



THE LAST
Week
Part Two

“The Last Week, Part Two”

A Lent Devotion written by Pastor Joe Meyer

Friday, March 8th
“Eye on the Prize”
Read Matthew 24:1,2

As I write this particular devotion, I'm in Virginia for the funeral of my eldest brother, Mike. Mike was just seventy years old when he passed but he suffered physically and did so from a variety of things. He was hunched over from a long list of back surgeries, thirteen in all. He also then had to use a walker to get around because he was so unstable and unable to straighten. And because his torso was stooped, his lungs were compressed and his heart was cramped, which certainly made everything worse. Before his passing in late January of this year, Michael was a mere shadow of his former self. I say that because Mike was a marathon runner, qualifying and running in some of the more prestigious marathons in the United States. His daily training runs would frankly be way more than most could handle...definitely way more than his younger brother Joe could handle! Most of his life, his physique was fine-tuned, and his physical abilities were far beyond the average American male. Until they were not. He wasn't old but he wasn't young either, and so that, combined with the multitude of extenuating circumstances, took Mike from a ripped, healthy, elite athlete, to a crumpled, bedraggled human being, and did so far before his time. Ultimately then, it would lead to what I think we'd all say is an “early death” at just seventy years old.

Now, I bring that to you because we all need to take stock of our lives and the brevity of our lives as well. The Bible is clear, our life is but a “mist” (James 4:14), and every single day that passes we are another day closer to that day we'll “cross the finish line,” that day we will then come face to face with our Redeemer, Savior and Lord. Let me say it this way: This world and our lives are fleeting and brief, they will all crumble and pass and yes, perish with time. Short or long, everything we have and everything we are in this world, will someday be done and done and we will then be in the one and only permanent place, in heaven forever with our Lord!

Jesus gives us a way of looking at that truth through our Gospel reading for today's devotion. Matthew writes this: *“Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, ‘You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not*

be thrown down.” I’ve always found this interchange with the disciples to be hilarious. After all, what they were saying to Jesus about the buildings to Jesus was completely ridiculous. Jesus, the Lord of Glory, the King of the Universe, the Creator of all that is, is standing there with them and they are pointing to the puny little buildings and how “magnificent” those buildings are? It’s ridiculous for them to have done so because Jesus is not only quite aware of the buildings Himself, but more than that, man-made buildings aren’t exactly amazing in comparison to the Lord of Glory who spoke a word and put this Universe into place! Jesus spoke a word and trillions of galaxies came into being! So, when He knows every inch of the Universe we live in, do you really think the insignificant little buildings that we human beings have erected would cause Jesus to say “Wow! Look at that!”? Do you think Jesus would marvel at an itsy-bitsy little stone structure when He knows the height and breadth and width of this crazy amazing Universe we call home? Let me answer for you...no, no He wouldn’t! He wouldn’t be amazed at all.

But more than that, Jesus, so to speak, kept His eye on the prize. What I mean by that is that Jesus didn’t even think this Universe was all that big of a deal, let alone the meager buildings in the Holy City. Indeed He knows all of the quadrillions of stars that are out there and even knows them all by name (check Isaiah forty when you get a chance). But He also knows that all of this His creation...all the buildings and land and space...all of this Universe...will at some point be gone and gone, done and done. He knew that the buildings He was looking at in that moment with the twelve disciples would be destroyed and that the destruction would happen in A.D. 70, not too many years after this conversation took place. But He also knew that every single bit of this amazing creation that we marvel at and say “wow” over, will one day all be gone, done, completely destroyed and taken away.

So, His eye was on the one and only true prize...that is, His eye was always on the prize of heaven itself, won for us through His death and resurrection. Indeed, His presence in our world was intended to secure for us an eternal home, a permanent home, one where “moth and rust cannot destroy” (see Matthew 6:19-21). He came to secure that permanent place for us! He came to give us an eternity in Heaven itself with Him!

And through that gift of everlasting and yes, never-ending life, He also then came to call us to keep our eyes on that same true prize! He came to give us a permanent home and He came to cause us to fix our eyes on that wonderful

prize every single day we live in this fleeting and flying and dying place. In fact, that's what gets us through times like my family is going through right now. To be sure, my brother is gone, his life on earth, his "race", is finished and done. But my brother is not gone or finished nor done! My brother Mike isn't dead...he's quite alive today, more alive than he's ever, ever been! He's standing upright! He needs no walkers, no help, no assistance whatsoever! He's not just physically fit...he's physically perfect! Will we miss him? Yes! Will we mourn him? Of course! But as we keep our eye on the prize that Christ won for Mike, we also keep our eye on the prize Christ won for me and for you, and we do so every day till we join Mike and all Christians in that truly prized place...in heaven itself forever!



Saturday, March 9th
“Live Like it’s Tomorrow”
Read Matthew 24:3-9

If you’ve ever been a student, and that would be pretty much all of us, you know that there are times when you ignore the end-of-term project or final exam because you know it’s just simply “so far away.” You are given the syllabus at the beginning of the term and told about the end of the year assignment or concluding test, but it just seems a little unnecessary to get too worked up about it in the initial days of the class. In fact, if you’ve ever gone through the semester or quarter system, you’d have to admit that you really didn’t prepare all that well until the project or the test was right there upon you, just the next day. Some wait til the last minute because they claim to be “better under pressure.” Understandably, some just get consumed with the every day “stuff” and the end of the class seems to sneak up on them and all of a sudden, there it is. Whatever the reason, very few of us are prepping all along the way, prepping every day, for the eventual end of the term.

Of course, that’s really not all that big of a deal since it is just a class after all, but what about being prepared right away, right now, for the end of time or the Second Coming? To keep with the illustration, Jesus has given us the “syllabus” and we know that the end is indeed coming and yes, coming soon. Jesus tells us what it will look like leading up to the Second Coming, that there will be signs marking the arrival of the end of time and His return. Those signs will be posted all along the way advertising the eventual end. Jesus says it this way: *“For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”* Matthew 24:5-8. Take note that Jesus gives us here the sign-posts of the end, markers of the eventuality of the consummation of creation and all that we hold dear.

But what do we do with all of that? What do we do besides saying “Sure seems like the end is just around the corner!” I guess I’d ask you, knowing all these things are the “beginnings” of the birth pangs, are you pre-

pared now for the end that is will eventually and perhaps, suddenly, come your way? Are you ready for it to happen? Are you heeding Jesus' warning and getting your affairs in order? Luther said it this way: "Live and preach as if Jesus died yesterday, rose today, and...is coming back tomorrow." So, do you "live and preach" as if Jesus died yesterday, rose today and... is coming back tomorrow? Or do you live as if it just far, far away and go about your every day life with little thought to what that means for you?

Just in case you're not sure where you're at, let me remind you what it means to be "ready" for His Second Coming. Remember that Christ spoke the words of our text in the last week of His life and ministry on earth. Let me say that a little differently: He spoke these words about His Second Coming when He was about to die for your sins and rise again for your justification. In doing that "cross and grave duty", He provided you with everything you need to be ready for His Second Coming. Living like it's tomorrow is centered in your redeemed status with Jesus!

Indeed, Jesus wants you to "*deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him*" (Matthew 16). Indeed, He wants you to love Him with "*all of your heart, mind, soul and strength*" (Luke 10:27). But in order for you to truly be ready for Christ's return you simply need to trust that He was crucified for you; trust that He rose again for you; and trust that He's returning for you too. 1John 5:13 reads this way: "*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.*" When you know that you have eternal life, you do live as if He died yesterday, rose today and will return tomorrow! When you know that you have eternal life you willingly push aside the things of this world and look forward to exiting this world for the place where Jesus is. Notice what 1Thessalonians 5:1-5 says about us who are Christians: "*Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.*" Live like it's tomorrow? You already do because you live in and through Jesus! You are not in darkness! You won't be surprised! You are a child of the light and as such you are living each day as if tomorrow was the day Jesus will return!

Please note, Sundays are a Celebration of the Resurrection and not a part of Lent. Therefore, there will not be a devotion tomorrow.



Monday, March 11th
“Being Prepared”
Read Matthew 25:1-12

I think most people like to feel prepared for whatever it is that they might be encountering in the moment. If you're going to work, you'd like to know how the commute will be so you check the local news or consult the Weather Channel app. If your child is involved in an extra-curricular activity, you'll track down the leader and get the ins and outs of what your child's involvement will cost you, monetarily and otherwise. If you go for a job interview, you'll want to see the job description so that you know what the job would entail should you land it. And I could go on and on with such things as...going on a trip; taking retirement; engaging in a volunteer opportunity; serving on a board or committee...all in all, we like being prepared.

Well, as we explored yesterday, of all the things you need to make sure you're prepared for, the Second Coming would top the list! I'm confident in saying that there isn't a person who is reading this that would say that preparation for Christ's return isn't important. Why do you think people get so wound up about cataclysmic events in our world, especially when those cataclysmic events appear to be pointing to the Second Coming itself. In fact, you've likely heard me say that right after 9/11 happened, our churches and Bible studies were packed to the brim and were so for months! Why? Well, to be sure, people were afraid. People sought God because they were afraid of what was coming on our country and possibly on our world. But most folks I've spoken to have said they felt as if it was “the end of time!” People were scared... they saw what they thought were end times “things” coming to pass and so, they ran to their churches to find out how to be prepared. When the things in our country and world seem to be flying out of control, people presume that the Second Coming is imminent and therefore want to be prepped to be received by Christ in the moment.

I bring it up of course because our text, with the parable of the ten virgins, gets at that very preparation for Christ's return. In truth however, while the parable indeed explains the need for preparation for the Second Coming, it does so in a seemingly cryptic way. The following explanation from gotquestions.org of the wedding tradition Jesus describes helps us understand better what Jesus was talking about: *“The ten virgins may be bridesmaids who have been*

assisting the bride; and they expect to meet the groom as he comes from the bride's house..." the groom, bride and bridesmaids would then join in on what was an after-sunset, evening processional, to the bridegrooms home that would then the bride and groom's home together.

With that historical background you then understand that since it was night-time when the processional happened, the ten virgins needed their lamps and needed them lit in order to greet the bridegroom properly. The ten virgins would have also needed an appropriate amount of oil in order to not only light their lamps, but to keep them lit as long as they needed them for the bridal-party-route. As you read in Jesus' parable, the foolish ones brought lamps but showed themselves truly foolish because they brought no oil for those lamps! In distinction then, the wise ones brought not only the lamps but also the oil to light but to also burn in the lamps, keeping them lit. Makes perfect sense to us from a practical standpoint...no oil...no light...might as well be no lamp either. However, oil in hand, oil in your lamp, you're prepared and ready to go! But how does "oil in the lamp" speak to preparation for the return of Christ?

Now, I won't go full on into the nuances of this story because I don't have enough space to do so, but I think you understand that the bridegroom is in fact Jesus. Therefore, the bridegroom coming to be greeted by these ten lamp-bearers is speaking of people meeting Jesus' at His Second Coming. So then the parable is a reminder that in order to be ready for the Second Coming you need...what? Well, you need "oil." What makes a person either prepared or unprepared for the Second Coming? What is it that the wise virgins had over against the unwise...what made them different? Oil. One had oil and one did not.

Well then, perhaps most importantly then, what is the "oil" for the lamps in this parable? If the oil is how we are prepared to meet the Bridegroom, to meet the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes, then what is the "oil"? Letting the Scriptures interpret the Scriptures we recognize that having "oil" for our "lamps" is just another way of speaking about having the Holy Spirit in our hearts, minds and souls. Oil in the Bible was used for "anointing" and the imagery of the anointing process gets at the idea of being given the Holy Spirit. The person anointing the priest or king would pour the oil over their heads. The oil is coming "from above" and is covering, perhaps even saturating, the person being anointed. You get the idea...from above, the Holy Spirit covers and even saturates us, filling us with His saving presence. So prepa-

ration for the Second Coming means having the Holy Spirit within or said another way...simply being a Christian!

Notice then how Paul describes Christians found in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”* Notice that when referring to Christians Paul speaks of “the oil” by saying that our bodies are “a temple of the Holy Spirit within...”. Said another way, we have the “oil” of the Holy Spirit in the vessels of our bodies. But how did that happen? How did we get access to the preparation for the Second Coming? This is what takes us right back to Lent yet again, as Paul writes it: *“you are not your own, you were bought with a price.”* The price Christ paid at the cross was paid in order to “buy the oil” that fills our bodies and saves our souls! The price was paid so that we could indeed have the “oil” of the Holy Spirit within and then indeed, be prepared for That Day, the day of Christ’s return, the day when the Bridegroom comes to call us all home to Himself!



Tuesday, March 12th
“Why this Parable...Why Now?”
Read Matthew 25:31-46

As I've titled this devotional booklet and been saying all the way throughout, this set of forty devotions is drawn from the teachings and events of "The Last Week" of Jesus' earthly ministry. All of these devotions are written based on the texts that were recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but all of them bring us the events that happened during the last week of Christ's work in our world. They all cover just the time between Palm Sunday and Easter. So, I want to ask you, as you read what happened and furthermore consider what you might have done if you were in Jesus' place...what would you want your followers to remember from that very last week of your life and ministry among them? What would you want them to carry close to their hearts as a result of your three years of mentor-work in their midst as you dotted the last "i" and crossed the last "t"? What would you want to say to them and leave with them and impress on them that would define your work and ministry, that would spell out clearly exactly what you came to do?

I ask the question because our text begs that question perhaps more than any other we've come across thus far. Of course this text is best known for being an "end of time" text and not a text about the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. Having said that, we often we read this text without giving a thought to the fact that it was indeed spoken and imparted during Holy Week. This reading from Matthew twenty-five is probably the most famous Gospel passage about the final judgment and is regularly used and preached by pastors all over the world, but I have yet to hear anyone remind us of when it was spoken. We're remind that some day Jesus is coming back and that that "some day" includes you and me, includes all of humanity, standing in front of Jesus and His throne and either being welcomed into heaven itself or...well...sent away from Him. End of time? Yes. Judgment Day? Yep. But it is in fact also a text about what Jesus came to do for us and also speaks into what He wants us, His disciples, to do through Him and in His name!

To begin with, His presence on our planet was to take us from our "goat" state as unbelievers and cause us to become "sheep" in the sheepfold of God! What an amazing way to look at what Jesus would call in John 3 "being born-again" or as some translations manage it "being born-anew". To be sure, you and I

are born into this world as “goats”. We are born into a broken world and as members of that broken world we are also outside the grace of God. As such we would stand before Him as “goats” and not “sheep” and would therefore stand with the crowd on the “left” and ultimately be sent away from Him forever. But through Christ and in Christ we are indeed “born again” or as Peter would write it in 1 Peter 1:3 “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*”. He caused us to become “sheep”, known by Him, hearing His voice clearly and yes, then following Him completely in this life and in this world (see John 10:27 for that).

But living life as His “sheep” and hearing His voice and following Him, isn’t just about our eternity, although it is that. Indeed, Christ came to bring us into His eternal sheep-pen and secured that for us in the last week of His earthly ministry and life. Having done that though, He calls us to be His sheep on earth every-single-day until that day that the Great Shepherd calls us home forever. Why did He speak this parable the last week of His earthly life and ministry? Because it’s a reminder that all of the amazing things that He did during His three years of ministry on earth would now be done by the sheep in His fold after He ascends into heaven! Jesus was concerned for the “hungry and thirsty” and proved it in the feeding of the five-thousand on one occasion and the feeding of the four-thousand on yet another! (See John six and Mark eight). He was concerned for “the stranger” such as the woman at the well in John four, the Samaritan leper in Luke seventeen, as well as the Syrophenician woman in Mark seven. He was concerned for the “naked” and the “sick” and the “imprisoned” as evidenced by the demoniac of the Gerasenes in Luke chapter eight and the countless infirmed people scattered throughout the entire region and throughout countless New Testament texts. In other words, Jesus was bringing this parable to His disciples at the end of His earthly ministry because He wanted His disciples to carry on what He was doing for three years among them! He Himself would be leaving, ascending on high just forty days after the resurrection, and so His disciples needed to hear Him say “This is what my sheep do...they act like me in this world!”

And my friends, 2000 years later, we continue the same ministry the Apostles and other disciples...the other sheep...started. We the sheep in God’s sheep-fold, willingly and joyfully carry on His ministry of care and concern as the Body of Christ on Earth and we do so to His glory and the good of His people! Paul wrote it this way in Philippians 2:3-4 “*Do nothing from selfish ambition*

or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” By His Holy Spirit and according to His will, may we be enabled to do that everyday until that day we all stand before His throne and are welcomed into the heavenly realm!



Wednesday, March 13th
“Because of the People”
Read Matthew 26:1-5

One of the biggest issues for us as human beings is that we like to be liked and love to be loved. We all want people to like us or even love us...which of course, in and of itself, is fine. The problem is, we'll do just about anything to attain that "highly favored" status in the hearts and minds of those around us. Sometimes people will accuse other people of being "people pleasers", but I would argue that the title "people pleaser" actually belongs to every human being ever born. To some degree or another we all want approval, and to be sure, for some it is a stronger need than for others, but for all of us collectively we have to admit that we want to please people and be liked and/or loved by them. Let me say it this way...while there are likely some people, there are seriously very few people in our world that enjoy being hated by others and opposed at every turn.

That seemingly innate need in all of us is problematic however. Doing things just to be liked or loved leads a person to doing things that simply are not right. True people pleasing moves you to punt your morals, eject your standards and go with what the "crowd" wants rather than what you know you should be doing or should have done. In fact, people pleasing for us as Christians is especially problematic because it can cause us to do things that are contrary to God's will, following the world and following the crowd, rather than following Jesus. Because of the people around us, we'll sometimes ignore the God who is within us!

Sadly, that's exactly what happened when it came to the death of Christ. Our text reminds us that the leadership of the Hebrew people of God were far more concerned about popular opinion than they were about doing what God wanted...these were the clergy of the day! Matthew writes this *“Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.’”* Matthew 26:3-5. They'd wait till after the Passover to kill Jesus because of the people. They'd do it by stealth because of the people. They'd do it behind closed doors because of the people. They were people pleasers at their core.

Now, in fairness, there were a lot of people in the city for Passover. Pilgrims literally came from all over the world to celebrate the holy festival. As such, doing something that the crowds didn't like wasn't just about popularity, it could have lethal consequences as the mass of people might just get out of hand and riot or worse.

But from other interchanges with the Jewish leadership we learn that they also had a need to please the people in order to keep their popularity, however low that popularity might have been at that moment. In Mark eleven the Gospel writer records a discussion Jesus had with these same leaders about John the Baptist. Mark tells us there that the leaders were weighing carefully how they should respond to Jesus based on what the crowds, based on what the people, thought. The people thought John to be legit, thought John to be a prophet from God, and he was very popular in that way. So if the leaders said to Jesus that he was not a prophet from God the people wouldn't like it one bit and might just revolt against them. Indeed, they were more concerned about pleasing the people than they were concerned about pleasing God! (See Mark 11:27-33).

Interestingly, though the leaders were concerned about the people rebelling and revolting, they went ahead with their plans to execute Jesus anyway. They would seek His life and yes, as we've discovered previously, they chose to kill Him during Passover anyway! Indeed, they were concerned about what the people wanted and were concerned about pleasing them, but as you know the story plays out...they pressed to get Him crucified and did so during the festival in spite of what might have happened with the people! Why did that happen that way? Why did the story play out that way?

The answer is in the title of this devotion "Because of the People." There's no question that the Jewish leaders were people pleasers and were doing or not doing things because of the people, but in this instance, they weren't actually in control of this situation at all. They thought they were but they were not. Jesus would be crucified during Passover because God wanted it that way. Jesus would hang on a cross during Passover because God was working in their midst. Jesus would die a horrific death because Jesus intended to go to the cross whether the leaders were people pleasers or not! But let me say it this way, Jesus died on the cross during Passover "because of the people." You see, God knew the hearts of all the people, leaders and lay-folk alike. God knew our sinful people pleasing ways (and all of their other sins as well) and

because of the sin of all people, God therefore sent His Son to the cross to die for our sins and stand in our place. His plan was to save...His plan was to redeem...His plan was in place and it was so “because of the people”...the people He loved so much! As we’ve read and heard dozens and dozens of times from John 3:16-17, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*” Thanks be to God, He indeed sent His Son because of the people...He sent His Son because of His love for His people, because of His love for you and me!



Thursday, March 14th
“A Teachable Moment”
Read Matthew 26:6-13

Teachers will vary in their preferred teaching styles. Teachers will vary in their approach to their subject and their discipline. For some, teaching is a matter of getting their students to process through, discuss and assimilate the materials for their course. For others, teaching is a matter of inculcation and memorization, getting their students to mentally maintain the facts and figures of their subjects. Essays for some, testing for others, teachers will vary depending on their philosophy and of course, their subject matter. Math is taught differently than literature and literature differently than social studies and so on.

But all true teachers share something in common which is found in the title of this devotion, namely, “teachable moments”. A true teacher not only cultivates and draws out teachable moments, but they will also look for a culmination of events that they can jump on to bring about a teachable moment. I presume you understand what I mean but let me make sure: A teachable moment is when circumstances come together for you as a teacher to get your students to inductively process a truth or fact based on those circumstances. Teachable moments have long-lasting effect because they generally have a real-life illustration attached to them, one that the students will long remember as their mind’s eye reminds them over and over again of the lesson.

Needless to say, “The Teacher”, the Lord Jesus, not only sought out but took full advantage of teachable moments...look back at the devotion for February twenty-first regarding the cursing of the fig tree for one such instance. But you can also look at our Gospel reading for today. This is the last week of Christ’s life and ministry on earth. He’s doing so many things as evidenced by all that we’ve looked at and encountered thus far. He has His mind set on the cross and all that will come with that. He has to be concerned about the coming judgment and coming torture as well. And yet, our wonderful Lord and Teacher takes time for a teachable moment. Jesus once again amazes us here with His singular focus on the things of God!

To be sure, one of the lessons that Jesus is teaching is found in His willingness to accept an invite for dinner from the man known as Simon the leper.

Simon is labeled “Simon the leper” for obvious reasons...not rocket-science here...he was a leper. But Matthew is making sure his readers don't think it's Simon Peter or one of the other countless Simon's they encountered or knew were part of Christ's entourage. Furthermore, Matthew is letting us know that Jesus was taking hold of a teachable moment as well. Although we are not told, we can indeed presume Jesus had healed this man Simon of his leprosy, and as a thank you, Simon had Jesus and the boys over for dinner. But take note that Jesus is teaching His disciples that this is what Christians do. Jesus is teaching the lesson that disciples of Jesus willingly take the time minister to people by spending time being present with them and for them. Let me say it this way: How important do you think a fellowship opportunity would have been to a man who had possibly spent years with no contact, no touch, no work, no family, no friends. I think we can say Simon the leper was craving dinner “together” at his house! And so Jesus teaches His disciples, and yes, teaches us, that we go out of our way and take time out of our busy schedules for those who need us to be present in the moment.

Having said that, there was another teachable moment here. Indeed, the disciples weren't wrong...the ointment being poured out was somewhat wasteful when it indeed could have been sold and the money given to the poor. They weren't wrong. And to make this situation seem a little stranger, Jesus says something odd, namely “*For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.*” Matthew 26:11. Wait, hang-on here Jesus, you taught these men to love people and especially the poor, the disenfranchised and the needy. How is it that you're being so nonchalant about the sermonette which we just read in Matthew 25:31-46? You said that it is your expectation that your disciples take care of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick and imprisoned? What gives here?

And the answer is? It was a teachable moment and Jesus wasn't going to let it pass.

Jesus in no way wants us to ignore the poor. Jesus is in no way was being flippant about their needs. He simply wanted to once again remind the disciples of the most important work of the Kingdom of God, His death for the “poor” of the entire world, His death for all humanity who were living in the “poverty” of sin. Notice what Jesus does here...He turns the discussion to His death on the cross saying “*In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.*” Matthew 26:12. The disciples didn't

know that's what this was about. The woman who poured the ointment nor Simon who hosted the party had any idea that this event would be used as a teachable moment regarding Christ's death. As we look back at it however, it's obvious that this was a teachable moment intended to remind them of the heart of the Gospel message, namely, that Jesus came to live among them, but more importantly, He came to die among them and for them as well. Simon did a beautiful thing by inviting Jesus as a thank you. The woman did a beautiful thing, also likely as a thank you to Jesus. But the invitation and the event was used by Christ as a teachable moment about the "beautiful thing" He would do just a few days later. And yes indeed, this was definitely a reminder that Jesus came to die for all the poor...for all the people born poor, born in the poverty of their sin! Paul would write it this way: *"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."* 2Corinthians 8:9.

Simon the leper. The sinful woman. The Lord Jesus. Wonderfully teachable moments for the disciples. Wonderfully teachable moments for us all!



Friday ,March 15th
“The Price for a Life”
Read Matthew 26:14-16

Regardless of your upbringing or your faith expression, we all hold that life is precious and would even go so far to say that life is priceless. While living in a sinful world there are always exceptions to that rule, in general, we all consider a life worth more than any amount of money. To be sure, we in the United States (and beyond) have a lot to learn about the precious nature of life, we nonetheless believe that life has ultimate value. While many human beings have sadly developed a double standard in regards to life by our acceptance of things like abortion and euthanasia, we nonetheless still all hold that life is precious. If you asked a person regardless of their particular bent “What is the price for a life?”, generally people will respond that’s it’s worth more than any amount of money in the entire world.

Apparently however, for Judas Iscariot, we find out that a life, and the life of a dear friend no less, is only worth thirty pieces of silver. While Judas was, from all time and eternity, fully expected to be the one to accept money for the life of Christ, nonetheless it really is amazing that he did what he did. After all, Judas had spent three years under the tutelage and leadership of the Lord Jesus. Judas had been given first-hand access and first-hand experience with all of the miracles of Jesus as well as Christ’s compassion for the hurting and the lonely and alone. Judas saw the love of Jesus on full display! Judas saw it all and the “all” that He saw had to have sparked, at the very least, some amount of admiration and love for Jesus and His message and His mission. I’d even argue that the fact that Judas took His life in the end meant that he understood just how amazing and wonderful Jesus was and that coins he was given weren’t just the life-price for the Messiah, but was actually blood money given for an innocent man.

But as the history of the New Testament tells us, Judas willingly took a ridiculously small amount of money in exchange for the Lord of Glory. More than that, Judas didn’t just accept the money, he actually sought out the Jewish leaders and sought out the money too. Let me remind you what the text says: *“Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an*

opportunity to betray him.” Matthew 26:14-16. Seems so sad, sick and wrong that Judas would be so completely depraved that he would willingly sell out the Lord of glory for next to nothing. Seems so sad, sick and wrong that the one and only, sinless Son of God would be killed for a small handful of coins!

Why would he view Christ’s life-price as so cheap? Why would he do this to Jesus? Well, remember that we do read in Luke 22 and John 13 that “satan entered him”. So there’s that. Judas was being controlled by satan directly and was therefore directed by him to sell Jesus out and we cannot underplay that truth. We’re not just talking about demon-possession here...satan himself is said to have entered him.

But as we explored earlier, there was way more to it than that because our Lord and God was fully in control regardless of satan’s intervention with Judas. You see, as we’ve learned already, by selling Jesus out, Judas did exactly what Jesus expected him to do, and furthermore did exactly what Jesus wanted him to do. In fact, the life-price that Judas took for Jesus was all about Jesus intending to go to the cross, or, as we could say it, about Him intending to pay the life-price but pay the life-price for us! Judas sold Jesus out because Jesus intended him to do so and all of that was centered in and focused on Jesus paying the price for our eternal life!

And how much is our life worth to Jesus? We know what Judas did but what did Jesus do? Surely we’re worth far less than Jesus, right? Well, not according to our Lord’s way of thinking. No, we were worth far more than thirty pieces of silver to Him, that’s for certain. Peter describes it to us this way: *“...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”* 1Peter 1:18,19. Ransomed! Bought back! Redeemed! And what was the life-price? Not silver. Not gold. No, something far more precious than anything this world has to offer! The life-price for His children, the life-price for humanity, was the precious blood of the only begotten Son of God, willingly and lovingly paid for us, by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!



Saturday, March 16th
“He Knows Your Future”
Read Luke 22:7-13; John 16:33

If you ask people what’s the thing they fear the most, the answers will certainly vary. Some might say something unique or even odd, like “mice” or “snakes” or “spiders”, something they rarely come across but nonetheless something that makes their skin crawl just at the thought of it. Some might say something far more common among all people like “being laid off” or “getting dementia” or “being diagnosed with Alzheimer’s” or “the death of a loved one”...those things we’ll all encounter in some way and are definitely frightening. As you know, when it comes to these kinds of questions, the answers are generally as varied as the people that you ask.

But there is something that we all together fear, something that brings, at the very least, deep concern...and that fear is the fear of the future. If I asked a person if they “fear their past”, most people will say no, “that’s just water under the bridge” and admit that even the “skeletons in their closet” don’t scare them all that much. If I asked a person if they “fear the present”, there will surely be some trepidation, but generally they are, in the moment, embracing their challenges and exercising some control over their difficulties. But if I asked a person “Do you fear the future?”, most people, if not all people, will almost immediately say “Yes!” In fact, it seems that fear of the future has been increasing of late. In the last three to four years I have heard so many people repeatedly saying that they are afraid of what the future will look like and what it will bring! They fear for the future of our country and our world. They fear for the future our kids and our grandkids will inherit. They fear for the future of all sorts of things because the future is that which they know nothing about, the thing they can’t see, the thing they can in no way, control.

So if that describes you, what do you do about that? How do you handle the fear of the future?

Well, let me simply remind you that there is Someone who not only knows your future but because He is omnipresent, He is also in your future and furthermore guards, governs and guides your future as well. While our text is about Holy Week and Passover, there are a few words imbedded in those verses from Luke twenty-two that we need to grasp-hold-of and be grasped by. Our

text reminds us that Jesus knows the future and does so, not as a prophet of God would, namely Him being given that information from God. No, Jesus knows the future because He is God and as such is the one who knows and owns and manages the future as well. Luke tells us that Jesus said *“Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.”* So the Lord tells them to make preparations but also tells them what they will encounter when they do and does so far before it even happens. Jesus tells them about the large upper room and that it would freely be given over to them for Passover. He saw a man carrying a jar of water and this is particularly intriguing because men didn’t carry water in that day and time, women did. There’s only one way Jesus would have known about all of that...He saw it before it ever came to be. He knew the future and yes, He did so because He is in the future and controls the future as only God Almighty can do. In fact, it’s not a surprise that Luke tells us this at the end of our section: *“And they went and found it just as he had told them...”* Of course they found it just the way He told them...they did because Jesus knows, controls and commands on the future.

Why is that important for you? Jesus said it this way about His work in our world: *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* John 16:33. Of course this gets at the work He performed on our behalf at the cross and the grave. He “overcame the world” by being overcome by our sin at the cross and overcoming the grave at His resurrection. His future was all about securing our future. Praise be to God, in Him we do have the peace He speaks of.

But notice what Jesus says here *“In the world you will have tribulation”* meaning trouble, trial and yes, “tribulation” are simply a for sure in your future. You will have tribulation means just what it says, not “you might” not “it’s a maybe” but instead, it’s a “gonna”! And what’s the answer to that? What’s the answer to a troublesome future? As Jesus said it, *“Take heart...I have overcome the world.”* And the unsaid said there? *“I have overcome the world...FOR YOU.”* Jesus who knows your future-world has overcome that future-world and all of its issues and done so for you! Jesus has overcome the world of your past, skeletons and all. Jesus has overcome the world of your

present, whether you have a handle on it right now or not. And if that's true, then Jesus has overcome the world of your future too! Your future is not only known by Him, but He has overcome it for you and will walk with you and walk with you through it too! As the saying goes, "We don't know what the future holds but we do know who holds the future!"

And remember most importantly then, Jesus, the one holding your future in His hands will indeed walk with you through your future on this planet...but... will also walk with you into your future with Him when you leave this planet as well!

Please note, Sundays are a Celebration of the Resurrection and not a part of Lent. Therefore, there will not be a devotion tomorrow.



Monday, March 18th
“Fellowshipping with God?”
Read Luke 22:14-23

Over the course of time we have all been witnesses to the fact that so many things have changed. Some things have changed just a little and some have changed radically. In my relatively short lifetime I’ve seen changes in many of the things we as Americans have long thought of as important. Our attitudes about dress codes have changed, e.g. ties are now fairly optional, even in church, and while some of the fashions are way too loose for me, I’m not sure losing the tie is such a bad thing! We used to work a forty hour work week, “workin’ nine to five” as Dolly sang it, but that seems to be no more, since in many sectors fifty and/or sixty hour work weeks are the expectation. What we spend our free-time on certainly has changed and in many ways has absolutely accelerated to the point where we’re often juggling fifteen “things” at once during the week. As a nation and as a people, our morals have certainly changed, and unfortunately, not for the better I might add. So many changes have come to pass, I could write many paragraphs about the subject.

Something that hasn’t changed however, is how much we value what used to be called “breaking bread together”. As a country and as a people, we still place a very high value on fellowshipping together and doing so around a meal. Think about what we do at the holidays! Think about how much emphasis is put on the gathering with family and gathering around food. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, the Super Bowl, Fourth of July...oh goodness, Groundhogs Day even...we’ll take just about any excuse to have intimate fellowship around food. In fact, my family is looking forward to the Paris Olympics because it’s our tradition that for opening ceremonies we gather together and eat the food of the host country! I know you’re thinking it, so let me answer you, “Nope”... escargot is a no go but I guarantee you the Meyer clan will be eating anything closely related to France and more importantly, we will be doing it together.

Now, I bring it all up because that’s exactly what we have in what is now called “The Eucharist” or “Holy Communion” or “The Lord’s Supper.” In the midst of the final Passover meal that the disciples prepared for and would eat with Jesus, we are told that Jesus gave us what we now celebrate week after week in the church through Communion. While what we eat in the Lord’s Supper can hardly be considered “a meal”, it nonetheless reminds us that the Lord

wants us to intimately fellowship with one another around His Holy Supper and do so regularly. The Lord instituted this just before He went to the cross and did so as a lasting reminder of His body given over to death and His blood spilled on our behalf. As we fellowship with one another around this “meal”, the unity and mutual support Christ wants for His Church is held sacred and kept central and indeed, kept long-lasting. (Look at what the early church did in this regard as recorded in Acts 2:42-47).

But what’s most important for us to remember about this supper is not the fellowship, unity or mutual support we have with one another, as important as that is. As vital as intimate fellowship with one another is for the health and well-being of the Church, we know that this meal is not just about fellowshiping with one another but amazingly, it’s also about fellowshiping with God! We’re told here in Luke 22:19-20 *“And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”* Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to write these words which define Communion even further: *“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?”* 1Corinthians 10:16. This text reminds us that in the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist or Holy Communion, we not only find fellowship with one another, but as Paul wrote it here we also find fellowship with God! The word rendered “participation” here is actually better rendered “intimate fellowship with”! When we commune together, we also commune with or have intimate fellowship with the very real presence of the Lord Jesus Himself through His body and blood given and shed for us and for our forgiveness.

And that should not be a surprise. We are after all, focusing on the last week of Christ’s life and ministry. And what what the last week of life and ministry all about for Jesus? Jesus was all about securing intimate and permanent fellowship with us His children by giving His life for us. Through Jesus and in Jesus, we are given that fellowship! And yes in and through the Lord’s Supper, we are blessed to have intimate fellowship with God Himself both now, and forevermore!



Tuesday, March 19th
“With You”
Read Matthew 26:26-29

When feeling challenged to read the Bible more often, particularly at the beginning of a New Year, many Christian people get excited about what’s called a “Read Through” plan. The “Read Through” plans give you a road map for reading through the entire Bible, usually in a year, by biting off what are often significant segments of Scripture. Sometimes there are multiple books of the Bible employed and the readings are then broken down into a Psalm segment, a New Testament segment and a Gospel segment each day. And please hear me say that I applaud the effort in the sense that when you do a “Read Through” you’re attempting to immerse yourself in God’s Word. I can guarantee you that regardless of how you approach it, being immersed in the Word will always have positive outcomes for your faith and for your life as well.

But the truth is, the best way to “read through” the Bible is not in large chunks, but is to do so in smaller bites, and do so slowly and meticulously. Of course to read through both “slowly” and “meticulously” requires that we look at much smaller segments of Scripture and study them intently, mining them for every bit of “gold” we can extract from them. To be honest, I’d rather that you read just a paragraph at a time and certainly never more than a chapter on any given day. Read every single word, and if you can, read them out loud. Read the words carefully, attempting to see their relationship to one another. Read the words slowly as you listen to the God-given meaning of the passage as a whole.

But why do I bring that up today? Well, if ever there was ever a passage of the Bible that could be considered an entire gold-mine of truth found in four short verses, it’s Matthew 26:26-29!

To begin with, we are what can be called “Sacramental Christians”. What I mean by that is that we take seriously what God’s Word says about the Sacraments, which are, for us, Baptism and Communion. We believe that in Baptism we receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38,39). We believe that in Baptism we are connected to the death and the resurrection of Jesus and are through Baptism enabled to walk in newness of

life as we follow our crucified and resurrected Lord (Romans 6:1-4). Notice what I did there though. I drew the statement of what we believe from what the Bible actually says about Baptism. I didn't just throw it out there, I gave you the reference as to why I'm "throwing it out there".

Clearly I bring it up because of what Jesus says here about the second of our two Sacraments, namely the Lord's Supper or Communion. Notice what Jesus says here *"Take, eat, this is my body" and "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."* The invitation is given by Christ to sinners *"Take and eat...take and drink"*. But the invitation includes definition as well. *"Take and eat...take and drink"* are both coupled with those amazing words *"This is my body"* and *"this is my blood"*. Slowing down and taking in the words of this passage remind us of what we believe, teach and confess about the Sacrament of the Altar, namely, Jesus gives us bread and wine but Jesus also offers us the forgiveness of sins through His body and blood, in, with and under the bread and the wine! (Page back to yesterday's devotion for more on that subject)

But I took you on this very brief "how to read the Bible tour" for a different reason than pointing out again our doctrine of the Lord's Supper today. When you slow down your reading with this particular passage you catch something that is both very odd and yet very, very important as well. Jesus says this in verse twenty-nine: *"I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* First of all, Jesus' words here lead us to begin to ask questions like "Will we eat and drink in heaven?" or "Will we have hunger or thirst in heaven?" Is that what Jesus is saying here? And as you know I always respond to that...yes we'll eat and drink in heaven...but it's always calorie-free Mexican food and it's always all day long!

But is that what Jesus is saying here? Is that what's most important? We don't know about food in heaven and we can't make a steadfast commentary one way or another based on this one passage. But again, there's something far more important here even though it's found in just two little words. Notice what Jesus said again: *"I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* Did you notice the underlined before I underlined it? What a promise! What a gift! Indeed His body and blood are certainly that, but what His body and blood does for us is secure our place with Him in His Father's kingdom! Is

there wine in heaven? I don't know...and this passage isn't clear enough to say. But what is absolutely crystal clear is that we can know that, wine or no wine, we will be there and we will be with Him! Jesus said to the sinners just like you and me assembled in the room that night, "with you in my Father's kingdom", and that "with you" extends to all sinners then, all who are saved by grace through His Word and His love, both now and yes, forevermore... with Him!

Slow down your reading Christian. Slow down so that you can bask in the wondrous truth that we will experience all of eternity, namely, God was with us so that we could be with God!



Wednesday, March 20th
“Reclining at the Table”
Read Luke 22:24-27

In the early 1990's I worked two jobs while I was a full-time student at the Seminary in St. Louis. Before you feel too sorry for me, I'm not only a guy who loves to work and work hard, but I genuinely loved the two jobs I had landed. The first one was working alongside a contractor remodeling homes as he updated them and flipped them. That job taught me serious skills, skills that I would then use over and over again in my own homes, saving us lots and lots of cash. I will be forever thankful to Victor my boss for all his patience and mentoring, I owe him big.

But it was my other job taught me even more and as well, taught me things beyond the skill-set of the job itself. My second income source was a catering job where I'd do just about everything from food-prep to set-up, from serving the meal to tending the bar. That job taught me some serious skills that then made entertaining at our home far more..well...far more entertaining! Let me put it this way, I am able to set up buffets and charcuteries and make them look like a pro put it together! (Robin will vouch for me here).

Having said that however, it was this catering job that also taught me a lot about how the world works. The people that we served were some of the most elite of our society as a whole, but certainly some of the most elite in St. Louis proper. In most instances, the people we set table for and brought meals to were not only extremely wealthy, but were also held in very high esteem in whatever field they happened to be a part of. They were the elite of the elite to be sure.

What I noticed about them however, and what taught me a deep lesson about how our world works, was how they treated the staff. Truth be told, in most instances, while they were friendly towards us, we the staff were irrelevant to the people that we served. It was almost as if they believed that the food magically appeared; that their drinks were filled and topped-off by themselves; that the plates, glasses, utensils and napkins just showed up for dinner and then were whisked away to be cleaned by tiny, little fairies ne'er to be seen again. For the most part, we were completely tangential to their very important existence. I never dared to do so, but I did wonder what would

happen if I simply sat down next to one of them at their parties. I wouldn't of course, I'm too polite for that, but what would happen if I sat down and told them to get up and serve me? Well, you know what would happen. You know I'd be looking for a new second job because I'd be fired on the spot! I simply didn't belong with them. I wasn't like them, I wasn't in their class of people. They certainly weren't going to get up and serve me because they were the elite of the elite, I was the lesser...they were extremely important and I was the extremely insignificant along with all of my other co-workers.

If you took the time to read our Gospel from Luke twenty-two and the last week of Christ's life and ministry, you know why I'm relaying this story to you. This narrative is such an amazingly beautiful text and one that gets at the heart of Lent, gets at the heart of why our Lord Jesus came into our world two-thousand years ago. Interestingly, it also gets at what I experienced years ago, speaking directly into my status in St. Louis. Luke tells us this about the situation with the disciples and Jesus and the story isn't exactly flattering for "the boys". Luke writes: "*A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors.'*" Luke 22:24,25. Take note that in the world of Jesus so long ago, people were just like they are today. Notice that the ridiculous disciples, who by now should have taken to heart the clues Jesus gave them and the example Jesus showed them, were arguing about who was the "elite of the elite". By this time in their three year discipleship duty with Jesus they should have realized that clamoring for the pole-position or being seen as the "greatest", was not at all what it meant to follow Jesus. And yet, sitting with the King of kings and Lord of lords, they are nonetheless arguing about who is most important.

And so, if we were writing this story we'd have Jesus get angry and lambast them for their insolent and horribly self-centered behavior. But what does Jesus do? Jesus simply points them to what He'd been doing for them all along and also what He came to do for all disciples, for the entire world. Jesus says it this way about their argument on greatness: "*Not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.*" Luke 22:26,27. In challenging their heinous and horrible behavior, Jesus simply points them towards the way He has acted and ulti-

mately would act in just a few days on their behalf. Jesus, the Lord of Glory, who alone deserved to recline at table, came instead to serve selfish-pigs like the twelve...selfish pigs like you and me. Jesus, the Lord of Glory, who alone deserved to sit at table and be served, was instead doing the serving, up to and including, washing the feet of those who were His guests. Jesus would say it a little differently as recorded in Mark 10:45 *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Jesus came to serve the disciples. Jesus came to serve us. Jesus came to serve the world. Rather than demanding service from us, our Lord and Master came instead, to have us sit, to have us recline, to have us eat, as He, the King of the Universe, served us and served us with His very life given as our “ransom”! Rather than considering us as irrelevant or invisible, He instead saw us and saw us as all-important, therefore making a place for us and inviting us to recline with Him at His table both now and forevermore! He did it all so that, as He said it about the disciples in verse thirty, we might, through His ultimate service for us at the cross, *“eat and drink at my table in my kingdom forever.”* Thank you Jesus that those who should be serving you, will instead be allowed to recline at your table forever!



Thursday, March 21st
“The Powerful Word of Jesus”
Read John 18:1-11

Likely we all heard, and possibly even said, the old sentence “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” Clearly the sentence gets at what was thought to be true, namely, that you can say whatever you want about me, speak whatever words you want about me, but your words will “never hurt me.” And...we figured out along the way that this is simply not true. We’ve figured out over time that while it’s true that “sticks and stones” will hurt you, “words” can hurt you too...and sometimes, hurt you far more than all the “sticks” and “stones” the world may hurl your way. We’ve all experienced it; we’ve all felt it. Words do indeed have power and power to hurt or harm.

Of course, when we’re speaking of the words of our Lord Jesus, the saying “words have power” is far more true! Jesus’ words have the power and authority to accomplish exactly what He says. We normally say it this way: Jesus’ words are “performative”, in other words, they perform what the Lord’s Word intends to have happen. Jesus said to the disciples “Follow me” and they up and left family and professions and indeed, “followed” Him! Jesus said “I will; be clean!” and the leper was cured of his leprosy. Jesus said “Lazarus come out!” and Jesus’ friend Lazarus rose from the dead. This shouldn’t be a surprise to us at all, we know that His words are performative and they have power! We know that Jesus is the self-same God who said “Let there be light” and there was light. His words are performative and indeed, they have power!

Our text is proof positive of that very thing. This is one of those Bible passages that many people are blown away by upon reading it or hearing it read for the first time. Yes, I’m using “blown away” intentionally because as you likely remember reading, Jesus words literally “blew away” those who came to take Him captive. John writes the account this way: *“When Jesus said to them, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground.”* John 18:6. As mentioned, this is often a shocking passage when people first encounter it. But remember my friends, Jesus is God Almighty in the flesh. According to John’s first chapter Jesus was *“In the beginning with God...Jesus was God...and all things came into being by Him!”* As already mentioned, Jesus is the same God who spoke “Let there be light” and there was light! The men who encountered Jesus

power that night encountered the power that put this Universe into motion. When Jesus spoke, the men encountered the presence of the Living God and as such were knocked backward by who He was, who He is, who He always will be. It's truly an amazing text, yes? Truly an amazing text as we encounter the powerful, powerful words of Jesus spoken that night.

But as I say that I want to point out something else...some other very powerful words spoken in that context. Maybe you noticed it...maybe it flew right past...but I have to mention it because to be honest, the men falling down at the powerful name of our power-filled God really isn't all that big of a deal in comparison. John tells us this in verse eight: "*Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.'*" Wait...let these men go? Do you feel the weight of those words? Do you understand the power of those words? Oh, I know it's not as dramatic as Jesus bowling human-beings over with His word of power and at the speaking of His name. I know it's not quite as amazing to us as Jesus' display of strength and might. But boy is it powerful! Really powerful! Let me say it differently and perhaps you'll track with me: Jesus gave Himself up and did so in order to set His disciples free. Jesus is saying "You have me...I'm who you want...let them go and sacrifice me in their place!" He could have said it this way: "This is why I came in the first place! I came to die that these men, and all men and women of the earth, might be set free."

The powerful words of Jesus in the Garden get at the truth of the Gospel Christian. Indeed I am amazed along with you that Jesus is able to topple men to the ground with His mighty word...I am. In fact, it's really pretty cool...yes? But let's face it, we should be far more blown away that Jesus willingly set us free! He stood in my place; He died for my sins; He spoke forgiveness and healing and wholeness into my soul and yes, He set me free! That indeed is weighty! That indeed is amazing! That indeed is the powerful word of Jesus for us!



Friday, March 22nd
“Foreshadowing”
Read Matthew 26:30-35

There is a literary device called “foreshadowing” that is commonly used both in written stories and those stories which played out on the screen. Foreshadowing is a fairly common word is one that is likely easily understood. The Wikipedia definition of foreshadowing is simply put this way: Foreshadowing is a narrative device in which a storyteller gives an advance hint of what is to come later in the story. Foreshadowing often appears at the beginning of a story, and it helps develop or subvert the audience’s expectations about upcoming events. Foreshadowing is when an author writes something into the earlier part of a story that will circle back around and come to pass at the end of the story, giving the readers that “aha” moment about what they initially read or saw.

Of course, when we’re talking about the Bible, we’re talking about historical events and not a fabricated story. The things found in the Gospels actually happened and are historical-fact, even though we nonetheless call them “narratives”, making them sound “story-ish”. Having said that, even biblical history, particularly when it comes to our very creative God, can have moments of foreshadowing involved in them. A great example of that happens in John 2:18-22 *“So the Jews said to him, ‘What sign do you show us for doing these things?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.”* John not only gives us the foreshadowing, *“destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”*, but also tells us that it worked by writing *“When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.”* Beautiful foreshadowing of what Jesus would do for us by rising again after the crucifixion!

But there’s another foreshadowing instance and its found in our particular text for today, one involving the disciples themselves. Now I know what you’re thinking, you’re thinking about when Matthew tells us: *“Then Jesus*

said to them, *'You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*" Matthew 26:31. Indeed, this is a foreshadowing too, one that was seriously long in the making! These words, spoken by Christ and recorded here, were initially spoken and written about Jesus by Zechariah the prophet more than five hundred years before it happened. And yes, this foreshadowing was prophesied by Zechariah and it was quoted by Christ, but it was indeed fulfilled by the disciples when they all left Jesus behind and "scattered"!

But there's yet another foreshadowing instance with the disciples that I want you to consider here. It happens when Peter bravely and boldly speaks up and all the other disciples then chimed in. Matthew tells us this: *"Peter said to him, 'Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!' And all the disciples said the same."* Matthew 26:35. Again, I know what you're thinking...Peter and the disciples were wrong. They would scatter. They would run. They would deny. This wasn't foreshadowing when Peter spoke this...he was actually lying!

And yet, these words from Peter and the agreement from the disciples would in fact be foreshadowing for what would ultimately come to pass in their lives in Christ as Apostles and as martyrs too. This important verse in Matthew twenty-six foreshadowed what would happen to these men and how they would face their future by the power of the Holy Spirit of God within. In and of themselves, they ran, they hid, they denied. History tells us that they in fact ghosted the Lord who loved them so much and did so at His most "needy" moment. But after Pentecost? After Pentecost happened they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, and these running, hiding and denying disciples, would in fact, all give their lives for Jesus rather than fall away from Him! Peter said it, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you" and so he did! Peter and all the "boys" died for Jesus, gave their lives as martyrs for the Lord, the Lord they confessed openly to the world! What an amazing truth about what our Lord came to do and fully accomplished by His death and resurrection.

And what happened to the disciples and with the disciples is exactly what has happened to us as well! In Christ and through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit within our bodies, we who deny and run and hide, can in fact be empowered to live for Jesus every day and if need be, give our life for the one who gave His life for us! You know that Christ has brought a change into your life. You know that you've gone from "sinner" only to "sinner/saint". You know that the Holy Spirit lives in your body and strengthens you every single

day in your confession of faith and your willingness to give your all for Christ. And you also know that His presence in your life, in your body, not only gives you the power and strength to boldly live for Him every day, but will also then, at your death or the Second Coming, carry you into heaven itself as well!



Saturday, March 23rd
“Taking One for the Team”
Read Matthew 26:36-46

I think you understand the title for this devotion, “Taking One for the Team”. Most of us have either heard someone say this phrase or have personally said this phrase ourself. My favorite “Rabbi”, “Rabbi Google”, gives this particular and very helpful definition of the phrase: *“To take one for the team is an idiomatic phrase used in the U.S. to indicate a person’s willingness to undertake an unpleasant/difficult/dangerous task or make a personal sacrifice for the collective benefit of others (“the team”).”* You may not have used those exact words, in fact it’d be odd if you did, but your definition would likely have gotten at that same idea I picked off of Google. “Taking one for the team” means going through something that may harm or hurt you, but will nonetheless be good for the others that surround you. Your boss might be mad about the company bottom-line or particular area performance, and one of your team steps up and takes the blame for the problem and take the onus for the fix, thereby “taking one for the team”. I’m sure you could give many other, and possibly, even better examples of this phrase. You might even be able give examples that were real-life instances for you, ones that you’ve seen with your own two eyes or experienced personally.

Well, for today, I’d like to bring you the quintessential “real-life” example of this phrase! The one I’m bringing up for you today is one that we’ve all seen but only seen with the eyes of faith, and that’s when our Lord Jesus chose to be the one “taking one for the team”...in the Garden of Gethsemane. Indeed, the Lord Jesus and His time in the Garden of Gethsemane is one of the single best examples of being willing to “take one for the team” that I can think of! I say that because another definition of “taking one for the team” is this: *“To accept some chore, punishment or hardship for the sake of one’s friends.”* Let me write that for you again because it’s critical to grasping what Jesus did for us: *“To accept some chore, punishment or hardship for the sake of one’s friends.”* Did you think of Jesus and what He did for us when you read that definition? I did. In my mind’s eye I can see Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane taking the “chore, punishment and hardship” that we know full well belonged to us. I can see the horrifying anguish gripping His very soul as He considers what is to come in just a few short hours. I can see the blood running down His face as He “sweat drops of blood” (Luke 22:44) because He was being pressed

by the judgment of God against our sin. I can see Him pouring out His heart in prayer with His arms outstretched and His hands held heavenward, crying out to the Heavenly Father. And...as He prays there in the Garden...it's almost as if we can all hear His pure and perfect voice. Can you? Can you hear Him begging the disciples to stay awake and pray with Him? Can you hear Him warning them to pray themselves so that they'd be able to remain faithful? I can.

But more than anything, and to the point of today, can you hear Him telling the Heavenly Father that He was willing to be the one "taking one for the team"? Jesus said initially, "*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!*" Let this cup pass from me? Please Lord, let this cup pass! What is He talking about? What is this cup and what is it a cup of? I think you know but let me remind you that this "cup" Jesus is referring to is what is commonly called "the cup of wrath". Isaiah, Jeremiah and the Revelation all make reference to a cup filled to the brim and filled to the brim with God's wrath. You can understand why Jesus wanted to take a pass on that cup!

But He doesn't "take a pass" at all, does He? He begs the Father, but you know the truth of it, He didn't get out of the duty but instead fulfilled the Father's will as He "takes one for the team" and yes, grabs hold of the cup of wrath! Remember that while Jesus said "*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!*", Jesus also took one for the team as He said those equally famous words "*Nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done!*" The duty was horrible. The torture leading up to the cross and the cross itself were frightening. But the cup filled to the brim with the wrath of God was absolutely terrifying! And Jesus knew that. Jesus knew that the torture and crucifixion given by the Roman Governor and his merciless soldiers were actually light and momentary in comparison to the "cup of wrath" from His Heavenly Father! You've heard me and other pastors say that when Jesus died on the cross He was punished for the sins of every person who would ever live. The cup of wrath which was filled to the brim because of our sin and disobedience against God, was then poured out on Christ...and He "drank" every bitter and horrible ounce of it... He drank it to the very bottom! He was willing to drink it for us. He was able to drink it for us. And at the cross, He did drink it for us. Horribly tortured by Rome to be sure, but far worse, sacrificed for the sin of every human being ever born into our world. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, God prophesied these frightening words about Jesus through Isaiah the prophet: "*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed*

him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:4-6. Indeed, Jesus took one for the team...and thanks be to God that He did!

Please note, Sundays are a Celebration of the Resurrection and not a part of Lent. Therefore, there will not be a devotion tomorrow.



Monday, March 25th
“The Holy Kiss”
Read Mark 14:43-50

In 2012, I was in Lima, Peru, with a couple leaders from our church for a small mission trip and a scouting endeavor, primarily to see if the mission in Lima could support teams coming from our church in the future. At the time we were in a partnership with the missionary down there, supporting him financially while he established several medical-mission sites and programs. We wanted to bring teams to him and have them experience a relatively close-by mission trip, but one that was nonetheless cross-cultural and deeply meaningful. (Lima is only about a six hour flight from Miami).

Our time in Lima was so great! The folks in Peru were so kind and gentle and loving. Their culture and lifestyle is amazing to behold and beautifully vibrant as well. They are community focused and they take care of their own. But as evidenced by the way they treated us, they also welcome “outsiders” into their fold with open arms. They fed us unbelievably well. Admittedly, it wasn’t the type of food I expected from a Hispanic culture, but nonetheless it was “muy delicioso” and was very, very plentiful. They made sure our sleeping accommodations were solid and safe, vitally important for foreigners of course. It wasn’t “The Hilton” by any stretch, but we had a bed and warmth...coffee in the morning...and as mentioned, safety too!

But of all the things I remember fondly about their hospitality on that trip, the thing that really impacted me was the fact that they kissed me on both cheeks every time they greeted us! I’m not going to lie, both cheeks, both kissed...got-ta admit, I was taken back at first! And while I know that this kind of greeting is not for everyone, once I got used to it, it was so wonderfully personal and heartwarming and so amazingly kind and gentle. I loved it. I loved the love they were willing to show me, a stranger, by being so personal with someone they barely knew. Friendship. Brotherhood. Love. All shown by a “holy kiss” on each side of my face.

Now, I think you realize why I bring it up today. Our reading reminds us of one of the most memorable things about Judas giving-up and selling-out Jesus to the Jewish leaders. We’re reminded from Mark’s Gospel that Judas betrayed Jesus by giving Him a kiss. This event is so well-known that instanc-

es of betrayal are sometimes called “The Judas Kiss”. Of course, you probably understand that this was actually a common greeting in Jesus’ day and one that showed “deep respect, honor and brotherly love”. I pulled that definition from one of my favorite websites, gotquestions.org, and here’s what else that author had to say: “*What really stands out in the mode of Judas’s betrayal is that Judas used such an intimate expression of love and respect to betray Jesus. Judas’s actions were hypocritical in the extreme—his actions said, ‘I respect and honor you,’ at the exact time he was betraying Jesus to be murdered. Judas’s actions illustrates Proverbs 27:6 “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” (See <https://www.gotquestions.org/betrayed-with-a-kiss.html>). Indeed, how terrible that Judas would betray Jesus at all, but that he would betray Jesus with such a hypocritical modus operandi.*

And yet, Judas’ horribly hypocritical behavior actually gives us a beautiful image of the Gospel message for us. Let me remind you once again that Judas’ betrayal of Jesus was all fully in-line with God’s will. Judas didn’t do anything that God didn’t already know nor that He didn’t fully ordain. In fact, his unholy kiss which gave Jesus up to His death on the cross actually provides for us another blessed reminder of what Jesus has done for us. You see, through Judas’ unholy kiss, we are brought close to Jesus and enabled to bring a holy kiss to the sinless Son of God without fear or trembling that we might be harmed by His power and might. I say it that way because Psalm 2:12 warns us with this: “*Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*” This Psalm verse reminds us that in our sin and sinfulness, we should be afraid of Lord because He is indeed an awesome and frightening being and won’t tolerate sinfulness of any kind in His presence. Could be said that God is not to be trifled with and honoring and adoring Him, showing Him the due respect He deserves is required, or we will “*perish on the way*” and “*endure His quickly kindled wrath.*” But because Christ was betrayed for us with an unholy kiss, because He incurred God’s wrath in our place, we don’t have to fear Him whatsoever! We can instead draw near to our Lord in joy and excitement and yes, be “*blessed*” as we “*take refuge in Him*”. Because Christ was betrayed with an unholy kiss from Judas, we can, in love and adoration and honor for Him, freely and safely draw as close to Him as needed to “kiss the cheeks” of the Lord who was crucified and risen again for us!

Oh and one more thing...because we are brought close to the Son through the

betrayer's kiss, we can then live and act as the folks in Lima live with respect to one another. We can truly show "deep respect, honor and brotherly love" to one another, or as Paul would write it in Romans, 1&2Corinthians, and Thessalonians, "*Greet one another with a holy kiss!*" How about starting our worship services with that?!! Okay, maybe not, but let's remember that in and through Christ we are not only brought intimately close to Him but we are also brought intimately close to one another in His name!



Tuesday, March 26th
“The Luck of the Draw”
Read Mark 15:6-15

All of us have had the experience at one time or another. All of us have lived the statement above and lived it out in real life. “The Luck of the Draw” is yet another American idiomatic statement and it means that just by chance or happenstance the person who experienced “The Luck of the Draw” came out on top. You get it because we see this happening all the time. A person wins the \$800,000,000 lottery and is the only one who picked all of the numbers and the “power ball” correctly. Really what happened was, they picked the numbers that just happened to be drawn for the lottery that day...or...they experienced “The Luck of the Draw”. Could be a card game instead of the lottery of course where you get dealt a four and a queen to complete a full-house with what you had in your hand already...or...they experienced “The Luck of the Draw”. It wasn’t planned...it was chance. It wasn’t planned...it was fate. It wasn’t planned...it was simply happenstantial. It was just “The Luck of the Draw”.

Some would say that’s exactly what happened with Barabbas the day that Jesus was tried and crucified when he definitely “hit the lottery” and received his personal version of a “get out of jail free” card! As our text tells us, Barabbas was imprisoned because he was a murderer and an insurrectionist. Please understand that the crowd and the Jewish leadership that called for his release knew that was true about this guy they were working to set free. They weren’t blind to the fact that in calling for his release they were actually endangering their communities, their businesses and their families as well. But the leaders needed to propose somebody besides Jesus to be released and so the leaders decided to insight the crowd into randomly asking for somebody and that somebody was Barabbas. Barabbas was as good as any of the other criminals rotting in prison for their crimes and some of them were probably much worse than him. Might as well let him go as much as any of the other prisoners who likely had equally evil backgrounds.

So...they randomly called for Barabbas? Just chance? Just fate? Just “The Luck of the Draw”?

I think you know the Lord well enough to know that the answer would be

“No” to all of the above. Our God does things on purpose! This wasn’t chance or fate or happenstance whatsoever. This was in fact completely and totally planned by Him. I won’t argue if you say it was Barabbas’ lucky day, except to alter the word “lucky” to be “blessed” of course. He was blessed! He was crazy blessed! He was blessed by God with a “get out of jail free” card that day and released because The Son of the Father, the Lord Jesus, took His place.

Now, I say it that way because “The Son of the Father”, the Lord Jesus, in fact stood condemned on behalf of “the son of the father” also known as Barabbas. You see, names have meaning and Barabbas’ name actually means “the son of the father.” Do you now begin to see why this wasn’t happenstance, chance or fate? God planned this all along. The son of the father, named Barabbas, was given the opportunity of a lifetime because of The Son of the Father, Jesus. The son of the father, Barabbas, was given a new lease on life because of The Son of the Father, Jesus. The son of the father, got his family, his life, his future back and did so because...The Son of the Father, the Lord Jesus, took His place and took His cross as well. In fact, Barabbas stands as an image of all of us, doesn’t he? All of us, fallen, broken, sinful sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father, were given a second chance because Jesus, The Son of the Father stood in our place too and took our cross too. Barabbas is an image of all of us...his name had meaning. All of the children of God would find their second chance, their get out of jail free card and would so through Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf!

And just in case you don’t think the Lord works that way, let me remind you that He in fact does. Barabbas’ name having meaning reminds us that Jesus’ name had meaning too. Remember that Jesus was intentionally named “Jesus” and was named Jesus by God Himself through the angel sent to Joseph. What did Jesus’ name mean? You’ll recall from the Christmas readings that Jesus’ name meant “YHWH Saves” or “God Saves” because, as the angel would tell Joseph in a dream, “He will save His people from their sins.” Happenstance? Nope. Chance? Not at all! No, God does work this way and through Jesus we are indeed blessed to remember that by our Heavenly Father and His love for us, we are set free and set free both now and forevermore!



Wednesday, March 27th
“Bearing HIS Cross?”
Read John 19:16b-22

One of the most difficult things to consider about the crucifixion of Jesus is the horror of what He went through before He went through the horrors of the cross itself. You’ve heard about what the Romans did to prisoners prior to crucifixion and probably have so many, many times. Even though that’s true, every time we hear it...we are deeply impacted again and again. We remember things that just make us mad, e.g. the soldiers mocking Jesus and spitting in His face. We wince when we think about the crown of thorns being forcefully placed on His head. We can see a swollen face, perhaps blackened eyes as we think about Him being beaten. We cringe deeply at the mere thought of Him being flogged and beaten with the forty-lashes minus one. All of His punishment lumped together deeply saddens us and causes us to hang our heads... and, we haven’t even gotten to the cross yet.

Here enters our text and John’s account of the events leading up to Jesus being crucified. After all of that just described happened, John lets us that now we get to the crucifixion. John writes *“So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.”* Can you even imagine Jesus going through all of the pre-torture-torture and then carrying the cross-beam for His own tool of execution? Can you imagine how painful and horrible that was for Him to bear His own cross? Can you imagine the struggle to just stay up-right or even alive, and yet having to carry the weight of a heavy wooden beam, the beam of your own cross? No wonder we’re told by Matthew, Mark and Luke *“As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.”* They likely grabbed Simon because they saw how badly Jesus was doing under the weight of His own cross.

I presume you noticed that I was emphasizing John’s words “bearing His own cross” in the paragraph above. I was because while the gravity of what I described above is accurate and heart-wrenching, He wasn’t actually “bearing HIS own cross” but a much heavier cross instead. You see, Jesus wasn’t bearing His own cross, He was bearing your cross that day and the cross of every human being to ever live. He was bearing my cross that day. He was bearing

your cross that day. He was bearing the cross for everyone that day.

But let's remember exactly what that meant for Jesus. We're not talking about Him bearing a wooden-beam for the sins of the world. Was that beam heavy and horrible? Yes. Was the crucifixion, being nailed to that beam heavy and horrible? Yes. But let's remember again what it really meant that Jesus bore our cross. Let me bring to you again the terrible and yet wonderful words of Isaiah fifty-three. Read them out loud. Read them with purpose. Think through what they mean. Isaiah 53:3-6 *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* Paul would succinctly write the truth of the words of Isaiah 53 this way: 2 Corinthians 5:21 *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

To be sure Christian, as you consider what our Lord did that day, be amazed, be blown away, be saddened, and be repentant too. But as horrible as all I described was for our Lord, there's no way to convey how terrible the weight of our cross was for Him...even with the above passages of God's Word. I can't know the pain and anguish and neither can you. Let me say that a little bit differently for you: I won't know the pain and anguish and neither will you. We'll never know what Jesus really went through because He took that all away for us. And yet, we will know the blessing of why He went through it. He bore our cross that we can live! He bore our cross so we could be set free!



Thursday March 28th Maundy Thursday—Attend Worship at Gloria Dei at 12:15p and 6:30p.

Friday March 29th Good Friday—Attend Worship at Gloria Dei at 12:15p, 4p and 6:30p.

