



SALEM CHURCH
God is still speaking

2021 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

emotions noise gossip
change worry finances
pain shopping memories
harmony fear organize
storage regret politics bills
money home work you play
stuff dirty me hate clean
social media

clearing the clutter



FOREWORD-2021 SALEM CHURCH LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: Luke 10:41-42

The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Martha's mentality was so cluttered with the details of being a hostess that she missed the spiritual gift of her guest's presence. When Jesus refused to chastise Mary, he told Martha that she was worried and upset about many things, but few things were needed. Jesus said that Mary had chosen what was better, which was sitting at his feet and listening to him speak. Like Mary, we too should focus on the spiritual gifts before us and not allow clutter to obstruct our spiritual view.

Spiritual clutter includes the thoughts and worries that waste our time and energy. We have thousands of thoughts a day and many of them are the same mental clutter that we've had for days, months, or years. Take the time to recognize the beliefs you have about yourself that are holding you back. De-clutter your thoughts by being conscious of these thoughts and throwing them away. Take a positive attitude. Learn to forgive others and yourself. Let go of grievances, bitterness, and resentments. Practice loving your neighbor and your enemies. If you can work on forgiveness, many of the other goals will become easier to accomplish. Pray for help if any of these are difficult for you to do. Dealing with clutter, physical or spiritual, is a life-long endeavor. Do not be discouraged if you find yourself repeatedly dealing with clutter. Forgive yourself for any mistakes and move forward.

I am excited about this Lenten journey of Clearing the Clutter. Spend the coming weeks choosing the better way of Jesus, like Mary did. It will take time and it will help if you make it a priority, but it will be greatly rewarding.

Rev. Matthew Hunt - Pastor of Salem Church

February 17, 2021 by Stacey Nicholas

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Meditation:

In the Broadway show *Rent*, the cast sings: “In five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred minutes. How do you measure a year in a life?” The lyrics ask about the proper way to quantify the value of a year of human life, concluding in the chorus that the most effective means is to “measure in love”.

The Gospel of Matthew asks a similar question “How do you measure your passion?” The writer answers clearly, “By how you spend your treasure.”

The intentional sharing of resources requires planning, prayer, and purpose. As followers of Jesus Christ, we recognize that all we have is a gift from God. Gifts that we are to use to further the Reign of God. Gifts are not to be stored, but used with a purpose.

American humorist Erma Bombeck wrote, “When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me'.” We should all be so faithful.

Prayer:

Giving Creator, help us to intentionally spend all that you have given us so that others may know your love.

February 18, 2021 by Stacey Nicholas

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:33

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.

Meditation:

As I write this, it is a time of disorder: insurrection, impeachment, and inauguration. The events of the moment stress my heart and head.

I asked a friend, “Where is God in all of this?”

She responded, “Where God always is—in the still small voice.”

I remembered. The prophet Elijah could not find God in the earthquake, or the strong wind, or the fire. He found God in the still small voice.

In this time of disorder, we can return to the still small voice. Deeply breathe God in while exhaling the chaos of life. Continue this deep breathing until we, individually and collectively, find the still small voice.

Presbyterian minister and children’s television host, Mr. Rogers said that when there is disorder, look for the helpers.

My friends, I urge you to breathe Christ in and when you hear the still small voice open your eyes to the helpers. Banish the disorder with the peace of God.

Prayer:

Creator God, in these times of disorder and confusion, help us center ourselves to the still small voice and bring hope to your people.

February 19, 2021 by Jenni Moran

Scripture: Mark 10:21

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

Meditation:

Whew--this one is a hard one, right? Jesus was always a good teacher, but this one makes me scratch my head a little bit. Sell all of my stuff? Like, ALL of it? What about my clothes? My treasured books? My Dwight Schrute and Doctor Who Funko Pops? Ugh....this scripture seems overwhelming and unfair to us in our modern, stuff-filled lives. And I bet it did to the young man as well. But I think the message is more than just what's on the surface, which Jesus was always showing in his teachings. Jesus knew we were mere humans, connected to our earthly stuff, but also that we yearned to have a deeper connection with God. In this short but impactful passage, Jesus is asking us to shed our ties to those things that keep us away from being fully in love with God--our worries, our appointments, our grievances--and give them up to follow Jesus and His teachings so we can form that deeper connection with God. He wants us to give up our “stuff,” both physical junk and human attachments, to attain that treasure in heaven that we strive to achieve.

Prayer:

Dear God, please guide us on the path to lighten our loads as we strive to follow Jesus. Allow us to give of ourselves freely and be able to join you in our heavenly rewards. Amen.

February 20, 2021 by Jenni Moran

Scripture: John 2:15

Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

Meditation:

In this verse, Jesus has come to his breaking point. He has traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover, and finally reaches the temple. Jesus is expecting to see a holy place, ready for the faithful to come and worship during this holy time. And instead, he finds brazen vendors and animals for sale and people hawking goods...and he loses his temper in a big way. Jesus tells them to get out, to stop defacing his Father's house. He is angry, and he lets everyone know it. This is one of the few instances in the Bible where we get to see where Jesus becomes somewhat violent and acts out his anger and frustration. We get to see Jesus' human side here, a good reminder that he was both human and divine. Not only is this a rare display of anger from Jesus, it is also an attention-getter for the reader: to treat ourselves as holy, to avoid corrupting ourselves and our world with less-than-Godly pursuits and ideas. Jesus seems intent on making sure that we are getting rid of all the “extras” of the world and focusing on our call to follow Him to God.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to always remember to keep our eyes on you and focus on what is really important. Show us the way to get rid of the extras that lead us off the path to you. Amen.

February 22, 2021 by Earl Bricker

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:6

*... a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away...*

Meditation:

We all have times of happiness, times of sorrow, times of abundance, and times of loss. Underlying all of these situations is the fact that God is in control: He is the author of life; He directs the seasons we experience, and everything that occurs happens in His time. God directs the course of all things, including your life. Knowing this should bring you peace, but that does not mean that you'll always feel happy or never experience trouble.

No matter what you are experiencing in life, whether it is lacking or in abundance, remember that God is with you. He loves you, and everything you experience is meant to grow you closer to Him. Hold tight to Him, whatever your season.

Prayer:

I am thankful, Father, that You know the end from the beginning and that everything under heaven is within Your authority. I am thankful that You are in control of all that is happening in my life and in the wider world. May I trust You through all that happens in my life, and as I seek Your face in prayer and praise, may I learn more and more to pray: "Thy will be done in my life and throughout the world." In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

February 23, 2021 by Earl Bricker

Scripture: Luke 12:15

And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Meditation:

How easy it is to look away from spiritual things and focus our attention on earthly pursuits. We would be wise to consider worldly things very lightly, for they are like foam on the waves in the sea which are fleeting, disappearing very quickly. Hope of a reward in heaven should be a greater incentive to live a life pleasing to God than the accumulation of things that will soon disappear in this world.

In our lifetime we will experience hardships and trials, but the life we lose here will be rewarded in the next. How important therefore to take care of our life and to be on guard against greed, for our life does not consist in the abundance of possessions while on earth but what waits for us in heaven.

Prayer:

Loving Father, keep me from covetousness and envying those who seem to have everything in this world while so many of Your children so often seem to be so deprived. Help me to live my life in spirit and truth and thus live my life in a way which will produce a great reward in heaven. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

February 24, 2021 by Cassie Koch

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Meditation: Let's break that down a bit. This scripture is all about trust. Let me explain. The cloud of witnesses were the people who trusted God and followed his teachings. The hinderances are things that keep us from trusting God completely. And the sins that we do keep us from living this life the way we are supposed to. They prevent us from "running" well.

So how do we run the race well and trust in God? We need to do exactly what it says in the scripture. We need to follow the examples of those who follow in Christ's likeness. We need to surround ourselves with those people. The ones who will help us through our temptations and help us to follow Christ's teachings: loving one another. Many people translate that to mean: love those who are similar to myself. If we are to truly trust God and follow his teachings, we must love those who are weak, hungry, mentally ill, DIFFERENT than us. If we can love others and surround ourselves with others who are trusting in Christ, we can be successful in our race: life.

Prayer: Dear God, please help us to surround ourselves with followers who will help us defeat temptations and follow in your ways. Help us show others that trusting in You is the only way we can be successful. Help us to love others as you loved us. Amen

February 25, 2021 by Cassie Koch

Scripture: Philippians 4:19

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Meditation:

In plain terms, this scripture means that God will take care of all of our needs. What many people misunderstand about this scripture is that God is not promising to make us wealthy or that we will have an easy life if we give to the right charities or do enough "good". While God may take care of your financial or health needs, it is not connected to the idea that "if I do this then God will take care of this other thing", although we have all plead with God in this way at some time or another. "If you help me get an A, I'll start reading the bible."

We need to also recognize that there is a difference between what we need, and what we want. That is the other step in understanding this scripture. Often when we ask God to take care of something, it is something that we want, not need. We do not need to get an A; we need to learn the hard lesson that you have to work for that A. Our prayers are not always answered in the way that we want, because God is taking care of what we actually NEED, not want. We need to trust that God knows what we truly need.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for taking care of our needs. Please help each of us to look inside and discover what those needs truly are, and help us to see how You are taking care of it. Help us to understand that what we need and what we want are different things, and to trust that you know what those needs are. Amen

February 26, 2021 by Barb Edwards

Scripture: Matthew 11:28

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Meditation:

I don't know about you, but this scripture really speaks to me. We've all been at a point in our lives when we are so bone-tired weary we just don't know how to go on. The children are arguing, the house is a mess, the laundry has mounted up, the washing machine is broken, and you just burned dinner because you were on the phone to the repair man.

Or perhaps we are carrying a burden/burdens – medical, physical, emotional, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, worry about our kids (both young and adult) – that we don't share with anyone.

Well the good news here is that we can share it all with God. God wants us to rely on him. God will listen and give us rest. Many people think they can handle everything all on their own. The thing is – we have to let go after we give it to him. Trust God and he will give you rest.

Prayer:

Oh God, you know everything, and you know that I have some burdens I need to let go of. Help me to trust that you will help me, and to learn to rely on you. Amen.

February 27, 2021 by Barb Edwards

Scripture: Philippians 3:13

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

Meditation:

Paul definitely looked ahead. If you remember, when he was Saul, he persecuted Christians. That's something that I would definitely want to leave behind. And he knew that he couldn't make it on his own – that he needed God every step of the way.

What about you? Have you made decisions that weren't the best? Have you cheated or lied to people? Have you hurt someone's feelings – either on purpose or accidentally? Have you gossiped behind someone's back? We've all said or done things we wish we could take back. These things clutter up our lives and just get in our way.

Repenting of those things and then moving forward is what God wants us to do.

Prayer:

God, I am so sorry for things I have done that weren't part of your plan and for not doing things that WERE part of your plan. Please forgive me for _____ . Help me to let go of these transgressions and move forward to do your will. Amen.

March 1, 2021 by Debbie Husar

Scripture: Mark 4:19-20 (The Living Bible)

“but all too quickly the attractions of this world and the delights of wealth, and the search for success and lure of nice things comes and crowd out God’s message from their hearts, so that no crop is produced. But the good soil represents the hearts of those who truly accept God’s message and produce a plentiful harvest for God — thirty, sixty or even a hundred times as much as was planted in their hearts.”

Meditation:

Jesus shared lots of stories with his followers and his disciples, drawing examples they could relate to from everyday life. Mark 4:19-20 continues the parable of the sower and his grain, this time in the thorny ground, which emphasized a familiar theme of farming to his contemporaries. While much less familiar today — farmers and ranchers represent less than 2% of the U.S. population, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation — the ideas still can resonate at least with every gardener, whether you have just a couple of herbs on the windowsill or a full-scale vegetable patch during the growing season. There’s some preparation involved with gardening, clearing the soil of potential problems and constant weeding to prevent the growth of “thorns” that can choke out young plants. It’s the same in our spiritual life, where “thorns” or distractions can draw our attention away from what God intends. And there’s plenty of distractions these days — from a global pandemic to money troubles, health issues and the latest binge-worthy show on Netflix. Despite the challenges, being what Jesus called “good soil” can return up to 100 times what was planted, creating a bountiful harvest.

Prayer:

Dear Lord: Help us please during this Lenten season to focus less on the distractions of life and to clear the clutter to focus more on you and what you would have us do. Amen.

March 2, 2021 by Annette Newquist

Scripture: Please read Luke 3:10-11

Meditation:

When John the Baptizer and prophet spoke to the crowds in the wilderness, he reminded his audience of Jews about their obligation to do acts of kindness toward the less fortunate. In the Old Testament, Jews were told to give tithes for the poor every 3 years, as well as allowing the poor to reap any fallen crops from their fields. Leviticus says they are to love their neighbor as themselves and love the alien also. At the time of John and Jesus, there were large numbers of people who lived below the subsistence level. Not only were they poor, but they were powerless and oppressed.

As a Jew, Jesus was well aware that the more fortunate were supposed to be charitable to the poor, but he also explained that selfless and self-giving love was required of anyone who wanted to follow him. He preached that a person who gave to the needy would obtain treasure in heaven. In the final judgment, God would give the kingdom to those who gave food, drink and clothing to the members of Christ’s family, who visited the sick and imprisoned. If they did these acts of charity, it was as if they were doing them for Jesus himself.

So Jesus reminds us to do all we can, any time we can, to feed his beloved sheep. Yes, give them that extra coat, and don’t forget to share Christ’s love as well.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, We know that the poor are always with us. Help us to consider what we can do to follow your way of merciful and loving caring for them.

March 3, 2021 by Sue Welch

Scripture: Proverbs 17:1

Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

Meditation:

Politics, pandemic, job or income loss, online school lessons, zoom meetings, grocery shopping, masks vs no masks, vaccine or not, quarantine. Aaagh!! What a confusing, chaotic mess! How do we cope with all that can come at us in varying degrees or in waves of turmoil?

Scientists have studied different ways we handle stressful situations. People turn to others for help, practice meditation, exercise, increase time spent with faith rituals and spending time in nature. Evidence showed that when people took time to explore the outdoors by walking, hiking, or just sitting outside enjoying the peace and quiet, that blood pressure rates dropped, heart rates slowed, and peace of mind returned. I know when I go for a walk on one of our many park trails in Quincy, life calms. The birds continue to sing, the stream trickles on in spite of some ice, the squirrels scamper about. The landscape offers so many changes in each season and each one has its own special beauty.

In this season of Lent, take time to just take a walk. Think of all the walks Jesus took to heal and cleanse himself and others. Prepare your soul, mind and heart to receiving the goodness and peace Jesus brings.

Prayer:

Dear God, Thank you for your beautiful world and your son, Jesus. Help me to find peace in a simple walk and know that you are in control. My peace rests with you. Amen

March 4, 2021 by Sue Welch

Scripture: 2 Kings 20:1

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order for you shall die; you shall not recover."

Meditation:

This scripture sounds pretty morbid! What hope did Hezekiah have with that pronouncement? But if you continue to read on, because Hezekiah was faithful and tried to live a good life, God granted him 15 more years of life. What a cause for celebration! How do you suppose he used those 15 years?

If you knew your time on earth was limited to a specific time, what would you do with it? God granted our life to do good, to follow in the steps of Jesus. I think of the fruits of the spirit and how those should influence my daily living: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. They're not always easy to live up to but they certainly give us a goal to reach for. I challenge you during this time of Lent to pick one of these each day and consciously do something that will embrace this idea. Jesus is our example who found ways to do this in big, miraculous ways, but also in small ways, like welcoming the little children into his circle.

Prayer:

Loving God, you sent your son, Jesus, to show us how to live and care for others. Help us, in these turbulent times, to find ways to show your love, joy, and peace to others and to ourselves. Amen.

March 5, 2021 by Linsey Laughlin

Scripture: Matthew 19:16, 21-22

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Meditation:

Have you ever wanted validation from someone so much, that you would do anything it took to earn it?

Imagine, if you will, that you were in school, and you had a teacher that you loved more than any other. In an effort to garner praise, you completed all the homework assignments early, and completed extra work around the classroom. But, you never received the praise you felt was due.

Now, here is the twist! While you are doing some pretty great things academically, you are also bullying kids at recess. When it comes to homework, you can do great all by yourself. But bullying is hard, and the behavior can only be curtailed with help.

Strive to be better than the man in our story today. Keep what you can do, but ask for help on the vices that stand in your way. For on our own, we cannot reach the heights that are available in Christ.

Prayer:

Please help me to face the hard decisions I must make. I understand that I cannot be an effective witness without your help. With you all things are possible. Amen.

March 6, 2021 by Linsey Laughlin

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of Truth.

Meditation:

In this letter, we learn that Paul is writing to Timothy, who, according to scholars, is ministering to a church in Ephesus. In reading the verses that lead up to today's scripture, we see that Timothy is dealing with a quarrelsome congregation. Members are posturing against each other in an effort to show who is right or wrong. They are diverting from the spirit of unity, which is essential to maintain in the Body of Christ.

To take the essence of Paul's message, we are encouraged to have confidence in His Word. We do not need to go through an approval process to be followers of the Word. All we need to do is accept Christ, and take on His mantle. We are imperfect vessels for the Truth, just the way God prefers. Even if we overcome our vices, we will still be imperfect. But that is fine, great even! Because we are STILL approved to do his work. No perfect track record required.

Now, let's apply that to a different congregation. Perhaps, in this body of believers, someone is not giving a weekly offering? Maybe is it a more "serious" indiscretion of having an extra marital affair. These people are approved to do His work! Love them, and yourself as imperfect followers.

Let's do our best, and Christ will meet us where we fall short. Let us give His grace freely to others, just as He did for us, with no stipulations applied.

Prayer:

O Holy One, thank you for making me the person I am today, blemishes and all. Please give me the grace to accept my imperfections, and those of my fellow believers. Bring us together, as only you can. Amen.

March 8, 2021 by Katie Edwards

Scripture: John 16:33

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Meditation:

Peace during 2020/2021 has proven to be a difficult task. God tells us to have faith in him, that he will provide for us with peace. God has always shown himself in the small things, like the faith of our children, or a cardinal perched in your window frame.

During these difficult times where are we going to find our peace? For me I have found peace in the laughter of my students as they play tag on the playground. Take time to find what brings you peace.

Prayer:

Dear God, Provide us with the strength to find peace in you during these difficult times. Lead us on the path you have paved for us. Calm our bodies to take in all your wonders. In your Heavenly name we pray, Amen

March 9, 2021 by Adam Spory

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:12

You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything.

Meditation:

The people in Corinth were struggling with understanding what it means to be a follower of Christ, surrounded in a world of corruption. Maybe early Christians encountered the same type of challenge that modern day Christians encounter. Paul believes that "Christ has truly set us free" (Galatians 5:1). To live in the freedom that Jesus Christ has provided is not to live a life of carelessness just because "God has your back". Paul is telling early Christians that physical actions speak louder than words. We can probably relate to the people of Corinth, considering we are also familiar with living in a world fueled by greed and selfishness. Paul wants us to think about how our actions represent our hearts. It sounds like Paul is asking Christians to consider if their actions reflect their relationship with God.

As a young man, I loved baseball cards. I loved everything about them - from opening up a new pack to seeing 'who I got,' from sorting them into teams on our family coffee table, and negotiating trades. I thought about baseball cards...a lot. As a parent now, I see why my parents then helped me realize I needed other passions to occupy my time. It wasn't that baseball cards were bad in nature, but by only thinking about baseball cards, I was not allowing myself time engaging with other people that were not interested in baseball.

Prayer: God of mercy, let our passion be for you. Show us how to live as people of faith. Amen

March 10, 2021 by Catherine Verneti

Scripture: John 14:6

Jesus saith unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Meditation:

Has anyone ever said to you, "Do I have to draw you a map?" when you can't find or see something obvious. Jesus was giving Thomas directions to eternal life and because Thomas was thinking in 'earthly' and not 'spiritual' terms he missed the point. How often do we hear or stare at a page of words, comprehend the literal meaning but the true meaning has escaped us? Sometimes we can quote a scripture and think we have a 'handle on it' only to find out later that our thinking was incorrect. The only way we will understand John 14:6 is to daily follow His perfect example of righteousness and truth.

Prayer:

O Lord, be my internal compass and show me 'Your way' and should I get lost in word or deed bring me home to a better understanding. Amen.

March 11, 2021 by Catherine Verneti

Scripture: Psalms 23:1-5

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me by still waters....(please refer to your Bible for the remainder)*

Meditation:

Psalms 23 describes a beautiful scene of God's protection, provision and love which are the rewards for following Him. Therein lies the crux of the matter. Humans, like sheep, are not the most intelligent of creatures and whilst we may not fall in ditches or get stuck in thickets, we do wander off and follow our own wills without any thought of danger. What do we do when danger comes? Shout to God to rescue us over and over again.

Prayer:

O Lord, I know your voice but often do not listen. Forgive me for choosing my way and not yours, for making excuses and doing just enough to get by. Help me to be more obedient, follow you and give you what you deserve, my all. Amen.

March 12, 2021 by Mike Edwards

Scripture: Acts 2:38 (NIV)

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Meditation:

It is tempting to take something we know, something that has been successful, and something we can do almost without thinking and add one more thing.

My wife is a fan of cooking competition shows and this is often a down fall of competing chefs. They will select their best dish but instead of following the recipe they can cook in their sleep, they add more ingredients or techniques. Many times the result is not a better dish or a winning dish.

This can also be true in our faith life. We clutter up the simple message of our scripture with other "ingredients and techniques" instead of the simple recipe of turning toward God (repenting), being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (being like Christ in our lives), and accepting the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If we do that, people will know we are forgiven and we will make the world better!

Prayer:

Dear God, help us to remember to live your simple message and show others how good a life with Jesus can be.

March 13, 2021 by Mike Edwards

Scripture: Titus 3:4-6 (NIV)

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior

Meditation:

I have been watching a television show "The Good Place". It is a simple secular view of heaven (the good place) and hell (the bad place.) The show explains that you earn your way into the good place by earning points for being good and losing points for being bad. It is a complex and messy calculation to determine if you are good enough. One of the lessons I have learned from the show is that no one, no matter how good you are, is really good enough to get into the good place. What a dispiriting view of life! Thankfully, we have the true path to the good place and it has nothing to do with anything we do. We know we cannot earn our way into heaven but instead we have a place there simply through God's mercy and knowing our sins have been forgiven through Jesus Christ!

Prayer:

God, thank you for your mercy and for the forgiveness we have received in Jesus.

March 15, 2021 by Scott Giltner

Scripture: Hebrews 10:22

“Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Meditation: There is seemingly nothing but bad news in the world today. Hostile politics, contested elections, unrest in the streets, and seeming widespread decay in national institutions that have held strong for centuries have left many of us scared and anxious. Sometimes that bad news makes us embrace the wrong things and makes us doubt the right things. We embrace anger, embrace violence, embrace an unfortunate rejection of the intrinsic value of our fellow human beings if they disagree with us. We know we should look to our faith and trust in God but we are even more than usual filled with doubt. It’s hard to turn on the television or read the news and not think that maybe we are further away from God than ever. But Hebrews 10 reminds us that we can trust and we can believe no matter the circumstances. The book starts out by talking about the old covenant between God and his people and describes the rituals and sacrifices long deemed necessary to really know God’s wisdom and receive his grace. But it tells us about such rituals to remind us that that was the old way. And we are about to witness the dawn of a new covenant and a new promise. The way to live life and to seek salvation lies completely through Jesus—through his blood and his forgiveness. That is all we need now. It is a message of hope and of keeping the faith—if we do our part and stay faithful—that if we accept the word and the love of God, we can always be assured of his forgiveness. No matter the challenge, no matter the crisis that makes us doubt ourselves and even our faith, armed with that “true heart” we must not fear. Pandemics should not shake it. The rancor of contested elections and civil unrest cannot stand against it when our bodies have been washed with that purest of all waters.

So let us all join together in these turbulent and frightening times and pray that even as we face a period of growing uncertainty in our national life, we must continue to embrace and cherish that “full assurance of faith” that is always with us.

Prayer: Let us pray that these dark days can be countered by remembering that we can always go to God. Let us pray that we hold fast to the truth that while the political news, though frightening, is only temporary, his good news is always there for us. Amen.

March 16, 2021 by Scott Giltner

Scripture: 1 John 1:7 - *“but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin”*

Meditation: 2020 was not a good year. And 2021 hasn’t started off much better. These have been times, as Thomas Paine once wrote of the American Revolution, that try men’s souls. But they have also been times that very much try our sense of community. Not only has a deadly pandemic taken friends and loved ones from us and prevented us from regular meetings together on Sundays as a church, but now the political situation has divided us to the point where we seem like a country torn asunder. For many of us, it can seem these days like our church community and our national unity is unfortunately and undeniably in decline. But now is exactly the time for us to get back to basics and this verse makes it plain that if we embrace God we “have fellowship with one another.” This is not a time for withdrawing from our faith. Nor is it a time to withdraw from each other. It is a time for us to try even harder to “walk in the light as he himself is in the light.” 1 John 1:7 reminds us that if we give of ourselves to God by living as we have been taught, the challenges of community will take care of themselves. If only we believe, if only we model ourselves after Christ and seek fellowship with him, then our earthly community will be strong. In other words, the dire medical and political situation in this country should not make us walk away from our faith and our community but instead should make us embrace it in its most basic form. For salvation, we must remember to walk in the light. And if we do so, the other problems will inevitably melt away.

Prayer:

So let us pray that our brothers and sisters in Salem Church, in Quincy, and around our country will always strive to walk in the light. Let us pray for the wisdom and the patience and the strength to look to you and the light of Jesus Christ even more during these dark times. Let us pray that we encourage each other and strengthen each other through that light and use it as a rock upon which to build a new unity for our church and our world. We celebrated joyful times and warm relationships before Covid and before the current political malaise and we fervently pray that someday soon we will again. In Jesus’s name we ask that you help us remember that if we walk in your light, we will come together, strengthen each other, and rejoice in your salvation. Amen.

March 17, 2021 by Connie Sue Novotny

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-9

“For it is by grace, that we are saved through faith. And this salvation is not of ourselves, but it is the gift of God. Not because of works, lest any person should boast.”

Meditation:

Too often we get so busy being the “good works” for the Lord, that we neglect the Lord himself in the process. We forget that the work of salvation has already been accomplished. All that is left is for us to accept that gift and receive the gift of salvation. All of the good works we do should be done out of love for our Lord and Savior. We need to be with him in times of Bible study and prayer. This is when we can hear God telling us what he wants us to be doing. Colossians 4:5 says, “Use your time in the best way you can.” Use it in view of what will count for eternity. We can’t borrow or save up time. It is important to use it in wise ways. Ways that show I am doing the work that Jesus has assigned me to do.

Prayer:

O Lord, guide me in using my time in the important work you would have me do. Help me as I do the work that you lead me to do. Amen.

March 18, 2021 by Connie Sue Novotny

Scripture: John 7:37-38

Jesus stood up and shouted, “If you are thirsty, come to me and drink. Have faith in me, and you will have life-giving water flowing from deep inside you, just as the Scripture says.

Meditation:

Today, many of us carry something with us to drink, having it at the ready to quench any thirst we might have.

But what about our spiritual thirst? How do we stand ready to quench it, do we even have a spiritual thirst? We should. Our spiritual thirst can be quenched by Bible study and prayer, and meditation on the Scriptures. They have been given to direct and guide us on our life’s journey. To ponder is to really chew on something, think on it for a bit. We should have some focused pondering, keeping it in the larger context. Ask for the Holy Spirit’s help and guidance as you ponder the word of God. The result is a growing love for our Lord.

Prayer:

O Lord, help me to do as your Word says in Psalm 119:15-16, “I will study your teachings and follow your footsteps. I will take pleasure in your word.” Amen.

March 19, 2021 by Katie Edwards

Scripture: Matthew 7:1

Do not judge others or you too will be judged.

Meditation:

To judge, what does it mean to judge someone else? If you look up the meaning of judging, it says that you form an opinion or conclusion of someone.

If we were living during Jesus' time, would we have judged him for what he had done? I know that I am not perfect, I would probably put judgement on him. He shouldn't hang out with people who are poor. He talks with prostitutes, so he must be dirty. He sleeps where beggars sleep. There are plenty of things we can judge him for.

In placing judgement on someone else, I will in turn be judged. What am I going to be judged on? Would it be my job or my friends? Would it be for drinking a glass of wine at dinner or for not making enough money?

During this Lent season, look for the good or unknown instead of jumping to a judgment.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, Help me to be quick to understand and slow to judge. Be with me as I am thinking of others. Make my thoughts kind and easy. Stay with me beyond this Lent season, to keep my thoughts free of judgement and full of love. In your ever wonderful name we pray, Amen.

March 20, 2021 by Douglas Peterson

Scripture: Isaiah 1:16

Wash and make yourselves clean.

*Take your evil deeds out of my sight;
stop doing wrong.*

Meditation:

Rickey Henderson, one of the all time baseball greats, was famous for talking about himself in the third person.

"Nothing's impossible for Rickey. You don't have enough fingers and toes to count out Rickey." - Rickey Henderson

Unlike Rickey Henderson, when I refer to myself in the third person, it's rarely to extoll my own virtues. Instead, I only say things like "Come on, Douglas!" when I need more focus, or I'm hoping to encourage myself to do just a bit better.

Isaiah's words are in the same vein: you know how to do the right thing... it's time to do it. Importantly, the Lord knows that you are able to follow these instructions and believes in you.

Nothing's impossible for you. There aren't enough fingers and toes to count you out.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for believing in me. Help me follow your command to do right, seek justice, and defend the oppressed. In your name, I pray: Amen.

March 22, 2021 by David Ball

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Meditation:

The message of rebirth is summarized in this single verse. Those that live in Christ reject their old nature and receive a new nature. Without Christ, humans are naturally drawn to acting selfishly. The ability to think of others first is something that has to be learned.

But God offers us a new nature. Through Christ's sacrifice we can let this old nature end and receive a new, eternal nature. One based on God's love instead of our own selfishness. God sent us the Holy Spirit to build up this new nature in us, to make us new creatures.

It can be difficult to put aside what once came naturally. Sometimes people fall back into old, selfish habits. But we must remember that God has better plans for us, and offers to help us become new, better people.

What new habits has God brought into your life? What parts of your old life need to be replaced? How can you encourage spiritual renewal in those around you?

Prayer:

God of grace, help me to let go of the things that need to go, and welcome the new habits you desire for me. Amen.

March 23, 2021 by David Ball

Scripture: Joel 2:12-13

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and relenting of evil.

Meditation:

There are times in everyone's lives when it's better to admit being wrong than to continue out of a sense of stubbornness. The book of Joel compares the day of the Lord to a conquering army that no city can stand against. When God has us surrounded and we realize that fighting against God will do no good, it's time to put down our weapons and make peace. Fortunately for us, God offers some very generous terms of surrender.

At such times we must honestly search our hearts for the source of conflict with God. Listen to what God wants from us. God might demand something very dear to us. But we must remember that God loves us, cares for us, and has better things planned for us. Having peace with God is far better than anything that could be gained by fighting.

Are there any areas of your life where you feel far from God? How is God calling you to return to Him?

Prayer:

God of mercy, where I am far from you, bring me close. Amen.

March 24, 2021 by Bobby Riney

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:6

“So humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time.”

Meditation:

We are called to be humble. True humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. Casting our cares on God is a form of humility, knowing He will take care of us. Christ was humble and we should imitate Him in all we do. Set aside self righteousness and pride. Remember God is with us and God oppresses the proud and haughty and graces the humble. Remember it is God who helps us do what we do; we would be nothing without Him. And our reward will be great in His time.

Prayer:

Pray at all times to be more humble and let God direct us at all times that we may be pleasant in his sight. Amen.

March 25, 2021 by Joel Koch

Scripture: Mark 1:12-15

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Meditation:

Resisting temptation can be difficult and hard to overcome. Jesus, though pure of heart, was still human and had temptation laid before him, but he overcame and was able to believe in the good. For us, this seems like an easy choice. You're out walking the Klingner trail and you see someone laying by the trail that needs help, so we of course stop to help. But what about the other temptations of our daily lives that we never pay attention to? It can be little, such as the desire to fudge your timecard for 15 minutes to get a little extra on your paycheck. The way to move forward is to understand that temptations are there to deter us from our goals and to believe in the good news of the Lord, to help others and treat them in the way which we wish to be treated ourselves.

Prayer:

Dear God, we lift our hearts up to You. We know to follow You, and that sometimes your ways will lead to temptations. Help provide us the strength to do what is right and repent our sins. Amen.

March 26, 2021 by Carol Hillebrenner

Scripture: Matt. 26:14-16

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

Meditation:

That is when one of the Twelve, the one named Judas Iscariot, went to the cabal of high priests and said, "What will you give me if I hand him over to you?" They settled on thirty silver pieces. He began looking for just the right moment to hand him over.

How could Judas, who had been with Jesus for three years and had been entrusted with the disciples' money, have decided to help the authorities arrest Jesus? When creating the King James Bible, the scholars decided there had to be a reason and added a statement that Judas was a thief, which did not appear in any earlier Biblical scrolls.

By this time in His ministry, Jesus had declared his kingdom was at hand, the mother of James and John had requested preferential treatment for them in His kingdom, and Jesus had warned them that He would be betrayed. They were all anxious for His kingdom to come. Could it be that Judas thought he was pushing Jesus into a confrontation that would bring about His kingdom, drive out the Romans, and prove His power?

Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, teach me patience and understanding that all things happen in your time. Help me to never doubt that you have heard my prayers. Teach me to believe that you know what is best for me and those I love. Amen

March 27, 2021 by Carol Hillebrenner

Scripture: Philippians 2:2-5 The Bible in Contemporary Language

Then do me a favor; agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front, don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourself long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourself the way Jesus Christ thought of himself.

Meditation:

Oh, how hard it is to watch others do things we think we can do so much better ourselves. Paul understood what trouble that attitude produced in the early churches. Well, today is no different. If I am not in charge of a project, I work hard at offering a helping hand. Still, sometimes, I forget and try to sell others on my ideas. We all know people who complain about how those in charge are making decisions, are frequently the same people who sit on their hands when leaders are needed. "We're only human" isn't a good excuse. As Christians we need to work with and support our fellow Christians.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, open my heart to the words of Jesus and his apostles. Teach me to work with others for your greater glory. Help me to be humble in spirit and work joyfully in companionship with all those who serve you. Amen

March 29, 2021 by Pastor Peggy Stott

Scripture: John 13:12-16

After he had washed their feet and put on his robes, and returned to the table, he said to them. "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

Meditation:

In Jesus' time, foot washing was a common practice. People wore sandals. Their feet were layered in dirt from walking dusty roads. Upon entering a house, foot washing was the first order of business. Servants were the ones delegated with this task. By washing His disciple's feet, Jesus was doing what an ordinary servant would do. This was extraordinary for someone of his stature, a teacher, in that society. In this simple task, Jesus demonstrated true greatness in God's eyes. In God's kingdom, the greatest person is the one who serves others. In today's culture, if Jesus visited your home, to demonstrate his love he would likely wash out your garbage cans, or clean your toilet. If he visited your church, he might be in the nursery changing dirty diapers. Then he might say to you, as he said so long ago, "I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you." John 13:15. In what ways are we willing to serve others in simple, practical, sacrificial ways that help produce the true humility Jesus mirrored for us? How are we "washing feet"?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as you would wash my filthy feet, or clean my smelly toilet, lead me and this congregation, to those tasks that most demonstrate your mercy, love, and humility to others. Amen.

March 30, 2021 by Rev. Tim White

Scripture: Mark 1:35

And in the morning, a great while before day, He rose and went out to a lonely place, and there He prayed.

Meditation:

Sometimes in the summer I get up early in the morning and take a cup of coffee out on to the patio. The air is cool and still smells fresh from the dew. I watch the hummingbirds flutter around the honeysuckle bush and listen to the chirping birds. I don't plan my day or make mental lists. I just breathe in creation and the new day which is a gift from God. During those quiet times outside, I experience the most personal and powerful prayers. There is something cleansing about getting away from the routine and the hassles of life and taking time to be in that quiet place.

If we read the gospels, we see that Jesus withdrew to quiet, lonely places on a regular basis to meet His Father, our God. As the pace of life continues to escalate at a dizzying speed, it is increasingly important to push back the demands of life and find a quiet place to be with God. If Jesus needed to pull back and regroup, then we certainly need that kind of relief as well.

Prayer:

Lord, we are so tired sometimes. We find that for days at a time we are too busy to enjoy the life you have given us, too busy to appreciate family, too busy to pray. Help us to slow down and give us a desire to withdraw to a quiet place where your comfort, peace and refreshment waits. Hold us in your strong, comforting arms and give us rest. Amen.

March 31, 2021 by Katie Edwards

Scripture: Mark 1:12-15

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Meditation:

Forty days. Jesus was sent into the wilderness for forty days; he was tempted by the devil. Jesus was able to resist the evil and temptations. What temptations are in your life? Would you be able to resist the temptations, or would you break down and give into them? As a kid growing up, I had friends that always gave up something during lent, like soda or fast food. I never understood why you would want to give something up, until I took a deeper look at this scripture. Jesus gave up his temptations for forty days before he knew the time was right. Instead of giving up something small, I am going to focus on doing something small each day to bring me closer to God, and knowing that I am listening for his plan.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, Help me to fight my temptations. Push me to listen for you and to your plan for me. I know that I have fallen into temptation before, so forgive me. In your name I pray, Amen.

April 1, 2021 by Annette Newquist

Scripture: Please read Matthew 27:38-44 - The Suffering Servant

Meditation:

What would be your reaction to being falsely accused of a crime and dragged before the civil authorities to be tried? Would you protest your innocence and ask for an attorney? Would you be angry and outraged at the injustice of it all? Yet Jesus, in this situation, said nothing in his own defense. Despised by the Jewish leaders and abandoned by his disciples, he had to face what was to come all alone.

How strange it seems that the one who was without sin should suffer for the sins of others. In accepting the will of God rather than insisting on his own will, Jesus understood that he must give his life to fulfill God's purpose. "The righteous one...shall make many righteous." (Is. 53:11). He refused to save himself by coming down from the cross. As the ultimate servant of God, Jesus completed the work of our salvation. No one has ever shown greater love than this!

Prayer:

Dear Jesus

We pray that when we face the trials of life we can rely on you for strength and comfort. Following your example, we will not fear.

April 2 by Doug Peterson

Scripture: Matthew 27:54-56

“Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son!’ Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.”

Meditation:

The passage takes place after Jesus had been taken down from the cross, the earth shook, and saints had been raised up. Quite spectacular events. Those who experienced all this were utterly convinced that Jesus was God’s Son. They felt deep in their core that these events happened because of who Jesus is.

Let’s reflect on that. Have you ever experienced the ground underneath you shaking? It is an experience like no other. I recall a few years ago I was in my home (in Vancouver), and I felt the ground tremor underneath me. It only lasted a couple seconds. But let me tell you, it gives you a vivid glimpse into your mortality. You feel how small you are. It also shakes you up enough that you are reminded what is important in the grand scheme of things.

The other item that stands out is how the women Jesus knew show up in the aftermath of His life. Women often get brushed off in scripture. But not here. They were credited for supporting Jesus in His mission, and they were present after He was taken off the cross. It goes without saying that women need their story told as well. That is just how it is.

Prayer: Creator God, may it not take an earthquake for us to recognize who you are as God’s son and Risen Savior. We do not always see the big picture clearly. But it does help when we get these glimpses of Jesus in the Gospels. May we live as if the ground beneath us tremored. May we know Jesus in such a way that we are inspired to follow in His ways. In Jesus our Hope, Amen.

April 3, 2021 by Rev. Matthew Hunt
Pastor of Salem Church

Scripture: Matthew 27:57-61

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus...So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb...He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.

Meditation:

I cannot imagine the grief and hardship Joseph experienced. All his hopes and dreams about Jesus likely seemed lost forever. He may have even questioned his loyalty to Jesus in the midst of such darkness. Jesus is dead. Even with the sun shining brightly, I am guessing it felt pitch black dark to Joseph.

That’s why clearing the clutter is so important. When life is darkest, it’s important to cling closely to God’s unconditional love and the light of Christ. Clearing the clutter helps us practice connecting with God even in the darkest of times. Political unrest, global health crisis, sleepless nights, and failed relationships all qualify, but this scripture reminds us that the darkness will never - under any circumstances - overcome the light of Christ. Let that sink in. Joseph did and we should too.

Prayer:

God of hope, help us to live as children of the light. Even as darkness tries to break into our lives, let the world see you in us. Help us clear the clutter of our lives, so we can see you during even the darkest of times just like Joseph did.



HE IS RISEN !