## Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 17 March 2024

**AM Worship**
Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-3
Opening Hymn: 249 For the Beauty of the Earth
Confession of Sin
Almighty God, Who are rich in mercy to all those who call upon You; Hear us as we humbly come to You confessing our sins; And imploring Your mercy and forgiveness. We have broken Your holy laws by our deeds and by our words; And by the sinful affections of our hearts. We confess before You our disobedience and ingratitude, our pride and willfulness; And all our failures and shortcomings toward You and toward fellow men. Have mercy upon us, Most merciful Father; And of Your great goodness grant that we may hereafter serve and please You in newness of life; Through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
Assurance of Pardon: Colossians 1:11-14
Psalm of Preparation: 102B Thou, O Lord, Art God Alone
Old Covenant Reading: Jonah 1:17-2:10
New Covenant Reading: Matthew 15:39-6:4
Sermon: *The Blinding Power of Sin, The Greater Power of God*
Hymn of Response: 436 My Faith Has Found a Resting Place
Confession of Faith: Apostles Creed (p. 851)
Doxology (Hymn 568)
Diaconal Offering
Closing Hymn: 422 We Rest on Thee

**PM Worship**
1B How Blest the Man
496 My Jesus, I Love Thee
529 Lead Me, Lord, Lead Me in Thy Righteousness
Old Covenant Reading: Philippians 1:9-11
New Covenant Reading: Psalm 1
Sermon Title: Growing for the Glory of Christ

**Adult Sunday School**: Fellowship Lunch – No Sunday School

### Suggested Preparations

**Monday** (3/11) Read and discuss Matthew 15:39-6:4

And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed. (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

> When we compare this account to the previous request for a sign (12:38-42), three features stand out, and each reveals that the opposition to Jesus is mounting. First, in the earlier, similar account, "some of the scribes and Pharisees" asked Jesus for a sign. Given the context of chapter 12, there is no real doubt as to their ill will and opposition to Jesus, b ut the readers till has to infer their evil motive. Here in 16:1, Matthew overtly states that the religious leaders' purpose is "in order to tempt" Jesus.
>
> Second, in this new request for a sign, Matthew narrates that an unexpected combination of "the Pharisees and Sadducees" approaches Jesus together. It is possible, given the Sadducees' likely base of influence in Jerusalem and the temple environs, that these leaders have come to the northern regions from the south in order to confront Jesus. Even more significantly, representatives of these two groups, who disagree with each other about many things, present themselves as a united front against Jesus, just as they had earlier opposed the ministry of John (3:7). The suspicion and mistrust of Jesus is not limited to some Pharisees in Galilee joined by local scribes, nor to Pharisees and scribes who have traveled from Jerusalem. The opposition continues to grow as Sadducees join its ranks.
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> Third, the fact that these authority figures blindly oppose Jesus is made all the more reprehensible by Jesus' acknowledgement of their ability to see and discern the signs of the weather. Playing off their request for a sign "from heaven/the sky" (16:1), Jesus chastises them by citing their ability to discern meteorological signs in "the heaven/sky? (three times in 16:2-3). On the one hand, they are perfectly able to read "the heaven/sky" for signs of coming weather of various kinds. By contrast, they are not able to discern the kind of times they are now witnessing, right in front of their eyes – in Jesus. In Jesus' previous response (12:39-42), He said nothing about signs of the weather or the signs of the times, but now He invokes both. Jesus own works and words are "the signs of the times" (16:3), that is, the current signs from God should be sufficient to enable people to recognize Jesus' identity and mission. But the people fail to recognize them. The combined effect of these features that distinguish 16:1-4 from 12:38-42 reveals the growing resistance to Jesus.

Read or sing Hymn 249 For the Beauty of the Earth

**Tuesday** (3/12) Read and discuss Matthew 15:29-38

Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he

healed them, so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?" And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. (ESV)

Most of the people who headed out to see Jesus would undoubtedly have brought a small amount of food and water with them for the trip. Yet, overwhelmed by what they were seeing and hearing they stayed far longer than their supplies would last. Even going without food did not seem like a big deal in light of the astonishing things they were observing Jesus say and do.

Even though they would not have fully grasped this the crowds were choosing to live *not by bread alone* but by every word that came forth from the mouth of the Incarnate God.

They apparently didn't care about their own hunger - but Jesus did!

We can sometimes be tempted to over-spiritualize everything, so that all that Jesus is concerned with is the forgiveness of our sins. But here the compassion of Jesus is drawn out by the physical needs of the crowds. Jesus says:

> I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.

When we choose to live by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God the LORD commits to meeting our needs. Isn't this precisely what our Lord teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount? Jesus says:

> Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Do you grasp the compassion that Jesus has for you?

Jesus is both willing and able to meet all of your needs. Therefore, you can let go of your anxieties casting all of your cares upon Him because He cares for you!

Read or sing Psalm 102B Thou, O Lord, Art God Alone

**Wednesday** (3/13) Read and discuss Jonah 1:17-2:10

And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying,

> "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress,
> and he answered me;
> out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
> and you heard my voice.
> For you cast me into the deep,
> into the heart of the seas,
> and the flood surrounded me;
> all your waves and your billows
> passed over me.
> Then I said, 'I am driven away
> from your sight;
> yet I shall again look
> upon your holy temple.'
> The waters closed in over me to take my life;
> the deep surrounded me;
> weeds were wrapped about my head
> at the roots of the mountains.
> I went down to the land
> whose bars closed upon me forever;
> yet you brought up my life from the pit,
> O LORD my God.
> When my life was fainting away,
> I remembered the LORD,
> and my prayer came to you,
> into your holy temple.
> Those who pay regard to vain idols
> forsake their hope of steadfast love.
> But I with the voice of thanksgiving
> will sacrifice to you;
> what I have vowed I will pay.
> Salvation belongs to the LORD!"
>
> And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. (ESV)

Rosemary Nixon writes:

> Whether for Jonah or ourselves, the great wonder of this kind of prayer is that our Lord, in His great love towards us, condescends to deliver us out of our frequently self-inflicted mess. Here is a God more willing to hear than

> we are to pray, a God who longs for us to speak them so that we may know He has heard our prayer.
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> Jonah's reference to 'those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their true loyalty' (v. 8) may be an indirect acknowledgement of his guilt in forsaking Yahweh. More likely, however, these words refer to the pagans whom God had called Jonah to address. Here he dismisses them as paying regard to 'vain idols'! In fact, the pagans, unlike the believers, do not know whom to call upon in their distress. Jonah was called to make God's ways known to these very people whom he here dismisses. … In calling the fish to spew him out, God is indicating that the key to Jonah's new life lies with the very pagans, the Ninevites, whom the prophet so desperately struggled to avoid.

Sing or Read Hymn 436 My Faith Has Found a Resting Place

**Thursday** (3/14) Read and discuss Psalm 1

> Blessed is the man
> who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
> nor stands in the way of sinners,
> nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
> but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
> and on his law he meditates day and night.
>
> He is like a tree
> planted by streams of water
> that yields its fruit in its season,
> and its leaf does not wither.
> In all that he does, he prospers.
> The wicked are not so,
> but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
>
> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
> nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
> for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
> but the way of the wicked will perish. (ESV)

The first Psalm is so important to the Christian life that it is well worth memorizing so that you can meditate upon it throughout the day. Allen P. Ross explains the central message of the psalm:

> By drawing a contrast between the righteous and the ungodly, the psalmist instructs believers not to live the way the world lives, not to take spiritual, moral, or ethical advice from unbelievers, and not to join them in their profane enterprises; rather, believers must study the word of God in order

> to live an untarnished and productive life for God, and that life will be evidence of a living faith that will see them through the judgment, when God judges the wicked. …
>
> For believers, the application is obvious: they must spend time meditating on God's word so that they may live a distinct and productive spiritual life for God, and in the process find assurance that God knows them and will preserve them through the judgment. To unbelievers the message is urgent: they must come to faith in the Lord, because if they live their lives without faith in him or his word, not even their good deeds will count, and they will not survive the judgment to come.

**Friday** (3/15) Read and discuss Philippians 1:9-11

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (ESV)

James Montgomery Boice writes:

> One of the reasons why God has saved us is that we might be fruitful Christians. He has not saved us merely that we might be free from judgment and go to heaven when we die, but that the character of Jesus Christ might be reproduced in us while here on earth. We are to live in the flesh but not of the flesh. We are to do good works that Christ might be glorified and that many might be brought to faith in Him.
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> This is stated in a wonderful way in Ephesians 2:10. Most Christians know the two verses that immediately precede verse ten: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not of works, lest any man should boast." But I wonder how many know the verse that follows: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." These verses say three things. They say that God has saved us by grace. They say that He has a plan for our lives. And they say that there are good works in that plan.
>
> God is somewhat like a father who is raising a large family. He is pleased to have the family, and He is delighted that you are a member of it. But He is not satisfied only with that. He is also interested that you grow up to be a good citizen, spiritually speaking. He wants productive children. He wants your life to be fruitful with good works.

> This is the message of Philippians 1:9-11. In praying for the Christians at Philippi, Paul asks for three things. He prays that their love might abound in all knowledge and discernment. He prays that their lives might be lived free of hypocrisy. And he prays, looking forward to the natural result of the first two requests, that they might be filled with "the fruits of righteousness."

Read or sing Hymn 422 We Rest on Thee

**Saturday** (3/16) Read and discuss Matthew 15:39-6:4

And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed. (ESV)

Grant Osborne writes:

> Davies and Allison say it well: "Seeing is not believing. If the Sadducees and Pharisees of our story were not persuaded by Jesus, neither would they have been won over by a spectacular sign from heaven. The truth is that one does not see until one believes." The theme of opposition and rejection is uppermost, and the warning to those in Matthew's day and in our day against refusing to watch and respond to God's clear signs could not be more clear. To fail to repent in light of the dawning of the kingdom in Jesus can mean only one thing – judgment.
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> Moreover, the resurrection is implicit and points forward to the passion events when God's plan of salvation will be enacted in human history, and it demands response. Hauerwas applies this to us: "To see the truth, to recognize the sings of the Kingdom, requires that we be rightly formed by the virtues acquired by following Jesus. To know the truth requires the acquisition of the habits of truthfulness. Knowledge and virtue are inseparable."

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.