



*Walking with Jesus  
in Faithfulness*

A Devotional Guide to Easter

February 17 - April 5, 2010



From the Faculty, Staff, and Students  
of MB Biblical Seminary

*Wednesday, February 17, 2010*

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

### Welcome to the Journey of the Faithful

Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent are relatively new concepts for me. Lent prepares us for Easter. Lent is not only a season for giving something up, it is a season for taking up repentance, prayer, fasting, and reflection on our baptismal covenant vows. Lent is not a season for giving something up. Lent is a time to take up the discipline of listening to the voice of the Spirit. Lent is a season to meditate on the cross of Christ.

For Joel's audience the day of the Lord was a bright season. Israel was convinced that the day of the Lord was "Independence Day." The day of the Lord would be the day when the Lord's enemies would be vanquished. The people of the Lord would flourish, they thought.

Joel warned the people that they were living with a false impression. They expected the day of the Lord to bring victory to themselves as the Lord's allies. Joel delivered devastating news. Israel had behaved as God's enemy. The day of the Lord would bring doom, darkness, and a devouring fire even to those who thought they were the people of God.

Joel describes the coming judgment. Then the message shifts to a call to turn to God. Joel calls for fasting, weeping, torn hearts, and complete turning. Joel bases his call on the person of God. Though God has announced judgment, Joel recalls the ancient testimony about God. Joel quotes Yahweh's own words to Moses, centuries earlier. "Yahweh your God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love."

*Lord, during this season help us to explore the journey of the faithful. Help us to walk with Jesus into the wilderness of repentance. Dear God, meet us afresh on this journey.*

Lynn Jost, PhD  
Associate Professor of Old Testament  
President of MB Biblical Seminary

*Thursday, February 18, 2010*

Psalm 51:1-17

### Amazing Grace

A good friend of mine, a man once groomed to become a Sudanese Muslim cleric, fled to Kinshasa to avoid being executed. His only goal thereafter? Return home and exact vengeance on those who forced him into exile and murdered his friend for challenging Islam.

But something extraordinary and unexpected happened in the Congo. This man met a Mennonite Brethren pastor and eventually gave his life to Jesus Christ. One moment my friend was dominated by an all-consuming hatred and an unquenchable thirst for blood. The next, his heart was bursting with the love of Jesus Christ.

He now lives in Canada and annually makes several trips back to the Middle East to share the Gospel. He does so in spite of regular threats against his life.

One day I asked him what ultimately persuaded him to receive Jesus Christ. What could possibly convince a man to abandon Islam and turn to Jesus Christ knowing full well it could mean death? His answer surprised me at first, but on second thought, it was the only answer he could give. His response was immediate and formidable—"Forgiveness!" he joyfully exclaimed.

Is there ever truly any other reason to turn to the living God? Think about it: Life-giving, infinite grace just for the asking. Grace enough for this life and for all eternity. How could God extend such forgiveness so generously and to so many? The amazing answer is found in the infinite price he paid that all may live: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Pierre Gilbert, PhD  
Associate Professor of Bible and Theology  
Winnipeg Campus

*Friday, February 19, 2010*

Isaiah 58:1-12

### True Evangelical Faith

I am sorry to say that on more than one Sunday during my childhood, my mother grew so impatient with my restlessness during church that she grabbed my arm and escorted me outside for a pointed mother-daughter conversation. I have a vivid memory of one of those occasions in which she walked me briskly up the aisle while I repeated an impassioned litany that sounded like this: “I’ll be good, I’ll be good, I’ll be good.” She was undeterred. “I’ll be good” doesn’t mean much if it is not backed up by right behavior!

That is the essence of our text from Isaiah. The people want to know why God hasn’t seen their show of grief. Doesn’t he know how sorry they are for their sins? Why won’t God bless them?

Isaiah—like my mother, and more importantly like God—is not fooled. Making a show of being sorry for sin does not mean much if it is not accompanied by right behavior, and it means even less if we continue to sin. We only fool ourselves if we think God does not see how we truly live.

What kind of behavior is expected of people who claim Jesus as Lord? Menno Simons, the former monk who became a leader in the 16th-century Anabaptist movement, put it like this:

“True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant.  
It clothes the naked.  
It feeds the hungry.  
It comforts the sorrowful.  
It shelters the destitute.  
It serves those that harm it.  
It binds up that which is wounded.  
It has become all things to all people.”

May we truly exhibit this kind of changed behavior!

Valerie Rempel, PhD  
*Dean of Students and Enrollment*  
*Associate Professor of History and Theology*  
*Fresno Campus*

*Saturday, February 20, 2010*

Romans 1:8-17

### Thanksgiving in April?

Typically, we celebrate Thanksgiving in the fall, at harvest time. At the beginning of his letter to the Romans, Paul also sounds a note of thanksgiving. In today’s reading, he pauses to praise God, commend his readers, offer a prayer, and set out several sound bites to develop later in the letter. He hopes to share with the Roman churches deeper insight into the faith they already practice. We, too, can find encouragement from reading their mail.

Paul’s thanksgiving is rooted in Easter. He says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” Paul is well aware that the gospel message will disrupt the established social values of those who are God’s people and those who are not. Such confidence is rooted in his conviction that the gospel is the worldwide demonstration of God’s mighty power. Once, this power was known almost solely to Israel. Now, in these last days, it is available for all to experience as well. God’s end-time power transforms the cultural categories, redrawing the boundaries with room for all who have the faith of Messiah Jesus and name his story as theirs. Paul’s thanksgiving message re-frames what some considered shameful, calling it honorable and a truer representation of God’s character.

Paul concludes his thanksgiving remarks by setting out his thesis, using the vocabulary (e.g., gospel, faith, power, righteousness) that will occupy him for the rest of the letter. He aims to show that God’s own righteousness is revealed in the gospel. Jesus is the “righteous one” who demonstrates God’s righteousness in these last days. Plus, the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who realigns herself or himself with the “righteous one.”

This is a Thanksgiving that can be celebrated not only at harvest, not only in April, but year round! Thanks be to God.

Jon Isaak, PhD  
*Associate Professor of New Testament*  
*Fresno Campus*

*Sunday, February 21, 2010*

Matthew 4:1-11

### Temptation

Childhood temptations involve clear boundaries and rules: Will we transgress the boundary? Will we break the rule? Will we choose “having fun” over “being good”?

Adult temptations are sometimes more complicated: What does faithfulness mean in this situation? What does integrity require? How do I know if I am testing or trusting God?

How did Jesus discern that turning stones into bread would be wrong but multiplying five loaves for 5,000 people would be right? How did he know it would be wrong to count on a soft landing in the temple court but right to trust God to buoy him up if he stepped out onto the surface of a lake? Of course bowing down to Satan to gain the world would be wrong. But Jesus also knew it was wrong when Satan tempted him to bow down just a little, to compromise here and there. And Jesus knew how to resist. How did he know? How did he resist?

Jesus discerned the source of ideas—sometimes Satan tempting, sometimes God directing. He was clear about his identity—God’s beloved Son. He understood his mission—faithfulness at all costs. He served others, not himself. He relied on Scripture, quoting it to strengthen his resolve and to thwart the enemy’s enticing schemes.

We have all these resources, too. And we can lean on the support of Christian brothers and sisters. And we can keep our eyes on the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus. He faithfully walked the road before us and understands our struggles.

*Lord Jesus, you who were tempted in every way just like we are, give us strength for the time of testing and discernment to know what it means to follow you.*

Tim Geddert, PhD  
Professor of New Testament and Academic Dean  
Fresno Campus

*Monday, February 22, 2010*

Psalm 32

### The Lucky Ones

My journey of following Jesus started as a young lad. In those early years, I somehow got the impression that I was one of “the lucky ones” who could now live free from sin. I discovered in later life, however, that “the lucky ones” are those able to move beyond our sinful acts by experiencing God’s grace and forgiveness (see Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, p. 95).

Psalm 32 was written by King David, a person who fully understood intimacy with God, but who also experienced the anguishing guilt of sin. He understood how disorienting and paralyzing life can become when we refuse to acknowledge or recognize our transgressions against God and against our neighbors. Harboring his sin led King David to experience feelings of depression, fatigue, and physical and emotional pain (vv. 3-4). He discovered that sin was not simply psychological feelings of guilt, but the breaking of intimacy with God and with others. So King David became one of “the lucky ones” by confessing his sin to God instead of covering it up. The result? He says that God “forgave the guilt of my sin” (v. 5), leading to joy (v. 10).

The movement in the psalm is powerful—from paralysis (vv. 3-4) to acknowledgement (v. 5) to forgiveness (vv. 6-7) to joy (v. 10). “The lucky ones” are those who fully embrace and acknowledge their humanity and sinfulness and receive God’s forgiveness. The result is a transformed life and renewed intimacy with him. The movement from sin to confession to forgiveness to joy is life-giving! Jesus called it the “narrow way” that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14).

Elmer A. Martens, PhD  
MBBS President Emeritus  
Professor of Old Testament Emeritus

*Thursday, February 23, 2010*

Genesis 4:1-16

### **The Reality of Evil and the Hope of Redemption**

If there is any doubt about whether something extraordinarily momentous happened when Adam and Eve rebelled against the living God, the Cain and Abel episode permanently lays that to rest. At the dawn of human history something goes terribly wrong—the first man to be born kills his own brother! Can it get any worse? Is there any hope for this fallen race?

Genesis 4:1-16 is all about hard reality and unexpected hope. The reality is that when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, something broke in the deepest recesses of the human heart. This first murder is the irrefutable proof that humanity has now entered into the age of violence, evil, and chaos. But it's not the whole story.

Adam and Eve did indeed sin and earned the curse, but life goes on. Cain is born, then Abel. While deathly violence erupts in Cain's heart, the text reminds us that he could have overcome the murdering impulse (4:6-7). Here is the earliest signal that we are not predetermined. We are free to give heed to the living God. While Cain chooses to feed his impulse to commit murder, God nevertheless allows him to live and have children. Again, life goes on!

Chapter 4 is not about the hopelessness of the human condition. It is about the depth of God's compassion. That is, in fact, the message that continues to echo throughout the rest of Genesis. Men and women sin, resist God's project, sink into chaos, but to no avail. Every time God's grace overwhelms and overcomes. God will not abandon his creature. He will provide in time a way, the only way, to redeem humanity and all of creation: His son will die on a cross and rise again.

Pierre Gilbert, PhD  
*Associate Professor of Bible and Theology  
Winnipeg Campus*

*Friday, February 24, 2010*

Matthew 18:10-14

### **An Eye for Greatness**

We live in a culture that encourages us to recognize greatness in those who are famous, glamorous, or powerful. However, Jesus calls us to be guided by a different definition of greatness. In verses 3 and 4 of this chapter he tells us that, within the culture of heaven, greatness is to be found among those who have demonstrated a willingness to humble themselves like little children.

It should be easy to recognize how profoundly Jesus' words contrast with the values of our society. These words should challenge us to consider the degree to which our notions of greatness have come to be influenced by these societal values. The Christian figures who sell the most books, speak at the largest conferences, or serve the largest churches are often those who are celebrated as the greatest among us.

However, Jesus urges us to measure greatness by an entirely different standard. This is not to suggest that there is necessarily anything wrong with prominent leaders or speakers. These individuals may very well fit Jesus' description. However, many of those who are truly great from Christ's perspective are entirely unknown to us. Many of these individuals live quietly, yet faithfully, in virtual obscurity. Some even occupy stations in life that are ignored perhaps, or even maligned, within our society.

Jesus cautions us not to look down upon those who meet his standard of greatness (v. 10). In fact, he tells us his Father values each of them immensely (vv. 12-14). We must be careful that we not become so caught up in the world's standards that we fail to recognize, honor, support, protect, and learn from those whom Jesus would call great.

*Jesus, teach me today to possess the humility to view myself and others according to your standard of greatness. Amen.*

Cory L. Seibel, PhD  
*Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministries  
Fresno Campus*

*Thursday, February 25, 2010*

Isaiah 51:1-3

### Out of the Quarry

For tourists traveling to Victoria, Canada, the Butchart Gardens are a must-see. The superabundance of roses, variegated floral designs, the exquisitely manicured bushes, the winding paths downward into a massive sunken garden, the bronze statues and lovely fountains fascinate every visitor. Once, this was an ugly gravel pit. Mrs. Jennie Butchart would look out her kitchen window to see boulders strewn about in this gigantic hole. Unsightly ridges and unattractive pits were everywhere. Then, imagination set in as to what could be! Effort and money were freely expended and behold—a garden of world-renowned beauty! What a transformation.

Isaiah calls upon his listeners to look to “the quarry from which you were dug” (Isaiah 51:1). In effect he is saying, “Look where you have come from!” Once, things were bleak. Abraham and Sarah were alone with no children. But because of God’s intervention, they are the ancestors of many descendants. Thanks to God’s abundant blessing, no longer are things bleak! The situation, thought to be hopeless, has been transformed.

Look to the quarry, the place from which you came, says the prophet. In this, the 150th anniversary of the Mennonite Brethren church, we may follow similar counsel. The group that, in 1860, signed the founding document in Elizabethtal, Molotschna colony, Ukraine, was but 18 in number. They pledged their fresh allegiance to God. Their number now totals more than 300,000 world-wide. So many lives and communities transformed!

God transforms people and situations. Here is ample reason for “joy and gladness [to] be found in her (us), thanksgiving and the voice of song!” (51:3).

Elmer A. Martens, PhD  
*MBBS President Emeritus*  
*Professor of Old Testament Emeritus*

*Friday, February 26, 2010*

Romans 3:21-26

### The Politics of God

Recently the two of us preached this text on the same weekend. Our theological starting point was the same: Paul announces that the end-time, world-transforming righteousness of God has been revealed in history in a new, powerful way.

One of the key issues is the translation of verse 22: God’s righteousness is revealed “through the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus.” The King James Version got it right. The righteousness of God is demonstrated in the world through the faithfulness of Jesus, not “through faith in Jesus,” as Luther translated (followed by many modern translations). The righteousness of God “through the faithfulness of Jesus” is for all who respond to God the way Jesus did, by loyalty to God.

During the worship service where one of us was about to preach the text, a mother asked for prayer. Her 18-year-old daughter had been assaulted late that Saturday night by a baseball bat-wielding gangster. The car windshield had been smashed, but the girl escaped injury. The mother requested prayer—not for her daughter, but for the offender.

Before the sermon was even preached, the application of the passage had already been proclaimed. God’s righteousness and redemption are revealed in Jesus’ act of faithfulness on the cross. God’s saving power over sin is further disclosed among God’s faithful people. When we forgive, we are living in the power of God’s redemptive liberation released at the cross. God effects salvation through Messiah Jesus.

After the worship service the girl’s father, a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, confirmed his desire to have tea with the gang member. God’s liberation is at work when we offer unmerited grace. To do so is to walk in faithfulness with Jesus. Thanks be to God.

John E. Toews, PhD, *MBBS Academic Dean Emeritus*  
*Professor of New Testament Emeritus*

and Lynn Jost, PhD  
*MBBS President; Associate Professor of Old Testament*

*Saturday, February 27, 2010*

Isaiah 51:4-8

### Shining Eyes

*“My justice will become a light to the nations ... my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations” (from Isaiah 51:4-5).*

They were refugees, but the barbed wire and soldiers made them feel like prisoners. With dark countenances the camp leaders told us of men, women and children being shot down by the El Salvadoran army, and of others drowning as they fled across the border to Honduras. Later we met with another group—Christians. They told similar stories of violence and loss; they too felt like prisoners and also wondered how many years would pass until they could return home. Yet their eyes shone; we sat in a circle of light and hope. More than 20 years later, their faces continue to witness to me of the difference Christ makes in a person’s life and in a community of believers.

I thought of those El Salvadoran Christians as I read: “the islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm.” Like the refugees, these people on the islands knew that things were not as they should be, they were oppressed. Like the Christian refugees these people also waited in hope for God to bring justice to a situation lacking justice.

The camp leaders knew of the grave injustices, but their eyes did not shine because they did not know the God of light and justice. I wonder if my eyes fail to shine because I have become dulled to the injustices around me. I invite you to join me in reflecting on where justice is lacking, and then pray with hope for God to act. As we more clearly see and name the darkness, may our eyes shine with hope as we wait for God’s justice.

Mark D. Baker, PhD  
*Associate Professor of Mission and Theology  
Fresno Campus*

*Sunday, February 28, 2010*

John 3:1-17

### Living in Another Reality

Recently I taught the book of Revelation, which reminds us of a spiritual reality that is in addition to the physical reality in which we live. In our passage for today, Jesus teaches Nicodemus of that spiritual reality as well.

Nicodemus comes with an observation that Jesus must come from God because of the signs that Jesus is doing. Jesus pushes Nicodemus to further discernment of the kingdom of God and what Jesus wants to accomplish in coming to earth. In order to “see” and enter this reality, Nicodemus will need to be born again—be born by the Spirit. This spiritual perspective will come through a belief in Jesus as God’s only Son and the obtaining of eternal life. God sent the Son in love in order to save the world.

Nicodemus has a fleshly perspective, Jesus is a man sent from God. The spiritual reality, however, is that the coming of the Son of God is part of the kingdom of God in which belief in him, when he is lifted up, will bring eternal life. A spiritual re-birth is needed in order to live in this kingdom.

May we continue to live life in the Spirit in order to see the kingdom of God. There is a reality to the spiritual perspective that is like the wind. You see the wind’s effects but you don’t really see the wind. My natural tendency is to view life from the earthly perspective rather than the heavenly one. I am the teacher who often doesn’t understand these things. May we live life in the reality of the kingdom of God and the Son of God who gives eternal life, a life of knowing God (John 17:3).

Doug Berg, PhD  
*Associate Professor of Leadership Studies  
Associate Dean of Administration  
Langley Campus*

*Monday, March 1, 2010*

Psalm 128

**A Blessed Life**

Later this month I will do what I've done only 47 times before in my life...blow out the candles on my birthday cake. It's a custom that seems to have survived the cautions of the H1N1 flu epidemic along with another custom. Before the candles are blown out, the birthday boy or girl must make a wish.

I don't remember when I started this, but at every birthday for years I've made the same wish. It's a prayer, really, since wishes aren't worth much if not directed toward someone who can fulfill them. Maybe that goes against the prevailing tradition that a revealed wish won't come true, but that's where the realities of faith trump tradition.

What's my wish-prayer? Psalm 128:6—to "live to see [and enjoy] my children's children". Since none of our four children are married yet, I'm praying to live a while longer!

During this season called Lent, Christians have traditionally sacrificed something to grow or to show their devotion to God. Though these are meant to connect us with Jesus' life of suffering, some sacrifices like giving up sweets or coffee or stopping TV-watching or smoking can also improve our health. There is value in that, but no such sacrifices can guarantee a longer life. Our days are in God's hands. We live by his grace, not by chance or by bargaining with him about the amount of chocolate we eat.

A full and blessed life is ours each day as we walk with Jesus in faithfulness, trusting and obeying his direction. We have joys ahead, for sure, but a blessed life is lived each day.

For my birthday and yours this year, receive Psalm 128:1 as a gift—"Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways."

Mark D. Isaac, MDiv  
*Director of Advancement and Constituency Relations  
Fresno, California*

*Tuesday, March 2, 2010*

Ezekiel 36:22-32

**Change I Can Really Believe In!**

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."  
(Ezekiel 36:26 NIV)*

In Ezekiel 36:22-32 the prophet relates a remarkable word from God. In the face of Israel's chronic and unrelenting disobedience, God will do something that only the living God could ever do—he will gather his people and make them into a nation again.

This promise of a new beginning is simply extraordinary. First, God's action is based on his character and is designed to show the world the kind of God he is. It is not in any way contingent upon Israel. Second, he will cleanse his people from sin. Third, God will get at the root of Israel's unfaithfulness—he will give his people a new heart and his Spirit so they may have the power to keep his laws. Fourth, he will bless and prosper them so much that the Israelites will not only recognize God's goodness but will also recognize and bitterly regret their own unfaithfulness. Now that's change I can believe in!

Let's not kid ourselves. Israel's inability to love the living God is not unique. It is a plight all men and women share. None of us has the ability to be faithful to God. If God were like us, we would be doomed. But God is not a man. He created us to enter into a loving relationship with himself and has done everything to make that a reality.

*"When we were utterly helpless,  
Christ came at just the right time and  
died for us sinners" (Romans 5:6 NLT).*

Pierre Gilbert, PhD  
*Associate Professor of Bible and Theology  
Winnipeg Campus*

*Wednesday, March 3, 2010*

John 7:53-8:11

### Calling a Sinner to Sainthood

The movie *Gospel of John* portrays the tense scene eloquently—a frightened, disheveled woman counting the length of her life in seconds and minutes rather than years; a group of men, rocks in hand, ready to make her an example by stoning; Jesus, quietly writing with his finger on the ground; the verbal challenge from the mob, met with the calm response, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her”; the group evaporating as they drift away; Jesus’ brief conversation with the woman, and her departure from center stage, alive.

First, we have here the wonderful gospel truth that Jesus freely offers mercy and life to those whose lives have earned them condemnation. We don’t need to earn his favor. While Jesus didn’t condemn her, he judged her behavior (v. 11)—sin is still sin, a reminder that the Jesus who came to seek and to save and to welcome the marginalized will one day be our judge. This time Jesus rescued her from punishment for sin. There is coming a day when he will no longer be able to do that for those who have not, in this life, turned to him for rescue.

And second, in Jesus’ challenge to the woman is also a message of hope. William Barclay writes that “Go, and sin no more” were Jesus’ words of inspiration to the woman; that he believed it possible, with his help, for her to break destructive patterns. He saw her potential as a saint.

*Father, may we walk in faithfulness with Jesus, welcoming the broken and rebellious, seeing their potential through your eyes, without compromising your call to leave a life of sin.*

Marvin Dyck, MDiv  
Pastor of Crossroads MB Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Student, MB Biblical Seminary

*Thursday, March 4, 2010*

Psalm 95

### Praise the God of Mystery

Our psalm today begins as a beautifully crafted praise song, a call to worship the LORD. Why? Because the LORD is truly God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

This song pulls us to the image of God in all his power and care putting the world in order. Everything has its place—the dry land emerges from the sea and all sorts of living things, humans included, flourish. Whenever we need to remember that God is in control, that God has a mission and the power to fulfill it, all we need to do is sing this song. Even if the world around us seems uncertain, “let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for he is our God.” We come into the presence of our King, our Savior, and we cannot help but “shout joyfully.”

“But in the midst of the swelling song of praise, the voice of the prophetic admonition bursts in” (H. J. Kraus). God speaks odd words: “Do not harden your hearts.” They seem out of place. Gathered to worship in the presence of God, are we to hear about our unfaithful forebears? Journeying through the Lenten season we can hear this warning as a promise. God may be telling us that he is about to act in mysterious ways and that, in the past, some have rejected those ways. But as for us, we can choose to remain faithful to God even if what we see next doesn’t make sense. Jesus tried to tell his disciples that his way would be one of suffering, but they couldn’t imagine a king who gets crucified. We will celebrate the resurrection soon—another baffling act of God. May we praise the LORD faithfully at every mysterious turn.

Michelle Ferguson, MA  
Registrar  
Fresno Campus

*Friday, March 5, 2010*

Colossians 1:15-23

**Making Faith Visible**

Felix Manz, an Anabaptist who was martyred for his faith in Christ, penned the following hymn based on this passage nearly 500 years ago. He is said to have been speaking and singing of his faith when he was bound and drowned in the Limmat River.

*"I sing with exultation, all my heart's delight  
Is God who brings salvation, frees from death's dread might.  
I praise thee, Christ of heaven, who ever shall endure,  
Who takes away my sorrow, keeps me safe and secure.*

*God sends him as example, light and living guide.  
Before my end he bids me in his realm abide,  
That I may love and cherish his righteousness divine,  
That I with him forever—bliss eternal may find.*

*Sing praise to Christ our Savior, who, in grace inclined,  
To us reveals his nature: patient, loving, kind.  
His love divine outpouring, displayed to ev'ryone,  
Is fashioned like his Father's as no other has done.*

(Felix Manz, 1526, trans. Mario Wenger)

Colossians 1:15-23 reveals many images of Christ and his reconciling work. This beautiful hymn describing and praising Christ and the list of what Christ does for us calls us to praise Christ, to give thanks for our salvation and hope, and to continue steadfastly in the faith. Based on Christ's person and work, reflect on the following: 1) How and when is your faith made visible to others in today's world? 2) Where in your life and world is the reconciling power of Christ needed? 3) Where do you need to be more securely established and steadfast in your faith?

Delores Friesen, PhD  
*Professor of Pastoral Counseling  
Fresno Campus*

*Saturday, March 6, 2010*

Ephesians 2:11-22

**The Real Survivor**

It's hard to believe the CBS TV show *Survivor* (2000-present) is still on the air. The still-popular 'reality' show pits individuals on two different tribes against nature and each other. They vote each other off until one person, the winner, remains victorious.

The reality of the Gospel in today's Scripture stands in sharp contrast. Here we find that one man draws two tribes together. This one man, Jesus Christ, was nailed to a cross. Through his death, victory was achieved and from that place Jesus drew all people from both tribes to himself—those who were near and those who were far away. Most of us are foreigners, from the tribe that was the furthest away. Based on God's amazing grace and on no merit of our own, we now have citizenship with God's people and are members of God's household. We have peace and are reconciled to our God and to each other!

As we journey through this Lenten season and consider the incredible sacrifice of Jesus, we have reason to hope. With Easter still a few weeks away, we can see a glimpse of the resurrection just on the other side of the cross. Citizenship, a place to call home, and true life within us are the Gospel realities that shape us and give us our identity. We truly have reason to celebrate. But as we celebrate the incredible status we receive in Christ, we would do well to remember that peace on earth is still a work in progress. Life sometimes feels more like *Survivor* than it does the Gospel. When we are tempted to "vote someone off" the street on which we live or out of our faith community, perhaps we would be wise to first consider the grace that was freely given to us.

James Bergen, MDiv  
*Pastor of North Fresno (California) MB Church  
MBBS Alumnus*

*Sunday, March 7, 2010*

Romans 5:1-10

### It is All About Access

Marlene LeFever in her book, *Creative Teaching Methods*, notes five ways to grow creative Christians. One of them calls for teachers to plan for equal access to the creative arts, encouraging both male and female students to develop their talents and gifts. LeFever's suggestion is not novel; it is rooted in the very character of God as Paul reminds us in today's reading.

The Gospel proclamation is that through Jesus "we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand." Therefore, we have "peace with God." This is good news! God paves the way so that we can return home and become what God always purposed for humanity. Finally, in these last days, at the right time, the source of our alienation and rebellion has been undone. Jesus "introduces," or "sponsors," us into the new humanity that is no longer aligned with the evil empire.

"Peace" describes the rich place of access. It is the way things should be (i.e., shalom, wholeness, completeness). Restored and right relationships produce peace, integrity, and authenticity. This is not imaginary peace; it is real peace. Why? Because we no longer need to automatically say "yes" to sin's deceptive ploys. In our attachment to Jesus and his body, we can now say "no" to sin.

Thanks be to God! For it is through Jesus that we now have access to the grace-filled life intended by God from the dawn of time.

May the Gospel potential be lived out in our lives today. It is all about access!

Jon Isaak, PhD  
*Associate Professor of New Testament  
Fresno Campus*

*Monday, March 8, 2010*

John 4:5-42

### Transforming the Ordinary

On an ordinary day, doing a routine and ordinary task, this woman of Samaria had an extraordinary encounter. This Samaritan woman—from a despised race and a snubbed gender (v. 27), whose name we don't even know—encountered Jesus.

Jesus spoke first, initiating the conversation around a common interest: water. But she was cautious in her response (v. 9), and pragmatic about Jesus' offer for water—for he had no bucket (v. 11). Yet she was intrigued by this offer of living water.

Jesus nudged her beyond the daily task to a deeper reality, identifying that she carried pain, hurt and shame. At this, she began to change the subject—arguing about religion. But Jesus gently brought her back to her real need—true worship, and a relationship with the Messiah. And when she was ready, he revealed his true identity as the one she was seeking (v. 26).

With new understanding, a transformed heart, and a purpose beyond herself, this woman set aside her task of drawing water and ran to town to invite others to meet the Messiah! Because of her testimony the people came to encounter Jesus. And when they heard for themselves, their lives were transformed; they too began to walk with Jesus in faithfulness.

Jesus can transform the ordinary into the purposeful, the extraordinary, and the eternal! When Jesus shows up in our routine today, may we recognize him as did this unnamed woman.

*Lord Jesus, we are so busy with our daily tasks. Open our hearts to see and understand the true and purposeful life that you provide. May we also be transformed, allowing you to shine through our lives to others around us. Amen.*

Steve Prieb, MDiv  
*Advancement and Admissions, Midwest US  
Topeka, Kansas*

*Tuesday, March 9, 2010*

Psalm 81

### **Honey from the Rock**

The Psalms sing for joy and call us to rejoice, remember, and repent. In Psalm 81, God's people are asked to sing aloud, shout for joy, sound the instruments, and celebrate the decrees of God. They are to listen to him who has delivered their shoulders from the burden, freed their hands from the basket, and brought them out of the land of Egypt. The Ten Commandments are recalled—there is to be no foreign god among them. This divine admonition ends with a promise that if we open our mouth wide, God will fill it.

God laments that his people followed their own counsel and stubborn hearts instead of listening and submitting to God's ways. If only we would listen, then God would quickly subdue our enemies and turn his hand against our foes. We would be fed with the finest of wheat. With honey from the rock God would satisfy us!

The strange gods of materialism, nationalism, political positions, and war threaten to undo us. What are Christians to do when their nations go to war and their economy is in free fall? This Scripture admonishes us to listen to him, and promises that we will be fed, filled, and satisfied. God asks us to walk in his ways and let him subdue our enemies—the battle belongs to God. He causes those who hate the Lord to cringe before him and their doom will last forever.

Reminiscent of Gideon's battle at Midian or Joshua's at Jericho, we are to rejoice and sing, listen and obey, and let God fight our battles.

Delores Friesen, PhD  
*Professor of Pastoral Counseling  
Fresno Campus*

*Wednesday, March 10, 2010*

Psalm 23

### **Through the Valley**

As I write these words, I am in the midst of funeral preparations for a much-loved aunt. Her death came suddenly, though it was not unexpected. During the last months we have watched her declining health and the increasing restrictions imposed by a failing body, and we have known that we were walking in the shadows of death.

Still, the reality is jarring. I sit in a room decorated for Christmas, the wrapping paper barely thrown away, and the Christmas goodies still tempting me to overeat. I am trying to write devotionals that help move us toward Easter while my friends are preparing to celebrate the New Year. In the midst of all this life, I am confronted by death.

Of course, the road to Easter is always through the valley of the shadow of death. Sometimes the shadows loom large and threaten to overwhelm us; sometimes they seem distant and we are able to ignore their presence. But here is a truth: we do not get to Easter's resurrection celebration until we die.

The days leading to Easter are days in which we live with an awareness of impending death. But even as the shadows grow longer our text today reminds us that we are not alone. This marvelous psalm of comfort reminds us that God's presence is with us always. It is God who sustains us, who gives us rest when we are weary, comfort when we are frightened, and hope when we are discouraged.

Indeed, our Easter hope is captured in the last verse of the psalm. "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Valerie Rempel, PhD  
*Dean of Students and Enrollment  
Associate Professor of History & Theology  
Fresno Campus*

*Thursday, March 11, 2010*

Ephesians 4:1-13

### Unity in Diversity

The extensive commercialization of the Christmas season in North America often obscures for Christians the fact that Easter has always been the central event of the liturgical calendar. Although there have sometimes been disagreements among Christians about the dates of Easter, there has never been any question that the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus are central to the commemorative events of the Easter season.

It is hard to miss the emphasis here: This unity is a reality! In today's passage the apostle Paul emphasizes that there is unity among Christians: there is "one body and one Spirit . . . one glorious hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father . . ." (v. 4-5). The emphasis here on the fact that this unity truly is a reality is hard to miss!

The fact that our unity in Christ has not resulted in a complete theological consensus, or total uniformity in liturgical practice, or the incorporation of all congregations into one institutional structure, troubles some people. Differences among Christians are an unavoidable reality in this world, but this does not mean that unity in Christ is not a reality. The "bond of peace" among Christians is possible when we manifest humility and gentleness towards others and when we act with patience and love (v. 2) even towards those who see some things differently than we do.

May this Easter be a time when we celebrate the way Jesus' redeeming work on the cross makes it possible for us to become members of the body of Christ. And may we also pray that differences in theology, worship, and polity not be allowed to obscure our unity, but rather enrich our relationships with other Christians.

Bruce L. Guenther, PhD  
*Associate Professor of Church History and Mennonite Studies*  
*Associate Dean of Academics*  
*Langley Campus*

*Friday, March 12, 2010*

Ephesians 5:1-9

### Whom Are We Imitating?

*"Watch what God does and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love is like that" (Ephesians 1:1-2 The Message).*

Looking up to heroes is not foreign to our culture—sports celebrities, movie stars, etc. Like most youngsters, my dad was my hero when I was growing up. I wanted to be just like him—big, strong, confident, and successful. It was when Dad, at the age of forty with his family around him, prayed to invite Jesus into his life that I had a new reason to follow his example. I saw a new person who purposefully sought to follow Jesus.

Paul is writing to new Christians who needed instruction as to what it meant to put off the old life and live the life God intended. He identifies sexual immorality, impurity and greed as primary evils his readers were contending with and warns against being "fooled by those who excuse these sins." Paul uses the image of darkness and light to illustrate the life change that happens as they decide to follow Christ. He encourages his readers—us included—to "live as people of light. For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true" (vv. 8,9).

As Easter approaches, it is not about what we give up for Lent. It is all about forsaking our old life and following Christ's example—living, not cautiously, but extravagantly in our love for others. "Whom are we imitating?"

Dave Teigrob, MA  
*Advancement Officer, Saskatchewan, Manitoba & Ontario*  
*Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*

*Saturday, March 13, 2010*

John 1:1-9

**God is On the Move**

We're halfway there! Don't give up! Keep moving forward on your Lenten journey. If you have given something up for Lent to identify and draw closer to Christ, keep it up! Stay in the Word, which helps guide our journey.

The beginning of John's gospel blesses us today. This passage is as powerful as it gets. Through the centuries many have come to this text to learn and then help convince others that Jesus, the Word, is God and that life comes from him. Much of our theology, doctrine, and apologetics (the basis and defense of the Christian faith) is anchored in this passage. But at its core this passage is primarily about mission and not theology or doctrine or apologetics. Action words are everywhere. We see that God is on the move through Jesus. He is on a mission to bring life and light to the world.

We are also called to join in this mission. Perhaps those are the most startling words we read today. We are in the midst of a grand and cosmic telling of God's story in Jesus and we are promptly interrupted by verse 6, "There came a man who was sent from God: his name was John." What is John doing here?! God is up to something—something big. Why is John getting in the way?! It seems that God is calling out human witnesses at the same time he is sending his son as Savior of the world. God's salvation plan is both a divine and human venture.

*Jesus, as I continue my Lenten journey, I recognize that you are on the move—in the world and in my life. May your life and light transform me. May my life be a faithful witness so others might also believe.*

James Bergen, MDiv  
Pastor of North Fresno (California) MB Church  
MBBS Alumnus

*Sunday, March 14, 2010*

I Samuel 16:1-13

**Looking Deeper**

*"God sees not as man sees....but the LORD looks at the heart"  
(I Samuel 16:7b).*

We've all heard sermons on this verse reminding us God is more concerned about who we are than how we look. It is awesome and frightening to think that the Creator of the Universe is concerned about who we are. But it seems that God is saying more to Samuel than this. God reminds Samuel that he also is to look at a person's heart.

I love it when I can help people see themselves more like God sees them, as gifted to "do the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12). One woman I knew had all the gifts to make a great counselor, but she could not show it in class. Then, I happened to see her teaching some friends skills she used in her job. Here she was aware of what each person was doing and coaching them with insight and love. I ran across the room shouting, "That's what you need to do when you counsel! I knew you could do it!" I am afraid I embarrassed her, but the next week in class she began to show the awareness I knew she had inside. Today, she is working as a Marriage and Family Therapy intern and has become a leader in her church.

This Lenten season let me encourage you to look within yourself while, at the same time, to look at others as God looks at them. What makes them precious to God? What gifts has God given them? How can you encourage them to see themselves as God sees them?

*Lord, be gracious as you look into my heart today. Cleanse me and make me fit for your service. Fill me so that I may show your love to others. Amen.*

David Bruce Rose, PhD  
Associate Professor of Marriage & Family Counseling  
Fresno Campus

*Monday, March 15, 2010*

John 9:1-41

**While It is Day...**

*“Neither this man sinned, nor his parents. But so that the works of God might be displayed in him, we must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming, when no one can work.”  
(John 9:3)*

Since punctuation was added later to Greek texts, the original meaning may well have been as translated above. Rather than looking back to debate the source of the blind man’s affliction (to blame it on his parents, himself, or even God), Jesus looks ahead—ready to work the works of God in every circumstance.

Healing is certainly the work of God. But so are love, forgiveness, generosity, grace, hospitality; the list of God’s works is endless, and most are at our command. Do we withhold God’s works while we ponder whether the afflicted brought their problems on themselves? Do we wait until we have time to get around to it? Night is coming, when no one can work.

As I write this devotional, the daughter I hope to adopt remains in an orphanage in another country, while the paperwork to bring her home sits idle on someone’s desk. Do petty bureaucrats, busy politicians, and yes, even lawyers, realize that with the mere stroke of a pen or a judicious word they could be working the works of God? Do you? Do I? What might I do for my fellow man, that God’s works might be displayed?

No one is guaranteed an endless day. Borders close, strength fails, influence evaporates, money runs out, lives end—if you have works of God to share, share them this day... and do not tarry, contemplating blame.

Mary Shamshoian, MA  
*Director, On-Site Counseling Program  
Fresno Campus*

*Tuesday, March 16, 2010*

Psalm 146

**Praise the God of Justice**

Today we encounter another song of praise from Israel’s prayer book. It speaks hope as it voices the prophetic imagination repeated throughout the biblical narrative. Hannah sang these words as she dedicated Samuel to the LORD’s service. Isaiah proclaimed these words envisioning the end of exile and the reestablishment of God’s kingdom. Jesus preached these words as being fulfilled by him.

Our God has done great things and in him we place our trust. God is the Creator who brought fullness and order to what was empty and void; God is also the King who brings justice on the earth he has made. Our faithful response is to “praise the LORD!” We do so with our lips and our lives as we sing these words and participate in their realization. When we pray with the psalmist, “The LORD will reign forever,” we invite God’s reign among us so that his vision for creation might come to fruition in and through us.

During the Lenten season we walk with Jesus for forty days in the wilderness, preparing for the mission to which we are called. That mission is one characterized by the vision of our psalm—justice for the oppressed, food to the hungry, liberation for the prisoners, sight to the blind, exaltation of the lowly, protection for the foreigner, home for the orphan and widow. During this time of preparation, can we stretch our imaginations toward this prophetic vision in new ways?

Michelle Ferguson, MA  
*Registrar  
Fresno Campus*

*Wednesday, March 17, 2010*

Isaiah 59:9-20

### The Hope of Justice

In high school, after a bout with pneumonia, I was prone to blacking out. Sometimes it would happen while I was walking from one class to another. It was always a jarring experience and sometimes I would have to just sit down, wherever I was, no matter how awkward it might be. This is the picture that comes to mind when I read this passage. The absence of justice and righteousness is debilitating, just as my blackouts could be.

The plot thickens though. Not only is the absence of justice and righteousness debilitating, they appear quite distant—“So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us.” There is no hope left. No one can survive this mess of people groping around as if in a constant state of dizzying blackouts. The hopeless situation seems beyond repair!

As a seminarian I hear of justice frequently, and I cherish the idea of justice presented by the Old Testament as more than just payment for wrongdoings (perceived or realized), but as an opportunity for right relationships, such as valuing the poor or oppressed. There is such hope in this word justice—it’s my favorite Hebrew word, *mishpat*! How sad to think it is a word our culture has often misunderstood. I wonder if the misunderstanding contributes to the lack of its real presence. Vengeance is plentiful, but justice is rare.

This passage does not end here, though. Yahweh, the LORD, clothes himself with the proper garments and soon we see that the Redeemer is coming! Let us learn to actively seek his redemption and engage in his justice and righteousness!

Amanda Young  
*Student, MB Biblical Seminary  
Fresno Campus*

*Thursday, March 18, 2010*

Psalm 130

### Fearful Forgiveness

Who are we more likely to fear, someone who forgives or someone who does not? In Psalm 130 we read the opposite of what one would expect. After acknowledging how we are all guilty, the psalmist states: “But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.”

Some translations use the word “revered” instead of “feared.” I find that helpful; it leads me to think of worshiping in awe rather than cowering in fear. It is a reverent fear. Still, how does that correspond with forgiveness? Sometimes in the presence of something great we feel a sense of reverent awe; we might even tremble and at times call it fear. It flows not so much from feeling endangered as feeling insignificant in comparison to the thing of awe.

We all have forgiven others and experienced human forgiveness. That gives us a sense of what it means that God forgives. The psalmist’s words, however, proclaim to us how immensely different God’s forgiveness is. It is awe inspiring! To begin to grasp it is to tremble in reverence, perhaps fear. We know this not just because of these words in Psalm 130 but because of the cross.

I often tell inmates in the county jail that if they doubt God’s forgiveness they should look at the cross. I ask them what would be the worst possible thing humans could do to God. Deny him, reject him, kill him—at the cross humans did that, and how did Jesus respond? By saying: “Father, forgive them.” How did God the Father respond? Not with lightning bolts of revenge, but by resurrecting Jesus—a living, forgiving presence. It is forgiveness beyond our comprehension—awesome!

Let us take a moment to reflect on how we need God’s forgiveness and respond with reverent awe to that forgiveness.

Mark D. Baker, PhD  
*Associate Professor of Mission and Theology  
Fresno Campus*

*Friday, March 19, 2010*

Revelation 11:15-19

### The Spirit of Prophecy

Throughout the history of Israel there seemed to be no shortage of prophetic spirits that would rise up to call the people of God back into covenant life. They often paid a high cost for their voice to be heard: they were shut up, crushed, and some disappeared.

Prophetic Israel taught the world to repent and walk faithfully with the Lord. Israel's neighbors disdained the prophets' restrictive theology. Many were glad when Israel was crushed by the Romans, its prophetic well run dry. As the church, however, we recognize the Holy Spirit's continuing presence and power to make known the word of God to the world. No empire has been able to extinguish the light (John 1:5) of prophecy despite repeated attempts to silence God's people.

Revelation 11 speaks finally to the consequences of the world's acts of savagery against the people of God. God's seventh trumpet declares enough is enough! God's great execution of judgment is bound up with the slain Lamb, Jesus.

In the Hallelujah chorus of Handel's Messiah, it is as if Handel subdued the orchestra and singers to reflect, one last time, the silenced, beaten people of God. They are bent to a whisper as they pronounce the formidable judgment locked in Rev 11:15, "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ..." Only after this proclamation has been sung with deep reverence do the singers burst out and upward into the glorious ending refrains, "And he will reign forever and ever!"

Walking faithfully with Jesus means vigilant discernment of when and where to utter God's prophetic truth.

*Though the world attempts to deaden our prophetic spirit, help us, O God, despite present sufferings, to echo the worship of heaven on earth.*

Ken Peters, MDiv  
Pastor of Killarney Park MB Church, Vancouver, B.C.  
MBBS Alumnus

*Saturday, March 20, 2010*

Luke 24:44-53

### The Temple of God

Luke's Gospel begins and ends in the temple. At the beginning an old priest, Zechariah, prays for Israel's redemption. God answers by giving him and Elizabeth the miracle child, John. He will prepare for the one who will answer Zechariah's priestly prayer.

At the end, a community of believers joyfully worships God in that same temple. They know that God's Messiah, Jesus, has accomplished Israel's redemption. Indeed, now "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

Between these bookend temple scenes, we encounter the drama of Jesus' life, ministry, miracles, teaching, rejection, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Along the way hints are dropped that Jesus is the "real temple," destined to replace the one Herod built. In Luke all the normal functions of the temple find their fulfillment in Jesus. In Jesus' presence there is prayer, worship, teaching, sacrifice; a revelation of the very face of God. At Jesus' feet there is surrender, forgiveness, joy, and worship.

When Luke wrote his Gospel, the temple may already have been destroyed. If not, he knew it was no longer a sacred Christian gathering place. Yet his Gospel starts and ends in the temple. I think his goal was to help readers discover what is available in the one who came to take its place. Let us also "with great joy, continually bless God in this temple!" (Luke 24:52,53).

*Lord Jesus, give us grace to find salvation and joy in you, God's holy temple made without hands. And may we bring to this temple our sacrifices of praise and our very lives.*

Tim Geddert, PhD  
Professor of New Testament and Academic Dean  
Fresno Campus

*Sunday, March 21, 2010*

Ezekiel 37:1-14

### **Can These Bones Live?**

Ezekiel's haunting vision occurred during a lengthy, dark period in the life of the nation of Israel. By this point, its spiritual condition had come to be like dry bones (v. 2). Its hope had disintegrated. Its citizens had been fragmented to such a degree that they felt "cut off" (v. 11), like bones spread across the valley floor. In the face of these conditions the Lord presented Ezekiel with a challenging question: "...can these bones live?"

Very few of us have experienced a time as dark as the one Israel faced. Nonetheless, there may be times when living our faith in a changing world causes our spirits to be feel dry. There may be moments when the immensity of the challenges posed by our complex society causes our hope to crumble. There also may be times when controversies within the Christian community leave us feeling as though the church has been pulled apart limb from limb. Perhaps we find ourselves wondering whether these bones could ever truly be restored to vitality.

Ezekiel's vision should be a source of encouragement to us. God promised the nation of Israel that his work of restoration would feel like being lifted from the grave (vv. 12-13). He would reassemble its people, breathe new life into their spirits, and return them to their rightful place among the nations (v. 14). Then Israel would be reminded that its Lord was Lord indeed.

Perhaps we too need our God to revive our hearts, our hopes, our unity, and our sense of calling by the power of his Spirit. He alone is the Lord. He is able to do it!

*Lord, I pray that your Spirit would renew me, together with your whole church, to be fully alive for you.*

Cory L. Seibel, PhD  
*Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministries  
Fresno Campus*

*Monday, March 22, 2010*

Psalm 143

### **The Lord Has Been Faithful**

"The Lord has been faithful to me. I don't know what I would do without the Lord." I listened to this declaration with a sense of awe. The elderly woman I was visiting was mourning the sudden death of a beloved granddaughter as well as the general loneliness of her living situation. But as her words of sorrow trailed off, she made this beautiful litany of affirmation, "The Lord has been faithful to me. I don't know what I would do without the Lord." I had heard her say these same words on earlier visits with a smile on her face and a sparkle in her eye. Now she was repeating these words through her sighs and her tears.

When our spirit faints and we feel lost in darkness; when enemies both seen and unseen press close to us, and God seems far away, Psalm 143 stirs our memory. The psalmist remembers God's past faithfulness: "I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands" (v. 5). The memory of God's presence is so strong that even as the spirit of the psalmist falters, he begs God to remain faithful crying, "Answer me," "Do not hide your face from me," "Teach me the way I should go," and "Save me, O Lord" (v. 7-9).

My elderly friend and the psalmist both understood the importance of cultivating memories of God's faithfulness. These memories give us the courage to call to God for help and the courage to say through our sighing, "The Lord has been faithful to me."

Laura Neufeld  
*Student, MB Biblical Seminary  
Fresno Campus*

*Tuesday, March 23, 2010*

Ephesians 2:1-10

**Grace, Grace, God's Grace**

Every once in awhile, my father and I have a short conversation that goes something like this: I say, "It seems to me that we have lost a sense of the wideness of God's grace, that we're always working so hard to be good; worried that we're going to misstep and that God will be unhappy with us. We need a better sense of God's grace." To which my father replies, "Yes, but you can't have people doing whatever they want and expecting God's grace to cover them. What does that say about the Christian life?"

He is right, of course, but so am I. God's grace comes to us when we are in the midst of our sin, or as our text today puts it, when we are dead in our transgressions and following the ways of the world. It comes to us freely, not because we are worthy but because of God's great love and mercy towards us. Because of that saving grace, we are released from the sinful patterns and habits that bind us. We are born again and experience a new life in Christ. It is marvelous good news.

This new life in Christ is not meant to be burdensome and it is not a new form of the law. Our "good works" simply give witness to our changed circumstances. Andrew Lincoln puts it like this: "God's saving power reaches its intended goal when there is a changed lifestyle. Only in the actual practice of good works is the contrast between then and now, between death and life, completed."

Jesus came to give us new life. Let's live it in a way that gives witness to our changed circumstances!

Valerie Rempel, PhD  
*Dean of Students and Enrollment*  
*Associate Professor of History and Theology*  
*Fresno Campus*

*Wednesday, March 24, 2010*

Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41

**Hope from a Field**

What's so important about Jeremiah's purchase of a field? At first glance the most pivotal point in this story seems to be the prophecy of Judah's demise in verses 3-5, but this but this is an afterthought from the author's perspective. It's revealed only to introduce the story about the field. In the midst of national turmoil the point isn't to tell about the battle, but to tell about the field being bought. The battle, exile, the imminent catastrophe, is the more compelling story, but it only adds drama to a story about a transaction over the field.

We want to hear about the downfall because we live long after that battle occurred, after the return from exile. But that's not the case for Jeremiah's audience. They live in exile; they need to hear about the field. The field is what gives them hope! The field story is far more enticing to people who would rather forget about the fall of Jerusalem and get back to their fields. Not all of them will return to their homeland, but that's all the more reason for a hopeful story—a field story.

When Jesus was on his way to the cross, he told his disciples that after he rose again he would go ahead of them into Galilee. For the disciples after Golgotha the cross wasn't the story they wanted to hear. They could remember that pain quite clearly. They needed a message of hope, and they needed to get back to Galilee.

For us it is hard to experience a day without hearing about injustices and invasions of evil into our world. While these stories garner popular attention, we need stories of hope—of a Messiah who has gone ahead to prepare a place for us; to meet us. Like the exiles and the disciples we, too, need stories of a place that awaits—a field story.

Trent Voth  
*Student, MB Biblical Seminary*  
*Fresno Campus*

*Thursday, March 25, 2010*

Psalm 31:9-16

### Terror on Every Side

The phrase “terror on every side” (v.13) appears here and five more times in the book of Jeremiah. David is besieged, surrounded, and suffering assault. Jeremiah uses the phrase to describe what is about to happen to Jerusalem, to its invaders, and as a way to convey the pitched horror of his own personal situation.

David experiences terror as he considers the great betrayals and opposition of his later years. God had shown Jeremiah what destruction, chaos, and pain awaited his people. Jeremiah’s body convulses, “Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain, Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry” (Jer. 4:19). And then there are the gospels that give us a penetrating look at the terrors which accompanied Jesus’ journey to the cross. Jesus would borrow from this very psalm in his last breath to declare to his heavenly Father, “Into your hands I commit my spirit” (Ps. 31:5).

When we are given vision and foresight to see impending destruction, we too can become sick. One otherwise strong youth who was ministering with me vomited after leaving the ward of an extended healthcare facility populated by men and women whose bodies tragically lay twisted in horrible fashion from accident and disease. Parents experience sickness watching their children destroy their lives through addictions. Children get sick witnessing parents going through separation and divorce. Loving spouses feel run over as they watch loved ones deteriorate before the onslaught of cancer.

As people who attempt to walk faithfully with Jesus, what do we do when despair hits us? Jeremiah laments. David trusts. Jesus commits. Each is legitimate.

*Lord, protect us in our times of terror.*

Ken Peters, MDiv  
Pastor of Killarney Park MB Church, Vancouver, B.C.  
MBBS Alumnus

*Friday, March 26, 2010*

Lamentations 3:55-66

### And All God’s People Said: “Help!”

When do you vent? Where do you take your pain?

To whom do you share the worst of your wishes upon those who have hurt you?

I’m guessing your answer isn’t a church worship service. Maybe you thought of your pastor, but where would you suggest your pastor go to unload the agony? It’s just not appropriate sermon material!

In my experience the church has been more comfortable with praise than pain. While it is perfectly fine to shout “Hallelujah!” or say “Amen!” in a worship service, it is less so to shout “Help!” or say “I’m hurting.” It is unthinkable to suggest that someone be permitted in church to call out curses upon those who have caused them pain. No choruses come to mind to accompany such a litany!

Why was it okay, then, for Jeremiah to unload his pain before God and his people?

In this passage from Lamentations, Jeremiah lets it fly. Writing in 4 stanzas of 3 verses each (55-57, 58-60, 61-63, 64-66), he says it like he feels it. In the first and third stanzas he refers to how God heard his cries as well as the insults of Jeremiah’s enemies. Stanzas two and four describe the response Jeremiah wanted from God—to take up his case and to deliver a curse upon his enemies.

Jeremiah could express himself this way because he fully trusted God. If we’re to walk with Jesus in faithfulness, we need a fuller understanding of what that means. Faithfulness is not hiding the worst of who we are from God who already knows these things about us, or from others who have felt the same way. Faithfulness includes being honest, trusting God enough to heal all our hurt and pain and anger.

Like Jeremiah, come as you are to worship.

Mark D. Isaac, MDiv  
Director of Advancement and Constituency Relations  
Fresno, California

*Saturday, March 27, 2010*

Mark 10:32-34

**Expecting Suffering – Counting on Victory**

Bible interpreters often talk about “passion predictions.” These are announcements by Jesus that he will be rejected and put to death. Some of these predictions are quite detailed, like the one in Mark 10:32-34. It predicts who will reject Jesus; it predicts Jesus’ trial and its outcome; it predicts the involvement of Gentiles, and that implies Jesus’ death will be by crucifixion.

In Mark there are three key “passion predictions.” Each time Jesus speaks of his coming death; each time he also teaches about discipleship. Once he instructs Peter to “get back in line.” Once he teaches his disciples to “get to the back of the line.” Right after today’s text, he challenges them to “lay their life on the line.” (Thanks, Jeff, for these catchy lines!)

Jesus makes clear that faithfulness comes at a cost, for him and for his followers. Jesus heads toward Jerusalem with his eyes open, knowing that the Scriptures have predicted his coming passion, and that God wills it.

Yet it is not quite right to speak of “passion predictions.” Really they are always “passion-resurrection predictions”! Jesus knows that faithfulness will always be vindicated by God. In his case, an unjust death will yield to God’s ultimate resurrection victory. In ours, any cost that discipleship involves will be more than repaid when we, too, are raised to be with Christ. Someone said: “One of us has already made it!” We live in hope of the resurrection awaiting us as well.

*Jesus, faithful Servant and Sufferer, give us grace to follow in your footsteps. Jesus, conquering King and Savior, keep our hope alive until you welcome us into your presence in resurrection power. Amen.*

Tim Geddert, PhD  
*Professor of New Testament and Academic Dean  
Fresno Campus*

*Sunday, March 28, 2010*

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

**“Hosanna! Lord, save us!”**

Today is Palm Sunday. Today our journey of faithfulness with Jesus brings us into the gate of the Lord. Psalm 118 invites us to “join the festal procession . . . with boughs in hand.” We are filled with thanksgiving because “the Lord is good” and “his love endures forever.” Hallelujah!

Jesus sang Psalms 113-118 at the Passover feast, as did all good Jews. Jesus’ contemporaries read Psalm 118:22-23 as a Messianic prophecy. This song also celebrates God’s redemption of Israel from slavery in the exodus. This song calls to mind God’s restoration of Israel from exile in Babylon. Psalm 118 is a song of expectation. May God save us yet again.

Psalm 118 calls for salvation because it recognizes that the enemy can hem us into a tight place. The psalmist laments, “The nations surrounded me. They surrounded me on every side. They swarmed around me like bees” (Psalm 118:10-12).

This week we will walk with Jesus in his last steps to the cross. We are reminded that faithfulness to Jesus invites opposition. The enemy of faithfulness is conspicuous consumption. The enemy of victory in Jesus is retaliatory violence. Jesus rejected these distractions of the enemy. Jesus entered Jerusalem on a borrowed means of transport, not with a hired chariot. Jesus rode into town on a humble donkey, not on a white horse of triumph. May we follow Jesus with faithfulness on this journey. May we join the procession and cry with the temple pilgrims, “Hosanna! Lord, save us!”

Lynn Jost, PhD  
*Associate Professor of Old Testament  
President of MB Biblical Seminary*

*Monday, March 29, 2010*

John 12:1-11

### **The Aroma of Worship**

On the road to Jerusalem Jesus stopped at Bethany (v. 1). There he was invited to dine and feast in the home of Lazarus where He would later be anointed (v. 3) and the fragrance of oils would fill the house (v. 3). We discover a natural response of worship, of service, and of faithfulness from Christians in the presence of the Messiah. Mary's actions of worship towards Christ (v. 3) might be described as illogical. At times, there is no logical explanation for our sacrifice, our service, and our natural response to worship Christ.

In grade 10 I experienced my first short-term mission trip. I was at a defining stage in life--searching for identity without the presence of a father figure, proclaiming my Christian belief at a large public high school, and searching for the call that God had placed on my life.

Each day of the mission trip ended in worship. On Day 2 I felt this deep desire to let God know that I wanted to worship and serve Him. I remember opening my swollen crying eyes to find the worship band packing up their instruments on stage. I noticed the volunteers sweeping floors and stacking chairs around me. The service ended, and I had worshiped and experienced a personal time in Christ's presence. Later I was told that "the fragrance of my worship had filled the room" and inspired others' worship.

During this Lenten season, does your faithfulness and worship of Jesus fill a room with sweet aroma? Is it an act of humility to the Messiah?

John 12:1-11 reminds us to remain obedient to God's work of service and hospitality, but also not to forget the importance of worshiping Christ. How will you anoint Christ this Lenten season?

Mike Rea  
*Ministry Quest Program Director*  
*Fresno Campus*

*Tuesday, March 30, 2010*

John 12:20-36

### **Believing is Seeing**

Sometimes I wonder why God doesn't just speak to me audibly. I keep thinking, if only I heard God's voice with my own ears I'd be more attuned to his ways. And if all the signs and wonders that were done in the Bible were done today and seen with my own eyes, I'd be much more equipped to silence all the skeptics and further his kingdom. But then again, would I really get it? Does the solution really rest with my eyes and my ears?

Look at Jesus' original audience. Their eyes saw and their ears heard, so why didn't they believe? In our passage we see the crowd miss it. They all hear the noise of God's booming message. A few even notice that it is something supernatural, but they don't perceive the voice. A little later, after hearing Jesus' words, they ask, "Who is the Son of Man?" They're *looking* at the Son of Man, but they are distracted from believing because they can't see how the Messiah can last forever if he's "lifted up." They see him but they don't recognize him.

Like the crowd I often get distracted by how Christianity is supposed to work out, rather than focusing on the fact that it does work out. I fall into the temptation of basing my faith on an airtight theology, thinking that clarity comes from having the right answers to all the questions. If I had airtight evidence—seeing with my own eyes and hearing with my own ears—my relationship with Jesus would be clearly solidified. Perhaps clarity in relationship comes when we set our eyes on Jesus' priorities, which are the same as God's, that his name would be glorified. I'm beginning to recognize that, with Jesus, believing is seeing.

Trent Voth  
*Student, MB Biblical Seminary*  
*Fresno Campus*

*Wednesday, March 31, 2010*

John 13:21-32

### **Risks of Relationship**

One of the risks of being in a relationship is possible betrayal. While friendships, romantic relationships, and family ties are great, such close bonds can come with much risk.

The story of Judas' betrayal exemplifies that Christ himself suffered the betrayal of someone close to him. In verse 21 we hear Jesus was troubled in spirit when he announced to the disciples that one of them would betray him. The person who would betray him was someone who walked with him and loved him.

As an individual who has experienced betrayal I can't imagine how it would feel to break bread with someone whom I knew was about to betray me, and yet Jesus continued to be at the table with Judas. In verse 27, Jesus says, "What you are about to do, do quickly." It's as if Christ was saying, "Get it over with already." I have often heard the question, "if Jesus was aware that Judas would betray him, why did he not stop him?" It's hard to know why he didn't, but the scripture tells us that Satan entered Judas. Earlier in chapter 13 we see that Satan prompted Judas to betray Christ. It was Judas who listened to Satan and allowed him to enter. This was not Christ's doing.

We often forget that when we are betrayed or hurt it is the other person's choice. It does not reflect who we are as individuals. Christ, who was without blame, suffered betrayal although he had done nothing wrong. Through it all Christ is still glorified; he continues to offer forgiveness and encourage relationships and community. As we continue to walk with Jesus in faithfulness, let us remember that there are risks to relationships but seek the example of Christ and love others.

Roxanne Gaxiola  
*Student, MB Biblical Seminary  
Fresno Campus*

*Thursday, April 1, 2010*

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

### **In the Steps of the Master**

After several years away from the world of dance, my wife began taking ballet lessons again this past fall. She was excited to discover that her instructor would be a celebrated Russian dancer who trained at the renowned Bolshoi Ballet Academy. Studying under a professional of this caliber has been a life-long dream for my wife.

Each week when she comes home from class, she works hard at replicating the various positions and movements she has learned from her instructor. She is determined to become the best ballerina that she can be. In order to achieve this goal she must carefully observe the example provided by her instructor and strive to imitate what he models.

My wife's experience bears some similarity to what we encounter in today's scripture. Jesus presents his disciples with a crucial lesson by washing their feet (vv. 4-12). He explains that, as their teacher, he has done this to provide an example that they should follow (vv. 14-15). In essence, the disciples of Jesus are to emulate their master by serving one another.

Jesus builds upon this by explaining that the core of his teaching is love (vv. 34-35). He has modeled love toward his followers. In turn, his disciples are called to demonstrate this same love toward one another. If his disciples imitate his example of love, he says, the entire world will know that they follow this great master (v. 35).

Today, I desire to love and serve like Jesus. Much like my wife the ballerina, I must pay close attention to what my Teacher models. I must be willing to trust his instruction, imitate his steps, and move in ways that I've never been moved before.

*Jesus, please teach me today to keep in step with your example of loving service. Amen.*

Cory L. Seibel, PhD  
*Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministries  
Fresno Campus*

*Friday, April 2, 2010*

John 18 - 19

### The Wonder of Good Friday

Imagine with me for a moment what it might be like to view the events of Good Friday on television with split screen technology. Half the screen would be focused on the human events on earth described in John 18 and 19. This includes themes like betrayal, denial, deceit, anger, mob justice, appeasing people and a shameful death on a cross. It's hard to conceive that anything good can come out of such tragedy.

The other half-screen shows our loving Father in heaven accepting the voluntary sacrifice of his Son, exchanging the ugly acts of human violence into redemption and forgiveness. Some biblical writers describe God's perspective of what happened like this: "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:8), "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21), "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24).

What must have seemed like the "blackest day in history" became known as Good Friday, rich with meaning for every follower of Christ. Centuries ago the first verse of this hymn by Charles Wesley summarized these truths so well:

*And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Savior's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain—  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

The cross, originally representing a shameful death, has become through the work of Jesus the symbol of peace, hope, and life—eternal life.

Aldon Loepky, MA  
*Advancement Officer, Alberta & BC; Abbotsford, B.C.*

*Saturday, April 3, 2010*

Matthew 27:57-66

### Who Gets the Last Laugh?

"Go and make the tomb as secure as you can," Pilate said to those who had rejected Jesus. They tried. What if Jesus' disciples were to sneak into Jesus' tomb, steal the body, hide it away, and announce that Jesus rose, as he had predicted?

So they sealed the tomb and they posted guards. This deceiver, Jesus, and his conniving disciples were not going to get the last laugh. Israel's leaders had worked hard to engineer the death of their rival. They were taking no chances even now that he was dead.

"You do not know the Scriptures," Jesus had once pronounced when asked about the resurrection of the dead. Indeed they didn't. Somehow Israel's religious leaders had not realized that the Messiah had to be rejected, had to suffer and die. Their selective reading of Scripture, filtered through their own lust for power and influence, had blinded their eyes. And if they did not believe the Messiah would suffer, they certainly did not believe that this crucified would-be Messiah would rise again. No, they weren't worried about a resurrection. They were worried the disciples might persuade gullible people it had occurred.

"You do not know the power of God," Jesus had also said when people expressed doubts about a coming resurrection. Now God would display that power . . . despite the heavy stone, despite the seal, despite the guards. The grave would not hold Jesus.

I think that when Pilate said "make the tomb as secure as you can," Psalm 2:4 was fulfilled: "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh!"

*Lord Jesus, Conqueror over sin and death, forgive us our sins,  
remove our fear and lead us into everlasting life. Amen.*

Tim Geddert, PhD  
*Professor of New Testament and Academic Dean  
Fresno Campus*

*Sunday, April 4, 2010*

John 20:1-18

### **When Jesus Calls Your Name**

I imagine it had been another sleepless night for Mary Magdalene. Just two days prior she had stood by watching as her Lord and Savior was publicly executed. Mary felt the full weight of powerlessness as she witnessed the brutal and humiliating death of Jesus. This man had freed her from the prison of demon possession and prostitution; he had spoken life into her broken spirit and called her by name. But now he had been defeated along with all the hopeful prospects he offered. Mary was truly walking to the tomb in darkness.

It was in that place of darkness that Jesus is once again present with Mary. But Mary is unable to recognize her Savior, her salvation, because the darkness and tears have overcome her. It's not until the Savior calls her by name that Mary is able to rejoice in the triumph of Easter morning. Jesus speaks, "Mary," and the darkness fades away to reveal the bright rays of hope and promise. Jesus is alive! He has triumphed over death and revealed the powerlessness of her captors.

On this side of Easter it is easy to forget that the darkness Mary faced that morning is still present today. There are people around us who continue to feel the full weight of powerlessness and hopelessness. There are people who have yet to experience the freedom that comes from hearing their name called aloud. They continually experience the demoralization of the cross without the triumph of Easter. As Christ's presence in the world we have yet to call them by name.

*Lord, grant us the faithfulness of Jesus so that we, too, can step into the darkness of others, proclaim their freedom, and call them by name.*

Steve Bomar  
Pastor of Music & Worship at Eagles Harbor  
Community Church, Clovis, California  
MBBS Student, Fresno Campus

*Monday, April 5, 2010*

Matthew 28:1-10

### **Christ Is Risen!**

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

The journey of faithfulness leads us today to the empty tomb. With Matthew the writer of the Gospel we celebrate the news of the angel. Jesus is not among the dead. He is risen. He has risen and is going ahead of you. Jesus has risen in power and exercises all authority.

Those who have journeyed with Jesus are invited to faithfulness in three acts. Act One, the angel tells the women "Do not be afraid." Resurrection marks the end of fear for those who walk in the way of Jesus. Death has been defeated. The way is open to live with Jesus. The way is ready for faithful mission. There is no need to fear.

Act Two is the call to witness. First, the angel commands the women to tell the disciples that Jesus has risen. Announce what you have seen. Proclaim the Good News. Second, Jesus himself gives an additional word to the women. Jesus says to tell the disciples where the next destination lies in the journey. Go to Galilee.

Act Three is a call to keep walking with Jesus in the journey. The disciples are called to Galilee. In Matthew's Gospel Galilee is the beginning of the journey for disciples. In Galilee Jesus first called the disciples. Jesus invites the disciples back to Galilee for a new beginning.

Today marks a new beginning for us. We have journeyed with Jesus in the way of faithfulness. The risen Lord calls us. Do not be afraid. Tell the Good News. Begin afresh in your faithfulness journey.

Lynn Jost, PhD  
Associate Professor of Old Testament  
President of MB Biblical Seminary

*Walking with Jesus in Faithfulness: A Devotional Guide*

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