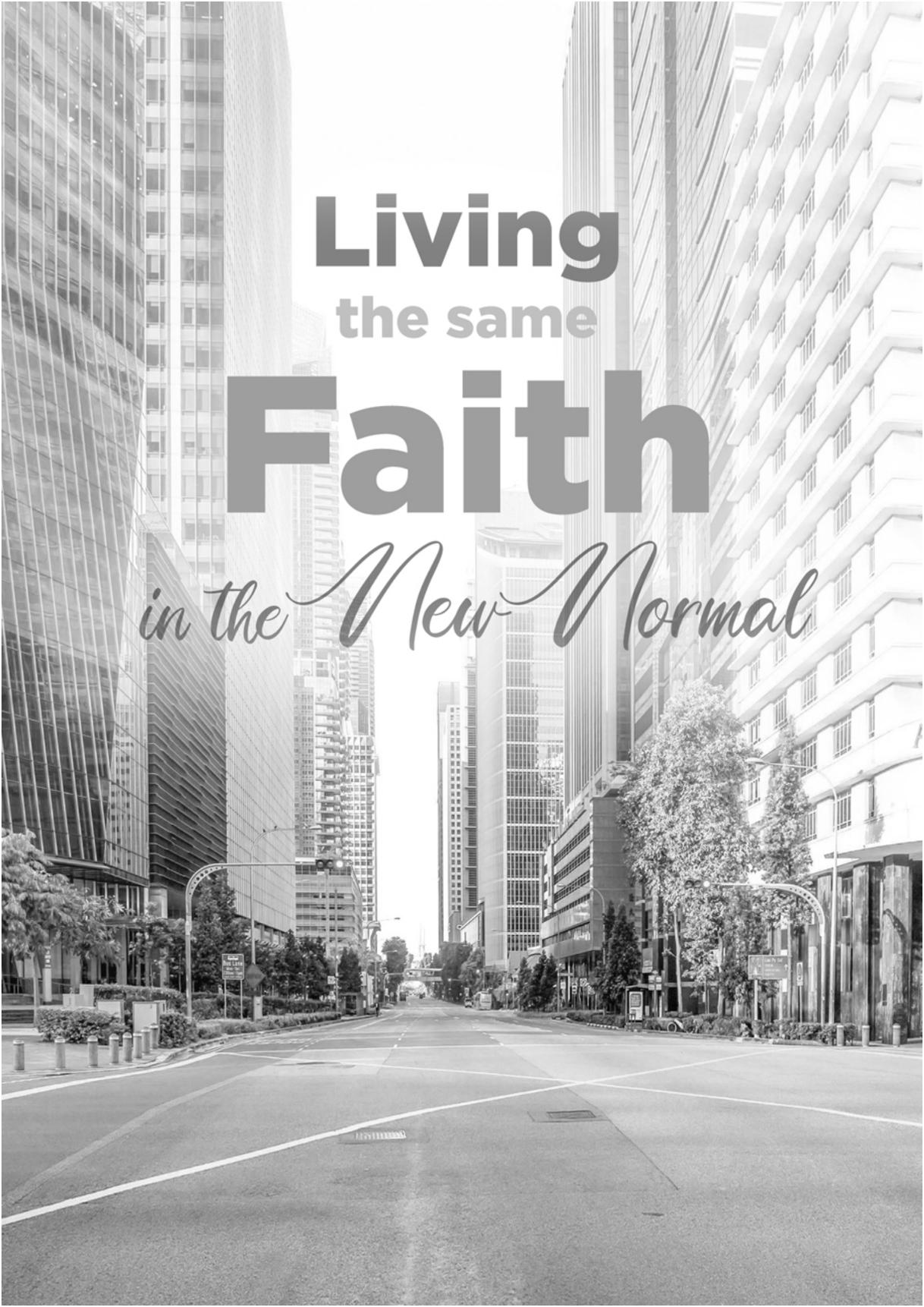


Living
the same

Faith

→ *in the New Normal*

DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR LENT 2023



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Living the Same Faith in the New Normal

Daily Devotions For Lent 2023 (Large Print edition)

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Foreword

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Scripture states in Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Biblical faith is based on the sure, unchanging promises of the faithful God. He always fulfils His promises and is completely trustworthy. When we recognise God’s faithfulness, our faith in Christ will be strengthened. We grow in faith by studying the Bible and seeing what God has done in the past and what He promises for the future. But it also requires that we diligently seek Him and strive to be like Him.

The season of Lent is a time of preparation, self-examination and reflection as we journey toward the cross. This year’s Lenten Devotion theme is “***Living the Same Faith in the New Normal***”. In this pandemic, where physical and mental afflictions are amplified, we remember that God triumphs amidst human weakness, as demonstrated by our Lord on the cross. Despite the different seasons and changes in life, we need to continue to lean on and obey Him. In this case, a new season of adapting to a new normal is a good time for us to renew our love for God and trust that God is exalted through what’s going on.

In James 1:2-4, we see that God wants us to respond to trials—to the hard things in our lives in a way that demonstrates our trust in Him. Faith, a trusting, humble reliance on God—is how we came into relationship with Him in the first place. That is how we come to trust in Christ for our salvation. A Christian’s growing faith in God is evidence of a growing relationship with Him. May this devotional help you to continue to trust God and find peace in Him!

Rt Rev Dr Titus Chung
The Bishop of Singapore
President, National Council of Churches of Singapore

Preface

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 2:20

Lent is a 40-day period of renewal and recommitment to the Christian life, examining our lives in light of the One we are supposed to follow. As we prepare our hearts for Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we—as one Body of Christ—reflect on our sinful nature and praise God for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who came to serve, live, and die for our sins. Lent ends on the glorious day of Easter when we celebrate Christ’s resurrection. We are no longer cursed to the grave but our sins are forgiven.

Since 2006, the National Council of Churches of Singapore has commissioned The Bible Society of Singapore to produce this annual devotional for Lent. This year marks the 18th edition of our Lenten devotional. Over the years, we have sought to make the devotional more available and accessible to communities from all strata of the local Church. Last year, we produced and distributed about 10,500 print copies in English and Chinese, and made digital copies available in English, Chinese, Bahasa Indonesian, Tamil, and Hokkien. We are thankful for the continued opportunity to bless and edify the Body of Christ through this effort, and for the contributions of our many partners who have come alongside us in doing so.

The theme for this year is “*Living the Same Faith in the New Normal*”. In the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has shaken up our daily lives. But through our faith, finding a “new normal” gives us hope for our future. A new normal is a new time amidst the changing landscape; it is a reminder that things in this world are constantly evolving and will never exactly go back to how they were before. Throughout all the changes around us, God remains our only constant. As believers of Christ, our hope isn’t of this world; our help comes from the Lord. After all, the conviction that the foundation of all of our hopes and joys is in the crucified and resurrected Christ.

As we settle into a new normal, we seek God’s wisdom and ask for new insight into a methodology for us to become more relevant in the society we live in, so that we can continue to touch more lives and bring edification to one another. I pray that in this season of Lent, we will remember the gift of salvation through Christ. May He trade the ashes of our lives for the beauty of His presence, trade our mourning and grief for the oil of joy and gladness from His Spirit, and trade our despair for hope and praise. We give Him thanks for His faithfulness and acknowledge that He is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). May Easter be a day of complete celebration as we rejoice in our risen Saviour and praise our gracious Father.

Rev Ezekiel Tan
General Secretary
The Bible Society of Singapore

Introductory notes

Through the traditional Lenten disciplines of almsgiving, prayer and fasting (Mt 6:1-18), the church seeks to be renewed in the likeness of its Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This booklet aims to foster such renewal by disciples of Christ by providing a series of readings and meditations focused specifically on Lenten themes.

Drawing on the *Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings* (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), the biblical passages in *Daily Devotions for Lent 2023* have been selected because of their thematic connection to the Sunday readings of the *Revised Common Lectionary*. The Sunday Gospel Lessons of RCL are the central foci to which our weekday Lenten readings will point. Users should be mindful of the major themes and motifs encountered in the readings of *Revised Common Lectionary* and RCL *Daily Readings* for Lent:

First Sunday — More joy in heaven over one sinner who repents... (Lk 15:1-10)

Second Sunday — I will make of you a great nation...in you all the families...shall be blessed (Gen 12:1-4a)

Third Sunday — Imitate God (Eph 5:1-14)

Fourth Sunday — Man looks on the outward appearance but the LORD looks on the heart (1 Sam 16:1-13)

Fifth Sunday — Grace Unlimited (2 Cor 11:16—12:10)

Palm Sunday — Your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey (Mt 21:1-11)

Following the RCL *Daily Readings* pattern, this booklet's readings for Thursday, Friday and Saturday are considered "Preparation for Sunday," and those for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are "Reflection on Sunday." The former group looks forward, the latter backward. (An exception to the pattern will be the readings for Holy Week, all of which will constitute a preparation for both Good Friday and Easter Sunday.) It is hoped that this system will provide a sense of unity and focus and enable users to appreciate the Sunday lectionary readings within a broader biblical context.

The booklet's overall theme of "**Living the Same Faith in the New Normal**" challenges us as we live "in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom" we are to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15b) in two ways pertaining to our walk with God in his world: **firstly**, in the light of God's Word and His other means of grace i.e. Prayer, Fellowship, Sacraments and Witness, humbly consider the current condition of our relationship with God with holy FEAR—"reverence and awe" (Heb 12:28; Phil 2:12) and as we face the challenges and renounce the

temptations of life (self, the world and the devil), reflect and repent where we fall short, and **secondly**, encourage and stirring each other up, unified as one, in knowing God's Word (Heb 10:23-25; Phil 2:16; Rom 15:4), live out in FAITH the Gospel ("both to will and to work for his good pleasure" - Phil 2:13) and declare and share the light of Christ (Phil 2:15; Col 1:27) to all people everywhere fruitfully hastening the fulfillment of His promised Return (Rom 15:12; Mt 24:14; Phil 2:10-11; Rev 22:20).

Some suggestions for your daily devotions:

1. Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted or distracted.
2. Choose a fixed time and begin with a short hymn or song of worship to prepare your heart for receiving the Word of God.
3. Take your time in meditating on the truth contained in the Scripture passage. As you read the Bible passage at least twice, meditate on the life-changing truth contained in God's Word.
4. Make a sincere commitment to the Lord (you may wish to modify the suggested commitment statement, or even make your own), and then spend some time praying.
5. If you are particularly touched by an aspect of the reading that day, try to share your insights with at least one other person.
6. Keep a journal that records significant insights.
7. As you begin each series of "Preparation" lessons, consider reading the Sunday lesson so that you get the "big picture."
8. Consider reviewing the Sunday lesson as you begin the "Reflection" series with your cell group at church and workplace.

May you draw closer to the Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit and His Word, be filled with the Father's passion (2 Pet 3:9b) and assured by His promise (Phil 2:10-11), and being challenged by His undying faithfulness, be a courageous, faithful and fruitful disciple and sent community fulfilling the Great Commission in the world where Christ may see "the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." (Is 53:11; Mt 24:14).

Canon Emeritus Louis Tay
Auxiliary Priest
St Andrew's Cathedral

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I Confess my Iniquity

22 February • Ash Wednesday

Psalm 38:1-22

- ¹ O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath!
- ² For your arrows have sunk into me,
and your hand has come down on me.
- ³ There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.
- ⁴ For my iniquities have gone over my head;
like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.
- ⁵ My wounds stink and fester
because of my foolishness,
- ⁶ I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all the day I go about mourning.
- ⁷ For my sides are filled with burning,
and there is no soundness in my flesh.
- ⁸ I am feeble and crushed;
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.
- ⁹ O Lord, all my longing is before you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
- ¹⁰ My heart throbs; my strength fails me,
and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me.
- ¹¹ My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague,
and my nearest kin stand far off.
- ¹² Those who seek my life lay their snares;
those who seek my hurt speak of ruin
and meditate treachery all day long.

¹³ But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear,
like a mute man who does not open his mouth.

¹⁴ I have become like a man who does not hear,
and in whose mouth are no rebukes.

¹⁵ But for you, O LORD, do I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.

¹⁶ For I said, "Only let them not rejoice over me,
who boast against me when my foot slips!"

¹⁷ For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever before me.

¹⁸ I confess my iniquity;
I am sorry for my sin.

¹⁹ But my foes are vigorous, they are mighty,
and many are those who hate me wrongfully.

²⁰ Those who render me evil for good
accuse me because I follow after good.

²¹ Do not forsake me, O LORD!
O my God, be not far from me!

²² Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

Meditation

The Psalmist struggled to accept how his sin triggered the anger of God and rod of discipline. It was not just verbal rebukes, but the pain of emotional and physical torment. He was fully aware of the Father's direct hand in the whole ordeal. The discipline of the Father affected every area of his life. The "compound suffering, complexity of troubles, multi-layered and overwhelming effects of sin was all-encompassing. There's guilt and sickness, tormented conscience, bodily, mental, emotional, relational brokenness and psychological pain" (Keller).

How are we to understand this dimension of the Father's discipline? What does it reveal about the Father? The Puritans' grasp of this is insightful.

“God does continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God’s fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of His countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance”. (*Westminster Confession 11.5*)

So the forgiveness of God is not in question when we fail. We still belong to God even when we fall and sin. What we are awakened to is the Father’s displeasure and disapproval towards our ungodly behaviour.

The turning point in the Psalm are verses 17-18, “For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever before me. I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin”. It’s the confession of deep sorrow that God sees, even as we struggle with the pain of sin’s consequences.

The only reason we can rise unscathed as we face the Father’s displeasure is because Christ Himself took on the Father’s full displeasure and wrath of the Cross. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...” (Gal 3:13). “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

Prayer

Dear Father, thank You that even though I fall and fail, You continue to show Your faithful and unfailing love through Your Fatherly disciplines. Thank You that through Christ, I am freed from condemnation and restored to Your favour and

pleasure, because Christ took the full measure of judgement for me.

Action

Make confession and repentance as a daily habit of life.

*Rev Dr Keith Lai
Emeritus Senior Pastor
Covenant Presbyterian Church*

I have Set Before you Life and Death...

23 February • Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Meditation

We all have made a deliberate choice to follow Jesus, trusting the Lord Jesus alone. The journey of faith is not a straight path. It is full of twists and turns. We need to make the right choice along the journey for a lifetime. Our choice will determine our destination.

But often, like the people of Israel, we face challenges to this faith in Christ. The Israelites were tempted with options, in their wilderness journey. Time and again they succumbed to the temptations. In Egypt, they were slaves with no options. In the wilderness, they were free people to choose what they

want. But when they went through trials in the wilderness, they forgot that God, who had saved them, was with them. They drifted away from Him many times.

God placed two choices before them. Note the words “today life and good, death and evil”. Whether it is the normal or new normal, our faith should remain rooted in Christ. Our belief should be reflected in our daily life. Our values must be based on who our God is. They should not change with shifting circumstances. Our identity as God’s people should not be compromised by life events.

Friends, evil can subtly destroy our life in Christ. Some people have come up with excuses for their inactivity and disobedience to God, citing the new normal during the Covid times. As God’s people we should recognise the sovereignty of our unchanging God, no matter the situation. Our choices should not be based on our circumstances, but on who we belong. God’s commandments, statutes and rules remain the same.

In the midst of suffering in the wilderness, God provided manna for the Israelites’ daily sustenance, a pillar of cloud to protect them from the scorching day and a pillar of fire to guide them at night. Unusual supplies for an unusual state of affairs. Staying with God in the “new normal” means that He will handle the unknown future.

When God says “if you obey”, the Lord is not just giving us an option to “disobey”. He is warning us of the consequences of disobedience. Disobeying God leads to obedience to the Devil. The Devil also places alternatives but his intention is to destroy. He even tried to tempt Jesus—“All this I will give

you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me” (Matthew 4:9).

Look at what Jesus said, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only’ (Matthew 4:10). Jesus rejected the devil’s offer. Friends, take courage from Jesus to refuse easy alternatives. God wants us to obey Him with all our heart and soul. Our intellect and emotions must agree to follow Him decisively. He wants us to leave this legacy of faith to the next generation. If we do so, we will be a blessed generation.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, we thank You for being with us in this journey of Faith. Help us to discern Your will when we encounter different options. Grant us that eternal perspective so that we will obey Jesus. Give us the courage to say no to the subtle offer of Satan.

Action

When attractive alternatives come with all logic, let us weigh the pros and cons of the offer in the light of God’s word.

*Rev Ranganathan Prabhu
Pastor
The Methodist Church in Singapore*

Abraham Believed God, and it was Counted to him as Righteousness

24 February • Friday after Ash Wednesday

Galatians 3:1-14

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— ⁶ just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” ¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” ¹² But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Meditation

There is much going on in this passage and theological themes abound. Perhaps we may bring all this together under the simple dictum: ‘Begin right, finish right’. We all

know how common it is to begin right, but only to end wrongly. Hence, this passage has much to teach us.

The Galatian Christians began by faith. This is certainly right, for without faith in Christ our Saviour, there can be no salvation. Unfortunately, they were hoping to finish without faith, by latching on to human works, such as ceremonies, rites or good deeds. Sadly, this came about because of the wrong teaching of some teachers. To be sure, works are good. They are the *fruit* of our salvation, but they cannot be the *way* of our salvation.

The life of faith was God's plan all along, starting with the promise he made to Abraham. He was declared righteous by God because of faith in God's word of promise. To fulfil this promise, Christ gave his life on the cross for us all, so that we too may be made righteous by faith. After being saved, we were given the Spirit to guide us in this life of faith. Hence, when we deviate from the path of faith, thinking perhaps that it is inadequate, we are actually disavowing God's great plan for redeeming the world, disrespecting the great price Christ paid for our salvation and deserting the all-important guidance of the Spirit.

The Christian life is all of faith. We must not let anything divert us from this path, not even the prestige markers and definitions of honour given by our society. It is far better to be recognised as a person of great faith, than a person of great prestige. Begin by faith, end by faith.

Prayer

Dear God, help me never to forget that I am saved by grace through faith. May I never deviate from this path of faith. Amen.

Action

Whatever God has led you to start by faith, seek to also complete it by faith.

*Dr Tan Kim Huat
Chen Su Lan Professor of New Testament
Trinity Theological College*

He Became the Source of Eternal Salvation to All Who Obey Him

25 February • Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Hebrews 5:1-10

¹ For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;

⁶ as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Meditation

The office of the high priest in the Old Testament was instituted by God “to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” (v.1). By the divine appointment of God, high priests such as Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8) were men called and ordained to show compassion to struggling sinners and to offer sacrifices for sins (vv.2-4). However, no amount of sacrifices offered through the human high priests could take away the sins of men (Hebrews 10:11). In response to the cruel nature of sins and its eternal consequences, God sent his one and only begotten Son (John 3:16) as the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, to enter the Holy of Holies once and for all to secure the eternal *redemption* of mankind (vv.5-6). Jesus Christ became the unblemished sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus Christ our Great High Priest, who was in the form of God, “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8). As a result of his humble obedience, there’s no longer the need for high priests as the go-between for God and men, and there’s no longer the need for sacrifices and burnt offerings as in the Old Covenant for sins of men (vv.7-10). As sons and daughters of God (John 1:12) who are redeemed, forgiven, and set apart, we are given access into the presence of our Father in Heaven. What a privilege we have received.

With Jesus Christ as the source of our eternal salvation—we can be confident of our spiritual inheritance, for He has given us the Holy Spirit as guarantee until we acquire possession of it (Ephesians 1:13-14). Let’s remain firm and confident in Christ as we learn to overcome the dark storms and

challenges in this season of the new normal, to His praise and glory!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for being our heavenly High Priest who bore our sins on the cross. Worthy are You Lord, the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honour, glory and blessing. AMEN.

Action

Jesus was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. On the spectrum of our personal obedience to our Lord, let us likewise readily pray, “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

*Revd Canon Dr Lewis Lew
Vicar
St Andrew's Cathedral*

More Joy in Heaven Over One Sinner Who Repents...

26 February • First Sunday in Lent

Luke 15:1-10

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’

⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸ “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Meditation

God’s attitude towards the human race is very clearly defined. He loves them and He longs for their salvation. The joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents illustrates His deep concern and intense longing for the salvation of men and women who are lost. God does not want anyone to perish.

The 15th chapter of Luke contains one parable in which we have the story of the lost sheep who was stupidly lost, the lost silver coin which was carelessly lost and the lost son who was willfully lost. In each case, we notice the attitude of the owner to that which was lost. The Shepherd sought the sheep until he found it. The woman sought the silver until she found it. The father waited patiently, lovingly, until his son returned.

Meditate on the Triune God. The Father, pictured in the father whose son went into the far country. The Son, pictured in the Shepherd who went in search of the lost sheep. The Holy Spirit, pictured in the woman who searched for her lost piece of silver.

What does it tell us? It tells us that God cares for every soul! He has made provision through the gift of His Son for 'whosoever' to repent, escape the punishment of Hell and receive the gift of everlasting life. This is the joy of the heavenly host and is fully demonstrated by the crucifixion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. See Him there, dying in great agony. This is the ordeal Jesus had to suffer which He did not refuse at all because He wants us to have eternity with Him. Jesus did not find joy in the pain of the cross but in the result of the pain. The joy of resurrection, the joy of fulfilling His Father's will, the joy of spending eternity with us in Heaven!

Prayer

God, use me as Your vessel to find the lost souls to know Your Son, Jesus, so that they can start worshiping You in truth. Indwell Your Holy Spirit in them. God, remove the evil influences from their lives that are blocking them from accepting Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Open their

spiritual eyes that they may know that life is beyond the physical and earth is just where we prepare for eternity. In Jesus' name, I believe and pray, amen!

Action

Ask God for the wisdom to preach the gospel of Jesus and may you open the hearts of those who are lost that they may be able to hear the word and accept it as the truth.

Seek God for His strength to uproot every lie that has been planted in their heart. Open their understanding that they may be able to see the truth found in His word.

Keep in step with the Spirit of God when He opens the door of opportunity for you to seek the lost. Claim the promises of God for every soul witnessed for Christ.

*Colonel Hary Haran
Territorial Commander
The Salvation Army
Singapore, Malaysia & Myanmar Territory with Thailand*

My Father is Working Until Now, and I Am Working

27 February • Monday of the First Week in Lent

John 5:1-18

¹ After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³ In these lay a **multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.** ⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?”

⁷ The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” ⁸ Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰ So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” ¹¹ But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” ¹² They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” ¹³ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶ And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

¹⁸ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Meditation

Dying and resurrecting are the grand themes of our Christian faith and truths that guide our lives. Day in and day out, we must die to who we are, what we cherish, in order that new possibilities, Christ's possibilities, may emerge. We see this in the experience of the invalid man. His life goal was to be healed by getting into the pool of Bethesda. Yet, his steadfast focus on his 'solution' blinded him to the significance of the man before him. Likewise, for the Pharisees, their world was chaotic and sinful. The solution was to stick steadfast to their laws, even at the expense of an invalid man. The net result was to fail to see that that Jesus could be much more than a mere man!

As we emerge from the pandemic into new disruptions and complexities, many of us will be tempted to stick to the familiar, to what has served us well in the past. While all these are well and good for their seasons, we must always remember that they are but means to an end. Means that change according to their contexts. Means for a true goal that never changes: to love God and our neighbours.

As we forge forward in our Christian lives and worship, let us be open to how Jesus will lead us by His Holy Spirit. Let us not be surprised or frustrated that He may disrupt our lives or cherished practices. Instead, let us be open to the new possibilities Christ will bring into our lives. To the new ways He may help us to love Him more. Such openness and spiritual freedom, however, requires us to embrace always that grand theme of our lives: to die daily to Christ, so that we may resurrect with Him.

Prayer

O Lord Jesus, You know how often we are tempted to hold on to our familiar strategies, our cherished plans, practices and forget to look out for Your Spirit's guidance in our lives. Grant us a discerning heart, that we may keep pace with Your Spirit and the courage to follow You. Amen.

Action

When uncertainties emerge, or when we find our plans disrupted, remember that God is still in control. He is leading us through these very inconvenient moments.

*Dr Lai Pak Wah
Principal
Biblical Graduate School of Theology*

Seek the LORD...Return to the LORD

28 February • Tuesday of the First Week in Lent

Isaiah 55:6-11

- ⁶ “Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
- ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion
on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
- ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
- ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- ¹⁰ “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
- ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Meditation

The coronavirus, war, violence, and strained family relationships have provoked a rising tide of fear and an increasing sense of vulnerability in the peoples of the world. So, what are God’s people to do? Though the book of Isaiah was written to Israel, it has wonderful implications for believers today, because it reveals the character of God and

His disposition to His people. God is speaking to a discouraged people in captivity, whose future was uncertain and whose life was hard.

1. Seeking God in Prayer

What does it mean to “seek the Lord”? It means “to seek with care, with diligence.” People in our secular world do not “seek the Lord.” But sadly, neither do many Christians. Are we seeking God diligently? It is dangerous to put off seeking God until a more opportune time. There is a time to seek him, and that time is now. Tomorrow you may not feel that same hunger and intensity. Prayer is one of the most wonderful and powerful avenues to pursue God. Without prayer, it is a real illusion to pretend to live a spiritual life. This Lenten season, reflect how good is your relationship with God in prayer?

2. Seeking God in Repentance

Verse 7 teaches us that turning from sin is also a vital part of seeking the Lord. If we are seeking God, we will not only forsake our wicked “ways,” but also our wicked “thoughts.” There will not be any area of our life, not even the hidden corners of our mind where we are allowing sin to run free. Repentance requires a lifestyle change. If we do not try to cleanse ourselves from ungodly thoughts and ways, then we are not really seeking God.

Prayer

O my God, teach me how to seek You in prayer and put my heart in contact with Yours. Teach me to withdraw, not only materially, but also spiritually, from all the attractions that this world offers.

Action

Jesus calls us today to leave behind the ways and thoughts that have clouded our vision of Him. He wants us to seek him, to see his face and be changed by it. That is our inheritance as disciples of Jesus Christ. Knowing God intimately and walking with him is the greatest blessing we can know.

Rev Gino S. Philip

Vicar

Mar Thoma Syrian Church in Singapore

They do not Defend the Rights of the Needy

1 March • Wednesday of the First Week in Lent

Jeremiah 5:20-31

- ²⁰ Declare this in the house of Jacob;
proclaim it in Judah:
- ²¹ “Hear this, O foolish and senseless people,
who have eyes, but see not,
who have ears, but hear not.
- ²² Do you not fear me? declares the LORD.
Do you not tremble before me?
I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea,
a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass;
though the waves toss, they cannot prevail;
though they roar, they cannot pass over it.
- ²³ But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;
they have turned aside and gone away.
- ²⁴ They do not say in their hearts,
‘Let us fear the LORD our God,
who gives the rain in its season,
the autumn rain and the spring rain,
and keeps for us
the weeks appointed for the harvest.’
- ²⁵ Your iniquities have turned these away,
and your sins have kept good from you.
- ²⁶ For wicked men are found among my people;
they lurk like fowlers lying in wait.
They set a trap;
they catch men.
- ²⁷ Like a cage full of birds,
their houses are full of deceit;
therefore they have become great and rich;
- ²⁸ they have grown fat and sleek.
They know no bounds in deeds of evil;

they judge not with justice
the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper,
and they do not defend the rights of the needy.
²⁹ Shall I not punish them for these things?
declares the LORD,
and shall I not avenge myself
on a nation such as this?"

³⁰ An appalling and horrible thing
has happened in the land:
³¹ the prophets prophesy falsely,
and the priests rule at their direction;
my people love to have it so,
but what will you do when the end comes?

Meditation

Can you believe that a 15-year-old boy in India was savagely hit and kicked by his teacher for spelling the word 'social' wrongly? The boy, who succumbed to his injuries, was a member of the Dalit community which sits at the lowest rung of India's caste system and has been subjected to prejudice and discrimination for centuries. (*Sep 27, 2022, The Straits Times*)

Can you imagine living on a meagre wage of \$1 per day? It was reported that about 150,000 Bangladeshi tea plantation workers who live in some of the country's most remote areas have been systematically exploited by the industry for decades. The plantation owners have hijacked the minimum wage authorities and kept the wages among the lowest in the world.

Besides tea plantations, in the past few decades, a handful of agencies and journalists have also exposed the widespread use of child labour, and in some cases slavery, on cocoa farms in Western Africa.

These are but some examples of daily news of exploitation of the weak and oppression of the vulnerable we read or hear from the social media.

Our text today gives some very descriptive pictures of how sinful the people of Judah were at the time of Jeremiah (about 600 BC). To use the analogy of onion-peeling, the first layer shows that things were definitely not as they should have been (vv.21-25). What should have been happening was awe, reverence, fear, trembling, gratitude, and worship of God. Just as nature keeps to its divinely set boundaries, people should know how to act toward God. But Judah was acting in ways that were spiritually blind and deaf, arrogant, foolish, stubborn, and rebellious. They did not fear nor revere God as the LORD of every season and harvest. They had turned aside and gone astray (v.23). God had planned to bless them, but their prevailing sins were depriving them of the good He intended (v.25).

The next layer was even worse (vv.26-29)! Simply rebelling wasn't enough for some wrongdoers. They set traps for others. They became rich and powerful through deceit and exploitation. Contrary to biblical justice, which seeks others' good (Deut 10:17-19; Jas 1:27), they were only looking after themselves. "They know no bounds in deeds of evil... and they do not defend the rights of the needy" (v.28). They deserved God's punishment, and God took it personally: "Should I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?" (v.29).

Still another layer—how low could it go (vv.30-31)? "Appalling" and "horrible" are the only appropriate words. Prophets told lies instead of truth, priests ministered by their own authority instead of God's, and, most regretfully, "My people love to have it so" (v.31).

The world we live in today is no different from Jeremiah's, if not worse, as illustrated in my introduction. What must we do in order that God's divine justice and love may flow in and through us? From our text today, there are at least FOUR hard questions that demand our reflection and response:

1. Have we also become spiritually blind and deaf (vv.20-21)?

If so, we must echo the prayer of the psalmist by asking God to, "*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law*" (Ps 119:18) and pray that God will do to us what He did for our Lord Jesus, who said, "The LORD GOD has opened My ear, and I have not been rebellious; I turned not backward" (Is 50:5).

2. Do we fear God and tremble before Him? (vv.22-24)?

Verses 20-22 remind us that if even the pounding waves of the ocean can't overcome the ribbons of sand that God sets, how could feeble creatures like us think we could ever win against God? The Bible teaches us that "*what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world.*" (Rom 1:18-20) Have you been awestruck by the images of distant galaxies and stars that the James Webb Space Telescope has been sending back to earth? The awesome around us tells us why we should fear and tremble before God always.

3. Do we ensure justice for the weak and vulnerable (vv.25-29)?

The "fat and sleek" of Jeremiah's day did not speak up for the poor or the orphan (v.28). What about us? Where in our

lives are we speaking up for biblical justice? Have we been turning a blind eye or a deaf ear to someone in distress or in need of help?

4. What will we do when the end comes (vv.30-31)?

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 reminds us, *“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*

Therefore, we need to carefully evaluate our relationship with God. Do we pause in our busy lives to ask, “Where is my life headed?” We must measure our attitudes and actions by God’s Word if we want God’s approval and blessing upon our lives, and especially to hear His affirmative welcome on THAT day, *“Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master”* (Mt 25:21,23).

Prayer

Lord God, from whom all blessings flow, You have taught us by the words of the prophets and the example of Christ how we are to behave. We acknowledge that we live in a world with corrupt authorities who seek to ensnare us and lead us astray. You who control the seas, we ask that You grant us the courage to resist oppression, injustice, and evil with our voices, hands, and feet in whatever forms they present themselves, so that we may not be false prophets but instead a people, called by Your name, rightly proclaiming the Word of Truth and thus enabling others to resist with us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Action

If God has placed you in a profession/position where you are able to speak up for the voiceless, assist the helpless, and

shelter the homeless, do prayerfully consider stepping up and offering your services to them pro bono. If you have already been doing so, praise and glory be to God, and please keep up your great deeds of justice and compassion.

*Rev Dr Steven Gan
Senior Minister
Amazing Grace Presbyterian Church*

How Much More will Your Father..Give Good Things to those Who Ask Him!

2 March • Thursday of the First Week in Lent

Matthew 7:7-12

⁷ “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

¹² “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Meditation

Our God is exceptionally generous: when we ask, we receive; when we seek, we find; when we knock, the door opens. In this short passage, the key word is “give”, which appears five times. Our heavenly Father wants to give His best to all His children.

However, in our real-life experience, it sometimes seems otherwise. We ask, but we don't receive; seek, yet feel lost; knock, and all doors close. We are then told that we do not seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Mt 6:33)—we do not ask, seek, and knock according to His will.

But we are still puzzled. We asked for good health, but young lives were taken away. We asked for joy, but elderly parents were left behind alone. We asked for peace, but war broke out. Does God not will these things (good health, joy, and peace) for His children? It is beyond our ability to comprehend the will of God.

Sometimes no answers are provided when we question, but as we continue to observe what God is doing, He opens our eyes and surprises us with good things. We see priorities reset in times of crisis; we see relationships restored in moments of life and death; we see lives transformed when God intervenes.

Our God still gives extravagantly. Use all your senses to see, hear, feel, touch **what** He is doing. Ask **what**, don't ask why. We can't always understand why God is doing this or that, but we can observe **what** He is doing and do **what** He wants us to do. Only then, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, open our eyes to see what You are doing; open our ears to hear what You are saying; open our hearts to feel what You are feeling. Remove all the blockages and barriers in our eyes, our ears, and our hearts. We want to know what You are doing, we want to know You more and more each day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Action

1. Reflect and give thanks for the good things God has brought into your life.

2. Write a text to, or arrange for a meal or a cup of coffee with, someone for whom you have been praying for a while. Listen and see what God is doing in his/her life.

*Rev Dr Koh Nam Seng, Forest
Associate Pastor
Glory Presbyterian Church, English Service*

But with You there is Forgiveness, that You may be Feared

3 March • Friday of the First Week in Lent

Psalm 130:1-8

- ¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!
² O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
- ³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.
- ⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
- ⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
⁸ And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

Meditation

Many years ago, I heard a speaker ask his audience this question: “If you suddenly found yourself at the gates of heaven, standing before God Himself, what would you say to Him?” How would you answer? My immediate thought was

the desperate cry of the tax collector at the temple, who stood far off, faced the floor, beat his breast and said: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Having read Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, I know that any honest meditation on the 10 Commandments will tell me in no uncertain terms that I am a terrible sinner. I sin everyday, no power within myself, nor in anyone else in all of sinful humanity, can save me from drowning in the mire of my own shameful thoughts, words and deeds. All I can manage is a cry for mercy, or a terrified silence in the hope that God can hear that same cry in my thoughts.

Reading Psalm 130 made me wonder if Jesus had this Psalm in mind in His wonderful parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18. The Psalmist, in this penitential Psalm, expressed basically the same cry for mercy, but fleshed out in Hebrew poetry. In verses 1-2 he confesses that he is mired in the depths of sin, drowning, sinking, and gasping his pleas to God for mercy, desperately hoping that God will hear his cries. Verses 3-4 are the heart of the Psalm. In verse 3 he speaks a word of law: that if God were to keep a record of our sin, absolutely all would fall condemned. The Psalmist, who has confessed that he is indeed soaked in sin, realises that he, and all sinners, deserve God’s wrath, and will have nowhere to run or hide if God were to keep a record of sins. But in verse 4 he speaks a word of gospel: that in the Lord our God there is forgiveness of sins, therefore all His faithful will be comforted! This comforting word of the Psalmist is affirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 where he states that love “does not count up wrongdoing” (ESV), that is, it “keeps no record of wrong” (NIV). Indeed, our God is the God who promises to forgive our sins in His boundless mercy and to remember our sins no more (Hebrews 8:12).

However, in verse 4, the response to God's loving and merciful forgiveness is, strangely, fear. Forgiveness is the reason for fear! That's not what we are used to hearing. We would think that our response should be thanksgiving, joy, praise and celebration, but not fear. The fear the Psalmist speaks of here is a fear born of love and gratitude for God's great forgiveness, not a fear born of dread and terror over God's wrath. It is a fear that wells up into awe, honour and reverence for God. It bears the fruit of love and good works, where we will forgive as we have been forgiven, and keep no record of the wrongs of our neighbours.

The Psalmist then expresses his faith by saying that he will wait for the word of the Lord's grace in confident hope (vv.5-6), and concludes the Psalm by inviting his entire nation to the same confident hope in the Lord's promise of redemption (vv.7-8). This gracious promise will ultimately be fulfilled in the person of the great and merciful Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord, in whom we will be comforted by His gifts of the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, in Your divine righteousness, produce in me a heart of repentance; and in Your divine and gracious mercy in Christ, forgive me of my sins and remember them no more. Grant, O Lord, that Your forgiveness will produce in me a fear of God born of Your love, and bear the fruit of love and good works for my neighbours. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Action

1. Spend some time to prayerfully reflect on the 10 Commandments as a mirror to your thoughts, words and deeds.

2. If you can, make a list of your sins in the light of your time of reflection.
3. Listen to the worship song “Only By Grace Can You Enter” by Graham Kendrick, which quotes from this Psalm. Give thanks for the comfort and assurance of forgiveness in Christ.
4. In the next worship service you attend, listen and give thanks for every word of forgiveness from the Pastor, Bible readings or service order.

*Rev Soh Guan Kheng
Pastor
Yishun Christian Church (Lutheran)*

Fulfill the Law of Christ

4 March • Saturday of the First Week in Lent

Galatians 6:1-18

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

⁶ Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

¹¹ See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. ¹² It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

¹⁷ From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Meditation

Jesus gave His disciples a “new command” to love one another as He had loved them (Jn 13:34). In summarising the Law and the Prophets into a vertical “Love the Lord your God with all your heart” and a horizontal “Love your neighbour as yourself”, Jesus gets to the *heart* of God’s law (Mt 22:37-40). The religious leaders of His day had turned the law into a legalistic edifice that did not adequately represent the holiness and heart of God. The Galatian Christians had a problem with rightly understanding the divine law. In this passage, Paul refers to “the law of Christ”—in particular His command that we love one another. James calls it the “royal law”—the law that was given by the Lord (Jas 2:8).

How can Christians obey the law of Christ? There are many examples here: from the way we gently restore a brother who is caught in sin (v.1) to how we keep doing good in an unwearied way, especially to our fellow believers (vv.9-10). This cannot be done in our own strength, for it requires supernatural grace brought to us by the cross of Christ, which itself is the best evidence of God’s grace and love (v.14).

Every day, we have opportunities to sow either to please our fallen sinful nature, or to please the Spirit (v.8). What we do habitually will show whether we are saved and will point to our eternal destiny. How we love God and others will show the true condition of our souls. When we stand before God one day, more important than saying “I knew” or “I did” will be to say, “I loved”. It reveals that Christ lives and rules within, and His love forms and informs all of our lives.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to remember what You have commanded and what pleases You. Help me to take care that I do not fall prey to the devil, the world, and the flesh by ending up loving just myself and taking pride in it. Instead empower me to love You, and as a result love the others around me. Help me to become like You in the way I relate with them, the good as well as the bad.

Action

Make a list under the title “Doing good to all people”. Be specific and focus on the real people in your life, be they family, friends, fellow-believers, and strangers, giving attention to attitudes and acts that will demonstrate obedience to the law of Christ. Seek to live out the list you have made.

*Bishop Emeritus Dr Robert Solomon
The Methodist Church in Singapore*

I will Make of you a Great Nation...in you All the Families...Shall be Blessed

5 March • Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 12:1-4a

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him.

Meditation

Since the beginning, God’s plan for humanity is to bless them (Gen 1–2). Before the events in Genesis 12, mankind was once united in one common language and geography (Gen 11:1-2). However, due to Man’s fallen and sinful nature, the people rejected God and his sovereignty over them. They united in rebellion against God by building the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:3-4). God, in his mercy to prevent his people from descending further into sin, halted the idolatrous project by confusing their language and scattering them throughout the earth (Gen 11:5-9). As a result, nations were then formed with a diversity of languages.

Even though the event was a setback for God’s purpose for mankind, God’s plan was to pursue the restoration of blessing to his scattered peoples. Several generations later in Genesis

12, God called one man from among the nations, Abram, to be his instrument of blessings to the whole world.

Abram was called not because he was a perfect man—we know that he had his moments of weakness and struggled with his own faith during his journeys (Gen 12:10-20; Gen 16:1-6; Gen 20:1-18). Despite these setbacks, Abram did not give up in his walk with God and the Scripture considered him a friend of God (Is 41:8) because of his renewing faith (Heb 11:8-19). To assure Abram and encourage him, God cut a covenant with Abram in Genesis 15. As a symbolic seal of the promise, God changed his name from “Abram” (which means “exalted father”) to “Abraham” (meaning “father of a multitude of nations”).

By his faith and obedience, Abraham allowed himself to be set apart for God to fulfil his restorative work through him. Eventually, the nation of Israel was formed from Abraham’s descendants. God’s purpose was for them to become a holy and priestly nation that would bear witness to all peoples, so that generations of nations would come to know the Lord as their God. The ultimate blessing came in Jesus Christ, descending from the lineage of Abraham, and with his finished work on the cross, complete God’s plan of blessing the whole world with the gift of eternal life.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we inherit the call and mission of Abraham. Like Abraham, we are chosen not as a result of personal merit, but the grace and mercy of God (Eph 2:8; Rom 9:16). Like Abraham, God is inviting us to be blessed to bless others. The greatest blessing that we can bring to the nations is for them to have a personal relationship with God (Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-16). Let us be intentional to go forth and shine our light before others (Mt 5:16), as we look

forward to the reversing of the curse of Babel, when all peoples regardless of nation, tribe, or language, are united as one people in worshipping God (Rev 7:9).

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, we acknowledge that You are the God of all nations. Help me to recognise clearly Your calling for my life and act upon Your call with faithful obedience. Even though I struggle in my own faith, continue to mould me, strengthen and renew my faith. Help me to be a blessing to the people around me, especially to the last, the least, and the lost, that they may know you and receive the gift of eternal life. Amen.

Action

As we enter into the new normal post-pandemic, reflect on how you can be a blessing to the nations in our country and beyond, especially those living in misery and despair. Go forth and shine the light of Christ in places where people are living in darkness.

*Rev Ezekiel Tan
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and Evangelical Alliance of Singapore*

Righting a 'Rong

6 March • Monday of the Second Week in Lent

Daniel 9:4-10

⁴ I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. ⁷ To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. ⁸ To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him ¹⁰ and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

Meditation

As we read this passage, there are three R's we can take note of to 'Right a 'Rong'.

1. Recognition. *...we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules* (v.5). We must be mindful of our own sins and shortcomings. Not infrequently, many of us have observed fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who may be angels in church but demons in their workplaces or outside venues. This is particularly true when these siblings in Christ have attained position and power. They are even

unable to recognise their unchristian behaviour. Lest we think we are exempt, let us take a long hard look at ourselves in the mirror of self-reflection. If we find black spots, let us recognise them. Let us not have blind spots.

2. Remorse. *To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, (v.7); To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. (v.8)* Recognition by the mind is followed by remorse of the heart. Daniel feels shame for the sins of Israel. We must feel shame and remorse for our sins. If we experience decreasing intensity of remorse, we are on the road to ruin. We must understand and grasp the severity of sin. Sin is an affront to God.

3. Repentance. All the recognition and remorse in the world come to nought if we do not turn from our wicked ways. Our repentance is key in the Righting of 'Rongs. Daniel reminds us all that *"To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness,"* (v.9) Our repentance is a trust in, and thanks to, our God who is gracious toward us.

Prayer

Dear Gracious Heavenly Father, full of mercy and forgiveness, forgive me, I pray. Grant that I may never have decreasing remorse for my wrongdoings. As I come to You today, I recognise that I am a sinner and that I have sinned. I ask Your help to repent, for I am too weak to do so on my own. May my heart always desire to please You and obey Your commands. Amen.

Action

Recall your behaviour in the last week carefully. Were there instances which may be considered sin? Were there occasions where you treated others in a standoffish or confrontational way? Recall the Lord Jesus who, even though he was God, treated the last, the least and the lost, not only with deep love, but also with respect.

*Rev David Gwee
Pastor-in-Charge
Covenant Community Methodist Church
Chaplain-in-Charge
Methodist Girl's School*

Persevere in Faith

7 March • Tuesday of the Second Week in Lent

Hebrews 2:1-9

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?”

⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honour,

⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Meditation

Letter to the Hebrews, also called Epistle to the Hebrews is an anonymous New Testament letter traditionally attributed to St. Paul the Apostle but is now widely believed to be the work of another Jewish Christian. Some traditions hold that the author may have been St. Barnabas or perhaps one of

Paul's other associates or later disciples. The letter was composed sometime during the latter half of the 1st century and is the 19th book of the New Testament canon. To judge from its contents, the letter was addressed to a Christian community whose faith was faltering because of strong Jewish influences.

Followers of Christ have suffered persecution through-out history. Stolen property, beatings, imprisonment and martyrdom have been the fate of countless Christians. Some reports showed that Christ's followers are being persecuted more than ever in our own day. For those of us who are not suffering in these ways, it is hard to imagine the temptations that persecution brings. Christians who live in peace and safety often compromise their faith even without threats. But can you imagine how tempting it would be to compromise what you believe to protect yourself, your spouse, your children and closest friends from serious harm? How could we possibly encourage fellow believers in these conditions?

This was the challenge that faced the author of the book of Hebrews. He wrote to a group of Christians who had suffered in the past and were threatened with even more suffering. They had done well years ago, but the author of Hebrews feared that they might now turn away from Christ to avoid further persecution.

To fortify Christian beliefs, the author describes the perfect priesthood of Christ, who, unlike the Jewish high priest, offered but one sacrifice as God's own Son, thereby redeeming all of humankind once and for all. The Christians are then warned against apostasy and the fearful prospect of judgement that awaits those who have spurned the Son of God. They are urged to persevere in their faith following the

heroic example of others well known to them, living the same faith in the New Normal, which our Lord Himself has taught us.

Prayer

Lord God, we thank You for the gift of Salvation You wrought for us once for all on the Cross. We realise the pain and the ridicule that You suffered for us. Today, as Christians when we face persecution in different parts of the world because of our faith in You, we pray that You would grant us Your grace not to drift away from You or deny You; instead to stand firm and persevere in our faith in You, knowing the great Salvation that You have gifted to us. Amen.

Action

Remember our brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their faith in Jesus, our Lord. Let us uphold them in our daily prayers so that God would grant them the courage to hold on to God in the midst of all challenges, and never to deny or forsake their faith in Jesus Christ.

*Rev Dr M. Mani Chacko
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Jesus...“Do you want to Go Away as Well?” Peter...“Lord to Whom Shall we Go?”

8 March • Wednesday of the Second Week in Lent

John 6:60-71

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” ⁷¹ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

Meditation

The passage above conveys to us the reaction of Jesus’ audience to his teaching at the Capernaum synagogue (see John 6:24-59).

Whether expectedly or unexpectedly, the reaction to Jesus’ ministry has been hugely negative. John the gospel writer tells us that among those who turned back and walked away

from Jesus were many of His own disciples (v.66). They may well have been the very same people who had enthusiastically flocked to Him. What had gone amiss? According to John, the defectors had found Jesus' teaching "hard"—not hard-to-understand but hard-to-accept. Hence the mutter, "Who can listen to it?" (v.60).

Seeing the mass defection, Jesus asks the group of disciples who remained: "Do you want to go away as well?" (v.67). This turn of event seemed to Him an opportunity to test the faith of His innermost circle of disciples, now designated as "the Twelve". The response to Jesus' challenge comes swiftly from Simon Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (vv.68–69). Notice that Peter uses the plural pronoun for he is speaking on behalf of the other disciples. In that glorious response, he disavows any thought of defecting on these grounds:

1. that there is no one else to go to;
2. that the words of Jesus are living words in that they deal with the subject of eternal life. They are no mere pleasantries or dead utterances. To those who hear and believe, they convey eternal life.
3. that Jesus is the Holy One of God. This is a conviction that comes about as a result of the disciples' personal faith (v.69).

A final thought for today's readers: lest we ground the basis of our allegiance to Jesus strictly on our own insight or ability, we are reminded that we owe it to Jesus for choosing us in the first place (v.70).

Prayer

In light of Your divine goodness, there is no one else I can follow. Keep me faithfully in Your paths. The words that You have spoken are spirit and life. Grant me the grace to receive and reflect on them and so learn to inherit the everlasting life which You have promised to give. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Action

Being a Christian can be hard at times. Do you ever think of throwing in the towel and walk away from your faith? In Peter's glorious response to the Lord's question "Do you want to go away as well?" we are given some good grounds for not wavering in or defecting from our faith. Go over what was said by Peter carefully and resolve to stay true to Jesus.

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Dean
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He had served as General Secretary of the Bible Society of Singapore, as General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Singapore, and as a member of the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony.

He had studied at the universities of Durham, Tübingen and Edinburgh.

Man Who Trusts in Man OR Man Who Trusts in the LORD

9 March • Thursday of the Second Week in Lent

Jeremiah 17:5-10

⁵ Thus says the LORD:

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.

⁶ He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.
He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

⁷ “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.

⁸ He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?

¹⁰ “I the LORD search the heart
and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds.”

Meditation

It is impossible to live without trust; everyone places trust in something or someone, and make choices accordingly. In this passage, the word “trusts” appears twice. The first time, it is connected with a cursed life when a person “trusts in man and makes flesh his strength” (v.5). The second appearance of the word relates to a blessed life when a person trusts in the Lord (v.7).

The critical difference is where trust is placed. People who place their total trust in fallible men are disappointed or betrayed because all of us are fallible, infected by sin, and limited in knowledge and power. But with the Lord, it is different, for He is not man, that he should lie or break His promises or forget us (Num 23:9). He continuously watches over us (Ps 121:7) and will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb 13:5). When we trust God, we will never be forsaken or disappointed.

The problem, however, is our deceitful and “desperately sick” hearts (v.9). Even though we might think we are trusting the Lord, we might in fact have turned our trust elsewhere. When we think that God has forgotten us or that His Word is not reliable, we turn away from God to lesser objects of trust. It is easy to deceive ourselves. The solution is to let God search our hearts and minds to reveal to us who we really trust. It is not wrong to exercise some measure of trust in others—family, church leaders, doctors, salesmen, mechanics, etc. But it is wrong to displace our trust in God with anything or anyone else. Our ultimate trust must be in Him. That will determine whether we are like a well-watered plant (cf. Ps 1:3) or a withered bush in the wilderness.

Prayer

Lord, even when my current circumstances may test my faith in You, help me to always trust You more than anything else, for You alone are my fortress and hope. Let me live in such a way that others can see that I truly trust in You in all aspects of my life.

Action

Ask the Lord to help you search your heart and reveal where your ultimate trust is—in God, in your health, finances, abilities, job or connections. Be convinced that more than trusting yourself or others, it is far better to trust in God. List out the evidence for this in the daily routines and relationships in your life, and in the choices you make. Ask God to help you trust Him.

*Bishop Emeritus Dr Robert Solomon
The Methodist Church in Singapore*

Breaking News—From Depths of Despair to Heights of Hope

10 March • Friday of the Second Week in Lent

Psalm 40:1-17

- ¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
- ² He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
- ³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.
- ⁴ Blessed is the man who makes
the LORD his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after a lie!
- ⁵ You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.
- ⁶ In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.
- ⁷ Then I said, "Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
- ⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."

- ⁹ I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.
- ¹⁰ I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your
faithfulness from the great congregation.
- ¹¹ As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me!
- ¹² For evils have encompassed me
beyond number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
and I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head;
my heart fails me.
- ¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!
- ¹⁴ Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who delight in my hurt!
- ¹⁵ Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"
- ¹⁶ But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"
- ¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!

Meditation

BREAKING NEWS—an increasingly common caption these days is almost always attention arresting. Whether natural or man-made, calamities contribute considerably to situations

of despair or even desperation. Where once human efforts may have helped bring these longed for hopes, these endeavours now seem to have diminishing returns.

In contrast, today's passage promises and prescribes the path for deliverance from desperation to a superb sanctuary for safety and significance. Psalm 40 gives us an insight into King David's own experiences. We know something of the suffering, anguish he must have gone through from both his physical and emotional-spiritual circumstances. Thankfully, he was able to fall back on his knowledge and experience of the Lord, and turn to Him accordingly in patient trust.

True to His character of forgiveness, love and grace, David's repentance led him to experience rest, restoration and renewal, even establishing him afresh.

We can imagine David's desire to burst out in praise, prayer and thanksgiving. Here again, we see God's grace in enabling David to give such praises to God not only there and then, but for so many other occasions. We are all the richer for this as we resonate and rejoice with David over these words.

Irrespective of the situation and sins, faults and failings of David compared to our own circumstances, God's word is very clear about the total depravity of man. Thus, Christ had to come to save, sanctify and sustain us. Like David, we should be overcome by this reality, realisation and respond in overwhelming worship. This in turn should influence our work for Him and our witness to a needy world. This should indeed be a telling testimony and tribute.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, when we reflect on Your word including today's passage and indeed our own lives, we realise our total depravity, helplessness and hopelessness. We are truly overwhelmed by Your grace, steadfast love and faithfulness in sending Your son, our Lord Jesus Christ to save, sanctify and sustain us. Thank You too for accepting and enabling us to worship, work and witness for You. Help us to truly GLOW with Your steadfast love and faithfulness. In Christ's name, amen.

Action

PRAY that we and those around us may so read HIS WORD that our response to WORSHIP, WORK and WITNESS for HIM may be spontaneous and overwhelming.

*Elder Dr Lawrence Chia
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known as EFOS)
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Yet the Most High does not Dwell in Houses Made by Hands

11 March • Saturday of the Second Week in Lent

Acts 7:44-50

⁴⁴ “Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. ⁴⁵ Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him. ⁴⁸ Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,

⁴⁹ ““Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,
or what is the place of my rest?

⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?’

Meditation

Acts 7 records Stephen’s magnificent speech to the high priest and the Sanhedrin.

Stephen’s message addresses the following topics: (1) the patriarchal period (7:2-16); (2) Moses and the law (7:17-43); and, (3) the tabernacle and the Temple (7:44-50). It concludes (7:51-53) with a searing condemnation of the Sanhedrin, who were repeating the sins of their forefathers.

In particular, Stephen criticises the idolatry of the Sanhedrin, their attempt to put God in a box, to reduce him to a

manageable size. Hence, he reminds them that ‘the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands.’

However, this tendency to ‘downsize’ God—to envision him as a diminished deity that fits snugly into our religiosity—is not just the predilection of the ancient Israelites and the Sanhedrin. It is a danger which every Christian must be wary of.

There are many ways in which Christians can unwittingly ‘downsize’ God. They do this when they confuse sentimentality with spirituality by reducing God and his presence to the way they feel.

They can also diminish God by their theology—their understanding of God and his ways.

Take healing, for example. There are Christians who no longer believe that God can heal miraculously. And there are those who think that God only heals supernaturally, and never through medical science.

Both viewpoints are guilty of ‘downsizing’ and putting the Almighty God in a box.

When Christians diminish God in this way, they are in fact transgressing the second commandment (Exodus 20:4). They are rejecting the true God and worshipping a graven image formed by their own ideas of deity instead.

This passage warns us against the danger of confining the sovereign God to our human concepts (‘houses made by human hands’). It urges us to worship the true God, whose

throne is in heaven, and who has made the earth his footstool (7:48-49).

Prayer

Almighty God, forgive us for failing to acknowledge who You really are. Help us once again to appreciate Your greatness, sovereignty and learn to put our trust in You. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Action

Prayerfully reflect on the passages of the Bible that speaks about the greatness of God.

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Imitate God

12 March • Third Sunday in Lent

Ephesians 5:1-14

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Meditation

As a child imitates his father, we too must imitate our Heavenly Father. To imitate God is to walk in His ways. The apostle Paul speaks about “**walk**” (occurs seven times in Ephesians) as a way of life. How then should we live our lives? Our Christian theology must be reflected in the **head**

(orthodoxy)—what we believe in (**principles**); the **heart** (orthokardia)—what we value (**perspectives**); and the **hands** (orthopraxy)—how we live (**practice**).

We imitate God in two ways:

A. Walk in Love (Eph 5:1-2)

Our manner of life must be characterised by the love that Christ has given us. He gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Jesus' love is **sacrificial!** This is the kind of love that is well-pleasing to the Father.

B. Walk in Light (Eph 5:3-14)

Before the gospel came to Ephesus, the Ephesian believers were in darkness (v.8). When the gospel came to their hearts, they were not only saved from eternal damnation, but became “light in the Lord” (v.8). As children of light, we are to walk in the light. We are not to take part in the work of darkness such as immorality, fornication, uncleanness, covetousness and greed. People will see the emptiness of the unbeliever's life as they see God's children walking in the light.

Rise and Shine

The Apostle Paul quotes verse 14 from Isaiah 60:1 to awaken the unbelievers who are sound asleep, and the believers who are slumbering. Rise and shine by walking in love and walking in light as God's children!

Prayer

Eternal God, help me imitate You as my Heavenly Father. May I walk in love as Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. Help me walk as a child of light so that others can see You, the True Light. In Jesus' name, amen.

Action

How can I imitate God in my life, family, work and ministry?

*Rev Tony Yeo
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Senior Pastor, Covenant Evangelical Free Church*

Wash and be Clean

13 March • Monday of the Third Week in Lent

2 Kings 5:1-15

¹ Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favour, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper. ² Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." ⁴ So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." ⁵ And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. ⁶ And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." ⁷ And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

⁸ But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." ¹¹ But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. ¹³ But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" ¹⁴ So he went down

and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

¹⁵ Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant.”

Meditation

The historicity of Naaman, the Syrian general and the prophet Elisha is attested to by Jesus who declared in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk 4:27), “And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha and none of them was cleansed but only Naaman the Syrian.” The Messiah directed the disciples of John (the Baptist), “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear...” (Mt 11:4).

Leprosy, in the Old Testament was not only a fearsome disease, but also rendered the sufferer spiritually an outcaste —“The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.” (Lev 13:45-46).

1. Leprosy is no respecter of persons

Though Naaman was a ‘great man’, a ‘mighty man of valour’, ‘he was a leper’ (v.1).

2. God uses anyone

The ‘little girl’ an Israelite slave/captive in Syria (to speak to her mistress, the wife of Naaman), the king of Syria, the unbelieving king of Israel, the arrogant and ‘angry’ Naaman,

his humble servants to speak sense to their master, saying, “Has he actually said to you, “*Wash and be clean?*” (v.13).

God uses anyone, including Elisha, the man of God (vv.8, 10), who said, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, ... and you shall be clean.” (v.10).

3. Faith brings glory to God

When Naaman relented and ‘trusted and obeyed’, “his flesh was restored ... and he was clean.” (v.14) and now he ‘stood’ before Elisha and worshipped declaring, “I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.” (v.15).

4. All of us have sinned (Disease of pride and disobedience that brings God’s wrath and separates us from our Holy God) “For all have sinned.” (Rom 3:23) and “the wages of sin is death.” (Rom 6:23), and, separation from God, the source of life and righteousness (Eph 2:12 – “remember that you were at that time **separated** from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” cf. Eph 5:8 “At one time you were **darkness.**”

5. Be washed in the blood of the Lamb and be reconciled to God and to one another/others

“If we walk in the light as he (God) is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the **blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.**” (1 Jn 1:7; Col 1:20; Heb 10:19, 22, 25, 9:14; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Rev 1:5, 7:14, 12:11; Eph 2:13-16)

Prayer

Righteous Father, we thank You that when all of us were lost and separated from You by sin and rebellion, You sent Your Only Son in our flesh to be made sin who knew no sin, so that

in Him we might become the righteousness of God. Help us to use our freedom to bring the good news of Your love for all through Jesus Christ to every people, family and individual. Amen

Action

None of us can pay for our sins, and none of us can earn our salvation.

We have to repent and humbly ask God to forgive us our pride and rebellion, and receive his **saving** grace, enthroning Jesus as our Saviour, Master, Standard and Christ.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Eph 2:8-9).

Daily receive and exercise His grace through the five means of grace—Word, Prayer, Fellowship, Sacraments and Witness, and, His Holy Spirit **for good works** “which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2:10)

*Canon Emeritus Louis Tay
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Show the Same Earnestness to have the Full Assurance of Hope Until the End

14 March • Tuesday of the Third Week in Lent

Hebrews 5:11—6:12

¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits. ⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Meditation

“We need to grow and progress in our faith!” This is the message in today’s reading. It was the message to the readers then and is still the message to us today. We should not stay where we are because we can’t. We either progress (forward) or we will drift (away). I remember this advise when swimming in the sea. We should always keep our eyes on a target on the beach for our bearings, because the currents will drift us away. Likewise, we need to focus on the Lord and progress forward in Him, otherwise the world/life will drift us away.

Growing and progressing is a natural aspect of life. We grow up and progress as time goes on. If we don’t, something has gone wrong or is wrong. Imagine a child who at the age of one could not speak yet—we say it’s ok, the child is still growing and is still learning. Fast forward 20 years. Imagine the same child now at the age of 21 yet still could not speak—we would say that’s not ok, something is/has gone wrong. Unfortunately, this is the picture of many Christians in our churches. They know Christ. They have been baptised. They are faithful to the church. They have attended church for the longest time, but yet when asked to progress in the faith e.g. to serve, they would not. When asked to share from the Bible or even to pray, they could not. Something has gone wrong.

This is why we need to practise more. People say practise makes perfect but I say, practise makes better. When we practise more, we (should) become better at it. We practise the ways of our faith more to develop and demonstrate a maturity in the faith and in understanding more of the ways of the Lord. We must practise doing His Word and being led by His Spirit. We need to continue on and “show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end”

(6:11). Yes, things have changed—life as we knew it has been disrupted and even become disjointed, especially in this new normal, but our focus should remain the same i.e. on the Person of Jesus Christ—His message has not changed, his ways has not changed.

The apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that as we keep our eyes on the Lord, His Spirit will transform us—“And we all, with un-veiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”. So, let’s keep our eyes on Him as we continue on and practise more to become better in (keeping) our faith to the end.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to keep my eyes on You and help me to continue on in You. Help me to practise Your ways more so that I can continue on until the end. I want to grow and progress in the faith to develop a maturity of faith to serve others with the ways of Your Kingdom so that at the end of it all, You may find me a faithful servant of the Kingdom. Help me O God, I pray this in Yeshuah’s name, amen.

Action

Increase the time spent with the Lord.

Extend more time in His word.

Pray more for others.

Seek the Lord more for opportunities to serve Him.

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I have Come to Fulfill the Law and the Prophets

15 March • Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent

Matthew 5:17-19

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Meditation

Why did Jesus come? The Gospels record Jesus’ own reasons. According to Mark, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for ‘many’” (Mk 10:45). Luke explains Jesus’ response to Zaccheus: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10). John describes the good Shepherd’s purpose for His flock: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Jesus’ service, sacrifice and salvation through His cross and resurrection bring abundant life. Such abundance includes right relationships, with God and also with others.

Matthew, in today’s passage, gives Jesus’ explanation as rooted in Scripture: “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to

fulfill them” (Mt 5:17). In the context of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus came “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (4:23). He came to establish Kingdom authority, and accomplish Kingdom righteousness. His beatitudes describe the character of Kingdom citizens who hunger and thirst for this righteousness, to the extent of being persecuted for it (5:3-12).

Jesus taught His disciples to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt 6:33). While we seek the peace and welfare of our country, we must always seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness. The righteous Kingdom is central not only to Matthew, but also to all Scripture, which is God’s inspired Word, His revealed will and purpose. At His baptism, Jesus told John the Baptist, “It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15). After His resurrection, Jesus explained to His disciples that “everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Lk 24:44).

The apostle Paul marvelled that through Messiah Jesus’ perfect obedience to God’s Law, and His sacrificial death on the cross, He can impart “the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness”, and victory to those who receive Him (Rom 5:6-19). “The Messiah, you see, is the goal of the law, so that covenant membership may be available for all who believe” (Rom 10:4, translated by Tom Wright, *The New Testament for Everyone*, SPCK, 2011).

This righteousness comes not through human observance of the Law but through acts of Divine providence and deliverance. “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the

flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

The Lord Jesus summed up the requirements of the Law and the Prophets in what has been called ‘the golden rule’: “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (Mt 7:12). To Him the greatest commandments in the Torah were: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “Love your neighbour as yourself”. He added: “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Mt 22:36-40).

He gave His disciples “a new commandment”: “love one another just as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34-35). He also asked the Father to send them the Spirit of truth—another Helper, just like Him—to indwell them and guide them into all the truth (Jn 14:15-17 and 16:13-15).

We can obey God’s commands only through denying self, taking up our cross daily, and following Jesus (Lk 9:23; compare Gal 2:20). This is only possible by submitting to the control of His Spirit, and thus bearing His ninefold fruit (Gal 5:13-25). May God graciously guide us in this lifelong journey of spiritual transformation and humble service, for the common good and His greater glory.

Prayer

Thank You, dear Lord Jesus, that You perfectly fulfilled God’s plan and promises, and have given us Your Spirit of life and righteousness so that we may become more like You. Help us each day to walk in love and light, for Your Name’s sake. Amen.

Action

Reflect on Romans 12:1-13. As you have received God's grace and gifts, ask Him to enable you to share His blessings with someone or some Christian ministry today.

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Levi himself, Who Receives Tithes, Paid Tithes Through Abraham

16 March • Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

Hebrews 7:1-10

¹ For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. ³ He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

⁴ See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! ⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. ⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸ In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. ⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Meditation

The encounter between Melchizedek and Abraham is found in Genesis 14:18. Abraham had returned from a victory over Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him who had captured Lot. We read that Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was a king of God Most High. Melchizedek blessed Abraham and also blessed God Most High “who has delivered your enemies into your hand”.

In response, Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. From the Hebrew word for tenth, we get the word “tithe”. We tithe when we give to God a tenth of what God has blessed us. After their freedom from slavery in Egypt, the descendants of Abraham continued the practice of tithing. Levi in his priestly office received tithes from the descendants of Abraham.

Yet Levi as a descendant of Abraham, gave a tithe to God. Levites need to recognise that they too are indebted to God for everything.

In whatever office we hold in Christian service, we need to recognise that we too are indebted to God for everything. When I was a young man, I remember the phrase that God is no man’s debtor. No matter how much we have done for God, God has done much more. It is like a father who gives money to his children. They in turn use the money to buy the father a present. Is the father indebted to his children?

Many who serve the Lord are guilty of the sin of presumption. They are so used to receiving appreciation from others, that they forget that it is God who deserves our appreciation. We should never forget, when in times of distress, the words of Job that “the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Naked we came from our mother’s womb and naked shall we return.

It is our privilege if the Lord calls us to serve the Lord in any capacity. If others show their appreciation to us, all the more we should praise God. If others do not do this, we should still praise the Lord.

Melchizedek appeared to Abraham as a reminder that God was the author of his victory over Chedorlamer and the kings

who were with him. We too need to be reminded that it is God who is behind our every victory in our mortal lives.

Prayer

God Almighty, from whom comes every good gift, we thank You for continually giving us what we do not deserve. While we have breath, let us praise You in our appreciation of others, as well as the material things You have given to us. Let us not take You for granted as if You are obliged to be on our side. We affirm that we are on Your side in giving to others what we have received.

We want to give more of our inner self to You, so that our lives may abound in thankfulness and overflow in love, joy and peace.

Show Yourself to us from time to time so that we give You back at least a tithe. We need to give all of ourselves to You, and keep only that which we need, not what we want. You gave all of Yourself to us in the person of Jesus in His life, death and resurrection. We need only follow in Your footsteps. There is nothing we give which we have not received from You.

Action

Say thank you to those around us. Follow that with doing something to those near us. Continue the same sequence to those further away from us. May we enlarge the circle of our appreciation in our daily life, in the same way as God has expanded His love for us in ever larger circles.

*Dr Lee Soo Ann
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Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God

17 March • Friday of the Third Week in Lent

Hosea 14:1-9

¹ Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

² Take with you words
and return to the LORD;
say to him,
“Take away all iniquity;
accept what is good,
and we will pay with bulls
the vows of our lips.

³ Assyria shall not save us;
we will not ride on horses;
and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy.”

⁴ I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.

⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily;
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;

⁶ his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like Lebanon.

⁷ They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish like the grain;
they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

⁸ O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress;

from me comes your fruit.

⁹ Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
whoever is discerning, let him know them;
for the ways of the LORD are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them.

Meditation

The Book of Hosea is full of terrible words: scathing attacks on the Israelites for their unfaithfulness, idolatry and immorality; horrifying images of coming judgement. God will rip his people to pieces like a fierce predator (13:7-8); God will be like a scorching east wind, sucking the life out of his people (13:15); little children and pregnant women will die hideously (13:16).

But at the beginning of Hosea 14 we read of different kind of words: words of repentance with which the people can come before God. Here the people are urged to confess their sins and plead for forgiveness, to acknowledge their folly in seeking help from pagan nations like Assyria and in worshipping false gods. Here the people are encouraged to place their hope in their God, in whom 'the orphan finds mercy' (v.3)—what an appealing image!

God promises to heal his people; his anger is over (v.4). In place of the earlier images of death, there are images of life and fruitfulness (vv.5-7): refreshing dew, plants taking root and producing a fragrant and delightful harvest. Where does this new life come from? From the Lord of life himself.

At the end God depicts himself using a daring and powerful image (v.8): 'I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit.' Israel previously sought guidance from pieces of dead wood (4:12)—lifeless and futile idols that could not do

anything. Now God likens himself to a living tree, under which his people can find shade, live fruitful and productive lives.

If we have drifted from God, here is a text in which every word encourages us to return to God and find healing. What are we waiting for?

Prayer

God, we confess our sins before You and ask for forgiveness. Thank You that we can place our hope in God and find mercy. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Action

Do encourage others who have drifted from God to return to God. They will receive healing and the abundant life of Jesus Christ.

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It was not that this Man Sinned...but that the Works of God might be Displayed in him

18 March • Saturday of the Third Week in Lent

John 9:1-17

¹ As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

Meditation

Although Jesus left the temple because the Jews wanted to stone Him (John 8:59), He stopped at the gate outside the temple and ministered to a man with congenital blindness, begging for alms. His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” It was a question the blind man had asked many times in his life, so he paid attention to Jesus’ reply, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him...” *When there is suffering, it is not necessary to ask, “Who caused the suffering?” but “What can God do with it through me?”*

While he was still pondering over what Jesus said, Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with His saliva, rubbed it on his eyes and said to him “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” He simply obeyed and groped his way to the pool of Siloam. He cupped his hands into the pool and splashed the cool water onto his eyes. As the water washed away the mud from his eyes, a bright piercing light entered his eyes—for the first time in his life he saw light! *There are moments that we may seem to walk alone, but all we need to do is simply trust and obey what Jesus tells us.*

Jesus told His disciples, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Jesus said in Matthew 5:14 that we are the light of the world. Therefore, as long as we are still in the world, we must seize every opportunity to do the work that Jesus sent us to do. *Every day is a day lesser for us to do what God can do through us. So, do it today!*

His neighbours were amazed, the Pharisees were angry, doubted and accused Jesus for not keeping the Sabbath. What was important to the man was, “One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see!” (v.25). *No one can take away what God has done for you when you hold on to it!*

Prayer

Lord Jesus, where there is suffering, help me not to ask who cause it, but what You can do with it through me for Your glory. Amen!

Action

Is there someone you know who is suffering from sickness, depression, physical disabilities, loss of income or loss of a loved one? Pray for the person, ask God to make you His hands, feet and voice to bring healing and encouragement to the person.

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Man Looks on the Outward Appearance but the LORD Looks on the Heart

19 March • Fourth Sunday in Lent

1 Samuel 16:1-13

¹ The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” ² And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.” And the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’” ³ And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you.” ⁴ Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, “Do you come peaceably?” ⁵ And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him.” ⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” ¹⁰ And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen these.” ¹¹ Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” ¹² And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the LORD said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.” ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

Meditation

From the scripture, we learn that God rejected Saul as king of Israel, and asked Samuel, the old prophet, to go to the house of Jesse and anoint the one that God has chosen to be king. This was a difficult task for the old prophet, as he would be killed by Saul.

The Lord God gave Samuel a coup “sacrifice” to fulfil his mission and anoint a King of Israel who was pleasing to God. Samuel followed God’s instructions and went to the house of Jesse. The Bible says that Jesse’s seven sons passed before Samuel (v.10), making David the eighth son. But the genealogy of 1 Chronicles 2:13-15 records David as the seventh son of Jesse, probably because one of David’s brothers had died, so the genealogy does not record it.

David was a despised young kid in his family, and he had no say before his brothers (2 Sam 17:28). And he was “ruddy” (2 Sam 17:42), which meant that he did not have a beard and was a child, so he was not taken seriously at home. He was not even invited for this peace sacrifice banquet!

Besides, David in Jesse’s eyes was a child, immature, with no potential; not a wise and impressive leader or warrior. He can only be a handyman, run errands, herd sheep, bring food to his brothers (1 Sam 17:17), be a messenger (1 Sam 17:18), and do other chores.

When his tall and mighty brothers walked up to Samuel one by one, the old prophet was equally impressed by their handsome and strong bodies, and even thought that any one of them may be the king chosen by God.

But the Lord does not look at man as man look at man. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (v.7b). God told Samuel that he should not judge by appearance; rather, it was the inner quality and character that would determine who would be king.

All his brothers had passed before Samuel, but David, a sheep herder, had not yet returned. If we were there when David ran back, we would have seen him with his cheeks flushed, his hair flying, his clear eyes shining with innocence, a handsome boy.

David came to Samuel and the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he” (v.12b). Samuel might have thought at this point that God chose David because he was the youngest.

However, the Bible says, “man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” (v.7b). This is the principle by which God sees people. A man “chosen and asked king” (1 Sam 12:13) is one who values outward appearance over the people (1 Sam 10:23-24), but the king that God chooses is one who values the true life within him.

The word “outward appearance” literally translates as “what the eye can see” and this is how people generally pay attention only to “what the eye sees! Therefore, God taught Samuel a lesson so that we would not repeat the same mistakes.

Prayer

Merciful God, examine me, know my heart and mind, test me, and know my thought. See if there is any evil in me? I am willing to repent sincerely. Please forgive me, cleanse me, and

give me a clean heart. So that I may be Your valued, beloved and chosen child. In the name of the Lord Jesus, amen!

Action

May we not be deceived by outward appearances. Pray that we might see the heart through the eyes of God. May 1 Corinthians 2:10; and 14-15 be our help: “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.” “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.”

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(Source: Translated from Chinese Lenten Devotions 2023)

I, the LORD Search the Heart and Test the Mind

20 March • Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Jeremiah 17:5-18

- ⁵ Thus says the LORD:
“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.
- ⁶ He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.
He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.
- ⁷ “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
- ⁸ He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit.”
- ⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?
- ¹⁰ “I the LORD search the heart
and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds.”
- ¹¹ Like the partridge that gathers a brood that she did not
hatch,
so is he who gets riches but not by justice;
in the midst of his days they will leave him,

and at his end he will be a fool.

- ¹² A glorious throne set on high from the beginning
is the place of our sanctuary.
- ¹³ O LORD, the hope of Israel,
all who forsake you shall be put to shame;
those who turn away from you shall be written in the
earth,
for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living
water.
- ¹⁴ Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed;
save me, and I shall be saved,
for you are my praise.
- ¹⁵ Behold, they say to me,
“Where is the word of the LORD?
Let it come!”
- ¹⁶ I have not run away from being your shepherd,
nor have I desired the day of sickness.
You know what came out of my lips;
it was before your face.
- ¹⁷ Be not a terror to me;
you are my refuge in the day of disaster.
- ¹⁸ Let those be put to shame who persecute me,
but let me not be put to shame;
let them be dismayed,
but let me not be dismayed;
bring upon them the day of disaster;
destroy them with double destruction!

Meditation

It is increasingly difficult to discern truth from untruth, let alone separate truth from half-truth.

We are constantly inundated with false information, misinformation and disinformation. They are extremely destructive and divisive, generating hatred for people and nations, and polarising communities.

Be reminded that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (v.9). Some people are paid to propagate

falsehoods and half-truths precisely to achieve the wicked aims of paymasters. More often than not, Christians also help to propagate such deceit and sow seeds of wickedness.

How can we avoid being used for this purpose?

First, have a skeptical mind. Do not trust in “man and makes flesh his strength” (v.5). Much of these information are earthly and fleshly. They are not edifying to the spirit. Since the human heart is deceitful, and are also self-deceived, we will do well to question the source and veracity of the information before we buy into it, let alone share it. If we can't verify the source or confirm its veracity, it is best to delete it and tell our friends not to inundate us with such information.

Second, trust only in the Lord (v.7). Drink deeply from the Word of life and pray for discernment to separate truth from falsehood. Nourished by the living water of life, we can be firmly rooted in the truth, sustain our spiritual growth and bear the fruit of the Spirit in all things (v.8).

Third, Let the Lord “search our heart and test our mind” (v.10). Be rightly motivated in sharing information for the good of the community. “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God” (Mt 5:9). Ask ourselves, why are we sharing this? Is this a truth that edifies and builds up? Is this helping to unite the world for peace?

Prayer

Jesus, You created the world which is now divided against itself. Conflict and corruption is destroying Your world. We pray that we will be able to mediate healing to this broken world by trusting in You and allowing You to make us

peacemakers. Grant us wisdom and courage to call out falsehood and testify to the Truth in Jesus Christ who alone can set us free. In Jesus' name, amen.

Action

Constantly search our hearts and test our minds under the scrutiny of God's Word. Determine to be the bearer of truth and peace. Delete unverifiable sources of negative information about people or nations instead of sharing them. Seek to share positive and inspiring information that edify and nurture the spirit of humanity.

*Rev Dr William Wan, JP., PhD.
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Singapore Kindness Movement*

Discerning the Gospel Which Leads to Freedom and Life

21 March • Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Galatians 4:1-5

¹ I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Meditation

Paul's letter to the Galatians addressed an issue that had crept into churches in the province of Galatia. In their midst was a group of Christians from Jewish background who insisted that their Christian Gentile counterparts had to be circumcised, in order to be authentic followers of Jesus.

As a Jew who from a young age was immersed in Jewish teachings and practices, Paul discerned that this teaching reeked of legalism which went beyond what Christ had taught and required. Paul's dramatic encounter with the living Jesus coupled with his deep understanding of Scripture led him to insist that the Jewish Christians were actually preaching a different gospel which didn't lead to freedom in Christ, but to enslavement to Jewish tradition. This teaching was poison in the church that needed to be removed!

In Galatians 4 therefore, we read of Paul correcting the error and instructing believers about their status as children of God. There was a season in their history when relationship with God was regulated by rulebook practices and traditions. That era was necessary, but it was over. Now, a new freedom, a new experience of sonship and heirship had been introduced. We must not cling on to the old, but embrace the new. Being an authentic follower of Jesus didn't require circumcision and other Jewish religious "justification-by-works" type add-ons that were insisted!

It is interesting to note that churches are not exempt from persuasive "false gospels" even today. These invite believers to embrace non-essential add-ons in worship and prayer life. Because of the Jewish origins, they are sometimes claimed as more authentic and essential to true spirituality.

The challenge arises when these religious practices and superstitions are promoted to the point where the Gospel's focus is displaced. In this situation, adherents are recognised merely by the way they parade peculiar practices, not by how the Spirit of God is molding his children and changing them as they die to self and yield to the Spirit.

Action

In the face of this challenge, Paul's counsel to the Galatians remains relevant today. Don't be "bewitched" (Gal 3:1), but have a clear understanding of the foundations of faith and the demands upon the faithful. Will you be discerning?

Prayer

Lord, protect your sons and daughters from teachings and spiritual practices that cause us to lose sight of the Spirit's

transforming work in our lives and our relationships with each other.

*Dr Calvin Chong
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Singapore Bible College*

By a Single Offering He has Perfected for All Time those Who are being Sanctified

22 March • Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Hebrews 10:1-18

¹ For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;

⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.

⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

⁸ When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,

¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, declares the Lord:
I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds,”

¹⁷ then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no
more.”

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Meditation

The world in 2023 is a world that is trying to shed away the remaining trappings of the Covid pandemic, which has taken its toll on the global population over the last three years. As we emerge from the dark tunnel, we find that even as the old problems are fading away, new problems are emerging on the horizons.

The new normal, as it is called, is still exhibiting an old pattern—we live in a fallen world, and all the challenges in life are still there to confront us. There are economic woes, escalating costs, rising unemployment, energy shortage, wars, racism, inadequate food, and geopolitical tensions in many regions. The new normal may bring new dimensions and new challenges to our lives. Yet, ultimately, what is it that was not already there before? They all stem from a common root, which is our human fallenness.

We are thus mindful of the fact that Christ came into our world—this fallen world—to accomplish exactly the one thing that is needed most, which is our redemption, and the reversal of the world’s fallenness. This is precisely what the author of Hebrews is doing in this text. He makes a rigorous argument to underscore the finality, sufficiency, efficacy and intentionality of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, which is the redemptive act that would heal the brokenness that we see around us in the world today.

The Author’s interpretation of Psalm 40:6-8 (he is reading the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) is exquisite. The words of the Psalmist are read as coming from the mouth of the Saviour as he entered into our world: “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired...I have come to do your will, O God.” These statements are understood as Christ’s volitional commitment to take the place of the OT sacrifices and offerings. The latter are understood as anticipating the ultimate sacrifice that Christ would make, as a final, sufficient, effective and intentional act of redemption to resolve the root cause of all our human suffering—our fallenness.

The world may remind us of our brokenness, but the season of Lent reminds us that Christ has brought salvation into this world to restore us. The followers of Christ should take courage that, as we continue to put our trust in God and live out the truth of the Gospel in our lives, we will be the salt and light. God can then use us to make a difference in the world, no matter how frightening the problems may seem!

Prayer

Dear Lord, accept me as I am—my weakness, my brokenness, and my worries—even as I come to You. Teach me to live my

life humbly before You, in obedience to Your commands, as I carry out Your will in the world. Together with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, may we be the salt and light that You want us to be! Amen.

Action

What is one thing that you can do to bless a person whom you have in mind? Pray that God would lead you to do it, and open the way for you!

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Trust and Follow

23 March • Thursday of the Fourth Week in Lent

John 10:22-41

²² At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” ³³ The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.” ³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? ³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken— ³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸ but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” ³⁹ Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands. ⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. ⁴¹ And many came to him. And they said, “John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.”

Meditation

The whole of John 10 illustrates Jesus as the Good shepherd. As the Good shepherd, He tends His sheep in fulfilling their needs, strengthening them and protects them. Above all Jesus describes His relationship with the sheep belonging to Him. This passage also describes the sheep which does not belong to Jesus' fold.

John opens this episode stating the celebration for which Jesus and the religious leaders met at the temple. He also describes the weather condition—winter, which can be cold and wet. Despite the season and the situation, we see these leaders coming to Jesus and asking Him to plainly tell if He is the Christ. Jesus answered, 'I did tell you'. Even at many instances before this chapter, Jesus had very plainly told of His divinity and His relationship with God. In John 9:37, Jesus declared that He is the Son of Man prophesied by Daniel. Jesus brought this to an end when He said, 'You do not believe because you are not my sheep' (v.26).

Then, who are the flock of His fold? What are their characteristics and behaviours? Jesus specified some of the supreme privileges of those who believe in him.

1. They are a summoned group—My sheep listen to my voice (v.27). The call of Christ has brought them into a new relationship with him (I know them). This relationship in turn leads to a new lifestyle (they follow me). The proof of faith is obedience.
2. They are a gifted group—The gift they receive in following Christ is Eternal Life (v.28). All who believe him will live. The eternal new life in his Kingdom is in heaven.
3. They are a secured group—no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand (v.29). Just as the shepherd protects

his sheep, Jesus protects his people from eternal harm. He has committed himself to them. There are many reasons to be afraid here on earth because this is a devil's domain (1 Peter 5:8). But if you choose to follow Jesus, he will be your everlasting safety.

Above all, we, as the people of His flock know that He is the Son of God in a unique, unparalleled relationship of oneness with the Father. Jesus Christ is God! Amen.

Prayer

Thank You Jesus for calling me to a new relationship with You. You are the Lord of my life. Help me to trust in You each day and walk in newness of life. In the matchless name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Action

How do I see Jesus in my life today? Is He the Lord of my Life? Do I fully trust Him?

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Pashhur Beat Jeremiah the Prophet and Put him in the Stocks

24 March • Friday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Jeremiah 19:14—20:6

¹⁴ Then Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the court of the LORD's house and said to all the people: ¹⁵ "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words."

20:1 Now Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. ² Then Pashhur beat Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the LORD. ³ The next day, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "The LORD does not call your name Pashhur, but Terror on Every Side. ⁴ For thus says the LORD: Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon. He shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall strike them down with the sword. ⁵ Moreover, I will give all the wealth of the city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them and seize them and carry them to Babylon. ⁶ And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity. To Babylon you shall go, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely."

Meditation

Why do dedicated Christians who serve God suffer unjustly? Answers to this question are not as readily identifiable as examples of its subject. Jeremiah is one such example. For all his dedication to the service of God, he suffered unjustly as

the LORD's prophet. Jeremiah was not unaware of the cost of obedience to God. God had warned him that kings, officials, priests and his own people would fight against him (Jer 1:19). But steadfast obedience is more trying than the first steps of faith.

Vicious attacks against Jeremiah are understandable if they came from enemies of God's people. Pashhur was not supposed to be an enemy. A high-ranking priest, Pashhur's ministry was meant to complement Jeremiah's along with that of the kings. His opposition to Jeremiah revealed a false teacher who "prophesied lies" (20:6) and the spiritual decay that had spread to the heart of Judah's top leadership. Pashhur's ill treatment and rejection of God's messenger signalled the rejection of God and his truth.

What can we do when we suffer unjustly in our service to God? We keep walking in obedience to God regardless of the difficulties that confront us. Like Jeremiah who continued to speak the truth of God's judgement at great personal cost, we continue to discharge our God-appointed vocations against all odds. This obedience is costly but not blind. It is an obedience of faith in the sovereignty of God.

As the Divine Potter, God has the sovereign right to judge Judah for her apostasy. But judgement will not be the final verdict. God's wrath will eventually reveal his sovereign mercy (Rom 9:22-24). We may not fully understand God's ways in our suffering. But like Jeremiah, our obedience will lead us one step further into God's redemptive purposes.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are my sovereign God who works all things for good. Give me courage to keep walking in

obedience to Your will, even though Your purposes are not entirely clear to me. Help me to trust in Your perfect dealings and remain in Your love amidst the storms of life.

Hear my prayer, Father, for the sake of Your Son who loves me and gave Himself for me. Amen.

Action

1. Spend some quiet moments in God's presence.
2. Identify one struggle you are facing in your Christian witness and service.
3. Tell God honestly how you feel about it.
4. Pray the prayer above.

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I Know that the LORD will Maintain the Cause of the Afflicted

25 March • Saturday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Psalm 140:1-13

- ¹ Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men;
preserve me from violent men,
² who plan evil things in their heart
and stir up wars continually.
³ They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's,
and under their lips is the venom of asps. *Selah*
- ⁴ Guard me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked;
preserve me from violent men,
who have planned to trip up my feet.
⁵ The arrogant have hidden a trap for me,
and with cords they have spread a net;
beside the way they have set snares for me. *Selah*
- ⁶ I say to the LORD, You are my God;
give ear to the voice of my pleas for mercy, O LORD!
⁷ O LORD, my Lord, the strength of my salvation,
you have covered my head in the day of battle.
⁸ Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked;
do not further their evil plot, or they will be exalted!
Selah
- ⁹ As for the head of those who surround me,
let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them!
¹⁰ Let burning coals fall upon them!
Let them be cast into fire,
into miry pits, no more to rise!
¹¹ Let not the slanderer be established in the land;
let evil hunt down the violent man speedily!

¹² I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted,
and will execute justice for the needy.

¹³ Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name;
the upright shall dwell in your presence.

Meditation

The Psalmist is under severe attacks from evil men. They put him in danger, give him no quarter and grant him no rights. He feels the affliction of the soul. He pours his woes before God with strong words against the evil men. We do that too, sometimes.

He asks God to maintain his cause for freedom to live a godly life without harassment from the enemy.

Legitimacy of a cause determines the level of commitment to it. Some causes are worth contending for, whilst many others are not. In a war for instance, those with a worthy cause would be highly motivated to fight. Those without a worthy cause would quickly flee.

Think about the causes that you devote your resources to. Then look at your limited resources and consider how you are managing them. You can be pulled in many directions by your commitments. They compete for your limited resources and create conflicts within. It can be very stressful. Sometimes it leads to resentment and affliction of the soul.

Some commitments must go while some others maintained. It is hard to decide which to keep and which to kick. Remember to stay the cause. There is a tendency to give up worthy causes that carry high commitments. It is easy to forget the primary cause.

Jesus said, “For this purpose (cause) I was born and for this purpose (cause) I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.” (John 18:37).

Jesus was clear and resolute about His primary cause in life. He came to bear witness to the truth. His cause is also our cause. We must maintain this cause and testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Other causes in life must take reference from this primary cause. Our many commitments must also be curated with reference to this cause. God will help us, by His grace, to maintain this cause.

Prayer

Help me Lord, to sieve out unworthy causes and give me strength to stay the cause to testify to Your salvation to the world. Help me Lord to drop commitments that are associated with lesser causes and help me maintain the commitments that spring from the cause of Christ.

Action

List five commitments that are exacting a toll on your resources. Evaluate each of them and identify the cause from which the commitment springs from. Re-order the list by reference to the importance of the cause. Resolve to devote your resources to the various commitments commensurable with the order of importance of the cause.

*Pastor Lawrence Chua
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Living Sanctuary Brethren Church*

Grace Unlimited

26 March • Fifth Sunday in Lent

2 Corinthians 11:16—12:10

¹⁶ I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. ¹⁷ What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. ¹⁸ Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. ¹⁹ For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! ²⁰ For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. ²¹ To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

12:1 I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. ⁵ On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses— ⁶ though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. ⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Meditation

In the life of a Christian believer, one experience will invariably come as a “required experience” for all believers. This is the experience of God’s grace at a time of our utter weakness and brokenness, we discover the reality of God’s grace and strength.

Such an experience is actually an extension of our conversion encounter with the Lord. At conversion, we tell God we cannot save ourselves; only He can save us. God’s grace that rescued us from the penalty of sin must continue to sustain us throughout our walk with Him.

In this regard, Paul boasts of his weakness. Unlike those whom he calls “super-apostles” (see 2 Cor 11:5; 12:11), he will not boast about his achievements and successes, but about his weakness. When we talk about our successes and accomplishments, we draw attention to ourselves. When we

talk about our weakness and struggles, we draw attention to God and His accomplishment.

Paul goes on to talk about “the thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7). We are not sure what the thorn is. It has been interpreted as a chronic physical illness, or weakness towards a particular temptation, or the relentless opposition of the fellow-Jews (see Num 33:55). Whatever it is, we can understand the “thorn” as anything that drives us to a point of despair in ourselves.

Paul asks three times for the thorn to be removed, but each time God’s answer is, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9). God’s grace is available and sufficient, but we discover it only when we come to the end of ourselves. When our weakness is complete, God’s strength is also made complete in us.

We cry, “I can’t! I just can’t!” The Lord’s answer to such a cry of desperation is, “Yes, you can’t, but I can.” Someone has said, “A true saint never says he can’t because it never occurs to him that he can.”

Such is the paradox of the cross. Jesus hangs from the cross in utter helplessness. He dies that He may live. He is defeated that He may become victorious, He becomes weak that He may become strong. Such is also the paradox of the Christian life.

For the Christian, despair is not the end. It is only the beginning. It is the end of self, and the beginning of God. “For when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor 12:10). The end is only the beginning.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Your grace is indeed sufficient in every situation, Your strength is perfect in my weakness, so let me boast of my weakness that all glory may go to You. Amen.

Action

Have you had this “required experience” so far? If yes, reflect on lessons learnt. If no, memorise the words of Jesus and Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 to be ready for it.

*Rev Dr David W F Wong
General Secretary
Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore*

Of Frogs and Gnats

27 March • Monday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Exodus 8:1-19

¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ² But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. ³ The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. ⁴ The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.’”” ⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt!’” ⁶ So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. ⁷ But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

⁸ Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” ⁹ Moses said to Pharaoh, “Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.” ¹⁰ And he said, “Tomorrow.” Moses said, “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. ¹¹ The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people. They shall be left only in the Nile.” ¹² So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. ¹³ And the LORD did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. ¹⁴ And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. ¹⁵ But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

¹⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.’” ¹⁷

And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸ The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹ Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Meditation

We often take important things for granted until they are taken away. Things like Frog-free Houses and Gnat-free Air. Pharaoh had to learn it the hard way.

Pharaoh’s happy life was disrupted because he refused to recognise God and let God’s people go and worship Him. He had to deal with messy and noisy frogs until he changed his mind and gave in to God.

But Pharaoh broke his promise to God... again. So came the gnats, not only into houses, but onto people and animals. The magicians got the message, as they urged Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God”.

Does this sound familiar? Were we not also caught up with work and play, chasing projects and ambitions, often to the neglect God, health, loved ones and creation?

We were stopped in our tracks by something smaller than frogs and gnats—the coronavirus. In 2020, we had to stop all human interactions for a time, and learn safe distancing, social responsibility and sacrifice of personal freedom in order to weather this storm together.

Today in 2023, we are in a new normal, learning to live with Covid. But what kind of new normal are you experiencing?

For nearly two years we could not *fully* fellowship face to face, worship in song, or celebrate the sacraments with water, bread and wine. Have we learned to treasure these gifts much more? Are we now eagerly embracing what we've missed? Or have we been so starved that we no longer feel hungry, and settle for merely watching services or listening to sermons?

While we were stuck working from home, many of us rediscovered the joy of home. Even though we were each working, the down times together reminded us that we are family. Now that we are back in school or in the office, do we still have time together? Or have we returned to our old ways of living separate lives?

Many of us treasured our time with God with fewer distractions during the pandemic. We tasted God's sweetness, and it helped our mental health. Are we still making intimacy with God a priority, under the demands of new normal?

The story of Pharaoh went downhill, each lesson more painful than the last. Hopefully we need not relearn these painful lessons. May we not go back to our old ways, as we march bravely into the new normal.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You love us so much that You will not let us lose our way. Remind us to put You first, to take time for self-care and the care of people around us. Help us to thrive in the new normal. In the name of the Christ our Saviour we pray. Amen.

Action

1. How can we embrace even more fully today what we missed about church life during the pandemic?
2. How can we sustain the life-giving, relationship-deepening and faith-building things we did during the pandemic?

*Venerable Wong Tak Meng
Archdeacon for Community Services
Diocese of Singapore*

Godly Lives in the Present Age

28 March • Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Titus 2:9–3:15

⁹ Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

3:1 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

⁸ The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. ⁹ But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ As for a person who stirs up division, after warning

him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

¹² When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. ¹³ Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. ¹⁴ And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

¹⁵ All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with you all.

Meditation

I often visit elderly parents whose Christian children are concerned about their salvation. Generally, I have three kinds of experiences. Some prayed to receive Christ the first time I visited. Some declined for heartstring reasons. But after more visits, they became open and prayed to receive Christ. The third is the hardest. They have been offended by Christians. A few eventually came to Christ after many visits. Many slammed the door shut on Christ.

But I also observe another pattern. Regardless of the elderly's experience with other Christians, those who prayed to receive Christ usually have Christian children or grandchildren who love them in practical ways. Indeed, it is the work of the Spirit who convicts hearts. But it is the lives and actions of Christians around them that either harden or soften the hearts of non-Christians.

Titus, the pastor of the church in Crete, faced challenges from false teachers who offered an adulterated Christianity that condoned ungodliness. Paul wrote the letter asking Titus to exhort the believers, that in the light of the Holy Spirit's "regeneration and renewal... those who have believed in God

may be careful to devote themselves to good works.” (3:5-8) The Gospel is transformative. One cannot be touched by the Gospel and remain unchanged.

This season of Lent is a reminder that the transformative work is already accomplished on the Cross. What challenges or difficulties are you facing now? Remember you have the Spirit of the Risen Christ who empowers you to “live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2:12-13) Your life can be the bridge to others’ knowledge of and coming to Christ.

Prayer

Dear God, Thank You for Christ and His transforming work on the Cross. In this season of Lent, grant me the desire to deal intentionally with the things in my life that do not stand up to the scrutiny of the godliness described in Your Word. I pray that indeed, my life might be the bridge to another person’s knowledge of Christ.

Action

Is there anything in your life that is obscuring your Christian testimony? Pray and ask God to reveal to you afresh the accomplished work of transformation of Christ on the Cross. May you find strength to overcome whatever that is affecting your walk with Christ and your testimony of Christ.

*Rev Dr Alby Yip
Senior Pastor
Zion Bishan Bible-Presbyterian Church*

The Pursuit of His Presence!

29 March • Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

John 12:1-11

¹ Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. ³ Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” ⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷ Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

⁹ When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

Meditation

The Gospel of John presents Jesus Christ to us as the Son of God and the Saviour in order that we might believe in him and, it shows us what it means to believe in him. Christian life is a relationship between the Creator and creation. God showed us how much he loves us by sending His only begotten son Jesus Christ to this fallen world as a ransom for our sins. He gave up his greatest treasure to go through the sufferings on the cross, just because he loves us. This is the

immeasurable Love that God has for you and me. As in any healthy relationship, love must be reciprocated.

God has instructed us in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one [the only God]! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and with all your soul and with all your strength [your entire being]. Our devotion to God is the greatest expression of our love.

Mary showed her devotion to Jesus by giving something that was of great value. A pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard would cost 300 denarii. Nard is an aromatic herb that grows in the high Himalayan pasture land of India and Tibet. It was very costly because it was gathered in such remote regions and had to be shipped such great distances on camel back. That perfume was extremely expensive. The denarius was the daily wage given to a worker in those days, so 300 denarii would have been a year's wages because nothing would have been paid to the man for the Sabbaths or other holy days. 300 denarii is an estimated \$36,000 - \$40,000 annual income for people in today's world. Here Mary expresses her devotion by offering Jesus something that was of great worth.

Judas saw this act of devotion by Mary as a waste, and suggested that the expensive ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor. In the eyes of most, what Judas said would have made sense as loving people was a command given by God. But the truth as Jesus mentioned was that the poor would be always there, people with needs will always surround us, but our ultimate priority is the pursuit of His presence. Loving God is our priority and from that relationship we love others.

Judas was later revealed to be driven by greed. His greed led him to betray Jesus. I believe that sometimes our priorities are shifted by the attractions and even pressures of this world. Even our noble acts of charity should not precede our pursuit for His presence. We must learn to see our lives as one constant anointing of the Lord's feet with very expensive perfume.

Prayer

Lord help me prioritise the pursuit of Your presence.

Action

Make time with the Lord the Priority each day. Block that time with God first.

*Rev Samuel Gift Stephen
Senior Overseer
Life Centre (Formerly Smyrna Assembly)*

Share in Suffering as a Good Soldier of Christ Jesus

30 March • Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent

2 Timothy 2:1-26

¹ You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. ³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. ⁵ An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. ⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

¹⁴ Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. ¹⁶ But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ who have swerved from

the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.¹⁹ But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

²⁰ Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Meditation

The Apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 2:3, invites us to share or join him in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Therefore, the focal point of this devotion is on our understanding of what it takes to be a good soldier of Christ.

While the early Christians view Rome and her military power negatively, Paul realises that Rome's military superiority comes from strict adherence to obedience and submission to a higher authority. To help us understand what it takes for Christians to rise as victorious overcomers in this world, Paul uses the imagery of soldiers, with Christ Jesus as our commander-in-chief. Our love for Jesus and our allegiance to Him is in keeping His commandments and instructions.

So, what are the marks of a good soldier? Good soldiers recognise, obey, and submit to their commander-in-chief. They prepare and set themselves apart for the battle. They

study the traps and tactics of the enemy. They faithfully carry out the instructions of their commander-in-chief.

While it is easy to have an intellectual acknowledgment of the above requirements, true discipleship comes with a price. If we have been taught or told that life will be smooth-sailing after receiving Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, then we have been misled with a half-truth that goes against the Word of God.

My friends, we are never promised a trouble-free life. In fact, Paul reminded us in 2 Timothy 3:12 that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” This is the reality of a righteous “salt and light living” in this dark world. But we can be comforted by God’s assurance of never leaving or forsaking us. In Christ, we will never walk alone. Our commander-in-chief is with us—always.

As soldiers of Christ Jesus, we also need to undergo regular self-evaluation. Are we transforming the world, or is the world influencing us against our commander-in-chief? True disciples of Christ will never compromise their faith to be lukewarm Christians. Hence, the only way to faithfully fulfil our calling and destiny is through total obedience and unwavering allegiance to God. Jesus stipulated the requirements in Matthew 16:24, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Today, Paul invites us to share in his suffering as good soldiers of Christ Jesus because our heavenly Father wants us to receive the victor’s crown. Let us persevere unwaveringly by holding on to Romans 8:17, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with

Christ if indeed we share in His sufferings so that we may also share in His glory.”

To God be the Glory.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we strive to be good soldiers of Your Son, grant us strength to fulfil our destiny on earth. May we take the authority in the name of Jesus to resist all distractions that aim to steal and destroy our birth right as Your sons and daughters. May our focus be on You alone so that Your name will always be lifted and glorified through our words and deeds. May Your joy be our strength to receive the victor’s crown as one who has completed the race according to the rules. We pray all these in the name of our Risen Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus, amen.

Action

Have we been compromising our values as children of God? Meditate and ponder over 2 Timothy 2:14-26 and reflect on the following:

1. Are we leading a consecrated life that honours God daily?
2. Are we mixing with the right company?
3. Are we partakers or stoppers of unnecessary quarrels/talks/gossip?
4. What can we do to present ourselves to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth?

It is never too late to start afresh. Take that first step home—our Father awaits us.

*Rev Dr Edwin Wong
Pastor-in-Charge
Christ Methodist Church*

My God, My God Why have You Forsaken Me?

31 March • Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Psalm 22:1-31

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of
my groaning?
- ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.
- ³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- ⁴ In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- ⁵ To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
- ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
- ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"
- ⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.
- ¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.
- ¹¹ Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.
- ¹² Many bulls encompass me;

strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
13 they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
15 my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

16 For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet —
17 I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
18 they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

19 But you, O LORD, do not be far off!
O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dog!
21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!
You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
24 For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted,
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.

25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
26 The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!
27 All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations

shall worship before you.

²⁸ For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.

³⁰ Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;

³¹ they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a
people yet unborn,
that he has done it.

Meditation

Psalm 22, in general is about someone crying out to the Almighty to save him from the taunts and torments of his enemies. Eventually, he thanks God for rescuing him.

In life, there are many enemies. Some are perceived, others are physically real. Often, the perceived enemies seem to exert much more damage than real ones. However, the combination of both can be devastating.

When enemies draw near and the route of escape is not in sight, discouragement comes, despair follows, then complete hopelessness. At that, nothing needs to be said. Life will be meaningless. We struggle for hope. When all personal human efforts fail, cries to the Almighty will be our last resort.

The problem for many is we believe that we do not need to acknowledge God as the Almighty and thus would not need His help. We think we can solve our own problems.

The writer of Psalm 22 expressed his anguish with personalised lament. He was suffering at the hands of his enemies. The intensity of mockery and taunt has reached its crescendo. There was need for relief and release. Only God

could help. When help comes, there would be rejoicing and worship.

When Christ quoted the Psalmist at the cross. He too faced his enemies on our behalf. Death would be the eventual outcome and that could have been victory for the enemy. He was going through the struggles and anguish, the taunting and suffering, both mental, physical as well as spiritual. Yet, He became our example when He acknowledges God's sovereignty.

Is there meaning and purpose in anguish and suffering? In Matthew 27, many of the images of Psalm 22 became familiar. Matthew presents Jesus as the innocent sufferer par excellence. In spite of His innocent suffering, He is vindicated, so too, will be Jesus' followers. Death couldn't hold Him to the grave. His resurrection is our victory cry instead of our lamentation.

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for being the first to utter the victory cry instead of just a lamentation for hopelessness. A cry not just to indicate a separation, but rather to reveal Your sovereignty over sin and Evil. You prevail over death and the evil one, and lead us to triumph on the empty tomb. Thank You, Lord that though You suffered and died, it was for us a victory cry and not a lamentation. We thank You in Jesus' mighty name, amen.

Action

Our wellness depends on God, not on our efforts, wisdom or abilities. Let's not wait till the last moments to cry to God for help, but to acknowledge God who will be with us till the end of the age. Whatever your struggles, anguish, pains or

injustices faced, bring them to God and He promises to stand together with you.

Rev Dr Peter Poon

has retired from full-time pastoral ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Singapore where he served for 40 years. However, he is still actively serving with Walk thru the Bible Ministry (under the Bible Society) as regional trainer with the Regional Office of WTB.

He's also a pastoral mentor with Bethel Presbyterian Church. Rev Poon and his wife Helena have three grown children and four grandchildren. They both enjoy the outdoor and birdwatch whenever possible.

I will Seek the Lost and I will Bring Back the Strayed

1 April • Saturday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Ezekiel 34:11-16

¹¹ “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

Meditation

The emphasis that the Lord God himself will seek the lost and bring back the strayed is unmistakable in today’s reading. In the translation above, ‘I’ was used 14 times for this purpose. Three times ‘I myself’ was used. Against the disappointing backdrop of unfaithful and unscrupulous shepherds, the Lord God himself will personally see to it what a good shepherd must and will do for his sheep. As for the abusive shepherds and their sheep, they will be brought to justice.

During Lent, we are reminded again of how the Lord God ultimately fulfilled his promise through our Saviour and Lord Jesus, the good and great Shepherd of God's sheep. In keeping with God's promise, the Lord Jesus publicly declared his mission through the words of the prophet Isaiah at the inauguration of his earthly ministry.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

He accomplished his mission as the redeeming Shepherd who came to seek and save those who are lost.

Today, we live in a chaotic world full of unscrupulous 'shepherds' in what can be described as 'a day of clouds and thick darkness' as in Ezekiel's day. Even so, let us take heart that our Lord Jesus was, is, and continues to be our good and great Shepherd through all history and into eternity. And he calls us to participate in his mission to be good undershepherds.

Prayer

Dear God,
Thank You for personally securing our salvation through Your Son, our Saviour and Lord Jesus. Even as You save, You also secure and provide for every one of Your sheep. We worship You in deep gratitude. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Action

Read the text again, slowly.

Let the action words that describe what God himself will do deeply minister to you.

Live securely and confidently in the great salvation God himself has secured for you in Christ Jesus, and bear witness to it as God's sheep.

*Rev Dr Jimmy Tan
Lecturer, Chaplain
Trinity Theological College*

Your King is Coming to you, Humble, and Mounted on a Donkey

2 April • Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday)

Matthew 21:1-11

¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

⁵ “Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” ¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” ¹¹ And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Meditation

Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem in a triumphal entry, but Jesus chose to sit on a donkey, not a horse or a carriage. Jesus wanted to show the people that this is how God condescended to become not just a man, but the lowliest of

all men. To sit on a donkey was a sign that Jesus was first and foremost the Servant of God.

A servant does the will of His Master and Jesus came to do the will of God. It was God's will to save the world, not just from poverty, disease or shame but from sin, the pride of rebellion against God which was first displayed by Adam and Eve, the apex of God's creation. So great was this sin, that nothing less than humility to be displayed by riding on a donkey would suffice. More was to come, the open death on a cross, the symbol of utmost rejection at that time. But first Jesus would show this humility in Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish worship to God. The people of Abraham need to become the people of God through Jesus, not just through Abraham their ancestor who had turned to worship a single God, rather than the multiple gods of his time. Great though that act of faith, Jesus as a descendant of Abraham, was greater than Abraham and Jesus is to be worshipped, not Abraham.

Pride is the greatest sin against God and only humility can destroy pride. Jesus demonstrated this humility in his entry on a donkey with Matthew quoting Isaiah 62:11. We are humble when we appreciate who God is and Jesus never forgot the greatness of God the Father, the second person of the Trinity. Let us never forget how great God is and how great God's love is for each one of us, and for all God's creation which God redeemed through His Son Jesus.

Prayer

Father God, we desire to repent of the pride which rises in us time and time again such that we do not recognise how humble Jesus was on earth. We thank You for the example Jesus set by entering Jerusalem on a donkey, an animal of

burden, not of outward strength but of the inner capacity to bear all burdens.

May we seek to be a donkey for Jesus, so that Jesus can ride in triumph through us through the streets we live and work in. May our neighbours and others see Jesus as the true King of the earth, through the victory of Jesus on the cross over all sin.

May we be humble to be a donkey for Jesus, openly as Jesus, who rode through the streets of Jerusalem on a donkey. May we rejoice in being called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord (Isaiah 62:12).

Action

Are there little things in our life where we can put Jesus first and ourselves last? Let us not seek to do great things for God, but little things which make God great. Start with your home, your neighbourhood, your workplace and your relatives. Jesus came to magnify us by riding on a donkey.

*Dr Lee Soo Ann
President
The Bible Society of Singapore*

Let him Give his Cheek to the One Who Strikes

3 April • Monday of Holy Week

Lamentations 3:22-66

²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.
²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
²⁷ It is good for a man that he bear
the yoke in his youth.

²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence
when it is laid on him;
²⁹ let him put his mouth in the dust—
there may yet be hope;
³⁰ let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,
and let him be filled with insults.

³¹ For the Lord will not
cast off forever,
³² but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
³³ for he does not afflict from his heart
or grieve the children of men.

³⁴ To crush underfoot

all the prisoners of the earth,
35 to deny a man justice
in the presence of the Most High,
36 to subvert a man in his lawsuit,
the Lord does not approve.

37 Who has spoken and it came to pass,
unless the Lord has commanded it?
38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
that good and bad come?
39 Why should a living man complain,
a man, about the punishment of his sins?

40 Let us test and examine our ways,
and return to the LORD!
41 Let us lift up our hearts and hands
to God in heaven:
42 "We have transgressed and rebelled,
and you have not forgiven.

43 "You have wrapped yourself with anger and pursued us,
killing without pity;
44 you have wrapped yourself with a cloud
so that no prayer can pass through.
45 You have made us scum and garbage
among the peoples.

46 "All our enemies
open their mouths against us;
47 panic and pitfall have come upon us,
devastation and destruction;
48 my eyes flow with rivers of tears
because of the destruction of the daughter of my
people.

49 "My eyes will flow without ceasing,
without respite,
50 until the LORD from heaven
looks down and sees;
51 my eyes cause me grief
at the fate of all the daughters of my city.

52 "I have been hunted like a bird

by those who were my enemies without cause;
53 they flung me alive into the pit
and cast stones on me;
54 water closed over my head;
I said, 'I am lost.'

55 "I called on your name, O LORD,
from the depths of the pit;
56 you heard my plea, 'Do not close
your ear to my cry for help!'
57 You came near when I called on you;
you said, 'Do not fear!'

58 "You have taken up my cause, O Lord;
you have redeemed my life.
59 You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD;
judge my cause.
60 You have seen all their vengeance,
all their plots against me.

61 "You have heard their taunts, O LORD,
all their plots against me.
62 The lips and thoughts of my assailants
are against me all the day long.
63 Behold their sitting and their rising;
I am the object of their taunts.

64 "You will repay them, O LORD,
according to the work of their hands.
65 You will give them dullness of heart;
your curse will be on them.
66 You will pursue them in anger and destroy them
from under your heavens, O LORD."

Meditation

Many know these famous verses: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (vv.22-23)

God's love is steadfast. It is covenant love. The committed love we imitate in Christian marriage. Our God will never

forsake us. He will not condemn or abandon us.

Knowing this, the author interprets his present suffering as God's loving discipline. The state of Jerusalem is in ruins, but it is ruined because of the people's own sin. Disobedience and rebellion have caused the devastation of the church—it is punishment from God (v.39).

How should we receive suffering from God who loves us? We bear it. We sit in silence. We allow Him to do His painful work in our lives and our church (vv.27-29).

“We give our cheek to the one who strikes us” (v.30).

In the end, we need to know that all His discipline is but a moment. Suffering lasts only a little while. God will not cast us off. All the pain He causes is tempered by His compassion. As strange as it sounds, God does not afflict us willingly (vv.31-33).

The desired outcome is repentance (vv.40-41). Turning back to God, with the knowledge that He has done this for our sake, even for our good.

Hardship is not wasted when we know it comes from the merciful God of steadfast love.

Prayer

Father in heaven, I know You love me. In all my affliction, let me sit in silence. Teach me to bear the yoke of Your discipline. I trust that despite my suffering, Your steadfast love for me never ceases. Amen.

Action

Brother, sister, if you are in a state of ruin because of your sin —now is the time to contemplate your ways. Turn back to the Lord in repentance and faith. His love will never fail you.

*Rev Dr Dev Menon
Pastor
Zion Bishan Bible-Presbyterian Church*

The Word of the Cross is...to us Who are being Saved...the Power of God

4 April • Tuesday of Holy Week

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Meditation

It is not easy for anyone, especially Singaporeans, who have been brought up and influenced by what is broadly described as meritocracy. In a meritocratic society, we place high premium and offer rich rewards to those who are considered the best educated and most competent. We look up to people who are smart and successful. We assume that the one who has done well academically, and who exhibits intelligence is the one who is wise and should be admired.

But that is not the first criteria we look for in our faith community. When we look at the Christian faith and how this faith has impacted our relationship with God, apart from introducing us to a deeper understanding of the salvific plan of God, it is clear that one does not have to be an intellectually brilliant or worldly wise to appreciate the gospel of Jesus Christ. One does not have to depend on nor does one have to demand signs and wonders to know God. Those who are worldly wise and have the best qualifications in the world may not be the ones who really know God or understand the ways of God.

Pointing to the Christian population in Corinth, Paul reminded the Christians in that city that not many of them became Christians because they were wise, powerful or from a noble family. They were mainly ordinary people who heard the gospel, repented of their sins and responded to the Good News of Christ crucified. If they were to follow worldly standards of wisdom and power, they might have rejected the story of the cross, which some have seen as a stumbling block and a folly. By worldly standard, the death of someone on the cross is scandalous! Crucifixion is nothing glamorous. It had been associated with folly and failure! Under ordinary circumstances, it would be foolish for anyone to follow those who preach the message of Jesus who was crucified.

Yet there were people who accepted the message of Christ crucified. It was those people who went against worldly wisdom to turn to God who made fools of those considered by the world to be wise. From the perspective of scriptural teaching, those who accepted the gospel of Christ crucified, were the ones who were truly wise.

May we not misunderstand, the message of Paul is not an anti-intellectual edict. Paul is not dismissing the place of the worldly wise and their contribution to the spiritual well-being of the faith community. Paul was not underplaying the need for the church to have such wise persons engaged in providing pastoral leadership and defending the Christian faith. Look at Paul himself. He was a very well-educated person with a formidable mind. From the letters he wrote to various groups of Christians, it is clear that he was an extremely wise man.

What Paul was targeting are those who might have thought too highly of themselves and who might have assumed that they were smarter or more powerful than God.

If anyone wants to be wise, do not depend exclusively on the worldly measurement of wisdom. Focus primarily on the teaching of Christ who died on the cross to reveal the depth of God's salvation message for those who would hear and believe. Thankfully, we do not have to be the smartest and the most brilliant to recognise Christ's work of salvation and accept the gospel.

Prayer

Most holy and wise God, thank You for Your gift of salvation made possible by the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. Help us not to forget the agony and taunting that our Lord had to

endure as He offered Himself as the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Forgive us if we have failed to contemplate on Your great love for us. Forgive us if we have tried to avoid the message of the cross. Instead of shying away from the pain of the cross, help us to rededicate ourselves to preach Jesus Christ who is our crucified and resurrected Lord and Saviour, amen.

Action

Borrow or buy a copy of John Stott's book, *The Cross of Christ*. Read it for personal benefit and if you belong to a small group, use it as a text for group study.

*Rev Dr Daniel Koh Kah Soon
Pastor, Barker Road Methodist Church overseeing
the works of Outreach and Social Concerns,
and the Oasis BRMC Mission @ Bukit Batok.*

One of you will Betray Me

5 April • Wednesday of Holy Week

John 13:21-32

²¹ After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.”

Meditation

What a tragic moment. Offered a morsel of bread (perhaps a last redeeming offer of grace from Jesus, as some commentators suggest, for Judas to reject the path of betrayal he had trod down), Judas accepted it while sin continued in his heart, and allowed Satan to enter him. Leaving the presence of Jesus and the disciples immediately thereafter, John adds starkly that it was night, heightening the sense of darkness. Judas had followed Jesus for three

years, witnessed His miracles, heard His teachings, experienced His love as Jesus washed his feet and yet chose to betray Jesus.

None of us are immune to betraying Jesus (in whatever form that might take), for we remember Peter, the other disciple mentioned in today's passage, with all his bravado later that evening declaring that he will never forsake Jesus. But he would ultimately also reject Jesus three times that very night.

In His grace, Jesus offers us morsels of moments when we too are confronted with the sin cherished in our hearts. What do we do in these dark moments? Do we forsake sin and embrace light, or do we betray Jesus and allow darkness to reign?

Prayer

Let us pray using the words in the first stanza of Charles Wesley's hymn, "I want a Principle Within".

I want a principle within
of watchful, godly fear,
a sensibility of sin,
a pain to feel it near.
I want the first approach to feel
of pride or wrong desire,
to catch the wandering of my will,
and quench the kindling fire.

In the loving and redeeming name of Jesus, amen.

Action

Today, in the quiet moments of our heart, let us consider how we might have cherished sin and betrayed Jesus in our lives. Let us repent and return to Christ.

*Rev Benjamin Lee
Pastor-in-Charge
Toa Payoh Methodist Church*

When I See the Blood. I will Pass Over you

6 April • Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14

¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴ And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbour shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.

¹¹ In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover. ¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴ “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.

Meditation

Miah Cerrillo, an 11-year-old in fourth grade who survived the school shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, USA said she covered herself in another student’s blood to trick the shooter into thinking she was already dead. The evil teenage shooter passed over her as he saw the blood. The Passover story however is the opposite, the angel of the LORD

passed over the households of believers who have the sign of blood at the doorposts.

As God is holy, His law always accuses. The soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:20). As everyone sins, and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), so everyone deserves death, eternal separation from God. The gospel promise proclaimed that for those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb of God, the Saviour Jesus Christ, God's wrath will pass over them. For without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22).

According to the Lutheran Confessions, the chief purpose of the church is to proclaim this gospel of forgiveness of sins in Word and Sacraments. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered (Augsburg Confession Article VII).

As we also similarly confess in the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of the saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

“I want to be and remain in the church and little flock of the fainthearted, the feeble and the ailing, who feel and recognize the wretchedness of their sins, who sigh and cry to God incessantly for comfort and help, who believe in the forgiveness of sins.

— Martin Luther, LW 22:55.

Prayer

Dear Lord, indeed I deserve eternal death because of my sins. I thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ to die and shed His blood for me, so that Your judgement can pass over me.

Action

As you participate in the next Holy Communion, remember that the Lord has forgiven your sins because of Christ's shed his blood for you, the judgement of God passed over you and you can have eternal life. Share this good news with others too.

*Rev Martin Yee
Assistant to Bishop Lu Guan Hoe
Lutheran Church in Singapore*

We have Confidence to Enter the Holy Places by the Blood of Jesus

7 April • Good Friday

Hebrews 10:16-25

¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,”

¹⁷ then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Meditation

About two thousand years ago, Jesus was tortured to death in one of the most painful forms of execution devised. It

gives us today the word “excruciating”—from the Latin ‘out of the cross’.

But Jesus’ great sacrifice opened a new and living way to God. The effect of that sacrifice is we no longer have to offer animal sacrifices for sin in accordance with the written law of the Torah. God has forgiven us and drawn us into a new covenant with Him, one in which God’s laws are now placed in our hearts and written in our minds. Hebrews 10:16 quotes Jeremiah 31:33, which says, “And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” We are God’s new people, created through faith in Jesus.

As God’s people, we offer ourselves in worship. This is a new form of worship: a worship of true hearts drawn close to God, in full assurance of the faith that Jesus’ sacrifice is once and for all, of people baptised with water and cleaned of any evil or guilty conscience that cannot be forgiven.

This new worship is not just done in private. It must be done in community, even publicly. Which is why we are called to stir one another to love and good works, and not to neglect meeting together. We need the support and encouragement of other Christians.

So as you read this, please think about how you, as one of God’s people offering worship, can stir and encourage someone else to love and good works. This is not as daunting a task as one might think, because ours is a confession of hope in a God who is faithful to us, a God who keeps His promises to us.

What promises can you make to Him?

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank You for the sacrifice of Jesus. We ask You to make us more and more like Jesus, that everyone may see we are Your new people in Christ.

Action

Encourage and stir someone to love and good works.

*Rev Dr Chiang Ming Shun
Associate Dean and Lecturer in Church History
Trinity Theological College*

And After my Skin has been thus Destroyed Yet in my Flesh I Shall See God

8 April • Holy Saturday

Job 19:21-27

- ²¹ Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!
- ²² Why do you, like God, pursue me?
Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?
- ²³ “Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
- ²⁴ Oh that with an iron pen and lead
they were engraved in the rock forever!
- ²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
- ²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,
- ²⁷ whom I shall see for myself,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me!

Meditation

Many friends who pay attention to market trends share their nightmare when facing the economic crisis: there is only the worst! However, is the dilemma faced by individuals, families or companies the most desperate situation of life?

Job lost his property and possessions overnight, his family was destroyed, his family deserted, and he became seriously

ill (Job 1–2). Job’s breath became strange to his wife (Job 19:17), and even young children despised him (Job 19:18a). In addition, his former close friends and confidantes turned against him (Job 19:13-14). For many people, what could be worse than such a predicament?

Job, who suffered a lot, made us realise the deeper hope in suffering. Job didn’t expect the situation to improve, but faced the three friends who misunderstood and blamed him (v.21), and the God who was misinterpreted in their mouths—the One who attacked and persecuted Job with His hands and was not satisfied with his flesh (v.22).

What people need to do in pain is to accept the fact of suffering and admit their present vulnerability.

Job faced the unjust accusations and grievances and bravely recorded them down—“Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever!” (v.23-24). This action illustrated his steadfast faith in the righteous God who will eventually vindicate and rehabilitate him (Job 19:28-29).

In the face of injustice and persecution, people should stand by God’s side, do the right thing according to justice, and truly respond to the accusations of distortion and error. In the end, He will vindicate you.

At the end of his life: when his skin had been destroyed and heart weak within him (v.26-27), Job still firmly believed in three things: first, his redeemer lives (v.25); second, after his death (outside the flesh) he shall see God (v.26); third, he will

see the Lord with his own eyes and enjoy close fellowship with the Lord (v.27).

When people come to the end of the road, they have the opportunity to experience the deepest lesson of faith—the hope of coming back from the dead and the new vitality of uniting with the Lord.

This kind of faith from death to life is what Jesus' disciples witnessed: I believed, and so I spoke, we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence (2 Corinthians 4:13b-14).

Prayer

Loving and righteous Lord, I am willing to admit my vulnerability in hardship, obey the Holy Spirit, and bravely state my grievances. I trust our heavenly Father, and experience the peace and joy of uniting with the Son Jesus Christ.

Action

My hardship is ... the injustice that I want to state before the Lord is ... My acceptance of the Lord's promise is ... (suggestion: I can also pray for the suffering believers.)

*Rev Dr Clement Chia
Principal
Singapore Bible College*

(Source: Translated from Chinese Lenten Devotions 2023)

Do not be Afraid; Go and Tell

9 April • The Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10

¹ Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

Meditation

Resurrection denotes restoration to existence or life. The resurrection of Jesus rings HOPE for mankind. The chains that held Him dead were broken. Perhaps you have been experiencing a certain type of death. It could be a long trial, a death of dreams, a sense of obscurity or an oppression of some sort. Covid-19 have further tarnished vision, banished plans, and ravished scarce resources.

Reflecting on this passage of Jesus' resurrection, consider three active movements:

Move and Look for. The two Mary's "went to see the tomb." Perhaps others might have discouraged them with, "what is there to see? An immovable rock? Don't waste your time and energy!" Grief, a sense of loss and despondency, may immobilise us and "lock us" in a spot. We need to MOVE—move out of our passive, discouraged, or lifeless state. Don't stay stuck where you are, or surely that very place will become your tomb.

See and Worship. As a result, the two women saw with their own eyes—an angel, an empty tomb, and Jesus Himself! What a reward! What they saw brought them both fear and joy! It also brought them to their knees in worship. They were not just mesmerised by the happenings; they were awed by the resurrected One.

Go and Tell. Joy did not keep the women stationary and silent. Fueled by the mixed emotions of fear and joy, they ran to tell His disciples. It looks like a changing out of grave clothes to a re-clothing for a purpose. Death is defeated. Life has triumphed. Destiny has changed.

Friends, move, seek the One who IS the resurrection and the life! Worship Him in awe! This Easter, may you experience a "resurrection" of God-given dreams, hope, sense of purpose, joy, and abundant life. Go and tell someone—Jesus is alive!

Prayer

Lord, I may be weak, but You are strong. Just like the two women, give me strength to seek for You even in my current state. Help me with my lack of love, tenacity, and desire for You. Teach me to seek You wholeheartedly today and everyday! I want to break free from my state of "death" and experience You as resurrection and life. Allow me to behold

You with a fresh vision and worship You with renewed passion. In the name of the resurrected Saviour, amen.

Action

Move and Look for: decide to move out of your current state, and look for or seek God—His heart, His plans, His word, His ways.

See and Worship: decide to worship Him everyday—in song or declaration of His Word.

Go and Tell: Pray that the power of the resurrected Christ be upon you—go and tell someone about Jesus.

*Rev Dominic Yeo
Lead Pastor, Trinity Christian Centre
General Superintendent, Assemblies of God of Singapore*

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"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." **JOHN 1:14 (ESV)**



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