship, read the John 13 text above and consider what Christ has done for you in and through faith and baptism into His name. Answer these questions:

What does it mean that Jesus has “washed” my feet?

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What difference does Christ's "foot washing" make in my every day life?

Whose "feet" will I "wash" this week and throughout the rest of the year?

Day Thirty Nine - April 15th

“Good Friday”

Read Matthew 27:45-56

On this solemn and holy day, in preparation for attending worship, read the Matthew 27 reading above and consider the depth of Christ’s love for you as seen at the cross. Between the hours of 9am and 3pm on this day, when Jesus hung on the cross, stop at each hour and not only thank the Lord for His mercy and grace, but additionally, pray for someone you know who has yet to hear and believe in the cross of Jesus. Take time now to answer these questions:

If you had to tell someone what Jesus did for you, how would you describe it to them? What illustrations or personal stories would you use to best help them understand?

Do you think you'd have been one of the doubters, or would you have been one to claim "surely this was the Son of God"? Why did you answer the way you did?

Why do you think the curtain of the Temple was torn in two and what does it have to do with Christ's death? Why do you think the tombs opened up and are the two connected?

Day Forty - April 16th Holy Saturday

“Is this even a thing?”

Read Matthew 27:57-66

Every now and again, I will hear people say “Is this even a thing?” What they are getting at is that something is so unusual and so out of the norm that they are questioning its validity. You might be all-in on something, even approaching being a “salesman” for that something, but if someone doesn’t understand it, they might just respond “Is this even a thing?” You think it is, but your friends, your family, those around you...don’t. I experienced that my first year at Gloria Dei. When I found out that we had services on Saturday of Holy Week, I automatically went into theologian mode...never a good idea when you’re new by the way. My heart was not especially keen to the idea, that on the Saturday before Easter, we’d be saying “He is Risen!” “He is Risen Indeed!” in what felt like was a violation of our Holy Week. You can’t say “He is Risen” on Holy Saturday, it just doesn’t work! The resurrection hasn’t happened yet! Jesus is still dead and wrapped and tightly bound behind the big rock they rolled in front. It’s Holy Saturday, not Easter Sunday, after all! If we have a worship service, it should be about His entombment, not His Resurrection! Okay...“Joe Theologian”...settle down and relax! While I had those feelings, I had to admit, we are children of the Resurrection and can say “He is Risen!” on Good Friday if we want to! We don’t have to wait till the day of Easter to proclaim the truth of Jesus conquering death. Easter Services on the Saturday before are fine and with our system, they are more than fine, they are absolutely necessary! I learned my lesson the hard way that first year as I attempted and failed to bring a hybrid service of Holy Saturday..Jesus is still in the tomb...to Easter (Saturday)

Sunday...and Jesus is resurrected. Didn't go so well. Having said and admitted all of that, I do want to take a moment to remind you here, just how important Holy Saturday actually is. If the question about this solemn and holy day is met with "Is this even a thing?", the question itself is met with "Yes, Holy Saturday is a 'thing', a very important 'thing' at that!" Remember Christian, Jesus stayed in the tomb intentionally! The debt was paid. The deed was done. All that remained was for Him to conquer death and the grave...the amount of days in the tomb mattered not. He could have risen Saturday morning...He could have risen late Friday night...but Jesus stayed put. Why? Well, take note that He stayed in the tomb all Sabbath. Sabbath is from sun down Friday to sun down Saturday. Sabbath also means rest, and Jesus did just that. Think of this: He rested after the creation of the world and He rested after He re-created of the world too! But there's something else, something equally important. We get at the import of this event in the funeral services. We say this "by your rest in the tomb you sanctify the graves of your saints". Isn't that a beautiful truth? Christ's rest in the tomb links Him with us, even in death, or more to the point, even in the tomb. Jesus is with us in every way and every day. Jesus is with us no matter what. When the body He created for us gives out, we indeed are with Jesus immediately as 2Corinthians 5:6-8 tells us. But as Jesus laid in the tomb waiting for resurrection day, we wait in the tomb as He did, waiting our resurrection day and the reuniting of our souls He gave us with the bodies He created for us. As the Lord did on Holy Saturday into Easter Sunday, so will be done for us by the power that Christ's death and resurrection brings! So is Holy Saturday "a thing"? Indeed, a marvelous, amazing, beautifully wonderful "thing" indeed!

Day Forty - April 16th Holy Saturday Questions

“Is this even a thing?”

Read Matthew 27:57-66

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?



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