

In Our Own Words



Christ Lutheran Church
Route 27 & Davis Mill Road (2.5 miles north of Rt. 355)
Germantown, MD

Lenten Devotional Booklet

2015

In Our Own Words

is an annual devotional booklet
for the Lenten Season
written by
The Members of
Christ Lutheran Church
Germantown, Maryland

We pray that as you share this devotional
you will be blessed,
and drawn nearer to
Our Lord Jesus Christ.



The American Association
of Lutheran Churches

Lent 2015

Dear Saints and Fellow Witnesses!

We, as the congregation of Christ Lutheran Church, begin another Lenten journey with faithful believers throughout the world. We share with you again this year our Lenten devotional “In Our Own Words”. I encourage you to “find time” in your daily schedule for practicing a Lenten discipline that can include fasting, prayer, worship and daily meditation through the use of this devotional, as we strive to be Worthy Witnesses to the World.

Through the weeks of Lent we will be reading through St. John’s Gospel. John does not give a synopsis of Jesus life. That is not his intent. All that John writes goes to support his purpose stated in Chapter 20 verse 31. “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John’s is the “theological” Gospel, much as Paul’s letter to the Romans is his theological epistle. That is to say they try to explain as clearly and completely as possible who God is and what he has done for us in Jesus Christ.

The Lenten journey is indeed Holy as we follow our Savior from Ash Wednesday, through his suffering for us, to his Easter triumph of the empty tomb. The devotional is a reflection, in our “own voices”, of the impact of the Scripture and the Holy Spirit upon each of us in our own unique place in life. Insights of these devotions come at a time when our church, our community, our nation and our world is facing great conflicts. Behind it all is a real spiritual battle where Satan seeks to separate as many people from Christ as he can. We are soldiers in that battle as we witness to the grace God has displayed in our lives. Through our joy’s, sadness’s, health problems and other travail’s in faith we praise our God for his steadfast love and for providing us redemption though Jesus Christ our Savior.

Our prayer this Lenten season is that the power of the Holy Spirit continues to spread through Christ Lutheran as we prepare to celebrate Easter.

Pastor Irvin F. Stapf, Jr.

Ash Wednesday, February 18

John 1:1-18

If one had to pick one paragraph (as opposed to one verse) to summarize the entire Bible, the first paragraph of the Gospel According to John would be a leading candidate: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." a valiant but inadequate attempt to describe our Lord God. First off, things get confusing when you try to speak about the word Word. It's OK in print, but we don't talk with capitals and quotation marks.

Second, the Greek is considerably better. The word is "logos", from which we get "logo". A logo is very important to the entity that owns it. It should symbolize as much as possible about the owner. In fact, many logos incorporate features you aren't even conscious of, although they influence your mind. But "logo" would not be good, as it makes us think of an emblem, and Jesus is infinitely more than a representation.

Some believe "Word" implies God spoke to accomplish creation. I don't think God even had to speak; "wish" or "thought" might be a better understanding. Also the instances in the Bible where God speaks it is thunder (or worse), and John is talking creation, not destruction.

Thirdly, the seemingly insignificant word "was" is actually crucial. In the Greek the tense used signifies ongoing. Jesus was there before creation, during, and after.

But the question was, "What does this mean to me?" That's easy - Everything! If Jesus/God created and continues to supervise everything in the universe, it would surely benefit me to pay attention to Him once in a while. If I owe my life to Him, maybe I should thank Him occasionally. If there is a choice between darkness and light and He is light, maybe I should consciously choose Him. And if He is the only man to have seen God (and survived) maybe He is the man I should talk to.

I am out of space. The other verses are good, too. Read them.

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us your Son Jesus, by Whom I can be brought into knowledge of You. Help me as I pursue that knowledge, so that at the last I may be with You. Amen.

Art Delagrange

Thursday, February 19

John 1:19-34

It appears to me that Jesus is taking over from John. Kind of like a new pitcher relieving a tired pitcher in a baseball game. However John says of Jesus, "....he was before me" vs 30. This is the first week of Jesus' ministry and like a football quarterback is going to assign his disciples. John tells the Priests and Levites that he is not the Christ and that he Baptizes with water. Baptizing with water is mentioned several times. John has trouble convincing those questioning him that, "I am not the Christ." Vs 20. And he goes on to say, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." vs 23.

John gives a good testimony for Jesus, "I saw the spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him." Vs 32. It would have been a different situation if John had claimed to be Christ. Thank God he didn't.

Thank God Christ was and is a man/God of action. Amen.

Bill Allen

Friday, February 20

John 1:35-51

I chose verses; John 45-46

Moses and the prophets wrote for years the coming of Jesus from Nazareth, son of Joseph. Many did not believe God's words or promises. Then and like today many people live and exist without faith and trust that the words of God are purely for our redemption and for guidance on a daily basis.

Can any good come out of Nazareth????

The answer is most evident to us, Christ was born lived and died for us. This question always let you know you cannot judge a book by its cover, or assume who and what a person is gifted with from birth to the time we go back to God.

My parents like their parents and their parents passed on the love for God and his son Jesus to us. They would say love the Lord with all your heart because he first loved you, he sent his son to die for us.

Lord, I am grateful that I was raised to Love God and Jesus. Amen.

Carol Bartels

Saturday, February 21

John 2:1-11

The occasion, a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The first miracle, Jesus turning water into wine or as John calls it "the beginning of signs".

Mary, Jesus, and His disciples attended the wedding, during which Mary found there was no more wine. Seeing that this might be an embarrassment for the bridegroom, Mary brings it to the attention of Jesus. I think Mary tells Jesus because she knows of the miracle of his birth and his destiny to do good things. But Jesus replies, "Woman why are you saying this to me? My time has not yet come." To me it means that Jesus was not comfortable revealing Himself as the promised Messiah, waiting for his true Father to instruct him when the right time had come.

Although Mary does not beg Jesus, he gives instructions to the servants. The servants do as they are told, filling the water pots with water and then giving it to the master of the feast. At this time, only the servants know that Jesus was the one who turned the water into wine.

Dear Lord, every day I try to be a faithful servant. To not ask why but to trust, believe and have faith in the instructions you have provided for my life. Thank You, Lord. Amen.

Deborah Catherine

Monday, February 23

John 2:12-25

Jesus Clears the Temple

In our readings in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, it becomes a real blessing when a family is following the rules that God provided for sin offerings and what to do at the altar to accomplish forgiveness in the sight of everyone. It all seemed very ornate and complicated. In Leviticus 1: 14 the Lord is teaching about an offering made on the altar of a dove and then at the end He says, “ it is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. “

In Deuteronomy 14: 22 God talks about tithes in their produce that they grew their selves. He says to eat it where and when He tells them at His dwelling, so that they may learn to revere the Lord God always.

In our scripture today, we see what seems to be a wild and crazy act of disrupting the money changers and upturning many of their tables. Jesus was well aware of all of God’s requests and ordinances given to the Jews for their well-being. He was there with His Father and was a part of His very being. Jesus knew very well the importance of the temple and His Father’s desire to keep it clean, Holy, and in proper order. When Jesus arrived at the temple and saw how it was being disused, He decided to make an example of this indiscretion and to have all the people rekindle their love and honor for the Lord’s temple. Psalm 69: 9 states that zeal for your house consumes me and the insults of those, who insult God, will fall on me. Jesus, of course, had that zeal and throughout His life He always took any insults upon Himself, for that’s the way He is and what He does.

Lord we need to be ever mindful of you and your house and always keep a proper love and zeal for your temple and its use. Amen.

Bruce Gladhill

Tuesday, February 24

John 3:1-21

Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus contains one of the most recognized passages in the Bible that expresses in a few words what Christians believe and the main reason why God sent His Son to die for us. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night (so he would not be seen) because he was wondering about the miracles that were being done, but Jesus told him something more important—unless one is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Jesus was not talking about the birth of our physical bodies; He was talking about our spirits. Nicodemus, the Pharisee and Leader of the Jews, did not understand what Jesus was telling him. That was because he had not been born again. He thought he was OK with God, but Jesus was telling him something more had to be done. Nicodemus was wise enough to ask Jesus questions because he really wanted to learn and understand. Like Nicodemus, we need to listen to what Jesus tells us and have faith in Him.

To believe in Jesus Christ is to be “born again” and receive eternal life—the need of every person on earth. Although being born again is a spiritual event, it happens here on earth. God accepts everyone who believes in his Son, Jesus. When we believe in Jesus, we will be saved. Death has no hold on us—we have life in Him and our life will never end.

Lord, thank you for blessing me and my days. Help me to be grateful for every blessing, whether large or small, never taking any of them for granted. Thank you most of all for loving me. Amen.

Connie German

Wednesday, February 25

John 3:22-35

When we look at the stained glass windows in churches, we might feel that Jesus' ministry was straightforward, excepting the Cross. It wasn't. At this point in the Gospel John has already met Jesus, baptized Him, and seen the heavens open. This was the moment he had dedicated his life to - the confirmation of the Messiah.

It should have been easy from this point, but no. First John's disciples come to him upset. Competition! Jesus is baptizing, too! Who should we go with? Just as John preceded Jesus, so his followers preceded Jesus', with silly questions. Whom should you follow? Both! I have said from the beginning I was only preparing the way for He Who is much greater than I. John's speech deferring to Jesus is marvelous; in fact, much of it will be repeated later by Jesus.

Jesus asks that we follow Him, which means not only accepting Him but living like He did. What a job! That's difficult, if not impossible.

But John the Baptist did, even to his death. Maybe if I can't be like Jesus, at least I could be like John??? But, no. John was too much like Jesus. Reject the ways of the world? I'm not big on camels' hair shirts. But I am encouraged that even John had doubts. Later he sends his disciples to ask Jesus if He was really The One.

What does this mean to me? I occasionally have a problem with humility. I find that when I accomplish something, I like to take credit for it. And when I fail? Obviously that was due to inadequate support from God! But look at John! He had a huge following. He got press just from the outfits he wore! He could have led a rebellion. Yet he spoke entirely of One yet to come, and when he saw Him, he turned all his accomplishments over to Him.

Maybe that's what I should do, too: turn all the management over to Him. I'm sure I could keep busy just doing His work.

Lord, take the wheel. You can do better. We might end up at a different place, but that's probably good, too. Just help me be a good passenger and not complain too much. Amen.

Art Delagrange

Thursday, February 26

John 4:1-26

"I, who speak to you, am He." A revelation. An unveiling. An identifying of himself. What must it have been like for the woman at the well to talk to Jesus? Listening to the astonishing things that He was saying. He was making claims about Himself that were too difficult to comprehend. But then He opens the door for complete comprehension, "I am He." He doesn't want to hide who He is. He doesn't want the Samaritan woman to continue to wonder about the meaning of what He is saying. He wants her to know Him. He wants her to understand who He is and why He was sent. He wants her to know what He has to offer her.... a new life and living water.

I've always imagined what it would have been like to talk to Jesus. So many times in the Bible, Jesus talked with and interacted with a variety of people. Sometimes He was accepted and other times, He wasn't. However, I've always thought, as I read through the various encounters, that each of the people who interacted with Jesus had to be different in some way after the encounter. I can't imagine that someone could talk with Jesus and be exactly the same when they walk away. My musings always take me to Jesus' eyes. It is said that "the eyes are the window to the soul". I think in Jesus' case, His eyes look deep into our souls. But I also think that they had to be filled with kindness and compassion, and a longing for those He spoke with to understand and want to know Him in a deeper, closer, more personal way.

Jesus talked with the Samaritan woman and offered her a wonderful gift. He offers us that same gift. He wants us to know ...Him to grow closer and more deeply in love with Him... and to draw strength from Him for all parts of our lives.

Dear Lord, Thank you for wanting to know us and for sharing Yourself with us. Help us to seek You more fully each day and ever draw closer to You. Amen.

Becky Stapf

Friday, February 27

John 4:27-42

Verse 38: “...Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

In reading and pondering this particular part of Verse 38, I am totally overwhelmed with all the people that have done such hard work so that I might have the opportunity to have my very soul saved. Of course, I have to start with God and His plan for my salvation. I think of the very life of Jesus and the trials, tribulations, and death that He endured for me. But then in my lifetime, I come to my parents who loved me and took me to be baptized and then raised me in a Christian home filled with love, forgiveness, and discipline to grow into my personal Christianity. I love that they prayed for me when I was too busy (albeit stupid) to pray for myself. Then in my life there were many family members and role models that taught me and showed me how a Christian should live and love.

Yep, they surely did the hard work and I am reaping and more importantly will reap all the benefits of their labor. But as such, now as an adult, I have to do my share of the hard work for others that may see me as a role model and a worker for God. Remembering that good works do not earn my salvation – there is nothing that I could ever do that would be a pennies worth of repayment for what Jesus did for me. But as His child, I have an awesome responsibility to try my very best to “play it forward.”

Dear Heavenly Father, As the words in the refrain of Great is Thy Faithfulness, let me always remember that “Morning by morning new mercies I see; all I have needed thy hand hath provided; great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.” Thank you! Amen.

Jeane Flesch

Saturday, February 28

John 4:43-54

Two words stand out to me in this scripture passage. The first word is life. The official asked Jesus to come heal his son. Jesus responded, your son will live. I thought it interesting that he didn't say he will be healed. That's what we want Jesus to do all the time. Heal this or heal that, but Jesus always wants more for us. He wants us to live the abundant life (John 10:10).

The second word that stood out was believe. In today's world I'm not in favor of this word as it stands alone. People will say, Just Believe, but believe in what? This man believed the word Jesus spoke and then his whole household believed in who Jesus really was. Why, because the man went back and shared everything about the event with his family. So, our God is so magnificent, he healed the son and gave the whole family life in Him.

We don't Just Believe, we believe in the one true God who loves us, forgives us, heals us, teaches us His ways, and died in our place. How great is that?!

Heavenly Father, give us a clearer understanding into your word and thank you for the abundant life you have given us. Amen.

Jan Gladhill

Monday, March 2

John 5:1-15

The Healing at the Pool

I am so alone. What has awoken me? Raising my head, I look around. I don't see anyone. I don't hear anyone. But something has awoken me. Wait, people are walking around. Has someone stirred the pool? Oh, mercy, mercy me.

I am an invalid. I have been one for thirty-eight years. No one has ever been here after the angel stirs the water, to help me in to the pool to be healed.

Wait, I can see someone coming. A man walks up to me. I tell him I have been here a long time.

Jesus asks me, "Do you want to get well?"

"Sir", I replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

Jesus tells me, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

At once, I was cured. I picked up my mat and walked. I can't believe it! I am healed!

Later I am in the temple, and I see the man that healed me.

"See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

I found out it was Jesus who healed me. But who is this man, Jesus?

Do you know this man, Jesus? Do you know him as your Savior and Lord? Do you depend upon his story in the Bible, to show you how to live each day?

Father: In this Lenten season, help us to open our hearts and minds to who Jesus is. Help us to know him as Your Son. Help us to realize the love You have for us, for you sacrificed your Son for our sins. Give us a repentant heart, Father. We pray in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Audrey Stapf

Tuesday, March 3

John 5:16-47

I chose verses; John 16-17; 41

The Jews sought to harass Jesus for working on the Sabbath. "Jesus replied my Father is always working, so am I".

The Jews' ulterior motive was to kill Jesus; they could not frighten or control him. They could not touch the love that Jesus had for the Father and gave that love to everyone at any time or any place.

The Jews did then, like many today would rather favor someone because they may be popular and say what they want to hear and believe. Jesus did not need anyone's approval or praise.

He expressed his love for God and how God loves us

Our love, smiles, and hugs for one another are always magical to me, God Bless. Amen.

Carol Bartels

Wednesday, March 4

John 6:1-21

Good Old Andrew!

Great crowds followed Jesus. On this day they were gathered on a mountain side. Jesus brought the problem to Philip about how they were to feed this large crowd. Philip did his mental calculations saying it would take a year's wages. "We simply can't do it, Lord." But then there was Andrew. He didn't know how they could feed them either, but he made the attempt. "Here is a boy with five small loaves and two fish." Andrew took what they had and put it into Jesus' hands. That is all that was required.

There was a time when Israel also had a problem with too little bread. On the journey out of Egypt the people got hungry and cried out to Moses to do something. That is when they received the manna in the desert. Moses later reminds them of that time saying, God "humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."(Deuteronomy 8:3) Of course bread is necessary. God knew that, and provided it, but that was not the central truth people needed.

We don't know a lot about Andrew, but he was a man who was willing to look beyond the immediate need to the One who has the power to satisfy all needs. He didn't know what the Lord would do, or if he would do anything, but he was willing to give all they had to Jesus, and trusted Him to do what was right.

That is our lesson for life. Whether we are faced with the need for food, a storm at sea, or any of our other cares in this life, we put it all into Jesus' hands and trust Him to do what is best.

Gracious Lord Jesus, these are our needs for this day I really don't have much that can meet those needs, but do take what I have, even the smallness of my faith, and multiply it by Your grace to meet those needs. I love and trust You Lord, and want all things to show forth Your glory. I pray in Your precious name. Amen.

Pastor Stapf

Thursday, March 5

John 6:22-51

John 6: 21-51 is a continuation of the events centered around the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on water. Those fed by Jesus believed in Him. Who wouldn't, since he gave them food which would normally have required $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ of a day's labor? Jesus went across the "lake" (Sea of Galilee) during night. In the morning, once the crowd realized that both Jesus and his disciples were gone, they followed him to Capernaum in some boat that had come from Tiberius. Once the crowd found Jesus, his work began. The crowd was full of questions, the essence of which was "what must we do to do the works God requires?" The people were hung up on physical requirements. In earlier times, God gave the Israelites bread in the desert. Jesus told the people "Do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

The people had a problem believing what Jesus said regarding being God's Son.

I am looking out over the Indian River in Florida. It is one plus miles wide here. I would guess that the disciples were rather fit to be able to row across the Sea of Galilee—a distance in excess of $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles—in rough water. I am constantly in awe at the events depicted in the Scriptures. What wimps we are!

I believe a few quotes from Jesus lifted from this passage sum up the meaning not only for the crowd that was following Jesus, but for us.

The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Jesus offers many more "truths" throughout not only this passage but the New Testament.

Lord, grant us the patience and the intelligence to believe in you and your son, Jesus. Teach us daily to follow your "truths". Amen

Glenn Shriver

Friday, March 6

John 6:52-70

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst." Jesus was talking about spiritual sustenance, but the people following him did not understand this. Many of them got annoyed with Him and left. However, when Jesus asked the Twelve he had chosen if they were staying, Simon replied that they were. All but one (the one who would later betray Him) knew He was the Son of God.

We must eat His flesh (bread) and drink His blood (wine) to be filled and have eternal life. We do this by believing in Jesus and obeying Him. Physical bread does two things. First, it satisfies us by taking away hunger. Second, it gives us life in the sense that we eat and live, rather than starve and die. Jesus is spiritual bread. He takes away our spiritual hunger by filling us up, giving us eternal life. Each time we participate in communion, we should remember that He is the Bread and Wine and that we live by His nourishment. The bread, which symbolizes Christ's body that was broken for me, and the wine, Christ's blood that was shed for me, are the unique sacrifice by God for the forgiveness of our sins. Why did Jesus use bread as a symbol for Himself? Maybe because He wanted us to be reminded of Him each time we eat? What if every time we ate bread we are reminded that we are abiding in Jesus and Jesus is abiding in us? What a difference that could make in our lives. Usually a meal is shared with other people. Maybe Jesus chose bread as a symbol of Himself so that we would share Him with one another. Whatever the reason, Jesus is the BREAD OF LIFE.

Dear Lord, Thank You for continuing to provide us daily with spiritual nourishment. There is no recipe on earth to compare with the one You have given us. Help us to use this nourishment to Your glory and service. Amen.

Connie German

Saturday, March 7

John 7:1-24

This passage covers many topics but they all have one thing in common, the world kept trying to trick Jesus, to trip him up. His brothers, his friends and the people who had become his enemies all tried to diminish him so they could reject his message. Of course they could not succeed against the Son of God.

But the world has not stopped trying to diminish Jesus and his teachings. And rather than Jesus in the flesh, only we imperfect Christians stand in the world. On our own, the world would certainly trick us into letting them diminish Jesus to prophet or just a man (as the Jews tried with Jesus) and thereby change his message to just a set of good ideas. Once they can diminish God, the door opens to many false teachings.

Thankfully we are not left to ourselves. Jesus and the Holy Spirit will speak through us if we let them. Beginning in verse 16, Jesus gives us guidance on how to do God's will on earth. He provides instructions for us in both words and in the example of his life. If we follow his guidance and speak for the glory of God we cannot be torn down. The world may not listen to us but the power of our message of life with God through Jesus Christ cannot be diminished.

Lord, guide me to speak from your doctrine and for your glory. Keep me from falling into the trap of self-righteousness or arrogance that can undermine your message. Let my words and deeds show the power of your love. Lord, guide me to speak from your doctrine and for your glory. Keep me from falling into the trap of self-righteousness or arrogance that can undermine your message. Let my words and deeds show the power of your love. Amen.

Greg Catherine

Monday, March 9

John 7:25-53

Is Jesus The Christ?

This is a section of scripture that is very believable for me. In this passage all of the people and most of the Pharisees are all asking the same question. "Is this the Christ"? For many it is obvious that they have never witnessed a prophet quite like this, but there was always the problem that Jesus was from Galilee, not from Bethlehem.

I have to admit, that if I had been there during His life, I am sure I would have been in a quandary about who Jesus really was, but there is always another way to look at things. I think I would also have looked at what He was not. John was so good at writing about Jesus' everyday life. All the people and the Pharisees knew He was a great prophet, for sure. They knew they had never experienced wisdom like He was using. They knew He was telling everyone that His Father sent Him. He was also telling them that they could not go where He was going. He was telling everyone that streams of living water flowed from Him and He invited them all to come and drink if they were thirsty. I'm sure that they could all tell that He was pure and Holy and led a life that was not of sin. He was the bringer of the Holy Spirit and gave Him to us after He ascended. He definitely was not the evil one like the Pharisees were shouting. He was indeed, the way, the truth, and the life.

Lord Jesus, we know that you would like us to believe in you totally, by knowledge and faith that the Father gives us. Lord we love you and depend on you for all things. Amen.

Bruce Gladhill

Tuesday, March 10

John 8:1-11

This passage is about compassion and mercy. Jesus is on the side of the woman who has been accused of sin and committing a crime. Jesus did not condemn her, but said to those present that anyone without sin should take a stone and throw it. Nobody did—nobody was without sin. Could it be that her accusers recognized their own sinfulness, intolerance, and hypocrisy?

Even though Jesus did not condemn her, He was not saying her conduct was acceptable. That is why He challenged her to live honestly and without sin. He looked with compassion upon a beloved daughter who had fallen into sin. He was troubled by her sin, but loved her anyway. Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world. He came into the world to save it.

Because we believe in Jesus there is mercy, forgiveness, and restoration. Through Him we have the power to go and sin no more. If we are shown compassion and tolerance, how much more likely are we to do the right thing in the future? How much more likely are we to avoid sin and to follow the ways of the Lord.

Lord, help me be compassionate and tolerant of others, not judging them unfairly or unkindly. Let me always remember that when I point a finger at someone, the other three point back at me. Help me to be the person You want me to be. Amen.

Connie German

Wednesday, March 11

John 8:12-59

Before Abraham Was, I AM!

This is a long passage of John's Gospel, but it is well worth reading over again and again. It is one of the clearest places in Scripture where Jesus declares who He is. He said, "before Abraham was born, I am!"(vs.58) He was taking the holy name of God for Himself. In Exodus 3:14 God had said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Jesus declared Himself to be God. The people listening to Him knew exactly what He was saying because they immediately picked up stones to stone him for blasphemy. But it is just on the basis of Jesus being God that He can say "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."(vs.12)

The questions the Pharisees asked is one that each of us must answer for ourselves, "Who are you?"(vs.25) Who is Jesus to you? It is not so much a question of who Jesus claimed to be. That is very clear. He said He was God, and John's Gospel declares that God has come among us in Jesus Christ, but that is still all "out there" in the written word. It is when we say "Yes, Lord Jesus, I believe that you are God" that He becomes real in here, in your heart. It is then that we realize He is the light of our life, and in Him we will never see death. (vs.50)

That is what this whole Lenten Season is about, seeing again more clearly that God has come among us in Jesus Christ. He is the Redeemer, not just of the world, but of your individual life and mine. Let each day of this season draw you more deeply into the truth of God's life for you.

Let us pray:

Good Lord, help us to always confess with Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." In that confession help us to grow in trust of You for each day, and for each need of life. We pray in Jesus' most blessed name. Amen.

Pastor Stapf

Thursday, March 12

John 9:1-23

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

The blind man did not ask Jesus to heal him. Jesus did it voluntarily to demonstrate the power of God. Giving sight to the blind was predicted in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah in Isaiah 29:18, 35:5, and 42:7 ("In that day the deaf will hear...the eyes of the blind will see."). Miracles were evidence that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah.

When this man was brought before the Pharisees he repeatedly told them the truth how Jesus healed him on the Sabbath. With the Pharisees' extensive knowledge of the scriptures they should have recognized Jesus immediately as the Messiah. However, because Jesus was a threat to their pride, position, comfort, and authority in the community, their eyes were closed and they were spiritually blind. Their actions were leading the people away from Jesus and the truth.

Like the Pharisees, we have God's word, the Old and New Testaments, to reveal the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, our Lord and Savior. Can we ignore all the miracles, the witnesses who testified to all that Jesus did? Who would sacrifice their life if it were not true?

Are we spiritually blind? Satan is using everything in his power to turn people away from God. With TV, Internet, news media, and even church leaders, people's faith, thoughts and actions are being clouded into spiritual darkness.

Do we remain in spiritual blindness like the Pharisees or be healed like the blind man by keeping our eyes focused on Jesus? By staying focused on Jesus, we begin seeing things through God's eyes. God has a different view--God's standards are better for our lives.

The blind man never wavered from telling the truth about his healing. The Pharisees even called in his parents and they verified he was their son but were afraid to say any more. Like the blind man, we must be bold and stand up for our faith.

Lord, I pray I keep my eyes and heart focused on you always. Amen.

Janice Delagrange

Friday, March 13

John 9:24-41

I chose the scripture passage John 9:24-41. This passage tells us about a man who was blind from birth and who was healed by Jesus. It also tells about Jesus admonishing the Pharisees for being spiritually blind.

I asked my sister Cheryl (Lambert) to contribute her thoughts also. The verse she focused on is verse 25: "I was blind but now I see." Her thoughts:

So often I am focused on everyday things that I forget to focus my attention on Jesus. This verse reminds me that I need to take all my cares, concerns, and joys to Jesus. He knows what is going on in my life, but it is up to me to talk to Him. When I do take the time to see Jesus, I see the beauty all around me, the good in other people, love from family and friends. I see His guidance throughout the scriptures. I SEE JESUS!

The verse I am focusing is verse 39: Jesus told him, "I have come into the world to give sight to those who are spiritually blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind." The man who was healed was blind from birth and even though I have my physical sight, there are many times I am spiritually blind. And, by the Grace of God, I am healed from that blindness.

I found this poem that was tucked in my Dad's bible written by Stephen Crane called, ***The Book of Wisdom:***

I met a seer

He held a book in his hands,

The Book of Wisdom.

"Sir," I addressed him, "Let me read."

"Child--," he began.

"Sir," I said, "Think not that I am a child

For already I know much

Of that which you hold;

Aye, much."

He smiled. Then he opened the book

And held it before me.

Strange that I should have grown so suddenly blind.

Thank you, Jesus, for showing me your love and goodness. Open my eyes that I might see you more each day. Amen

Debbie McCutcheon

Saturday, March 14

John 10:1-21

The Good Shepherd

Jesus teaches us here a parable of the Good Shepherd. It is helpful to consider the way a shepherd would have cared for his sheep back in Jesus day. When evening came or when a danger was present, the shepherd would gather his sheep and direct them to the sheepfold. A sheepfold was an enclosed yard that was built with piled stones made into a high wall and topped with thorns or briar. There was only one way in and during times of danger the shepherd would actually sit at the opening of the gate ready to protect and defend his sheep if thieves or wild animals attacked the herd. If an enemy would come for the sheep, he would have to face shepherd. The shepherd would risk his life to defend the sheep because they were his. He would lead them out into the pasture to feed and bring them back in. The sheep would even recognize the shepherd's voice over all other voices and respond only him.

For us Jesus is our Good Shepherd. What a beautiful illustration of Christ's love for us. Jesus is not like the hired hand that was only there for the paycheck and would flee at the slightest danger. It is Jesus on the other hand when the battle for our soul rages He stays and fights for us. Verses 17 & 18 say, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This charge I received from my Father."

In these few verses we see Jesus speak of the Death, Resurrection and Life that the Good Shepherd accomplishes for us. Each of our lives is in the able hands of the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for us.

Our dear Lord we thank you that no matter what, whether life is overwhelming or the world is spinning out of control, you remain our Good Shepherd who lovingly cares for us and holds in the midst of it all. Amen.

Tom Elder

Monday, March 16

John 10:22-42

The phrase that stands out to me is Jesus saying “My sheep hear My voice and I give them eternal life”. We hear many voices throughout life; teachers, parents coaches, friends. They teach us many things we need to know, but to hear the voice of Jesus calling us is awesome. It is hard sometimes to hear Him when we get busy and all the voices of the world kick in. I find when I focus my thoughts on Jesus I can be calmer and listen better. Then I hear Him saying I love you, I will never leave you, I died for you and no one can snatch you out of the Father’s hand. Listen and hear and rejoice in Him.

Father, let your voice be the first we hear in the morning. Let us take time to listen to you throughout the day. Thank you for caring for us so much. The Joy of the Lord is our strength. Amen

Jan Gladhill

Tuesday, March 17

John 11:1-44

Want to hear a wonderful story? Well, it doesn’t start out too wonderful, but it sure does end up that way!

Mama and I went to visit our cousins, Mary and Martha, because our cousin, Lazarus, was sick, but then he died. Lots of people came and everyone was crying. It was so loud! Mary and Martha were very sad, and it made me sad too. I liked it better when Martha let me help her in the kitchen or Mary would take me for walks in the orchard and tell me stories. I wished that they would feel better so we could do those things again.

Well, one day, I was taking water to Mary and Martha when someone came and told them that Jesus was coming. Martha ran out to meet him, and then Mary went out as well. Everyone followed along because they thought she was going to the tomb. I went along too, so I could give her a hug and help her feel better.

I had heard stories of Jesus. He helped blind people see and lame people walk. He gave a little bit of food to a whole lot of people. It seemed like he could do anything!

I followed along and saw Mary and Martha talking to Jesus. Then, Jesus went and stood by the tomb and began to cry. Of all the people crying at the house, no one seemed to be as sad as Jesus. But then, he stopped crying and told them to open the tomb.

I didn’t think this was a good idea. One time, I had a pet rabbit that died in his cage, and when I found him, he didn’t smell too good. Lazarus had been dead for a few days, and I didn’t think he would smell too good either.

But the people did what Jesus asked, and then Jesus yelled out and told Lazarus to come out. And do you know what happened? Lazarus came out! He was all covered in bandages and cloths and needed help to get unwrapped, but he was alive.

Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead! It was the most wonderful thing I have ever seen.

Dear Jesus, Thank you for your wonderful miracles and for all the things You do for us each day because You love us. Amen.

Becky Stapf

Wednesday, March 18

John 11:45-57

Jesus lived in dangerous times and he knew it. He managed to evade his own townspeople who once wanted to throw him off a cliff. This occurred after he read the Isaiah 61 passage in his local synagogue (the passage referred to himself as the Messiah, Luke 4). And when he hears of the imminent death of his friend Lazarus (John 11:4-7), he tells the disciples they must return to Judea. But the disciples remind him that that is where the Jewish officials recently wanted to stone him. [He had used the sacred name of God in referring to Himself]. Jesus was making both loyal friends and hard hearted enemies. Jesus himself said in Matthew 10:34 **“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”**

And now Jesus’ time had come. When the chief priests and Pharisees heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead and that the entire countryside had heard about it, they feared that Jesus’ followers would make him king (and therefore would be a threat to the puppet king that Rome set up). This they feared would cause the Roman occupiers of Judea to take away their temple and the nation. But then surprisingly the chief priest said it was better for one man to die for the nation (namely Jesus) than for this to happen. What Caiaphas the priest did not recognize was that this was a prophecy from God that would come true, and not just for the nation but for the entire scattered people of God throughout the world.

After Jesus learned of their plot to kill him he ended his public ministry and withdrew to the wilderness. All the events that led to the crucifixion were foreseen by God as a witness to us that he is in charge of history. We should take great comfort in knowing that God is able to overcome Man’s will and replace it with His.

Father, we thank you for sending your Son into a hostile world to redeem us for your everlasting love. Amen.

Doug Bollman

Thursday, March 19

John 12:1-19

This passage is filled with vivid images of our Savior riding into Jerusalem on a “donkey’s colt” surrounded by crowds waving palm branches and crying out, “Hosanna.” But with all of the imagery of Jesus, verse 16 stands out to me the most. The verse begins, “His disciples did not understand these things at first...” With all of the great and wonderful happenings surrounding their Leader, it astounds me that the disciples still did not truly understand that Jesus was the Christ. Jesus had raised a man from the dead, gave sight to a blind man, and gave a paralyzed man the power to walk again before their very eyes, and yet they still did not understand!

If the 12 disciples of our Lord can witness His works in person and still not understand, I realize that I may be missing things in my life too! Am I missing signs of the Lord’s reappearance? Am I missing times that God is reaching out to me? To others? Am I missing the blessings that God gives me every day? In a fast paced world, where there are so many decisions to make, tasks to do, and expectations to fulfill, I worry that I do not step back and reflect on the wonders and works of God often enough.

One person who did take time to reflect on her situation was Mary of Bethany. She was not worried about selling her fragrant oil for monetary gain. She was not thinking of what chores she had to do the following day. Mary of Bethany simply knelt down and washed the feet of Christ; and Jesus commends her for recognizing that on that day, she was blessed by the presence of the Lord.

Reading this act, I remember that God gives me blessings every day. He is with me every moment of my life and has given me all that I have in my life. I hope that we can all take time to appreciate the special gifts that God gives us every day.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the wealth of blessings that you give me every day of my life. I pray that I can put aside earthly worries and appreciate all of the experiences, trials, and triumphs that You graciously guide me through. In Jesus’ blessed name,
Luke Catherine

Friday, March 20

John 12:20-50

How many of us really think about what Jesus suffered when he died on the cross. Jesus knew his crucifixion was coming, and the human part of him dreaded what was going to happen. He didn't want to die this horrible death, but he knew that this was the reason God had sent him into the world to die for our sins. Jesus was willing to let his human dread of death on the cross go and obey his Father. Let us never forget he died for our sins

Thank you Lord for your son who died to save us all. Amen

Helen Gibson

Saturday, March 21

John 13:1-17/26

In this passage Jesus tells the disciples that one of them would betray Him.

Simon Peter motions to John, the disciple whom Jesus loves, to ask of whom He spoke. Then leaning back on Jesus' breast, John said to Him; "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered; "it is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it."

How wonderful that John had such a close and loving relationship with Jesus. I think this teaches us that this is what Jesus desires of all His children – love and trust!

In reading about the Gospel of John, I learned that John's name does not appear anywhere in his gospel. He, as the author, preferred to identify himself only as "The Disciple Jesus loved," a deliberate avoidance by John of his personal name. This reflects his humility and celebrates his relationship with his Lord Jesus.

My prayer is to be more aware of how God is working each day in my life and to be thankful for all things. In God it really is a wonderful life! Amen.

Joyce Ballard

Monday, March 23

John 13:18-38

Jesus- Fully Divine Yet Fully Human

As I read this Scripture I thought, “Wow there is so much going on. Where do I focus? As I meditated on the words, Jesus divinity was very apparent. He knew who would betray Him. He knew He was going to the cross. He knew what needed to happen for His Father’s plan to be carried out. Even in the midst of His divinity, the Scripture reveals Jesus’ humanity. Verse 21 says, “After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in His spirit, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’” Jesus was troubled by what was about to happen. I’m thinking if I knew that I was going to die a horrible death, I might be troubled in my spirit as well. Jesus understands our humanity and I am so grateful. Another thing that strikes me about Jesus being troubled is that He wasn’t just concerned about Himself. He was also troubled for Judas. Jesus knew the path that Judas was choosing and I’m sure it broke His heart and yet He knew it was all a part of God’s plan.

In His divinity, Jesus made it clear to the disciples that where He was going no one could join Him. Only He could go to the Cross, only He could bring salvation, only He could be the perfect Lamb of God. No one can take any credit for his or her salvation. NO ONE! Aren’t you glad that He did it all? I know I am! What an awesome Savior we have!

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your perfect plan of salvation. Thank You that it is only by Your grace that we are saved. What a precious gift You have given us. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Martha Elder

Tuesday, March 24

John 14:1-14

Jesus Comforts His Disciples

Three words speak to me: comfort, troubles, and trust. Recently I began reading a book by Joni Eareckson, a quadriplegic, concerning her troubles or struggles in life. What she had to say made a lot of sense to me. Everyone fits somewhere onto a scale of suffering that ranges from little to much. We usually compare ourselves only with those who suffer less so we can pity ourselves and pretend we are at the top of the scale.

After her accident she came to the conclusion that one of God’s purposes in increasing our trials is to sensitize us to people we never would have been able to relate to otherwise. It is easier to reach out and comfort someone with a similar problem. Your words are then not empty, hollow statements when you say, “I know exactly how you feel.”

Since Jesus Himself suffered when He was tested, He can help others when they are tested. We have a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses. If He endured hardship in order to relate to those who suffer, we can expect to do no less.

Because everyone knows problems and pain, we can be certain the Bible is speaking to all of us when it speaks about suffering. God’s grace and mercy are sufficient.

How we react and live with our troubles or pain can be a testimony of our faith and an inspiration and comfort to others.

Jesus said “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. I am going to prepare a place for you.” Our trials and sufferings on earth are for a little while, but eternity with Jesus without them is worth it! Read also II Corinthians 1:3-4.

Lord, help me trust in you in all things.

Janice Delagrange

Wednesday, March 25

John 14:15-31

Although Jesus would depart in the flesh, he revealed to us that he would be with us through the Holy Spirit, **“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.”** (vs.25) **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”** (vs.26)

I travel a lot for the Army and every time I leave I pray to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for safe return and protection for my family. **“...you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”** (vs.17) I know that the Lord will provide for our family if I am not there and I know he is with us. **“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”** (vs.18) After I conclude my prayer, I always feel at peace and that the Lord will take care of everything. **“...Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”** (vs.27). If this is my day, He has prepared it. I am ready to meet Him.

In the worst times and in the best, we know that He is there and always will be; and that this life may be short, but it is not the end if we believe in Him and keep his word. **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you;...”** (vs.27)

Lord, we pray to you, that you will in all times and all places be with us. We know you are with us in the ebb and flow of life. You are our rock and everything that makes us whole. We have not seen, but we do believe in you and your salvation for us in this life and life everlasting. We pray in your holy name. Amen.

Chris and Jessica Clarke

Thursday, March 26

John 15:1-17

The Vine and the Branches

This is one of my favorite teachings of Jesus. God is the gardener and Jesus is the root of the vine. Each branch that does not bear fruit is cut off, but every branch that bears fruit is pruned so it can bear more fruit. As the root, Jesus keeps us connected to God through the Holy Spirit.

“If you remain in Jesus, and His words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to God’s glory, that we bear much fruit, showing ourselves to be disciples of Jesus.” (Vs.7-8)

We are to love as Jesus loved. This sometimes is sacrificial love. You are to forget about yourself and love someone else. We are to sacrifice ourselves for others.

Daily as we study God’s Word, we learn more about how Jesus lived, loved and followed His Father’s plan. This gives us clues on how we are supposed to live. We are to remain in Jesus, and He will remain in us. We are to choose those paths that bring us into a fuller life in Jesus and also with God.

Heavenly Father: We thank you for creating us and allowing us to be your children. Help us to read your Word each day, and seek your strength through our prayers. We want to be your branches reaching out to those who do not know you. Guide us in all we do. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Audrey Stapf

Friday, March 27

John 15:28-16:4

John 15 is a wonderful chapter which contains one of the most well-known passages in the New Testament. Through our faith we are connected to God, and how because we have been chosen by God, he calls us "friend."

Well, that was yesterday. I don't know about you, but I found today's verses much less uplifting. Hate. "The world will hate you because of Me." Again, I don't know about you, but I don't like to be hated. I want people to like me. But the truth is, if people we encounter do not know Jesus the way we do and chose to not try and understand His love, they will resent us. We have something, a connection to Someone, that makes us different and gives us a worldview that others do not share and most do not understand. And because they do not understand, they are wary of us, sometimes to the point of hating us.

As if that wasn't enough, the next verses include a challenge. Even though we are hated, we still have the responsibility to testify about the hope we have in Jesus. Will the world listen? Maybe. Maybe not. But we have to try. Is it difficult? Absolutely! But through the power of the Advocate whom He sent, the very connection that causes others resentment allows us to have hope, joy, and the patience to persevere. James exhorts us, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (vs.2-3)." And from yesterday's verses we recall, "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (John 15: 10-11)." Doing God's will, we can have joy and hope in Jesus, even when we are despised by the world.

Lord Jesus, thank you for the challenge of today's verses and for sending the Holy Spirit to help us share our faith with those who may resent us. Give us courage, patience, and faithfulness to share your Good News and love with all whom we meet. Amen.

Grace Stapf

Saturday, March 28

John 16:5-33

We all have seasons of grief for those that we have to leave or those who are leaving us, be it moving to another area or the death of someone we love. We absolutely know that we will miss them and that their departure from us will leave a hole in our heart that never can be filled. Oh sure, we go on with our life and get busy and have less pain as time move on. But that hole is always there and when we think of them we absolutely grieve for them.

Jesus knew that to be a fact. He loved the disciples and He knew that they would experience grief when he died. He also knew that this world is and always would be a troubled place to live. So He promised them a special support system. In verses 13, Jesus said: "***But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.***"

So every day, in our morning prayers, we call upon the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to abide with us and to fill our hearts with love, light, peace, and joy in loving our Lord and to give us discernment, wisdom, and courage to do His will. So that every day we will have an opportunity to be a blessing to someone to His glory! Then every evening, in our evening prayers, we return to the Holy Spirit and thank him for abiding with us and guiding us through the day the Lord has given to us. Such a wonderful gift!

The refrain to the hymn *In The Garden* states so clearly this special relationship that is a gift from God:

***"And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known."***

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for your Son and for the Holy Spirit that we may day by day have such a dear friend to guide us.

Jeane Flesch

The Goodbye Prayer of Jesus

It is Monday of Holy Week and we now focus on the final few days of Jesus on Earth as “True Man”. This week we revisit the events leading to His crucifixion; burial; decent into hell; and glorious resurrection. John 17 is the only gospel that records Jesus’ final prayer with his disciples. It is following this prayer that He leads his disciples to the garden and is betrayed. As you read this prayer keep in mind that He knew that His physical death as man was near.

He prays to be Glorified in vs.3 that eternal life for all those the Father has given him is that we know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom God sent; and in v5 He asks to again be glorified in God’s presence as He had been before the world began. His prayer continues for His disciples and for all believers.

So then, Jesus’ final prayer with his disciples is for his Glory, for his disciples and for us (past, present and future). In vs.20-21 He states, “...I pray also for those who will believe in me through their (the disciple’s) message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.”. It is indeed GOOD NEWS that in His final prayer as death was imminent our Lord prayed for us.

To me this prayer casts the responsibility upon all believers to diligently study the Word – the Scriptures and the Bible, in doing so we strengthen our faith and fortify ourselves to the trials of this earthly life. We also have a task to share the Word with non-believers. In vs.9 Jesus indicates that, “I pray for them (disciples & believers). I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.” In this prayer he also asks that believers not be taken from this trouble filled world but that they are protected from the evil one – see v15.

Our Father in Heaven: Help us to solemnly renew our commitment to Your Word and to Christ our Saviour during this season.

Joe Flesch

John 18:1-27 covers Jesus’ arrest by way of His betrayal by a friend. This friend later changes his mind and tries to return the betrayal money. When the money is refused, he feels remorse and kills himself

It also covers Peter’s spontaneous reaction to protect/defend Jesus. When pondering this, I had to think about the many times I have lashed out (i.e. cutting off an ear) without comprehending the deeper issue, and all the while thinking I am doing the “right thing”

Then there is Peter’s 3-time denial. How devastated Peter must have felt when that rooster crowed and he looked into the face of his Lord. The account in Mark says: “And he broke down and wept”. The accounts in Matthew and Luke say: “And he went out and wept bitterly.” Knowing Peter’s determination to be faithful and considering my own desire to be faithful, it makes me contemplate how many times and in how many ways I have made that rooster crow.

Lord, thank you for Peter’s zeal for you and thank you for his remorse, his forgiveness, your mercy and your love. “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” [Philippians 1:9-11] Amen.

Carolyn Shriver

Wednesday, April 1

John 18:28-40

It's just not fair, Lord!

Jesus was feeling the weight of mankind's sins coming upon Him. Sins He had never committed, but was now being asked to pay the penalty for. One of the men He had poured His life into over the past three years betrayed Him. Another denied he knew Him. All the rest fled from Him in fear. The spiritual leaders who should have received Him gladly denounced Him. He was brought before a secular judge who cared nothing about God, and couldn't understand this man who stood before him. Pilate examined Jesus. He could find nothing in Him deserving of the death the Jews demanded. Somehow he knew that he was facing a King, and one far greater than himself, but his fears and concern for his own position kept him from saving Jesus from the cross.

Of course, it all had to be. Scripture was being fulfilled, and the perfect atoning sacrifice was being provided for the sins of all mankind. God had entered into the midst of a fallen and rebellious world for the very purpose of redeeming that world. It is a world that is not fair. We should never expect fairness to come from a fallen world. There is no injustice that we face that can match what our Lord endured for us. Let's remember that the next time we are tempted to complain about something being unfair. But let us also remember that it is not fairness or justice that we really need. It is grace, the pure grace of God that has taken all of our sin, and the penalty we justly deserve and nailed them to a cross on a Judean hill. He gave us, as a free gift, all that we do not deserve, all that is not really fair for us to have. He gave us life.

Holy God, I bow before You in humble thanksgiving. Forgive me for ever complaining about something being unfair, or about not getting what I think I should have. You have given me infinitely more than I ever deserve. You have given me life, now and eternally. Praise be to Your holy Name through Jesus Christ my Saviour. Amen.

Pastor Stapf

Holy Thursday, April 2

John 19:1-16

As we read these verses, we felt a strong message to us about who really has control in our lives. We felt the center piece of the message is found in verses 10 and 11, where Pilate says "Do You not know that I have the power to crucify You, and the power to release You?" and Jesus replies "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above." With this verse, Jesus reminds us that we are given a choice. That choice is to try to be the master of our lives, an illusion of power, or follow a path that God has laid out for us to join with Him in heaven.

As we read this passage we found ourselves feeling bad, in some cases a little angry, at the way Jesus was being treated. We wondered if the soldiers and Pilate, maybe even the Jews, were pushing Jesus to display His power and change the outcome of the path he was on. However, we see in Jesus an acceptance of the Father's plan. We often struggle to accept when things are not going the way we want. If we are not careful, our prayers can be a little like the demands to God to prove himself by doing what we want.

The final message of control comes in verse 15, where the chief priests answer Pilate by saying "We have no king but Caesar." This verse reminded us of 1 Samuel verse 7 where in response to Israel's demand for a king, God replies "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them." The Jews turned to kings to avoid the need to follow God's path. We see a message to us now that we can be tempted to place control into the hands of those who promise us what we want rather than follow the path of God for what he thinks is best for us.

Jesus, we pray that we would have the strength You had, that we will follow the path the Father has laid out for us. Amen.

Deborah and Greg Catherine

Good Friday, April 3

John 19:17-27

Scripture fulfilled – “ for my clothing they cast lots.” Psalm 21:18

The soldiers had no personal interest in their victims. As a “reward” for crucifying those condemned to death, the guards would simply divide the “spoils” of the individual, their clothing. Those crucified were always crucified naked, for that was the Roman way. The criminal was nailed to the cross without any covering just to further humiliate the individual. So these soldiers took the clothes of Jesus, dividing them up between them. But the inner garment of our Lord, the tunic, still remained. Because it was woven as one seamless piece, it was special. Clearly the guards knew that, so they decided to play dice for it.

These soldiers gambled for the only thing that Jesus had left; his tunic. But this game of chance, as Paul Kretzmann suggests, is “not the result of chance, but happened in accordance with the prophecy of the Psalmist, Ps. 22:18.” David prophetically writes about the Messiah and this very event a thousand years before it happened.

Nevertheless, this image of the soldiers gambling under the cross of Christ is a fitting picture of our sinful world; it speaks to who we are and what we care about. For this world foolishly lives for the things of this world. It recklessly believes that “chance,” this imaginary powerful force exists; calling all things into place, even our own existence. But such foolishness speaks to man’s pride and arrogance.

It is not “chance” that provided one Roman soldier a seamless tunic that day, it was God. And it is not “chance” that brings life and salvation to this fallen world. Prophetically promised from long ago, it is the Christ, hanging on the cross, who provides such things. It is Jesus, who willingly gave up everything, even His clothing, to die for our sins.

For God does not love you by chance. His love, poured out on the cross that day, was determined even before the foundation of the world.

Father in Heaven, We thank you for your promise of long ago fulfilled in your Son, Jesus. We thank you for your faithfulness in loving us even before the foundation of the world. We thank you, that although we are so unworthy, by your grace you bring your gift of salvation to us through the cross of Christ. Amen.

Pastor Stoner

Saturday, April 4

John 19:28-42

God is Prepared

The scene presented by the Apostle John is one of extraordinary reverence at break-neck speed. Sometime after 3:00 PM, Jesus was pronounced dead. A soldier’s spear had pierced His side; blood and water had poured forth. Jesus was removed from the cross. A garden tomb was secured for His burial. It was nearby. The band of mourners carried the body to its resting place. They washed the body and began the anointing process. Exorbitant amounts of spices and ointments were used. The body was bound in linen funeral wrappings. Finally, He was laid in the tomb and a large stone was placed before the opening. The process was so hurried that it was not completed. The women would have to return after the Sabbath to finish the burial.

Two things are clear: neither the women nor the disciples were prepared for such a hasty burial, and no one was expecting to greet a Resurrected Jesus.

One more thing is clear: Though no one else seems to have been prepared, God certainly was! God was not surprised by the amount of time that it took for Jesus to take upon Himself the sins of the world, die a death that would defeat the devil and destroy death’s power, descend into hell and preach to the souls in prison, rise from the dead and greet an unsuspecting Mary, and visit a room full of frightened disciples. Our Heavenly Father had been prepared for it all, before the foundation of the world.

Let us pray:

Almighty God Our Maker and Redeemer, You know how unprepared we are for the trials of life and the temptations to sin. In your mercy, You have prepared for us a Savior. Through faith in Jesus Christ, You have made us children of God, given us complete forgiveness of all our sins, and promised us eternal life. Hallelujah! Thank you, Glorious God. Amen

Pastor Leins

Cross Reference

<u>Text</u>	<u>Voice</u>	<u>Date</u>
John 1:1-18	Art Delagrange	Wednesday, Feb 18
John 1:19-34	Bill Allen	Thursday, Feb 19
John 1:35-51	Carol Bartels	Friday, Feb 20
John 2:1-11	Deborah Catherine	Saturday, Feb 21
John 2:12-25	Bruce Gladhill	Monday, Feb 23
John 3:1-21	Connie German	Tuesday, Feb 24
John 3:22-35	Art Delagrange	Wednesday, Feb 25
John 4:1-26	Becky Stapf	Thursday, Feb 26
John 4:27-42	Jeane Flesch	Friday, Feb 27
John 4:43-54	Jan Gladhill	Saturday, Feb 28
John 5:1-15	Audrey Stapf	Monday, Mar 2
John 5:16-47	Carol Bartels	Tuesday, Mar 3
John 6:1-21	Pastor Stapf	Wednesday, Mar 4
John 6:22-51	Glenn Shriver	Thursday, Mar 5
John 6:52-70	Connie German	Friday, Mar 6
John 7:1-24	Gregory Catherine	Saturday, Mar 7
John 7:25-53	Bruce Gladhill	Monday, Mar 9
John 8:1-11	Connie German	Tuesday, Mar 10
John 8:12-59	Pastor Stapf	Wednesday, Mar 11
John 9:1-23	Janice Delagrange	Thursday, Mar 12
John 9:24-41	Debbie McCutcheon	Friday, Mar 13
John 10:1-21	Tom Elder	Saturday, Mar 14
John 10:22-42	Jan Gladhill	Monday, Mar 16

John 11:1-44	Becky Stapf	Tuesday, Mar 17
John 11:45-57	Doug Bollman	Wednesday, Mar 18
John 12:1-19	Luke Catherine	Thursday, Mar 19
John 12:20-50	Helen Gibson	Friday, Mar 20
John 13:1-17	Joyce Ballard	Saturday, Mar 21
John 13:18-38	Martha Elder	Monday, Mar 23
John 14:1-14	Janice Delagrang	Tuesday, Mar 24
John 14:15-31	Chris & Jessica Clarke	Wednesday, Mar 25
John 15:1-17	Audrey Stapf	Thursday, Mar 26
John 15:18-16:4	Grace Stapf	Friday, Mar 27
John 16:5-33	Jeane Flesch	Saturday, Mar 28
John 17:1-26	Joe Flesch	Monday, Mar 30
John 18:1-27	Carolyn Shriver	Tuesday, Mar 31
John 18:28-40	Pastor Stapf	Wednesday, Apr 1
John 19:1-16	G & D Catherine	Thursday, Apr 2
John 19:17-27	Pastor Dean Stoner	Friday, Apr 3
John 19:28-42	Pastor Curtis Leins	Saturday, Apr 4