

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 1--Ash Wednesday, March 6**

#### **Making the Decision**

*“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” 2 Corinthians 5:7*

The 259 steps up to the Whispering Gallery of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London are challenging. The passageway is narrow, the steps sometimes slippery and the light is dim. The view at the top, however, is breathtaking.

Not all visitors to St. Paul’s make the decision to climb to the Whispering Gallery. Some have legitimate physical reasons for bypassing the challenge, but others are too hurried or not convinced that the climb is worth the exertion and energy.

We make decisions everyday regarding our physical, spiritual and emotional health. It is so easy to procrastinate and fill our days with everything but that which is good for us. This week as you begin on this walking journey and decide to be good stewards of the body God has given you, may you walk by faith and grow stronger spiritually and physically as you spend time with your Heavenly Father. Congratulations on making that decision to come on this journey!

**Questions to ponder:** How has my faith developed throughout the years?

Were there special people who mentored me in my faith?

What steps am I taking to strengthen that faith?

Is God telling me to step out in faith about some issue?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 2--Thursday, March 7

#### Preparing for the Journey

*Jesus told the disciples, "Take nothing for the journey – no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic." Luke 9:3*

I remember the excitement I felt as a child, anticipating a journey to grandparents who lived hundreds of miles away. The suitcases were out for a week prior to departure. We wanted to make sure that all items were in place and that we would be well equipped for the journey. Nothing could be left behind that might be necessary for the journey!

When Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick in the Gospel of Luke, He instructed them to travel light! No staff – no bag – no bread – no money – no extra tunic! Now that is light travel! Ah – to travel light! What a feeling to be able to simplify our lives of clutter and things and enjoy those things in life that truly last – God, people and the Word of God. Those are the only “items” we will take into eternity – our ultimate journey.

What preparations am I making for that final journey? A deep and personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ will make Heaven an easy transition and continuation of that relationship. Loving relationships with family and friends will continue into eternity. So – to life! Seize the moment! Enjoy God and people! Keep short accounts! Repair relationships as much as it is in your ability to repair! Forgive! The energy and time put into those relationships will bring life, hope and health – physical, spiritual and emotional.

**Questions to ponder:** Are there any relationships in my life that need some repair?

Do I need to make some phone calls?

Do I need to simplify my life?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 3--Friday, March 8

#### Taking the Time

*“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

*Psalm 139:16*

Have you ever said, “There just aren’t enough hours in the day ...?” Our days can become pretty cluttered – and yet God says in Psalm 139, that *“all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”* Does that mean that God knows when we waste time or when we pack too much into our days?

Isn’t it a mystery that we don’t know the number of our days or what the future holds? Only a wise God – ever knowing and ever wise – could create such a system. And yet, we live and act as if we know everything and can control our future!

Maybe we need to ponder how we fill our days. We can take the time to ponder, and while we walk this week, let’s do just that – take the time to ponder the mystery of our all knowing, all loving God who knows what lies behind, before and with us today.

**Questions to ponder:** God thinks of me constantly. How often do I think of Him?

What percentage of my day is spent on God?

What percentage of my day is spent on enriching my relationships with family and friends?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 4--Saturday, March 9

#### Plotting the Journey

*“In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.” Proverbs 16:9*

It was one of those long automobile rides through Tennessee on Interstate 75. The AAA TripTik travel planner did not indicate any detours or road construction, but the large orange “detour” sign and the accompanying orange barrels were unavoidable. The course had been smooth and sleek up until this point with nicely angled roads and well planned rest stops. The detour would delay our arrival and change our plans.

We exited the freeway and found ourselves on a narrow winding road dripping with fresh mountain streams, fringed with delightful wild flowers of purple hues, bright yellows and soft magenta. The turns in the road were hard and narrow, and the prospect of an unseen approaching car suddenly appearing on one of those hard turns kept us alert and expectant. But the flowers were beautiful and the streams refreshing even though the road was difficult. The road was also quite brief. It seemed like time stood still as we focused on the beauty and the winding road. In a minute we were back on the super-highway. The drone of the widely paved road lulled us into a senseless stupor of grey cement, blurry green forests and flashy billboards. We struggled to keep awake.

As you walk this week, let your senses come alive as you ponder God’s creation and creativity.

**Questions to ponder:** Am I including God in my decision making?

Do I trust Him to direct my paths?

Am I taking the time to see and appreciate people, things, blessings in my life or am I riding the superhighway?

How do I handle detours along the way? Am I flexible to change or very rigid?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 5--Sunday, March 10

#### Change Happens

*"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28*

Change is something that we all go through. We have big changes in our lives and we have little changes. Some of us get set in our ways and we don't like change and I'm not saying that all change is good. There are some things I don't want to change myself but the fact is in life we all go through some type of change and it affects us in some way. Here are some people in the Bible who went through change.

**Ruth**—Ruth lost her husband which caused change. The loss of her husband caused Ruth's life to be displaced. I remember when my father passed away. My mother seemed so alone and it was hard to see her that way. I know many ladies who have lost their husbands and it is such a struggle for them, especially at the beginning right after their loss. They are so used to functioning as a couple that moving on alone is almost unbearable for them. That's where Ruth found herself. Ruth moved to a different location too.

I've moved many times and I think I've mentioned before that whenever I see a U-Haul or a moving van I send up a prayer for the family it belongs to. Believe me. It's tough to move. Sometimes you move away from family and friends. You may not even know a single soul where you are moving to. It takes some time to adjust to a move even if it isn't far away and just from one house to another. Ruth had to learn to adjust to where she was in her life. God blessed Ruth with a new husband because that was God's plan, but that's not always his plan for every widow. He may not bless in that way but God has a purpose to everything that happens.

**Mary, the Mother of Jesus**—Mary found out she was going to have a baby through an angel. Not only was she carrying a child, but it was the Son of God. What a change that would turn out to be in her life. Becoming a parent always causes change in our lives. No matter what your circumstances are, when you find out you are having a baby, it causes dramatic change. We may be overjoyed at the prospect of having a child and feel totally blessed about it but still it changes our whole lives. It is not only a change for you but affects everyone in the household. Look at where Mary was in her life. She wasn't even married to Joseph officially yet. I wonder how she felt and what went through her mind when her life was changed so dramatically. We know how we all have been blessed by Mary carrying our Savior. It was what God had in his master plan to bring salvation to the world.

**Paul**—Paul’s life was changed dramatically when he met Christ on the Road to Damascus. I think we all look at him as this strong Christian who faced life with courage and he did, but what a change it was in his life. Even his name was changed. Even those we think of as “strong” Christians have struggles when it comes to change. Look at the things that happened to Paul because of the change in his life by accepting Christ as Lord. Life wasn’t easy for him. He was even put in prison but God had a plan for Paul’s life and we are still encouraged and blessed today by how he lived and what he shared in his letters.

Conclusion: Change can be hard. On the other hand, some change can be easy but in the end, we can learn from it. Sometimes it helps make us stronger. Sometimes we look back and see how God worked through it and that is such a blessing. Other times though, we don’t know why we had to endure change. Sometimes we can’t see God’s plan and sometimes we never will know why He worked in a certain way. Change will happen. In the end, all we can do is trust the Lord and allow His moving and leading because we know that God always has a plan.

*“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28*

**Question to Ponder:** So, what have you learned from change?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

**Day 6--Monday, March 11**

#### Where Am I Going?

*“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”  
Philippians 3:14*

Are we almost there now? Are we really going to Jerusalem? How much longer before we get there? Are you sure we're heading in the right direction? These are questions that may bring to mind memories of past journeys traveled as a child or with children.

Most of us know what it's like to be the child and the adult in such a situation. As a child, we must trust that the adult really knows the way. As an adult we must press on toward the goal, knowing that if we follow the map and continue to travel, we will eventually reach our goal. Having a goal helps us to continue until we reach the prize or the destination.

In the same way that we set physical goals to increase the number of steps we take each day, we can set physical goals. Having that goal helps us to continue on. Your spiritual goal may be to read the Word of God daily, pray daily or memorize a Bible verse. The deeper spiritual goal may be to have a deeper personal relationship with Jesus, to confront each other in a kinder more loving manner or to forgive someone. The ultimate spiritual goal is to become more Christ-like in our everyday encounters with people and society.

**Questions to ponder:** Do I have physical and spiritual goals for this week?

Do I have physical and spiritual goals for my life?

What is one thing I can do to help achieve my physical goal?

What is one thing I can do to help achieve my spiritual goal?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 7--Tuesday, March 12

#### Daily Walking close to Thee

*"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits,  
even the God of our salvation." Psalm 68:19 KJV*

I remember everyone making New Year's resolutions in January. But actually, I am not a big fan of them. I think that we generally don't follow them anyway. When we really resolve to do something to change our lives, it is usually at a time in our life when we are to the point that we see the need for change. Of course if a resolution works for you, then great!

A resolution usually means that we want to resolve to improve or better ourselves and that's always good, especially in the spiritual areas of our lives. I'm always for anything to improve our lives and relationships with our Lord. When it boils down to it, bettering ourselves as Christians involves bettering our relationships with God. We have to draw closer to Him before we can improve our Christian lives. Sure, we can make a New Year's resolution to do that but I think just resolving, day by day, gets the job done in a better way.

Do you remember the old hymn? "Just a Closer Walk with Thee." I can remember that playing off a record when I was little. We had a record in our family, I think by Tennessee Ernie Ford with that old song on it and I can remember learning the words when I was quite young.

I am weak but Thou art strong, Jesus keep me from all wrong;  
I'll be satisfied as long, As I walk let me walk close to Thee!  
Just a closer walk with Thee, Grant it Jesus, is my plea,  
Daily walking close to Thee, Let it be dear Lord, Let it be.

Whenever I think of that song it always turns my thoughts toward David. There are several passages in Scripture where we can see that David lived the day-by-day way to be closer to God. Yes, he was human and had his faults, but he had some good practices in his life.

**First of all David prayed daily**—*"Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice." Psalm 55:17*

**Secondly, David realized the benefit of God's daily blessings**—*"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation." Psalm 68:19*

**Thirdly, He praised God daily**—*"And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised." Psalm 72:15*

**Fourthly, David learned that he needed to rely on God daily**—“*And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised.*” *Psalm 72:15*

We've all got to live the Christian life just one day at a time. That, in turn, will cause us to have that improvement in our Christian life that we all so greatly need. Just resolve to live better for God, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment and that will add up to our best for Him not only for this new year but for our entire lives as well.

**Question to ponder?** What can you do to be sure you are praying daily like David?

What are your blessings?

How close have you walked with the Lord today?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 8--Wednesday, March 13

#### Visitors Along the Road

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23.*

When we think of visitors along the road, the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 naturally comes to mind. We can all somehow relate to that story. The Good Samaritan actually stopped to help the hurting person while others ignored the hurting person.

How often can we say that we have walked past a hurting person? How often have we helped a hurting person? The person may not even be a stranger. The excuses are many. To help the hurting person means stepping out of our comfort zone, rearranging plans and yes, showing and living the fruits of the Spirit which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

This week as you walk you may not see a physically hurting person, but ask God to help you see others as He sees them. If we are willing, He will show us the hurting of this world and fill us with His compassion and love.

**Questions to ponder:** Have you ever unexpectedly and spontaneously helped a stranger?

How did you feel?

Think about hurting people you know. As you walk this week pray for those hurting ones. Does God want you to take some action?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 9--Thursday, March 14

#### Who is My Neighbor?

*He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:27*

How's the neighborhood? That is sometimes one of the first questions a prospective buyer asks when looking at a house, but for many, gone are the days when neighbors sit on porches and spend time with each other. It's difficult enough carving out time for family, let alone neighbors. Jesus says we should love our neighbor as ourself!

This week if you walk or drive through your neighborhood, consider it an opportunity to pray for your neighbors. Pray as you pass by each house. If you see bikes and swing sets, pray for the children in the house. If the drapes are drawn and there's little activity, pray for those who live in the house. Sometimes homes become secret cocoons of pain and strife.

Just as only God knows what is going on inside our lives, God is sometimes the only one who knows what goes on in our homes. Pray that the Holy Spirit can break through and ease the pain and strife that your neighbors may be experiencing.

**Questions to ponder:** What can it possibly mean to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind?

Think about yourself. Are you pleased with yourself? Do you love yourself? Are you able to love others?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 10--Friday, March 15

#### Let Our Life Flow!

*“Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.” Jeremiah 17:7, 8*

Where the waters flow there is life, because this flow of God’s Word brings life to all and all who are thirsty has this flowing water of God’s Word within. Not only is this flow of water in the rivers that bring life, but also this flow of life giving water is in us. *“Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” John 7:38* If anyone should thirst, let them come to these waters that flow. If anyone that has this water within them and should see another person drying up, let them share the life giving waters with them! Let these once again plant their roots where the waters of life flow!

Today if you will take a moment and find a plant or a tree that has leaves, take a moment to look at that leaf, notice the veins and arteries within that leaf. They continually allow the flow of the waters that carry life giving nutrients throughout the entire plant, but if any one of those veins or arteries should be closed off, the area that lacks this life giving water shall soon die, it is the same in our lives!

Blessed are those that trust the Lord, because they are forever planted near to God’s Word. They are always near to the water that flows bringing nutrients into their life; they will always be protected, never suffering in the heat of the day, and when trials come, God’s Word of Life surrounds them with perfect peace! They are unmovable, unshakable, and never rattled by the incoming hardships of life, because their roots are deeply planted near these flowing waters of God’s Word. The Word of God continuously brings life, through Jesus we will never run dry in a drought, because God’s Word is stored up in us for that dry day, and we will always bear fruit because Jesus abides in us, and we in him. And when we are planted deeply, having our roots attached to this vine, Jesus the True Vine of God, the River of Life, will flow in us!

**Questions to ponder:** What people or activity brings the flow of God into your daily life?

How can God’s love flow through you into the world?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 11--Saturday, March 16

#### Walking Your Faith

*Jesus replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20*

CNN posted an article about a young man's spiritual pilgrimage. When Andrew Domini learned that a friend had recently been diagnosed with stage IV cancer, the 19-year-old college student had traveled 70 miles to pray at the shrine of Catholic Saint, Theodore Guerin. Domini could have easily driven the 70 mile distance, but he wanted his journey to be a sacrifice, so he chose to walk instead. The journey took him two days. He arrived with feet blistered and bloody, but as he prayed over the remains of the Catholic Saint, Domini said he finally felt at peace.

Now here's the interesting part, Andrew Domini isn't Catholic, and when asked he admitted to mixed feelings about the Church. Reading this story, I couldn't help but be struck by the boy's similarity to the Roman centurion from Luke 7, *"When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Luke 7:1-9*

I have to admit, I felt pretty ashamed after reading that article. Here was a boy willing to make sacrifices in order to pray to a God he barely understood, while my prayer life consists of a few garbled words before falling asleep at night. Andrew Domini spent two days walking 70 miles to reach a place of worship, while I struggle to make the five minute drive to church every Sunday. It is so easy to become complacent in our faith, to make it such a part of our daily ritual that we end up forgetting God. But God wants more from us than our hollow actions and lifeless obedience; he wants to be the center of our lives. Being a true Christian means living with a passion for God, and a willingness to go the extra mile. It means living with vision, and not settling for the bare minimum your faith requires. It's seeking to know an unfathomable God, and realizing that He will always have something new He wants to teach you.

**Question to Ponder:** When was the last time you sacrificed something for God?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 12--Sunday, March 17

#### Eyes Wide Open

*“My eyes are ever toward the LORD; for he will pluck my feet out of the net.” Psalm 25:15*

It is finally warming up around here and I've been noticing all the little bugs and insects around. There are bees and wasps where I park every day and wait for my daughter to get out of school. They want so badly to come inside my car. I roll the windows down because I'm hot. Then I roll them up to keep the bees or wasps out. Depends which one is bugging me that day. I repeat that up and down with the windows several times in just the space of a few minutes (as I get panicky that they might get me).

All those insects are a little buggy at times, but I sure enjoy watching all those little critters that are God's creation. I was thinking about all these small things and the dragonfly came to mind. Now it is one of those mysterious ones that God created. Dragonflies have those big eyes wide open. I've read that their sight encompasses basically 360 degrees and that they can see everything at most angles. Wish I could see like that, especially those things that seem to sneak up on me and sideswipe me. There are things I wish I could have seen coming. I know there are things that as Christians we should watch out for so we don't get off track in our daily living. We need to have our eyes wide open like a dragonfly.

**Eyes Open to Understanding**—If we would keep our eyes open to understanding the Lord, just think how much better we would get to know Him. *“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.” Ephesians 1:17, 18*

**Eyes Open to the Word**—I guess if we had our eyes wide open to what God's Word says, we'd learn more and be better to handle those things that get into our view. *“My eyes are awake before each watch of the night, that I may meditate on your promise.” Psalm 119:148 “Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” Psalm 119:18*

**Eyes Open to Temptation**—Just think how much smoother our lives would be if we were constantly on guard for this one. We know we are supposed to be on our toes for it to come sneaking in but sometimes it's there right in front of us before we see it. *“Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:41*

**Eyes Open to God's Help**—We get into these situations and our eyes are bugging out because here comes trouble. How much better we could handle it if we constantly had our eyes on God

and were really relying on the Lord. *“I lift up my eyes unto the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.” Psalms 121:1-3*

**Questions to Ponder:** So, are your eyes wide open?

What can you do to open your eyes to the Word?

What can you do to be more open to God’s help?

An Irish Prayer

Christ within me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left. Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ is the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.  
—St. Patrick

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 13--Monday, March 18

#### Walking on Water

*Matthew 14:26-33 "But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"*

Peter exhibited GREAT faith when he stepped out on the water... but then he allowed his immediate surroundings to hinder his walk! Peter's faith began with a tremendous bold step, but it required a level of focus that he wasn't used to. Follow through.... that was the problem; those pesky waves, and the way he usually thought about and experienced water; (not something that generally supports your feet)... We all know what Peter should have done, right? Keep his eyes on the Lord, NOT the waves!!! That's easy for us to say. But how many of us have ever stepped out of the boat? I didn't notice any of the other disciples playing follow the leader with Peter.

I see two things from this: first, put a little adventure into your life; step out on the water; you might actually enjoy the exhilaration and really glorify God on the way. And secondly, if and when you do, learn from Peter's mistake. Make sure you live life keeping your focus on the Lord (not on your own spiritual ambitions)...because you can be totally confident the waves will come, once you're out of the boat. But watching the Lord of Life walking there with you will give you the vision to follow through.

**Questions to Ponder:** When have you felt Jesus walking by your side?

What should you do to step out and glorify God?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 14--Tuesday, March 19

#### Zig and Zag With God

<sup>3</sup>*A voice cries out:*

*“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

<sup>4</sup>*Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.*

<sup>5</sup>*Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*

<sup>6</sup>*A voice says, “Cry out!”  
And I said, “What shall I cry?”*

*All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.*

<sup>7</sup>*The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.*

<sup>8</sup>*The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever. Isaiah 40:3-8*

Yesterday while I was talking one of my anxiety-prone kids through a seemingly endless set of worries and what-ifs, the weirdest thought came into my mind. All those years in the wilderness must have forced those Israelites to become really flexible! The Exodus would have driven my young worrier nuts. Think about it: The Israelites were there in the desert without a plan, without a set destination, without a timetable, in a place they didn't want to be, led by a guy they didn't really know. They had none of the comforts of home. The neighbor's kids were either bawling or else flinging scorpions at each other. Grandma was cranky, the sun was too hot, and nothing was going the way it was supposed to. No one knew what to expect, and the food stunk. Flexibility had to be one of the keys to sanity... and survival.

Thus it dawned on me, that while I'd always thought those 40 years in the desert were just about trust, they were also about flexibility. For how can we imagine we trust God if we're not open to unexpected detours and radically roundabout pathways? God is with us at every pivot point, at every intersection. He will be with us no matter which sand dune we cross, however many times we cross it. And in that sense it doesn't matter if life works the way we want it to or not. It doesn't matter if the path is smooth or bumpy, clear or uncertain. For as long as we are willing to traverse every zig and zag with God, the path is a good one, and we will be satisfied.

**Questions to Ponder:** Is my path today smooth or bumpy?

Where have I seen God along this path today?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 15--Wednesday, March 20

#### Walking In Faith

*“But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” Matthew 14:30-31 ESV*

We have all dreamt of doing something great for God. These dreams might involve some form of sacrifice or great leap of faith. We see others around us who have sold everything to follow Jesus as a missionary in some far corner of the world and view them as a person of great faith, maybe even aspiring to be like them.

Consider this, if we had been sitting in that boat with Peter we would have thought he was brimming with faith as he began to climb out of the boat and walk toward Jesus. But suddenly, something even stranger happened and Peter began to sink. That courage and faith he had in Jesus was getting smaller as he saw the wind and the waves getting bigger.

A true measure of a person's faith then is not just the first step of their faith journey, but the subsequent steps thereafter. We deal with this every time we get excited about something, starting any given project only to stop halfway through because it was much more difficult than anticipated. The same thing happens when we believe Jesus would have us do something. But as we start doing it and it doesn't turn out like we thought it would, or the ministry isn't immediately growing we begin to sink, losing faith in and sight of Jesus. What we must realize is that if Jesus has called us to make a first step, then he will provide a path for each step toward him after that.

**Question to Ponder:** Where is Jesus calling you to walk in faith?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

**Day 16--Thursday, March 21**

#### **Be a Grace Giver**

*“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*

*Matthew 16:14-15*

The question of genuine forgiveness is one of eternal importance. And why is it, you may ask, so crucial that Christians forgive? For starters, Jesus’ statement in today’s text is quite a compelling reason, for “if you do not forgive others...neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Suffice it to say then, we had better make sure we are forgiving “our debtors” and “our trespassers” (Matthew 6:12). Jesus made it clear that we are to “walk the walk,” not just “talk the talk.”

Here’s the bottom line: forgiveness is such a central element to Christianity that it is an indicator of salvation! Not that we are saved by any works of our own, such as forgiving others, but that when we are reconciled to God through Christ our new life will be marked by grace giving and forgiveness. Remember, our sin was exchanged for Jesus’ righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21), our wrong for His right, our injustice for His justice. God meets our rebellion and pride with grace in and through the person and work of Jesus. Those to whom grace is extended should also extend grace, and those to whom forgiveness is extended should also extend forgiveness.

**Question to Ponder:** Is there someone you should forgive?

Why is it so hard to forgive?

In what areas of your life is it harder for you to walk the walk, than just talk the talk?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 17--Friday, March 22

#### Struggling With Sin

*“For no human being will be justified in his sight by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” Romans 3:20*

We all struggle with sin. There is not one of us who lives life perfectly, so in God’s eyes, we are unholy and imperfect. We can justify our sins and make excuses for our mistakes, but that just compounds the difficulties in our lives and our relationship with God.

Most of us just want to be happy and hope that God understands when we fail Him. We want to be loved and tolerated, accepted and embraced by God, without being challenged or changed. We want our choices to be approved and our lives to be given an A+, but that’s a sinful delusion and selfish way of dealing with life. We are not at the center of God’s great universe; we are not God’s sole focus in the world. We are sinners who do unholy, unworthy, and ungodly things. We are careless creatures who cast God aside when He gets in the way of getting what we desire, and living the way that we want.

Thankfully, God knows us better than we actually understand ourselves, which is why He sent us His Son to die for our sins, in order that all things could be redeemed, reconciled, and restored perfectly to Him. Great sinners like ourselves need a Great Savior. Who else but the Holy Son of God can forgive our sins and bring us back to God? In all of the universe, there is Only One; in All of Creation, there is just One Savior: Jesus Christ.

**Question to Ponder:** What is my most repeated sin?

How can Jesus forgive me, and empower me to overcome that persistent sin?

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 18--Saturday, March 23**

#### **Pressed But Not Crushed**

*“But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly.” Exodus 1:12-13*

Sometimes when people are oppressed because of their faith, they grow in numbers. Christianity in China is a good example of this. In 1949, when the Communists took control of China, there were only about 500,000 Christians in the nation. After persecuting the church for more than sixty years, how many Christians are there in China? 84 million.

It appears that when Christianity is backed into a corner and almost annihilated, it finds a new way out and grows. Perhaps at some future point in our decadent and deviant Western society, we will see a real reemergence of the church because Christians will once again stand up for their beliefs, instead of embracing the culture which is causing a passive church to wither and decay.

Long ago, the Egyptians used a form of genocide in an attempt to wipe out the Jewish community in their midst. It didn't work because God's will could not be thwarted, no matter how powerful the leader of the Egyptians appeared to be. Moses was predestined to be born and become a great leader of his people. God desired this, so human wickedness would not prevail.

Nearly half of today's missionaries are being sent from Global South--Africa and Asia, India and China--to Europe and the Americas in order to reclaim churches and Christians for Christ. God's work will not be undone and Christ's words will always endure. A challenge for our churches today is to be faithful to God's Word and serve Christ truly, even when it is unpopular. If we do that then a people yet unborn may be claimed for Christ and His Kingdom.

**Questions to Ponder:** Has my faith grown in times of adversity?

Have I personally shared my Christian beliefs with the upcoming generation?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

**Day 19--Sunday, March 24**

#### A Tale of Two Gifts

*“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”*

*Zechariah 12:10*

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14*

The older I get, the more I need God’s grace in my life. Decades ago, I thought it would be the reverse. I believed then that I would by now have worked out all of my flaws, failings, and mistakes because I would be older, wiser, and more mature. The reality is a whole lot different: I get set in my ways, whine for the good old days, and feel out of place. Ecclesiastical curmudgeonly and dinosaurian drudgery can best describe me at times.

I was born in the 1950s, raised in the 60s, and formed in the 70s. I’m a 20th Century man living in a 21st Century world. I know how I would like things to be, but there’s no going back. In order to accommodate a new bold world, I constantly need an old beautiful gift: grace.

The two Bible verses for today were written hundreds of years apart, but they express God’s remedy for a broken world in almost the same terms: “grace and supplication” and “grace and truth.” In the Old Testament, God’s patience and mercy were appealed to through the means of sacrifice and supplication. In the New Testament, the Supreme Sacrifice had already been made, so the opportunity of God’s patience and mercy were given through this truth: Jesus is the Savior of our sins. In the past, grace was a means of being granted the permission to approach God; now grace through Christ means that we can not only approach God, but we may also abide with Him forever.

Grace: an ancient, blessed, and beautiful gift from God granted to us today (and for all time) through Jesus Christ our Lord and King.

**Question to Ponder:** How many times have I needed God’s grace this week?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 20--Monday, March 25

#### Habitual Sinner

*Jesus concluded: "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15:10*

Every day, I do something wrong. I say the wrong thing or forget to do the right thing. I break a promise that I made or neglect an obligation I meant to fulfill. I break one of God's commandments or I deliberately go against Christ's Word. In short, I am a habitual sinner who needs to repent every single day.

When I'm made aware of my mistakes, I get defensive at first. I don't want to claim the sin as my own or take the blame for what is wrong. I'm just like a quarterback that I watched recently on television who threw a terrible ball which his receiver could not catch. As he ran off the field, he looked to his coach and I lip-read his words: "It wasn't me," he said. He didn't want to take ownership of his mistake and, unfortunately, his attitude permeated across the entire team. Needless to say, they lost the game.

After initially being defensive, I later realize that I've made a mistake and seek forgiveness for what I've done wrong. This process is called repentance in the Bible and it involves letting go of my pride by humbly asking for God's pardon. So long as I recognize that my sinful behavior, misdeed, or mistake is wrong, I can repent. If ever I believe that my sinful behavior is acceptable, then even God cannot help me and His grace can never be applied to my life. That's why there is a lot of rejoicing in heaven when a sinner truly repents and returns to God. The free will choice to do as we please can either be a blessing or a curse. When we choose to repent, we are restored to God and heaven rejoices; that's also when the beauty of God's grace can positively change our lives forever.

**Questions to Ponder:** When have I ever truly repented before God?

Is there something that I am still reluctant to confess to God?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 21--Tuesday, March 26

#### Sticks and Stones

*Jesus said: "They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.' "* Luke 7:32

The street I lived on as a child was the greatest playground I have ever known. My brothers and I played with the other kids at football, hide and seek, rounders, dodgeball, Best Man Fall, Kick the Can, Red Rover, hopscotch and were even known to play skipping ropes with the girls or challenge them to a hula hoop contest (which the girls always won). The street was always full of excitement and laughter, cheers and songs.

Sometimes we all fell out with each other and formed cliques. We would then yell at each other across the street and call one another names. At some point, both groups would end up singing "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." We would sing it as loudly as we could until one of the homeowners on the street would come outside to tell us kids that we were making too much noise. This was immediately met with peals of laughter, at which point, we forgot our dispute and gathered together again to play a new game.

In Christ's time, the children also played on the street and sang derisive songs to one another. Today's verse includes one of them which must have been well known to Jesus, as well as His listeners. He used the song as an example of people always finding fault with others, whose narrow-minded ways or bitterness precluded them from enjoying the wonders of God's Kingdom and Christ's ministry. Usually, His veiled comments were meant for the religious authorities who were displeased with, and displaced by, His ministry. Their callous hearts could not comprehend the compassion of His work. Their self-righteousness severed them from God's love.

As Christians, we can be smug at times and spiritually aloof. Our pride can damage our effective witness and our religious arrogance can undermine Christ's great work. It's never easy to be a Christian, but sometimes we are our own worst enemies. Perhaps, instead of scornfully singing dirges of derision at the world, we should cheerfully give voice to the songs of salvation for the healing of God's Creation.

**Question to Ponder:** What kind of song of faith do I sing to the world with my life and Christian beliefs?

## Journey to Jerusalem

## Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 22--Wednesday, March 27

### Bible Quiz

*“Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.” Genesis 25:1*

*“They got up, drove Jesus out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff.” Luke 4:29*

Okay, hands up all of you out there who knew that a) Abraham married again after Sarah died and b) that Jesus was almost thrown off a cliff to His death by his own neighbors? I'm thinking that there may not be many hands up out there and that you are probably surprised by these events. Not many pastors preach on those topics and I can't ever remember a Sunday school class ever tackling these passages. And yet, these events are written and described in the Bible, so why don't we know about them? We've stopped reading the Bible, plain and simple.

We've all the time in the world for a best-selling novel, or checking our emails, or reading our tweets and texts, but when it comes to actually reading God's best seller, God's text message – the Bible, we've grown careless and inconsistent, making ourselves biblically weak and scripturally ignorant. That's why the church in Western society is encountering so much inner turmoil. Mainstream Christians believe that their own life experiences and personal feelings, their own ideas and individual opinions outweigh God's Word. They want their faith to be relevant, but they don't want to read the scriptures. They want their culture to be accepted, but they don't want to accept Christ's Gospel. In fact, when faced with the audacity of the New Testament message, they want to throw the uncompromising Christ and His First followers, like Peter and Paul, over a cultural cliff. In other words, they want the church to catch up with the world and alter its Christian ways, rather than face up to the world and challenge it to change.

I firmly believe that if people want their churches to grow, they have to re-invest their time in God's Word. It's no use hoping for the best and wishing things were different; if Christians really want to be effective and influential in the world, they honestly need to know God's Book. Anything else will just be superficially experiential and grossly inauthentic.

**Questions to Ponder:** How often do I read the scriptures?

How can I make this a daily practice?

How will my faith and life improve by knowing God's Word for myself?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 23--Thursday, March 28

#### Simeon's Prayer

*"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." Luke 2:30-32*

I have seen God's salvation in the lives of other people, as well as my own. I have seen addicts turn their lives around and their families restored. I have seen people healed of various illnesses and injuries, and have watched them continue to enjoy life. I have seen the work of many churches across various cities, towns, and villages seeking to support the weak, love the lost, and embrace the hopeless. I have seen the work of missions and missionaries among the poorest of people and in the most deprived communities on Earth. In all of these places and among all of these people, I have seen the continuing ministry of Christ and God's unending work of salvation.

The prayer of Simeon of old is still relevant in today's world. All over globe, Christians are working for the Lord to bring salvation to anxious persons and healing to broken hearts. Life is a constant struggle for most people on this small planet, but Christ's work, words, and ways still manage to bring light and love, as well as hope and healing to billions of human beings in hundreds of nations.

The prophecy that Simeon expressed in the Temple courts is still being experienced today. If we open our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and our hearts to receive, we will notice what God is truly doing among us. Christ's light reveals to us the redemption, renovation, and restoration of lives throughout the Earth. We only have to be open to His Spirit; we only have to be willing to serve Christ in order to see.

**Questions to Ponder:** Where is Christ at work in my life, community, and world today?

How may I help Him?

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 24--Friday, March 30**

#### **A Place for God**

Exodus 25:1-8 Having escaped Egyptian bondage, the Israelites are in the middle of the Sinai desert traveling toward the Promised Land, Israel. God gives Moses the Ten Commandments and then instructs Moses to tell the Israelites to build Him a sanctuary.

This would have seemed like a strange request when there were so many other needs. The people have to be clothed, fed, and housed, plus the fear of Pharaoh once again coming after them. But God demands that they take the time to construct a house of worship. Why? Because without God, they were truly lost.

The Tabernacle, as it was called, represented the presence of God among God's people. The Israelites knew that God was everywhere, that this structure could not contain God. But they also realized that within this enclosure they met God. The Tabernacle was a visible sign of God's presence among them. It focused their energy, their thoughts, their worship. The Tabernacle proclaimed that God is not remote, out of reach, unapproachable, but a God who is here, who sees our struggles, who loves and cares about each one of us.

And this passage reminded me how important our sanctuary is to our community of faith. Its presence declares that our God is here among us. It demonstrates our commitment to the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. In this building, we baptize our children, give our sons and daughters in marriage, celebrate the resurrection of our loved ones. A sanctuary expresses our gratitude to God.

But, most importantly, this is where we come to meet God. Here, we contemplate the very reason for our existence, our place in the universe. Here, challenged and touched by God's word we decide how we will respond to God's call on our lives. Every time we walk through those doors, the grandeur and beauty of our sanctuary reminds us of the majesty and love of God, and demands to know what place in our lives we will give to God.

**Question to Ponder:** Let's contemplate the same question that faced the Israelites: when I evaluate my family life, work, lifestyle, finances, leisure activities, what place am I making for God in my life?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 25--Saturday, March 31

#### Sowing Tears, and Reaping Joy

*“May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.” Psalm 126:5-6*

Reaping “You reap what you sow.” I imagine that Paul, in Galatians 6, wasn’t the first person to write these words. Perhaps he was quoting an old proverb. Regardless of who first uttered the phrase, people have been saying it ever since—often in a pragmatic, even callous tone. “You reap what you sow.” That’s the way the world works, we’re taught.

In this Lenten season, many of us might feel like we’ve been sowing tears. For some, living in the spirit of Lent simply means engaging in a somber devotional exercise. For others, life on the journey through Lent has brought actual tears, triggered by unexpected pains that have made devotion difficult. For those of us in the latter group, the notion of reaping what you sow can dishearten or embitter. Of course, we don’t want our tears to reap more tears.

Psalm 126 opens our eyes to the possibility that though we sow in tears, we may one day reap in joy. This possibility is most profoundly and beautifully actualized in the story towards which this season is moving. Only through the Spirit’s resurrecting power can tears sown be transformed into joy reaped.

**Questions to Ponder:** What makes you cry?

Where do you find your joy?

Do joy and sorrow ever come from the same place?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

**Day 26--Monday, April 1**

#### **Lord, Make Me Humble**

*“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” John 17:20-21*

One of the things that always strikes me about Jesus is the great love He shows for us. He came to overcome suffering and death to sanctify and save us, following the Father’s will. It’s His immense love that moves him to pray for those who believed then and those who believe in Him now. His prayer soars to incorporate distant and future countries, that all those who, in distant lands and ages yet to come, would know and accept the gospel.

I remember a popular saying: “divide and conquer.” There is no human body that could work if each organ decided to act independently; they must all be connected together to achieve harmony. Jesus’s prayer is for each race, language, class, and social stratum to rise above cultural differences and embrace their unity.

“Lord, make me humble,  
Don’t let me stumble  
Over feelings of others not mine.  
Help me to see  
That others like me  
Also need to let their light shine.”

**Questions to Ponder:** How can I find unity with my neighbor?

How can I find harmony with those who are different than I?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 27--Tuesday, April 2

**Self-Talk: prayer as tending to the competing voices in us**

*“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?*

*Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.” Psalm 43:5*

When we are consumed with sadness, prayer may sometimes involve sitting in silence with mindful attention to the competing internal voices within us. We listen to old tapes of self-talk repeating in our mind, voices that often undermine our sense of security, trust or hope.

The Psalmist urges us to attend to each voice that troubles us. Why are we cast down? Why is our soul disquieted? In regularly taking this self-inventory, we take a step forward in our pilgrimage of faith, leading to a place where we may perhaps once again sing the praises of God.

**Questions to Ponder:**

1. Sit quietly and listen to the voices that are disquieting your soul today. What troubles you? What questions do you have for God?
2. Contemplate a past experience when you joined with others in an outpouring of praise and thanks for God’s faithfulness and trust. Recount in your mind the details and feelings of that time and ask God for a sense of hope that you will again experience such joy and assurance in the future.

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 28--Wednesday, April 3

#### Road Work Ahead

*“Prepare the way for the Lord!” Mark 1:3*

From driving (and waiting in traffic!) we know all too well that it takes time for a road to be built. Removing stones, leveling out bumps, laying the foundation and smoothing the asphalt to even the road. John the Baptist was telling exactly this to people: “Prepare the way for the Lord!” John essentially was saying that road work is ahead. Jesus will make a major change in your life if you let Him. He is Christ who can give us eternal life.

Being a follower of Jesus means being ready and open to his road work in you— that you are ready to let Jesus remove the stones and bumps in your life that hinder the way for Jesus to enter into your life. It might be self-focus, vanity, career goals, wealth, or pride that can hinder our relationship with Jesus.

Prepare the way for the Lord in your life today. Give Jesus the highway to your heart by seeking His will through spending time with Him in prayer and reading His Word. Jesus has come to set us free from all evil, sin, and death. Only he can forgive sins and give eternal life.

**Question to Ponder:** How will you prepare the way for the Lord in your life?

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 29--Thursday, April 4**

#### **Hope Lives to See Another Day**

*“Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry.” Psalm 146:5-7*

We constantly hope for something. We hope it doesn't rain when we schedule fun outdoor activities. We hope our favorite team can make it all the way to the big game and win. We hope our lives will be filled with more smiles than tears. We hope we will laugh more than we cry. We are all constantly hoping for something that gives our lives meaning and fulfillment. Sadly, hope can sometimes seem pointless. When the rain cancels plans, everything goes wrong, and our team loses by a missed shot, hope can seem useless. Yet, the sun will shine again and next season will come as it always has. We are not without hope. There will always be another reason to believe in brighter days. As long as the One who created us continues to hold us, there will always be hope.

**Questions to Ponder:** What are your hopes for today?

Where will you look to find your brighter days to come?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

**Day 30--Friday, April 5**

#### Tearing Off the Roof

*Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Mark 2:3-5*

"I'll try anything." After years of searching for healing, these were my brother's desperate words. I'd heard about this Jesus who was in town. He had throngs of people following him, all looking for a revolution or a miracle. I gathered a few friends, people who stuck by us and comforted us through my brother's illness. Between the four of us, we managed to get him to Capernaum, but when we approached the house we saw the crowd spilling out the door.

I began to lose hope. I tried to look confident for my brother, but it seemed that we might not get anywhere near Jesus, much less receive his help. Our friend came up with a creative and rather unorthodox plan. I laughed at his brazenness when he climbed up on the roof, but his determination inspired me. Soon I was up there with him ripping off tiles. We enlisted some strangers to help boost my brother up.

I started to wonder how Jesus would respond to our ridiculous intrusion, but as we lowered him into the startled crowd below, I saw Jesus grinning up at us, and I knew we were welcome.

**Questions to Ponder:** Is Jesus walking this journey with you?

How do you know that is true?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 31--Saturday, April 6

#### The Walking Word

*“And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of Peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’ ” Romans 10:15*

In Jesus’ day most people traveled by foot. But most of us drive to the store or a friend’s house, especially in bad weather. What shall be our method of transportation? Why is it written, “How beautiful are the feet?” Why not, “How beautiful the voice, or the smile, or the eyes, and so on?” Why the feet? Because the message of God is carried from place to place, sent from one city or country to another, and how is that? By our feet!

Now there are some that would say today, "we have the internet and we can just sit at our desk and tell the world, or “times have changed and we no longer walk everywhere that we want to go,” but this is not so much about how you send the Word of God, but more about getting up and going, or actually getting busy doing it!

How can people hear and believe if we, who have been entrusted with God's Word, keep it to ourselves? Friends, we seldom hear about God on the street because we seldom get busy telling others. Where is the stirring about Jesus? Where is the chatter about heaven? Where is the excitement about salvation? Shall we only hear about Jesus in the church?

How beautiful are you that preach the Gospel of Peace, you who bring glad tidings of good things where ever you go! This is not a hate message; it is message of love. The Gospel of Peace is love! When we go, when we get up and go from our comfort zone, we must present the traveling Word, or the walking Word to a world that desperately needs to hear about the hope of glory!

*“For this cause God has placed all things under our feet and given us dominion and authority, as it is written, ‘for he has put all things under his feet.’ ” 1 Corinthians 15:27 and again, “What is man that you are mindful of him? You have made him a little lower than angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of your hands, You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” Hebrews 2:6*

We must understand that we are God's mobile messengers, prepared to deliver the Gospel of Peace, the Hope of Glory, even Jesus Christ our King of all Kings! Friends, we are peace and glad tidings of good things on feet! Out of your seat, and on your feet, share God's message today!

**Question to Ponder:** How can YOU share God’s message?

**Journey to Jerusalem**

**Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 32--Sunday, April 7**

**Joining in God's Work**

*“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.” Galatians 6: 9-10*

What can I, just one person do? How can I join in on God’s work on this planet? Here is an example what just one person did: At the age of 36, Mother Teresa, after feeling another call from Christ, left her convent to start the order of the Missionaries of Charities. In 2012, there were over 4,500 sisters as part of this order and it served people in 133 countries. The order manages homes for individuals dying with AIDS, leprosy and tuberculosis, mobile clinics, children and family counseling programs, orphanages and schools. That is a lot of doing good!

God does not expect (or want) us all to be Mother Teresa’s. But, are there times when our lives have been too busy with other things, that we have missed an opportunity to join in God’s Work? Have we really done good to all God’s people? Consider that question as you read Mother Teresa’s prayer: “Dearest Lord, may I see you today and every day in the person of your sick, and whilst nursing them, minister to you. Though you hide yourself behind the unattractive disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognize you and say, ‘Jesus, my patient, how sweet it is to serve you.’”

**Questions to Ponder:** Have I missed any opportunities to join God’s work this week?

Have I “done good” to everyone I have encountered?

What actions must I take to do good to the whole “family of believers?”

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 33--Monday, April 8**

#### **Continuing to Join in God's Work**

*“He has shown you what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy. And to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8*

There seems to be much wrong in our world today and sometimes it is hard to find a nugget of goodness. Many of us are familiar with the Mr. Rogers' saying of “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”

So I would ask you to look around at some of the people who have joined us in this journey to Jerusalem: • You will find people who give of their time to plan, prepare, plant, tend and harvest a huge garden plot only to give it away to those who need it more! • Then there are the folks who organize, cook, serve and clean up a meal for us in our times of grief and loss with only kindness in their hearts. • There are also many among us who pray unceasingly and act for others who are in need of justice and mercy. • Yes, “you will always find people who are helping!”

**Questions to Ponder:** What have you experienced of God's goodness?

Where have you seen the need for God's work this week?

Have you been able to do justice for God's people as you walked humbly this week?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

**Day 34--Tuesday, April 9**

#### Walking Cheerleaders

*“Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Hebrews 12:1*

Being the mother of a cross country runner, I know what it is like to be in the “cloud of witnesses” that cheers on the runners. The runners disappear in a flash as they emerge from woody trails, but I am told that a familiar face , an encouraging shout of “Go Dave!” or a thumbs up gesture is energizing to the runner.

Likewise surrounding ourselves with encouragers and being encouragers ourselves is uplifting to our spirits and helps us continue on the course set before us. It has been said that there are no “lone-ranger” Christians. We need each other. Walking with a companion makes the walk seem much shorter.

The week as you journey, think about that “great cloud of witnesses” in heaven cheering you on to run the race and persevere in your faith.

**Questions to Ponder:** How can I encourage someone in their faith this week?

Think of a time when someone has been a great encouragement to you.

Do I have someone in my life with whom I can share deep spiritual thoughts, hope and desires? If not, is there someone I know who might be willing to share their spiritual journey with me?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 35--Wednesday, April 10

#### What Kind of Walker Am I?

*“Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Psalm 103: 1-3, 5*

When was the last time you walked with a spring in your step? Was there a reason for that feeling of joyous abandon while you walked? Perhaps you received an “A” on a difficult exam or maybe it was news of a baby’s birth, or maybe your soccer team won the championship or you were offered a much needed job.

While you journey this week, dwell on the verses from Psalm 103. We have many reasons to rejoice and praise God. He forgives all our sins and heals our diseases. He satisfies our desires with good things so that our youth is renewed like the eagle’s. Now that is something to rejoice about!

**Questions to ponder:** What are some of the benefits of following God?

Think of some good things God has given to you... the things that made you walk with a spring in your step.

What desires has He satisfied?

Think about your deepest desires. Do you think that they are in line with God’s will?

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 36--Thursday, April 11**

#### **Visitors Along the Road**

*“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widow in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” James 1:27*

Caring for those in distress is not optional for those who follow Christ. Caring for orphans and widows is mentioned 27 times in the Bible. However, we must not think of it as simply a command from God that we must fulfill “or else.” There is tremendous joy and blessing in serving and standing up for orphans and widows around us. In considering what our own attitude should be to the orphans and widows around us, it’s helpful to remember that we were all adopted into God’s family through the life and death of Jesus Christ. It should be a joy and blessing to join with God in caring for those in distress among us.

**Questions to Ponder:** What practical action can I take to look after those in distress among us?

Is there a group or organization that could use my help?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

**Day 37--Friday, April 12**

#### A Love that Compels

*Jesus says, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whomever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10: 43-45*

In reading the Gospel text from Mark on the life of Jesus, one cannot fail to see that the ministry of Jesus centers on servanthood. Jesus' ministry was to be with the people; to meet them where they live and work and to bring the hope that transforms and reshapes lives. In the verse chosen for this reflection, Jesus says that to be great in the eyes of God we must first serve others; to live a life of service.

As Jesus' ministry is drawing to a close, He gathers His disciples for a last meal together. At this Last Supper, Jesus removes His robe, reaches for a towel and begins to wash the feet of each disciple. This is not only an act of great love but also serves to illustrate the ministry that Jesus is asking of His disciples; to minister to others, to be present and to be His hands, His feet, His heart.

Lent is a reflective season, a time of drawing inward. Lent compels us to seek what God is calling us to do; how to live His ministry. We remember that God has formed us to be more like God. We are given opportunities to be the best possible versions of ourselves. How do we live this calling?

If we believe that we are here to give freely to others, we must put others first – always. We embrace the call to serve the lost, the marginalized, the hurting, and the unloved by meeting them in the places where they live and work. We understand that our work becomes the light that penetrates the darkness. We seek change in the world by starting first with ourselves knowing how deeply we are loved by God and that this love calls us to a life of servanthood. Accepting this love compels us to live boldly and without fear.

**Questions to Ponder:** How does understanding God's great love for you help you to love others?

Jesus lived His life in service to others. How can you live each day being Christ's hands and feet until His return?

## Journey to Jerusalem

## Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 38--Friday, April 12

### Are You Thirsty?

*Jesus answered her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." John 4:13-14*

Never have I experienced a greater physical thirst than when driving through the Arizona desert in a non-air-conditioned car with a screaming 9 month old. That thirst becomes an ache and a desperate longing when we don't know when or where we will obtain a refreshing drink of water?

Desert travel brings thirst. I wonder how thirsty the Israelites must have been traveling through the desert for 40 years. Our lives too sometimes become like deserts. We neglect to replenish our souls with the Word of God. We forget to pray - or we're just too busy trying to survive the desert experience to stop long enough for refreshment. The Scripture says that if we drink of the refreshing water that Jesus gives, we will never thirst. In fact, that water that Jesus gives us will become a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. May we drink deeply of the water that Jesus gives.

**Questions to Ponder:** Consider times when you've been physically thirsty.

Have you ever been so thirsty that you could only think of satisfying that thirst?

Have you ever been spiritually thirsty? What does that feel like?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 39--Saturday, April 13

#### Satisfaction and Keeping On

*“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:13-14*

We're at the end of our walk to Jerusalem. Are you weary? Or, are you physically more alive and spiritually more attuned? Hopefully this has been a journey of spiritual renewal. Hopefully you've satisfied your soul with spiritual food and living water. Hopefully the increased spiritual-exercise has renewed and revitalized the body God has given you and you are able to have more energy for His vital work here on earth.

Pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles likely sang these fifteen Psalms. Jerusalem was the highest city in Palestine, so all who traveled there spent much of their time ascending. We know Jesus traveled with his family to Jerusalem for the feasts from an early age.

The ascents for the pilgrim were not only literal but also a metaphor for life—life lived upward toward God—advancing from one level of maturity to another. Eugene Peterson in his book on discipleship based on the Psalms of Ascents, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, writes: “One aspect of world that I have been able to identify as harmful to Christians is the assumption that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once. We assume that if something can be done at all it can be done quickly and efficiently. Our attention spans have been conditioned by thirty-second commercials.”

In my own life and ministry over the last twenty years I see how change comes not with a quick fix but with small daily choices to follow Jesus. We do not become more compassionate, kind, or patient by getting up one morning and declaring, “Today I will become more compassionate, kind and patient.” Instead it is seeking to walk faithfully on a daily journey with Jesus. The Psalms of Ascents provide a necessary antidote by directing people of faith to remember who we are and where we are going.

**Questions to Ponder:** Do you experience the journey with Christ as a “joy?”

How much energy and commitment am I putting into the spiritual race that Paul speaks of in Philippians?

## Journey to Jerusalem

### Daily Devotions and Scripture

## Day 40 Palm Sunday, April 14

### Two Parades

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

*21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."*

*4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*

*5 "Say to Daughter Zion,*

*'See, your king comes to you,*

*gentle and riding on a donkey,*

*and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"*

*6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,*

*"Hosanna to the Son of David!"*

*"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

*"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

*10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"*

*11 The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."*

*Matthew 21:1-11*

There would be two parades entering Jerusalem on Passover Sunday. The first coming in great military strength rode in from the west: row upon row of Roman soldiers with the finest horses, their armour and banners shining in the sun, a bold political statement of pomp and glory announcing the arrival of Pilate, Roman Governor of Judea, as he made his annual trip to Jerusalem from Caesarea. The second parade from the east was in every way the opposite, an absence of military splendour with the central character riding on a donkey.

Until this point in his ministry Jesus had always maintained a relatively low profile. This makes it all the more striking that he gives the disciples instructions that will generate a degree of notoriety and guarantee him an audience. For the first time Jesus wants to be seen. He intentionally sets out to draw a crowd around him as he makes the Journey to Jerusalem. Jesus

knows that this time he must enter the city as the Messiah, prophesied in Zechariah 9, riding on a donkey. Passover was an important religious event and every year Jerusalem would be thronging with “tourists” who had journeyed together to celebrate the Hebrew festival.

The passage appears like a celebration, a procession with crowds lining the street, cheering and waving palm branches. They cry out “Hosanna,” a Hebrew plea for salvation, “Please deliver us!” It would seem they have recognised, at least in part, who Jesus is. We read this passage with hindsight, ever aware of the death that is to come, but for those celebrating outside Jerusalem on that first Psalm Sunday they simply welcomed their King, the one they hoped would save them.

**Questions to Ponder:** What did you like or dislike about these scripture verses?

What did you notice about humanity and what did you notice about God?

What impacted you the most?

Who do you know that needs to hear about this today?

**Activity:** Imagine you are going on a journey to Jerusalem with Jesus and fill a backpack with things you feel are essential for your journey. Do you take snacks, a mobile phone, your Bible, a favorite CD or book?

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 41 Holy Week--Monday, April 15**

## Never the Same Again

### Jesus at the Temple

*12 Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 “It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”*

*14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.*

*16 “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.*

*“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,*

*“‘From the lips of children and infants*

*you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”*

*17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.*

*Matthew 21:12-17*

Yesterday’s passage tells us that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, “the whole city was stirred and asked ‘Who is this?’” It is no coincidence then that the first act Matthew records Jesus doing in Jerusalem was guaranteed to cause a stir!

Once again we are aware of Jesus making no attempt to keep a low profile – quite the opposite. His show of frustration, even righteous anger as he clears out the temple, is a direct challenge to the Hebrew authorities. But when we look at his overturning the tables we should never underestimate the degree of offence the traders caused him. This was his Father’s house, set apart for worshipping the one true God and yet Mammon is the god being worshipped here. And so he sets about clearing the outer courtyard of everything that was not of God, the cheating, the selling, the profiteering from the temple rituals and ultimately the violation of holiness caused by greed. How can the people truly worship God when the way into his presence is marred by man’s sin?

Imagine the umbrage of those who had been so publically put in their place when the children begin shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Recognition from the youngest in society that the promised Messiah has come to their temple – and worship will never be the same again. Do you find yourself wondering if the Hebrew authorities knew, if they even suspected, that the events of this week would forever change how mankind approached God?

**Questions to Ponder:** What did you like or dislike about these scripture verses?

What did you notice about humanity and what did you notice about God?

What impacted you the most?

Who do you know that needs to hear about this today?

**Activity:** Who would you like to see coming to our church?

What would you like to see happening in our church?

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 42 Holy Week--Tuesday, April 16**

#### **Who Does It Belong To?**

Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar

*15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax[a] to Caesar or not?”*

*18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”*

*21 “Caesar’s,” they replied.*

*Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”*

*22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.*

*Matthew 22:15-22*

There is an underlying layer of deceitfulness and intrigue in the actions of the Pharisees. They are trying to discredit Jesus and are not afraid to use manipulation to do so. In the midst of a week when the crowds are awakening to who Jesus is, when Jesus himself is revealing all of his authority, the Pharisees still believe that he is the enemy rather than their saviour. By aligning themselves with the Herodians, hated supporters of Roman rule, their actions were not only devious but desperate. No answer could be the right answer – one would offend the Hebrew and the other the Roman. On the face of things Jesus couldn’t get this right. But one of the things that is wonderful about the ways of God is that he is never restricted to our limited understanding of justice. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

Jesus is not so much answering the Pharisees’ question as condemning it. This is not a question of to whom tax should be paid. Instead the answer questions where a person’s true devotion lies. If Caesar should be paid that which belongs to him then what is it that Jesus says should be given back to God?

**Questions to Ponder:** What did you like or dislike about these scripture verses?

What did you notice about humanity and what did you notice about God?

What impacted you the most?



Who do you know that needs to hear about this today?



**Activity:** Who do these items belong to?

Draw a picture of yourself? Who do you belong to?

**Journey to Jerusalem**

## Daily Devotions and Scripture

Day 43 Holy Week--Wednesday, April 17

### Giving It Away

#### *The Widow's Offering*

*41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43 Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."*

*Mark 12:41-44*

In Mark's account of this incident Jesus appears to intentionally sit down opposite the offering depositories in the temple court – he is deliberately watching the crowd. In our Church culture today it would be the equivalent of watching the offering plate being passed along the row and taking note of who puts what in. It's an uncomfortable thought.

Jesus then calls the disciples to him and uses the offering boxes as a teaching aid. Compare and contrast: some give only what they ought to but the widow gives everything she has; some give large amounts from fortunes and one gives everything from nothing. Who has been more generous?

Affluence is not necessarily a blessing, for it brings with it a temptation to become less reliant on God and increasingly reliant on resources we count as our own. Conversely, those who have very little find dependence on God's provision a daily act of worship. How often do we long to have more money believing that it will give us greater comfort and security? What would it take to live each day simply desiring more of God and less of wealth?

As Jesus reaches the last few days he will spend with his disciples we might assume that every lesson taught to them had critical significance. We must ask ourselves what it is he is trying to teach them here at the temple offertory that they will need in the days to come.

**Questions to Ponder:** What did you like or dislike about these scripture verses?

What did you notice about humanity and what did you notice about God?

What impacted you the most?

Who do you know that needs to hear about this today?

**Activity:** Is there something in the backpack that you imagined packing earlier this week that you really don't need?

Do you have other things in your home that you never use? Maybe someone else could benefit from them. Take some of your things to a local charity or give to someone you know who could use them.

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 44 Holy Week--Maundy Thursday, April 18**

**Same Meal, New Significance**

### *The Passover with the Disciples*

**17** On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" **18** He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" **19** So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

**20** When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; **21** and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." **22** And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" **23** He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. **24** The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." **25** Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

### *The Institution of the Lord's Supper*

**26** While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." **27** Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; **28** for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. **29** I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

**30** When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

### *Matthew 26:17-30*

In many ways Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples is a very ordinary occasion. It was an annual meal. Presumably they had shared it together before since they had been following Christ for three years. But this is in fact an extraordinary occasion. It is the night Jesus will be betrayed.

The Jewish leaders have finally worked out a way to arrest Jesus and, they hope, have him put to death. If Judas thought this was a carefully kept secret he must have been shocked when Jesus openly tells the disciples that one of them is going to betray him. Later that night Jesus will reveal to Peter that he will deny Christ three times. And before that moment comes the other ten will flee, deserting Jesus in his hour of need. Yet knowing all of this, Jesus gathers his friends

together for this one last supper – the one who would betray him, the one who would deny him, the others who would desert him.

And into this context of human failure and sin Jesus transforms the Passover meal that spoke of God rescuing and saving his people Israel from slavery in Egypt. The ordinary bread and wine are given extraordinary meaning through what Jesus will accomplish on the cross. And having begun to expose and confront their very human failures, Jesus speaks of God's salvation. A body given, blood poured out, forgiveness offered and a new covenant sealed. In this extraordinary moment God himself offers them salvation and the invitation is for all. Jesus gives bread and wine to them all. His invitation is, "take and eat ... Drink from it, all of you."

Two thousand years later a table spread with simple but profound symbols of salvation speaks of that same open invitation, from the same incomparable and unchanging Savior, who offers us forgiveness for our very human failures. An ordinary occasion made extraordinary because of Jesus.

**Questions to Ponder:** What did you like or dislike about these scripture verses?

What did you notice about humanity and what did you notice about God?

What impacted you the most?

Who do you know that needs to hear about this today?

**Activity:** Do you have a special meal or time that you celebrate annually? Has it changed over the years? How might you give it expanded significance?

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 45 Holy Week--Good Friday, April 19**

#### **Final Words**

*The Soldiers Mock Jesus*

*27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29*

*and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

### *The Crucifixion of Jesus*

*32 As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; 36 then they sat down there and kept watch over him. 37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."*

*38 Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" 44 The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.*

### *The Death of Jesus*

*45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." 48 At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53 After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54 Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"*

*55 Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.*

### *Matthew 27:27-56*

The trial, with all the false accusations and injustice, is now over. Jesus, condemned, passes into the hands of the Roman soldiers who set the pattern for what is ahead, inflicting cruel suffering and ridiculing his claims as they conduct their own mock coronation. On the final journey to Golgotha Jesus is given brief respite from the physical weight of the cross as Simon of Cyrene is

conscripted to help. Condemned and crucified as the king of the Jews, Jesus is put to death alongside two other “rebels.”

In the midst of the insults two sarcastic requests are repeated, “Come down from the cross” and “Save yourself.” Yet Matthew records two statements that, despite their intent, are prophetic in nature and which correctly interpret what God is doing in the midst of human injustice and cruelty: “He saved others ... but he can’t save himself!” which speaks of Christ giving himself over to death on the cross that others might be saved, and, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,” which looks forward to the fulfillment of that claim on a bright resurrection morning.

Christ’s cry of dereliction from the cross speaks of how much it cost God to bring about our salvation. For all that humanity had been doing against God in those awful hours what is advanced and accomplished is the plan and purposes of God to bring salvation to humanity. When Christ dies the temple curtain is split in two and the barrier to God is torn down forever, while the resurrection of many holy people prefigures Christ’s coming resurrection, and the resurrection of all who believe and are made holy through him.

**Questions to Ponder:** What did you like or dislike about these scripture verses?

What did you notice about humanity and what did you notice about God?

What impacted you the most?

Who do you know that needs to hear about this today?

**Activity:** Watch a video or movie on the last week of Jesus’ life.

Attend the Community-Wide Good Friday Service at Noon, First United Methodist Church in Fenton.

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

**Day 46 Holy Week--Holy Saturday, April 20**

#### Humanity at its Worst

##### *The Burial of Jesus*

*57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to*

*be given to him. 59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.*

### *The Guard at the Tomb*

*62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64 Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” 65 Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” 66 So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.*

*Matthew 27:57-66*

At the moment when those disciples who had publicly associated with Jesus desert him another disciple who had believed privately steps forward. Joseph of Arimathea’s devotion is recorded in all four Gospels. Joseph boldly asks Pilate for Jesus’ body, wraps it in a linen cloth, and lays Jesus in his own tomb before rolling a big stone across the tomb and going away.

But Joseph is not alone. Sitting opposite the tomb are Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph. They witness Jesus’ burial, just as they had witnessed Jesus’ death, watching from a distance. Their faithful vigil and testimony would be vital to the Gospel writers as they recorded the story of Jesus.

On the Sabbath day, which God commanded Israel to remember and keep as a holy day of rest, the chief priests and the Pharisees are active. Even after they had secured Jesus’ death they cannot find rest. Aware of Jesus’ claim that he would rise again on the third day they enlist the might of the Roman Empire, and with more than a hint of irony, Matthew records Pilate’s command, “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know.” But once again, as so often in this story of Jesus, after humanity has done its worst God will act and accomplish his plans and purposes.

**Questions to Ponder:** What did you like or dislike about these scripture verses?

What did you notice about humanity and what did you notice about God?

What impacted you the most?

Who do you know that needs to hear about this today?

**Activity:** Make Resurrection Easter Cookies

To be made the evening before Easter--Overnight gives the best results.

**Ingredients:** 1c. whole pecans

1 tsp. vinegar

3 egg whites

a pinch salt

1c. sugar

zipper baggie

wooden spoon

tape

Bible

1. Preheat oven to 300

2. Place pecans in zipper baggie and let children beat them with the wooden spoon or mallet to break into small pieces. **Explain that after Jesus was arrested, the Roman soldiers beat him.** Read John 19:1-3.

3. Let each child smell the vinegar. Put 1 tsp. vinegar into mixing bowl. **Explain that when Jesus was thirsty on the cross he was given vinegar to drink.** Read John 19:28-30.

4. Add egg whites to vinegar. Eggs represent life. **Explain that Jesus gave His life to give us life.** Read John 10:10-11.

5. Sprinkle a little salt into each child's hand. Let them taste it and brush the rest into the bowl. **Explain that this represents the salty tears shed by Jesus' followers, and the bitterness of our own sin.** Read Luke 23:27.

6. So far the ingredients are not very appetizing. Add 1c. sugar. **Explain that the sweetest part of the story is that Jesus died because He loves us.** He wants us to know and belong to Him. Read Psalm 34:8 and John 3:16.

7. Beat with a mixer on high speed for 12 to 15 minutes until stiff peaks are formed. **Explain that the color white represents the purity in God's eyes of those whose sins have been cleansed by Jesus.** Read Isaiah. 1:18 and John 3:1-3.

8. Fold in broken nuts. Drop by teaspoons onto wax paper covered cookie sheet. **Explain that each mound represents the rocky tomb where Jesus' body was laid.** Read Matthew 27:57-60.

9. Put the cookie sheet in the oven, close the door and turn the oven OFF. Give each child a piece of tape and seal the oven door. **Explain that Jesus' tomb was sealed.** Read Matthew 27:65-66.

10. **GO TO BED! Explain that they may feel sad to leave the cookies in the oven overnight. Jesus' followers were in despair when the tomb was sealed.** Read John 16:20, 22.

11. On Easter morning, open the oven and give everyone a cookie. Notice the cracked surface and take a bite. The cookies are hollow! **On the first Easter Jesus' followers were amazed to find the tomb open and empty.**

## **Journey to Jerusalem**

### **Daily Devotions and Scripture**

#### **Day 47 Holy Week--Easter Sunday, April 21**

##### Jesus is Risen!

Matthew 28:1-20

Early in the morning after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary make their way to “look” at the tomb. What they see, and what the petrified Roman guards see, is an empty tomb guarded now by an angel of the Lord come down from heaven, whose arrival is announced by an earthquake. The angel’s repeated message is transformative, “He has risen.” To these women, come to look at a tomb, the angel issues the invite, “Come and see.” The angel then commands the women, “Go and tell,” with the promise that, “You will see him.” As they go to fulfil the angel’s commands they meet and see the resurrected Christ. Christ himself repeats the angel’s commands to these terrified women, “Do not be afraid ... go and tell,” with the promise that his disciples will meet and see him in Galilee.

This Easter day, as we celebrate again the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, may we follow in the footsteps of these faithful women. May we journey with them to that empty

tomb, may we come and see the evidence that he has risen, and as on this day we encounter afresh the risen Christ, may we heed his command, given to all his disciples in every day and generation, “Go and tell!”

**Questions to Ponder:** What did you like or dislike about these scripture verses?

What did you notice about humanity and what did you notice about God?

What impacted you the most?

Who do you know that needs to hear about this today?

**Activity:** Watch a video about the Sahara Resurrection plant that can survive without water for 100 years. <https://youtu.be/qK4tFicSbzc>

Make a hardboiled egg this morning and write a thank you for what Jesus did for you on one side and decorate the other side.