

Introduction to Lenten Practices 2021

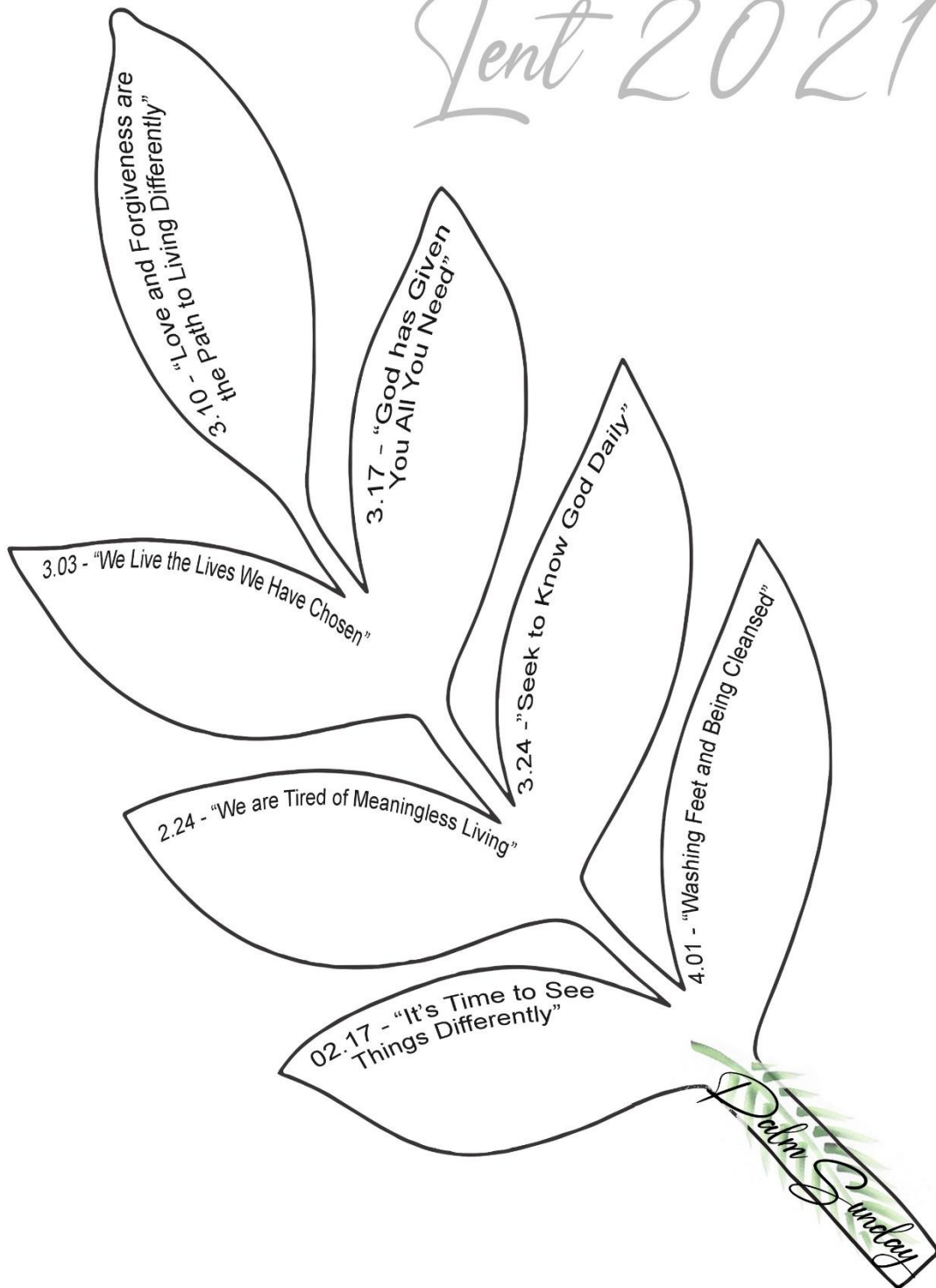
These devotional materials are produced to go along with our Wednesday Lenten Devotions and fellowship. The purpose of Lent is to focus on our personal relationship with Christ Jesus and our discipleship. We will work together to support each person's individual growth and strengthening our relationship in Christ.

We will be using these materials as the basis of our Zoom Lenten Workshop. You are welcome to use them individually or with your family. Pay particular attention to the practices. You may wish to use them repeatedly in the week between programs. Do not worry about what you may feel or experience when using the practices. Their value is developed over time. Do not seek to feel something or understand ideas. Simply allow the practice to open your thinking and experience God's love in new ways.

You may wish to engage in journaling or in some other way to record your thoughts during this Lenten Season. This will be a time for reflection and examination of what God is speaking to you, for the entire year.

Above all let this be your time. Lent is a gift to you for your own spiritual growth and reflection. Shape this time to make it work for your benefit.

Lent 2021





Lenten Study - Introduction

February 17, 2021

Read scriptures from Ash Wednesday Service

Joel 2:12-14

¹² Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³ rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.
¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain-offering and a drink-offering
for the Lord, your God?

Isaiah 58:6-10

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.
⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

^{6:1} 'Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² 'So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ 'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶ 'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹ 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Purpose of this Series

We are participating in a process that moves from the darkness of anxiety and fear, through release and forgiveness to peace and wholeness. This is the true aim of discipleship: like an expert stone cutter who transforms a rough stone to allow its inner light and perfection to show through.

Discussion

Consider from the passages today. What does it mean to fast? Fasting means to remove something from our lives to create space for growth and healing. Fasting can be to remove specific words from our speaking, to reduce or eliminate use of social media or watching television, or to take some sort of food or drink from our diet. Allow yourself to be creative in items or behaviors you would like to set aside for Lent.

What is one thing you would like to change in the world today? If you had the power to change anything, what would it be?

What are you able to do to make that change possible? What would all people need to do to make that change possible? How might we be a part of making those changes happen? In what ways do we depend upon God to make things different?

What would you like to see leave your life? What might you want to leave behind? Are there things in the past that you would like to keep in the past? Are there things that are current you would wish to make go away?

Consider one change you can make every day that would open space in your life to let God provide you more of what you crave? What could you take out of your “spiritual closet” so that you could have space for something new?

Closing Prayer

We come to you, Jesus our Lord, opening our hearts to your love and healing. We have chosen to lower our defensiveness and welcome your loving presence into our darkest places. We realize that the unforgiveness, fear, and anger that we carry are robbing us of the love and joy that you want for us. We trust you to lead us through this time of renewal and awareness with love and to lead us with gentleness.

Through this coming week, show us our hearts and the hostile places in our minds. Show us our weary nature and our unnecessary burdens we carry from the past. We praise you for this time of rebirth and welcome the light that you are bringing into our lives. Amen.



Lenten Study – Week 2 February 24, 2021

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, we pause to listen for Your voice. We prefer to do the talking, to explain our thinking and to justify our behaviors. But instead, today, we will pause. We will ask you to speak and we will listen.

We need You to show us a way different from our own. We have become weary with repeating the same fights, and seeing the same hurt and pain in the world around us. We are weary of meaningless noise and pointless activity. We are ready to stop living by bread alone. We want to know what You might speak to us that would show us a different way.

Send us Your Holy Spirit to guide us and enable us to hear Your voice of wisdom as we learn to let go of those things that keep us from knowing the love and peace that You desire to share with us. In the love and wisdom of Christ Jesus our Lord we pray, Amen.

Scriptures

Read the Proverb's passage. Pause for a brief time of silence. Pay close attention to the words that stand out to you. What words seem to particularly impress or call to you in the reading?

Before reading the scripture take a moment of silence and just breath, releasing the tension from your mind and body. Listen to the feelings behind the words and allow particular words to resonate with you. After the reading, take a moment of silence to consider the message that the Holy Spirit is sharing with you.

Proverbs 30:1-3, 7-9

^{30:1} The words of Agur son of Jakeh. An oracle.

Thus says the man: I am weary, O God,
I am weary, O God. How can I prevail?

² Surely I am too stupid to be human;
I do not have human understanding.

³ I have not learned wisdom,
nor have I knowledge of the holy ones.

⁷ Two things I ask of you;
do not deny them to me before I die:

⁸ Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that I need,

⁹ or I shall be full, and deny you,
and say, 'Who is the Lord?'

or I shall be poor, and steal,
and profane the name of my God.

Read the passage a second time and again allow silence. What do you hear God speaking to you about wisdom?

Read the passage from Matthew's Gospel, again pause afterwards to listen. What words stand out to you?

Matthew 4:1-11

^{4:1} Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴But he answered, 'It is written,

"One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." '

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,
"He will command his angels concerning you",
and "On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

⁷Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." '

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written,
"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him." '

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Read the passage a second time. Pause again for a time of silence. What do you feel God is saying to you through this passage?

Discussion

What do you think the author means when (s)he says: "I am weary, O God ... Surely I am too stupid to be human ... I have not learned wisdom nor do I have the knowledge of the holy ones?" Have you ever felt that type of frustration? Take a moment and either discuss what frustrates you or what has been a struggle over the past months. If you are by yourself you may want to write some notes or simply think about the things that recently have been a source of frustration.

The prayer in Proverbs is that falsehood would be removed from the heart of the one offering the prayer. What do you think the writer means by this? What is the falsehood which is a constant part of our lives?

Why do you think the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil? Notice that it wasn't accidental that Jesus went to be tempted. He was intentional about going to have an experience which would challenge his identity and what it means for him to be the Messiah.

The first question is about Jesus' identity as the Son of man and what it meant for him to be God's beloved. What does it mean for you that you are God's beloved? In what ways do you feel beloved of God? In what ways do you feel less like you have been loved by God?

The last temptation is an invitation to "compromise" and do a small amount of wrong to accomplish a great deal of good. How is it that we struggle with that same temptation? What compromises do you need to address in your life?

Practice

Look about you and notice the items that around you. Take a couple moments and simply observe the items in the room around you, and things you might be wearing.

Pick out one item in the room and silently remind yourself, "a time will come when this thing is no more." As you do so imagine how that thing might be worn out and thrown away, discarded, or in another way come to its end. Do the same for one or two additional items in the room.

Think about what is in your life that will truly last? What have you said, done, or made that will last a generation or more into the future?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, it pains us to see and be aware of how temporary everything is. All that surrounds us will pass away. Very little that we will create with our hands will last to the next generation. But we know that some of our words will echo in hearts, generations to come. Your Word will last forever.

We have become focused on things that are temporary and live as if what is meaningless is the center of our lives. We seek Your wisdom so that we may see what is truly important and valuable in our lives and in the world. Free us from what is petty and particularly from the foolish things that are past. Remove from us our preoccupation with the trivial and open our eyes to see Your light of eternity within us and within all of the people around us. Guide us in the way of wisdom we pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.



Lenten Study – Week 3

March 3, 2021

Opening Prayer

Jesus, our Savior, we call upon you to heal our hearts and set us free from the prison of darkness in which we have been trapped for so long. No amount of denial can free us from the burdens of guilt which we bear. No amount of self-justification can defend all of the faults and failings we see within ourselves. We bear a heavy burden of shame and responsibility.

And yet, you have already forgiven us. You died to set us free. You gave everything to release us from the prison in which we still dwell. How do we find ourselves in this place of continuing to bear burdens which you have offered to take away from us? We need to learn to see and understand your grace and forgiveness.

Open our hearts to releasing the stains that we cling to like ragged blankets to cover our shame. Show us how to release others from the prisons in which we would hold them, through our own blame and unforgiveness, so that we may walk free from the chains we create for ourselves. Let us live in the light of wholeness, freedom, and peace. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scriptures

Before reading the scripture take a moment of silence and just breath, releasing the tension from your mind and body. Listen to the feelings behind the words and allow particular words to resonate with you. After the reading, take a moment of silence to consider the message that the Holy Spirit is sharing with you.

John 12:36

³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

Read the passage from John's gospel a second and third time. Allow time between the readings for silence. What do you feel God is speaking to you? What does the light mean to you?

Discussion

Do we tend to hear the love behind God's discipline and correction or are we more focused on our own hurt feelings? What difference might it make if we see the love behind God's anger?

What causes us to not see God's love during our trials or challenges? How do you think God feels about the consequences that we experience for the indifference and hostility of humanity? In what ways does God want to protect us and in what ways does God seem to want us to learn and see the light?

Practice

We will cease to blame others for our outcomes.

Begin by taking time for silence for a couple deep, relaxing breaths.

Scan your mind and emotions for a moment. How are you feeling? Are you anxious, or bored, or relaxed? What is the state of mind and spirit that you are experiencing right now?

Allow yourself to consider what or who you blame for the things that are troubling you right now? Do you identify with particular groups, situations, or events that have caused you inconvenience, trouble, or discomfort? Have you particular groups or individuals who you frequently identify as the cause of much of your discomfort?

Take a moment and lift that individual or group in prayer. Pray for God's to comfort, heal, and bring them joy in their lives. Repeat the prayer silently in your mind three times and seek to let go of what animosity or anger you might have towards that person or group.

In your imagination, open your mind to seeing that person or group in comparison to the scope of God in time, space, and power. Allow that person or group to become very small in comparison to the expanse of God's greatness. Allow your vision to "zoom out" as far as your mind will allow.

Prayerfully ask God to help you to release that person or group from your blame and mental attacks. Ask God to help you to see them as one of God's creations and see them in perspective of God's works of love and grace.

If you wish to you may prayerfully speak that you release them from blame or guilt for anything that they have done.

Closing Prayer

Holy God, You look upon us with love and grace while we tend to see our own faults and failures, You look upon us with love and acceptance. As we judge and criticize the foolishness and wrong in the world, You shower compassion and grace upon Your creation. We will strive to see the world without condemning while we accept Your forgiveness. We will seek to cherish all that is good and holy as we work to be part of the message of reconciliation and healing that is flowing eternally from Your heart to all people. In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior we pray. Amen.

Practice

I choose forgiveness.

Make yourself comfortable and relaxed. Keep your head level and close your eyes. Slow your breathing with three deliberate, slower breaths and then seek to quiet your thoughts.

Briefly allow issues or troubles to come to your mind and seek to see them from a perspective that is not caught up in the emotions. Seek to take a moment to state to yourself the specific

event in simple terms such as: “_____ spoke harshly to me.” Or _____ treated me with disrespect.” Or in some other way summarize the event in a very basic description.

Allow yourself to see how that event has shaped your relationship with that person or persons. Take a moment and consider how your feelings about that event have shaped your relationships and choices. What has been shaped as a result of that hurt into your life. Be as objective and fearless in considering the ways in which your hurt has shaped your life.

Now say out loud to yourself, “I can choose forgiveness.” Allow yourself to consider what forgiveness would change in your attitudes and perceptions.

Repeat again to yourself, “I can choose forgiveness.” This time allow yourself to relax into a sense of freedom from attachment to the event or people that you have perceived through the lens of the hurt or grievance that you have held.

A third time, repeat to yourself, “I can choose forgiveness.” Allow yourself to explore what that would mean. What would you release or leave behind? What do you wish to retain as what you have learned or gained since that experience? How do you choose to describe that event now? You may want to rewrite the narrative of your experience in a journal or prayerfully consider how you wish to move forward.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, our Savior, teach us to choose forgiveness over grievances, and to choose freedom over holding others to debts and faults. We realize that our freedom comes when we release others from the chains in which we hope to trap them for the wrongs that we hold accountable.

Loving Lord Jesus, we particularly open our most raw and hurting places where we first need to find the willingness to forgive. We are not ready to feel differently, but we want to experience transformation and release. We cannot imagine how you might change what we have felt for so long. But we know that you do miracles. We choose to allow you to do a miracle of softening those hard places and beginning to heal our wounds. We offer ourselves to your never failing care. Amen.



Lenten Study – Week 4

March 17, 2021

Opening Prayer

Jesus, our Lord and Savior, we thank you for your forgiveness, love and grace. You accept us just as we are. You welcome us with compassion and seek what is best for us. Help us to learn how to live without the burdens of unforgiveness and bitterness that we add to our lives.

We realize that you don't want to punish us for being hostile or foolish in our decisions; but that you want us to be saved from the way in which our unforgiveness and selfishness harms us. Help us to listen to your word and your law so that we can live in the freedom of love and peace that you desire for us. In the name of Jesus our Savior we pray. Amen.

Scriptures

In the passage from 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul is speaking of the Israelites who behaved badly when Moses was on the mountain communing with God and receiving the law. The passage is speaking about temptation. Read the passage through slowly.

1 Corinthians 10:13

¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

Take a moment to consider the examples of reckless and hurtful behaviors that come to mind. Are there people who have made especially poor decisions? What kind of outcomes take place when people do not consider the consequences of their choices? How do parents and friends feel when they see people they care about making decisions which cause them harm or shame? How do you think God feels about his people who are making decisions which will result in harm to themselves or others.

What do you the Apostle Paul means when he said: “¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it?”

John 8:12

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’

What does it mean to you when Jesus says: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life?”

Discussion

Darkness is often associated with either being full of themselves, selfishly doing what seems good to them right at that time or is connected with being full of hostility and bitterness so that

they see everything through their resentment. Which of those things have you encountered? Are there situations which you have seen in which people's "sight" is darkened by their personal issues or resentment?

Consider a time when your perspective or point of view has been shaped by feelings of anger, fear, or resentment? How do negative feelings affect your thinking about plans or events that may be taking place? Has there been a time when your feelings made it much harder to go somewhere or complete something you needed to do?

What would change if you were no longer feeling anger or resentment or unforgiveness towards things that are troubling in your life? How would your life be different if you did not carry anger or resentment with you from past bad experiences?

Practice

Gratitude instead of grievance.

Find a comfortable position and relax. Breathe easily, paying attention to easing your breath and slowing down your thinking. Take a moment to simply rest comfortably feeling the stress fall away.

Consider an event or grievance that frequently comes to your mind, one which particularly recurs to you. It doesn't have to be big or small, painful or amusing. Simply allow one of the issues or episodes that frequently bother you to come to mind.

Allow yourself to observe your feelings and thinking that surrounds that bothersome issue. Simply pay attention, not so much to the issue, but to the feelings that you attach to it, and to your response. As you do so notice if this causes you stress in your body – tightening in shoulders or jaw, or tension in other parts of your body. If you are feeling tension in that way, pause and consciously relax as you observe it. Simply remain in a place of observing your own reaction to whatever the issue might be for a couple moments.

Gently consider if there was someone who was supportive or helpful in the midst of this issue. Search your mind and see if there was a gift of comfort or a way in which someone was particularly compassionate or helpful for you. Allow your mind to drift about for assets and supports that have been given to you as you have dealt with the particular issue.

Offer a thank you in your mind to the person, or the thing, or to God for providing those things. Allow yourself to feel appreciation and thanks towards whomever or whatever was present as a support.

Bring the time to an end with a brief prayer of thanks to God and allow yourself to be calm and relaxed as you enter again into your day.

Closing Prayer

Holy God, we are grateful for Your presence in the midst of trouble, even when we are not aware that You are walking with us. We thank You that we can depend upon Your love and compassion to sustain us. Help us to be more aware of Your constant care and less focused on our fears and insecurities. Enable us to trust that You will provide for our needs rather than our feeling that we should be in control in all times. Let us know Your blessing of steadfast love and to share that with the world.

Holy God, we choose gratitude over blame and attack. We choose to know love and healing rather than seeking vindication and retaliation. We want to live in the fullness of joy and peace that comes as we let go of those things that separate us and limit our gift of peace. Teach us and shape our hearts we pray in Your holy name. Amen.



Lenten Study – Week 5

March 24, 2021

Opening Prayer

Jesus, our Loving Lord, we are here to listen to what you wish to say to us, and to see ourselves as you are calling us to live. Enable us to hear your word and to be inspired by your grace. Show us what is unique in each of us as we are called to do your work and share your love. Enable us to be servants to one another we pray in the name of the one whose love brings us together and makes us one people, Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Scriptures

Read the passage from Philippians together out loud.

Philippians 2:1-11

^{2:1} If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Have one person read the passage aloud while everyone else listens. Listen for words or phrases that stand out to you.

Have someone in your group read the passage from John's gospel aloud. Others may listen with their eyes closed if they like. Listen and focus on "sight" and "light."

Discussion

Take some time to talk about the various gifts that you see in the people around you. If you are on your own, you might want to jot some notes of the gifts you see in people who you know well.

Speak with one another about the abilities and strengths that people naturally show? (If you are on your own, make notes about people who stand out to you and the strengths that they have shown). What influence or impact do these gifts have on the people around them? How does their unique personality and capability help to support the people around them in their own lives and challenges? Try to make a list and identify three to five people whose gifts are particularly important in your life.

Practice

Our Morning Affirmation and statement of purpose.

Become comfortable in the place where you are sitting and relax. Take a couple breaths and relax. Make sure to relax your back and shoulders, your jaw and your facial muscles. Simply allow yourself to feel comfortable in that space for a couple moments.

Think back through your last week and ask yourself, "How have I made a difference this last week?" Think through various relationships, particularly paying attention to people who have been particularly important to you in this past week.

Prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to show you your unique gifts and the part you play as God's representative in the world. You may want to return to this thought repeatedly. Gently prod yourself to look at the role you would like to be able to play in people's lives. Take a moment to write down thoughts that come to you and then return to quietly sitting and reflecting for about five minutes.

After about five minutes end your time of quiet reflection and make some final notes about what you see as your purpose.

Take a piece of paper and write in a short sentence "I am here to serve God by doing these things...." Write down between one and three things that you feel are your role for the coming week. Put the paper where you can see it in the morning and evening and reflect back on your purpose. As needed, add or adjust the roles that you feel God is giving you for your purpose.

Closing Prayer

Holy and Loving God, You created each of us with gifts and abilities and have set us in places where we are each gifted with a holy calling to live as Your people. You have shaped us so that we will naturally be people who will share Your love and presence, simply by being ourselves. Help us to embrace and live our gifts, to be fulfilled by doing the things that will enable others to know Your love and grace. We thank you that each day we are gifted to live as Your beloved children, amen.



Lenten Study - Maundy Thursday April 1, 2021

Opening Prayer

Jesus, our Lord and Savior, you washed the feet of the disciples and commanded them to love one another with the love that you showed. You even washed the feet of the one who would betray you, and the one who would let you down. Your love was greater than judgment or blame.

Holy Lord, we struggle to imagine how we could have that same sort of love for one another. We are unable to envision being people who can fulfill your commandment to love one another as you have loved us. But we believe that you would not ask us to do anything that we could not do. We give to you our willingness to be transformed and renewed. You give us the means to be transformed and set free to live in the fellowship of your love, we pray this in the name of Christ who died for our sins. Amen.

Scriptures

Read the passage from 1 Corinthians and pay particular attention to what words or phrases stand out to you as you hear it.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Say out loud any word or phrase from that passage that stand out to you. Are there any parts of it that make an impression upon you?

Read the passage from John (or if there is more than one in your group, have one group member read the passage while others listen. It is a longer passage but try to envision the story, to see it as the action is taking place as if it is in a movie.

John 13:1-17, 31-35

^{13:1} Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer

robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' ⁹Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

Think about what was done and said in the passage and if necessary, go back and read it through again. What do you think Peter felt as Jesus was washing their feet? How do you think Judas felt, as Jesus said, "Not all of you are clean?" How do you think John, the disciple who so very deeply loved Jesus felt to see Jesus humbling himself in this way?

Discussion

Jesus' act of washing the disciple's feet was an act of humility. Think of a time when someone showed great humility and kindness to you. How did it make you feel about yourself? How did you feel towards them?

What is needed in personal traits and self-worth in order that they can act with great humility and compassion? What happens if someone is insecure, hostile, or acting out of obligation? How does that change moments of serving or giving to others?

What do we need to do in order that we can combine humility with love? How do we become focused on others as beloved children of God rather than seeing "tasks" to be completed or acts of obligation? What do we need to do in order to practice the kindness and humility that Jesus showed?

Practice

To See Christ in Each Person.

Our biggest challenge is to see Christ in people with whom we only see past history of hurt or injury. Often we attach to particular people or groups fear and resentment from painful experiences from our youth and childhood. A particular person or group reminds us of times when we felt threatened, out of control or humiliated.

Begin by relaxing and becoming comfortable. Allow yourself to be aware of how you are feeling this moment, whether it is comfortable, or anxious, or stressed. Will yourself to relax and work to breath in a comfortable relaxed manner. Seek to be in a position where you feel comfortable.

Close your eyes and allow a person to come to mind. It doesn't have to be a specific person. Simply allow a name, face, or experience to come to mind. This doesn't have to be a good or bad experience. Simply allow yourself to think of that person.

Say out loud to this person: "I wish to see Christ in you." Pause for a moment of silence and consider how you feel. Does this seem absurd or repulsive? Or does it seem possible. After a moment of returning to a calm and even state. Repeat again out loud: "I wish to see Christ in you." Again, consider how this makes you feel. What is your reaction. Do not judge your own reaction but merely observe it. Repeat this one last time after you have reached a point of feeling relaxed and comfortable. "I wish to see Christ in you."

Take a few minutes and contemplate your reaction to seeking to see Christ in that person. You may wish to journal your thoughts and reactions. Do you experience judgment or thoughts attacking the person? Do you feel guilt or shame in your own reaction? Do not judge those thoughts or feelings, merely observe them. Consider what it is that is causing you to see and feel this way.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, our Lord and Savior, we thank you for your love which sets us free from our past. You free us from the burden of resentment, hostility, and judgment. You work within us to make us people of love and peace. With humility and gentleness you cleanse us of all that would pollute our relationships and separate us from others. We are grateful for the sacrifice of your love.

We offer you our willingness to see differently, to live in your light and your love. We are willing to be changed and to release our baggage that holds us back from the kind of relationships which would be fulfilling and healing. We offer you our hearts. Transform us and cleanse us. Feed us with the bread of your sacrifice and enable us to sip of the new covenant that is our life as brothers and sisters in Christ. We come to you as we are knowing you will renew and transform us. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior we pray. Amen.