



Winfree Church

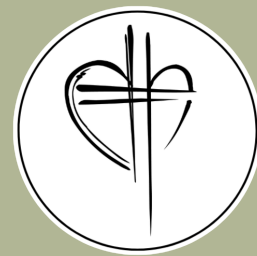
Lent Devotional Guide

Share Christ | Serve Others

Section Four:

Crucifixion

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When I was young my parents would mediate many childhood squabbles between my three brothers and me. As I got older, mediators in my life took the form of teachers, friends and others involved in whatever conflict that was happening at the time. Being a mediator is not an easy task. Ask any teacher, parent, counselor and the like. Many times, either side in the mediation is not willing to do what is required to achieve resolution. This was not the case with Jesus. He was ready and willing to become the sacrificing mediator between people and God. The covenant before Jesus was wrought with laws and restrictions increased by Jewish priest and hierarchy that were nearly impossible for people to adhere to one hundred percent of the time. The annual blood sacrifices were replaced with the new covenant brought by Jesus' sacrificing himself once and for all, negating the need for annual animal sacrifices.

This sacrifice, this mediation sounds so simple. Yet it is fraught with many theological questions. These questions have been discussed and hammered over by theologians through the centuries. In The Broadman Bible Commentary 1972 edition Charles A. Trentham states the following:

Chapter 8 (of Hebrews) falls quite naturally into two parts. The first part is composed of vv. 1-6 and compares the old order of priesthood and the old earthly tabernacle with the new priesthood of Christ in the heavenly tabernacle.

This passage thereby proves the inferiority of both the old priesthood and the old tabernacle. The second part of the chapter, composed of vv. 7-13 is concerned with comparing the new covenant with the old covenant and thus proves the inferiority of the old to the new."

Trentham goes on to say; ***"we have an adequate, permanent High Priest (mediator), now ministering in an eternal tabernacle of the Lord's own making."***

Saint Augustine in today's reading states, ***"to this end Christ died for all, that they who are alive may live not for themselves, but for him who died for them. (Jesus)"*** Jesus Christ became the ultimate mediator between people and God. His sacrifice opened the gateway between heaven and earth

This Lenten Season take time to read Hebrews 8 and 9 and reflect upon what scripture has to say about the old and new covenant, and Jesus as mediator. Knowing that He is there, at the right hand of God petitioning on our behalf is an overwhelming thought, but comforting as well. Thanks be to God for God's perfect plan.



Reflect upon the following passages:

- Hebrews 9:15 "For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."
- Hebrews 12:24 "And Jesus is here! (our mediator) He is the one who makes God's new agreement with us, and his sprinkled blood says much better things than the blood of Abel."
- Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men (humanity), the man Christ Jesus."
- Hebrews 8:6 "But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises."

What is the difference between a cross and a crucifix? The crucifix is a cross with the body of Christ hanging on it. I grew up understanding that Catholics often use a crucifix while Protestants use a cross. Why? Because Protestants serve a risen Lord! However, Thomas Howard leads us to question that as a false choice. During Lent we need to turn our eyes toward the crucifix so that we may more fully rejoice in the coming of Easter morning. Perhaps there is room for both kinds of cross.

When did people begin to make and use crucifixes? We don't know for sure, but it was probably after Constantine made it safe to practice the Christian faith with the Edict of Milan in 313 CE.

The Western church crucifix usually portrayed Jesus wearing a loin cloth while the Eastern church portrayed Him in a simple shift.

The sign often affixed above His head, INRI (or sometimes JNRJ) is the first letter in Latin of the four words Pilate had inscribed over Christ's head: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. It was the custom then to post on the cross the crime for which the person was being crucified.

Crucifixions were used by many countries, beginning before the 6th century BC and continuing until Emperor Constantine abolished them in the early 4th-century CE out of veneration for Jesus Christ.

**“THE LASH, THE CROWN OF THORNS, THE MOCKERY, THE STRIPPING, THE NAILS—
LIFE HAS EQUIVALENTS OF ALL THESE FOR US AND GOD ASKS A LOVE FOR HIMSELF
AND HIS CHILDREN WHICH CAN ACCEPT AND SURVIVE ALL THAT IN THE
PARTICULAR WAY IN WHICH IT IS OFFERED TO US.” - Evelyn Underhill**



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What is your “burden of the moment”?

Gaze upon the crucifix and feel the Son of God beside you, sharing in your pain.

2. What are the sins of others that most disturb and anger you?

Gaze upon the crucifix and follow Christ’s example of forgiveness.

3. What are your sins that most grieve the Almighty?

Gaze upon the crucifix and feel all that Jesus suffered in order that you could be forgiven.

Finally, gaze upon the crucifix and exult in God’s love restored to you through the death of His only begotten Son.

There is no single path to Christian faith common to everyone, and the spiritual journey of Morton T. Kelsey proves it. He was a seminary graduate with several years of ministry as an Episcopal priest when he realized his soul was empty. He could articulate intellectual arguments for God, but had no experience of God's reality in his life. To heal his soul, Kelsey sought the counsel of a secular Jewish psychologist, a man who had survived a Nazi concentration camp, to help him deal with his anxiety and depression. He discovered an experience of God. In time people started coming to Kelsey for help, and the balance of his life was spent as a therapist and writer.

Kelsey's sensitivity to the inner lives of human beings shapes his perspective on the Cross. He understands that all human beings have a private "cellar," a secret place where we hide from ourselves and others our potential for evil. "The Cross," writes Kelsey, "shows what possibilities for evil lie hidden in human beings." He warns that we attempt to fool ourselves about the demons that lie dormant deep within ordinary people.

"THE CROSS SYMBOLIZES WHAT ORDINARY PEOPLE DO WHEN THEY FAIL TO SEE THE MONSTERS DWELLING DEEP WITHIN THEIR LIVES."

He mentions some of the ordinary people who contributed to Jesus' crucifixion—the cowardice of Pilate, Caiaphas' conviction that he possessed the whole truth, Judas' impatience with Jesus, the nameless carpenter who built crosses to earn a buck. Jesus was crucified, says Kelsey, because of garden-variety vices all of us have—"the civilized vices of cowardice, bigotry, impatience, timidity, falsehood, indifference."

Personal Reflections:

1. What would prevent ordinary Americans from repeating the callous indifference of Germans to the atrocities of Nazis in the 1940s?
2. Are there monsters or demons in your cellar? How do you name and defeat them?
3. Where do you dump the refuse and rubbish that accumulates in your inner life?

Simone Weil was born in 1909 in Paris to a Jewish family. She was a deep thinker and philosopher, who came to know and sought to more fully understand God. Her life was sadly short; she died at age 34. But during her brief life, she wrote much about God based on her experiences during a troubled time in world history. She especially pondered questions about God and distance.

Today's reading brings to mind the words of Dr. Albert Schweitzer which have been set to music by Jane Marshall in the choral anthem "He Comes to Us". Schweitzer wrote the following about God:

"HE COMES TO US AS ONE UNKNOWN, WITHOUT A NAME, AS OF OLD, BY THE LAKESIDE, HE CAME TO THOSE MEN WHO KNEW HIM NOT. HE SPEAKS TO US THE SAME WORDS: "FOLLOW THOU ME!" AND SETS US TO THE TASKS WHICH HE HAS TO FULFILL FOR OUR TIME. HE COMMANDS. AND TO THOSE WHO OBEY HIM, WHETHER THEY BE WISE OR SIMPLE, HE WILL REVEAL HIMSELF IN THE TOILS, THE CONFLICTS, THE SUFFERINGS WHICH THEY SHALL PASS THROUGH IN HIS FELLOWSHIP, AND, AS AN INEFFABLE MYSTERY, THEY SHALL LEARN IN THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE WHO HE IS."

God does indeed come to us and is constantly at work around us – certainly during happy times, but also when we suffer, when life is hard, and when evil appears to be winning.

Weil asserts (pg 215) that the “link between God and man” is love. God created love. God creates out of love. God Love’s can be found in the music and the silence... in the factory and the office... in the prison and on the prairie... in corporate worship and solitary meditation. Love is found in the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus. After all, what else could have held Our Precious Savior to the cross, burdened with the sin of all humanity, but His Immense Love for us? Meditate on that!

A few thoughts for reflection:

1. What helps you begin to grasp the enormity of Christ’s Love for you?
2. Read John 21:1-15. How did Simon Peter respond once he realized Who the Man on the beach was and what propelled Simon Peter to do what he did?
3. Simone Weil sought Godly understanding by working side by side with the French Resistance and poor laborers of various sorts. She ate the same meager rations allowed soldiers and factory workers. In the end, she contracted tuberculosis, dying quickly from it. During her brief illness, she meditated and wrote. Consider these words from Miss Weil (pg 216): “God wears Himself out through the infinite thickness of time and space in order to reach the soul and captivate it”. What response should we make to God taking captive our souls?

John Stott highlighted that pride is humanity's greatest barrier to God. It is self-exaltation that refuses to acknowledge our dependence on Him. In contrast, humility is the foundational virtue of the Christian life, as demonstrated by Jesus Christ, who humbled Himself even to death on a cross. True Christian living requires humility, submission to God, and reliance on His grace.

"WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE OUR NAKEDNESS, SEE THE DIVINE SUBSTITUTE WEARING OUR FILTHY RAGS INSTEAD OF US, AND ALLOW HIM TO CLOTHE US WITH HIS OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS".

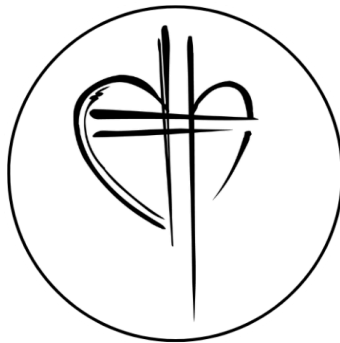
Key Reflections:

- 1. Pride Strips Us Spiritually** – "Naked pride" could symbolize the way pride leaves us exposed before God, revealing our self-centeredness and resistance to His grace. Stott taught that pride blinds us to our need for salvation and prevents us from experiencing true spiritual renewal.
- 2. The Call to Humility** – True discipleship requires a surrender of self-sufficiency and an embrace of Christ's example of servanthood.
- 3. Pride as the Root of Sin** – Pride is at the heart of human rebellion against God. Just as Adam and Eve's pride led to the fall, our own pride leads us away from obedience and trust in God. Recognizing our pride and repenting is key to spiritual growth.

4. The Humility of Christ – Stott encouraged believers to reflect on the humility of Jesus, who, despite being divine, chose to become human, live among sinners, and suffer for the sake of love. His humility is the model for how Christians should live—with selflessness, service, and dependence on God.

Personal Application:

- Are there areas in life where pride is preventing spiritual growth?
- How can we cultivate humility in our daily interactions and relationship with God?
- In what ways can we follow Christ's example of servanthood and selflessness?



Brennan Manning uses three stories to illustrate some of the characteristics of Jesus and of man in today's reflection. First, Jesus came not to condemn humankind but to save humankind. (John 3:16-17) Second, Jesus loved as the Father loved us and sent His son to save us. (John 3:16) Third, Jesus experienced life as a human on earth without sin. (Heb. 4:15) Each of these stories can encourage us, remind us, or correct us in our current life.

In the first story we can relate the old man to Jesus and the scorpion to humankind. Jesus came to save humankind, but humankind killed Jesus. Humankind is like a scorpion (Rom. 3:23) but unlike the old man who died in the story, Jesus died on the cross to save the humans who believed in Him. (Rom.10:9-10) No scorpion was saved in the story and the old man died never saving the scorpion.

In the second story Brennan senses what it is like to be "seized by the power of a great affection" by the actions of Elam Zook. Elam becomes an example of love in action at the table that day (1 Cor. 13:4,5,7). Elam reminds us of Jesus' word of how we are to come to him as little children (Mat. 18:3; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17).

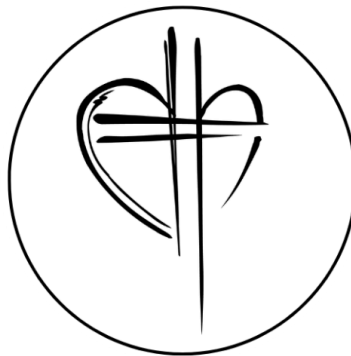
WE SHOULD LOVE JESUS LIKE ELAM LOVED BRENNAN. JESUS LOVED US WHILE WE WERE SINNERS, DYING FOR US, SO THAT WE COULD BE RECONCILED TO GOD (ROM. 5:8). WE ARE TO MANIFEST THIS LOVE BY LOVING ONE ANOTHER (JOHN 13:34-35).

The third and last story illustrates the world's attitude toward God. It is not a new attitude. It can be seen throughout the Bible, even among the "people of God." The book of Judges ends saying, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever he wanted." (Judges 21:25) People like to provide input to God regarding how He should judge the world (Rom. 11:34; Isaiah 40:13-14; Job 21:22; Isaiah 55:8-9; 1 Cor. 1:25). Where does that place them before God, condemned (John 3:18b)? Unfortunately, when Jesus Christ comes again there will not be an inscription, "I have served my sentence" to satisfy humankind's justice.

Each of these stories can cause us to reflect on truths about Jesus and about humankind. We should see such illustrations in our lives, as we slow down and reflect. These stories show the fallen nature and attitude of humankind. None of the stories can completely characterize Jesus because He was the unique and only Son of God. That is why we have the Bible. We are totally inadequate in our own strength and capacity to live the life God desires us to live, which is why we need Jesus Christ to transform our lives, to pay the price for our sins, and to guide us daily. There is no other way to satisfy the one and only Holy just God! (Rom. 3:24-26; 2 Cor. 5:21)

Questions:

- Do you look for examples of God working in your life and or other lives each day?
- Do you enjoy stories, videos, and life events as allegories that remind you of God's characteristics?
- Which character/s in Brennan's stories best represents you?
- Have you been "seized by the power of a great affection?"
- Are you known as a disciple of Jesus Christ by your love?



**“WE HAVE REDEMPTION IN HIM THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE
FORGIVENESS OF OUR TRESPASSES, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS
GRACE” EPHESIANS 1:7**

Today's reading is a reflection on Ephesians 1:7 by two authors who lived a century ago in two different cultures, Toyohiko Kagawa from Japan, and Sadhu Sundar Singh from India. Kagawa approaches the subject looking at the role of blood in the body's metabolism and healing. Singh focuses on the human need for forgiveness and redemption. He finishes with a story of a father giving a lifesaving transfusion to his son that costs the father his life. Both agree on the essential role of God's love in forgiveness and redemption through the blood of Jesus poured out for us. Just as blood is necessary for physical life, Jesus' blood is necessary for spiritual life.

The connection between blood and life is found in all cultures across the centuries. This is a central belief in Jewish culture and history. The first blood spilled in the Bible is in Genesis 3 when God, in His compassion, doesn't leave Adam and Eve in their fallen, naked state, but makes them clothes out of animal skins. In Exodus 12 God's people are told to kill a lamb and put the blood on the lintel and doorposts of their houses so that the angel of death will pass over their homes, so they will be saved from the final plague against Egypt.

God tells Moses at Mount Sinai that the eating of blood is forbidden, then continues, saying,

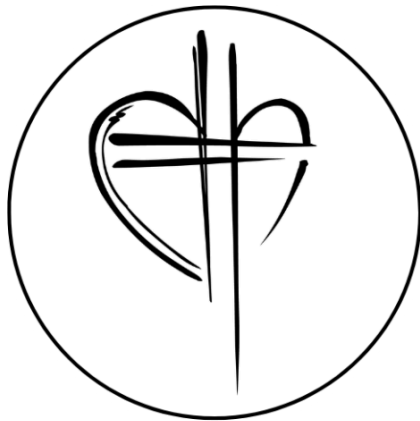
“FOR THE LIFE OF A CREATURE IS IN THE BLOOD, AND I HAVE APPOINTED IT TO YOU TO MAKE ATONEMENT ON THE ALTAR FOR YOUR LIVES, SINCE IT IS THE LIFEBLOOD THAT MAKES ATONEMENT.” (LEV 17:11).

God’s declaration not only makes the connection between life and blood in physical terms, but also in spiritual terms. Blood’s physical healing properties are now reflected in spiritual healing, the forgiveness and redemption from sin. From Mount Sinai, through the times of the Judges and Kings, and into Jesus’ time, the High Priests offered blood sacrifices for the sins of Israel. Then, in His love and compassion for us, God sent Jesus, the Messiah, and everything changed.

“BUT THE MESSIAH HAS APPEARED, HIGH PRIEST OF THE GOOD THINGS THAT HAVE COME. IN THE GREATER AND MORE PERFECT TABERNACLE NOT MADE WITH HANDS (THAT IS, NOT OF THIS CREATION), HE ENTERED THE MOST HOLY PLACE ONCE FOR ALL, NOT BY THE BLOOD OF GOATS AND CALVES, BUT BY HIS OWN BLOOD, HAVING OBTAINED ETERNAL REDEMPTION. FOR IF THE BLOOD OF GOATS AND BULLS AND THE ASHES OF A YOUNG COW, SPRINKLING THOSE WHO ARE DEFILED, SANCTIFY FOR THE PURIFICATION OF THE FLESH, HOW MUCH MORE WILL THE BLOOD OF THE MESSIAH, WHO THROUGH THE ETERNAL SPIRIT OFFERED HIMSELF WITHOUT BLEMISH TO GOD, CLEANSE OUR CONSCIENCES FROM DEAD WORKS TO SERVE THE LIVING GOD?” (HEB 9:11-14)

Questions:

1. How did these two different reflections on Eph 1:7 speak to you?
2. Why do you think the book editor put them together in one devotion?
3. How does reflecting on Jesus' blood poured out for your sins make you feel? Squeamish? Grateful? Humble? Ashamed? ...
4. Read and reflect on Rev 1:5-6. "... To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood, ... to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."



"The thought of slain bodies and of murdered men must always harrow up the soul...if we should see at our doors the marks of carnage and bloodshed, then should we more thoroughly appreciate what war means." "...nothing can be more abhorrent to the Christian man than wholesale slaughter." – C. H. Spurgeon

A traditional goal of Lent is to focus Christians on the suffering of Jesus Christ, allowing them to appreciate God's saving grace for all sinners. Dale Aukerman invites us to reflect on the presence of God (through Jesus Christ) amid the horrific, unimaginable events associated with the massive loss of life at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

There is no denying the tragic loss of life caused by these nuclear weapons. Might we consider that an even greater tragedy of lost lives was inflicted by Japanese culture and authorities who banned Christianity for centuries? By the time a nuclear bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, the Kakure Kirishitan (hidden Christians) were starting to emerge from hiding thanks to a Catholic-led revival. Today, it is estimated that only about 1.6% of the Japanese population is Christian. Yes, war kills people; unrestrained and undefeated sin destroys souls. Jesus saves.

For everything that is born of God overcomes the world; and our faith is the victory that has overcome the world. 1 John 5:4

The wars of a Christian are fought against principles, sins, the miseries of mankind, and that Evil One who has led humanity away from its Maker. Our struggles are against the iniquity that makes individuals their own enemies. The weapons we use include sacred arguments and consecrated lives, along with devotion and prayer to God, teaching, and setting an example among humanity.

Instead of echoing “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”—which translates to “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)—we might consider being more assertive in sharing the message of Jesus Christ with those lost around the world. He became human to endure a death that all sinners deserve, so that we may live eternally with God the Father. Aukerman arrives at this conclusion when he writes:

“Our Lord does not ask that we stare heroically into the nuclear abyss; he asks that we look toward him and align our vision with his.”

The tragedy and horrors of war leave unimaginable scars. My dad’s service in the 77th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army ended on a ship off the coast of Japan as the nuclear bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I still recall my dad’s nightmarish screams from childhood as he relived his experiences at the Battle of Hacksaw Ridge in Okinawa. I never fully understood the depth of his pain until I watched the film about Desmond Doss, a conscientious objector who became a medic and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions at Hacksaw Ridge. Before seeing Hacksaw Ridge, I thought the carnage in the first 30 minutes of Saving Private Ryan delivered the greatest shock regarding the horrors of war.

However, I ended up in tears at the end of Hacksaw Ridge, emotionally responding to what my dad and so many other veterans endured during combat. Dad's PTSD scars were deep, but they pale in comparison to the agony Jesus felt as He bore our sins on the cross.

Ponder and pray about Jesus' sacrifice for us on the Cross...

1. Are wars ever just?
2. Can a Christian serve both God and Country equally?
3. As the Son of Man, how did Jesus fully exercise the same free will that God the Father gives us to trust in Him?
4. How might you be motivated by the threat of unthinkable destruction of humanity to reconsider our mission as Christians to tell the world about the salvation story of Jesus Christ?

“After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.”

When you and I read these words from John’s Gospel and the accounting of the cruelest death imagined, we immediately understand the need for something that would quench Jesus’ parched throat and lips. In agonizing pain, and in his deep humanity, Jesus makes the statement, “I am thirsty.” But was it something damp, water or something similar, that Jesus was speaking to. He made the statement, in closing breaths, “I am thirsty”. Alexander Stuart Baillie, in his treatise entitled “Thirsty”, presents us this question. What is it that Jesus thirsted for? Was it the water that you and I drink on a hot day when perhaps our throats are parched? But in bringing us this question, he brings us to another. What is it that you and I thirst for?

Baillie reminds us that we, alive in a very broken world, thirst for many things that we are sure will satisfy. But these are the things of earth. We might thirst for wealth and prosperity. We might find ourselves believing that abundant life comes from riches. Huge bank accounts and financial superiority, a huge estate, land, buildings, and the like. We can find those things here. But at what cost?

Or perhaps we thirst for rank, station, and power over others. I am reminded of another time in Jesus’ life. A time after his baptism when he was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. A time when the father of lies whispered in his ear.

**"Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."
(Luke 4:5-7) The cost? "If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."
(Luke 4:7)**

Perhaps our thirst is for pleasure. For excitement in life. No commitments to time or others. Total relaxation. We want "the good life". That's where our abundance lies. We seek what satisfies that thirst. But what is the price we pay for pleasure's thirst quenchers?

As I read Baillie's devotional I was reminded of what the preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes said multiple times and in multiple ways. *"I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun, and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind".(Eccles.1:14)*

What was it that Jesus was thirsty for. Surely not "the things of this world" but the things of God. As Baillie states, "away from the things as they are into the world of things as they ought to be". Jesus longed to be, once again, in the presence of the Father, the giver of abundant life. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well;

"but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." (John 4:14-15)

As you and I continue through this season of Lent, this season of self-examination, this season of self-forgetfulness, should we be asking ourselves

“What is it that I thirst for”? “What can truly quench my thirst”?

A final thought.

Colossians 3:2

“Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth”,



“It is finished.” Our Savior who had suffered for hours upon hours on our behalf had completed the payment of God’s wrath. The wrath we deserved sending us to a place of eternal separation from God and pain. A place where God’s justified wrath would be poured out every second to us who had sinned against him. But God’s one and only Son took that place, suffered and died for us.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins, in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 2: 1-2)

To fully understand the cost, you must look at the fall. We once walked in dark; a darkness without any hope. In this darkness, we cannot hope to save ourselves. Look at the leaders Noah, Moses, and David. All great leaders, but each unable to save themselves from the sin of this world. No man alone, could save humanity. It had to be the perfect lamb, God’s Son Jesus.

(Ephesians 2: 4-5) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved

The Lord loved us so much, He came to die for us, so that we may have eternal life with Him. Jesus suffered, died, and cried out when the Lord's presence was taken from Him. He cried out, "Why have You forsaken me." But he persevered and cried out once more that, "It is finished." He had completed His task to save us all from our sins. Because of this, a seat is open at the Lord's table for all of us. Jesus has set the table for us to commune with Him, and He gave up his life for us to have that seat. And yet, we take it for granted so often. We let the world distract us from our relationship with the Lord. Our seat at the table was paid with a great price. We must realize how important the relationship with the Father is, and understand the price that he paid for us to be there. Focus in on our relationship with the Lord, and let his guidance shape our life.

Ponder and Pray:

1. Where in your life can you turn toward the Lord?
2. What distracts you, from sitting in relationship with the Lord?
3. How can you see to a greater extent the price paid for your sin?
4. What is God placing on your heart right now?

George MacDonald, a 19th century Scottish minister, is not only known for his religious writings, but also for his poetry, fiction and fairy tales that inspired Lewis Carroll, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. He was known for painting vivid word pictures. So, as you read today, I encourage you to engage your imagination and envision his word pictures.

MacDonald says, “Every highest human act is just a giving back to God of that which He first gave to us”. It’s worship, recognizing that everything we have, everything we do, everything we are, is already His. Placing ourselves in the Father’s hands is not a duty, that would turn the “highest privilege” into a “grievous burden”, rather than the “most simple and blessed” act of worship. Hannah gave her son Samuel back to God (1Sam 1:1-2:11). Abraham offered up his son Isaac (Gen 22). Both trusted God with their most precious treasure, their child. It was their worship.

Life in Haiti was a constant “Father, into your hands...” when we went through each police checkpoint, when the roads and trails were muddy during rainy season, when spiritual warfare was raging, when a deaf woman was dying of dysentery.... At night when the gunfire kept sleep at bay, visualizing myself curled up in God’s lap, with His arms around me, brought rest.

Well of course, you think, that's the mission field! My first cancer diagnosis was here in Richmond, and I struggled with what the future would bring for me, my husband, our toddler daughter. Then, the week after surgery, I discovered I was pregnant. Only 1 out of my 5 doctors said congratulations. The rest all agreed, abortion was the only option. But that wasn't an option for us. We placed ourselves and our baby in the Father's hands. There were lots of challenges along the way, but as I sat in the hospital holding my newborn, Abigail Joy, one of my doctors told me an amazing story. You see, when I refused the abortion, the doctors had to go beyond all their training. They had all been taught that breast cancer patients should never have children. My refusal pushed them out of their comfort zone, and they had to research and learn to do the impossible. At that point, in that hospital room, the doctor shared that since then 5 other women had come to their office pregnant and with breast cancer, and that the doctors could now offer successful deliveries rather than only abortions. That's the moment I realized that trusting the Father's hands was more than just about me, my baby, my family. My cancer had been a gift from God. Placing it back in His hands and trusting Him with it, He did way more than had ever occurred to me in my wildest imaginings.

MacDonald ends with, ***"... for how shall my imagination overtake Your swift heart? I care not for pain, so long as my spirit is strong, and into Your hands I commit that spirit. If Your love, which is better than life, receive it, then surely your tenderness will make it great."*** Amen!

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever placed something into the Father's hands? How did He respond?
2. Is there something you need to place in His hands that you are struggling with, that's hard to let go of? Visualize placing it into your Heavenly Father's hands.
3. Read Hannah's and Abraham's stories. How can you apply their experiences in your life?
4. God keeps His promises, He is trustworthy. Take a moment to savor His character, and grace.



Matthew 27:45-54 NLT

⁴⁵ At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. ⁴⁶ At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

⁴⁷ Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. ⁴⁸ One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. ⁴⁹ But the rest said, "Wait! Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."

⁵⁰ Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. ⁵¹ At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, ⁵² and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. ⁵³ They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people.

⁵⁴ The Roman officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said, "This man truly was the Son of God!"

The power of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot be overstated. It was on the cross of Calvary that the Creator of the universe hung suspended between the heavens above and the earth below. The whole universe was impacted by this wooden cross on Calvary's hill.

- Darkness fell over the land
- Tombs of faithful, hopeful men and women were opened, and they walked out.
- The earth shook.
- The rocks split.
- The veil of the temple was spilt in two from the violent quakes of earth.

The response of creation was clear...everything was changing. The cosmos all in watch of this pale, blue dot, watching and whaling as its creator bows his head in death...death no longer prevailing as its captives walk away into the city. The veil of the holiest place breaks as the tearing of one's garment in grief. A pall of darkness covers the earth as a pall covers a casket. All of creation is waiting.

Response:

Look to the Roman soldier, who after witnessing all that had taken place utters, "This man truly was the Son of God!" Quiet your mind and imagine the scene. In your heart, do you see Jesus as the Son of God? How are you loving this truth out in your life?

O Sacred Head Now Wounded

1 O sacred Head, now wounded,
with grief and shame weighed down,
now scornfully surrounded
with thorns, Thine only crown.
O sacred Head, what glory,
what bliss till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call Thee mine.
2 What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered
was all for sinners' gain;
mine, mine was the transgression,
but Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior!
'Tis I deserve Thy place;
look on me with Thy favor,
vouchsafe to me Thy grace.
3 What language shall I borrow
to thank Thee, dearest Friend,
for this, Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever!
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
outlive my love for Thee.
4 Be near when I am dying,
O show Thy cross to me!
And, for my succor flying,
come, Lord, to set me free:
these eyes, new faith receiving,
from Thee shall never move;
for he who dies believing
dies safely in Thy love.

***When I Survey the Wonderous
Cross***

1 When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.
2 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me
most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.
3 See, from his head, his hands, his
feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?
4 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.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Maundy Thursday

April 17, 2025

Service at 7:00PM

Palm Sunday

April 13, 2025

Services at 9:40AM & 11:00AM

Easter

April 20, 2025

Services at 9:40AM & 11:00AM