



LENT

The Fullness of Time

Volume 2

Lent

The Fullness of Time

Volume 2

Preface

Time seems to slow down when we are waiting for something important to happen. While that slowing of time can be frustrating when we are living in eager anticipation, the slowing of time can be healthy when it makes us pause long enough to prepare ourselves for what awaits. Sometimes waiting is good. Sometimes waiting is even important.

Lent welcomes us into that important slowing of time, that holy waiting. Lent is the 40 days that carry us from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. It is a time of preparation for our encounter with Jesus on the cross and the powerful resurrection story of Easter morning.

Lent, in its earliest forms, was a fasting period where for 40 days only one meal a day was allowed. This period served to call the people out of the rhythms of their everyday lives and to focus on the way and walk of Jesus. As time went by, the deliberate fast gave way to a less physically rigorous season of reflection. With the Reformation, many Protestant traditions set the practice of Lent aside for many years, seeing it as too Catholic. For more radical Protestant traditions, like Baptists, the recovering of Lent has taken longer. It is our loss. As disciples of Jesus Christ, it is important that we slow down to remember the journey to the cross and the empty tomb. It is important that we take time to wait, to listen, and to prepare. The Lenten stories call us to a walk with Jesus and the great story of redemption.

This guide will invite you to slow down and take some time each day over this 40-day period to consider passages from Scripture and to hear a word from one among us on what these passages mean to them. This Lenten guide acts as the second year when our Young Adult Ministry brings a gift of Scripture and reflection to the whole of our church family. It is a great gift. I am grateful that many of our young adults were willing to share a part of their walk with Christ with us. Listen as they call us to Scripture. Listen, as they call us to step out of the rhythms of our everyday lives to focus on the way and walk of Jesus. Listen, as they invite us to slow down and wait with them.

Grace and Peace,



Introduction

This collection of devotions grew out of a simple belief: that writing and reading about faith is essential. These devotions come in all shapes and sizes, written by people of all types and stripes. You will find some voices quite mature and reflective while others are young, just beginning to learn the strength of their own voice. By making space for this work, you are marking space for young believers to further hone their faith and witness.

Nothing in these devotions seeks to prescribe but rather only to describe, to describe what it means to be a young adult of faith living and working at this moment in time. While each devotional comes from a young adult, we offer them to the broader First Baptist community as a gift. We hope they serve as a source of encouragement and engagement for you as you begin your own journey with God's word during this season of Lent.

Below are some notes regarding this guide's structure and recommended use.

Throughout our churches today, most of us are not familiar with the word *kerygma*. In New Testament Greek, the word literally means preaching. It's been used by modern believers as a way to distill and then speak about the entirety of Jesus' life and message. When we say the "kerygma of our faith" or the "kerygma of the gospel," it's an attempt to talk about the essence of the gospel.

For Lent this year, we're taking one of Jesus' central preaching moments—his first proclamation in the Gospel of Mark—and unpacking its contents over the season of Lent. While not the gospel in its entirety, we believe this initial proclamation captures crucial elements that stand central to Jesus' life, death, and saving work throughout history.

Introduction

Each day will suggest a reading from the Psalms and another from either the Old or New Testament. You will find an accompanying devotional reflecting on one or both passages. The devotion will conclude with a prayer for your use.

On Sundays, there will not be a devotion. Instead, you will find a more detailed reflection on a portion of our central passage, Mark 1:14-15. The six Sundays of Lent will be divided into three sections, each two weeks in length. The intervening devotions will reflect on the theme introduced on the previous Sunday. We encourage you to make reading this guide a daily activity during Lent. First, read the suggested Scriptures, then the devotions, and then finally spend a few minutes in reflection and prayer.

These devotions come from a diverse group of young adults, but they represent only a fraction of our church's young adult population. In the coming months, we hope to bring even more voices to the table as we work together to hear God speak in and through one another.

Thank you for sharing this journey with us. We count it a privilege and honor to share it with you.

Scott Claybrook and Josh Durham

February 2016

Mark 1:14-15

Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has been fulfilled!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"

Contributors

Volumes 1&2

Natalie Bailey

Claire Blackstock

Tim Boone

Richard Buerkle

Patrick & Courtney Carmichael

Scott Claybrook

Jonathan & Liz Coffield

Josh & Laurel Durham

Justin & Leah Fisher

Daniel Headrick

Jordan Humler

Tyler Johnson

Christal Lane

Angie & Matt Lyon

Megan Petter

Laura Beth Roberts

Mason Thornton

Andrea Wheeler

Ben & Laura Beth Winder

*Special Thanks to Vanessa Moore, Tom Ogburn, and Linda Walsh
who helped make this project possible.*

About

This collection of devotions comes from Dwell, the young adult ministry at First Baptist Knoxville. The name Dwell is taken from Isaiah 58:12 where God speaks to His people about the sort of worship He desires. More than simply a right form of worship, God desires a right substance at the heart of our worship. We believe that God continues to speak and work in this world, a testament to His unending desire to renew and redeem all of creation – including us. This collection of devotions is an attempt to bear witness to God’s work in our lives as well as encourage others in their own journey of transformation.

First Baptist Knoxville is a vibrant downtown church located in the heart of Knoxville. We hold a deep commitment to seeing the kingdom of God come to the city of Knoxville and the cities of the world. We would love the chance to get to know your story as well as share our own.

For more information about First Baptist, please visit fbcknox.org or join us for worship on Sundays at 8:45 am or 11:00 am.

510 W. Main Street, Knoxville, TN 37902.



Sunday, March 6

Kingdom of God at Hand, Pt 2

*Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has been fulfilled!" he announced. "**The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!**" (Mark 1:14-15)*

I was very fortunate to visit Disney World at the age of five. In the weeks leading up to the trip, I could barely contain my excitement. My dreams, both waking and sleeping, were filled with my own vision of what Disney World would hold. I had never seen photos of Disney World or had friends who had visited. In reality, I had no idea what to expect, but this didn't matter. My imagination filled in the gaps. The night before we were scheduled to leave, I couldn't sleep. I was so excited to go that I packed my miniature backpack for the plane and got myself dressed by 3:30 AM. When my dad came to wake me up at 6:00 AM, I threw off the covers, jumped out of bed, and ran to the door ready to go. I could hardly wait!

The trip to Disney World, of course, was better than I imagined and totally different too. The process of getting there was challenging. I was motion sick, threw up for most of the flight, and was miserable the rest of the day. There were parts of Disney World my little imagination hadn't taken into account: 90+ degree weather, lines and wait times, other people's preferences for rides and shows. But just as there were unexpected challenges, so too were there unexpected joys. From Star Tours to Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, the magic of the place far exceeded anything I had imagined. In the end, the trip was worth it – even if it wasn't at all what I imagined.

Sunday, March 6

The original hearers of Jesus' words or readers of Mark's gospel might have felt a similar way. For centuries, the Jewish people imagined what their Messiah might be and what the Kingdom of God might entail. Then Jesus arrived, not meeting a single one of their expectations. The Kingdom of God – a kingdom where God holds the merciful, humble, and peaceable in esteem – is not like any kingdom ever imagined. It's not a kingdom of our own minds or making. It's far better.

Lent provides us the opportunity to take stock of our relationship to the Kingdom of God. It creates space for us to dwell between the dust of Ash Wednesday (death) and the hope of Easter Sunday (life). Here, in this "in between," we live our life. The Kingdom of God has drawn near in Christ's life, death, and resurrection, but it is not yet fully here. God calls us to both *live* vibrantly in the Kingdom now and *wait* patiently for the Kingdom to come in fullness. Learning to live in God's Kingdom – not the Kingdom as we imagine it but the Kingdom as God creates it – serves as the task of all believers. Day by day, we must strive to draw near to the Kingdom just as Christ brought the Kingdom nearer to us. Christ is the "Kingdom Bridge." As we move toward a deeper relationship with him, we move toward a deeper experience of his Kingdom.

In the days ahead, you'll find devotions focused on God's Kingdom work. May they help us all better understand God's Kingdom-work in the world.

Prayer

God, give us eyes to see your Kingdom as it is. Let us live into the challenges, surprises, and amazing experiences you have in store for us. Thank you for drawing near to us. Amen.

Monday, March 7, Day 23

Leviticus 7:28-30 | Psalm 96:8

We are a people who every day must bear witness to the reality that *the Kingdom of God is at hand*. In our faithlessness and in our tendency to dwell in our human, temporal moment, we miss God's presence in our very midst. Do you believe the Kingdom is at hand? Are you prepared to respond to those who doubt it, who might ask: *Where is the Kingdom when suicide bombers tear apart lives and nations? Where is the Kingdom when so many worship and glorify guns and violence, rather than Jesus Christ?* To say the Kingdom is at hand is not to say we've already arrived. Instead, it is to confess this broken world has work to do.

The Kingdom of God is not just a theory but an in-breaking reality that demands our response. The Old Testament Law was already carving out a space for individual response, unmediated by a priest or other human intercessor. In Leviticus 7:28-30, God commands Moses to tell the people to bring their "sacrifice of well-being" by "your own hands." In other words, the people are to participate in the process of restoring relationship with God.

There is a paradox on display here because in the giving of the command, there were three levels of separation: God, Moses, and the people. Why? The proclamation straight from God's lips, during that time, must always be mediated by human thought and speech. But *our* response, when we approach the altar in full repentance, prepared for what God the Father will do in our lives through the cleansing power of Jesus Christ's blood, well that part, at least, is in *our own hands*. To believe with Jesus the Kingdom of God is at hand is to believe we are called to repent, to be Kingdom people, and to follow Jesus.

Prayer

Father, you beckon us to approach you with our own hands. The wall of separation has been completely torn down by Jesus Christ. To confess the Kingdom is at hand is to respond with an act of fidelity by our own hands. Enable us through your Holy Spirit to so respond.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Tuesday, March 8, Day 24

Micah 6:6-8 | Psalm 119:33-40

Our daughter will probably never be a very good poker player. Whenever she does something she knows is wrong, (which, in fairness to her, is rarely) you can see her transgression displayed on her face like a billboard in Times Square. She gets terribly nervous and quiet and does not want to tell us about it for fear of getting in trouble, or, far worse, of having her parents think less of her, even for a moment. So it is with us and our Heavenly Father.

In Micah 6, God puts the Israelites on trial. Adjudged as sinners and fearing for their eternal lives, God's people want to know how to get back in His good graces. Can they offer thousands of rams, rivers of olive oil, or even their own firstborn to make Him happy? His answer in Micah 6:8 (*The Message* translation) is simple, but much more difficult to actualize: "Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously—take God seriously." When it comes right down to it, most of us would rather just place a bigger check in the offering plate than do the hard work it takes to change our hearts and put God first. But God is telling us what He wants.

How will we respond?

Prayer

Father, you have shown us how to live in a way that is pleasing to you, while at the same time granting us the free will to make our own decisions. Open our hearts to your ways, and instill within us the strength to choose the path that is pleasing to you. Amen.

Wednesday, March 9, Day 25

Mark 12:28-34 | Psalm 84:1-4

One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

(Mark 12:28-31)

God loves us. As Christians we are taught from a young age that Jesus loves us so much that He died for us on the cross. Loving the Lord, the greatest commandment, seems like the simplest commandment. If we are mindful of this commandment all the time and focus our lives on loving God, because we know He loves us, other commandments will not seem difficult to us. Cultivating a love of God transforms us.

Mark tells us the scribe only asked Jesus for the greatest commandment, but His response goes a step beyond by also teaching the second-greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. It is difficult as humans to love one another, especially without knowing someone quite well. Jesus teaches us that we should love everyone, no matter the circumstance, and that this love is how we show our love for God. If we are mindful of the simplest but greatest commandment throughout our lives, loving others becomes second nature.

Prayer

Father, dwell in my heart so that I might love others as You have loved me, that they might also know You through me, and that through Your love we are better able to serve You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Thursday, March 10, Day 26

Matthew 5:43-47 | Psalm 75:2-7

In high school, I remember being challenged at a youth conference to always go one more verse. Why? What's one more verse? If you haven't read the scripture yet, look at Matthew 5:43 – no more, no less.

Now, go one verse further. It's easy to take Matthew 5:43 out of context and to only pray for people who love us and want the best for us. But what about praying for and forgiving those who hurt us?

I spent precious years harboring anger and hate towards a mother who walked out of my life. This anger kept me from a closer walk with God. I struggled daily with forgiveness. Not only did I fight to forgive a mother who had hurt me, I also struggled with asking God to forgive me as well, however, with each passing day, the prayer flowed from my heart a little easier. And with time, I came to believe the words I spoke.

Today, maybe your enemy is not a parent, but a co-worker, boss, professor, customer, significant other, or friend. Today, I challenge you to forgive those who have hurt you, to pray for them. It won't be easy, but it is not our place to judge them. Rather, we can ask God to give us compassion and strength to forgive others as He has forgiven us.

Prayer

Father, your grace is overflowing for me. Where I am weak, YOU are strong. Today and every day, Lord, I struggle in this fight to be closer with you and to you. It is so easy to go about each day loving those who love me, so easy to forgive those whom I care for; but Lord, help me to love my enemies. Help me to love those who have trespassed against me, just as I have trespassed against you. Amen.

Friday, March 11, Day 27

Matt 6:1-6, 16-21 | Psalm 25:4-12

I continued to ask myself why I was there. Yes, they needed me, that was obvious; but did I need them? Either way, it was our last day, and I knew what was waiting for me after the six-hour plane ride: certainty, safety, air-conditioning. This was a good, quick reminder to be thankful that I didn't live there. Thank the Lord, the guilt was only temporary and didn't last past takeoff. I had accomplished what I went there for: approval, a clear conscience, photo-op. I thought, "Don't worry; we'll be back next year."

My parents were international missionaries until I finished high school; with this fact came a certain amount of attention and expectation: *Do the right thing; be recognized. The more mission trips the better, the more recognition the better. Do the wrong thing, and be forgotten.* My relationship with Jesus was simply a means to make a good impression.

Not until later in life did I begin questioning my intentions, my heart. Surely I was missing the point. Why did I want to dedicate my life to serving others? Because it was the right thing to do? Because it was what Jesus would do? Maybe because it was what I was expected to do?

What does Jesus want from you and me? To greatly love because of His great love for us, to greatly give because of what we have been given, to faithfully follow because of whom we follow—for His glory and for His praise.

Prayer

Lord, show me the right path. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves. Lead me to do what is right. Forgive my many, many sins. Show me the path you would choose. You are worthy of all I can give. Amen.

Saturday, March 12, Day 28

Philippians 4:4-9 | Psalm 19:7-14

In this stage of my life, my heart and mind are constantly burdened with anxiety. I stress out about school, work, my decisions, and my future. I am usually a firm believer that things will work themselves out one way or another and try not to sweat the small stuff; but as I have begun to venture into adulthood, I have found myself worrying that things might not work out. This fear in the back of my mind has filtered into my everyday life and caused breakdowns and depressed moods; however, through these experiences, I am reassured constantly that I cannot take on anything on my own without God by my side.

I find so much relief in this Philippians passage. I am reminded to give all my anxious thoughts to God, who will grant me peace. I find this so true in my own experience. When I feel most overwhelmed, I pray to God and instantly feel peace of heart and mind knowing He loves me, will take care of me, and has a greater plan for my life. I also love that the passage says to think of what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. Dwelling on the negative has no value. Instead, filling your mind with good thoughts brings joy that can shine through you and influence those around you. Are there anxious thoughts in your life you should be submitting to God? What “excellent and praiseworthy” things can you think about, and how can you spread your positivity to others?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please grant us peace in our anxieties and faith in your work and in your plan. Let us find joy in you and show your love to those around us by our infectious spirit. Amen.

Sunday, March 13

Repent and Believe, Part 1

*Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has been fulfilled!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! **Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!**" (Mark 1:14-15)*

We began wrestling with Mark 1:14-15 because of its uncanny ability to distill the message and ministry of Jesus into a few brief sentences. It highlights, in brilliantly blunt detail, the *kerygma* (central message/preaching) of the Gospel: God is bringing about a seismic shift in history, the Kingdom is breaking in upon creation, and followers must repent and believe in God's work. Jesus serves the essential function of being message and messenger, proclamation and proclaimer.

Jesus' message here follows an orderly progression from grand cosmic significance (The time promised by God has come in fullness!) to intimately personal responsibility (Repent and Believe!). While Jesus' ministry bears consequence of a cosmic scale, its focus lies on the individual. Jesus did not come to simply change the cosmos; rather, He came to redeem creation. He came to bring wholeness, Shalom, to his people. He came for you and for me. If we're honest, we must admit that in many ways we're more comfortable with the "Cosmic Jesus." When Jesus lives and operates on a universal scale, it somehow lets us off the hook—if even ever so slightly. As long as Jesus stays busy bringing about a new age of history or bearing the Kingdom into the world, we don't have much responsibility. And we like it that way.

It's no coincidence, I believe, that Jesus' sermon here in Mark 1 ends with a call to his people. "The Kingdom is here," he says. "The world is never going back to the way it was. A new moment has arrived. Therefore, you must decide." It's in the intimate, personal

Sunday, March 13

challenge that we feel the most unsettled. Repent? Believe? If we do, it means things will change. It means they must change.

Lent provides us the chance – and the challenge – to struggle with this call to repentance. Too often, we cast repentance in terms of a dichotomy: black/white, good/bad. Perhaps it is in some instances. Much of the time, however, our path to repentance is not so clear cut. The fullness of God's time and the coming of the Kingdom signal to us a new way of being in the world. They hold for us a new vision for life. The gospel holds for us new values, virtues, ethics, and dreams. The question, Christ asks us, is if we're willing to leave behind the values, virtues, ethics, and dreams of our design. Are we willing to believe in such a way, at such a level, as to leave behind the certainty of our despair for the wild unknown of God's Kingdom?

Over the coming week you'll find devotions focused on the disciplines of repentance and belief. May they serve to call you into a deeper trust of God's call on your life.

Prayer

Take time to reflect on the final stanza of Isaac Watt's hymn,
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Monday, March 14, Day 29

Hebrews 4:1-3 | Psalm 81:5b-13

When we reflect upon God and His character, how often do we as believers, who have the knowledge of His affinity for deliverance, fail to combine that knowledge with a trusting faith?

In both passages, we find reference to the Israelites who, even after being shown evidence of God's promises being fulfilled directly, were still so quick to doubt His plan and purpose. Now, it is easy to look upon the mistakes of individuals and even whole nations described in God's Word and think, "Wow...that was incredibly stupid." But the funny thing with God's Word is that it always has a way of forcing us to reflect upon ourselves when we are so desperately trying to reflect upon it objectively. After reading these passages, I found myself thinking about the past few months of my own life through which I have had to struggle to believe that God's deliverance, which was revealed so often throughout the ages, was in fact real and attainable.

Having that knowledge—simply hearing about it—was not enough for me. I had to experience God's call in the midst of the trial. At first, that call very much felt like an "unknown voice" or "unfamiliar language." God couldn't be looking for me. Why would the perfect and flawless God of the universe be seeking out such a doubtful and imperfect being?

But over and over again, God reveals to us His unconditionally loving heart that so desperately longs for the lost to listen to Him, and longs to see us in communion with Him. How truly amazing it is that we can believe in a way that is deeper than a simple base knowledge, and what an unimaginable privilege it is that through a simple blind trust we can enter into the beautiful rest of God.

Prayer

Lord, I pray that we would not disappoint you or bring you pain through our lack of faith. I pray that you would never have to plead with us to gain our trust. I pray that our ears would always be open to hear your voice when it calls to our hearts. And I pray that our knowledge would be united with faith so we could enter into your perfect rest. Amen.

Tuesday, March 15, Day 30

Mark 9:17-18, 22-24 | Psalm 6:3-4

"Everything is possible for those who believe...."

I have been a Christian long enough to have seen this quote both on a needlepoint pillow and the latest inspirational Facebook post. As I read this passage, I am convicted, for my faith is small. Time after time in my own prayer life, I feel like I have come to God wondering *if* He could do something. My prayers might just not be large enough. "If you can..." seems to imply there's an inconvenience in even asking. Jesus wasn't inconvenienced. He wanted people to know there is power in having faith in who He is. When the father asked Jesus if he could heal his son, Jesus' answer was astonishing to him. It invoked an immediate response of faith and belief in who Jesus is and what He can do.

This father didn't take time to ask questions or figure out how such a declaration of faith in Jesus applied to the law; instead, his heart leaped with faith. He wasn't skeptical or cynical; he abandoned everything for faith in Jesus. Jesus changes the atmosphere, and when He does, faith can grow. Today I crave the faith of the boy's father who didn't let the crowd, his past, or his future dictate his belief in Jesus. Jesus changes everything and calls us to believe not only that He can meet our needs, but that in Him EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE!

Prayer

Oh God, may I see your hand at work today. Forgive me of my prayers that have not been driven by faith. You are God and I believe you. Help me to run to you with confidence. Amen.

Wednesday, March 16, Day 31

Romans 8:24-25 | Psalm 62:1-2, 5

“For God alone my soul waits in silence.”

I don't know how to be silent. I have tried a time or two to bundle up my noise and be patient for even just a few moments. The longer I am silent, the more I feel my thoughts racing through my head, my inner peace never seeming to be met. Each time I am silent, my hope is this time it will be different. This time I will stay engaged in the conversation, and I will only speak when I have something of value to say. I hope that my comments can be seen as valuable and I will receive praise for them. I put more of my hope than I would ever care to admit in others' praise and recognition, especially in seasons of life when God seems so distant, when I can't hear him speak or feel His presence.

“But if we hope for what we do not see,
we wait for it with patience.”

For in the hope that we would be adopted into His presence as Sons and Daughters of Christ we are saved. We hope what can be seen, but in what we do not see, believing what He said is truth. This idea of patience kills me; it fights against who I am, but I think that's for the best. It is calling me to be more like Christ and less like who my nature yearns for me to be. This patience is demanding that I be less reliant on seeing Him and more reliant on the hope that He is faithful and good.

Prayer

God, my prayer in this Lenten season is that I can learn from Paul and the psalmist and have a patient, waiting heart towards you, and I can see value in the silence and can understand that in you, alone, comes my salvation. Amen.

Thursday, March 17, Day 32

2 Chronicles 7:14 | Psalm 126

Almost all of 2 Chronicles 6 is a prayer in which Solomon makes multiple petitions to God, that He would hear the prayers of those Israelites who truly repent. He even requests God would hear the heartfelt prayers of foreigners who visit the temple! Verse 7:1 says, “When King Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and burned up the sacrifices... and the dazzling light of the LORD’s presence filled the Temple.”

After this awesome display of God’s approval, an elaborate two-week long ceremony/festival is held to dedicate the temple Solomon built for the LORD. The priests stand in formation singing hymns and playing instruments, and over 140,000 sacrifices of animals and grain offerings are made. During all this, the LORD is quiet. Then, after everyone has gone and the festival is over, the LORD appears to Solomon at night in a strikingly subdued scene.

God has agreed to dwell in Jerusalem but knows there will be times when Israel falters. In verse 14, He says, “...if [My people] pray to me and repent... then I will hear them in heaven, forgive their sins and make the land prosperous again.” He has accepted the temple as a place of sacrifice but does not require of Israel an elaborate ceremony or thousands of sacrifices in order for them to regain His favor. It comes, simply, “if they repent.”

Certainly the Law still required sacrifices; even then, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, where the LORD’s spirit was considered to dwell. But even in this time before the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, it’s clear the sacrifice God most desires is a broken heart brought before Him in earnest prayer.

Prayer

Holy God, we humbly bow before you and confess that we have fallen short. We give thanks for Christ’s blood, which covers all sins and restores those who seek you. In your son’s name I pray, Amen.

Friday, March 18, Day 33

Colossians 1:20-23 | Psalm 85:8-13

Repentance is so important – not just the first time we accept Christ’s salvation but every day thereafter. It’s so easy to fall into the mindset of the Christian checklist: salvation – check; generally good behavior – check; hard work – check; sweet family – check; paid taxes – check. Okay, not as much on the last one, but you get the picture. I know how completing the checklist feels. I’ve felt that way myself.

In my short life, I’ve found that I’m closer to the Lord the more I can admit how much I need Him. The more I repent, the more I reconcile with Him, the more evident my desperation for Him is. Like Psalms 85 reads, “Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, that His glory may dwell in our land.”

Take inventory of your past week or the past 24 hours. Take the next few moments to repent where you fell short and reconcile with our Lord. Ask Him to send His righteousness before you that it will prepare the way for your steps (Psalms 85:13).

Prayer

Lord, forgive me where I’ve fallen. Thank you for our relationship through which I can continually come to reconcile with you and draw near to you, regardless of what is going on in that moment, in my flesh, in this world. I worship you for your goodness, and long to be faithful to you all of my days. There is none like you. Amen.

Saturday, March 19, Day 34

John 6:28-29 | Psalm 80:3

Has someone ever asked you to do something absolutely ridiculous? Something potentially impossible? Too hard to even comprehend? Something you don't have the resources to accomplish nor the time nor the will power? At one point or another, we've all been given seemingly impossible tasks. I don't have an overbearing parent or a crazy boss to hold me to these standards, but I pressure myself to complete tasks that fit into these categories. I expect perfection in my grades, my image, and in my relationships. But those things are messy, and I am human (not a perfect one, I might add). It seems like God, someone who is not even on the same playing field as us, would expect huge things out of us. But he doesn't. He knows us, loves us, and just wants us to believe in Him.

The work the Lord calls us to is to believe in Him. Is it really this simple? I think so. Because out of belief in God, we are truly transformed. Because of who God is, we are not the same. Because we believe in Him, we are not the same. This transformation changes absolutely everything. The Lord restores us and heals us. We need only believe in Him. Because if we truly believe in Him, everything is different. The Lord God sent His son to save us from our sins. We are free because of who He is and who He has chosen to be. We should live different lives because of Him. By believing in Him, we should live lives of love and grace and mercy and passion. God loved us first, extends grace and mercy to us, and gives us a passion for Him and His children. We should be bursting at the seams to tell others about this Jesus, who has saved us and restored us. By simply believing in Him, everything has changed!

Prayer

Lord, thank you for loving us relentlessly. Open our hearts and minds so that we may believe in you whole-heartedly. Thank you that your love for us has changed our stories. Thank you that believing in you changes everything. We love you, Lord. Teach us to love you more. In your name, Amen.

Sunday, March 20

Repent and Believe, Part 2

Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has been fulfilled!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! **Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!**" (Mark 1:14-15)

What are we to make of Palm Sunday? It's a powerful glimpse into the world as it should be. Jesus arrives, triumphant, in the city. He's greeted as a conqueror, a hero, a champion. The people adore Him. He moves through the city unmolested, celebrated rather than despised. For a brief time, the people of Jerusalem finally seem to take hold of the message.

But we know today is not the end of the story. Leaders foment unrest. The crowds cry for violence. The faithful disciples abandon their rabbi. So much goes wrong so quickly. We know all this awaits Jesus, making today, Palm Sunday, bittersweet. It's a powerful glimpse of the world as it should be and a stark reminder of its reality.

As we draw closer to the cross, we can begin to feel the urgency at the heart of Christ's preaching. "Repent and believe," we hear Him say. "There is no time to waste!" At the heart of the gospel lies a deep urgency, though difficult to hear and feel today. We live 2,000 years after Christ's life, death, and resurrection. God's kingdom work seems to be moving at a glacial pace. It feels so slow that at times we forget it altogether. We become consumed with our own life's frenetic demands. The exhausting business of our lives stands in stark contrast to the deliberate movement of God's time. The fullness of God's time moves at an altogether different pace than our time.

Sunday, March 20

As a result, we too easily lose the sense of urgency at the heart of the gospel. For Christ, the fulfilling of God's time and the coming of the Kingdom signal a crucial, urgent need for work. It's as if he proclaims, "Stop what you're doing! Everything has changed. Head in a new direction—repent—and believe this Good News. It changes everything. There's so much for us to do!"

Over the coming days, you'll find devotions that wrestle with the tension at the heart of the cross. How did the people of Jerusalem turn so quickly from cheering crowds into leering masses? Are we capable of the same mercurial behavior? Why did this all have to be so violent, so painful? As you read and reflect, let me invite you to live into the urgency at the heart of the gospel. Only a few days are left in our journey. The cross stands on the horizon. It approaches quickly.

Prayer

God of grace and God of glory, meet us now we pray. Help to transform our lives of anxiety into lives of urgency. May we view repentance not as a punishment but an opportunity, the first step on a pathway to transformation.

Monday, March 21, Day 35

John 12:42-43 | Psalm 107:1-3, 31-32, 43

Our lives revolve around "our" time and convenience. "I have to be at class on time." "I can't be late for work." "We don't have time for _____ (fill in the blank)."

A little over five years ago, I was reintroduced to my wife. I had been struggling to find a career path. Beginning a long-distance, serious relationship was the last thing on MY agenda; However, I immediately knew my soon-to-be wife was different. She was for me! God had put her in my life for a reason, which was not based on my convenience or time. I struggled with the issue of a life-long commitment and whether it was the right time in my life. Yet I realized that this was not an issue of my time but God's perfect timing.

When I recently Googled "Time to Commit," the first page was filled with websites that claimed to know the magic of getting guys to commit to a serious relationship. Our society is infatuated with how to make a life-long relationship work. From TV to the Best Sellers' list, many deal with the idea of a perfect relationship. The answer is really quite simple...Commit. Not just a thought but a deep, heart-felt decision to commit to a decision. As Christians, we have been given the only example of perfect love and commitment. Our scripture from John gives a perfect example.

The Jews were terrified of committing to Jesus because they were more interested in the praises from their peers than their heart for Jesus. Jesus longs for us to have a life-long relationship with Him, a relationship with no strings attached. Our prayer during this Lenten season is that you will allow Jesus to move among you and that you will make a concerted decision to commit to the relationship that He longs to have with you.

Prayer

Father, let us not delay committing our lives to you, fearing what our peers might think. Help us to be bold in our faith and our walk with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday, March 22, Day 36

Lamentations 3:40, 55-57 | Psalm 32

In the midst of destruction, God's people have cried out. The temple has been destroyed, and the Babylonians are taking the Jews into exile. The very place where God is worshipped is now a heaping pile of ashes. Prophets had spoken out against Jerusalem's people because of their injustice and their immorality, namely, worshipping foreign gods. The destruction of the temple and the exile are the consequences for such actions.

Lamentations is a collection of poems from the perspective of the community rather than the prophets, who at times can sound like broken records. Over and over the prophets have pleaded with the people to repent from their evil ways and return to God's law. But all is not lost; there is always hope for those who turn towards God.

The careful reader should notice that the verbs used in verse 56 are in the past tense (NASB). This is not a plea for God to change the past but a plea for God to remember His people in the future. This is a plea for them not to be forgotten amidst the wreckage they have created.

If we truly examine ourselves, we can become aware of our own deficiencies and shortcomings. This realization should not drive us away from God but call us to our knees to seek mercy and forgiveness. How can we truly appreciate God's grace if we are not even aware we are desperate for it? The beautiful lining to the often dark prophetic cloud is that those who return to God are given a hope that He will not leave or forsake them.

Prayer

God we come with hearts heavy and in need of forgiveness. We repent and turn towards you. May you meet us and greet us with grace. Amen

Wednesday, March 23, Day 37

Isaiah 30:15-19 | Psalm 116:1-12, 17

Impatience. It plagues all of us, even those who are cognizant and work to find that place of rest and trust in the Lord. Our God of justice is a mighty God. As noted in Isaiah, swift will be our pursuers; a thousand of us shall flee at the threat of one if we rebel and make our own path without consulting or waiting on Him.

In Isaiah we see the Israelites longing for an “easier” time - a time when they had shelter and protection from Pharaoh, but when they were also enslaved. They sought to return to Egypt, but this plan was not the Lord’s plan. How often do we do the same? How often do we try to “take the bull by the horn;” go our own way, and make our own plan. Do we succeed when doing so? Perhaps we succeed sometimes, but usually only briefly and rarely by our own doing.

How great and gracious is our God that He is merciful! He inclines His ear to our wants. Blessed are we who wait for Him. As we near the end of this Lenten season, let us reflect on when we are being impatient. What are we missing in this moment God has led us to as we long for a future or past time? Where do we need to rest and trust in the Lord? Call on His name as long as you live and offer Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Prayer

Oh God of justice, have mercy. Be gracious in your acts toward us. Send your Helper to guide our paths not to where we want but where you want. Help us to see in times of trial or discomfort that you are with us so that we may be people of peace and patience. Send not your swift pursuers but draw near and have mercy. Amen.

Thursday, March 24, Day 38

John 13:1-5, 12-17 | Psalm 113:5-8

During Holy Week, each day has its own name and its own powerful memory. Through them we experience the full gamut of emotions, from the exuberance of Palm Sunday to the intimacy of Maundy Thursday to the pain of Good Friday to the silence of Holy Saturday and, ultimately, to the hallelujahs of Easter Sunday. Some part of us would prefer to skip the intimate, painful silence and jump straight to the hallelujahs of resurrection. We should not.

If we pause long enough to let today speak with its full power, we will find ourselves gathered around the table with a traitor, served by the incarnate Word with a towel tied around his waist. As we dwell in this moment, we can better understand John's meaning as he writes, "[Jesus] loved them to the end."

Jesus loves us fully, deeply, and well. Jesus loves us fully enough to show us following His way means taking up the cup with those who betray us. Jesus loves us deeply enough to stoop down and take up the washcloth to show us His way is the way of service. Jesus loves us well enough to remind us knowing these things is not enough; we must do them to receive the fullest blessing of being His disciple.

For sinners like you and me who too often hate our enemies, seek comfort rather than service, and agree with Jesus in principle more than practice, Holy Week calls us over and again to repent of all this and believe Jesus indeed loves us to the end. He does. Repent. Believe.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, forgive us for the times we have heard your teachings and done otherwise. Help us turn back to you, the one who loves us to the end and in whom the end is always glorious resurrection. Amen.

Friday, March 25, Day 39

Matthew 27:45-46 | Psalm 22

In the verses preceding Matthew 27:45-46 there is a striking similarity to Psalm 22. I wonder if any of the mockers later came upon the psalm and saw their very words staring them in the face. I have also wondered why Jesus would confess to being abandoned by God. Why give His enemies such ammunition against Him? Having said these words, He surely meant for them to be heard, but not for the unbelievers' benefit and possibly not even for God.

At noon the sun was at its height, so there should have been barely a shadow; yet the whole land was in darkness. For three hours (and later 3 days) the one in whom there is no darkness was submerged in darkness. Neither on earth with his disciples nor in Heaven with his Father, He is alone "Why have you forsaken me?" He knows why.

The psalmist goes back and forth between accusing God of abandonment and praising Him. Many psalms are like this and I think it is a beautifully, mercifully depicted human quality captured in scripture. And on the cross Jesus is again seen being torn between faith and suffering. How much more agonizing to be the Son separated from the Father, to be God Himself torn in two?

It was a cry of absolute despair: "Why have you forsaken me?" However, Jesus was not confused. I think He called out in anguish for the sake of our hearing these words; He wanted us to better understand the consequence of our sin. It wasn't the betrayal and accusations that broke his heart: "They know not what they do." Worse than being beaten and crucified, He also endured the shame of our sins and the sudden, crushing absence of the Father.

Do I cry out when sin separates me from the Father? Do I feel defeat only when I'm no longer in the presence of God?

Prayer

Father, we couldn't bear the full weight of our separation from you, but give us only a small sense of that burden. When we stray from you, LORD, convict our hearts that we would cry out, desperate to feel your presence again. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, March 26, Day 40

John 19:41 | Psalm 30:2-5

It's a familiar scene: Death enters a garden. The first time it happened so early on that many people mistakenly identified it as the defining moment of the entire story. And so crushing and humiliating and seemingly final was Jesus' defeat that even those closest to him could be forgiven for believing it was the story's end.

For me, the defining moment is not man's failure and not even Jesus' death. No, our story is not about destruction but creation, not death but life. Chaos, it *seems*, is a dominant theme throughout much of the story; but chaos is not how the story began, and I promise you it's not how the story ends. God created the world from nothing. He spoke and the shapeless took form. He *commanded* that darkness give way to light. Our God, our Creator, does not submit to chaos. He separated the Light and the Dark and gave each their seasons.

Holy Saturday is a dark "season." Our Jesus lies in the grave after being submitted to the world's chaos, which delivered Him to Death. His form gives way to corruption. A cloud of despair hangs so thick over us as to blot out the light; however, the season we are in will soon give way to the next. The Darkness will submit to the Light.

For now, there is Death in the Garden. For now, we hide and mourn. For now, we sit in the silence and the dark. For now, we wait. We wait for the dawn.

Prayer

LORD, we thank you that we know the story does not end in darkness. We cry out to you for healing and know that we will be restored. We may weep through the night but know that joy comes with the morning. We praise your faithfulness. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen

Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:20b | Psalm 52:1-5, 8

It is Easter morning. Today is a day of joy and celebration. Today we rejoice because death gives way to life, sin gives way to forgiveness, and God's great act of grace is on grand display. As we prepare to walk away from the darkness and brutality of the cross and move into the light of resurrection, this morning's passages invite us to pause for just a moment to find our place in the story.

We begin with the first five verses of Psalm 52. They are difficult for us to hear. They remind us with stinging words of our brokenness and sinfulness. These razor-sharp words pierce us with the picture of our deceit and choices for self and for evil. These are hard words on a day intended for joy, but they ring true. They remind us of the reason for the cross. They remind us that on our own we are left apart from God. We would like to ignore these hard words and move on toward songs of celebration, but as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German theologian, noted, "Whenever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian Church. With its recovery will come unsuspected power."

Fortunately, the Psalmist does not leave us in the shadows of darkness. In verses 8 and 9 we hear him sing: *But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. For what you have done I will always praise you in the presence of your faithful people. And I will hope in your name, for your name is good.* God comes for us not because we are worthy, but because His grace makes us worthy. What God has done moves us from the shadows into the great light of resurrection and into the promise of never-ending love in His presence. The resurrection tomb helps us to recover the unexpected power available to us through faith in Jesus Christ. This power is not just for today. Jesus tells us, *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

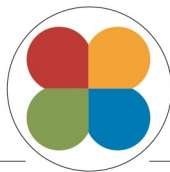
Prayer

God of life, meet us now, we pray. We come with Thankful humble hearts. Breathe new life into us, and help us go with passion and purpose. Amen

Notes

Notes

Notes



FIRST BAPTIST

KNOXVILLE

510 West Main St
Knoxville, TN 37849

fbcknox.org
865-546-9661