

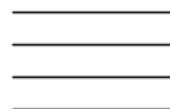


Jesus
Was
Here

2012 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

WILMORE FREE METHODIST CHURCH

CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD



The Garden



The Court



The Jerusalem Road



The Upper Room



The Cross



The Tomb

Jesus
Was
Here

Lenten Devotional Guide, 2012
Wilmore Free Methodist Church

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Editor: Martha Evans Sparks

Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are from the NIV.

THE UPPER ROOM

And He, [the Holy Spirit], when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment;... (John 16:8 NASB).

Many years ago, my father, C. Hoge Hockensmith, was preaching in East Africa to a tribe who was hearing the gospel for the first time. With the help of a translator, the people were told of the Loving Creator who fulfilled His promise to a fallen race by sending His Son to save us from our sin. Suddenly the whole group fell on their faces on the ground with loud groans, weeping, and wailing. Shocked, my father turned and asked the interpreter what was going on. "Pas-tore," the man exclaimed, "Dey are re-pent-ing!"

During this season, let us train our eyes on the cross and open ourselves up fully to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Let's ask Him for our hearing to be restored so that the story of redemption is vivid and fresh again, like it was to the tribespeople. While loud weeping and wailing is not really necessary, we will surely experience grief as we become aware of the things in our lives that are grieving the Lord. This is not remorse and/or groveling in one's failures but a request for true repentance to return more fully into the healing paths of righteousness and renewal.

"Breathe on me, Holy Spirit of God,
Breathe on me, and fill me anew,
Breathe on me, Holy Spirit of God,
To love what You love and to do what You do."
—John Michael Talbot

Janette Reeves directs a life transition coaching/mentoring ministry in Greenville, SC. She visits WFMC with her parents, Hoge and Nora Hockensmith, of Wesley Village, Wilmore.

Scripture: John 18:1-11

February 27, 2012

When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which He entered, and His disciples (John 18:1 KJV).

THE LORD AND HIS DISCIPLES IN THE GARDEN

Have you ever thought much about the gardens in the Bible—from the one in Genesis (Gen. 2:8-3:8; 3:22), where God provided for man's needs and also took occasions where He walked with him in the garden, to the beautiful city garden in Revelation (Rev. 22:1-5), where the river of water of life and tree of life are located? There we can see God's face and walk with Him forever.

However, between the two "bookends" of Genesis and Revelation, there is the reality of gardens in difficult places in life, due to sin that entered the world. Jesus Himself walks with us during those difficult places, just as He led His own disciples into the Garden just prior to His arrest and journey to the cross. He has promised never to leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). However, He Himself often had to walk in gardens alone—from the garden where Adam and Eve hid from Him to the garden where His disciples slept rather than keeping watch for an hour with Him in prayer. And He went alone to the garden where He was buried after His death on the cross. However, Jesus Christ rose victoriously from that garden tomb and now lives in fellowship with His Father and with us through the Holy Spirit!

We look forward to the Lord's redemption of not only humans, but also the beautiful "garden" where we can walk with singing and rejoicing, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isaiah 35:1-10).

Joyce Underwood is walking with Jesus in many areas of life: wife, mother of two adult children, grandmother of six, a biology lab teacher, daughter, sister, aunt of five, and friend.

Scripture: Luke 24:13-24

April 8, 2012—Easter Sunday

FOOTPRINTS OF JESUS

They were talking with each other about everything that had happened...Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing Him (Luke 24:14, 15).

The two disciples were walking to Emmaus, the same day the women found the empty tomb and heard the declaration of the angels: *He is not here; He has risen!*

An unknown person joins them and asks about their conversation. They are amazed that this stranger does not know the dramatic crucifixion of the assumed Messiah. As they talk, Jesus now teaches them even more about the true King of men's hearts. He even joins them in supper and then disappears from their sight but not from their hearts: *Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us (v.32b)?*

I once wrote a short drama used for an Easter church program based on this story of Jesus and the two on the road to Emmaus. One actor was supposed to alert the other disciple to someone coming up behind them. He was supposed to say, "Hark, I hear footsteps." Actually, he said, "Hark, I hear "footprints." For weeks afterwards, the actor was reminded of "hearing footprints."

We all have read of the two people walking on the sand with only one set of footprints because Jesus is carrying the weary one. In sand we can see footprints. Just as the two disciples felt their hearts burn as they listened to Jesus, so we hear the voice of Jesus through the imprint of His teachings in the Word of God. Are you hearing His footprints today? Does He walk and talk with you?

Norma Schultz Erny is a retired missionary from Japan and also pastor's wife. Her professions included nursing, teaching, and counseling. She is a ten-year member of WFMC.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2 April 7, 2012

BECOMING POOR

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Here is another marvelous definition of “grace.” It is the movement from riches to poverty; from heavenly splendor to human limitation. In that process, Jesus gives up “equality with God” to gain “the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7).

How can this be gain? It can be gain only because it is God in Christ who is bringing about this mysterious change. This great identifying work of God is not only real but sufficient. I can, therefore move as William Sleeper writes in his grand gospel song:

Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night,
Into Thy freedom, gladness, and light,
Out of my sickness, into Thy health,
Out of my want and into Thy wealth,
Out of my sin and into Thyself,
Out of my shameful failure and loss,
Into the glorious gain of Thy cross,
Jesus, I come; Jesus, I come to Thee.

Through the incarnate Jesus’ self-emptying sacrifice on the cross, I can receive the grace needed to be transformed. As I allow Jesus to remold me, I can allow him to absorb the “bondage, sorrow, and night” and replace it with His “freedom, gladness, and light.” This is indeed the work of Christ on the Cross! Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Timothy Thomas, after years in the academic world, continues to teach the Wrestling with Truth Adult Bible Fellowship, maintains a web site, fixes the house, travels with his wife, Joyce, and tries to work on some writing and editing projects.

Scripture: John 11:17-32

February 28, 2012

JESUS IS HERE

If You had been here, my brother would not have died (John 11: 21, 32).

We are familiar with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, this little family of some of Jesus’ closest friends. Whenever Jesus came to Jerusalem, He and His disciples would often stay with them. Now we find Mary and Martha grieving over the death of their brother. Perhaps part of their grief was a disappointment that Jesus did not come to heal Lazarus. They had sent for Him, but He did not come. Why did Jesus, who had healed so many, allow Lazarus to die?

Is something causing me to grieve today? Am I struggling with some puzzling concern? Am I disappointed with Jesus? Why does He not fix my situation? Why did He let it happen?

Mary and Martha were mistaken. Jesus **was** there. In His spirit He had been there throughout Lazarus’ illness. He grieved with them; He even shed tears. He had a purpose in allowing Lazarus to die. His purpose was to raise Lazarus from the dead, bringing glory to God and even greater good to the family.

So, too, Jesus is here right now in the crisis I am facing, the struggle I am having. There is a purpose in it. Jesus, in His own time, will cry out, *Lazarus, Come forth*. He will deliver me from the power of death or bondage. God will be glorified, and my life will be richer and more Christ-like because of what I face today. *Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? (John 11:40)* LORD, I BELIEVE.

Bob Erny was born of missionary parents in China. He and his wife served with OMS International in Hong Kong, Indonesia, and OMS headquarters for more than forty years.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

February 29, 2012

ENDURING THE PLACE OF TEMPTATION

No temptation has taken hold of you, except what is human. But God is faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond your empowerment and will provide with the temptation also an escape, so that you are empowered to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13, Fredrick Long’s translations here and below).

Jesus said to His disciples at His last supper, “You are the ones who have remained with Me in my temptations” (Luke 22:28). Jesus referred to many temptations during His time on earth. Fully human, He faced temptations just like us. Hebrews affirms of Jesus, “Because of what He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is empowered to help the ones who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

Jesus entered our human place of temptation. More importantly, He has succeeded where we all have failed. His holy presence brings divine help and grace for us as humans to live better. This grace comes from His Holy Spirit.

While the Lord does His part, we must do ours. How? By following Jesus and relying on divine help. At Gethsemane, Jesus urged his disciples, “Pray not to enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40b). This is like the Lord’s Prayer: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One” (Matthew 6:13). Praying to God for help in light of our weakness to sin is precisely where we should start. This acknowledgement humbles us.

Throughout my life, I have repeatedly received the Lord’s help in times of temptation in the form of phone calls, friends, conscience, God’s presence, and in other ways. Have you received help? Count on it when the temptation comes.

Fred Long teaches New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary. He is married to Shannon, and they have five children, Hannah, Nathan, Gabrielle, Samuel, and David.

Scripture: John 20:1-9

April 6, 2012—Good Friday

EMBRACING GOOD FRIDAY

They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead (John 20:9).

Embrace Good Friday? Is that not an oxymoron? Who would choose to embrace, arguably, the saddest day in history?

Perhaps a better question is, “What happens if we don’t?”

1) We forget the enormous price paid for our salvation. 2) We are tempted to live as though it’s Easter, and Good Friday is behind us.

Jesus defeated death on the cross; yet the enemy of our souls still lurks in the shadows, seeking all whom he can tempt, defeat, despair, and devour. With confidence we know a day is coming that Satan will not only be defeated, but DESTROYED. Glory!

In the meantime, however, we are in the already/not yet, the limen, as Professor Matt Zahniser would teach.

Those first disciples hid in fear due to the events leading to their Friend and Rabbi being nailed to a cross. No doubt, in disbelief, they wept, despaired, and felt totally defeated before that first glorious resurrection Sunday. They did not understand.

Yet you and I, too, sometimes live as though we do not understand. God does not promise that death will not come to us.

God does promise to *never leave us* or forsake us.

You see, in the already/not yet, we are Easter Christians living in a Good Friday world.

Take heart. The day is coming when every tear will be wiped from our eyes, when there will be no parting, no saying goodbyes: eternal Easter Sunday. Hallelujah!

Diane Muñoz has attended WFMC since 1996. Diane is an elder of the FMCUSA and serves as a full time chaplain with Hospice of the Bluegrass. Diane and her 7th-grade daughter, Kathi, love living in Wilmore with their three cats.

Scripture: Matthew 26:36-46 April 5, 2012 Maundy Thursday

GETHSEMANE: THE PLACE OF PRESSING

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane ... (Matthew 26:36 KJV).

The name, Gethsemane, means “oil press, a place for squeezing the oil from olives.” By its very nature, this is a place of pressure and separation. Oil came not from the olives without a great deal of pressure as they were laid between two flat stones, one on the bottom and a heavier one on top. So it was that frightful night when Jesus, feeling the agony of being crushed by taking on the sins of the world, was pressed till “...His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44).

It was there Jesus took on the pressure of our sins between the stone of sins past underneath Him and the stone of future sins above Him, being crushed as the olive in order to produce a healing oil. This was the beginning of the road to Calvary. Jesus knew that a substitute must be fully identified, that for which it will substitute. It was His condition for ours: His righteousness for our wickedness; His faithfulness for our unfaithfulness; His grace for our greed; His love for our hatred; His mercy for our vengeance; His truth for our lies; His justice for our injustice; His obedience for our disobedience; His compassion for our apathy; His meekness for our pride. It was all laid on Him.

The sorrow and agony of Gethsemane that was pressed on Jesus in the garden was, indeed, pressed out on the cross. May we be as willing to enter Gethsemane, a little farther, that we may be pressed to the point of saying, “...nevertheless not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42 KJV).

Johnson Cannon is married to Amy Cannon. They reside in Lexington, Kentucky, with their five children.

Scripture: James 1:2-8

March 1, 2012

JESUS CHRIST IS OUR PATTERN

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:2-3).

I’ve been studying the letter Jesus’ half brother, James, wrote to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. His fellow Christ believers, devout and practicing Jews as well, taught that what was necessary for salvation was to believe that Jesus was the true Messiah and Savior. James presents Jesus Christ as our Pattern, that we are to be “...doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22 KJV).

The earliest fellow believers were in great danger of being discouraged in their faith by the persecution of their own unbelieving country people. I’ve been wondering—*Could this happen to us, here in Wilmore? Nicholasville? Lexington? Will unbelieving neighbors be able to discourage us in our faith?*

Consider it pure joy to face a trial? I usually am more than happy to escape temptation and sorrow. James says God makes trials His instrument of blessing. So, as the trials roll on, we are to ask for His patience to overcome and keep believing His words to James and us that “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:4).

Heavenly Father, straighten my spine and build my spiritual muscles to overcome testing and trials. Keep me focused on Your Son, my Pattern for holiness. Give me satisfaction to know I have victoriously resisted temptation in Jesus’ name and power. Amen.

Pam Pepper says she loves leading sisters in Christ in Bible studies, handcrafting greeting cards, and cooking Sunday dinner for kids and grandkids.

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:20-25

March 2, 2012

WALKING WHERE JESUS WALKED

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24 ESV).

Peter urges the Christians to imitate Jesus' obedience to the Father and perseverance in suffering by mentioning Christ's righteous suffering (2:21-24). Peter leads his readers back to the road of Calvary where Jesus walked and to the place under the wooden cross where Jesus was hung. This historical, saving reality becomes the ultimate model for all saved Christians today.

We may meditate on this verse by asking two questions. First, what has Jesus accomplished? Jesus hung on the tree (cf. Deuteronomy 21:23) not for *His* own sin but rather, He bore *our* sins in His body (Isaiah 53:4). While Peter leads us to Jesus' cross, we may see the innocent Jesus on the cross, suffering the burden of our sins. Indeed, Christ did this for us! Second, what is the result/purpose of Jesus' crucifixion? Those who are in Him may die to sin and *live* to righteousness (cf. Romans 6:3-5). Christians, having been healed by His wounds (Isaiah 53:5), now have such a new life they are able to live a righteous life with obedience and perseverance to God in this world, like their Lord Christ.

Jesus' cross is *not* a Christian religious decoration. It is what Christ's followers should live *by* and what they should live *out*. Suffering for righteousness is not meaningless or for penance. Rather, it is what our Lord did. It is the Christ-like life that Christians should live out in this sinful world. Indeed, it reflects a true Christian's Christ-converted life.

Caleb Wang is a student in the Biblical Studies PhD program at Asbury Theological Seminary. He is married to Aurora, and they have a 10-year-old son, Ian. This is their fifth year in WFMC.

Scripture: Mark 10:17-31

April 14, 2012

WHAT WILL I GIVE UP?

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," He said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me" (Mark 10:21).

For most of my life, I've looked down on the man in this story. How could he be so foolish as to turn away from eternal life in favor of earthly riches and comfort?

"I would never make such an unwise choice," I thought.

Now I'm not so sure. When I owned no property, had nothing much to sell or give away, and held no expectation of ever owning much, it seemed relatively easy to leave all and follow Jesus.

But if Jesus confronted me today with such a demand, would I be willing to sell everything and give it to the poor in order to follow Jesus and find eternal life? Or would I, like that young man, turn away crestfallen?

Lent is about giving up something for Jesus for forty days, about living "spare, plain, or meager" for a few weeks, about identifying with Jesus as He journeys to the cross. What Jesus asks of us is a lifetime of identification with Him, a lifetime of devoting everything to Him and gaining eternal life in return.

Am I up to it? Are you?

**"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep
to gain what he cannot lose."**

–Jim Elliott

Shirley McMillan, an Indiana native, has lived in Wilmore since 1999 and is a 12-year member of WFMC. She serves on the WFMC World Mission Team and leads a writers group at the Senior Community Center at Wesley Village.

Scripture: Exodus 12:1-28

April 3, 2012

HAPPY NEW YEAR AT EASTER

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year” (Exodus 12:1-2).

The Passover feast was initiated by God for His people. He said, “This month is to be the first month of your year.” Just as God set a new timeline for Israel, He calls us to align our calendar to His salvation in humble and joyous submission. Because of sin, God instituted a salvation calendar that was blended with, yet took precedence over, His creation calendar set at the beginning of time. Easter comes first. That’s where the timing of our lives begins. When we set the timing of our lives to God’s calendar, we are saved. In God’s salvation, our life has purpose and hope. During Lent we ask, “To what time is my clock adjusted? Is my timing off? Is it adjusted to Easter?”

All the elements in the Passover Feast are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the blood sacrifice for our sins, the bread we break in fellowship with others, the joy we celebrate at deliverance from sin and Satan, and the stories we tell as we journey toward our heavenly city. The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ are the paramount events in human history, signifying when real life begins. So, at the start of your day, your week, your month, and your year, align your schedule to God’s gracious salvation. Celebrate His death and resurrection. Know His goodness and salvation. Avoid the chaos of hurry and the dullness of hopelessness. Hell, Satan, and death are defeated. New life begins.

Daniel Owsley grew up in São Paulo, Brazil, son of missionaries, Clarence and Elizabeth Owsley. Dan met his wife, Hope, while studying at Asbury Theological Seminary. They were married in 1985 in the Wilmore FMC. They have served as missionaries in Brazil since 1988. They have four adult sons.

Scripture: John 16:17-24

March 3, 2012

JOY BEYOND TOMORROW

I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy (John 16:20).

Anticipating His impending death only a few hours away, Jesus speaks to His disciples these words of comfort. Perhaps He also spoke them for Himself. His heart was heavy with the burden of responsibility He carried on behalf of the Father to bring eternal hope to the world and, simultaneously, as a man, to face the pain and shame of the cross. He was grieving, and He knew that soon His disciples would grieve as their hope and faith lay shattered in the shadow of the cross.

But Jesus also knew there was joy beyond tomorrow! The cross of grief was to be the ultimate means for the inauguration of God’s Joy—joy for Jesus Himself as He realized the completion of His task and purpose in bringing the Good News to all people, joy for His disciples as they were reunited with their friend and their Messiah, joy for all people of all ages who would choose to receive eternal life.

I wonder why we do not live more fully in the joy that Jesus promises. I think at times there is a sense in which the pain of this world comes to us somewhat as the staggering grief of Jesus’ crucifixion came to His disciples. We easily lose focus and sink into dismay. But, in contrast to the disciples, we know the end of the story! Jesus is Lord—today, tomorrow, and always! Take time today to focus on Him, and experience the joy that awaits the Believing Heart.

Joyce Thomas has recently been spending much of her time commuting to New York to care for her parents. When she has time to “play,” she enjoys sewing and gardening.

Scripture: Matthew 10:2-10

March 4, 2012

LESSONS FROM A LITTLE BUCKET

Freely you have received; freely give (Matthew 10:8b)

Lent reminds us of the value of giving sacrificially; giving the best to those we love. We find in life many human examples that are glimpses of a higher, holier giving.

On Mother's kitchen bar, a little wooden bucket sat for years. It was spotted and old, one that held salt fish in its earlier days. Mother, who disliked such fish, had lovingly washed, soaked, and fried the strong seafood for a husband who found them a treat. When the little bucket had served its store-salt-fish purpose, Mother aired it and finding it too "good" to throw away, paraffined the bottom and placed candy in it for Daddy—chocolate bars, those that Daddy loved, ones she didn't usually buy on her limited budget.

When I came home for visits, I waited until I was alone; then sneaked the top of the little bucket off to see what I might eat on the sly. It was not that we couldn't have the candy; it was that we knew the candy in the bucket had a special purpose—to please our father.

God is in the business of giving us, not just the essentials, but the "desires of our hearts." We, too, must plan gifts to please our heavenly Father.

Prayer: May my response to Your many gifts, especially Your own Son, be to give and give and give again.

Thought for the day: Love is marked by sacrificial giving.

Yvonne Moulton describes herself as a "long-time resident of Wilmore, retired teacher, very thankful and happy wife and mother, committed lover of the Person whose life we honor in these meditations."

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:2

April 2, 2012

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18 NIV).

William Temple says that "seeing the Cross helps to feed my mind with the truth of God." Similarly, in 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul argues that wisdom and power are to be found in the cross.

The truth of God is to be found not in the wisdom of the present age but in the radical and scandalous nature of the cross. It seems to be an insult to our sensibilities that through the blood shed on the cross we can, indeed, gain newness of life. Yet, William Cowper's words ring true:

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

The cross expresses the truth of God's saving work—yes, but it is also the truth of discipleship. Seeing the cross should speak to our minds directly of our cross-carrying responsibilities. The call of Jesus is clear: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23 NAS). And similarly, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27 NAS).

Let us see the cross; let its truth be expressed in our lives; and let us walk by way of the cross since that way leads home.

Timothy Thomas says he likes to think theologically and hook the major themes of Scripture together. The cross is one of those and is a theme to which he likes to return both in thought and in the music of the great hymns of the church.

FANTASTIC SEEKING

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”... “[W]here I am, there my servant will be also” (John 12:21, 26 ESV).

John narrates Palm Sunday with several vignettes (12:1-15). What makes these vignettes intriguing is John’s highlighting of his characters’ fantasies. Judas feigned moral outrage over spilt perfume as a ruse for his thievery (12:6). The chief priests wanted to murder a man who had been miraculously raised from the dead, as well as the One who miraculously raised him (12:9-10). Next, a crowd waving palm branches greets Jesus entering Jerusalem in a docile manner. (12:12-15). The palm branch was the Jewish national symbol for their previously successful Maccabean rebellion that secured their national independence for the first time in several hundred years. The crowd crowned Jesus as king over their fantasy of achieving independence from Rome.

John’s use of fantasy highlights the duplicitous nature and ulterior motives of each of these parties seeking out Jesus. Judas worked for Jesus to steal from Him. The chief priests wanted to work Jesus over, not to defend the crowds, but to defend their popularity. The crowd eagerly greeted Jesus as their king, insofar as He would be *their* mascot for *their* kingdom.

Then Jesus is told that Greeks are seeking Him, but their motives are unknown (12:20-22). Jesus responds rather pointedly: His true followers would seek to be His servants, not seek Him to serve their lustful fantasies (12:25-26). To truly serve Jesus is to follow Him, to be where He is. Where was He going but to sacrifice Himself for the world? Why do you seek Jesus?

William Daniel is an Asbury Theological Seminary student seeking to serve Jesus in the Navy chaplaincy. He and his wife, Rebekah, have three “authentically awesome” children: Annesley, Amie, and Alister.

LENT AND DELIGHT

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled (Mark 6:41-42 NRSV).

It occurred to me recently that the story of Jesus’ feeding the multitude is not only about His power and compassion, but also about Jesus’ ability to accomplish much with little.

If we imagine a situation where Jesus had, instead of five loaves and two fish, let’s say 500 loaves and 200 fish, what would have happened then? Does this thought-experiment make us a little uneasy? Jesus changes people’s dearth into abundance, but what can he do with our abundance? Does this show not only that God makes abundance out of scarcity, but that He prefers it?

How can God do much with our lives when we live in such luxury? When we have so much bread and so many fish that they regularly spoil in our refrigerators? Can wisdom truly speak to us when we have so much information? Can we experience deep excitement when we are entertained at every turn? Are our lives often too full to be meaningful?

Lent is thus a good opportunity to learn to be satisfied with less, so that we can enjoy it more. A few things experienced in depth matter more than a million things scratched on the surface. One deep love is more than a dozen flirts. One day on the doorstep of God’s house more than thousands elsewhere.

Josef Sykora and his wife, Lynette, are Free Methodist missionaries to Europe. They have two sons, Simon and Luke. They live in Bratislava, Slovakia, where Josef pastors a church. Lynette oversees the member care for FM missionaries on the continent.

Scripture: John 12:20-33

March 6, 2012

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus" (John 12:20,21)

According to John, the conflict was mounting and Jesus knew His time was near. Raising Lazarus from the dead had created such a stir in Jerusalem "the whole world" was following him, and the Jewish leaders didn't like it.

But what intrigues me about this passage is that it was two Greeks, not Jews, who prompted Jesus to say "it is time." Up until now His ministry had been to Jews, and His followers were looking for a Jewish messiah to deliver Israel. In fact it was much later before the disciples finally comprehended that the gospel was for the Greeks and all Gentiles as well.

Jesus saw the bigger picture. He understood the promise to Abraham repeated by the prophets that through his offspring "all peoples on earth will be blessed." But He also saw the importance of the cross in order for this to happen. "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (v. 24).

Later in the passage, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (v.32). The crucifixion and resurrection opened salvation up to the world, to all peoples everywhere.

Paul Shingledeker is a World Gospel Mission (WGM) missionary working with Radio Lumière in Haiti. He is a "missionary kid" who was born and raised in Africa.

Scripture: John 13:1-17

March 31, 2012

WHAT CAN I GIVE FOR LENT?

*Now that I the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example....
John 13:14-15 NIV*

The Thursday of Holy Week is known as Maundy Thursday. From the word "maundy" comes the word mandate or commandment. At the final meal Jesus celebrated with His disciples He surprised them by washing their feet illustrating for them the humility of servanthood. Following the meal He gave them a new commandment: "...Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

During the Lenten season, we are encouraged to fast, to give up something we ordinarily enjoy. But this year, let us consider asking ourselves, "What can I give for Lent?" Isaiah tells us the kind of fasting that pleases the Lord: "...to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke....to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood (Isaiah 58:6-7). Jesus spoke similar words and added: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

In 1975, Margaret Cropper penned these words:

Take my hands, Lord Jesus, let them work for you;
Make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do.
Let me watch you, Jesus, till I'm gentle too,
Till my hands are kind hands, quick to work for you.

Marcia Burgess, an ATS alumna '88 and retired teacher, participates in Common Threads, WFMC's Prayer Shawl ministry.

Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40

March 30, 2012

ANYONE CAN DO IT

Jesus replied, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. The second most important is similar: ‘Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself’ ” (Matthew 22:37-39 Living Bible).

Years ago two young ladies from Thailand who were coming to Lexington to go to graduate school sat by Judy on a flight into Lexington. By the time the plane landed at Bluegrass Field they were calling her Mom. We call them our Thai daughters. One evening they asked me why there are so many different Christian churches.

There are probably a number of scholars in Wilmore who could have answered the question but I wasn't one of them so I changed the subject to, “What does God want from us?” I explained that God wants us to love him with all of our being. He also wants us to love each other.

One of them, Toup, gave a response I will never forget. “It's so simple anyone can do it.” We had recently received a letter from Rex and Nancy McConnell. Among other things, they mentioned that their mentally-challenged daughters, Sharon and Kristi, continued to grow in their love for Jesus. I thought, “You are so right, Toup. A person doesn't have to have a string of advanced degrees behind his/her name. It really is so simple anyone can do it.” Hopefully you have been able to experience the type of Christian love for God and for each of us that Sharon and Kristi demonstrate so well. God loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for each of us so that we may spend eternity with Him.

Arvid Metcalf, now retired, piloted big airplanes for UPS. He and Judy live just north of the church on Veteran's Drive. Their twin granddaughters, Emily and Rose, live next door with their parents, Mark and Kathy Davila.

Scripture: John 17:9-23

March 7, 2012

CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR US

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message” (John 17:20).

John 17 reveals Christ's heart, as He prayed for His disciples and for “those who will believe on me through their message.” This prayer is for you and me. It is reassuring to know that Jesus prayed for us. He specifically asked the Father for several things: (1) that we would have His joy fulfilled in us (v. 13), (2) that we would be kept from the evil one (v. 15), (3) that we would be sanctified through God's truth (v. 17), and (4) that we might be one in Christ. (v. 21)

Jesus didn't pray for us to be taken out of the world, or that we would not have trouble. In verse 14, He states that the world will hate us because we are not “of the world.” However, in the midst of trouble, we can know His joy. He has power to keep us from evil. Praise the Lord! We don't have to live in defeat! It is His will to give us victory. May we allow God's word to bathe our minds and hearts so that we are sanctified through God's truth. Jesus overcame temptation by quoting Scripture. May we fill our minds with God's word so that it is available to give us strength for the temptations we face. Finally, it is Christ's desire that we be one with Him. To be one with Christ, our will must be yielded to His will, even as Jesus yielded to God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). Our desires must conform to His desires (Philippians 2:2-5). As we are one with Christ, our lives will bring glory to Him and be a positive witness in the world in which He has placed us.

Margaret Dargan is a retired schoolteacher, wife, mother, and grandmother. Her calling is prayer ministry, and she has been a part of WFMC for over 40 years.

DEATH IS COSTLY TO GOD

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15 KJV).

Should Christians welcome death as the vehicle to get us from “this vile world” into the courts of heaven? St. Francis spoke words to that effect. Sometimes this verse is used in that way. It seems to say that God is especially gratified when someone dies in the faith. In fact, the psalmist is saying that the death of a saint is terribly *costly* to God. “Precious” meant that in 1611.

Like all the ancient Israelites, the psalmist sees death as something terribly wrong. He had been about to die: “The pains of death surrounded me...” (v. 3). [But] “you have delivered my soul from death” (v. 8). We can imagine King Hezekiah saying these words after his near-death experience. So when the psalmist says, “The death of His saints is very costly to the LORD,” he is saying that God does not want anyone to die. How true that is! God made us for life, a life that would begin in this world and move without decay, dissolution and pain directly into the world to come. But sin has intervened and brought with it the great obscenity of all existence—death. This is why Jesus agonized so in the garden. He who was Life Incarnate was about to bear all the death(s) of this broken world.

So if you weep uncontrollably when a sainted loved one dies, know this: God is weeping too. The death of His saints is horribly costly to him – as costly as the cross.

Dr. John Oswalt is Visiting Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary. He is a native of Ohio. He and his wife Karen have three children and four grandchildren. They have attended WFMC for three years.

FOLLOWING JESUS TO JERUSALEM

When the days were approaching for His ascension, He set His face toward Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51 ESV).

I found myself in a conversation about Ramadan with my majority background neighbor. She said, “It’s like when Christians give up chocolate.” “Lent?” I asked. I then joyfully explained that it’s not just about giving up chocolate, but about making room to hear Jesus’ voice and let Him call you into deeper relationship with Him. “You hear His voice,” she asked? Her question was steeped in longing that her voice could not hide.

As we approach Lent, are we filled with that same longing to hear His voice and to let His word have His way in us? Are we ready to see what it truly means that Jesus “set His face toward Jerusalem” and calls us to do the same? Only love could have motivated Jesus to draw closer to Jerusalem. He knew what would come; He knew the demands of love. Only love could have empowered Jesus to give of Himself to those who would soon reject Him. Only love could help Him hold His tongue and entrust Himself to the One who would ultimately defend Him.

As we journey with Jesus through this season of Lent, let us draw near. Let us cry out for God to do what only He can do, and let His love set our faces toward Jerusalem. Let us follow Jesus’ way of wholehearted abandonment. Let us hear Him say, “I held nothing back and I hold nothing back.” Let these compelling words win our hearts again. May we do what it takes to give Jesus time and space to speak, so that we can follow Him to the cross, stay with Him there, and learn how to live out love amidst a hurting world.

Megan Weber is a graduate of Asbury University (07). She and her husband, Dustin, are currently serving in the Middle East with Free Methodist World Missions.

Scripture: Galatians 6:1-10

March 28, 2012

CARRYING SOMEBODY ELSE'S BURDEN

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2 NRSV).

Mary and I were walking to the grocery store on a very cold, windy 30-40mph, and rainy (coming sideways) day in Scotland. We spotted an elderly lady who was obviously unstable and attempting to shuffle along painfully struggling to walk with several heavy grocery bags. Mary approached her first and just started helping her. She was on a cane and could barely stand up. She needed to get to the bus stop to go home. Mary held her up on one side, I held her on the other side, and took the grocery bags. They were heavy and she would not have made the two hundred yards to the bus stop on her own power. Mary and I took her body to stabilize her and her heavy bags to carry.

It occurred to me afterwards. This is similar to what Christ does for us. He makes the exchange and gets our burdens and we get Him. The exchange was that we took her external burdens (the heavy bags), we held her up so she could walk, and she had no load to carry. We literally became the burden bearers (substituting our energy and strength for her frailty) for a few minutes. The substitution took place on our backs with our strength. She got the benefit of a lighter walk. She even was able to literally lean on us. I think for a few minutes, all three of us co-inherited as one; in and with each other. This is one small example of the way we all help each other by prayer and physical actions. We carry one another in our hearts and in our bodies fulfilling the law of the love of Christ.

Paul and Mary Blair make their home in Wilmore where Paul is president of the Francis Asbury Society. They have three children and two grandchildren. They attend WFMC.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

March 9, 2012

THE LIVING MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.... And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Walking the cobble stone streets of Old Jerusalem recently, I was struck with the tension. Down the same streets Jesus once walked, everyone was walking towards places of prayer; the Jews to the Wailing Wall, Muslims to the Dome of the Rock. The tension between the groups was obvious. Distrust and strife has long separated them yet a common longing envelops them.

As I watched people pray I saw fervor in their eyes and a longing and straining for something just out of reach. Adherences to strict religious rules were falling short of fulfilling the innate desire for the peace and presence of God.

As I watched this modern religious and political tension play out, I couldn't help but imagine a scene from the *same street* 2000 years ago. Jesus was beaten and forced to carry His cross down these same streets. Religious and political tensions converged that day to result in His death.

As tension and strife divide these two groups, how interesting it is that their common longing for the presence of God holds the hope of bringing them together. Reconciliation between them lies in their reconciliation to God through Christ.

The painful trek down these streets that ended in the death of one man on a cross resulted in the opportunity for life and peace for those who walk these streets today. May our commitment be to "the message of reconciliation."

Dustin Weber and his wife Megan help lead the FM church planting initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa. They reside in the Middle East.

Scripture: Genesis 3:8-15

March 10, 2012

THE DEFEATED FOE

“From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15 NLT).

Ever since God created humans to have an intimate relationship with Himself, Satan has been in the forefront trying to destroy that relationship. The temptation to sin—to willingly rebel against God’s will—has been Satan’s ultimate weapon against humans. To push humans far away from God has been Satan’s exclusive mission. The battle for the human soul rages on. BUT, THERE IS JESUS CHRIST—God’s ultimate weapon against Satan—the One who came to earth to destroy the works of Satan. Jesus is God’s Son, God’s warrior, God’s agent of salvation. Hope amidst sin and evil was declared in Genesis 3:15.

The death of Jesus on the cross seemed like an apparent victory for Satan. However, the works of Satan were defeated on that cross. Sin and death were conquered through His precious blood. On Easter morning, Satan’s plans were crushed. God raised His Son from the dead and death was destroyed! Once Jesus left the tomb, Satan was a marked serpent! Satan was conquered! The human soul can live forever! The human body will one day be transformed into incorruptibility, and the intimate relationship God has with humans will live on forever—face to face—in His everlasting Kingdom! Satan continues to war against the human soul and, devastatingly, many succumb to his temptations. Yet, Christ-followers proclaim loudly in a dark world, Satan is the defeated foe! Jesus has won the battle! All of Creation celebrates and rejoices!

Craig Saunders is a PhD Candidate in New Testament Studies at London School of Theology in London, England. He is Pastor of Outreach and Evangelism at WFMC.

Scripture: Mark 15:16-20

March 27, 2012

LOVE THE DRIVING FORCE

After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put His own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him (Mark 15:20 NRSV).

It is hard to imagine the journey. The streets are so cluttered with shops bursting beyond their doors obstructing the passerby. Cameras everywhere. Guns hang in full view on the shoulders of barely-voting-age youth. Each step is to navigate the sea of people. And the heat! The nose draws in and dissects the information: food cooking, humanity, waste and something else, too. Distractions pull from every side and at every sense. What would drive you to push through? Why carry on when there are tee-shirts to buy, people to see and food to enjoy?

Jesus didn’t encounter these modern trappings on the Via Dolorosa, but He did have distractions and detractors. He carried a burden much heavier than the wood on His shoulders and much heavier than the Jewish notion of sacrifice as a substitute for sin.

Love was the focused driving force behind each step of Jesus. God’s intense desire for friendship with His creation motivated that journey. Competition for our attention is fierce, but there is more to Jesus than a passing glance affords. His loving friendship bears the burden of our sin that we cannot carry alone. His love will never let us go but continually pursues us, wooing us, never tiring, never giving up until the walls of pride, hate and indifference are down forever.

May the absolute vastness of Infinite Love arrest us, renew, focus and lead us along the Lenten journey.

Byron Skaggs loved living in Egypt for 10 years and enjoyed traveling to Israel multiple times. He resides in Wilmore with Jen, Jonathan and Aubri, and works at BEJA Environmental, Inc.

WHAT IS IT WITH “LOVES”?

[Jesus] took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matthew 26:37-38).

My knowledge of the season of Lent as a child was very limited. I would hear the kids at my public school ask other kids, “What are you giving up for Lent?” Usually a dejected response followed: “Sweets.” The “Lenten question” came up each year. I began thinking, “Maybe I should give up something. Sports? No. Sweets? Too general. I need something specific that I can do without!” My childish ways of thinking saturated my minuscule desire to sacrifice a “love” to honor the Lord in the Lenten season.

The Garden of Gethsemane resonates highly with me. I can see myself as a disciple sleeping instead of keeping watch, unprepared for Jesus’ arrest. What would have happened if the disciples had kept watch and prayed? Would it have made a difference? Instead of finding the disciples sleeping, what if Jesus heard their prayers in the midst of His agony?

Multiple times in every day, we have opportunities to give up one our “loves” to do something for Jesus. While this is noble, I’m pretty sure it’s not what Jesus had in mind for us because we could spend our whole lives choosing our mini sacrifices. We all have orientations toward things we love. Typically these point to ourselves. Encountering Jesus transforms us, including what we are oriented toward. My problem is not my “loves”—it’s me. This season, may the One who suffered and died transform us, making it possible for us to supremely love our greatest Lover.

John-David Van Valin is a fourth year MDiv student at Asbury Theological Seminary. He enjoys spending time with his wife, Brianna, who is a senior at Asbury University.

BE ON GUARD

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come” (Mark 13:32-33).

Last spring in preparing a series of sermons, I asked some of the residents of Royal Manor, a nursing home in Nicholasville, what questions they had for God. The immediate response was, “When will Jesus come back?” This is a common angst among many of the elderly to whom I have ministered over the years. Many have said to me they were ready to go. Sitting in a wheelchair day after day, unable to propel oneself, is a difficult place to be. It is especially lonely if you can no longer be in your own home and are separated from family and friends. For some, Christ’s return is the only hope they have.

Jesus’ disciples asked Him when He would return. He told them that not even He was aware, but only the Father knew the time. He warned them to be alert, and watchful in their waiting. In Matthew, Jesus said it will be like the days of Noah. Noah prepared while his detractors ate, drank, and married. When the rains came, it was too late; Noah and his family were already in the Ark.

The residents of Royal Manor would do well to heed Jesus’ warning. The days are long and the body has failed them. What they see before them is the end moving closer at the speed of life. After teaching the disciples, Jesus turned toward Jerusalem one last time, knowing His end was near. Just like those in Royal Manor, He was ready.

Christopher Wittenberg is Pastor of Rest Homes for WFCM, serving at Royal Manor Healthcare. He and Annette have been married for 23 years and have five children.

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:20-25

March 12, 2012

FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:20-22).

The Qur'an contains an ambiguous verse saying that the Jews didn't crucify and kill Jesus, and Muslim commentators have been grappling with this issue for hundreds of years. Of course it seems unfair to think that Jesus was crucified. We all agree that He was so good and helpful. Muslims propose that maybe Judas was switched out and crucified instead. Or maybe a person who looked like Jesus agreed to take Christ's place in exchange for a future in paradise. Maybe the Romans started to crucify Jesus, but Jesus survived it. How could God allow THAT to happen to a prophet who was SO GOOD?

In his book, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, Matt Zahniser respectfully relays Muslim theology that says the Qur'an was sent down from Heaven word for word, as God's revelation. In contrast, Christians believe that the Bible has been raised up by the Holy Spirit's work in communities of faith. We believe God's one perfect self-expression is Jesus. He was sent down as an exact representation, and He lived by Kingdom values. As a result of the conflict between the world and the Kingdom, Jesus died, and He identified with us to the extent of even feeling abandoned by God in death. Christ radically engaged with our world, and died, and rose in triumph, and He calls us to follow in His steps.

Kathy Metcalf Davila is the wife of Mark and the mother of twin girls, Rose and Emmy. She teaches ESL to Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian kids in Jessamine County Schools.

Scripture: Mark 11:12-25

March 25, 2012

HIS PROMISES ARE ALIVE

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (Mark 11:24).

Jesus was near Bethany, at the Mt. Of Olives, approaching Jerusalem when he cursed a fig tree because it was not bearing fruit. Peter remembers and points out to Jesus, "the fig tree you cursed has withered." Jesus replies, "Have faith in God" (v. 22) and goes on to give some broad, wonderful promises to each of us! God gives us His word filled with His promises. His son Jesus brings you and me healing power. As Jesus spoke to Peter, He speaks to us. We need to, as it says in 2 Corinthians 4:18, "...fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

At the triumphal entry, people spread cloaks on the road, while others spread branches. They shouted things like, "Hosanna," "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," "Blessed is the coming Kingdom of David," "Hosanna in the Highest." When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey never ridden before, it foreshadowed what was to come. He was preparing to take upon himself the sins of the world. The people waved their palm branches, placing clothes in His path, honoring him, the King they could see, failing to see God for who He was, the One in whom sins were forgiven, the unseen Savior.

As we see the sun rise on Easter Morning remember Jesus died, giving His life that we may live! His promises are alive. He has risen! As in the chorus we sometimes sing, Christ was "like a rose trampled on the ground. He took the fall, and thought of you and me above all!"

Beth Wheelock has attended WFMC since 2008 with husband Jeremy and daughter Heidi Rose. She has a BA in Sociology and volunteers at Thomas Hood Veterans Center and Royal Manor.

Scripture: Mark 15:25-32

March 24, 2012

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCE

“Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe” (Mark 15:32).

These are the words of the chief priests and the teachers of the law as the mocked Jesus hanging on the cross. But it was not just the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocking Jesus; v. 29 tells us that “Those who passed by hurled insults at him,” in the same manner as the chief priests and the teachers of the law. Yet it’s ironic that even in their mocking of Jesus, they unintentionally bore witness to Jesus’ miraculous power: “He saved others” v.31.

Right after this testimony, the religious leaders challenge Jesus to come down from the cross that they may believe. What more did Jesus have to do to prove he was their Messiah? He had already shown His power numerous times, but they wanted more proof. It’s a shame that so many people missed what Jesus’ Kingdom was truly about. They could not wrap their minds around a Messiah who would have victory through death. But the way of the Kingdom is the way of the cross.

Maybe today you have doubts about this Jesus. How could the Messiah of not just Israel but the entire human race submit himself to such a horrendous and humiliating death? Only a Messiah who knew what was required to fulfill God’s purpose in redeeming humanity. Imagine the love that held Jesus to the cross, as he endured the mocking and the pain, knowing full well that he possessed the power to save himself—yet knowing that he must endure the suffering and humiliation in order to save you, me, and all who would follow him.

Andy Bentz is a second year MDIV student at Asbury Theological Seminary, and a Conference Ministerial Candidate in the Southern Michigan Conference of the Free Methodist Church. He and his wife, Ashley, are from Mason, Michigan.

Scripture: Luke 22:7-16

March 13, 2012

GOD’S PLAN UNFOLDING

When the hour came, Jesus and His apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-16).

As Jesus joins His disciples in that upper room to observe the Passover meal, He tells them He has desired fervently to eat this Passover with them. I wish I could have been there to feel the weight of the moment as Christ observed Passover for the last time before He would offer Himself as the perfect sacrificial lamb. Of course, I wouldn’t have begun to grasp that, and would have missed the significance that we are fortunate to trace through the completed scriptures. During that meal, Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper saying, “do this in remembrance of Me.”

During communion I often picture this scene, and Christ’s intense desire to share the meal with His followers that night. Not only was He looking back to the Exodus, and at His present Passion, but He could see as clearly a future meal, a marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride when He gathers His church to Himself. I don’t begin to understand these mysteries but as I meditate on the Lenten season and the work of the cross, I am amazed at the unfolding of God’s plan. It is a great comfort to me in the midst of the uncertainties and difficulties of this life to know for certain that Christ will come back for me, and that He eagerly desires for me to be with Him eternally. Each remembrance of Him reminds me to continue abiding in His words as I wait.

Erin McLaughlin lives in Wilmore and began attending WFMC in 1999. She currently serves on the Board of Administration. She teaches the middle school girls’ Sunday school class, enjoys participating in Women’s Bible study, music ministry, youth events, and helping with socials.

Scripture: John 13:1-17

March 14, 2012

JOHN'S RECURRING THEMES

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of His love (John 13:1).

John's Gospel recounts Jesus' miraculous healings, His testimonies of being the Christ, and His power over natural laws. These events flesh out John's recurring themes of "truth" 26 times, "love" (26 times), "believe" (60 times), "I am" (69 times), and "world" (80 times) [NKJV].

Chapters 13 through 17 take place in the upper room and in Gethsemane. Jesus is deliberate in engaging His disciples with these same themes "truth" (9x), "love" (16x), "believe" (12x), "I am" (20x), and "world" (41x). In saying, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer," v. 33, is Jesus uncertain of their understanding or is He reframing what He taught them these past three years? Is that why Jesus began with the strange love language of acting as their slave and taking on the task of feet washing?

Jesus prayed "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message....May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (17:20, 21). That being said, we are charged with the same command three times—13: 34, 35; 14:15; and 15: 12-14: "My command is this: Love [agape] each other as I have loved you.... You are my friends if you do what I command." We have plenty of opportunities.

Ralph Yoder and his wife, Grace, make their home in Wilmore. They have two daughters, Laurel and Annie.

Scripture: Mark 14:3-11

March 23, 2012

THE BROKEN JAR

While Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on His head.... "Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her" (Mark 14:3, 9 NRSV).

This event happens as Jesus is nearing the end of His life and ministry. This woman's act of extravagance was scorned and criticized as a "waste" of precious resources. Yet, Jesus reprimands those who condemn her; rather, He states that she is preparing Him for His burial. Indeed, He praises her for her generosity, v. 9.

It is the act of extravagance. I am clearly too far removed from the culture of Jesus' day to "get it" as far as what this woman did. As I have studied the passage, I have tried to picture the setting in my mind and to witness, in my mind's eye, her act of pouring the ointment on Jesus' head. I just cannot grasp it. It was clearly a sacrifice that earned her nothing but judgment and condemnation from those around her.

Yet, it meant so very much to Jesus. Are we ready to show Jesus that kind of extravagant love and devotion? Are we ready to give of ourselves in ways that only we can, even if it costs us more than we can imagine? This woman's contribution was one that only she could make—she was uniquely suited to do so and most willingly did so. Do we have that mindset—to do whatever we alone can do, to give what only we can give? May God grant us each that extravagant devotion during this season of Lent!

Patti McPeake, wife of David, is a student at Asbury Theological Seminary. She says she has "two fantastic sons, one sweet daughter-in-law, and two adorable grandsons." Patti hopes to finish her seminary studies at the end of 2012.

SURROUNDED BY DARKNESS

Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces the east; and it was shut. ² And the LORD said to me, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut (Ezekiel 44:1-2 NAS).

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray" (Matthew 26:36 NAS).

Following the last supper, when Jesus retreated from Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane, He had left the noise and activity of the city behind, in favor of the quiet dark. His surroundings were a metaphor for how He surely felt: alone and surrounded by darkness. Even though He had brought His three closest disciples with Him, they were of little comfort in the suffering He knew He would soon experience.

We can follow Jesus' example in that when He was experiencing His darkest hour, He turned to His Heavenly Father. We are invited to do the same. Though well-meaning friends and family may fail us, He never will.

The Garden of Gethsemane is just to the east of Jerusalem, facing what was known as the Golden Gate, or Beautiful Gate. The traditional Hebrew understanding of Ezekiel 44:1-3 was that the victorious Messiah would one day enter Jerusalem from the East, through the Golden Gate. Little could anyone guess that this scripture was fulfilled as a bound Jesus was led from the Garden of Gethsemane to His trial that dark night.

John Crow is a third year Masters of Divinity student at Asbury Theological Seminary. He plans to one day pastor a Free Methodist Church. He is married to Mindy, and has 3 boys: Sergei, Josiah, and Stephen.

A SEVEN-PART LENTEN STUDY BASED ON PART OF JESUS' FAREWELL SPEECH**Part 1. Jesus Washes Feet: John 13:1-5**

In what follows, lengthy excerpts are taken from John's Gospel for our Lenten devotions. The format will be slightly different, in that, before giving the passage to be read, observations and questions will be asked first, to help guide the reading and your thoughtful consideration of its meaning today.

John 13-17, the Farewell Discourse in John, begins the second half of John. John 1-12 features Jesus in "public" ministry culminating with the raising of Lazarus (John 11) and Jesus' triumphal entry and teaching in Jerusalem (John 12). John 13-17 recounts Jesus' intimate time with His disciples before He was arrested and crucified (John 18-19) and raised again (John 20-21). The Farewell Discourse gives Jesus' teaching in form of His example (John 13), teaching (John 14-16), and prayer (John 17). We begin with Jesus' example in John 13:1-5 (NASB95).

- a. How does Jesus show His love "to the end"? Why does He have to show it?
- b. Why would Jesus wash His disciples' feet, even Judas' feet?
- c. How is Jesus an example for us today?

13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. ² During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, ⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. ⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded (NASB95).

JESUS' FAREWELL SPEECH

Part 2. Peter's Cleaning Lesson: John 13:6-17

It is offensive for Jesus, God's Son our Lord, to act as our servant. Read the passage and consider these questions:

- a. Why did Peter resist Jesus' initial attempt to wash his feet? Why did he change his mind?
- b. Why do we resist Jesus' attempt to clean us? What areas of ours need cleaning?
- c. What were Jesus' reasons for washing the disciples' feet?

⁶ So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." ⁸ Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." ¹¹ For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³ "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them (NASB95).

Fredrick Long (see biography on p. 4) prepared this seven-part study of John 13-17 especially for our Lenten Devotional Guide.

JESUS' FAREWELL SPEECH

Part 7. Peace to the Disciples, but Not to the World (John 14:22-31)

A break occurs at the end of this chapter (see "Come now; let us leave" in verse 31). Jesus appears to finish this phase of the discussion of His leaving and returning. The Disciples, understandably, remain a bit confused, because losing Jesus meant so much to them. How did Jesus answer Judas' question? (Or, did He?) How does Jesus' relationship with the Father affect what He says and does?

14:22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

²⁸ "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. ³⁰ I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹ but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me. "Come now; let us leave" (NIV).

JESUS' FAREWELL SPEECH

Part 6. Effective Work through Prayer and the Spirit (John 14:12-21)

We all want to be effective in our work for the Lord. Jesus here promises amazing things “in His name.” This effectively limits our concerns to Jesus’ concerns—and this will take study of Scripture, prayer, and discernment of the Spirit—often together. Consider these questions as you read: Whom do we have as advocates before God? What difference does that make? Why should someone keep Jesus’ commands?

14:12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

JESUS' FAREWELL SPEECH

Part 3. Judas in League with Satan: John 13:18-30

While reading, consider why Jesus was troubled in 13:21. Also, when did Satan enter into Judas? See verses 26 and 30. Why might this be significant?

¹⁸ “I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.’ ¹⁹ “From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He. ²⁰ “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” ²¹ When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.”

²² The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. ²³ There was reclining on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴ So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, “Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.” ²⁵ He, leaning back thus on Jesus’ bosom, said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus then answered, “That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.” So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.”

²⁸ Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. ²⁹ For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, “Buy the things we have need of for the feast”; or else, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night (NASB95).

JESUS' FAREWELL SPEECH

Part 4. Jesus Is Glorified and the Hallmark of His Disciples: John 13:31-38

There has been much thought about what the “glory” is that Jesus spoke of in this passage: Is it His sacrificial death? Is it His resurrection? Is it His reunion with the eternal Father? The answer is “yes” to all the above, but especially Jesus being accepted back into eternal, intimate relationship with the Father. Jesus glorified the Father in all He did, but then He asked very pointedly of His Father in 17:5 “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” This is a unique glory that none of us can know. Before reading the Scripture, consider these questions: What relationship exists between Jesus’ glorification with the Father and His command to love one another? How did Peter want to express his love for Jesus? Was he successful?

³¹ *Therefore when he [Judas] 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 will glorify Him immediately. ³³ Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

³⁶ *Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered, “Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.” ³⁷ Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.” ³⁸ Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times” (NASB95).*

JESUS' FAREWELL SPEECH

Part 5. “Where are you going, Jesus? What about us???” John 14:1-11

After dropping the bomb that He was leaving them for a unique place and after putting Peter in his place, Jesus immediately comforted the disciples. Why is it important that Jesus’ followers have a place with Him? What is the most critical notion that Jesus attempted to convey to His disciples in verses 8-11?

14:1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.”