



Introduction

“Getting Unstuck”

Have you ever gotten stuck? Maybe on snowy roads during winter or in a traffic-jam on the way home from work? Or maybe you’ve been stuck in a job you don’t like, or in a relationship that just can’t move forward. Getting stuck happens to all of us from time to time, and we can also get stuck spiritually! We can get caught in a rut and become complacent. Lent is a time that we can all focus on our relationship with Christ and work on getting unstuck!

We have been focusing on the book of Mark here at Church of the Lakes this year. Since we have been going through Mark, we decided to put together a Lenten devotional focused on this book, but we decided to have the members of our church write the devotions! This devotional will have a variety of contributions from people who attend or work at our church, and we hope that you can grow closer to Christ this Lenten season through their input!

The Lenten season is important because it leads us to journey toward the cross one day at a time. As we work through the book of Mark with each other this year, as a church body on Sundays and individually as we read these devotions and reflect during the week, my prayer is that each of you can grow closer to Christ and find yourselves “unstuck” in your faith.

Blessings,
Pastor Jared

Day 1 ~ Wednesday, March 1st

We have begun the forty-day period leading up to Easter. This forty day is known as Lent. When I was growing up, many of my friends would ask, "What are you giving up for Lent?" The United Methodist Church did not have obligatory things we had to give up so I was not sure to what they were referring. I was curious, however, about what my friends were giving up. Their answers usually ran the gamut of things from chocolate to candy to soda to desserts.

Since that time, I have come to understand that **Lent incorporates two essentials--giving up and taking on.** We give up what is not good for us. We are let go of all manner of evil and sin which we have allowed to accumulate and burden down our spirits. We are to 'clean house' in order to make room for Jesus Christ to be exalted as our Savior from sin and to be enthroned as Lord of our lives. We are also to take on spiritual habits which will bring about spiritual refreshment. If we have not been going to church regularly, we make a commitment to attending each week and preparing to do so by reading the Bible and asking God's blessing on those who lead us in worship. If we have not been doing what is pleasing to the Lord in the use of our time or money, we ask God to take charge of these assets and put them to work for His kingdom. If our prayers have grown cold, we start praying daily and asking for a new fire from the Holy Spirit. If we need to be cleansed and forgiven and built up, we begin fasting weekly for one or more meals and take that mealtime to feed our souls.

There is a positive spiritual habit for every bad habit human beings have. Going to God in prayer and taking steps to change our bad habits to good ones is not only helpful but also healing. My prayer is that this Lent will be a time for spiritual healing, for revitalizing our faith personally and corporately, an opportunity for individuals and families to seek God's help and to advance in their journey with Christ.

David Oliver

Day 2 ~ Thursday, March 2nd

Mark 9:7

"Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!"

There are times when God comes into my life as strong and as large as a cloud so I can't miss it because I am covered by it. The last time this happened to me was the day we went to our neighbor's funeral.

Our dear neighbor, Dick, was a Godly man. He loved Jesus. He was a neighbor we talked to daily especially in the spring, summer, and fall since our driveways were side by side. When he came home our boys always had something they wanted to share with him. Sometimes it was a neat rock they found, or even caterpillar or toad. Other times it was a new toy or a new trick they learned on their bike. There were many days he could barely get in the driveway before the boys ran up to him to share with someone who cared so much for them. Sometimes it even meant he had to eat a cold dinner. Either way he always responded in love.

Dick had a stroke in August of last year. We were saddened and awaited his return to his house from the nursing home. We heard he was doing well and was getting close to walking. When we saw his family's cars next door in January we thought they were getting the house ready for him to come home. We told our boys maybe he would be coming home soon. His two goals after his stroke was to walk and return home. He was able to walk and he did go home, but not to his earthly home but his heavenly home.

I felt moved the evening of his funeral when Neil, my husband, was practicing songs to play on Sunday. I turned to him and he was playing Victory in Jesus. This was the first song they played at his funeral earlier that day. Dick loved music and loved to sing. I thought to myself, "How awesome is God to send down a message in a song." As Neil continued to play his music for Sunday, he played Amazing Grace, another song from his funeral. Wow! The strong power that had. Sometimes God spends down not just a cloud but a cloud so large that it covers you so you can't miss it! Dick wanted to make sure that he told

people about Jesus. He shared his love of Jesus in his actions towards our boys. We thank him for that! That evening I knew God was telling me that Dick was home!

Sandy DelCorso

Day 3 ~ Friday, March 3rd

Mark 9:1-10

I can assure you that some of the people standing here will not die before they see God's kingdom come with power. Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him. They went up on a high mountain, where they could be alone. There in front of the disciples, Jesus was completely changed. And his clothes became much whiter than any bleach on earth could make them. Then Moses and Elijah were there talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Teacher, it is good for us to be here! Let us make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But Peter and the others were terribly frightened, and he did not know what he was talking about. The shadow of a cloud passed over and covered them. From the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, and I love him. Listen to what he says!" At once the disciples looked around, but they saw only Jesus. As Jesus and his disciples were coming down the mountain, he told them not to say a word about what they had seen, until the Son of Man had been raised from death. So they kept it to themselves. But they wondered what he meant by the words "raised from death."

I am a planner, I have a list, I have goals, I have an idea of just how everything should go. I have always been this way. In fact from the time I was young, I had a very detailed set of plans. I was going to grow up, go to college, get a job teaching 4th grade, get married one year later, a couple years later have my first born son, and then a couple years after that have twin girls. A set plan!

Shortly after I graduated from Kent State with my degree in education, my Youth Minister called me and wanted me to apply for a job in ministry. Well, many conversations and years later... here I am. I have been in ministry for since August of 1994, just three months after I graduated college. And I have been at Church of the Lakes since August of 1997. My youth leader, Rev. Quillen knew something I didn't. What I have come to appreciate is that

he accepted a long time ago, that God always knows more than us.

Don't get me wrong, to this day I am still a planner and you will always see a list near me. However, I have a very clear understanding that I need to be flexible. I need to allow for ideas, plans, and changes that I never could have seen coming. As we see from Mark 9, God often has an understanding of something we don't. This plays out in our life much more then we usually know. For example, a couple years ago there were many changes in the people I encountered on a daily basis. I wasn't so great at being welcoming and open. I had a friend say, you really need to give them a chance. Little did I know, that as the rest of my world changed drastically later that year, that those very people would combine with the rest of my support system to be the strength and support I needed to stay focused on my faith through challenging times.

We as people usually want control, but I promise, it is when we give the control over to God that we find ourselves at the most peace regardless of what is going on around us. God knows what is ahead, God knows what is in our hearts, and most importantly God knows what we need much more then what we want.

Cara Schroeder

Day 4 ~ Saturday, March 4th

Mark 9:23 (MSG)

Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, "Do you have any idea how difficult it is for people who 'have it all' to enter God's kingdom?"

Indeed, most of us at Church of the Lakes "have it all". Food, shelter, friends, money for extras, etc. This is what we are told are the goals of our culture. We really aren't good enough, we're told, because we don't have the latest car, we stink, we look funny without makeup, our clothes are so 'last year' and so on.

These are the very things Jesus was referring to when identifying the difficulty we, who "have it all", face in getting into the Kingdom of God. Not that those things are bad in and of themselves. The trouble is that we allow them to distract us from

seeking God's way. Our hearts become preoccupied with 'things'. I find it easy to replace search for God with search for security. And a lot of us do the 'when . . . then' dance. When I get this project done, then I'll join a small group; when the kids get through college, then we'll become more involved in church. You can make up your own.

Now, there is no nobility in being poor. Just being poor is not a ticket into heaven. But, it seems the poor are sometimes so much better at grasping the importance of a relationship with God. Think of the black slaves who sang those moving songs like "I'll fly Away" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot". The thing is that they, because of their situation, didn't have anything else to put their hope in. Nothing to distract them. Jesus was their only hope.

We have to put so much aside to have that sense that Jesus is our only hope. It takes a daily decision, a daily commitment; and it is not easy. I don't know about a camel going through the eye of a needle, but I do know I have to focus on Him, not on what I have, or don't have.

Bill Wendell

Day 5 ~ Monday, March 6th

Read Mark 9:14-29

A man, desperate with worry for his child, comes to Jesus. The boy has been suffering from an evil spirit since childhood, and his father, clearly distraught over his son's condition, seeks help from Jesus. I can only imagine the desperation, the worry, and the fear that this man had been experiencing for years. And then he hears about Jesus, and there is a glimmer of hope.

Before casting the spirit out, Jesus tells the man, "All things are possible for one who believes." The man, overwhelmed with a mixture of hope and anguish, cries out "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Can you feel the longing here? Here is a man, so desperate for answers, so desperate to help his son, faced with the possibility of hope and healing. He wants to believe but he doesn't know how. "Help me in my unbelief," he cries.

Fast forward a little bit. Now Jesus is leaving the city of Jericho, and Bartimeaus, a blind beggar, is sitting by the road. He hears that Jesus is passing by, and what does he do? He cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Again, the longing. Again, the anguish. Again, a person so desperate for the healing touch of Jesus that all sense of propriety is lost and the only sensible thing to do is to cry out and make a spectacle of himself.

I love Jesus's response to these honest, heartfelt cries for help. He doesn't stoop down and shush these men, asking them to lower their voices. He doesn't roll his eyes, annoyed by yet another interruption. No, Jesus stops what he's doing. He finds out a little bit more about them. He responds with love and grace and compassion. And then he heals them.

I think we can learn from these men. Are we willing to throw aside the notion that we have it all together, that we are doing just fine, and really cry out to Jesus when we are in need of healing?

How often do we honestly go before the throne of God, knowing that he's our only hope? Jesus can handle our anguish and our cries. He doesn't need us to "keep it together." Let's be honest in our need for healing and give him a chance to make us whole.

Meredith Priset

Day 6 ~ Tuesday, March 7th

Read Mark 9:14-29

I have a confession to make. I often have doubts about my Christian faith. This is very difficult for me to admit, especially to fellow Christians.

I was raised in a Christian home, attended church regularly and grew up loving Jesus. In my senior year of high school I rededicated my life to Christ and for the next several years became almost a zealot about my Christianity. But then I went to college and my faith was tested. I fell under the influence of liberal professors, philosophy courses, existential authors and non-Christian friends who influenced my thinking. I started to doubt everything I had learned about the authenticity of the scriptures, the power of prayer, the divinity of Christ -- and religion in general. I turned toward many New Age ideas and continued on

that path for 30-some years.

Then slowly I became aware of an internal pull wanting me to return to church. Looking back, I see where it was the prayers of family and friends intervening. Plus, I'm reminded of the truth of Proverbs 22:6 – *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

I began “church shopping” which eventually brought me to Church of the Lakes (13 years ago) where I felt comfortable and accepted as I slowly made my way back to the Christian beliefs I had left behind. Soon my faith grew in leaps and bounds, as my soul responded to sermons, Bible studies, small groups, retreats, the ALPHA course, Emmaus, etc.

But over the years I've noticed an ebb and flow in my spiritual life and, as I said at the beginning, too often I've found myself fighting those doubts planted in my mind years ago. Even though I realize they are whispers from Satan, I am still susceptible.

That's why I am drawn to the story of Jesus healing the demon-possessed boy as told in Mark 9:14-29. After Jesus tells the boy's father that “everything is possible for one who believes”, the father responds: “*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*” (NIV)

At first glance that statement seems conflicted. Does the father believe or doesn't he? What's this mean when he asks about overcoming his unbelief? I found it helpful to read this same passage in other versions. In the CEV (our pew Bibles) the father answers: “*I do have faith! Please help me to have even more.*” And in The Message the father cries out: “*Then I believe. Help me with my doubts!*”

I'd like to think that Mark included this father's statement to help people like me. People who really *want* to believe – but still have difficulty doing so. I very likely will have some doubts until I leave this earth, but now when they creep into my mind I will remember this verse in Mark and call out to the Lord: “Help me with my doubts!”

Barbara Nieder

Day 7 ~ Wednesday, March 8th

Read Mark 9:17-19, 28-29

I decided to follow Jesus

My life will always be great!

I decided to follow Jesus

Why is my co-worker full of hate?

I decided to follow Jesus

My relationships should be the best!

I decided to follow Jesus

Why do my kids put me to the test?

I decided to follow Jesus

Go to church? Why, sure! When it fits...

I decided to follow Jesus

I'm sorry, too busy, I missed.

I decided to follow Jesus

I've said the words, what more do you want?

Do you want my whole life too?

Life's hard! How do I find what to do?

Perhaps I should look in His Word.

I decided to follow Jesus

Maybe then I would have heard,

I decided to follow Jesus

That it isn't promised that life will be great.

I decided to follow Jesus

Sometimes I will experience hate.

I decided to follow Jesus

Sometimes life won't go my way,

But always, at the end of the day,

I need to remember always to pray.

The Bible I'll read, and prayers I'll say.

My life will be great, in good times and bad,
When I talk to my God through my prayers.

And all this because of an idea I had,

I DECIDED TO FOLLOW JESUS!

Dawn Crum

Day 8 ~ Thursday, March 9th

Read Mark 9:33-36

Disciples had been discussing who was greatest. Jesus' response led me to recall one of my favorite poems, "Touch of the Master's Hand". In it a violin is being auctioned off and getting low bids. A man walks from the back of the room and makes a few adjustments and plays the violin. When finished the bids jumped a thousand percent. What was the difference?

It was the touch of the master's hand. We are all made great by that same touch by accepting through childlike faith the free gift of salvation. How you may ask? With Honest, Openness, and Willing joy. Innocently trusting Heavenly Father and the wonder and awe of what Christ did for us. He loves us and will lead us. Papa, guide me in your path. Take my hand as I cling to my fellowman's hand. In doing so I will be unable to grasp hold of any temptations that may try to distract me.

Ray Griffith

Day 9 ~ Friday, March 10th

Mark 9:35

"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." - Mark 9:35 (NIV)

Have you ever thought deeply about the word *humble*? For the past several months, the word *humble* has been “jumping off the page” during my quiet times. *Humble* is one of those words that is so familiar that I routinely read over it...speed past it. Since that word keeps drawing my attention during readings from the Bible and various devotionals, I felt a nudge to ponder its significance.

Jesus tells us in Mark 9:35, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” With humility Jesus showed us servanthood when he washed the feet of his disciples, carried his own cross, forgave those who crucified him and took our place on the cross.

In Micah 6:8, God names three requirements for us...to *act justly, be kind and walk humbly* with Him. Within these requirements, God has provided insight for living a life of humility. God tells us to walk humbly not by ourselves but with Him. Humility is

required to hear God's direction, experience his presence, submit to his will and apply his teachings in our daily life.

Only with humble hearts can we do what Jesus commands in Mark 12:30-31, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” And also, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Can we really “love our neighbor as ourselves” without first loving God with all of our being? Jesus tells us in the parable of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:27b) “...all things are possible with God.”

When we seek him with humble hearts, he walks with us supplying the grace that enables us to serve, forgive and love others.

Lord, help us become more humble by loving you more deeply. Amen.

John Dilworth

Day 10 ~ Saturday, March 11th

Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

When I read this passage I am reminded of my mother singing “Jesus Loves the Little Children” to me as a small child. I am also reminded of this passage as I walk down the stairs of the church and see the beautiful sketches of Jesus holding the children and the joy that is displayed on His face. As a parent I love my children more than words can express, but I know that Jesus loves them more. Because I know that Jesus loves them more than me I entrust them to Him. Before my children were born I prayed for His protection over them and that my children would know Him, love Him, and serve Him. Jesus’ desire is for us to bring our children to Him. We are given a short amount of time to teach, lead, train, and direct our children in a way that will lead them to

a growing, life-changing relationship with Jesus. As church members, we have made the commitment to help support, empower, and encourage parents as they are raising their children in the way of the Lord. We live in a world that is quick to judge, criticize, and shame parents. May we not fall into the pattern of this world, but let us walk alongside parents and their children and help lay the foundation for these little ones' faith.

In verse 16 Jesus, "placed his hands on them and blessed them." Jesus was blessing them in the Hebrew sense of parental bestowal. This was giving the children favor and acceptance rooted in who they *are*, in their very personhood. Let us be encouraged to bless our children at home and at church with our words and actions that reflect their identity as children of God who are favored and loved by Him.

Dear Jesus, Thank you for all the little children in our lives. Thank you for showing us a glimpse of your love through them. Help us to be a blessing to other parents as we work together to raise a generation for you. Amen.

Angela Schneider

Day 11 ~ Monday, March 13th

Mark 10:13-16 (MSG)

The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: Don't push these children away. Don't ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in." Then, gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them.

One of my favorite memories growing up is running around the church. My dad is a United Methodist pastor so there were many days in my childhood where I would be at the church sprinting down hallways, breaking into rooms, and causing a general commotion. I was privileged with the opportunity last spring to explore the nooks and crannies of Church of the Lakes with Maggie and Elias Piset, another generation of pastor's kids. We went all throughout the building and I saw the joy they had with running down hallways and up stairs (I will admit, I personally

had fun running down hallways again in a church), but there was a moment of awe that I got to witness them having. It was when we entered the balcony of the sanctuary and there were no lights, no sound, no people, just an empty room. I was able to see two young kids venture down the stairs and overlook the vast room that was lit up by the sunlight shining through the windows. There was a brief moment of silence that felt special.

Children contain this pure joy and hope, but like the disciples, we sometimes don't notice the lessons we can learn from them. When the disciples tried to shoo away the children Jesus utilized them as an example. "Unless you accept God's Kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in." We need that childlike faith that contains pure joy, excitement, and love. Sometimes we need to embrace that part of ourselves that wants to run enthusiastically down the church hallway at full speed to share an exciting lesson we learned during service. I pray that we can embrace this childlike enthusiasm during this Lenten season.

Kelley Gifford

Day 12 ~ Tuesday, March 14th

Read Mark 10:13-16

What does it mean to have childlike faith? Jesus poses this question in Mark 10:13-16. Even though Jesus only refers to it as "child-like" in this instance, his teachings actually point to the meaning throughout his entire ministry. Often Jesus is trying to simplify faith. In fact, he broke down the foundation of a Christian faith into two meaningful commandments, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Luke 10:27 NIV)

Now, it is important to remember that a simple faith can also be quite mature and that this recommendation of having a child-like faith is not an excuse to become complacent in our relationships with Christ. The main characteristic of "child-like" as it is used in this scripture is one of trusting. Often you will see children carrying themselves in confident, trusting, and outgoing ways. Children will often talk to anyone, go anywhere, and do anything without thinking too much about what could go wrong. They lack

a fear that adults have gained throughout life. A fear of what it is like to fail, or to be put into danger. Often that fear, albeit healthy in many aspects earthly life, can restrict us adults in our spiritual lives. Often we are afraid of what will happen if we openly practice our faith and profess that Jesus Christ is our Savior. We can be afraid of what it means to wholeheartedly let go of our worldly ways and possessions and follow Jesus.

Think of those children that were brought by their parents to see Jesus. They most likely did not know him and certainly did not understand who Jesus was. However, that did not stop them from trusting and approaching him even though the disciples tried to block them. Often we can do to our faith what the disciples did to the children. We can get in the way of loving God with all of our heart, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. It is important to accept and pursue Christ without the fear that life itself often instills in us, lest it will hold us back much like the disciples held back the children trying to unabashedly and quite literally draw near to Christ.

Matt Ropp

Day 13 ~ Wednesday, March 15th

Mark 10:15 NIV

“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never see it”

It amazes me to watch child play. Their imagination can run wild, taking them to place only they can think of. No one has to teach them how to play and imagine. It just comes naturally to them.

Sometimes I wish I could go back to those days, where a simple cardboard box becomes a castle and I am defending the kingdom from a mean, old dragon. Or a rocket ship taking me to the far reaches of the universe.

Oh, but how time and age can sometimes steal that wonderful innocence from us. As we “grow up” we become more congruent in our thinking, putting aside the wistful wonder of imagination and taking on the more serious sensibilities of age. Why do we have to grow up? Why do we have to lose the wonder of imagination? According to Jesus, in Mark chapter 10, we don’t. In verse 13, we read the people were bringing their children to

Jesus to be blessed. His disciples were attempting to stop the people and to not bother the teacher. Jesus stops his disciples and tells them “...Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom belongs to such as these.” (Mark 10:14 NIV)

You see the wonder of a child knows no bounds. Their simple understanding allows them to believe and make believe to their hearts content. We need to recapture that sense of innocence, the sense of wonder, that children possess. We need to be able to go to Jesus, every day, as one of these little ones. We need to believe as a child.

Father God, allow us this day and every day to approach you with the wonder and delight of a child. Trusting in your compassion and wisdom to allow you to guide our lives. Amen.

Paul Stoner

Day 14 ~ Thursday, March 16th

Read Mark 10:17-25

I am an avid runner. I actually love the sport immensely. I run everyday. Some days, I log a ridiculous amount of mileage. Last year, I ran 2500 miles. This year I am working to break the 3-hour barrier in the marathon come June. As I prepare myself for this race, one thing I will definitely do is buy a pair a racing shoes. Racing shoes are different than trainers in that they are lighter – it almost feels like you have nothing on. Trainers, on the other hand, weigh you down.

In Mark 10:17-25 a young man comes up to Jesus with a very important question: *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* Jesus spoke plainly. You must not murder, commit adultery, or steal, or bear false witness. You also cannot defraud another. And, also, you must honor your mother and father.

The man, probably in a moment of pride, exclaimed, *“All of these I have kept.”*

Jesus, however, looked deep into his eyes, 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.”* We are then told that the man, with a downcast face,

walked away, not willing to take Jesus up on what was needed for his salvation.

It amazes me immensely that Jesus knows the very things that weigh us down; that prevent us from living the kind of life he desires for us to live and be the kind of person he longs for us to be. One thing you can know for sure, Jesus loves you and wants to give you eternal and abundant life. But here is the question that remains: "What is weighing you down and preventing you from having all that Jesus wants to give?"

Pastor Jared Priest

Day 15 ~ Friday, March 17th

Mark 10:33

"We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

Three times? Really?? Let's see – Mark 8:31, Mark 9:31 and here in Mark 10:33. Yep, three times. Jesus told his disciples 3 times that he would be killed and after 3 days he would rise again. How did the disciples miss this? I get that during the crucifixion the disciples were scared for their lives and focusing not on Jesus' teachings but how to save their own skins. But, after three days safely locked away from the world and with a visit from Mary who'd actually seen Jesus alive, wouldn't you think one of the 11's memories would have been jogged?

Now, at 52 years of age, I admit to some memory issues. I've walked into another room and forgotten why I was there. I've been told my college daughter's plans more than 5 times for a given weekend and can't for the life of me remember what is when mere hours after the conversation. But, the disciples were contemporaries of Jesus ranging in age from 18 – 40 says my pastor husband. Granted the three times Jesus mentioned his death were several days, if not longer, apart. But, this was Jesus life and death we're talking about! How could not one of them remember Jesus prediction that he would rise on the third day?

We have no way of knowing why the disciples forgot Jesus' words and therefore lost hope. But, the disciple's forgetfulness, fears and confusion are a great comfort to me. If those who walked and talked and ate with Jesus so closely for three years could so ***not get it*** and yet go on do such great things for Christ, surely there's hope for me!

Over this Lenten season, we focus our minds and our hearts on Jesus. On Maundy Thursday we reflect on the Last Supper, on Friday we consider Jesus death. On Easter Sunday, let's ***remember it's the third day!***

Father God, Thank you for overlooking our forgetfulness and our other weaknesses. Thank you for loving us enough to give us the third day. Give us eyes to see you active in our lives. Help us to feel your presence. Empower us to act for you and yours. Please, fill us to overflowing with the love and excitement of new birth and life in you so that the Good News of Jesus spills and splashes and sprays out of us and onto everyone we meet! Amen.

Amy George

Day 16 ~ Saturday, March 18th

Mark 10:35-40 tells the brief but powerful story of two disciples who yearned to be close to Jesus:

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."

But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."

I can relate to James and John. I have often started a conversation with the Lord with the same kind of demanding presumptuousness. "God, I want you to do something for me,

whatever I ask.” My petitions to the Lord are often shaped more by what I want than by a genuine desire to learn the Lord’s will for my life. And yet, we see how the Lord responds. He doesn’t scold them for their audacity. He doesn’t tell them He’s the boss and they should kneel and cower before Him. Instead, he asks what they would like Him to do for them.

In their answer, we see that their request is not, on its face, a selfish one. They don’t ask for fame or fortune or power. They don’t ask for protection from persecution or death, or for a long and happy life. On its face, their request is holy. They merely want to sit at the left and right hands of the Lord, and remain in His glory. I take this to mean they want to walk with Jesus, to remain with Him eternally, to abide in Him, and to bask in the eternal radiance of His presence. It seems like a worthy request.

In my own spiritual life, I’ve certainly made similar requests at times. I yearn for a closer relationship with my Creator. I hunger for an intimate relationship with Jesus. I want to abide with Him always and feel His radiating presence in my life at all times. I believe He wants this too, and scripture promises that this kind of a relationship is available to all who believe and put their trust in Him. But as Jesus explains to his disciples, this kind of a relationship comes at a price. As the saying goes, grace is free, but it isn’t cheap.

Jesus first questions James and John, to make sure they understand what they are truly asking for. Do you really want to have a relationship with me and to live eternally in my glory? This means you have to drink the cup I drink and be baptized in the way I am baptized. Are you able to do that? And they answer, “We are able.”

Do James and John realize what they are taking on? Jesus is not speaking in literal terms here, simply telling James and John that they need to share his dishes and be baptized in the river Jordan. He is explaining that in order to share the intimate, eternal relationship with Him that they are yearning for, they have to be able to drink from the cup of suffering that awaits Jesus. Remember, in Gethsemane Jesus asks the Father to “take this cup from me”, before He ultimately surrenders to His Father’s will. So for Jesus, the cup is a symbol of His suffering, His blood

poured out for us all. And when he refers to His baptism, he means more than just being immersed in the river Jordan by John. His baptism was an act of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus was baptized the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and God claimed Him as His “beloved Son”. To be baptized as Jesus was baptized means to demonstrate publicly our commitment to turn away from sin, our acceptance of the Holy Spirit within our lives, and our acknowledgement of being forever claimed as beloved children of God.

In the hymn, “Are Ye Able” (#530 in the United Methodist Hymnal, and one of my favorites since childhood), the first verse asks, “Are ye able, said the Master, to be crucified with me?” The second verse asks, “Are ye able to remember, when a thief lifts up his eyes, that his pardoned soul is worthy of a place in paradise?” The third verse asks, “Are ye able, when the shadows close around you with the sod, to believe that spirit triumphs, to commend your soul to God?” The refrain answers these questions as follows: “Lord, we are able. Our spirits are thine. Remold them, make us, like thee, divine. Thy guiding radiance above us shall be a beacon to God, to love, and loyalty.”

So the question still remains for me, when I seek a closer walk with Jesus, when I ask Him to allow me to remain at His side, to abide with Him, do I know what I’m asking? Am I able to drink the cup of suffering that life may hand me? Am I able to acknowledge that a criminal forgiven by the Lord is as worthy of heaven as I am? Am I able to live as a baptized and forgiven child of God? Am I able to face death with confidence and hope? I pray that I am indeed able. But when I doubt myself, I take comfort from the fact that even Jesus’s disciples –those chosen by Him and who loved Him best—still struggled with these same questions. Surely God will forgive the same failings in me.

Julie Geiser

Day 17 ~ Monday, March 20th

Read Mark 10:35-45

How often do we make wishes for things? Every year when we blow out the candles on our birthday cake, what do we wish for? Do we wish for more money? A better job? A bigger house? A

free day? To become more like Jesus? Our goal should be to become more like Jesus, but what does that look like? Does it look like we are sitting in the glory seat? The highest place of honor? It isn't quite like we pictured it. In Mark 10, James and John tell Jesus that since they have done so much for Jesus that Jesus should grant whatever James and John ask of Him. What did they ask of Jesus? *In your glorious Kingdom, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one at your right and the other at your left.* They thought that Jesus was going to set up an earthly kingdom, and they wanted to sit beside him on the throne. They wanted to share in his greatness.

However, Jesus tried to clarify to them that they did not know what they were asking for. James and John wanted to be sitting to Jesus' left and right in the seats of highest honor in heaven. But Jesus didn't come to earth to be served... but to serve.

Jesus asked them if this is what they really wanted. James and John didn't know what they were wishing for when they made this request.

He said, *For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.* I think that being a servant was not what James and John were wishing for. I don't think they even knew this what they were expecting. Jesus' entire ministry was serving. He gave himself for the sake of others.

We cannot use our entitlement or status as an excuse to be served. We should not deserve anything... Instead, we must serve and become servants to others.

To be like Jesus is to serve others. It isn't getting everything we ever wanted. It isn't as simple as it sounds. Have you ever made a wish? Maybe it should be how can we serve like Jesus did, serving the un-servable. That is what makes life great! Living a life of service to others, just like Jesus did.

Dear Jesus, let us become more like you. Give us the hearts to help serve those around us, whether in our homes, workplaces, schools, etc. Show us the joy in serving your beloved people.
Amen

Julia Fabich

Day 18 ~ Tuesday, March 21st

Mark 10:45

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Think about how cool this is: God came down from his comfy throne in heaven to become one of us. But he didn't make himself royalty, or even wealthy – he was a common person living life just like everyone else. He didn't expect people to serve him; he served others both spiritually and physically. He could have come to earth as a mighty king and ruled over nations, but instead Jesus travelled around talking to people about God, about what he wanted from us, and how we could live better lives. He could have had servants, but instead he washed the feet of his disciples. He could have forced everyone within his earthly kingdom to bow to him, but instead he died on the cross, so that we would want to worship him on earth and for all eternity in heaven.

If God did all this for us, why wouldn't we want to do what we could for other people on earth in His name? We are not in this world to be served, to command respect or to collect possessions. Just as Jesus was here to die for our sins and to save our souls, we too are called to serve God. We are here to serve others, to help the least and the lost. We are here to love our neighbors. We are here to shine God's light into the darkest areas, and help usher in God's Kingdom here on earth.

God does not want to RULE our lives He wants to be a part of our lives in a way that makes us (and in turn the world) better. Having God be a part of your life doesn't just mean knowing God, it isn't just about reading the Bible and gaining more knowledge, it is about serving others. Just as Jesus served, and ultimately gave His life, we are to devote our lives to God and to serving Him and all of His creation.

Betsi Knis

Day 19 ~ Wednesday, March 22nd

Read Mark 10:47-52

As I read the scriptures in Mark, the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, remaindered me of a basketball game in Cleveland in 1990. The

Chicago Bulls played the Cleveland Cavs on March 28, 1990. Michael Jordan scored a career high 69 points but it was Stacey King that cinched the win for Chicago. Stacey had 4 shots and missed them all but was fouled on his last attempt. At the foul line the first shot went off the rim. The second attempt swished through the basket and secured the win for the Bulls.

Later in the locker room, as reporters swamped Jordan, one reporter spoke to Stacey and asked him how he was feeling. He said, "It's amazing how Michael Jordan and I had a combined score of 70 points tonight." Although he was only one man with one point, he made the difference in the game.

Bartimaeus was only one blind beggar but Jesus heard him. Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" "O Teacher," the blind man said, "I want to see!" Jesus told him, "All right, it's done. Your faith has healed you." And instantly the blind man could see, and followed Jesus down the road!

You may be only one person in this world but you too can make a difference through your faith and Love for Christ.

Pat Perkins

Day 20 ~ Thursday, March 23rd

Read Mark 11:1-11

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, people laid down their cloaks on the road in front of him and hailed him as a king coming in the name of the house of David. As amazing as this is to us as readers, this was a very common type of parade in that era of history: A king would ride into town publicly and be hailed by cheering crowds.

But here is what Jesus did that was completely different. The kind of king the people wanted rode in on a powerful war horse. Jesus, however, rode in on a small donkey. Picture if you will for a moment: Here is Jesus Christ, the King of authoritative, miraculous power, riding into Jerusalem on an animal a child would mount.

What on earth is Jesus doing? He is beautifully bringing together both majesty and meekness; honor and humility; royalty and

service; justice and grace. Jesus did everything in stark contrast to what we are inclined to want. We want power and honor. We want the accolades and applause. We want the affirmation of a crowd. And yet, I think Jesus calls us to something that is so culturally unacceptable, it's foolish: he calls us to live humble lives of service and grace.

As we continue on during this Lenten season, let's continue to remember this image of Jesus, riding on a donkey, humble in the face of what was to come.

Pastor Jared Priset

Day 21 ~ Friday, March 24th

Mark 11:17

And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations' but you have made it a den of robbers."

When Jesus entered the temple area in Jerusalem, He was very angry to see that animals were being sold, currencies were being exchanged, and people were being cheated in His "house of prayer." Jesus was upset because the temple area had been turned into a noisy, dirty, smelly marketplace so He chased out the merchants, the animals and the money changers to make the temple clean and holy again.

This in itself was a powerful message but is there even more to learn from this story? In 1Corinthians 3:16, we read: "*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you?*" Maybe we need to look at our own lives and ask God to help us chase out anything that is unclean or unholy from our life - his temple.

Nothing brings this to mind more than a song that the Chancel choir is doing on March 19, called "Jesus, Clear the Temple" by Pepper Choplin. Here are the words that have become so meaningful to many in our choir:

Jesus clear the temple, make it clean and bare. Purge the needless clutter, make this place a house of prayer. Cast out all distractions that would take our eyes from You. Jesus clear the temple, make our worship true.

Jesus clear the temple, chase away our pray'rless pride. Strip away pretenses, places where our sin can hide. Scour every corner where temptation draws us in. Jesus clear the temple, make us clean again.

Drive out self-ambition. Cast out the petty things. Break down the divisions and the conflict that they bring. Overturn the tables of our selfishness and greed. Break our hearts to minister to those in need.

Jesus clear the temple, let your spirit fill this place. Immerse us in your power, transform us by Your wondrous grace. Let this place be sacred, where your healing may be found. Jesus clear the temple, make this holy ground. Jesus clear the temple, make this holy ground.

Heavenly Father, please clear out our temple so that we can live clean and holy lives and be a house of prayer for you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Brenda Rapp

Day 22 ~ Saturday, March 25th

Read Mark 11:22-25

I don't know about you, but this passage and others like it, are very difficult for me. Prayer is not a rabbit's foot. When I concentrate on the desires of my heart, I miss what I see as the most important thing about prayer: aligning my will and my character to the will and character of God.

The explanation given in my bible is that our prayers must not be selfish and must be good for God's kingdom. We cannot come to God in prayer and expect an answer if we are holding a grudge, you must believe what you are asking for without doubt. Wow, that is a lot of conditions for a human heart that is approaching their father in heaven in prayer.

It seems to me, God wants us to share the desires of our heart, but far more importantly, God wants us to understand that His grace and promises are enough. What I have come to, at least right now, is this:

My father in heaven, your name is holy, you are the great I am. I want your kingdom to come here, not just in heaven but here, on

earth. Please let your will be done and help me to accept that will, no matter what. Please give me what I need to thrive today and forgive me when what You give isn't enough for me. Help me to have a forgiving heart towards others. Please lead me away from things that pull me away from you and keep me safe from the evils that so easily can destroy my life. Let me always remember that You, God, are the all in all, You are the power to sustain and Your glory will reign forever. Amen

When I become frustrated with prayer and how I should to pray, I go back to the Lord's Prayer and paraphrase it to guide my thoughts.

Cathy Wendell

Day 23 ~ Monday, March 27th

Read Mark 11:22-25

The heading for these verses in my bible says "Jesus Says the Disciples Can Pray for Anything." WOW Jesus gives us permission to pray for anything. So I can pray for a new house, new car, a really big TV or maybe the winning lottery ticket. Somehow I don't think that is what Jesus had in mind. As a Christian I should do better, I am expected to do better. I could pray for people that are sick, having surgery, going through turmoil or are healing from something. I can do that, that is easy I only need to read over the church prayer chain. I can also pray for the unmentioned prayers out there and throw in some prayers for family and friends. I'm done, it didn't take to long and I'm thinking I did a pretty good job. Then I remember verse 25, oh no, there is something required of me before I pray. There is work Jesus wants me to do. Not physical work, which is easier for me to do. Spiritual work which means I have to look within and that becomes uncomfortable. I need to be in the right heart and not hold anything against anyone. I need to start with forgiveness; then I can start praying.

Chrissi McCormick

Day 24 ~ Tuesday, March 28th

Mark 11:22-25

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if

anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go throw yourself into the sea’, and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.’

So how come there are so many unanswered prayers? Why does it seem that God doesn't hear us? There are a few clues from the verses above why are prayers aren't answered. Do we have enough faith? Do we doubt it will happen? Are we holding a grudge against someone?

What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 tells us “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”. Faith is described by two words in this verse “sure” and “certain”. When we believe that God will answer our prayer even though we don't see it materializing yet, we are being faithful. This is easier said than done.

Do we doubt that prayer can be answered? Thomas was one of the most famous doubters in the Bible. Jesus said to Thomas in John 20:27 “Stop doubting and believe”. ²⁹Then Jesus told him “Because you have seen me you believe; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Are we holding a grudge or not forgiving someone? We need to start our prayer by forgiving those who have wronged us and then asking God to forgive our sins. If we start our prayer with an attitude of gratitude and forgiveness, we open the door to better communication with our Lord. We must also question our motives; is the request for the good of God's kingdom or our own selfish desires. To pray effectively, we need faith in God not faith in the object of our request.

Dear Lord, help our prayer life to be more meaningful. Help us to deepen our faith in you. Help us to be thankful for all your many blessings and forgive us for all of our sins. Help us not to doubt but to believe in you and your Son Jesus who did the ultimate sacrifice through his death on the cross, so our sins may be forgiven and that we will have eternal life with you. Amen.

Monica Coventry

Day 25 ~ Wednesday, March 29th

Read Mark 11:27-33 (MSG)

During my senior year of college, I took a business negotiating class where we practiced negotiating once a week and then the other class period is where we analyzed our performance. There was one person in my class who I had heard was a tough negotiator and when I was matched up with her, I came prepared. I had studied the case, created different scenarios of what could happen and what outcomes I would be comfortable to agree on. When we sat down and after exchanging pleasantries we got to negotiating and I was able to corner her with a simple question that she could not answer. It brought me a smile not because I had the upper hand, but on the fact that her reputation of being a tough negotiator was not because she was tough but was a bit unprepared and focused on winning.

The religious leaders during Jesus' times were asking the wrong questions. They were too focused on "winning" the argument of trying to disprove Jesus that they missed on learning the full lesson and meaning of who Jesus is. They were not coming fully prepared with an open heart to seek to understand. While Jesus, on the other hand, approached the conversation not with the drive to "win," but to give the opportunity for the religious leaders to admit who he is. The religious leaders conceded and refused to answer and missed the beautiful opportunity to follow Christ. Let us not be caught up in the mindset of winning but be open to the opportunity to claim Jesus and exclaim his credentials.

Kelley Gifford

Day 26 ~ Thursday, March 30th

Read Mark 11:8-10; 12:30-31

One of my favorite memories from childhood was Palm Sunday. I remember each of us—the small children--held palm branches and waived them as the choir and Pastor walked through. We felt so important having a part in the Worship Service.

I wonder how Jesus felt as he rode into town with everyone laying their cloaks and palm branches on the ground before him. They shouted “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name

of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David!"

He knew these same adoring, happy faces would at worst betray him and at best keep silent in just a week's time. Because Jesus always showed love and kindness, I think he probably smiled and enjoyed the adoration. He loves us—even when we don't deserve it. Do we show the same love to those we encounter in our lives, even when they don't deserve it?

A teacher of the law asked Jesus, "Of all the commandments, which is most important? Jesus answered him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

For me the best way to witness to others in my daily life is to treat them with love and kindness. As I follow Jesus' examples and treat others as I would want to be treated, I make friends. Many times this leads to the topic of my source of love and kindness—my faith.

Smile, laugh, acknowledge, help, encourage, support---No, it's not always easy! But it is **always** worth the effort!

Holy Father: Please help us to be kind and loving to the people we are with each day—our families, friends, co-workers and acquaintances. Give us the kind words to say and show us ways to share our love. Thank you for sending us the best example of loving kindness: your Son, Jesus. Help us to follow his teaching and example always even when it's not easy. Amen

Elaine Strock

Day 27 ~ Friday, March 31st

Read Mark 12:1-12

Jesus is telling the "Parable of the Tenants" to those in Jerusalem. He tells of a man who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it. He then rented the vineyard to some farmers (tenants) and left to go on a trip. When it was harvest time, he sent one of the servants to bring in fruit from the vineyard, but the tenants beat him up and sent him away empty handed. Again another servant went to bring in fruit and the same thing happened to him. Many others

were also sent; some of those were beat up and others were killed. Finally, he had only one more to send and this time it was his Beloved son, whom he loved deeply. The man didn't think they would harm his son since they would show respect to him. When the tenants saw who the man sent, they killed him too and threw him over the fence of the vineyard.

There was a murder in the vineyard and we know who committed the crime.

Verse 12 – Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Meaning of the Parable: The man who plants the vineyard is God the Father. The vineyard is Israel. The tenants are the religious leaders of Israel. The servants, represent the faithful prophets sent by the Lord time and time again. The Beloved son is Jesus. This parable also shows the patience and long suffering of God with humanity.

Even though people today believe they can escape, God's judgement will certainly come. Sadly the religious leaders are blind to all of this. Knowing he told the parable against them, they were conniving to seize him.

Conclusion: God will win even when, for a fleeting moment, it seems He has lost. An empty tomb proves it is so.

Jackie & Walter Clark

Day 28 ~ Saturday, April 1st

Read Mark 12:18-34

The quest to define what God truly asks of us will always inspire incalculable teaching, learning and debate. Praise the Lord! Sharing the Good News, discovering new ways to reach unbelievers, and searching for clearer interpretations about the Scriptures and our Savior are all good and necessary. Yet, with so many instructions, warnings, and exhortations, it is spiritually rejuvenating and arguably more actionable when our purpose and our calling is simplified and focused.

That is precisely what Jesus brought forth in his ministry. Mark

12:18-34 records perhaps the clearest example of simplicity and focus, when Jesus saw through a veiled attempt by the Sadducees to better understand the Law of Moses. While it became obvious that their intent was to entrap Jesus in blasphemy, the jewel of this encounter was Jesus' answer to a question of another teacher of the law who was overhearing the exchange. He asked Jesus, "Of all of the commandments, which is the most important?"

Jesus knew this question was sincere and poignant, so he quickly had a clear answer. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."

Since these two commands uphold the intent of all of God's laws, we have practical ways to assess our thoughts and actions. Are we using every day to honor God? Do we act when we see a friend or stranger in need? Have we avoided saying or doing something hurtful to another?

Overall, can we see ourselves living sacrificially, as Christ did?

It's simple and it's focused, but it's not easy. God knows this, but he more than equips us. We have His Word, the Holy Spirit, and our faith family. But most importantly, God gave us a Savior who paid the price for our inability to overcome sin, which is essentially the focus on ourselves. It is my prayer that we will acknowledge Jesus as our Savior and that, out of gratitude for our redemption, we will faithfully honor God with every aspect of our being and care for others as we would care for ourselves.

David Williams

Day 29 ~ Monday, April 3rd

Mark 12:30

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

If you love someone this wholeheartedly, you will seek to serve them. You will look for ways to help them in what they are doing. This is certainly much different than seeking to gain their favor so they can help you, or make you happy. This deep level of love doesn't care what others think; no, the focus is on serving the

loved one. How many have tried desperate measures to save the life of a loved one? This is the love we are called to have with our savior Jesus Christ!

Yet, when it comes to serving God I worry about how I'll be perceived by those around me. If I share my story, they will think it is boring, a common story without special merit? If I volunteer, will I be of value? But if I look at it from God's perspective and I "Have faith in God," (Mark 11:22) then I can join God in his work and know that he will use me to further His plan. I likely won't know how it will happen, but I know the God of creation has that worked out! I can rest assured; He has the power to work through me.

The challenge is aligning my will to God's will. The Bible reveals God to us. It shows us that he is a good and loving God. He is also a jealous God, and we are to have no other god's before Him. If I try to serve another god, perhaps money, self-interest, or my career, I am trying to get God to serve my will. That is clearly not the example we have been given in Christ Jesus. Jesus prayed to the Father, listened for a response and obediently served the Father. As I spend time in God's word and in prayer, I grow closer to God. I learn His ways, and purposes over time. As I align with His will, the pressure is not on me the servant, for I don't have to have the plan and know all the answers. Rather, I need to observe, look and listen for where he may be calling for me and my unique story to serve His plan. Then I can be confident that in serving, God will equip me to meet the needs of my call. My obedience will provide a front row seat to watch God working in the world!

Mike McCormick

Day 30 ~ Tuesday, April 4th

Read Mark 13

Am I a "Chicken Little" yelling the sky is falling or am I "prophet" carrying my placard saying repent the end is near? I hope that I don't fall into either caricature of the end times. We do know the end times are coming. Jesus promised they would come and that they would be a struggle. Will it be a personal struggle for me at my end time? Will it be a communal struggle

for all when Jesus comes again? As this will happen in God's time I don't know the answer to that question – the answer to when the end time will come.

As I am sitting on hold, for now 47 minutes and 52 seconds and counting, I am trying to remain patient as I know the bank is dealing with lots of customers and their questions over the bank merger from First Merit to Huntington. It is a personal reminder that I must be patient in waiting for God too. He works in His own time, with answered prayer, with our questions such as: will the end time be tomorrow or in 200 years?

My only choice is to be ready for that time – the time when my Savior comes knocking at my door. I can't put this off until Monday (like my diets) because Monday is not a guarantee. I need to live my life each and every day, ready to meet my maker, ready to face His judgment, rely on His grace and hope that I am worthy to be called His own.

Jo Jacobs

Day 31 ~ Wednesday, April 5th

Mark 12:31

"The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."

That wasn't the only time Jesus told us to love one another or to love our neighbor as ourselves. Mothers have a knack for doing that. They're the ones who always eat the burnt cookies or the egg with the broken yoke. In my mom's case, it went a bit further. Our favorite meal at home when I was growing up was fried chicken. The best pieces were always given to my dad, brother and me while my mom settled for the wings. An early memory of my mother's love of neighbor was when she and a friend took turns sitting with a neighbor's toddler who was dying of cancer. There was no hospice care in those days so family and friends provided the comfort and care. It was not an easy thing for my mom to do since my brother was just a few years older than the little boy, but the parents needed time to rest and to care for their other three children. Mom and her friend sat with the boy until he passed away. Today is Mom's birthday; she would have been 93. I ate Sunday dinner with her when she was in assisted living.

They were having fried chicken that day and when they asked Mom what piece she would like, she said, "I'll take a wing." She always left the best for someone else.

Susan Huston

Day 32 ~ Thursday, April 6th

Read Mark 13:1-2

We all have an innate drive to create. We acquire this attribute due to being made in the image of God and with the desire to share the attributes that God shares with us. The story of God and humans begins with God creating and we feel the desire to emulate this. We also find awe in the works that others create.

Close your eyes and imagine the most awe-inspiring man made structures or buildings that you can think of. Did you think of the Taj Mahal and its domes, the Colosseum in Italy, or possibly the Parthenon in Greece? Perhaps, images of the Great Wall of China or the Eiffel Tower cross your mind. Maybe you have more modern buildings in your mind like the world's two tallest buildings, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai and One World Trade Center in New York. All of these works have required great skill to build. From the intellect of design to the brute force of labor, these projects have pushed humans to exert themselves in ways the world had not seen before.

Mark 13 tells us of Jesus' disciples being in awe of the Temple's design. They exclaimed, "Teacher, look at that stonework! Those buildings!" Jesus responds by saying, "You're impressed by this grandiose architecture? There's not a stone in the whole works that is not going to end up in a heap of rubble."

Jesus is telling his disciples that the Jewish Temple, the center of faith, the community center, and where God meets humans, is ultimately meaningless. He is pointing us to a more important reality of where we place our awe. Do we live and interact with the world as if what is material is what's important or do we live as if what is material is ultimately useless?

Take time to honestly reflect on if there is something in your life that you currently place importance that Jesus would say, “This impresses you? In the end it will be trash”.

John Kocher

Day 33 ~ Friday, April 7th

Read Mark 13:14-23

“Pray that it may not happen in winter.” This line, easily glossed over when reading Mark 13, just keeps sticking out to me. All around this line, you have descriptions of tribulation, suffering, and warnings to be on our guard. It’s all quite frightening, really, when you read this section of Mark, and I think if we are paying attention, it’s pretty obvious that as a Christian, we need to be ready to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Following Christ isn’t going to be easy and it’s not going to get any easier, at least for the time being.

But, amid all this discussion, Jesus throws in this little comment: “Pray that it may not happen in winter.” Jesus knows it’s not going to be easy, and he sure as heck knows that it will be that much harder during the cold, barren season of winter. Right before this comment, he mentions pregnant women and nursing mothers. As someone who has been both of these things at one point in life, I can personally relate: it’s not easy, and I can only imagine that during intense tribulation, it would be that much harder, especially in winter when sickness, lack of fresh food, and piercing cold can make life extremely difficult.

I think what strikes me in this section is not that suffering is inevitable for those who choose to follow Christ, but that Jesus, all those years ago, thought to mention the importance of praying that this would not happen during winter. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was actually considering the welfare of his future followers. It reminds me of Matthew 10:30, when Jesus tells us that even the hairs on our heads are all numbered. He’s not just giving vague references to generalized events and fictional people. He’s concerned about each and every one of us in real life. He knows how many hairs are on our heads and he knows that winter is a tough time to care for a baby in the midst of tribulation. And he asks us to pray about it.

Jesus doesn’t miss a thing. He knows the cost of following him, and he doesn’t beat around the bush about it. But he also cares a great deal, and he promises us that “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” He’s got our backs. And he specifically asked us to pray about it.

Meredith Priset

Day 34 ~ Saturday, April 8th

Mark 14:22-25

Even though I am gluten free, one thing I can still enjoy is a Snickers bar! I’ve always loved Snickers bars and their slogan, “Satisfies the hunger!” When I am heading from place to place, late to a meeting, or if I didn’t pack my lunch, I can always grab a snickers bar and “satisfy the hunger.”

In Mark 14:22-25, Jesus institutes the Lord’s supper. He breaks bread, offers it to his disciples, and says, “Take; this is my body.” He then takes the cup and offers it to them as a symbol of his blood, which would be poured out for them. This might have seemed strange to his disciples at the time, but we all know the truth: Jesus’s death on the cross was the answer to all our problems, the fulfillment of all our needs.

The next time you feel a pang of hunger, go ahead and have a Snickers bar. You know I will be! But let’s also remember that true satisfaction is only found in Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins and ultimately paved the way for us to have eternal life.

Pastor Jared

Day 35 ~ Monday, April 10th

Mark 14:29-31 (MSG)

Peter blurted out, “Even if everyone else is ashamed of you when things fall to pieces, I won’t be.” Jesus said, “Don’t be so sure. Today, this very night in fact, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” He blustered in protest, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you.” All the others said the same thing.

In the 14th chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus made a comment that every one of the disciples would reject him. Peter takes

exception to that remark. Peter knows for certain that he would never abandon Jesus. Jesus then predicts that in less than 12 hours, Peter will deny Jesus three times. Peter didn't like hearing this and insists he will be loyal. After all Jesus had appointed him as a leader. For Jesus to tell Peter that he will deny knowing him is unthinkable! This betrayal will never happen. Peter is confident beyond any doubt.

We like confidence in our leaders don't we? When we choose a coach for our sporting teams, we want to make sure the candidate exudes confidence to lead our team to a title. When we choose governmental leaders, a majority doesn't want introspective or ambivalent politicians. Instead we desire folks to have the resolve of Churchill, the forbearance of Lincoln, the sense of conviction like Roosevelt. We also desire confidence in our **business leaders** as well. If Janet Yellen hosts a press conference and comes across looking like Eeyore people would want her removed from their position on the Federal Reserve.

While we like our people in leadership to demonstrate confidence, we know that there is a distinction between **confidence and cockiness**. According to the dictionary cockiness is marked by overconfidence or presumptuousness. Whereas we appreciate confidence in leadership, we disdain those who are so cocky that they feel that they are better than everyone else. All of us can identify people in our lives: co-workers, relatives, neighbors, perhaps if we were honest, ourselves who fight the temptation between an inner confidence and an arrogant cockiness.

So what is the difference between confidence and cockiness? The biggest difference between confidence and cockiness is realizing the **basis of your confidence**. If you think that all your good fortune, intelligence, or wisdom comes from within yourself, then you will develop a **cockiness**. If instead you find the basis of your confidence in a higher power that is trying to use your gifts, intelligence and leadership to make a difference for a larger world then you will find the source of **confidence**.

Perhaps the poster child for cockiness is Simon Peter. Peter believes that he has inner resources to be able to withstand any temptation. Yet the point of this story in Mark is not about Peter's

failure due to his cockiness but rather the confidence in the grace of Jesus which saves us despite our failures. Even when the chips are down and the future seems dim, I have the confidence in the promises of Jesus that He will go ahead of me and lead me home.

Pastor Bryan George

Day 36 ~ Tuesday, April 11th

Read Mark 14:32-41

Have you ever had a "Gethsemane moment" in your life? A time when you were faced with something you had been asked to do that was very important to many and you really didn't want to do it? You pleaded to be released from this calling. However, it was determined no one else was going to volunteer and you were the one who had been asked to do what you had deemed to be a most painful experience.

During a walking tour in the Holy Lands with a group from our church, we paused by many sites where Jesus had been and read scripture passages relevant to that site. At the Garden of Gethsemane, I felt a deep sadness fall over me as a voice read what Jesus experienced there. My eyes teared as I began to think about the agony he must have suffered as he fell to the ground and begged hi Abba, Father, to take this cup from him, no once but three times. He always added, "Not what I will but what you will."

Jeanie Gunn

Day 37 ~ Wednesday, April 12th

Read Mark 14:27-31, 66-72

As an elementary school teacher, I hear children making promises all the time. When you make a promise as a child, it must be a pinky promise. Breaking a pinky promise is bad news, especially in the eyes of kids. The pinky seals the deal. Promises about playing together at recess, sitting next to each other at lunch, keeping a special secret a secret, and promises about being friends forever. The list goes on. How many promises have we made that we have either kept or broken? When we break a promise it gives us this overwhelming feeling of sorrow, bitterness, and/or despair. It makes us feel like we have failed one

another, and maybe even failed God. I make promises to friends and family and I break those promises sometimes. I do not like it when I do. I know when I pray I often make promises with God and I know I have broken those promises too. It isn't the greatest feeling to break a promise, especially breaking a promise I made to God.

In the Bible, during the Passover season, Peter made a promise to Jesus saying he would never disown Him. Jesus told Peter before the rooster crowed twice he would deny Jesus three times. Guess what happened? Three times, Peter denied Jesus and Peter felt very disappointed and he wept. The difference here between the promises we make to others and the promise Peter made to Jesus was that Jesus already knew Peter would break the promise. We don't always know when someone will break a promise that was made to us. Even with Jesus knowing that I can only imagine it still had to hurt knowing someone He loved very much would break a promise.

However, the story doesn't end there. Jesus is a Savior who forgives promise breakers when we ask for repentance. The whole purpose of this Easter season is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, our broken promises. They are restored when we ask for forgiveness. Jesus forgave Peter and he will forgive us too. After Peter wept, he lived his life differently. That is what we need to do too. When we break a promise we should figure out how to rise again and continue to faithfully follow and serve.

Dear Lord, we thank you for your forgiving grace. Forgive us when we break promises and help us live differently in service to you. We love you! Amen.

Julia Fabich

Day 38 ~ Thursday, April 13th

Mark 14: 66-72

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. And the servant-girl, on seeing

him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Peter promised and I think truly believed he would never deny Christ. Yet when confronted, when fearful of the consequences, when afraid of death, Peter did deny Christ three times just as Jesus said. Peter thought he was strong enough to stand with Jesus but he soon discovered that his humanness made him unable to face the consequences of following Jesus. He wasn't ready to face the ostracism, the pain, the torture, the death that could follow if he proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. When he accepted his weakness he was overwhelmed with grief and sorrow.

While I have never had to face death for admitting my faith, I have found ways to deny Jesus as my Lord and Savior. When I do not follow His commandments to love all my neighbors I am denying Jesus as my Lord. When I do not show compassion to those in need of understanding, financial help or just a hug, I am denying Jesus as my Lord. When I criticize those who don't "do it as I would" or do as much as I think they should, I am denying Jesus as my Lord. When I envy those who have more (more gifts, more talents, and more resources) yet waste my time, resources and fail to use my blessings to the best purpose, I am denying Jesus as my Lord. When I follow society's morals just to fit in instead of following God's desire for me, I am denying Jesus as my Lord. When I fail to stand up for my beliefs or for someone else's as I am a conflict turtle, I am denying Jesus as my Lord. When I refuse to give Him my burdens, my worries, or control, I am denying Jesus as my Lord. Unfortunately I find myself denying Christ in some way every day, just like Peter. Yet, My Jesus, My Lord, My Savior, *never* denies me.

Jo Jacobs

Day 39 ~ Friday, April 14th

Lord, teach us to be more like your son, Jesus. As the book of Mark teaches us of Jesus' many healings, help us to be healers of others. Help us to heal by using kind words instead of gossip, kind gestures instead of ignoring those around us, and even a smile instead of a frown. Help us to not feel sorry for ourselves, and to realize that there are probably many others in worse situations than we are. Let us pay for those people, and help us to be a shining light for others on a daily basis. Help us to be "healers" like your son. Amen.

Mark MacIsaac

Day 40 ~ Saturday, April 15th

Mark 16:7

"Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

On November 28 2016, A Columbian airliner crashed killing 71 people on board including most members of a Brazilian soccer team. An investigation by the investigation team revealed that there was no mechanical failure instead there was no gas left in the tanks. The technical name offered was "fuel exhaustion." The plane was just five miles away from the airport and had been in a holding pattern before the pilot declared an emergency

How many times have we felt like we are flying in a holding pattern running simply on fumes? Perhaps you recently lost a loved one, and you have been simply going through the motions of shock. This is a holding pattern of grief. Maybe you have been stressed out at work, a powder keg ready to explode. This is a holding pattern of stress. Then there is that holding pattern of fear as you await some medical tests. I imagine that all of us have felt like that Columbian airliner, circulating a safe spot while our fuel gauge runs dangerously empty.

Our universal human condition of facing loss and death has been felt by people since the dawn of time.

Take for instance the women who have come to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They have come together to go through the motions of anointing the dead body of their friend and

teacher. The crucifixion on Friday was quick and brutal. They didn't have time to say goodbye.. The Sabbath observation meant that they needed to wait another day. Now it is early on the third day. It is time to let go of a loved one, a time of abandonment, a period of grief giving up hopes and dreams. On that morning, the women face a new problem: How will they anoint the body since a large stone covers the entrance of the tomb? It is a pathetic and sad scene: A small group of women early in the morning going through the motions of mourning.

But while the women were in the holding pattern of grief and shock, **God came to fill their empty tanks.** In Mark's gospel, the messenger of the good news of Easter was a young man... an angel like figure who appears to the women outside the tomb whose stone had been rolled away. When they saw that Jesus' body was no longer there, the women asked the same question that you and I would ask! What happened? The young man's answer was to the point. He has risen. He is not here.

So what happened that Easter morning? I believe the angels. Jesus has risen. Somehow, the Lord got up, conquered death and embraced life. It is a miracle of faith, where there is no videotape to provide convincing evidence. Jesus was flat lined...cold... dead as a doornail ..and somehow God came back. The stone has been rolled away.

The angel announces to the women that Jesus is going ahead of you. Going ahead of us is part of the character of our God. When the women came to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, God went ahead and rolled away the stone. God is always going ahead of us, from the moment of our birth to the time we take our last breath. Easter celebrates the Go ahead God.

So when we are in the holding pattern of grief... Jesus goes ahead to weep at the tomb of Lazarus. When we are in the holding pattern of stress, Jesus goes ahead by crying out "Please take this cup from me... but not my will but your will. When we are in the holding pattern of depression... Jesus goes ahead and tells us that in a little while God will send a comforter who will be with us.

When we are in the holding pattern of fear, Jesus goes ahead and stretches his arms over our turbulent waters and soothingly says. Do not be afraid.

Pastor Bryan George

Easter Blessing

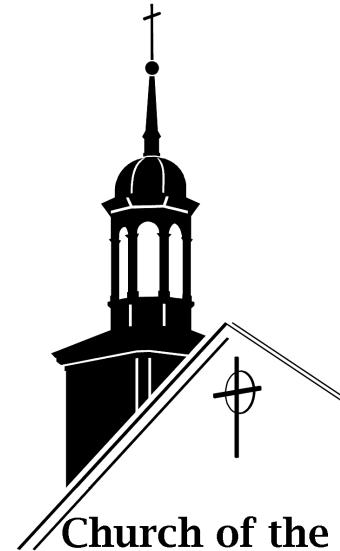
May the celebration of resurrected life bring new hope
to your being.

May the victory over earthly death turn your eyes to the
promises of heaven.

May the empty tomb help you to leave your sorrows at
the foot of the cross.

So that God's hope, promises and forgiveness reign in
your life forever.

Amen.



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