

Monday April 6, 2020 – Monday of Holy Week

Read Hebrews 9:11-15

How Much More

“How much more” could mean multiple things. It could be a question: How much more can I take? (Of the bad news, of being cooped up in my home, of loss) But that’s not the way it is used by the writer to the Hebrews. It could be a question that speaks in awe of God’s work in our lives: how much more has He blessed me, than what I deserve – He has given me my life, my family, my home, salvation, forgiveness, eternity with Him!

“How much more,” is closer to this idea in the reading. It is a comparison. Up until the time of Jesus, the people of God were to be sanctified (made holy) through sacrifices in the temple. **“The blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh.”** This was the manner by which God’s people were prepared to worship in His presence, but now there was a far greater sacrifice that had taken place and would not need to be repeated. These sacrifices only sanctified the flesh, yet now something greater had arrived.

“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify (not just our bodies, but also) our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Think of how much greater this sacrifice is – it is complete, it is once and for all, it cleanses not just our bodies, but also our consciences, our inner beings. We are cleansed of everything that would lead to death – all of our sin. We are welcomed into His presence without fear. We are made alive to serve the living God. How much more could we ask for or imagine, since He has given us everything in the sacrifice of Jesus!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for your great sacrifice that cleanses our flesh and our conscience. In Your Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, April 7

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“The Word of the Cross”

If this week were to be an “ideal Holy Week,” what would it look like?

For me, it would look a lot more like Holy Weeks of the past. This year is hard. It hurts not being able to gather with you all as usual. But as we mourn what we are missing out on this week in our usual worship services, notice what today’s reading holds before us: the word of the cross which is **“folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”**

The word of the cross is something that does not come naturally to us or anyone. If I were to have helped plan the first Holy Week using the wisdom of the world, I likely would have been right there with Peter, telling Jesus that He couldn’t suffer and die (Mark 8:32)!

We can have ideas about what this Holy Week should be. But in the end, what matters is that without our input, Jesus, in His wisdom, made that very first Holy Week exactly what it was supposed to be. No matter how lowly, how weak, how foolish it may have seemed and still seems in the eyes of the world, He took up the cross, He died, and He rose to forgive our sins and give us eternal life. He gives us the faith to believe this. He gives us the word of the cross for our salvation this week and forever.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for becoming my wisdom, my righteousness, my sanctification, and my redemption. Thank you for the word of the cross. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Jacob Tuma

Wednesday April 8, 2020 – Wednesday of Holy Week

Read Romans 5:6-11

Worth Dying For

It has often been said that, “Until you have something worth dying for, you don’t have something worth living for.” So what would you die for? Often times we answer, “who would you die for?” Your spouse. Your children. For soldiers, it might be their fellow soldiers or the ideals that they are fighting for. For medical personnel, some have had to decide whether their patients (or the oath that they took) were worth dying for.

Paul makes an interesting statement in today’s reading that **“one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die.”** Someone or something must be *good enough* to die for. Are you good enough? I’m not, and neither are you. Such is the truly remarkable nature of Jesus’ sacrifice: **“at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.”** Ungodly – that’s us apart from faith. God dies for those who are against God – in their lives, actions, thoughts, desires. Paul goes on to refer to us and all humanity apart from faith as **“sinners”** and **“enemies”** of God.

This truth, the very heart of the Good News, is beyond our full comprehension: **“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners (still enemies of God), Christ died for us.”** And since He decided you were worth dying for, you definitely have something worth living for – Him. **“We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”**

Prayer: Dear Jesus, even when I was Your enemy, You died for me. By Your grace, lead me to live in grateful thanks to You. In Your Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

April 9, 2020 - Holy Thursday

Read Exodus 24:3-11

Richer Blood

One of the most familiar images in the Old Testament is animal sacrifice. It was used to signify a covenant between God and his people, as we see in this passage from Exodus. And it was also to atone for their sins. We're pretty familiar with the system they had. But have you ever thought about the bloody reality of it all? It gets pretty graphic. There are literally basins full of blood. It's covering the altar. And to top it off, Moses pours the rest on the people, until they're literally soaked in blood. It's not a pleasant image, it may make us squeamish just to picture it in our minds. And all this sacrifice, all this blood, still wasn't enough. If we take anything from the account it should be that sin is serious business.

As we enter into our remembrance of Jesus' passion, we remember the seriousness of our own sin. Lent is a season of repentance, and we're now at the climax. Jesus is about to shed his blood for the sins of the world. For your sin, and mine. And it's also going to be graphic, and bloody. But forgiveness is coming to us in the blood of our Lord.

I'm reminded of a hymn, *Not All the Blood of Beasts* (LSB 431). Stanzas 1 and 2 sum it all up:

Not all the blood of beasts, on Jewish altars slain,
could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb, takes all our sin away;
a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.

Praise be to him who shed his rich blood for us.

Prayer: Jesus, we give you thanks for shedding your precious blood for us. Help us live in gratitude of this wondrous gift. In your name we pray, Amen.

Today's Devotion is by Seminarian Alex Smith

April 10, 2020 – Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Remarkably Unfair

Isaiah declared, **“we all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”** It would sure make a nice salve to our consciences to suppose that our troubles are not of our making. We might try, as did our first parents in Eden, to portray ourselves as poor and innocent victims of tempters. Or we might try to believe that we are really blameless victims of unavoidable circumstances.

But we are sheep who love to wander. We have no one to blame but ourselves. God has set a path before us, clearly marked out on tables of stone, and commanded us that this is the way we are to walk throughout our lives. But we have decided that we can find something better.

We don't get to blame Adam and Eve either. We aren't merely innocent victims. No one was forced to sin. We choose it for ourselves every day. And so, we choose for ourselves the punishments pictured in Isaiah's words. We should be carrying our own infirmities and sorrows; we should be stricken, smitten, and afflicted.

That is how things are supposed to be. That's fair. That's just. But on that confused Friday when the sun went down at noon, God made things turn out different for us. Oh, the wages of sin were paid—but not by the sinners. God's Son made the full payment for us all.

Nature was in upheaval because an upheaval was taking place before the judgment seat of God. The innocent one was suffering for the sins of the guilty. The Creator was dying for the sins of his creatures. The Son of God was shedding his blood for the transgressions we committed against Him.

That we should go astray was sadly too predictable. That the Son of God should make full payment for our sins...there is nothing more remarkably unfair or beautiful. **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; (but) the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** And by His wounds we are healed.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive me for my sins that placed You on the cross. Thank you, all the more for your love me, that led you to that cross. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday April 11

Read [Daniel 6:1-24](#)

Daniel 6:21 “Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever!””

Holy Saturday

The Bible doesn't say much about what Jesus was doing on Holy Saturday – you know, today – the day after Good Friday, when He was put to death on the cross, pierced in the side, and buried in the tomb. Scripture is very clear what happened on Easter Sunday (hallelujah!), but what was Jesus doing on Saturday?

The familiar story of Daniel in the Lions' Den may shed a little light on this. I challenge you – I realize it's a length reading, but read it twice. First time, read it to recall the story. The second time, when you read “Daniel”, put in “Jesus” instead. Where you see “King”, read “the Heavenly Father”. It's not a perfect fit (as for any analogy), but it's a striking foreshadowing of Jesus' final days.

Like Daniel, who waited until he “knew that the document had been signed” before publicly violating the king's law, Jesus lived His entire life, knowing beforehand that He would be brought to trial for every good deed He performed throughout His life.

Jesus' tormentors were deceitful, lying men, just as were the satraps and high officials who conspired against Daniel. As Daniel was faithful when even his life was on the line, so too did Jesus go faithfully to His death. As king Darius' sense of justice would not allow him to break his own law, so too our heavenly Father's justice would not allow our crimes to go unpunished.

And so, to those of us who wear crowns of righteousness given us by our risen Savior who paid for our sin by His death, we hear Jesus say to us the same words spoken by Daniel, “O king, live forever!”

Lord Jesus, thank you for taking our sin into death to forever rest in the tomb. Praise be to You for closing the lion's mouths wherever they roar in our lives. In Your Name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

April 13, 2020 – Easter Monday

Daniel 12:1c-3

In the Book of Life

The library of Congress in Washington DC is immense. It stretches over three buildings. Perhaps most impressive is that the library currently has over 32 million books. In our world, books are numerous. In fact, you can publish your own book through many different websites.

But in the ancient world, books were rare. Each one was precious. For your name to be written in any book meant that you would be remembered. Isn't that exactly the promise of Daniel 12? **“At that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.”** Daniel is referring to the end of the world, and the rescue of all of the Lord's people, all those who have their names written in the book.

Who is remembered? How are their names in this most precious book? Well, we could skip ahead to Revelation (13:8 & 21:27) where it is “the *Lamb's* book of life.” He owns it. It belongs to Him because He paid for it by His blood. Those who are in the book **“have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb”** (Rev. 7:14). You have been washed in baptism and made clean in the blood of Jesus, the lamb. You are in the book!

His promise is that you are remembered. You will be remembered on the final day to **“shine like the stars forever and ever.”** But that also means you are remembered now. He is with you to strengthen your faith, hear your prayers, forgive your sins, remind you of His promises in His word. Your name has been written in the book to be remembered now and forever.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, when I am discouraged remind me that my name is written in your book of life, that you remember me always. Amen.

Today's devotion was written by Pastor Jason

April 14, 2020 – Easter Tuesday

Read Daniel 3:8-28

Your God

There are plenty of questions that can accompany even familiar Biblical accounts like today's story. One question that comes to mind is: *wouldn't it be nice to have the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?*

Wouldn't it change the way that I look at the world and its challenges if I knew that there is One who reigns over all things- One who is always one step ahead of every power and threat in the world? Wouldn't I have a peace that the world cannot give if my God was One who is able to deliver me from any time of need? Further yet, what if my God was One who had shown me so much goodness and had worked in me such trust that I could say, "Thy will be done," alongside Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in verses 17-18? Wouldn't this change not just my mind, but my heart, my identity, my hope, and my future?

So it is. For the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is my God. **He is your God.** He has not just delivered us from one moment of need as in Daniel 3, but Our Lord Jesus Christ- *the Son of God*- has come to dwell with us in the midst of our need and has delivered us from our sin, death, and the devil for eternity. He died and lives and now reigns as the King of Kings. He is *the King* who really does live forever (v.9)! Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Prayer: Blessed be You, Lord Jesus, who has delivered me from eternal death unto life with you forever. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Jacob Tuma

April 15, 2020 – Easter Wednesday

Colossians 3:1-7

Set Your Mind on Things Above

I am far from an expert on running, but one of the best pieces of advice I was given was simple, “don’t look at your feet.” If you look at your feet when you are running, it ruins your posture, makes it harder to breathe, and you lose track of where you are going.

In running the race of faith, Paul tells us, “don’t look at your feet.” Actually he writes, “**Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.**” It is easy to get stuck looking your feet. It is easy to get stuck focused only on things on the earth. It might be your current boredom or frustration or extreme workload. You could get stuck looking at your feet that includes the sinful desires and actions that Paul catalogs at the end of the reading: “**sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness (which is idolatry)**...(Paul later adds) **anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk.**” Whether consumed by the cares of the day or the sinful desires of our hearts, when we look at our “feet” it certainly makes us lose track of where we are going.

So, lift your eyes. You’ve been raised with Christ! “**When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**” Christ is your life. He defines your life now. His resurrection also tells you where you are headed. He is your life forever. So, turn your gaze from sinful desire. Confess your sin and hear once more the forgiveness of the risen Jesus. He has paid for and overcome your sin. When you are overwhelmed by the cares of the day, lift your eyes to the One who has overcome all things for you including sin, death and the devil.

Set your mind on the One who has run the race for you already and won. Set your mind on Christ, and the peace of knowing He is your life.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, when I am overwhelmed, lift my eyes from the care of the moment, and remind me that I share in Your victory. Amen.

Today’s devotion was written by Pastor Jason

April 16, 2020 – Thursday after Easter

Read Acts 10:34-43

Our Lord Jesus Christ

Oh Peter. What a difference from Maundy Thursday! Just a few days ago, as we remembered our Lord's passion, we saw Peter fail spectacularly, denying even knowing Jesus. But in this reading from Acts, Peter couldn't be more confident! He preaches to the Gentiles about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It's basically a creed, it sums everything up so well.

As I read these verses, I was struck by a phrase in verse 36. In the ESV translation, it's in parentheses: **"(he is Lord of all)."** While all the rest of the things Peter says are true, and a great comfort to us, this short phrase really sums it all up in just a few words. In the past few weeks, maybe it hasn't seemed like *anyone* is in control of this situation. It can be overwhelming just to watch the nightly news. Governmental leaders are trying to maintain control, but it's clear that uncertainty and anxiety are all around. But there is one who truly is Lord of all, and it's Jesus, as Peter reminds us.

Jesus proved this in his ministry: **"He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."** As Jesus walked the earth, he brought about the reign of God. By his death and resurrection, he conquered sin and death, **"that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."** And he will return on the Last Day, as **"judge of the living and the dead,"** to continue his reign as Lord of all forever and ever. As we live through this time of uncertainty, let us cling to this certain hope: That Jesus is Lord of all, and this situation is in his control.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us remember that you are Lord of all when we are uncertain or begin to despair. Strengthen our faith by the power of your Word. Amen.

Today's devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith

April 17, 2020 – Friday after Easter

Read Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

Coming Clean

We have all heard this saying, “the cover-up is worse than the crime.” We see the truth of that statement in the young child who sneaks a stash of candy from his Easter basket into his room, eats all of it, ruins his dinner, and then mom finds the pile of candy wrappers stuffed in a drawer. His problems get worse when he claims that he doesn’t know anything about where his candy went.

We see the truth of the statement in the world around us right now. No matter how this virus first infected people, many more people are suffering because certain nations tried to cover-up the problem, and not let the rest of the world know what was going on until the infection had spread far and wide.

This pattern of covering up wrong doing stretches back to Adam in the garden with his fig leaves as he tried to cover his sin. It extends to us too. We tend to compound the problem of sin by covering it up, instead of coming clean. In the reading, Peter confronts a crowd telling them of no small indiscretion, “**you killed the Author of life.**” The group could shout Peter down. The group could deny their involvement. But Peter encourages them to come clean. “**Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.**”

When confronted with our own sins, we often want to try to cover them up, ignore them, or distract and point toward the sins of others. None of that does us any good. The cover-up is truly worse than the crime, because these cover-ups would leave us in our sin. But look at the promise attached to repentance, to coming clean. “**Repent...that your sins may be blotted out.**” We don’t just get to stop hiding, we are made clean by the forgiveness of Jesus. Think of it! When we come clean about our sins before God, He makes us clean by taking those sins away.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Author of life, I know that my sin played a part in killing You. Help me to be quick to repent, to come clean. Then, according to Your promise, make me clean by Your forgiveness. Amen.

Today’s devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday April 18

Read [Acts 13:26-33](#)

“There’s a cure!”

When World War II ended, nearly 75 years ago, the headlines read, “The War is Over!” That little, simple statement said it all. After years of life and death struggle, after countless lives were obliterated – military, civilians, and the underclasses of societies – it was over. Atrocities would be prosecuted, lives and cities rebuilt, and peace would again prevail. People had been yearning to read that headline, to hear those words proclaimed, as if their lives depended on seeing and hearing it to make it real.

Just a few months ago, if someone told you that a pandemic was going to blanket the earth, shutting down economies, leading to unemployment, social distancing, and death for thousands, you’d have thought they were writing a science fiction novel. That exact plot has been turned into many books and movies over the years. But now it’s real. Now, people are waiting – longing to hear – similar words: “A Cure is Found!” We all want to put this Coronavirus behind us and return to our lives. Peace has been missing. Normalcy. Hugs and handshakes. Certainty.

But that’s not in the news (yet) today. God willing, it will come, with time, toil, and prayer. Evidence for this is in our reading for today, where Paul and Barnabas told the people of Antioch, “Your Redeemer Lives!” A much worse pandemic – Sin – had afflicted all mankind, leading to sickness, death, and damnation. Their message was “The War is Over!, A Cure is Found!” Christ paid the debt we owed for our sin with His own life. But He was not overcome by death, rather He rose victorious over the enemy and now gives His cure to us.

So Paul, having seen with his own eyes the fulfillment of God’s promise, was filled with joy to proclaim this news. If God so loved the world then, He will continue “curing” us today.

Prayer: Risen Savior, praise be to you for defeating sin, death, and the grave. Make us now to be witnesses of Your Good News to the world. In Your Name, Amen.

Today’s devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson