



Daily Devotions for Lent

March 1 through April 11, 2020

St. Andrews Lutheran Church

Stockton, CA

A note about these unique devotions: You'll notice that the writing style varies from day to day. Pastor Dan Deuel gave Scripture references and themes to several members of the congregation and staff and asked them to share their thoughts in the form of short devotionals. The format was up to each writer. Some include guided prayer; some include personal stories; some include options for additional Bible readings; and so-on.

We pray you are blessed during this season of Lent as we share our hearts with you through the themes of Being, Forgiving, Serving, Giving, and Holy Week. Sincerely,

Sheryl Bettencourt (March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30; April 6)

Deacon Kirk Hamilton (March 6, 13, 20, 27; April 3, 10)

Charles and Debra Johnson (March 4, 11, 18, 25; April 1, 8)

Rachel McGehee (March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; April 5)

Ann Marie and Michael Rehbein (March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31; April 7)

Pastor Brian Muldowney (March 21, 28; April 4, 11)

Rev. Jim Zimmerman (March 5, 7, 12, 14, 19, 26; April 2, 9)

❖ Being ❖

March 1 Read: John 8:28-32

Think: Spend enough time with someone and you end up knowing them better, perhaps even becoming more like them. Before Jesus intersected time and space to be born as a man, He'd spent infinite time with the Father and the Spirit, in perfect unity as the Trinity. What a mystery to know each other so well and mirror each other so fully! Jesus now invites you to spend real time—eternity, yes, but in this life too—abiding with God. What are some ways you can create space in your life to spend time with Him, so you can know and become more like Him?

Pray: *Thank You, Lord, for Your incredible invitation to know and follow You. Help me be consistent in making time to read Your Word, listen to Your Spirit, and experience Your ongoing presence so that I will know You, resemble You, and reveal You.* (For further reflection, read Psalm 139)

March 2 Read: Matthew 6:5-8

Prayer is one of the closest connections we have to God. He waits patiently each day for us to come to Him. God cares about every aspect of our lives and longs to give us peace and comfort. He is well aware of the trials, temptations, and the blessings in our lives. In our quiet time with Him we can share our deepest thoughts and concerns. Then in complete thankfulness we are free to give all honor and glory to Him for hearing and answering our prayers according to His will. *God is waiting patiently for you to come to Him today.* (For further reflection, read 1 Thess. 5:17-18)

March 3 Read: Psalm 96

Think: What is your favorite song to praise and worship God? How can you praise and worship God in your life this day?

Pray: *Dear Lord, may our lives join all of creation in giving You honor and praise today.*

March 4 Read: John 4:39-42

We have all been blessed to hear the testimony of another believer whose life has been changed by spending time with God in prayer or in His Word. Scripture tells us that many people believed in Jesus because of the powerful testimony of the woman Jesus met at the well. He offered her living water and she ran to tell everyone in the town. But their faith really grew when they spent time with Jesus. It became a personal faith, a sure faith, a saving faith. Jesus wants each of us to spend time with Him every day. By doing so we get a clearer understanding of who this Savior is. We experience peace that passes understanding and wisdom to manage our daily struggles. "And the God of all grace will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." (1 Peter 5:10)

March 5 Read: Matthew 6:8-14

It seems we always have to be right. Recently I reached out to several loved ones, and asked them to share their feelings with me about topics they had strong feelings about. No one did, and the reason was simple. They felt they knew my bias and felt threatened. What that said about me is evident. When we talk to our Father, He already knows our "right and wrong" opinion or actions, but still wants to hear us, since we are without judgement because He loves us and forgives us. How special He is and He makes us!

Pray: *Lord, I am so mixed up—saint and sinner. Hear me and share Yourself through me that those around me may see acceptance and not judgement, as You see us in Jesus.*

March 6 Read: Luke 15:23

How often do we celebrate our liberation from sin and the gift of our Salvation? Celebrate! Party! Enjoy! We have been freed! Christianity isn't about the don'ts; it's about what Jesus has done for us! Be joyful! Be grateful! Celebrate our God and His Salvation! The Victory is won, party on.

March 7 Read: Mark 2:25-36

Life is so very special and we celebrate it as a gift from God, partly by worshiping on Sundays. Our church is a great place to spend time with God. But as this passage shows, often our faith community separates us from those in need, like the man with the withered hand. Do we have people around us with many problems and then say, “Someone should do something for them, but church comes first.” Jesus shows us a different perspective. The world is watching our priorities for believers and unbelievers. Jesus’ healing of this man led to His rejection and death. Can we have that kind of courage to minister to unbelievers?

Pray: *Lord help us worship You by being sensitive and loving to the many pained people around us, thereby giving You praise by being lovers of people with “withered hands.”*

♦ Forgiving ♦

March 8 Read: Acts 9:4-19

Think: Have you ever put someone into the “Impossibility Box”? *So-and-So will never change. It’s hopeless.* That’s where Ananias had put Saul, because Saul was an enthusiastic persecutor of Christians. Yet Jesus spoke to Saul in just the way he needed to hear, and his life was changed in an instant. God is speaking to you in just the way you need to hear, too. No one is ever impossible, hopeless, unchangeable, or unforgivable. Is there an “Impossible” person you can pray for today?

Pray: *Lord, without You, it is impossible for anyone to repent and receive forgiveness for the weight of their sin. You are great and merciful, and can melt the hardest heart in an instant, including mine! Thank You for Your deep forgiveness and help me to pray for and forgive others, as well.* (For further reflection, read Psalm 52)

March 9 Read: John 8:7

Have you ever had your feelings hurt? If you’re anything like me I’m pretty sure the answer is YES. In those times I am tempted to get back at that person. To make them feel the hurt that I have experienced. But then God knocks at my heart. He shows me the things that I have done in the past. He opens my eyes to see my imperfections. He tells us to forgive as He has forgiven us. How can I continue to find fault with others when I know that Jesus laid down His precious life for my sins and their sins? Is it easy, NO. Is it possible, YES. We can go to God in prayer and ask for strength to forgive. *God is waiting patiently for you to come to Him today.* (For further reflection, read Matthew 6:14-15)

March 10 Read: Matthew 7:1-5

Think: Are you more likely to trust or distrust someone when meeting them for the first time? Zach Zehnder says in *The Red Letter Challenge*, “What if, rather than judging people, the church was known for embracing people where they are? What if we stopped trying to change people and just accepted them? What if we remembered it’s the Holy Spirit’s job to change them, not ours?” Our job is to love people the way God loves us.

Pray: *Dear Lord, may our lives reflect Your love and grace for all today.*

March 11 Read: Matthew 18:21-22

We’ve all heard sayings that sound biblical but aren’t, like, “God helps those who help themselves.” One time in a Sunday School class we were discussing forgiving seventy-seven times and someone offered his motto for life, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” Well, that one’s not in the Bible either. Throughout Scripture we are taught how God’s ways are not our ways. And if we live by man’s wisdom, our world and our personal lives end in resentment and broken relationships over things that have no eternal value. But God never tires of forgiving us when we ask, and longs to restore broken relationships. “I’m only human!” is no longer an excuse for believers. In

Christ we are a new creation with power not only to avoid sinning, but to live a life of forgiveness toward others. (For further reflection, read *Ephesians 4:31-32*)

March 12 Read: John 21:15-19

How amazing! Jesus asks the disciple who betrayed Him three times if he loved Jesus. Imagine yourself in Peter's situation. "Lord, you know that I love you!" Yet he also knew he was not worthy and wanted the denials swept under the carpet. Jesus did not hold Peter's denial against him, and ended up with the simple invitation—follow me! You and I also often deny Jesus by our words, actions, thoughts, and values. Yet He forgives us and invites us to follow Him.

Pray: *We are such weak vessels. Father, we fail You so often. Yet You give us the faith to love You and receive Your grace. Help us remember Your invitation to follow You, even if we do not deserve to do so.*

March 13 Read: Matthew 5:44

Hate those who hate you. Hope for the worst to those who have wronged you. A life lived in a state of bitter anger cannot grow into a Jesus heart. Remember how much you were forgiven, then forgive and move on with a heart that holds no resentment or anger and ask forgiveness for yourself. The world's way is not Jesus' way. Praying for those that have wronged us and then forgiving them requires a Jesus heart. We grow into a Jesus heart as our relationship with Him grows.

March 14 Read: Luke 19:1-10; John 8:11

Do you feel that every sinner can be forgiven by God? The question reflects our culture's tendency to rate some sinners less-deserving of grace than others. The woman in John 8:11 was guilty of sexual sin. Zacchaeus was a rich white-collar sinner who was a tax collector. Witnesses criticized Jesus for being his guest. We are forgiven but have also been called to forgive. We are not called to either agree or disagree with who He chooses to forgive. The tax collector, the adulteress, and ourselves are in the tree; Jesus looks up at each of us—unworthy—and tells us, "I'm coming to your house today."

Pray: *God, it is so hard to forgive those we feel are unworthy. In Your Spirit, fill us with such joy in our forgiveness that it flows through us into all those around us, and we throw the stones away.*

♦ *Serving* ♦

March 15 Read: John 14:8-15

Think: Philip wanted to see God the Father, and Jesus essentially said, "If you've seen me, you have seen the Father. The work I do proves it." If you were to hold a mirror up to the way you spend your time, would the reflection show the Father? Do the ways you treat others point them to God? How about when you're driving? In a long line at the grocery store? Tipping your restaurant server? Disagreeing with a family member?

Pray: *Dear Father, I want my life to point others toward You. Give me the awareness and strength to treat others with respect and kindness. Thank You for giving us Jesus to show us what true love looks like. (For further reflection, read 1 John 2:3-10)*

March 16 Read: Mark 9:35

Putting others before myself is not something I really want to think about. After all, the world tells us over and over again that we are special, that we are Number One, and that we're free to find happiness wherever it takes us. But then I open my Bible, and there it tells me, as plain as day, that is NOT what God desires. He does NOT want me to look the other way when someone needs a listening ear, a loving hand of comfort, or a warm, home-cooked meal. Jesus says, put your life on hold for a minute and reach out your hand of love and help your fellow man. Ask God to give you

minutes each day to find time to meet the needs of someone in your life. *God is waiting patiently for you to come to Him today.* (For further reflection, read Romans 12:10-16)

March 17 Read: Luke 14:12-14

Think: If you were throwing a party for the “poor,” the “crippled,” the “lame,” and the “blind” in your world, who would you invite? How might you do this? In *Red Letter Challenge*, Zach Zehnder reminds us, “Many times we serve and expect to receive something in return. But God wants us to be people who just naturally serve and don’t expect anything back in this world.”

Pray: *Dear Lord, instill in us Your servant’s heart so others will see You through our serving today.*

March 18 Read: Ephesians 2:10

Have you ever thought, “What good works has God prepared for me to do?” After listening to neighbors complain about the corner house where the yard had become a weed lot two feet high, God woke me up one morning saying, “Today you are going to mow that yard.” As I mowed those weeds, God brought into my path an opportunity to serve and witness I would never have expected. “Did someone tell you to mow my yard?” questioned a young man who burst from the front door. “Yes, God did,” I replied. A lengthy conversation concluded with a hug and a prayer for his sick grandmother who owned the home. “Why are you doing that?” asked another, who offered advice and a mower attachment to keep my mower from getting clogged with the tall weeds. “Because God told me to do it and He told you to help me. So thanks.” Another young man stopped his car and offered help. When he found out it wasn’t my yard, we talked about God, exchanged phone numbers and I invited him to church. He was there the next Sunday. Mowing that yard was a task God prepared in advance for me to do that day. By listening and obeying, my actions glorified God as I shared His Word with others. God may not be calling you to mow your neighbor’s yard, but you can be sure he has prepared something for you to do. At the beginning of each day, ask Him to reveal it to you and then listen and be a willing servant. (*For further reflection, read Hebrews 3:7, 8*)

March 19 Read: Matthew 19:14

I am blessed to live on a street with 20 children aged 1-13 who love to play in my front yard. High fives and big smiles are part of our daily routine. One Sunday in July I approached about ten of them, and asked if they wanted to sing my favorite song with me. They agreed, and we learned “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy Down in My Heart” and “Love, Love, Love, Love, That’s What It’s All About.” Even the one-year old said “joy joy joy,” and a mother told me they sang it all day. What a blessing these children are to us. All races, and varieties of religions, but loving and being loved, praising God! May we have a faith like theirs.

Pray: *Almighty, help us to have a simple happy faith like we had as children, all things expressed with big smiles, serving and giving joy to all around us. Move us to a positive hope by serving You as a child.*

March 20 Read: Matthew 25:35

Loneliness is a killer. As a believer, we are not in this life alone. Jesus said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” We are to support and encourage each other. Coming alongside someone and offering support and care can ease the stress of their situation and hopefully open their hearts to hear the good news about Jesus. Or, if they are already a believer, a visit can provide the comfort of knowing that Jesus is with them even in the hard times. Jesus always showed compassion. We become the hands and feet of Jesus as our relationship with Jesus grows. His compassion for the hurting starts to manifest itself in us. Our visitations of the sick is Jesus showing His love and compassion to the hurting through us.

March 21 Read: 1 Peter 2:9-12

It's important for us to not just talk about doing good things, but to also actually do them. Why? It's how we show others who Christ is! And yet, Saint Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:9-12 that we are to keep our actions holy when interacting with others, *because of who God has proclaimed us to be*. You are a part of God's Royal Priesthood, His Holy People! As God's People, we are no longer sinners, but have now received mercy from God! Keep your identity at the forefront as God calls you out in service to those around you!

Pray: *Lord Jesus, I am a part of God's Holy People. Use me to spread Your glory to the people You have placed in my life.*

❖ Giving ❖

March 22 Read: Luke 6:20-35

Think: In these few verses, Jesus turns everything about the way the world seems to work upside down. Blessed are the poor and the hungry? Woe to the rich? Jesus said that it is more important to have reward in His kingdom than it is to have wealth and ease on this temporary earth. While it seems nice now to have extra tunics (or in today's lingo, maybe extra shoes or a larger house), if having those things means you can't give to someone else, you're missing out on the greater blessing—eternal reward. Does your lifestyle keep you from being generous?

Pray: *Dear God, You have given me everything I need. I'm sorry for ways I've put too much importance on comfort and material things. Help me to give generously as You do! (For further reflection, read 2 Peter 1:3-11)*

March 23 Read: Philippians 2:13

Have you ever said to yourself, "There is no way I am capable of doing what that person is asking me to do. I'm too scared to put myself out there. What if I fail and others judge me?" I'm pretty sure we have all found ourselves in that position one time or another. When we take that approach we are falling short of God's plan for our lives. We are not giving Him a chance to use us in this world to spread His loving message. He is well aware of our capabilities and strengths. After all, He is the one who made us and knows us from the inside out. God is always there to help, guide, and lead us. We are *not* alone. *God is waiting patiently for you to come to Him today.* (For further reflection, read Psalm 40:8)

March 24 Read: Matthew 25:35

Think: Think about a time when you were hungry, thirsty, or a stranger, and someone met your needs. That's what followers of Jesus do: they help people who are the least privileged. How have you reached out to help others in need?

Pray: *Dear Lord, help me to strengthen my relationship with You, so that it becomes more natural for me to reach out and care for Your children in this world. Please help me remember that everything I have is a gift from You, to be shared with others.*

March 25 Read: Luke 7:36-50

We've all heard the story about a sinful woman anointing Jesus with an alabaster bottle of expensive perfume. While Jesus dined in the home of a righteous man, this woman showed a beautiful example of unselfish giving. So many times when generous gifts are given, something is expected in return. Maybe a road or building is named in honor of a generous donor. Or a friend or spouse gives an expensive gift expecting one of similar value in return.

The "sinful" woman in today's scripture showed the true spirit of giving. Her gift was lavish. Jesus had no material gift to give her in return. But He gave her what she truly needed—forgiveness for her sin. If you are giving out of obligation or because you want something in return, check your motives.

Instead, give as this sinful woman—as the sinful people we all are—expecting nothing, but receiving from God forgiveness and eternal life. (For further reflection, read Matthew 6:1-4)

March 26 Read: Matthew 23:23

When Jesus invites us to follow Him, He is inviting us to give ourselves away totally. How difficult that is! We hear Him say “woe” to us because we so often neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness. We are so full of ourselves that our attitude becomes exclusive of the poor and hurting rather than seeking to be loving and giving to all—not just ones of whom we approve. The need of all is our call.

Pray: *God, it is so hard to be full of grace as You are—You who showered absolutely every good thing on us, especially the gift of Your Son. But somehow we end up hoarding Your gifts for ourselves! Remind us daily that we are not ours but Yours and help us live it.*

March 27 Read: Mark 10:21

Seriously? Is God really asking me to sell everything and give it to the poor? Well for this young man, that's what he needed to do to be able to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus tells the young man the exact same thing he told Peter, James, and John, “Leave what you are doing and follow me.” Our three did as Jesus asked but our young man walks away downtrodden and sad. What's the difference? I think the difference is something else Jesus talked about—being poor in spirit. Peter and the rest knew they needed something more. Our young man thinks he needs nothing and that is what Jesus is addressing. Things have falsely filled his needs and until he gets rid of the things, he will never be poor in spirit. Have you used things to falsely fill your needs? Is it time to sell everything that is getting in the way of following Jesus? Or maybe give it away? Jesus asks us to be generous. The more generous we are, the less the things can get in the way of following Jesus.

March 28 Read: Acts 20:35

Our entire relationship with God is one of giving. Have you ever thought about that? But it's not that we give and give to God, it's that He gives and gives to us! The gospel Paul preaches here centers all around giving. God giving us forgiveness and eternal life through His Son! And now, God's heirs give to others based on what God has given them. We give abundantly because Christ gave abundantly. Share your gift of faith with others!

Pray: *Almighty God, I thank You for giving me the gift of salvation! Help me to share this gift through my thoughts, words, and deeds, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

♦ Going ♦

March 29 Read: Luke 8:22-39

Think: Jesus got into a boat with His disciples and said, “Let us go...” When a terrible storm whipped around them, the disciples seemed to forget that Jesus said “us.” When Jesus asks you to go somewhere, His power goes with You! Is He asking you to share His love in places that are unfamiliar to you, like the disciples going across the lake? Is He asking you to share with those right around you how He's changed your life, like He instructed the man healed of demons? Wherever God is calling you, remember, He goes with you!

Pray: *Dear Lord, Your presence, forgiveness, servanthood, and generous love have changed my life forever. Show me people today who need to hear my story, and thank You for always being with me!* (For further reflection, read Deuteronomy 31:7, 8)

March 30 Read: Romans 10:13-15

Jesus tells us that we are to be in the world but not of the world. Why does He want us in the world? When He went back into heaven the last thing He said was, “Take my message to the ends of the earth.” So that puts us right in the middle of the world. This is where we live, work, socialize, and go

about our daily business. Each day we are exposed to many different people and situations. Many times God is putting people in our path that He wants us to witness to. He may be using us as His instrument to bring that gospel message to them. So wherever you are and whatever you are doing, put on your evangelism eyes. Be ready and willing to give God's life-saving message to those He puts in your path. *God is waiting for you to come to Him today.* (For further reflection, read Acts 8:25-39 and John 14:26)

March 31 Read: Acts 1:8

Think: What has God done for you? What difference has God made in your life? Who in your life needs to hear your story of God working in you? Remember, the Holy Spirit is with you!

Pray: *Dear Lord, thank You for all You have done in my life. Help me now to share with others all that You have done.*

April 1 Read: Acts 8:1; 26-39

During the early persecution of the Church, followers were scattered far and wide. Scripture tells us how the Holy Spirit directed their path. They went wherever God sent them. And while they suffered severe persecution, they also experienced great joy. Philip was sent out onto a desert road and willingly followed the Holy Spirit's direction without question. Because of his obedience, he met an Ethiopian man traveling along that road who was seeking to understand the prophecies from the Book of Isaiah. Philip was able to explain that those prophecies were about Jesus, the Christ. The Ethiopian man believed and was baptized and went on his way rejoicing! Philip's obedience made it possible for him to share the Good News and experience the joy of the man's baptism. If Philip had not followed the Spirit's lead, he would have missed it all. God puts each of us on paths to share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Where is He taking you? (*For further reflection, read Romans 10:14, 15*)

April 2 Read: Ezekiel 37:1-10

When in San Francisco, an opportunity dropped before me that astounds me to this day. At a totally secular conference with representatives of many groups in the Mission District, two Roman Catholic laymen and I decided to have a little service on Sunday morning. We invited the group, but expected little. When we started, the doors to the chapel suddenly opened and the very mixed groups came in. We had an electric, joyful singing service. I gave a witness with a Spanish-speaking interpreter about the love of Jesus. I thrill to the spirit even as I write this. How seldom we get to witness to so many. A vast army.

Pray: *God, this is what it's all about. You call us to prophesy the breath of Your Spirit to all the dry bones among us and around us, creating a vast army.*

April 3 Read: John 15:16

Do you know that God loves you? Even when you have had a day of failures, He loves you the same as if you had experienced a day full of victories instead. God chose you before the foundations of the world. Before you did anything good or bad. Before you had any successes or failures, God chose you because he loves you. Paul tells us in Romans chapter 8 that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. Nothing. Don't worry so much. Focus on your relationship with Jesus first. The closer your relationship, the more victories you will have. Jesus tells us in this same chapter that we can do nothing without Him. So, focus on Jesus and let Him do what He does, namely, change hearts and minds, like yours. Reminds me of a song: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace."

April 4 Read: Luke 5:27-32

Christ came to call sinners to repentance, not those who think they don't need His love, and who are already righteous in their own mind. No matter what your past, whether you were a sinner, or a self-righteous hypocrite, Jesus forgives you. He calls you to repentance, and makes you more holy each and every day. Jesus, the Great Physician, forgives a whole manner of sins. This is the message that Christ has given us to spread. To tell others about. To preach. To "gospelize," as the Greek goes. May Jesus give you the strength and opportunities to spread this, the Gospel of Christ. And surprise, surprise, He already has given you the Holy Spirit, who strengthens you in holy living day-in, day-out.

Pray: *Lord Jesus, You have called me to repentance and washed me clean. No longer am I known for my sins, but now when God sees me, He sees only You! Help me to spread this message to all people, whether I see myself as "more righteous" than they are, or if they think they are too much of a sinner to be loved by You.*

♦ Holy Week ♦

April 5 (Palm Sunday) Read: John 12:12-18

Think: Palm Sunday was kind of like this year's Super Bowl. One Forty-Niner fan excitedly watched most of the game, felt victory was assured, and fell asleep in front of the T.V. When he woke up, he was shocked to learn his team had lost. Similarly, people in Jerusalem welcomed Jesus with joy, thinking He was going to defeat the Romans. But by the end of the week, their hero was dead. Jesus did not bring victory over their *earthly* enemies, but His death and resurrection (spoiler alert!) defeated *eternal* enemies of sin and death. What kind of hero do you want Jesus to be? Have you been disappointed? What do you want victory over?

Pray: *Father, thank You for giving me victory over death through Jesus! Help me keep my eye on eternity as I make choices about what's important in my life. Thank You for Your grace when I lose sight of what's really important.* (For further reflection, read 1 Corinthians 15:54-58)

April 6 Read: Mark 15:22-25

When we read the account of Jesus' death on the cross, it is almost too much for us to bear. Why would our Lord do such a loving thing for such a sinful world? That's exactly why He did it. It is such a sinful world. Without His great sacrifice we would be doomed, lost, and forgotten. His love was so great that He was willing to sacrifice it all for us. Think about that throughout this holy season. Those of us who know and understand who Jesus is are so blessed. Say a prayer of thanksgiving to Him for what He did for you! *God is waiting for you to come to Him today.*

Pray: *Help us to be willing to bring that beautiful message to everyone we meet. We love You, Jesus! Help us to share that love with others.*

April 7 Read: John 13:1-5

Think: If you knew your time on earth was short, what would you do? Would it look like selfless, tireless servanthood? In your life of faith, who is one person who has demonstrated what it means to "wash feet," and what did they do?

Pray: *Dear Lord, thank You for showing us how to serve. May we reflect Your love as we now serve in Your name.*

April 8 Read: Isaiah 53:1-3

This powerful prophecy from Isaiah reminds us that believing in Jesus as the one who would save us from sin and death is not of our own power or ability. How many of us want to be best friends with the poor, the weak, the ugly person? What if it's someone avoided by everybody else at work, at school, or in church? Jesus was not just avoided and bullied, he was despised and rejected. He had no

money, no designer clothes or shoes. He didn't live in a nice neighborhood or eat out at fancy restaurants. So why did people follow Him? Some did so for the miracles—He fed them, healed them, turned water into wine. Some thought He would gain a following and become powerful, and free the Jews from Rome's tyranny. But those who believed in Him did so because they listened to what He said. They trusted when He said He was God's Son. They opened their heart to a faith and hope that only God can give. They took the step to Jesus as their Savior and never turned back. (*For further reflection, read John 6:68-69*)

April 9 (Maundy Thursday) Read: Mark 14:17-19

Much effort is put into helping each other receive Holy Communion with repentant hearts. Yet I know that my preparation is always suspect because "I daily sin much and deserve nothing." Have you, like me, betrayed our loving God by what you do, say, and think? All sinners everywhere brought Jesus to the cross—including me—so we can only say, "I'm so sorry," and receive His forgiving gift.

Pray: *As I commune at your table, Lord, I tremble with need, and anticipate with hope that because Your forgiveness, I will one day dine with You at the banquet in heaven.*

April 10 (Good Friday) Read: Isaiah 53:1-12

Good Friday. When I was a kid, I didn't think that Jesus' death was very Good. It was a horrible death. In our Scripture from Isaiah, we have a pretty good description what our Lord was to endure. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. Unjustly condemned so we could be forgiven. All of those descriptions were prophesied 700 years before Christ. Jesus was the plan all along. His death as a sacrifice for all was what God promised Adam and Eve in the Garden. What God promised Abraham, Jacob, and David. A Messiah. A Savior. A righteous one that would make us right with God. Jesus came to fulfill the promises of God and the prophecy of Isaiah. So why is the death of God Good? Because without the blood sacrifice of Jesus, we have no savior. Through Jesus' obedience, even to death on a cross, our rebellion is forgiven. God's salvation is here. And that's not just Good, it's priceless.

April 11 (Holy Saturday) Read: Matthew 27:57-66

Jesus is buried. All seems lost. Satan has won. Sin, death, and the devil reign supreme. And yet, Easter is almost here. By sharing our human grave, Jesus takes all of our sin, all of our death, every tomb that we will ever deserve, and throws it into His grave. And then, in three days, He will rise. His resurrection is no hoax, even though the Pharisees tried to prevent such a hoax from happening. Death cannot hold the Christ, the Ever-Living One, the Son of God, God Himself. Even though our sin drove the nails into His hands and feet; even though our sin shoved a spear into His side; even though our sin placed Him into His tomb, He still rose. Christ is greater than all of our sins and fallacies. On this Holy Saturday, pray on this. Christ patiently resting in the tomb, no doubt already proclaiming His victory in Hell, a victory that is soon to come on Easter.

Pray: *Lord Jesus Christ, by Your death and resurrection You not only forgive, but promise me everlasting life with You. Help me to believe this every day of my life, and that by Your wounds, even my most grievous sins are washed away.*

Please join us for Easter Sunday services!

Easter Sunrise 6:00am

Traditional Worship 8:15am

Contemporary Worship 10:45am

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