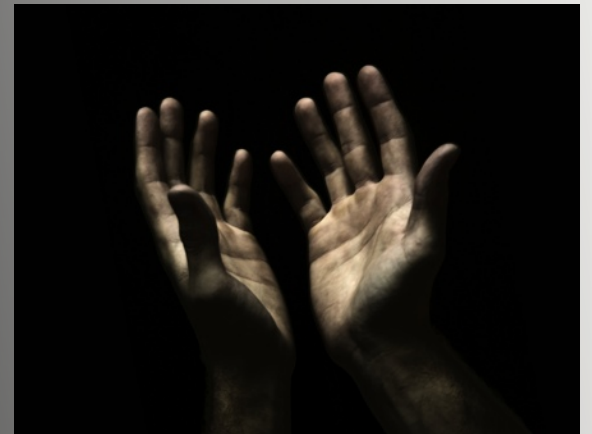


2008
Holy Week
Devotional
Guide



m y f a t h e r



m y s o n



*Palm Sunday
through Easter*

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12222 US 24 West • Fort Wayne, IN 46814
260-672-3377

Let's take a journey together. A journey to understand our relationship with God.

This week we are focusing on the relationship between the Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus. We'll see the full range of emotion from pride, to grief and to joy as we follow Jesus from the Triumphal Entry, to the Last Passover, to the Cross and then to the right hand of His Father.

There is another side of this relationship however: our relationship to the Father, Son and Spirit. But then that makes me ask the question, "What does the relationship between the almighty God and us little, puny people look like?"

These devotionals, the art on the walls of the Sanctuary lobby, the dramatic testimonies in the services and original song are all attempts to help us better understand how this relationship works and looks like day to day. They were all created by people who attend ECC...people who are all believers working out their faith through art.

Let's take a journey together. A journey to understand our relationship with God.

Sam Ward

Contributing Artists:

Devotional Writers - Jeff Keplar, Lisa Guthrie, Mike Lee
Rod Embree, Sara Ward, Sam Ward, Steve Clough

Visual Artists - Pam Turnbow, Sharon Turnbow,
Melody Ferrier, Jerry Ashcraft, Kate McMahan,
DeWayne Salter

Original Song - Matt Kennedy

Stage Decorators - Linda Hall, Sarah Wall

Dramatists - Mia Blocher, Joan Ross, Steve Weber

SUNDAY
March 16, 2008

Mark 11:1-10

When obstacles and challenges are lurking on life's pathway in front of me, what do I do? Unfortunately, sometimes I turn and run, thinking I am avoiding the problems successfully. Of course, they usually just wait for an even more inopportune time and there they are in front of me again. Or maybe I just crawl off the path of progress for a while and quietly avoid dealing with the issues today. I should know by now that avoiding my troubles never seems to work long-term. I find myself right back there later – no closer to conquering my problems than before.

However, Jesus never did that. He didn't run from challenges. He didn't evade his enemies. He didn't avoid challenges for a better time. Not once! His time was now as the cross awaited his limbs, the grave awaited his limp body, but Easter morning also eagerly awaited his resurrection. He faced them here and now, with faith and an action plan that was always centered on the Father's perfect will.

What would happen if I did that? How about for the next hour, can I make it? Of course I can. So then, how about for the next day? Is it still possible for a Christian that claims to be committed to walking with the Lord and trusting in Him to truly be my Messiah? Can I dare to think I might make it for an entire week, all the way to Easter Sunday, and still have my eyes on Him – on the Messiah who has risen from the grave and conquered sin and death? Or can I keep my feet walking straight toward His will for even longer?

Yes, I can...and I will! Since the Lord is my light, my pathway is lit all the way as He leads me. Since He is my salvation, my end goal is clear and my daily motivation is already determined.

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" As our Messiah, He came for me and He came for you! And He did that so that you and I both might go for Him! I'll see you on the journey...let's walk it together.

Jeff

MONDAY
March 17, 2008

Mark 11:27-33; 12:12

Their plan was a great one! They were in very difficult, oppressive circumstances for the people of God. After all, shouldn't the people who bear God's name be happy, healthy, and wealthy? If anyone was going to dominate anyone else, shouldn't it be the righteous over the wicked, the good over the bad, the followers of God over everyone else? That is not how God's chosen people found things to be.

The Jews were oppressed, heavily taxed, and dominated by their enemies, so they came up with a great plan. God would send someone to rescue them. They envisioned the Messiah to be a great warrior riding on a white horse, followed by his army which would free them from Rome's iron grip. His arrival would be accompanied by pomp and ceremony. They would all know he had come, and they would follow him in a triumphant campaign against their conquerors.

And then one night the Messiah arrived, but instead of being a great military leader, he was a helpless child. No great white horse was in sight; only a donkey. There was no army, but rather an angelic choir. When he grew up, he led no major campaign against the pagan Rome. Instead he condemned the Jewish leaders. He was so different from the Messiah that they had waited for over the years that it wasn't long before they were screaming for the death of their rescuer.

They had a plan. It wasn't just God's plan. They wanted freedom from political oppression, fiscal stress, and physical strain. God knew that what they really needed was spiritual birth, cleansing, and forgiveness. So he sent his son to be born as a helpless, human baby, to grow up like thousands of little boys of his day, except he lived a perfect life and died a horrible death. They were so involved in pursuing their own plan, however, that very few of them were able to recognize Jesus for who he really was! He was the Messiah, and they missed it because they were looking for something else.

As I pause to think about my Messiah this year, I must recognize that at times I too have made my own plans. I have become so wrapped up in my plans that I didn't recognize God's plan. His plans are always far better than mine!

As you celebrate the Easter season and the birth, death, and resurrection of our Messiah, my prayer is that you will pause to reflect on your life, that you will have eyes to recognize what you really need, and that you will have a heart open to allowing God to meet your needs through His perfect plan for you.

Lisa

(special thanks to Larry Wilbite)

TUESDAY
March 18, 2008

Mark 14:3-10

They were at his house; Simon's.
Simon the Leper.
With the blotches of white, red sores and numb limbs
They were at Simon the Lepers.
The outcast. The scourge.
Why there?
Of all places for our Lord to go.
Why there?
Would I have went?
Would I of gone?
Is this where we find Him?
Is this how we draw nearer?
With the downtrodden, the incurable.
With the outcasts, the untouchables.
Am I looking in all the wrong places.
They were at Simon the Lepers.
They were reclining around the table.
They were reclining around the table enjoying one another's
company.
The disciples, Lazarus, Martha, Simon....and Martha's sister,
Mary.
Hardly anyone notices her enter the room.
She doesn't cook or serve food like her sister –
Yet she holds something, something she values.
Something she embraces not only with arms but also with
her heart.
What is she holding so close? A jar.
A jar, a flask, it's a rare alabaster bottle.
An alabaster bottle of holy oil.
It must be precious the way she cradles it.
It's her alabaster offering.
She seems to recognize Him.
She knows Him, she's met Him before.

I've seen you before.
I have seen you with my mind, with my heart,
I have seen you before!
Open my eyes Lord so that I may see you.
That I may see you again.
Give me sight that I may recognize you.
That I may see your face.
Hear your voice.

She stands by His side.
Briefly their eyes meet,
you can see they have communicated without saying a word.
He knows why she is there.
She knows who He is.

He knows her heart's intent.
He is.
Teacher, Messiah, Savior, Lord Friend
She breaks open the flask.
And pours the ointment over His head.
Over His head...anointing the King!
Over His feet...
Over His feet...preparing Him for the grave.
She seized the moment.
He seized her life.
In her worship she withheld nothing
He is pleased!
He is pleased with Mary of Bethany!
He is pleased with the alabaster offering.
She gave what was possibly the most valuable to her.

What am I to give?
I better sell my house, I better sell everything.
What am I able to freely give?
I give drops, she gave it all.
She gave with abandonment,
I give with conditions.
Surrendering herself with no strings attached.
I'm always wheeling-n-dealing.
If you do this, I'll do that.
She didn't use words when she worshipped the Lord.
She didn't look to see who was watching.
She was focused on Him.
She had her eyes open – please open mine.
Please remove the blindness.
Don't let me be afraid.

Mike

WEDNESDAY

March 19, 2008

Mark 14:17-24

Many business organizations have been shaken to the core upon finding out a trusted leader has in fact betrayed the organization in some way. Perhaps the most well known example in recent times was the massive Enron scandal. Over 20,000 employees from more than 40 countries quickly found their lives uprooted as an elaborate scheme of deception and fraud from the leaders of their organization came to light.

When I was a kid, my family went on several trips to places I had never seen before, such as the Grand Canyon. As a young boy, sitting in the back of the family car, I soon began to wonder if our destination even existed. No matter how hard I tried to focus on the future destination, the discomfort of the back seat of the car – and the overwhelming boredom only kids can experience – made my focus blur significantly. Only a parent can appreciate how tired my mom and dad had to have been of hearing “are we there yet?” for the hundredth time!

At first the Enron scandal and my childhood vacation memories might not seem to have a lot in common, but in reality they are flip sides of the same coin – how this life affects our faith. What we experience so vividly moment by moment often profoundly affects our faith in two significant ways. First, our experiences and perceptions can make it very difficult to hear and accept a truth that seems to contradict what we perceive to be true, as in the Enron case. Secondly, the vividness of this short lifetime can make it difficult to focus on the promise of our eternal future, just as my childhood boredom caused me to start to doubt that we’d ever get to our promised vacation destination.

So it’s encouraging for me to see in Mark 14:17-24, Jesus’ disciples struggling with these same two aspects of our faith. How could one of their own betray Jesus, when everyone seemed to be sincere followers of Him? And how could they focus on the promised future reality in the face of this startling revelation now? Men who lived and interacted with the King of kings on a daily basis, struggled with the same issues I often struggle with today. May God give us the strength and discernment to see the truth *behind* what we perceive and the hope *beyond* what we perceive.

Rod

THURSDAY

March 20, 2008

Mark 14:32-39

We have all found ourselves desperate and on our knees praying for help. But how often have we prayed the same way for others? It is easy to see the importance of our own prayer needs. They’re on our minds throughout the day. We think about them before we sleep, when we get up, and over lunch. But so many times when our friends are in need, we pray a quick prayer for them and go on our way. We do not carry their burden with us. We do not “watch and pray” for them in their time of despair.

When Christ asks the disciples to keep watch, he is asking for more than them to stay awake. Yet they couldn’t even do that. The cost of staying awake even one hour was too much for them. He asked them to pray, because he knew the coming trials that he and they would go through in the next few days. He would soon be leaving them and dying on the cross. They would face many temptations and would need to recognize these and fight against them. Would they have the strength to endure the coming trials, when they did not have the strength to watch and pray now?

Christ faced his own trial by watching and praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, which translated means “Garden of the oil press.” It contained an olive grove where oil was made by rolling a heavy stone over the olives so that the oil was pressed out. This is significant because in a sense, Christ was also “pressed” by the burden of his mission that his sweat was like “drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44b). Yet despite being overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, he was still willing to do God’s will. The cost would be great; he knew that, but he also recognized his need to face the task ahead. In his desperation, he cried out to God. He expressed his true feelings, but was committed to God’s plan for salvation. In his sorrow he said, “Not what I will, but what you will.” That is the beauty of prayer—that we might express our deepest feelings and still be obedient.

If we look at prayer as an act of service for others, then we need to keep watch and pray both for ourselves and for others. Who do you know that is going through a personal trial? For whom can you watch and pray?

Sara

FRIDAY
March 21, 2008

Mark 15:21-37

It was the third hour when they crucified [Jesus]. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27 They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

While there are stages of time, there are also miracles in the world, but most of them get missed because we are too busy or too desensitized to them. I'm starting to see them more this week as I look back. I can spot them with regularity, sprinkling my path with drops of miracle, like blood, that will lead to healing and wholeness. But in the ER, like any hospital, it starts with forms, blood tests and the never-ending interrogation of questions.

"Name?" "Birthdate?" "Why are you here?"

It starts with the first nurse you see and then continues with each new nurse and doctor.

"Name?" "Birthdate?" "What's been going on?" Again and again. Yes, there are periods of time. Epochs when things change from what they've been. But in between these different ages, there are the few moments in between when time stops. The doctor walks in and sits down.

"It's cancer. I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this. It's not part of the job that I enjoy."

I realize now that there is no easy way to break this kind of news. It's better to just say it without any embellishment or corny additions. Just say it. So you sit there and all the air has suddenly left your lungs. You can't breathe and you don't know what to say. All I want to do is hold Sara's hand. I reach out for her and we hold onto each other for dear life. For our dear life. The only one we have and one I happen to love.

"But, he's a young man. He just turned 30." Sara blurts out.

It didn't seem fair. I had just turned 30 and younger friends asked what it was like.

"Is it a big deal?," they asked, "Were you really upset and did you feel like life had passed you by?"

"No" I said. It wasn't a big deal. I don't feel any different and I think I've plenty of time to accomplish other things in my life. Well that was just plain old 30. At 30 and 4 months my body started falling apart.

"How bad is it?" I ask.

"Oh, it's extensive in the abdominal area," he says.

At that moment, I envision my abdomen from the chart I vaguely remember in biology with the stomach, intestines, bladder, pancreas all full of holes like swiss cheese, because the cancer has eaten through it...OR what USED to be stomach, bladder, intestines and pancreas all dissolved into a grey colored gelatinous mass that the surgeon looks at and shakes his head.

"Man, that's extensive. Just sew him back up and send him home with morphine to enjoy his last few months."

It's those kinds of thoughts that make no sense at all. They shoot through your mind at the same time and it all seems so real, even though it makes absolutely no sense. I would like to say that in this situation, I had something profound to say...that my faith was so strong and that I made the best of it and held my wife as she broke down or that I suddenly had a great sense of the Lord's peace and a light from heaven broke through to shine around my head. But I didn't. I cried out...

At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

There would be many times after that I would feel alone, but this was the first time I can remember feeling forsaken. I know it doesn't compare to the suffering of Jesus, but in the midst of that physical and emotional pain as I held my wife's hand and watched our dreams die, I had an inkling of what it feels like to cry out,

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?...With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

I felt forsaken in the ER that day, but I wasn't alone. The man, Jesus, who was forsaken and knew what it felt like stood by me. He was there with me as I cried. So now I look at him and with the centurion can say, "Surely this man was the Son of God."

Sam

SATURDAY
March 22, 2008

John 19:38; 40-42

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. Psalm 55:22

As a little girl, I often ran into my Father's arms for comfort. "Oh Daddy, Daddy," I cried, "I was climbing on the swing set and fell down. Now my knee is hurt!" Big tears spilled onto my cheeks as Father held me tightly. He sat me gently down and looked at my scratched knee. As he carefully wiped the blood away and put on a band-aid, he calmed my fears saying, "Don't worry, Daddy's not going to hurt you." With my cheeks still wet, I broke into a giant smile and exclaimed, "Daddy, you made it all better!"

As Christians we have the assurance that our Heavenly Father is going to help us through our deepest sorrows and trials. In Psalm 55:11 David writes, "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall." Many times we try to bear these burdens ourselves, but when we come to the Lord and ask for help, he not only takes these burdens, he makes it better by sustaining and protecting us.

Whenever we are suffering, we can go to our Father and trust him to carry life's burdens. He will hold us tightly in his arms and assure us of His strength and love. Like little children, we can trust our Father to soothe our hurts through His loving care and protection.

Father, help me to trust you with my deepest sorrows. Let me rest in your arms. Amen.

Sara

SUNDAY
March 23, 2008

Mark 16:1-8

Mary Magdalene, who had so deeply encountered Jesus, whose life had been indelibly touched, now came to anoint his body for proper burial – to give back to Him a portion of what He had given her.

Problem: that morning the three women came in grief, seeking what they knew would be a dead man. He had told them all that on the third day He would rise again, but in their limited vision and experience they acted on what they expected – not on what He said, not on what He claimed to be, not what He was.

The hopes for all those who had followed for three years were crushed when they had watched Him die – they had stood at the cross and watched the blood pour as the spear was thrust up into His chest. They had watched as He spoke His last, breathed His last – and died.

And rather than believe what He had told them, they came in defeat, looking to prepare a dead body to stay dead, to return to the dust from which they now concluded it had come. No more dreams of a kingdom, no more sitting at His feet to be taught, no more touch of His strong hand, no longer the sound of His comforting voice, never again the sibilant sound of His sandals across a floor, or the light of His smile. No more reason to hope that anything He had said or done was more than just a once-in-a-lifetime encounter with a man upon whom God has put his stamp – as He had done with Moses, Elijah, David. And now He was dead – gone – their hopes with Him.

When most see the cross they see suffering and death. But something would be different this morning – three women came to find a dead man, but found that death had died. They came in defeat and instead found victory in its place. They came expecting nothing and received more than everything for which they could have hoped.

How often do we approach the Christ, seeing only His suffering and His death? How often do we place Him in the grave and leave Him there – hearing about the resurrection but not really believing it, because in our modern-day scientific, technologically-advanced minds we really know that dead people stay dead, that they don't come back. So we approach Easter – content with the King who rides the

donkey's colt on Palm Sunday, touched by events of the Passion Week, grieving through the trial and the crucifixion.

And how often do we come to Sunday morning, sit in our regular spaces, sing the songs, hear the sermon, but depart unmoved, unchanged, and silent—because although we enter the tomb and find it empty, we miss the angel, refuse to believe the heavenly words. Worse, we depart in silence—ready to say we believe that a dead man got up off a slab of stone and lived again, but not sure enough to live differently. Someone once asked, “If I were on trial for serving Christ, would there be enough evidence to convict me?” Does my life tell the world how much I love this Christ, my Messiah?

Ironic, isn't it, that the lowly shepherds of the Christmas story woke the whole world with their story, unconcerned about who heard and what anyone might think of them. These women saw the empty tomb, visited with an angel, were told exactly what to do, and went away silent and afraid. Afraid of what? Afraid that someone had played a cruel trick, and that he wasn't really alive—or afraid that he was?

If he died and stayed dead, then we have little to worry about; a dead man doesn't require much of us. However, a Messiah who died and loved us so much that he rose to glorious life again is no longer the sweet baby Jesus asleep in the manger; instead, he is The Lord of glory, the King of all kings who demands the allegiance of His subjects. He is the King to whom, one day, “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.”

Now is the time when He still calls us to choose to serve Him; however, when He comes again the time for choosing will be done. “Now is the acceptable time.”

He is Messiah, Savior, Lord. He is the King. He is my King. And I bow before my King. I bow before my King.

Steve

(References: Cheney, 1 Corinthians)