

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2024

Thank you for joining us on this Lenten journey! Several folks contributed their hands to this project and I greatly appreciate each of them.

- Rev. Johnnie Hankins
- Courtney Hornsby
- Peyton Hornsby
- Rev. Alan Johnson
- Rev. Chris McLain
- Nancy Smith
- Gary L Stringer, Lay Leader
- Jordan Warner, Family Ministries
- Various Children from Our Congregation & CDC

If you are new to observing a Holy Lent, then I welcome you to an ancient practice of preparing your spirit for the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus. During this 40-day season, Christians have practiced various forms of fasting, prayer, and devotion in order to orient ourselves more towards Christ. Sundays during Lent are viewed as mini-Easters, therefore the ancient church would not fast on those days. The seven Sundays from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday are not counted in the 40 days of Lent.

In this devotional guide, you will find that each Friday features Scripture regarding the cross of Christ, Psalms on Saturday, and art for your reflection and enjoyment on Sunday.

My prayer as you read and pray through this devotional will be threefold:

- May God grant you what you need in this season.
- May your spirit be refreshed and refocused on our Lord.
- May you be inspired to contribute to next year's devotional.

May God bless you this Lent!
Prayerfully,

Pastor Shawn Hornsby
McGuire Methodist Church
2075 Arkansas Rd.
West Monroe LA 71291
318-396-6114 o



SERVICES FOR LENT & HOLY WEEK

ASH WEDNESDAY – FEBRUARY 14

**7:15AM STOP & GO IN THE PRAYER ROOM
6:00PM WORSHIP SERVICE**

MAUNDY THURSDAY – MARCH 28

6:00PM WORSHIP SERVICE

GOOD FRIDAY – MARCH 29

6:00PM WORSHIP SERVICE

EASTER SUNDAY – MARCH 31

**TBA COMMUNITY SUNRISE SERVICE
8:30AM BREAKFAST AT MCGUIRE FELLOWSHIP HALL
10:30AM WORSHIP SERVICE**



ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2024

Joel 2:12-13 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

*12 That is why the Lord says,
"Turn to me now, while there is time.
Give me your hearts.
Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.
13 Don't tear your clothing in your grief,
but tear your hearts instead."
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is merciful and compassionate,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
He is eager to relent and not punish.*

After years of reading through the Common Lectionary, this passage from Joel has become synonymous with Lent. I find it difficult to consider the other passages offered because of God's heartfelt call to His people.

To begin this season of preparation for the Resurrection of Jesus, I invite you to read Joel's words again. Note the sense of urgency to turn to God "now." He doesn't ask for their riches or their intellect or their strength because no one among them has more wealth, wisdom, or power than our Creator. Instead, God calls for our hearts.

He calls for us to come to Him in weeping, fasting, and mourning. Israel had once again strayed from God and He wanted the contrite hearts of His people to return to Him. The practice at the time was for the men to tear or rend their garments in order to expose their bare chests as an act of repentance before God. God, having seen enough of the hollow acts of men, implores them to rend their hearts, not their clothes.

Over the course of this 40 day journey, I invite you to observe a Holy Lent and rend your hearts before our God in prayer and devotion. Just as He assured Israel, He remains merciful and compassionate and is slow to anger, filled with unfailing love.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024

Philippians 1:6 by Rev. Alan Johnson

Every December 25, one of our family traditions is to begin work on some sort of Christmas-themed puzzle. This year we really got after it, and by December 27, all we have left are multiple identical shapes of night sky or snowy ground. Puzzles are interesting journeys, and you can learn a lot about people by observing how they handle the 1,000 piece adventure.

I'm not really a puzzle guy, so for me it's about working on something together, and I also have to be excited about the final product. The picture the puzzle forms needs to mean something to me or I'm not going to be invested. My daughter, Emery, is a puzzle solver by nature, and she's also the kind of person who can dive into a book or project and not come up for air for several hours. My wife, Shawna, has a creative and crafty eye, which makes her a valuable member of our puzzle team. My son is more of a last piece kind of guy, a characteristic I believe he inherited from Me!

About 2/3 of the way through this year's puzzle, we realized there is one piece missing. The final product will no doubt be flawed. Knowing we can't complete the mission unless we find something under the couch sort of douses the flames of finishing the race.

One of the things us preacher types will make reference to during Lent is the journey to the cross. Fortunately for the sake of the world, because God so loved it, Jesus completed his journey of 1,000 grueling steps. Our Savior happens to be a first, middle, and last piece kind of guy. And He's also the kind of guy who will leave the 99 (or 999) and go looking in way more disgusting places than your family's couch for the missing piece.

Paul reminds us in his letter to the Philippians that we serve a God who finishes what he begins. Despite our flaws, He is invested in us...1,000 percent. And He's pretty pumped about the completed picture at the end.

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. Philippians 1:6

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2024

Philippians 2:6-8 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

*6 Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
8 he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

Each Friday, we will consider the cross. It stands as the premier symbol of Christianity, yet countless thousands of people from other cultures and beliefs died on the cross before Jesus. Its renown as a symbol of brutal punishment did not originate with the Romans; however, they certainly used it as if they invented it.

The Scripture today comes from what scholars call, the Carmen Christi, a hymn of the New Testament church that actually predates the first letters. In the 20 years following the death of Jesus, these verses became so common that Paul would incorporate them into his letter to the Philippians.

Today, let us consider the humility of Jesus, Son of God. This passage tells us that His humility led to utter humiliation as He died a "criminal's death on a cross." I practice humility as well as I can, but it takes frequent reminders to intentionally shrink away so that God can work through me and receive the credit and glory. Jesus, equal with God, gives up privilege, position, and invulnerability to take on the frailty of humanity. In order to redeem humanity and honor the Father, Jesus gave up everything.

I confess, I hold on to my dignity, comfort, self-determination, privilege, and more as valuables that I cannot part with, despite this divine example. What do you hold back as precious? Have you valued something in your life that prevents you from humbling yourself for fear of experiencing humiliation? Pray today that the divine example of Christ will encourage us as we answer God's call to faithfulness.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2024

Psalm 139:13-14 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

*13 For You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother's womb.*

*14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.*

So often we read this passage and marvel at ourselves. We think, "thanks God for doing such an awesome job on me. I'm special!"

It's become a mantra of self-assurance, "you are fearfully and wonderfully made," instead of the signpost it was meant to be. The Psalmist celebrates God's presence in all. There's no time or place where God did not know us down to our most minute detail.

Have you marveled at God's work today? We often have strong language surrounding all the things and people we give thanks over while we struggle to find the words to praise God. Let today become a day of praising God for His presence, power, grace, mercy, faithfulness, and love. Praising God focuses more on His nature than what He has done for us.

As you complete this reading, take a couple of minutes to note all of the times and places you felt the presence of the Holy. Then, take a minute or two and think of all the times you wanted to feel God's presence but didn't...He was there too! Let's celebrate our Creator for a love that knows us and sees us in the most intimate of ways.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2024
“Jesus died for our sins.” – Abram



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2024

Psalm 25:4-7 by Peyton Hornsby

4 Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.

*5 Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.*

6 Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.

*7 Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good.*

As a 20 year old, there's a lot of life that I am figuring out. Separating truth from fiction, knowing when to speak and when to listen, learning how to love, forgive, and show mercy just as God has done for me all continue to be lessons I've yet to master.

What I love about this section of Psalm 25 is that none of those things will happen overnight. The Psalmist calls on God to 'show me, point out, lead me, and teach me.' I am reminded during this Lenten journey that I am in the process of becoming more like Christ. Like our physical maturity, spiritual maturity takes time. Unlike our physical maturity, our spiritual maturity depends on more than sleep, nutrition, and time.

When we read this Psalm, we are reminded just how much we depend on God to lead us where He wants us. We cannot stumble our way into holiness or reason our way into His Truth. Only when we realize how much we need God, can we really let God deliver us.

Personally, the problem I run into comes when I refuse to acknowledge my own weakness and inability to follow God and try to will myself to do and be good.

During this Lenten season, we first need to accept that we are powerless without God. Full reliance on God seems scary because it means we surrender control. Yet, the Psalmist celebrates God's compassion and unfailing love. God's love doesn't fail!

What parts of your life do you refuse to surrender to God?
Where would we be if God hadn't gone to the cross?

This Lent is a time for us to remember that we rely on God because we don't have all the answers or power, but because of Jesus we have access to the One who knows all, is all powerful, and all loving.

Lord, grant us the humility and the courage to rely fully on You. As we move towards the cross this Lent, we pray that Your ways will be our ways. **Amen.**

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2024

1 Timothy 2:1-2 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

"Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Not teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others." 2 Timothy 2:1-2

How do you live out your discipleship? Being a disciple of Jesus covers a few key areas. Jesus clearly talked about the importance of following His commands and teachings (Mark 3:35), loving God and neighbor (Luke 10:25-28), not merely avoiding sin but pursuing a holy heart (Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7), and of course making disciples. Lately, I feel God has convicted me of this last mark of following Jesus. As a pastor, husband, father, friend, and so on, I continually ask God to show me where I have the influence to disciple others.

When you think about it, helping another person grow in their faith in Christ may be the second best gift we can give them besides helping them come to faith. In my prayers, I've asked God to show me the few who I can reach out to in this season of life. Jesus practiced a great model of teaching, preaching, and healing to many, but he personally disciplined a much smaller circle of people. Some would limit it to the 12, but we know many others followed Him. I would say that Jesus intentionally narrowed His time even further and personally disciplined three: Peter, James, and John. Which three people could you pray for and listen to? Which three people could you offer counsel and encouragement to? Pray through this day and the next about this simple statement, "Disciples make disciples." Allow God to direct you and live out your call as a disciple of Jesus.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024

Matthew 6:9-13 by Rev. Johnny Hankins

A Blueprint for Prayer

Jesus was praying one day, in Luke 2, and his disciples asked him to teach them to pray just as John taught his disciples. They did not ask Jesus to teach them to preach, heal, or do miracles. They did not ask Jesus to make them prosperous evangelists. They simply asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray."

Luke 11:1. When "we" pray this, the Lord's Prayer, it encourages and even develops proper attitudes on our part. Found this several years ago: (author unsure)

When praying, "Our Father who art in heaven," we display:

A CHILDLIKE ATTITUDE.

In saying, "Hallowed be Thy name," we show:

A RESPECTFUL ATTITUDE.

When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we manifest:

AN EXPECTANT ATTITUDE.

In saying, "Thy will be done," we assume:

A SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE.

When requesting the Lord to give us this day our daily bread," we adopt:

A RELIANT ATTITUDE.

In asking the Lord to "forgive us our debts," we demonstrate:

A PENITENT ATTITUDE.

When asking God to "...lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," we take on:

A VICTORIOUS ATTITUDE.

And finally, in saying, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever," we develop:

A WORSHIPFUL ATTITUDE

During this season of Lent don't wait to lift this prayer in worship on a Sunday morning. One of the blessings in the Christian life is being able to talk to our heavenly Father in prayer. Pray this prayer driving to work or walking to class. Or just lift it up in the stillness of a moment phrase by phrase. When the Lord's Prayer is prayed, not merely recited, it does something to us. It brings the whole of God into the presence of our life. For me, it helps me have a better attitude.

Prayer: "Heavenly Father help us to pray the Lord's Prayer and not just recite it from memory this Season of Lent 2024."

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2024

Luke 17: 11-19 by Theophilus (A Friend of God)

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. 15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Most of us at some point in our lives have had the opportunity to make a new start and likely will again. It may be a new school or job, a new hobby or skill to learn, a relocation, new relationships or just a fresh start to the year. We often enter with excitement to leave a few things behind and focus on the adventures ahead.

The ten men in the Gospel story had been living a difficult existence during their sickness. Leprosy caused them to be cut off from family and friends, unable to work or worship in their communities, dependent on charity for all necessary things and shunned by many people who saw them as forsaken by God. They sought out Jesus for healing. His gift of cleansing gave them an incredible new start that they all undoubtedly were eager to embrace. While nine of them likely ran off excitedly to rejoice with friends and family, one returned to praise God and give thanks at the feet of Jesus. He recognized that the first response for him had to be glorifying the One who brings God's blessings.

In each of our new beginnings, may we remember to first give thanks to Him who forgives our sins and makes us whole.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2024

Luke 9:23 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

23 Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me."

Some of you may remember a song by Barbara Mandrell, "I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool." She sang about her affinity for Levi's, the Grand Ole Opry, George Jones, and peanuts in her Coke when those things were not en vogue.

We often read Luke 9 through the lens of the resurrection. Yet, Jesus called His would-be followers to 'take up their cross and follow' before His death and resurrection redeemed it. Due to the ruthlessness of Rome's use of the cross, there was nothing cool about it!

That's why I read these words with trepidations about what it means to follow Christ. He knew there would be a weight, literally and metaphorically, to becoming a disciple of His. And those who followed Him at that time had little to no concept of the resurrection. They moved for the Glory of God.

At times, when my faith seems to require little of me, I wonder if I am truly following what Jesus has before me. A friend recently told me about a giving conversation he had. As he explained tithing to another, the person responded, "If I give that much, it will change my life."

My friend and I both wondered how long it would take that man to realize just how right he was. When we give sacrificially to God, our lives will be changed. Please don't take this to be a clever way to discuss money. Parting with wealth pails in difficulty when compared to time, health, personal interests, pride, etc.

Today, ask Jesus what it looks like for you to take up YOUR cross and follow His example.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2024

Psalm 63:1-4 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you.

My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is not water.

I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory.

Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you!

I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer.

A few years ago, I remember the thirst I felt finishing a 26+ miles race across Dallas. It was a team race, and my partner pushed the pace for the last two and a half miles. We were both out of water and electrolytes in our packs, and there were no aid stations between us and the finish line. I couldn't go any faster than a slow shuffle without cramping in my hamstrings. My throat felt like I swallowed gravel.

That's the closest experience I can think of to compare to David's journey through the Judean wilderness. While we journeyed for staged competition, David likely found himself in the wilderness due to conflict with his son Absalom. On the run, away from resources and comforts that come with home, David deeply desired refuge.

Yet, his thoughts in this Psalm primarily turned to God's power, glory, and unfailing love. Have you cultivated such a deep desire for God's love that even when your body cries out for sustenance, your soul thirsts for God? I don't believe that to be a natural response, but truly a response won through long periods of faithful time spent seeking our Creator in prayer and worship.

David knew God and thirst for God because he spent time in His presence, "I have seen you in your sanctuary..." Prepare yourself for the inevitable wilderness periods of life by spending time with the Lord now. Develop your appreciation for His power, glory and unfailing love, so that you can turn to Him when the resources of this world fade away.

"You satisfy me more than the richest feast.

I will praise you with songs of joy." (v. 5)

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2024
Easter Scene by CDC 3-4 Year Olds with Thumb Prints



CDC 3-4 Yrs Thumb Print Easter Story



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2024

Philippians 2:3 by Courtney & Rev. Shawn Hornsby

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves." – Philippians 2:3

So often during this season, we try to find rhythms of sacrifice that involve denying ourselves. Our preparations for the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus leads us to various forms of fasting or some type of additional devotional time...just like these. Shawn and I invite you to engage in a slightly different practice today or this week or even for the rest of Lent.

Find someone in your life and intentionally lift them up in prayer, seek them out in encouragement, present them with a gesture of appreciation, or spend time with them in a meaningful way. The closer you are to them, the easier it will be...sort of. For those you are not close to, any form of intentionally showing another person kindness will go a long way. For those closer to you, find a way beyond the ordinary to make known how much you appreciate their friendship, leadership, partnership, etc.

Write a note or letter by hand. Mail it to them or if you share the same home, leave it for them in a place that will surprise them. Humble yourself, make yourself vulnerable, and share your prayers for them. If you don't know what to pray, ask them, "How can I pray for you?"

Becoming Christ-like does not happen by reading and praying alone. When we follow His examples of humility and vulnerability with others, we experience fully what it means to put others before ourselves. Let your love for God and others be known in new ways, even if it begins with just one person this Lent.

Blessings,

Courtney & Shawn Hornsby

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2024

Ezekiel 2:3-5 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

"Son of man," he said, "I am sending you to the nation of Israel, a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me. They and their ancestors have been rebelling against me to this very day. They are a stubborn and hard-hearted people. But I am sending you to say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says!' And whether they listen or refuse to listen – for remember, they are rebels – at least they will know they have had a prophet among them."

Have you ever felt like a failure because you shared your faith with someone and it had no effect on them? Have you ever shied away from sharing your faith because you felt like it wouldn't be effective? God calls Ezekiel to speak to Israel on His behalf knowing that they may not listen. Think about this situation – even God acknowledges that the stubbornness of humanity can resist His call.

So often, we judge the value of our witness based on results of those hearing the Good News we share. We believe our worth as witnesses lies in the OUTCOME of the encounter. Never does God place such a standard on His prophets, judges, evangelists, apostles, etc. Our Creator calls us to focus not on the OUTCOME but the OUTPUT. Ezekiel's instructions were to speak on behalf of God regardless of Israel's response. In the New Testament, Jesus sends out the 12, then the 70, with the instructions to "shake the dust" from their feet when they are not welcomed. God the Father and Jesus the Son, called and sent messengers knowing that there would be those who would not receive the message. That reality remains true to this day.

Your faithfulness will not be measured in how many people responded to your witness but instead how many people you offered words of grace and healing to. Be an obedient voice in a rebellious land, knowing that God has given His Holy Spirit for each of us to speak light into the darkness.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2024

Psalm 3:3-4 by Rev. Alan Johnson

*But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.
To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill.*

A few years ago, I got what the kids call a smart watch. And by all accounts it is way more intelligent than I need it to be. Truth be told, I wanted the watch for only two reasons: It can track the miles that I run, and the display is big enough that I can see what time it is without needing my reading glasses! Every other capability of the watch is a bonus, and I have no idea how to use most of the features.

One interesting thing it does is count my steps. On a non-running day, I never pay attention to how close I am to the arbitrary factory-set goal of steps because I'm nowhere near it. However, if I make my three-mile run, my watch lets me know a little later in the morning that I have achieved my daily step goal. The watch seems more excited about my thousands of steps than me!

Anytime we count anything into the thousands, our emotions tend to swell. If we are counting money in our bank accounts, we're excited...but just about anything else we count that high leaves us overwhelmed. In his third Psalm, King David writes about his many foes and the tens of thousands drawn up against him on every side. He is in a tough spot, and he calls out to the Lord for deliverance. Lent is meant to remind us of the cross, and more specifically our need of the work done from it. And maybe even the fact that we actually deserve the cross that our Savior bears. Our foes - our sins - rise up on every side to defeat us, and indeed they are too numerous to count. If we had a smart watch that was tracking our sin...what a terrible thought...it might never stop beeping!

In verse 3, David says the Lord is a shield around him, and that God covers him with glory and lifts up his head. The saving work of Jesus is a shield around us. We are protected from the ultimate consequence of our sin. So the shield is a gift, but it is also a tool for battle. We are shielded, so we can go forward. Thousands of years later when Paul writes to the Ephesians about the armor of God, he describes a soldier – ready for battle, prepared to stand ground and to press on.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024

Luke 6:22-23 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

The boldness to share our faith has been a topic at every church and in every Sunday school class or small group I've participated in for the past 15 years. Undoubtedly, someone raises their concern over knowing how, what, or when to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. In most conversations, a 'fear' of getting it wrong stops most of us from sharing our faith.

Sometimes that fear has more to do with the idea that we might offend the other. And the truth is that YOU MIGHT OFFEND THE OTHER. Out of their pain, their fear, their brokenness, they may respond in an angry or cruel fashion. Jesus teaches that when we are scorned, turned away, insulted, or even hated for our faith, that we should rejoice in that day. In our passage today, Luke records it not as a simple inward rejoicing but an actual LEAP FOR JOY!

We should not share our faith in an effort to offend but I strongly believe we should share our faith at the risk of offending the other. Jesus certainly offended many in His ministry. As a means of living out your beliefs today, ask God to give you the opportunity to share your faith with someone who doesn't believe. On this Leap Day, remember that we are called to leap for joy at the insults of others and that our "reward is great in heaven."

More importantly, your faithfulness may change eternity for the other should they come to Christ.

And that too should cause us to leap for joy!

FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024

Colossians 1:19-20 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

19 *For God in all his fullness*

was pleased to live in Christ,

20 *and through him God reconciled
everything to himself.*

*He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.*

For thousands of years before the earthly ministry of Jesus, only a temporary peace could be found on earth. Each year, according to the teachings and commands of God, the people of Israel would present Sin Offerings or Guilt Offerings in order to atone for their sins (Leviticus 1-7). Their offerings were a constant reminder of God's grace and their need for a redeemer. These rituals helped the people atone for their transgressions before God. They experienced a peace between them and God for sins committed since the last offering. However, they could neither offer a sacrifice for future sin, nor one that covered additional sins.

The blood of Christ uniquely addresses sin in ways unattainable through the sacrificial Law of the Old Testament. When Christ proclaimed "It is finished," on the cross, He offered a final resolution to all debts created by sin, past, present, and future. No other sacrifices could accomplish what the blood of the Lamb of Heaven could.

Christ made peace "with everything in heaven and on earth." As followers of Jesus, our call to faithfulness and obedience doesn't involve further sin offerings because Jesus has met that need for all time. Instead, we are simply called to confession and repentance as we accept God's Grace through Jesus Christ.

Today, spend a few minutes in your prayer time confessing your sins of omission and commission. Then, rest in the reconciliation and peace that Jesus brings for all believers.

SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2024

Psalm 141:2 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

Accept my prayer as incense offered to you, my upraised hands as an evening offering.

I've always loved the image of our prayers as incense to the Lord. In the traditions of the faith going back to the Tabernacle, priests burned incense to signify their prayers rising to the heavens. The aroma, often sweet and pleasing, rose continuously from the Temple to honor God as a perpetual act of worship. In some of our oldest expressions of Christianity, priests still burn incense on high holy days to invoke a reverence befitting the occasion.

Personally, I will find myself burning incense in my office during times of prayer and reflection. As I watch the smoke rise and the fragrance fills my nose, I am reminded of the intimacy of my prayers before God. I choose my words carefully. I speak to my Creator with intention and reverence.

Consequently, I am also challenged to think of all the times where something less reverent slipped my lips. What if the pettiness of our thoughts and feelings rise not as a sweet aroma, but as fumes of trash and waste rotting away in my heart? Does our God experience those foul odors just as intimately as He experiences the pleasing fragrances of prayer? Too often, we find ourselves trying to purge the foul nature of our sinfulness from our spirit in one breath, so that we can talk with our Redeemer in the next.

Today, join me in praying for a spirit devoid of bitterness, selfishness, rebellion, envy, anger, pride, and so much more that rots in our hearts. I pray with and for you that your spirit will be filled with prayer offerings worthy of the Goodness of our Creator. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2024
“Jesus died for me and I love Him.” – Asa



MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2024

Ephesians 3:14-16 (Part 1) by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

14 When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, 15 the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. 16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.

For the last five or so years, I continue to experience a fundamental change in the way I view the world. For most of my life, I have operated out of a scarcity mindset. It's a deeply rooted fear that has to do with my feeling of being prepared. I often wonder if I "know enough" or "have enough" or if I am "capable enough." Fortunately, the Holy Spirit continues to reveal more of the nature of God to me. Paul prays through this passage speaking of the "unlimited resources" of our Creator.

It feels somewhat embarrassing to think of the self-imposed limitations on what can be accomplished as a servant of God when Scripture so clearly describes His strength as inexhaustible. Do you pray big prayers? Do you cast awe inspiring vision or do your plans focus on easily attainable accomplishments? I'm certainly not criticizing as I have played it safe many times only to have others challenge me to take a bigger step in faith.

I invite you to pray big prayers today! Lean into our Creator's glorious, unlimited resources as you spend time in communion with Him.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5, 2024

Ephesians 3:17-19 (Part 2) by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. 18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. 19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

I love the imagery of this prayer! It reminds me of the moment when my father rushed into the room after hearing glass shatter only concerned with my well-being. While climbing on a cabinet to change the TV channel (some of you remember when you had to turn the dial on the television), a shelf filled with glasses gave way and I tumbled down showered in glass. My immediate thoughts were of fear for the mess I made and the damage I caused. However, my father first, then my mother rushed into the room to make sure that I was not injured.

Perhaps we only have ourselves to blame for telling the wrong stories or focusing on the wrong parts of the story, but often our view of God centers on His judgment and wrath. While I certainly recognize those as genuine attributes of our Heavenly Father, Scripture proclaims even more so His unfailing love. Paul prays that we would "experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully" as the measure of a complete life.

How much of our life has been incomplete because we failed to experience the love of Christ because of our focus on fear, wrath, and judgment? That day I experienced new depths of my earthly father's love that still warms my spirit to this day. How much greater will the love of Christ, which has no measure of depth, or length, or width, encourage and embolden you as a child of God?

Like Paul, I pray that you receive the power to understand and experience such love.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2024

Hosea 10:12-13 by Rev. Chris McLain

*Sow righteousness for yourselves,
reap the fruit of unfailing love,
and break up your unplowed ground;
for it is time to seek the Lord,
until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.
But you have planted wickedness,
you have reaped evil,
you have eaten the fruit of deception.
Because you have depended on your own strength
and on your many warriors,*

Wow... Just wow,

I stepped into this verse during the dark days. Days when I was focusing on the sin of another. Not wanting to recognize my own plank or lack of faithfulness to God's hope-filled promises. Out of nowhere comes Hosea, the prophet, speaking his calculated, specific imagery harkening to a cause-and-effect analogy of planting, reaping and eating.

You started with wickedness, experienced evil and delighted in deception. There is a cure...

Break up the unplowed ground.

Where is the place you haven't let God do the work in you yet? God created the dust and then created you from it. It's the story we have always believed. How then can we still have dark days? They exist because we fail to open the gate to that one particular pasture.

Our Addiction Our Pride The Grudge The Pain
The Relationship The Fear

Spend some time today being intentional to invite Christ into every place where you are not experiencing his "unfailing love." (and joy) God has a desire for you to be showered with his righteousness and is even willing to go into the wilderness with you... but you still have to open the gate...

Letting Him,
Rev. Chris McLain

THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2024

Genesis 18:1-5 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

"The Lord appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. One day Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. He looked up and noticed three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground."

"My lord," he said, "if it pleases you, stop here for a while. Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. And since you've honored your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food to refresh you before you continue on your journey."

I've always loved the surprise and the urgency of Abraham in this story. His reaction to this unexpected honor of entertaining messengers of the Lord shows us how to react when God moves in our lives.

First, Abraham moves swiftly and humbly. He doesn't take his position as master of his own house as something to 'lord' over his guests. Of course, Abraham's view on hospitality differs greatly from that of ours in the West. Never the less, he moves quickly and bows lowly before his guests.

Second, he invites them to stay with him in a way that suggests that they honor him by doing so. He tells them how they honor him with this unexpected visit rather than show any signs of inconvenience. There was a day when friends and neighbors just popped on by unannounced. This practice has largely faded from our culture.

Finally, the text goes on to say that he rushed into his home and tells Sarah to begin preparing bread. The exchange always makes me chuckle because he offers no context or explanation as he rushes in one entrance barking orders only to exit to the back to prepare the fatted calf. Abraham brought out his best for the messengers of the Lord.

As a congregation, I pray that our response to unexpected guests will always meet or exceed Abraham's.

May we move quickly and humbly to make others feel welcome.

May we invite them to stay so that they know they honor us with their presence.

May we offer our very best each time for we know not when we entertain angels unaware.

FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2024

1 Corinthians 1:17-18 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News – and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power. The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.

In ministry, I've found myself walking a fine line between the shiny practices of this world and the simple preaching of the Good News when it comes to leading the church. Paul wrote to the Corinthians with a clear sense of purpose and the means by which to achieve it. Jesus called him to preach the Good News – in particular the cross of Christ.

We believe, from the context of his writing, that some in the Corinthian church relied too heavily on human wisdom, eloquence, rhetoric, and philosophy. For us, we might equate that to clever marketing, cutting edge media, and freshly designed spaces reflective of the latest cultural trends. The modern church fights the same battle as the ancient church when it comes to living as the body of Christ.

I believe we can use some of the tools of the world. Yet, I never want to value them above preaching the Good News of Jesus. The difference between programs and ministries often comes down to the intended need: one helps fill a seat while the other fills a spiritual need. Well adorned and clean spaces can proclaim the beauty of God and reflect the honor He's due. Similarly, trendy and culturally relevant experiences can stir powerful emotions within would be worshipers without actually drawing them closer to the Divine.

Ultimately, the message of the cross has the power to change hearts for all eternity. For some, this will seem antiquated, irrelevant, even foolish. However, no one has ever been saved by lights, lasers, and smoke. Our response to the world might change in medium, but our message remains constant.

'For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.'
Col. 1:19-20

SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 2024

Psalm 142:2-5 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

I pour out my complaints before him and tell him all my troubles.

When I am overwhelmed, you alone know the way I should turn.

Wherever I go, my enemies have set traps for me.

I look for someone to come and help me, but no one gives me a passing thought!

No one will help me; no one cares a bit what happens to me.

Then I pray to you, O Lord.

I say, "You are my place of refuge. You are all I really want in life."

Do you complain to God?

I dare say most of us probably do not. Although, I don't think neither He would mind nor would He be surprised. Personally, I struggle with constantly tempering myself in prayer to perhaps illicit some type of favorable response like a child who thinks they can con their parents into something outrageous. Yet, neither God, nor those proverbial parents, are fooled by weak-minded children set on manipulating the relationship.

As I pray over this passage, pouring out our complaints before God seems to be the most genuine response. My children complain to me, as I have no doubt my siblings complained to my parents (see what I did there?). Yet, I love my children just the same and my parents love my siblings despite the collective complaints offered.

Our heavenly Father should be the one we bring our complaints to, if for no other reason than there exists no one anywhere or at anytime more capable of addressing our complaints than the Creator of the universe. Yet, we defer.

Join me in this commitment: the next time we find ourselves plagued with complaints, let's offer them to our heavenly Father. Ultimately, I believe He wants us to trust Him; He wants us to take refuge in Him; and He wants us to desire Him above all.

SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2024

“Reminds Me of Jesus and How He Didn’t Stay on the Cross” - McKinley



MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2024

Luke 3:10–11 by Gary L. Stringer

¹⁰ "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. ¹¹ John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."*

*John the Baptist

One of my earliest recollections of the Lenten season was the Easter Offering folder back in the early 1960s. These were cardboard folders from the church that were basically a calendar with a slot in each day. The slot was designed for a quarter to fit into it. There were also short Scriptures and prayers on the folder. The premise was that one would save a quarter each day to place in the folder for the Easter Season. On Easter Sunday, the folders were placed on the altar.

One may think that a quarter a day is not much of an offering or sacrifice (as a kid in elementary school in the 1960s, it would purchase a couple of comic books or a lot of bubble gum). If you filled each slot, it was only \$10. However, the offering usually totaled about \$1000, which went a long way at the church at that time. The most important aspect of project was not just the money. It was a realization that many of us had more than we needed and that we could share. John the Baptist, who foretold of the coming of Jesus the Messiah, instructed the crowds to share. As Christians, we should certainly give our tithes and offerings to the church. However, during Lent, it is a perfect time to go beyond what is expected of us. We need to remember that Jesus certainly went well beyond for us. Just attempt to comprehend leaving heaven and the presence of God to live on this Earth with people.

Just as Jesus sacrificed and gave His life on a horrific and painful cross for our redemption at Easter, we should share our blessings with those less fortunate. **Amen**

TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2024

Judges 6:11-12 (Part 1) by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!"

Look back to your youth...yes, I realize some of us have further to look than others!

How many of us knew, as teens or young adults, what we would do with our lives when we got older?

I love the image of Gideon hiding in the winepress to thresh out a little wheat for him and his family. The Midianites oppressed the people of Israel, by taking their crops, raiding their livestock, and destroying their homes. Gideon, fearful of the superior force around his home, cowered in the winepress in order to provide food for his household.

In this moment of uncertainty, oppression, and powerlessness, the angel of the Lord calls Gideon "Mighty hero!" Like Gideon, God sees us where we will be as we follow Him instead of where we are. Gideon could not have seen the future before him. Yet God does!

What's great about this truth is the fact that the same God who saw Gideon's future as a champion for Israel can see our future as well. Today, if anything in life drives you to cower or turn away, ask God to reveal the means to meet your needs and overcome. Remember that we serve a mighty God capable of equipping us for victory in the scariest of battles.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024

Judges 6:25-26 (Part 2) by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

That night the Lord said to Gideon, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it. Then build an altar to the Lord your God here on this hilltop sanctuary, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down."

Gideon's first task as Judge of Israel began in his own backyard...literally! Can you imagine the monumental request this must have been from God to Gideon?! These altars were personal to the people who knew Gideon most intimately.

Gideon would eventually go forward into battle against tens of thousands of Midianites with only 300 Israelites and the Lord. The victory would be astounding for Gideon and the people of God. Before Gideon could face the enemies of his people, God needed him to address the idolatry of his own family.

This story should teach us how important it is for us to get our own houses in order before we rush into the world to do God's work. Gideon began by clearing out the very stumbling blocks to his people's faithfulness. Today, ask God to show you what altars need to be replaced in your life so that He may more effectively use you for the Kingdom.

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2024

Ephesians 3:20-21 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

Now all glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to Him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever. Amen!

How big of a dreamer are you? I must admit that I often dream small and that I have been fortunate to have God bring big dreamers into my life. It's not that I don't believe what the Gospels proclaim, 'with God, all things are possible.' It's just that I find myself thinking far more practically than my big dreaming friends. How big is your vision?

Paul ends a beautiful prayer (3:14-19) with this praise of God's power. Essentially, Paul acknowledges that even those among us who can dream big cannot come close to exhausting the power and ability of God. "Infinitely more" reminds me that we can all lean into our imagination when it comes to seeking God's intercession in the world around us. However, Paul names this power of God in the proper context of the church and Jesus who by their very mission exist to bring glory to God (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; 5). Let us seek to trust and call on more of God's powerful intercession in our lives but only for the purpose of His glory.

As you pray today, where have you half-heartedly prayed for God to act? Let us pray boldly to the One whose strength infinitely exceeds our ability to pray. And let us do so to His glory! Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2024

Galatians 3:13 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become the curse for us – for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE" – in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Long before the Romans took over the practice of crucifixion, Deuteronomy warns Israel not to leave the condemned to hang on a tree overnight for that person will be cursed by God and the land of the people will be defiled. For those Galatians with the Hebrew Scriptures in their hearts, this testimony about Jesus would carry additional significance.

Removed from so much of the Jewish culture, we miss out on the totality of what Jesus did for us on the cross. Deserving of the curse of God as sinners, we received the blessing of the Holy Spirit because of His sacrifice. The cross opened the grace of God to more than just the people of Israel. Gentiles began to hear the Good News and experience salvation.

As we remember the curse that Jesus received on our behalf through, let us rejoice with humility and thankfulness for God's outpouring of blessing and Spirit!

SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 2024

Psalm 143:5-6 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

I am losing all hope; I am paralyzed with fear.

I remember the days of old. I ponder all your great works and think about what you have done.

I remember the first time I experienced an anxiety attack. As a fairly laid-back person most of my life, I couldn't make sense out of the overwhelming fear and dread coursing through my body. The sensation paralyzed me and drained my hope.

It happened in the weeks after a tragic accident which resulted in the injury of several teens and the death of another in my youth ministry. Fear has the power to invade our bodies and leave us irrationally struggling with our surroundings. My first attack came during a Christmas cantata. We gathered in the same space we used just months ago for a memorial service. Maybe it was the space filled with people just like that day months ago. Maybe it was the close quarters being surrounded by a few hundred people. Whatever it was, I remember power of the fear.

If you or someone close to you experiences such powerful fear and dread, I invite you to take up the words of the Psalmist. He reminds us to remember the "days of old" and to think on all of the "great works" God has done. In my recovery through that period of grief, I spent a great deal of time remembering God's goodness.

Not a day goes by where I don't remember those young faces and the joy God granted us all in ministry together in the time before that difficult day. In those memories, God heals and prepares us for new life together

SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 2024
Never Before Ridden – Jordan Warner



MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2024

Colossians 3:13-14 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us together in perfect harmony.

If I haven't read this passage at every wedding I've officiated over the past five years, then I read it during our pre-marital counseling sessions. Courtney has had the opportunity to make allowance for my faults on many occasions. And there have been a few times where I have been able to reciprocate. Paul doesn't write this passage for marriages particularly, but the same expectation for community expressed in this section of Colossians three applies to marriages, business partnerships, Sunday school classes, neighbors, etc.

We continue in devotion this season to remember that Jesus has done something amazing for us: He forgave us out of His abundant love for us!

Congregations experience conflict and relational challenges just like any other group of people working together for a common cause. The difference for us, as the body of Christ, comes down to what binds us together. Remember this Lent that we gather in the name of the Lord, Jesus, a forgiven people, devoted to loving God and neighbor.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024

Galatians 5:13 by Peyton Hornsby

"For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve on another."

When you think about "serving" what comes to your mind? The simplest definition that comes to me is helping others. Really and truly serving is quite simple in terms of physically doing something for others, but when our hearts take an attitude of selfishness it becomes extremely difficult.

We have the best example of someone who lived a life of service. Jesus did not come back so that he could be served, He came so that he could serve.

Some reminders of how He served and loved others came to mind.

Jesus washed his disciples' feet.

Jesus fed over 5,000 people with only a few loaves of bread and fish.

Jesus healing the blind and ill.

This Lenten season, I invite you to ask God to prepare your heart with an attitude of serving. Ask God where and how you can serve with those around you.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you will open my heart to serve those around me.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024

Job 12: 7–10 by Gary L. Stringer

7 But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; 8 or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. 9 Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? 10 In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

One of the most memorable Lenten seasons that I can remember occurred when I was a teenager growing up in the Free Methodist Church. The conference decided to have a one-day program for the youth on the Saturday before Easter. The program was going to be held at the small church next to the conference campground in the sprawling metropolis of Summerville, Louisiana. For those who have no idea where it is located, it is between Olla and Jena (if you still do not know, you might try Google). Summerville is situated among thousands of acres owned by timber companies.

Our youth director, who was from Summerville, decided it would be neat for the boys to camp out on Friday night and attend the program on Saturday. After arriving, our youth director took us down a path (a rather long walk loaded down with camping equipment) to a small creek with crystal-clear water and sandy banks. We barely had enough time to set up the tents before it got dark. The next morning, I awoke and could hear the creek gurgling. As I climbed out of the tent, the canopy of the trees was full of a wide variety of birds that seemed to be attempting to surpass the others with their songs. There were massive beech trees with their silvery-gray, smooth bark interspersed with sweetbay magnolia. The sun filtered through the tree branches leaving strange shadows on the leaf-littered ground.

Now, over 50 years later, I am still inspired by that Lenten morning. Job 12: 9 asks, "Which of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this." Lent is a perfect time to remember that the life of every creature and breath of all mankind is the hand of God and to thank Him for His unparalleled gifts including his Son Jesus.

Amen

THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024

Isaiah 25:6-9 by Shawn Hornsby

*6 In Jerusalem, the LORD of Heaven's Armies
will spread a wonderful feast
for all the people of the world.
It will be a delicious banquet
with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat.*

*7 There he will remove the cloud of gloom,
the shadow of death that hangs over the earth.*

*8 He will swallow up death forever!
The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears.
He will remove forever all insults and mockery
against his land and people.
The LORD has spoken!*

Courtney and I recently attended the funeral of her Uncle Ed. I remember him as a kind, fun loving man, who spent a career in sales. Before cognitive decline robbed him of his personality, he always had a large infectious smile and usually a joke or funny story to tell. The church selected this passage for his committal.

Uncle Ed had South Louisiana roots with a strong Cajun heritage. The image of the delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat, offered some comfort as I thought of Ed joining in the table of the Lord. Our grief often troubles us beyond reason if we believe what we profess in our faith.

For the prophet Isaiah, he spoke to something that he could not possibly understand as clearly as we do through the life of Jesus. Yet, he proclaimed the truth that God would one day welcome His people to a great banquet. Then, He would destroy the darkness of death and wipe away every tear. We know this reality in part because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. One day, we will know it in full, along with Isaiah, Uncle Ed, and any other who sleeps in the Lord.

Today, we have but to continue to live out the last verse of this section.

- Let us proclaim who our God is.
- Let us continue to trust Him.
- Let us experience the grace of salvation.
- Let us rejoice!

FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

Galatians 6:14 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Paul certainly knew how to frame the issue in colorful language. Combating the cultural pressures to have themselves circumcised, so they would not experience persecution from the authorities, Paul writes to tell the Galatians that those Jews who pressure them cannot keep the law themselves. Their circumcision does not save them! For Paul, there remains but one thing that can save the Galatians, one thing that has saved him: the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Like a man lost at sea, Paul clings to this lone image like a life raft because he knows that nothing else can save him. Not only does he cling to the cross, but Paul renders all other aspects of the world as crucified to him. Have you experienced cultural pressures to conform to the world around you in order to “fit in” or avoid ridicule? It’s true that we experience nothing resembling persecution when we look at the faith of our international brothers and sisters. However, I believe the enemy uses a different tactic with the church in America.

As a people, we exist in a consumer driven society. The trends of the market have filtered into the church. So often, I have heard that the local church needs to compete with the big church across town. Voices claim that we need to develop programs to appeal to people of every age so that we can attract more “members.” Sadly, we miss that we compete against the distractions of this world, not the body of Christ. Sadly, we cling to our marketing and crafted programs instead of the cross of Christ. Membership replaces discipleship.

Today, ask God to help strip away everything except the cross of Christ. Let that image, that solemn sacrificial act be your life raft from which your salvation comes.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23, 2024

Psalm 144:3-4 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

O Lord, what are human beings that you should notice them, mere mortals that you should think about them? For they are like a breath of fresh air; their days are like a passing shadow.

I'm told that birthdays seem to come faster and faster as we get older. I don't really feel that way about my birthday, but I certainly feel it when I look at my children and my parents. Peyton entered her 20s, Emily turned 18 yesterday (Happy Birthday!), and Cooper will be 14 next month. My father has slowed down tremendously over the last 5 years and mom has had some struggles. Where did my children's baby faces and parents' strength go?

Even though these changes have been years in the making, they are but a breath to God. The Psalmist knows this and marvels at our Lord's intimate familiarity with humanity. He celebrates the significance of our Eternal, All-Powerful, Creator taking notice of us. As the Psalm continues, David asks that no enemy would overcome him and that the lands would yield great prosperity to the people.

Do you ever feel small? Insignificant? Unnoticed or ignored by God?

God sees you and knows your troubles, your desires, your joys, and your secrets. This Psalm should remind us to continue to marvel at the God who sees us with such precision and to trust in Him for all things.

PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2024
Palm Branch with Hands – Abram



MONDAY, MARCH 25, 2024

Zechariah 9:9 Matthew 21 1:11 by Jordan Warner

Tell Daughter Zion "See, your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Matthew 21:5

The triumphal entry, words to describe Jesus's entry into the city of Jerusalem. This phrase has always left me more perplexed than joyful. Why a donkey? In Zechariah 9:9 we are told that Zion's king is coming. He is righteous, victorious, humble, and riding on a colt of a donkey. Growing up one of my favorite things to do was visit Mr. Donald Hawthorn's farm in Ringgold, Louisiana. He had all kinds of animals but one of his favorites was his donkey. Mr. Donald would hitch him to his wagon and come and pick me and my grandfather up and we would proudly ride around town. One day I wanted to ride the donkey. I learned very quickly and to the humor of my grandfather that donkeys do not like to be ridden. That short ride was anything but righteous, victorious, or triumphant; however, it was humbling.

The donkey was a symbol of peace. A new king riding on a donkey into his land symbolized that he was going to be a peaceful ruler. If he rode in on a horse he would rule fiercely. The people of Jerusalem welcomed peace and shouted adorations and pleaded with Him, "Hosanna." Hosanna is a shout of praise, but means come save us now. This is exactly what our Prince of Peace would do. How many people lined those streets that day singing "hosanna," waving palms and covering the road with their cloaks, knew what they were asking? He knew. He knew his purpose. Jesus rode into the town that day ready to welcome the defenseless and the weak. To become our defense and our power. He saved us all.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2024

Jeremiah 17:14 by Courtney Hornsby

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for thou art my praise.

During Lent, many people spend these 40 days in prayer and some type of fasting, or the giving up of something, whether it be sweets, sodas or social media.

For the past several years, Shawn and I have chosen to not eat meat on Fridays during Lent, something I began practicing as a young adult in the Episcopal Church. For the two of us, it is a tangible way to remember the sacrifices Jesus made for us and his suffering.

Lent does not have to be a time to beat ourselves up over our failures or wallow in guilt, but it can be a time to slow down and find room to heal our own hearts or pray for the healing in others. If given the opportunity this Lenten season, take time to pray for healing in others, whether that be a physical, spiritual or emotional healing. Have you ever been asked to lay hands on someone who was in need of healing? Both Shawn and I have had the privilege of laying hands on friends, colleagues and strangers who were desired God to bring healing to their lives.

This Lenten season, may you find ways to slow down, dig deeper and prepare for the glory of Easter. Sunday is Coming!

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024

1 Peter 1:18–21 by Gary L. Stringer

¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

It sometimes seems that Advent is barely finished, and Lenten has already arrived. I would be the first to admit that Advent is a wonderful and joyous time with the birth of Jesus as foretold by the prophets for centuries. It is such a festive and awe-inspiring story with Jesus' birth, the angelic hosts, the manger, and the shepherds. There are Christmas trees, lights, presents, and Christmas cards. I received a Christmas card this year that shows a carpenter in New Testament times working in his shop and, on the floor, is a small child playing. The card was entitled, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). It is obvious what the card represents. However, the most poignant, gripping, and heart-wrenching aspect of the card is what baby Jesus is doing—playing with several large spikes or nails. Yes, just like the ones that would pierce his hands on a heinous cross although Jesus was blameless and sinless. I can barely look at the card without warm tears flowing down my cheeks.

So, Christmas is only the beginning. Jesus' mission on Earth was completed 33 years later at Easter as he fulfilled the will of his Father with His death and subsequent resurrection with victory over sin and death. Yes, Jesus was the Lamb of God, perfect and unblemished, and He took away the sin of the world. That sin that He took away included yours and mine. During Lenten, let us always remember and thank God for what Jesus did for us.

*In John 11:25-26, Jesus stated, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" **Amen***

MAUNDY THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

John 13:34-35 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Around 2015 I attended the New Room Conference in Franklin, TN. It's a Wesleyan gathering focused on worship and leadership with several breakout sessions and the opportunity to meet some great people of similar theological backgrounds. One of the professors from my recent alma mater, Asbury Theological Seminary, spoke about his recent sabbatical readings of John Wesley's letters and other writings. As many of you know, Wesley and hand full of others are responsible for the Methodist movement that has flourished into several denominations and other movements over the two and a half centuries. History has several volumes of Wesley's letters and writings for scholars to pour over.

This professor, whose name escapes me, confessed to reading the complete collection not once, but twice. He went on to emotionally admit that in all his years as a Wesley scholar, he focused on all of the theological nuances of Wesley's practices and teachings. Yet, when he sat for these two most recent readings, God revealed to him a continuous thread that could be found in all of Wesley's writings: love.

Perhaps that's why his movement has persisted through revolutions, civil wars, world wars, pandemics, depressions, natural disasters, moral failings, and so much more. Wesley took the same instructions Jesus gave the disciples at that final Passover meal and wove love deeply into his ministry. Like all of us, Wesley had many flaws. Just the same, his love for God and for people began something that continues to this day.

I rarely talk about Wesley because I believe we can focus more on the Source rather than the messenger. However, sometimes, it's good for us to see what happens when take Jesus at His word. He told us to love each other. The world will know that we belong to Jesus, not because of our judgment, obedience, buildings, programs, or preaching, but because of our love for each other. Jesus gave a new command that night that should still shape us to this day. I pray you love each other as Jesus has loved you!

GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 2024

John 19:32-37 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

32 So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus. 33 But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they didn't break his legs. 34 One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out. 35 (This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account. He speaks the truth so that you also may continue to believe.) 36 These things happened in fulfillment of the Scriptures that say, "Not one of his bones will be broken," 37 and "They will look on the one they pierced."

What makes this Friday so "Good?" Each year, we recount one or more of the versions of the sufferings of Jesus. This account by John gives eyewitness testimony to the brutality of crucifixion. The soldiers, in an effort to quicken death, prepare to break the legs and pierce the sides of the two criminals and Jesus. The practice of breaking the legs, hastened the suffocation felt during crucifixion as the condemned were unable to relieve the growing strain on their lungs. Piercing their sides ended their lives in an odd act of mercy. As the soldiers broke the criminal's legs, they determined that death had already claimed Jesus. So they pierced His side to ensure that His punishment was complete.

Again, what makes this day "Good?" John references time honored teachings and prophecy of Israel. First, God taught Israel that no bones of the Passover Lamb were to be broken (Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12, Psalm 34:20). Second, Zechariah 12:10 speaks of how the people of Israel will gaze upon the one whose side they pierced. What makes this Friday Good? God foresaw the need for humanity's redemption long ago and the life and death of Jesus in the context of God's ancient teachings and prophecies highlights the miraculous work of the Father to move through time for our Good. We serve a Good, Good, God.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30, 2024

Psalm 130:1-2 by Rev. Shawn Hornsby

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

To what depths have you been spiritually or emotionally? I remember darkness so completely enveloping me that sobbing and crying out was the only hope I had. That's the difficulty of "the depths," as I understand it, there's no orienting yourself to overcome the paralyzing weight of your sin, grief, loneliness, doubt, fear, etc. There was, for me, only the strength to reach out to God for the grace and strength to continue.

Traditionally, the ancient church held that Jesus "descended to the dead" before rising on the third day. Our Hymnal contains a couple of versions of the Apostles' Creed, including UMH 882, which states in a footnote that some traditions held that Jesus "descended into hell." As if His betrayal, trial, humiliation, and crucifixion were not enough, He descended into hell (according to some traditions). It's a small comfort, but I am comforted, as I hope you are, by the fact that our Redeemer knows what "the depths" can do to a person. At His most vulnerable and broken state, Jesus cried out from the cross. On this Holy Saturday when we prepare ourselves to celebrate the joy and triumph of resurrection, let's be still long enough to listen for those who cry out from the depths around us.

EASTER SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2024
Let Me Tell You About My Jesus – Rhett & Crew Warner



From the Song, "My Jesus" by Anne Wilson

He makes a way where there ain't no way
Rises up from an empty grave
Ain't no sinner that He can't save
Let me tell you 'bout my Jesus
His love is strong and His grace is free
And the good news is I know that He
Can do for you what He's done for me
Let me tell you 'bout my Jesus
And let my Jesus change your life

