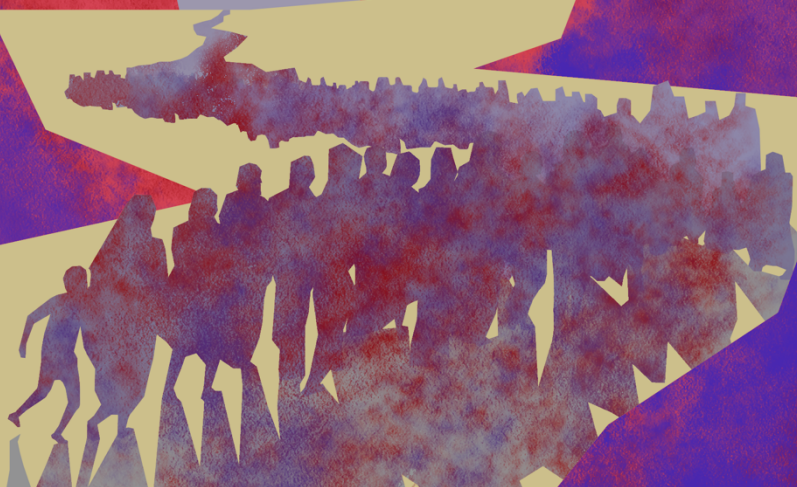


THIS IS MY STORY THIS IS MY SONG

EXO DUS



LENTEN DEVOTIONAL SERIES

EXODUS: THIS IS MY STORY, THIS IS MY SONG

I've always loved music and still do. You will likely catch me singing or humming a song most of the day. Can I tell you an embarrassing story? One of the first times Kyla and I hung out in college, we sat in front of my new white MacBook and I took her through my entire iTunes library, song by song, and asked her the same two questions: What's the name of this song? Who sings it? Ya'll, I had 2,500 songs in my iTunes library. I asked her those same two questions 2,500 times. I'm a romantic at heart, I know. It's truly a miracle that we kept in contact after that day. Now, to my credit, I opened her eyes up to some great millennial music. She got to hear the rhythm and albums of bands like Blink 182, Eminem, Good Charlotte, and Outkast. And what would an iTunes library have been without the millennial anthem Mr. Brightside by The Killers?

Exodus introduces us to a great song, to a Biblical anthem. The beat starts slow as we are introduced to a King of Egypt who doesn't remember the greatness of Joseph (1:8). While this anthem didn't name the King of Egypt, it did name the midwives that saved the song, Shiphrah and Puah (1:15). These midwives went from zero to hero and started the divine rhythm of redemption. Soon all of the Hebrew people would start tapping the rhythm of redemption that those two women started. The song picked up momentum when the composer was given a name: YHWH (6:2). The cadence gets louder during the plagues, as the Nile River is turned into blood (7:20). The chorus of the song is introduced when we find out that the purpose of the song is to make YHWH's name known (9:16). The song crescendos when YHWH brings Israel out of the house of slavery walking on dry ground (14:22). The song continues when Miriam and all the women break out their tambourines saying, "Sing to the Lord, Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea" (15:21). YHWH's song continues in the wilderness as the divine rhythm of redemption continually plays for the Israelites.

You can still hear this song today. We call it the Gospel. This song finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. When He came, the world did everything it could to stop His beat. They abused Him, spat on Him, whipped Him, nailed Him, and even killed Him. It seemed as if the song had come to an abrupt end. But just like every good concert, the song of salvation took back the stage with the greatest encore known to man. For all of humanity, Jesus was alive again! And since then, this song has been amped up for the entire world to hear.

During the season of Lent, I encourage you to remember the beat, hear the lyrics, and sing the melody of the book of Exodus with us. What's the name of this song? It's the Song of Salvation! Who sings it? You do, because you have been brought out of the land of your sin and into YHWH's Promised Land. Exodus is your story. Exodus is your song.

Pastor Adam

Rejected

AUTHOR: Rick Ralston

READ EXODUS 1:1-14

VERSE OF THE DAY EXODUS 1:8

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.

Rejection is something many fear. The so-called “cancel culture” or rejection of today operates on the premise that rejection is punishment. According to *Psychology Today*, “Canceling is an individual’s volitional act of publicly rejecting and actively pursuing harm against a perceived transgressor.” In today’s Scripture, the Israelite nation was “canceled” and rejected by Egypt’s pharaoh for becoming too numerous and posing a security threat to the nation of Egypt. All Joseph had done to save Egypt from famine didn’t matter to a new king who didn’t know him (Genesis 41).

Joseph’s life is a pattern of Jesus’ life. Both were rejected by their own people, suffered so God could rescue their people, and subsequently glorified, though their descendants would go on to be rejected by the world. Let’s take a look at it.

In Genesis 37 Joseph was rejected by his own people when his brothers sold him into slavery. In Genesis 39 Joseph was rejected by the world when his master, Potiphar, sent him to prison after Potiphar’s wife falsely accused Joseph of indecency. Later, Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt when he recognized Joseph had wisdom and was “filled with the spirit of God.”

Like Joseph, Jesus was also rejected by His own people. The leaders of Israel turned Jesus over to Pilate demanding He be crucified. Jesus was rejected by the world when Pilate bowed to the will of the people and sentenced Him to death. But now, as Peter proclaimed to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear” (Acts 2:32-33).

Biblical patterns are important because they show us how God works. When we see a pattern of the Good News of God repeated in Scripture, we can be confident that God’s faithfulness will be repeated in our lives as believers. Fear of rejection is one reason people don’t share the Good News of Jesus. That fear is justified because Jesus told His disciples in John 15:20, “Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.” We can trust in God’s faithfulness to us even when we’re rejected by the world because we know His pattern.

Although Joseph’s people endured a time of hardship and suffering, we know that by God’s power Moses led them from slavery into the Promised Land. Jesus has promised us, His people, salvation!

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son to endure the greatest rejection of all, separation from You. As we start our devotions in Exodus, grant us eyes and ears of faith to see the pattern of Your continued redemption for Your people. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

THIS IS MY STORY

Pharaoh Who?

AUTHOR: Katy Krenzke

THIS IS MY SONG

READ: EXODUS 1:15-22

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 1:15

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah.

In my mid-twenties, I had many names and titles that could describe me: daughter, wife, friend, teacher, and coach. I enjoyed these roles and felt much value and worth in them. After I had my first son Owen, I added the title “stay-at-home mom” to that list. While I had hoped for this role my entire life, I couldn’t help feeling like I had been demoted in the world’s eyes. Suddenly, I wasn’t contributing to society the way I was used to doing. Who was I now that I wasn’t out in the working world? Was I doing something worthwhile with my time? I went through an identity crisis of sorts and often compared my worth to others.

In today’s reading, we are introduced to two Hebrew midwives who also had the responsibility of raising children. I’m sure most days they felt unimportant and lowly compared to others, especially the powerful king of Egypt. Yet God chooses to specifically introduce these two women because they were going to save many Hebrew lives. In contrast, God never names that particular pharaoh in the entire book of Exodus. The only name he is given is “king of Egypt.” Even though this king had all of the power in the world’s eyes, he had little to no significance in God’s story of redemption. “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

When Jesus came on the scene, He gave His people a new name they could live by. Galatians 3:26 says, “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” Because of what Jesus has done on the cross, we can be a part of His family. No matter what status we hold or how much influence we have, we can all share the title “child of God” as Christians.

It’s been a few years now since I first became a stay-at-home mom, but I can confidently say I am proud of this role God has given me. My impact on society looks a little different than it used to, but I can see the ways God uses my new role to shine His Light. Whatever your role is, may He help you see the impact you can have as His beloved child too.

Heavenly Father, thank You for making us all Your children through Your Son Jesus. Help us to remember our worth in You by dwelling on the sacrifice You made on the cross. In Jesus’s name we pray, Amen.

Moses in the Ark

AUTHOR: Evan Elsbury

READ: EXODUS 2:1-10

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 2:3

But when [Moses' Mom, Jochebed] could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.

Moses was born at a time when God's people were under oppression by the Egyptians. Pharaoh ordered that all Israelite baby boys be thrown into the Nile River. This would have been a horrible time to be a parent, especially a mother, when all you want to do is keep your children safe. Jochebed did not have many options for how she would protect her son Moses. What she did have was faith. Faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. She placed Moses in a basket along the Nile River. She did not know what the outcome would be for Moses, but she was willing to trust that God had a plan and would protect Moses from death.

There are many examples throughout the Bible where God's people had to be willing to trust that He had a plan. In Genesis, God tasked Noah to build an ark to deliver His people and His creation. The earth had become a wicked, violent place and God sent a flood to destroy everything. Noah trusted God, and God's people were saved through Noah and his children. In the story of Moses, God used another ark, a different ark, a much smaller ark, Jochebed's basket, to deliver Moses who would ultimately deliver the Israelites out of Egypt.

To this day, God is asking His people to put their trust in Him. And to this day, God is delivering His people out of death. When my wife and I had our daughter baptized, we were putting our trust in God. Although not as extreme as the story of Moses or Noah, we are still trusting God with the life of our little one. We are trusting that God has a plan for our daughter's life and that through Him, He will lead her out of death into life. When you are baptized you are putting trust in God. We don't know what the outcomes of our lives will be. However, we can be assured that God uses the holy waters of Baptism and the ark of the Church to deliver us from our sin and our death and lead us to life with Him.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for continuing to deliver Your people from sin. Just as You delivered Moses and Noah, You deliver us through the waters of our Baptism and the work of Your Church. Strengthen our faith to trust in You Lord and Your plans for us, Your people. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Moses and Murder

AUTHOR: Ian Scholl

READ: EXODUS 2:11-22

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 2:12

Looking this way and that and seeing no one, [Moses] killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

God uses people who fail. All of the heroes in the Bible were failures at one point in their lives. In 1 Samuel, David sends Uriah into battle to be killed. In Luke, Peter denies knowing Jesus. And in Jonah, Jonah refuses to bring the Ninevites to repentance. All three were failures, but God turned them into heroes. In Exodus 2, Moses murders an Egyptian, gets rejected by his people, and flees to the desert, where he lives for forty years. Moses made an impulsive decision and he had to deal with the consequences for the rest of his life.

Moses' failure reveals three ways that we often fail God. The first way that we fail is when we try to do God's work with human strength. We often try to do God's work on our own when we really should be a vessel through which God does His work. Another way that we fail is when we are more concerned with what others think of us instead of what God thinks of us. It is hard in today's society to not care about others' opinions, but Galatians 1:10 says, "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ." The final way we fail God is when we try to cover up our sins. God already knows our sins so it seems silly to try and hide them from Him. But yet, often we do. Proverbs 28:13 says, "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."

Dwight L. Moody, a theologian in the 1800s, said "Moses spent his first forty years thinking he was somebody. He spent his second forty years learning he was a nobody. He spent his third forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody." I think Moody summed it up perfectly. You must first become a nobody before you can begin to serve the Lord. And this starts with confession when we unveil our sin, we recognize that we are nobody and recognize that Christ is everything.

There is only one kind of Christian: those who have failed God. But God turns our failure into fruitfulness, just like He did with Moses. We have all made mistakes, but the Bible never hides sin or failure because it is the reason that God sent His Son. Jesus came so that He, not us, would be struck down for our failure.

Dear Heavenly Father, help us understand how You can use even the actions of sinners to fulfill Your plan. Grant us wisdom to see Your purpose in unexpected places. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

THIS IS MY STORY

God Listens

AUTHOR: Ben Eckert

THIS IS MY SONG

READ: EXODUS 2:23-25

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 2:24

God heard [Israel's] groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

In our verse, decades after decades of slavery continue to go by, and the Israelites continue to cry out to God for help (Exodus 2:23). Is God listening? Does He hear His people's plea for help? Will He be faithful and keep His promises? If you're anything like me, these thoughts that doubt God's power often rise up in my mind. To combat these thoughts and to open my eyes to the bigger picture, I look to Isaiah 55:8-9 which says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." With this verse I ask myself, "Is it possible that God may act in a way that I don't expect?"

How does God respond to the Israelites' call for help? If we look ahead, in Exodus chapter 3 we see God reveal His plan to Moses. If we skip further ahead, we see God's hand at work even more so as He leads Moses and delivers the Israelites from the Egyptians and leads them out of slavery. Moses in all of this is the mediator between God and the Israelites.

In our new covenant today, we have Jesus as our leader and mediator. He empathizes with us and allows us to approach God with confidence knowing that our prayers will be heard in our time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16). We just need to be patient and wait for God to act.

Waiting is not always easy though. In the case of the Israelites, waiting meant continued suffering and perseverance for hundreds of years. During periods of waiting in my life, I find encouragement in the words of Paul in Romans 5:3-5, "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Just like the Israelites had a mediator through Moses, we now have a Mediator between God and us, Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). We can approach Him with faith and confidence that He will hear our prayers. When we pray, we need to remind ourselves of this truth because God promises to act for those who wait for Him (Isaiah 64:4).

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your faithfulness towards Your people and always hearing our prayers. We pray that You remind us of this truth when doubt creeps in. Help us to rejoice in the comfort of knowing that we can approach You with confidence and help us to open our eyes for Your answer. In Jesus' perfect name we pray, Amen.

The Burning Bush: Separated

AUTHOR: Josh Van Valkenburg

READ: EXODUS 3:1-6

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 3:5

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

When God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush, God told Moses to remove his shoes because the place where he was standing was holy ground. Moses then removed his sandals and listened to what God was telling him. God told Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand that he release the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. God told Moses that He would be with them through all of it. Even though Moses was told that God would be with him, Moses was still very frightened. Moses pleaded with God, asking that someone else be sent to free the Israelites. Moses felt unworthy to take on this major task for God. Moses felt that he wasn't good enough and that no one would listen to him.

In that moment, in the back and forth with God in Exodus 3 and 4, Moses must have felt the separation between himself and God. Moses felt and saw the holiness of God both in the burning bush and in God's plan for Moses' life. Moses felt that his doubts and his fears were separating him from the holiness of God. However, God reassured Moses and promised to be with him every step of the way. So, while there was a temporary feeling of separation from God, it was ultimately overcome by God's presence and guidance. Even in Moses' doubt, he trusted God's plan and followed God's instructions.

In the same way, we can feel separated from God because of our doubts and sin. We as sinners can feel that we aren't good enough for God's plan for our lives. We as sinners, just like Moses, can feel and see the holiness of God that separates us from Him. But because Jesus came down from His heavenly throne to die for our sins, we are forever united to God through Jesus' death and resurrection. No doubt of God's plan or fear of the future will ever separate us again! Furthermore, we don't have to be scared to do what God asks of us. We can trust in Him and know that He is there for us and guiding us through it all. We are no longer separated from God, but united because of our Savior Jesus. Because of Jesus, we can stand on holy ground.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your plan in my life. Help me work through all of the questions that I have, and, like Moses, trust in the plan of Your deliverance for Your people. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

The Burning Bush: God Hears You

AUTHOR: Bonnie Goodart

READ: EXODUS 3:7-12

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 3:7

The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering."

For the second time in the book of Exodus (Exodus 2:24), God assures His people that He has heard their misery and is gravely concerned about their suffering. For over 400 years the Israelites suffered at the hands of the Egyptians and cried out to the Lord for help. 400 years! Patience is not my strong suit. Sitting at a stop light for three minutes seems like hours, I'm always jumping from one check-out line to another to get out of the store quickly, and even a thirty second warm-up of my coffee in the microwave seems to take forever. When one of my loved ones was diagnosed with cancer, the time to the "all clear" prognosis in reality was within two years but the time went so slowly that I often wondered if God had forgotten about us. In our fast-paced lives we just can't fathom not receiving what we ask for as soon as we ask for it. Yet the Israelites continued to pray, and taught their children to pray, who, in turn, taught their children to reach out to the Lord for their needs. God heard their cries, and was concerned about them and had a plan to help them. His plan involved a man named Moses.

The words in Exodus 3:7 were spoken to Moses from within a burning bush. Can you just imagine the state of mind Moses must have been in? Seeing a burning bush and hearing God's voice calling his name from within it? As if that wasn't enough, God then proceeded to tell Moses to go to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Like any other human being, Moses questioned God's reasoning in choosing him for this job. He doubted his ability to do what God was asking of him. We often do the same thing. Many times I have not felt equipped to do what I thought God was asking me to do, but with His help and guidance I have been able to complete the task. Just as God told Moses in verse 12, "I will be with you."

God's ultimate plan is to free us from our slave driver of sin and relieve us from the suffering caused by sin and to grant us eternal life. To complete this He sent His son, Jesus Christ, to earth to fulfill Scripture and carry out that plan. Jesus came to teach and to serve and when the Father's timing was ready, He took our sins with Him to the cross. He died so that we can be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus so that by faith in this act of love we can still, today, lay our sins at the foot of the cross. I think of that famous hymn that sings, "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness." I cannot imagine a better foundation on which to build.

Heavenly Father, I am so thankful for Your shoulder to lean on. Knowing that You are concerned about me gives me strength to get through all situations. Thank You for the blessing of Jesus, who took on the sins of the world so that we could have life eternal. Help me to always remember this act of love. In Jesus' precious name I pray, Amen.

The Burning Bush: God Plunders His Enemies

AUTHOR: Adam Cline

READ: EXODUS 3:13-22

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 3:22

[God said] Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.

Have you ever felt that it was just one of those weeks where nothing was going right? Have you ever felt like no matter how hard you try you just continue to fail? Do you subscribe to bad things always happening in threes, and are just looking for the next bad thing to arrive? Over the course of the last few years, I am sure many have felt this despair. I know I certainly have through all the challenges that life has thrown at us. In these times, if I can be honest, it is tough to cling to God's promises. I often feel like we are somehow the cause of these issues. Have you ever felt that?

In Exodus 3, God shared a promise with Moses to deliver to the Israelites. This promise was to free them from Pharaoh's slavery and not only deliver them to "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:17) but also to plunder the very captors that had held them in slavery for four hundred years. God's promise on the surface feels like revenge against the Egyptians but it isn't. It is God following through on His promise to free His people and to build a place where He can dwell among them in the Tabernacle, built with the very gold and silver plundered. God's mighty hand was on display to ensure that all could see that nothing would stand in the way of His promise. The grand splendor and magnificence of the tabernacle on the backdrop of the wilderness must have been a continual reminder for God's people that He alone was their Deliverer.

I feel comfort in knowing that God not only told His people He would deliver them out of slavery, but also kept His promise through forty difficult years for His people in the wilderness. I cling to the fact that God continues to keep His promises to us today, tomorrow and for the rest of our lives. He plundered our enemy, death, so that we can live the life God has intended for us and we can ensure that no matter where we go God will always be with us. Now, not even death can separate us from the love of God! And He promises to one day take us to be present with Him in "a land flowing with milk and honey." I can take comfort knowing that nothing I do grants me admission but by Jesus' blood on a cross and by His grace we can one day be whole again with all our heavenly family.

Dear Lord, please help me face this week knowing that through all trials You are with me and will keep Your promises. Please help me to focus on You during those difficult times where it seems like nothing is going right, and all we feel is sadness and despair. Help me know that You will deliver us through these trying times. Through Your Son, we long for the day where we are side by side with You! In Your holy and precious name I pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 4:1-17

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 4:

"Now put [your hand] back into your cloak," [God] said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh. 7

No matter your age, there has probably been a time in your life that you have wanted to be in control. Calling the shots makes us feel mature, powerful, and in charge. As a toddler, you may have wanted to dress yourself or pick the color of your sippy cup. As a teen, you likely wanted to have a say in your choice of movies and music. And as an adult, you may want to control relationships or situations at work. Oftentimes, being in control may make us feel safe and seem like a positive. However, control can be an illusion and the situation we feel the need to control may turn out to be yet another source of frustration in our lives.

Moses, like all humans, wanted to be in control too. He didn't want to be led so he questioned God's calling in his life. Moses saw only his own weaknesses while God saw Moses's ability to be whom he had been created to be. God used Moses time and time again to be the leader His people needed in times of trials and troubles.

As someone with anxiety, I can feel the need to be in control as a way to manage anxious feelings. Letting God be in charge is hard to do as it means letting go of control. It takes me out of the driver's seat and places me into the unknown. Instead of dwelling on the unknown, I try to remember to find comfort in God's promise that He has a plan for me.

During this Lenten season, I challenge you (and myself!) to let go and let God. Instead of worrying about what you don't know, you can use prayer as a tool to help you trust in God and His will for you. For it was Your Savior (and mine!) that prayed "not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). May that be our prayer this Lenten season!

Heavenly Father, as we move forward in this Lenten season, I ask for You to guide each and every one of us through our days. I ask for You to take control instead of us feeding off the feeling that control gives us. May we turn to You always and trust in Your ways. Not my will, but Yours be done. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 5:22-23

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 5:22-23

Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Why, LORD, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.”

How many of us know what it means to lament? And how many of us include laments in our regular prayer life? The truth is that lamenting is actually a form of worship and God welcomes it.

In Exodus, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh on behalf of God and requested the Israelites be allowed to hold a three-day festival for Him. Instead of granting their request, Pharaoh punished the Israelites and made their lives of slavery even more difficult. Moses caught a lot of grief for this from his people and felt betrayed by God. So, he took his pain and frustration directly to God in a lament: “You have not rescued your people at all” (Exodus 5:23).

Lamenting is how Christians pour out our emotions to God about our pain and sorrow in this sinful world. In our lament, we appeal to God’s character and faithfulness and ask Him for relief. We cry to God because He made us and saved us. We cry to God because He always sees and hears us. To cry is human, but to lament is Christian.

The Bible is full of lamentation. Almost a third of the Psalms and an entire book of the Bible deal with lament. There are many instances when God’s people bring their sorrows and grief to God. Jesus Himself laments when He is on the cross “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). In His lament, Jesus expresses raw emotion about how His Father, who has always been with Him, has abandoned Him in His greatest time of need.

Thankfully, God hears all prayers from His people and offers relief. “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles” (Psalm 34:17). In Exodus, He delivered Moses and the Israelites from the oppressive hands of Pharaoh. We also know that Jesus’ death on the cross opened the doors of Heaven for us...where He sits at the right hand of God the Father.

As we endure pain and sadness in this sinful world, we can take comfort in the fact that God is listening. He wants us to share our emotions (lament) with Him. “Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:22). And in our lament, let us not lose sight of the big picture. Thanks to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and our faith in Him, everything’s going to be alright.

Dear Lord, thank You for allowing us to be open and honest with You. We know You will always listen to our thoughts, prayers, and laments. During difficult times, help us to lean into Your character and faithfulness found in Your Son and trust You above all things. Thanks for offering Your shoulder to cry on. Help us also to see Your grace in these moments, and may we glorify You in our response. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Divine Help

AUTHOR: Bethany Brenneman

READ: EXODUS 6:1-8

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 6:6

“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.’”

Moses was entrusted with a great task: to stand up to Pharaoh — the greatest king in the world at the time—and lead God’s people out of slavery and into the promised land. Moses made excuses, fearing that people would not listen to him, would not believe him, or that he simply couldn’t speak eloquently enough. But God provided a solution for each of Moses’ objections, and finally Moses went to Pharaoh. The first visit to Pharaoh did not go well. Instead of allowing them to leave, Pharaoh mocked God and on top of that, increased the work quota for the Israelites, AND stopped providing the raw materials that they needed. The Israelite leaders accused Moses of making things worse for them, and Moses lamented to God.

In Exodus 6:2, God reminded Moses of His character, of who He is, and of the promise He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give the land of Canaan to them and their descendants. He assured Moses in verse 5, “I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.” Verse 6 is the powerful response that God told Moses to give to the disheartened Israelites.

Just as He answered Moses, God gave the Israelites a reminder of who He is, followed by promises of what He would do and the relationship He would have with Israel. God uses the word “I” repeatedly, leaving no shred of doubt that it is God who would take care of His people.

I totally get Moses’ hesitation. It can be difficult—even terrifying—to speak in front of people. God promised that He would provide divine help.

Even in today’s social media world, it’s easy to get bogged down with thoughts of what to say, how to word it, and who might be offended. Sometimes we think about this so much that we end up not even making that post.

But just as God reminds Moses and the children of Israel that He was the one who would deliver them, we too, are promised that Jesus will deliver us from slavery to sin through His death. Romans 6 speaks of how we partake in His death through the Sacrament of Baptism, and in His death we find freedom from sin. “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:4,6).

Father, thank You for reminding us that You are the one who brings us new life through the death of Your Son Jesus, setting us free from sin. Let us be encouraged by this truth. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

The Plagues: Part One

AUTHOR: Josie Havenaar

READ: EXODUS 8:1-10

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 8:9-10

Moses said to Pharaoh, "I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile." "Tomorrow," Pharaoh said. Moses replied, "It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God."

Most people are scared of the creepy, slimy, and crawly creatures that roam our Earth. If you ask the average person if they are a fan of frogs, that average person would probably hop right over to you and say, "Heck no!" Now imagine frogs all around you. Frogs are in your bed, frogs are in your cabinets, frogs are everywhere. Frogs have become the only thing you can even think about.

In our story from Exodus, we know that frogs become a massive part of Pharaoh's life. They are everywhere! Moses says to him, "I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile" (Exodus 8:9). Now, Pharaoh's response to this offer is quite shocking for someone in his situation. Pharaoh says, "Tomorrow" (Exodus 8:10).

Tomorrow? What do you mean tomorrow? I don't know about you but I would have croaked if my leader said the frogs would stay around until tomorrow. Tomorrow? Why not today?!

Oftentimes in our lives, we tend to make empty promises to ourselves by saying, "One of these days." "One of these days I am going to apologize to my friend." "One of these days I am going to finish school." "One of these days I am going to go back to church." Let's be honest here, "one of these days" really translates to "none of these days." The moment we try to follow the plan that we have created for ourselves, we begin to make empty promises. It is time to fill those promises, but how? Jesus had the right idea. When Jesus was speaking about salvation to the criminal next to Him as He hung on the cross He said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Notice the word today. Jesus does not make empty promises, He only fulfills them.

We see this concept all throughout the Bible. It is difficult to trust God's promise in your life, especially when you find yourself waiting for your life to change. Our trust comes in when we can believe that God is working at the exact pace that we need, and we have no control over it. Salvation is not something that we can obtain on our own and it is not something that we can find on our own time. Read this again, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Because of Jesus, salvation is yours, not yesterday, not tomorrow. But today.

Heavenly Father, thank You for my salvation that comes to me today, and every day. Help me to not delay for tomorrow, what I can accomplish for You today. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

The Plagues: Part Two

AUTHOR: Kendall Wichman

READ: EXODUS 8:16-19

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 8:19

The magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said.

Throughout Exodus, God confronts evil and brings justice and rescue to His people, ultimately leading to their redemption. When difficult situations are presented, there is no need to be afraid, God is always with us. When we in faith repent, we will see the evidence of His work.

Exodus chapter 8 narrates the events from plagues two, three, and four. But it’s the third plague I want to zero in on. During the third plague, the insects were so bad that, “All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats” (Exodus 8:17). Remember, they are in Egypt, in the land of the pyramids. There is dust everywhere! This plague served as a warning from God to Pharaoh to let His people go but Pharaoh failed to realize the power and authority of God over all creation.

Interestingly, this was the first plague that the magicians did not have the ability to replicate. They replicated turning the Nile River into blood and the plague of frogs. But they weren’t able to replicate even the tiniest of God’s creation: insects. At this point even the magicians acknowledged God’s sovereignty over creation and confessed their weaknesses in comparison to Him. “The magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said” (Exodus 8:19). Pharaoh and the magicians found out that no power or force can stand against God.

God’s power would come down again, and no power or force would be able to stand against Him. God’s powerful finger would take on flesh and blood through our Savior. At this time God’s powerful finger wouldn’t bring plagues, rather, the plague of sin and death would be upon Him so that He can be with us in the good times and the bad.

Heavenly Father, I come before You sinful and wanting to repent. I know You have the power to change anything. Help me turn away from this sin and lead my life by Your example. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

THIS IS MY STORY

The Plagues: Part Three

AUTHOR: Micah Wettschurack

THIS IS MY SONG

READ: EXODUS 9:1-34

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 9:16

But I have raised you [Moses] up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

When I was in the fifth grade I was invited to one of my close friends' birthday parties. I was really excited when he handed me the party invitation and I quickly ran to my locker and stuffed it inside my backpack. One month later, I heard my buddies at school sharing stories about the friend's birthday party. Did I really miss out on the party? I went home that night and found the invitation in the same place I had put it a month ago. I had never taken it out of the bag and had never told my parents about it. I HAD MISSED OUT on what seemed to be the party of a lifetime.

Throughout the book of Exodus, especially chapters 7-14, God reveals Himself to Pharaoh through His almighty power and plan of deliverance for His people. Through Moses, God was offering Pharaoh a heavenly invitation to a front row seat revealing God's power and proclaiming His name, "in all the earth." Each time Pharaoh rejected God's invitation, God revealed His power again to Pharaoh with another plague. Even his magicians knew that it was God working and sending an invitation. In the last devotion, we focused on Exodus 8:19 where the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said. Pharaoh was so caught up in his own desires that even when everything around him was pointing to a relationship with the one true God, he and his proud, hardened heart refused to listen. Just like me, Pharaoh missed the invitation.

Today in our daily lives we are given the same big invitation, to follow Him whose name is Jesus Christ. He gives us the invitation to the party of a lifetime. This invitation comes with peace, joy, love, and faith filled strength beyond comprehension. When you see the invitation to join Him in whatever situation you find yourself in, don't hold back. When you wait like I did, you may never get that same opportunity again. He wants the RSVP now. God doesn't want to start the party without you. Your invitation to live with Christ may not come through a burning bush or through plagues, but it does come through the waters of Baptism, that you pick up each and every day.

Lord, soften our hearts so that we are able to see Your work in our lives. May Your glorious party come down from heaven soon! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The Plagues: Part Four

AUTHOR: Sarah Weber

READ: EXODUS 10:21-27

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 10:23

No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.

Nyctophobia is described as a fear of the dark. Being afraid of the dark is one of the most common fears of children but even adults can be uncomfortable with darkness. Most homes have an abundance of flashlights in case of a power outage, nightlights in bedrooms, and now LED light strands are lining the walls of many teenagers' rooms. We tend to avoid darkness whenever possible. Light brings us comfort. It drives away fear and helps us to not feel so alone.

In Exodus 10:21-27, we read about the plague of darkness that was brought upon the Egyptians as a result of Pharaoh again denying Moses' request for the Israelites to "take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God" (Exodus 3:18). In Exodus 10:21, the Lord told Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt—darkness that can be felt." This was more than just a power outage or a moonless night or sunless day. The text says this was "darkness that you could feel." I can't imagine the fear, anxiety, and loneliness the Egyptians must have felt during those three days. This total darkness was especially devastating to the Egyptians because the sun (Ra) was the Egyptian national god. Pharaoh was even considered the physical representation of Ra. This plague sent a clear message that the Israelites worshiped the one true God who was sovereign over all creation including the sun and there were indeed no other gods than Him.

Verse 23 goes on to tell us that this plague lasted for three days, yet the Israelites had light and were not consumed by the darkness. The text doesn't explain how the Israelites had light, but we know they had the comfort of light while the rest of Egypt was overwhelmed by darkness. God provided light to His people in Egypt and He continues to provide light to us today through Jesus Christ. "Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'" (John 8:12). There are seasons of life when you may feel fear, anxiety, or loneliness, but just like the Israelites, God has provided us with the Light that overcomes all darkness in our Savior Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, when the world feels dark and lonely, help us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Light of the world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The Plagues: Part Five

AUTHOR: Kimberly Carothers

READ: EXODUS 11:1-8

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 11:7

But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any person or animal. Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

Have you ever felt out of place? Maybe you had an injury and needed to wear a cast, boot, or sling? Last year in volleyball, I dislocated my shoulder and had to wear a sling. It was my first major injury, and I wasn't sure how to handle it. Later that night, I ended up going to the boys' soccer game and that's when I got hit with questions: "Oh no, what happened? How long do you have to be out? Did it hurt? Do you need surgery? Are you okay?" All these questions made me feel so overwhelmed. If you have had an injury, I'm sure you can relate to feeling different than everyone else. My sling was a visible sign which distinguished me from everyone else.

This is our last devotion on the ten plagues. And it ends with the most devastating plague, the death of the firstborn. This is the plague that ultimately made Pharaoh relent and allow God's people to leave Egypt. But God made an interesting remark in this verse, "Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel." Indeed, there was a distinction between Egypt and Israel, one believed and trusted in the promises of God, and the other believed and trusted in the promises of Ra (and numerous other Egyptian gods). As much as we don't like to talk about it, this distinction still is in place today. Some people believe and trust in the promises of God (you and I) and some people believe and trust in things other than God. Ultimately, just like the final plague, we will see this distinction at death. God's people will go to be with Him and those who die apart from Christ won't. And why is this? In our story there was one thing that separated the Israelites and the Egyptians, the blood of the lamb on the doorframe of the house. And the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, still separates us today. Because when death arrives, the blood of the Lamb tells death, "Your power is useless here, because they are with Me."

Wouldn't it be interesting to see how life might be different if those who were saved by the blood of the Lamb had an indisputable visible mark that undeniably marked them and differentiated them from the rest of society? When people in the public see one who is redeemed by Jesus, they would automatically know that they were saved? How different would life be? But isn't that how we should stand out in life as Christians? When people see us, our words and actions, they should know that we belong indisputably to Jesus.

Dear God, help us to trust You fully, even in our struggles. Strengthen us and assure our hearts that You are always by our side. Help us live out our lives as one redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The Passover: Part One

AUTHOR: Vivian Ernst

READ: EXODUS 12:1-14

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 12:13

The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

Many communities regularly hold organized blood drives to help people of all ages who are in need of life-saving transfusions. People volunteer to donate blood because it's one way they are able to help others in a life-saving way, even though they don't usually know the recipients. Did you know that one pint of blood is able to be used to help save up to three lives?

Today we also read about blood being used to save lives. While Moses and the Israelites were in Egypt, the Lord instructed him to tell the people to take some of the blood from a slain year-old male lamb, one without blemish or defect, and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses. The Lord told Moses that later that same night, He would pass through the land of Egypt to strike down every firstborn—both men and animals. The blood on the houses would be a sign, an indisputable and visible mark to identify their homes as under the Lord's protection. He would "pass over" the houses of the people of Israel, and because of the blood, the lives of their firstborn would be spared.

In the New Testament we read about a Passover Lamb in the person of Jesus, our promised Savior. Perfect in every way, yet born into an imperfect world of imperfect people. He lived a perfect life among them, teaching about the kingdom of God, about life and salvation, about spending eternity with Him, for all who would believe in Him. Out of His great love for all people, Jesus shed His blood on the cross as the perfect sacrifice. Jesus, the Passover Lamb, sacrificed His life for all. But this Lamb didn't stay dead. Jesus rose again promising life eternal for all who believe in Him as their Savior. Thanks to His great sacrifice, He gives us white robes, washed in His blood.

One pint of blood donated...to save one or more people.

One lamb per household sacrificed...blood shed to save the firstborn of God's people.

One perfect life sacrificed...Jesus' blood shed to save all of God's people.

As a result, you are blessed to be marked with one word: forgiven!

Heavenly Father, the Passover was but a foreshadowing of the Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world. Through Your Holy Spirit, may we look to point to Your Son, through word, deed, and action. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

MARCH 2, 2024

THIS IS MY STORY

The Passover: Part Two

AUTHOR: Erik Thomack

THIS IS MY SONG

READ: EXODUS 12:43-51

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 12:46

[The lamb] must be eaten inside the house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones.

Have you ever broken a bone? When I was in fifth grade, I came close when I cracked my shoulder blade in a sledding accident. I had to wear a sling for what seemed like forever.

The medical term for a broken bone is “fracture” and results in the bone being broken into two or more pieces. A doctor will need to set the fracture, which may require surgery and 6-8 weeks in a cast to allow the bone to heal.

Broken bones are examples of total despair and complete devastation in their Old Testament references. In Isaiah 38:13 for example, King Hezekiah compares his illness to being eaten by a lion, “breaking all my bones.” Yikes, talk about being fractured!

This is why an animal that was to be used as a sacrifice must not have any broken bones. In fact, Leviticus 1 states these animals must be males and are to be without blemishes, bruises, or fractures, in other words, “perfect.” It must be in this condition as it is to be sacrificed (killed) on their behalf (instead of them) to atone (pay) for their sins.

You may be wondering why an animal needed to be sacrificed. Romans 6:23 states, “The wages of sin is death. . .” Sin is the broken bone in our life and fractures everything. Sin is what drives us to focus on ourselves which fractures relationships with friends and family, but even more so, it fractures our relationship with God. It is because of our sin that death is in the world, and it is through death that the debt we owe is paid. This is why the sacrifice of animals was done in the Old Testament, to point to the need to pay for sin.

Just like that Passover Lamb saved the Hebrews from the death of the firstborn that night, we too have a Passover Lamb that saves us from death. In John 1:29 we see John the Baptist pointing at Jesus and saying, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

Yes, Jesus Christ is that one perfect sacrificial lamb, who saves us from our sins, death, and the devil. He lived a perfect life, one without the blemish or stain of sin. He was nailed (killed) to the Cross (instead of you) as an atonement (payment) for your sins. The weight of your sin may have crushed Him, but His bones did not break, nor did His love for you!

Dear Father, we thank You for the cross and for the sacrifice made there by Jesus. We ask that You mend the fractures in our life and use us to bring the healing love of Jesus to those around us. In the saving name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 13:17-22

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 13:19

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath. He had said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.”

I find it very interesting how in Exodus 13:19, our verse of the day, Moses made the choice to grab Joseph’s bones when they were about to head out of Egypt. Why would he do that? Well Joseph spoke a promise to his family before departing to Egypt. “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place” (Genesis 50:25). But I think that Moses used this moment for another point. Moses took those bones to serve as a symbol and a reminder that God is faithful to us and He will always follow through with His promises to us. Just look at the bones of Joseph being taken up out of Egypt! His promise to the Israelites was that God would come to their aid, and they were literally walking toward freedom.

His promise to all of us is also freedom. God has always promised freedom to His people; freedom from the power of sin, freedom from the power of death, and even freedom from the power of the devil. But God has one more promise to keep, His promise is to lift your bones to the ultimate freedom; life after death in the presence of God Himself.

Until God fulfills this great promise, we live in this earthly life. In this earthly life, I find myself stressed over what to do next, and what decisions to make in my life. The future has always been something that I’ve worried about, whether it’s about school, sports, or even my future career, those thoughts have all spent a lot of time in my mind. Even though I do have to face those thoughts, I can remember that God is with me and guiding me. He is my pillar of cloud and my pillar of fire that guides me through life. And this pillar always sees His people to freedom.

Heavenly Father, thank You so much for promising us freedom and guiding us through life! We ask that You help us to remember to trust You and remember Your promise to us always! In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 14:1-14

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 14:14

The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.

Most of us have been in a situation in which we felt defeated - a no-win situation, “between a rock and a hard place.” In Exodus 14, the people of Israel were trapped between the depths of the Red Sea and the approaching armies of Pharaoh. For three days, God had been leading them as a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of flame by night, showing them the way and going before them.

In Exodus 14:10 we see the Israelites not just crying out, but crying out to the Lord. Immediately after the cry, they turned to Moses and berated him for taking them from Egypt, where they had grown comfortable in their slavery. While they had suffered through restriction and constriction, they had felt secure in their Egyptian enslavement. They knew each day would be exactly like the previous day. They knew that they would be fed. They knew that they would have a place to sleep. Now, they were wandering through the desert, unsure of where they would be tomorrow, where their next meal would come from or whether they would even survive.

In the NIV translation of Exodus 14:14, Moses told the people of Israel to “be still.” However, the Hebrew word תַּחֲרִישׁ pronounced ta-ha-ri-sun translates more precisely not as physical stillness, but “to be silent.” In the next verse, the Lord asked Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on” (Exodus 14:15). God was not telling the Israelites to stand still and not move. He was telling them to calm themselves, to stop their doubting, to have peace and to trust in Him. He said that He would be alongside them.

When we encounter physical and spiritual troubles and tribulations, we should go to God in prayer. There will be times when we must be silent, trust in God and march forth. Have you ever asked these questions:

What is the move that I am afraid to make?

Am I waiting for God to make my way effortless?

The Messiah has already redeemed us and removed the obstacles in our path: sin, death, and the power of the devil. He’s parted our Red Sea. We simply need to follow our Messiah into the path between the waters. The limitations which we have are the ones which we have placed upon ourselves. Cast fear, worry, and doubt aside. In faith rely on Jesus and trust in God... and march forth!

Blessed are you LORD, our God, King of the universe, who fights alongside us through all our battles, both internal and external. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Freedom: Part Three

AUTHOR: Mark Krenzke

READ: EXODUS 14:15-31

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 14:29

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

Lent has always been my favorite season of the Church Year. One reason is the intensely pensive hymns we sing, but mainly Lent has just felt like the most real season of the church calendar to me. Intellectually, I know that all the seasons of the Church Year celebrate very real things, but experientially Lent is more tangible and relatable to me.

Arguably one of the highest priorities we've set in our culture is the avoidance of personal discomfort, pain, and death. If that sounds like your priority too, I'm right there with you. At face value, it doesn't sound like such a bad goal to avoid these things. However, I wonder if we as Christians have misplaced our purpose. Often we're more interested in what God is doing for us than what God is wanting to do in us.

Despite our efforts, life remains full of discomfort, pain, and death. In Lent, we meditate on the discomforts, pain, and death of Jesus. He joins us in our trials and meets us where we are, and instead of running away from the painful realities of life, we're called to follow Him through them.

The Israelites in today's verse were in the middle of death itself. In that time, the waters and the sea were synonymous with chaos and death. We see this in the pre-ordered universe where "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Scripture tells us that God then separated the waters, which allowed a space in between for life to flourish. When the Israelites were backed up against the sea which was chaos, God once again provided a space between the waters for the Israelites to pass through death, and delivered them into the life He promised.

As Jesus was preaching about the Good News of God's Kingdom, many would come to Him and ask for a sign, some of whom were looking for relief from the discomfort, pain, and death brought by Roman oppression. Jesus responded to these requests with strong words: "A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah" (Matthew 16:4). Jesus gave that sign by descending into the waters and chaos of death for three days and passing through those waters to life in His resurrection.

As we face the trials that are ahead, instead of asking God for a sign to prove His faithfulness to us, may we ask God to renew us with His Spirit, that we can faithfully follow Him through the waters of death. May we trust in the "Way, the Truth, and the Life" that through Jesus' death and resurrection, He has provided a path on dry ground to the ultimate reality, life with Him where there is "no longer any sea" (Revelation 21:1).

Heavenly Father, create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

MARCH 6, 2024

THIS IS MY STORY

The Song of Victory: Part One

AUTHOR: Drew Schiefer

THIS IS MY SONG

READ: EXODUS 15:1-9

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 15:2

The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him.

I have a strong appreciation for Christian music. I remember being young and singing along to Christian music in the car or wherever I heard it. It seemed like every time we would go anywhere there would always be K-Love playing in the car. My parents would play Christian music in the house too, whether it was the radio or even a CD player, back when those were a thing. Even now, I continue to listen to K-Love when I'm driving, alternating with some country music. Before basketball or football games, I will play some Christian music in my earbuds because I feel like it gets me in the right state of mind and helps me to realize what it's all about. It's one way for me to worship and praise God in my everyday life.

Moses is challenged to deliver God's people out of Egypt but can't do it on his own. I am sure Moses felt very lost and scared questioning if God would be with him at all times. But when God says He is with us always until the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20), we can trust and believe Him. God guided Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt and away from Pharaoh and slavery. After Moses led the Israelites on dry land through the parting seas, they praised God and glorified Him for rescuing them. They lifted up their voices in victory and praise to God! They praised Him for being their strength, defense, and salvation. God is indeed all of these things, He promises to guide us in life and through the ups and downs. We, too, can feel lost and in need of rescuing. God comes to us where we are and picks us right back up. He gives us strength when we feel weak or scared and delivers us from sin. He has done the unthinkable for us. He died on the cross so that we can live forever with Him!

I appreciate that Moses and the Israelites sang out in praise to God for all that He had done for them. Me singing along in the car to Christian music might be a bit different than Moses and the Israelites, but we both lift our voices to praise God for His victory over our enemies! God might not have delivered me out of Egypt and away from Pharaoh, but He did deliver me from my greatest enemies: sin, death, and the devil. He also continues to love me and guide me in life each and every day. I will sing and continue to praise the Lord because I know what He did for me and you and all believers! This Lenten season, I encourage you to turn on your favorite song and sing praise to God and thank Him for everything He has done and continues to do for you!

God, we thank You for all that You have done for us and for the blessings You give to us every day. Thank You for Your Word so we can see and understand how mighty and wonderful You are! Help us to continue to praise and worship through all of our life. We love You Lord! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The Song of Victory: Part Two

AUTHOR: Phil Jensen

READ: EXODUS 15:10-18

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 15:10

But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

Do you remember how you first learned your ABCs? How about your days of the week? If you're like me you learned them first through songs. When something is put to music, it taps into a different part of the brain and wields a new power over both memory and emotions. Exodus 15 records what many refer to as "The Song of Moses" or even "The Song of Victory." Moses and the Israelites sing this song to the Lord and will continue to do so for generations to come - a song of victory, a song of praise, a song of remembrance, a song of worship.

Moses just finished leading the Israelites through the midst of the Red Sea on dry land and delivering them completely from the armies of Pharaoh. The enemy hotly pursued them through the desert and made bold threats like "I will overtake them...I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them" (Exodus 15:9) and with such a great army, the Israelites had every reason to believe that Pharaoh could deliver on these promises. But what does the Lord do? Verse 10 says "You blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters." The Lord showed His power of protection to His people in ways they couldn't even imagine - not with the power of the sword but simply with His breath!

Then the song switches abruptly from what God has done for them to the present/future tense and what He will do for them. "Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? In your unfailing hand you will lead the people you redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling" (Exodus 15:11-13). God has just proven His faithfulness to Israel and has unequivocally shown His power to deliver them from any enemy, no matter how powerful they may be.

God's promise of deliverance wasn't just for the Israelites and their Exodus from Egypt to the land promised to Abraham. His deliverance was fulfilled once and for all in His Son Jesus who died on the cross and rose again to deliver us from sin, death, and the devil. God's victory over death is as complete as the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. In verse 16, Moses refers to the Israelites as "the people you bought." We have been purchased with a great price and the Lord has marked us as His own. We get to be a part of the greatest Exodus of all when Christ leads us from death into life, from the grave into glory. God was faithful to Moses and He will continue to be faithful to His people today and forever. "The Lord reigns for ever and ever." Come soon Lord Jesus so we can experience the greatest Exodus—walking out of this life and into your eternal Promised Land.

Dear Heavenly Father, we are privileged to sing songs of victory, praise, remembrance, and worship every day because of the work of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Let us especially remember this when Your Church gathers to worship You together! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

MARCH 8, 2024

THIS IS MY STORY

The Song of Victory: Part Three

AUTHOR: Mitch Paswater

THIS IS MY SONG

READ: EXODUS 15:22-27

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 15:24

“The LORD reigns for ever and ever.”

Has the bad guy really ever won? Think about it. Every play you have been to, every book you have read, every movie you have ever watched, in the end, the bad guy never wins. Lady Macbeth, the Wicked Witch of the West, Captain Hook, Darth Vader, the Joker, Voldemort, and the list goes on. All of these villains tried to get what they wanted or handle the situation on their own terms and failed. In the end it was not them celebrating but the other side, the good side.

In our verses for the day, that is exactly what has happened. It is God's people who were rejoicing as they looked back at the bad guy, Pharaoh, and his army being swallowed up by the Red Sea. Their song is full of astonishment, relief, joy, and thankfulness. The Lord in whom they put their faith and trust had prevailed and they could rejoice knowing that they were safe.

Faith and trust are not easy. Any one of those villain's opponents could have easily joined the villains in evil but didn't. Harry Potter could have joined the forces of Voldemort, Glenda could have defied gravity with the Wicked Witch of the West, and Luke Skywalker could have joined the dark side. But instead, they fought the good fight and won. So many times in our lives, we are tempted to take the easy way out. Instead of waiting on God's plan we want to so quickly go and take it for ourselves. But as followers of Jesus, we trust in His plan and know that He has our best interests at heart. He has never led us astray nor will He ever do so because the Lord reigns forever and ever!

Evil may win from time to time in a battle or two, but the Lord prevails in the war. He is King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords. We can trust and rejoice in that!

Dear Lord, thank You for leading me. Help me to be patient and trust in You to lead me to victory. I know You will. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 16:1-10

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 16:10

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

Chapter 16 of Exodus starts with the Israelites leaving their oasis at Elim and heading to Sinai where they would receive the Law of the Lord. Shortly into this journey, the Israelites noticed that their food supply was beginning to run low, which prompted complaints to Moses and Aaron. What I always find startling was how quickly the Israelites began to recount “the good old days” in Egypt. They had just seen God bring plagues upon the Egyptians, deliver them during the Passover, and split the Red Sea...and they would rather be enslaved in Egypt?

But, before we are too critical of the Israelites, we need to use these verses (Exodus 16: 1-3) as a mirror. How have I overlooked God’s provision in my life? Am I praising God when things are good, but quick to complain when they aren’t? God’s work in our lives may not be as obvious as splitting open a sea, but that doesn’t take away from the fact that He is still in control.

What I find comforting is that despite Israel’s complaining, God still provided. He didn’t say, “Stop complaining, then I will help you.” No, God is faithful even when we are not. Instead, God said in Exodus 16:4, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you.” He showed His mercy and grace by providing bread for His people. But He didn’t stop here. We find out in verse 10 that the whole Israelite community saw “the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.” What a beautiful picture this is! The Lord of the universe drew near to His people to lead them and dwell among them. This cloud continued to be with them and guided them throughout their time in the wilderness.

Like the Israelites, I sometimes feel like I am the one wandering in the wilderness finding myself lodging complaints to God. My complaints ultimately stem from a lack of trust and dissatisfaction in what God has already provided me. I forget that God is providing in my life and promises to continue. But most importantly, I forget that He already has provided. Through Jesus, the glory of the Lord appeared in full. And through Jesus, God once again provided bread from heaven. It reminds me of John 6:33-35 where Jesus says, “For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” The passage continues, “‘Sir,’ [the crowd] said, ‘always give us this bread.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life.’” I don’t know about you, but when I think about the reality of Jesus’ claim, my whole list of complaints suddenly seems trivial. God has given us Jesus to not only be our compass as we navigate through the wilderness of our lives, but to also be the bread that sustains us along the way. My voice becomes the voice of the crowd, “Jesus, always give me this bread!” Jesus has provided, is providing, and always will provide.

Dear Lord, thank You for all the ways that You provide for me. Thank You so much for sending us Jesus. Please help me to keep my eyes fixed on Him through the wilderness in my life. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen

READ: EXODUS 16:31-36

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 16:35

The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

What's one of the most repeated questions you can hear as a parent or spouse? I would argue it is the proverbial "what's for dinner?" Or at least it is in our house. Whoever is asking, be it our children or ourselves, it is the never-ending question. Exodus 16 brings us the Israelites, not very far removed from slavery in Egypt, posing that exact question to Moses and Aaron.

Now, feeding a family is one thing, but ensuring this Israelite community (made up of 600,000 men, plus women and children) had enough to eat was something totally different. It was not like Moses and Aaron could have just gone to the local grocery store and picked up some basic items to take care of this massive group of people. It was going to take a serious large scale food delivery service to handle this enormous problem. God came to the rescue yet again for the Israelites in the form of manna. This bread from heaven, or manna, was sent each morning as a gracious gift from God. Every day, except on the Sabbath, God religiously (pun intended) sent bread down from heaven for the Israelites to eat. He also sent quail in the evening to provide meat. He did not do this once or twice, but continued providing food for this entire group over the course of their time in the desert—forty years of a faithful food delivery service to ensure this group never went hungry. He also graciously responded to their cries for water (Exodus 15:25 and 17:6). Think about that fact for just a minute. This group never had to wonder where their food would come from or if they would have to worry about not having enough. What an amazing blessing!

Think about your own life and how God has provided for and continues to provide for you and your family. I am not saying God is going to send a large-scale food delivery service to your house every week with ingredients for you to cook, but truly think about the ways He daily provides for your needs. He likely has granted you the ability to work so you can earn a living, thus providing for your daily needs. Or perhaps He has put others into your life (family/friends) who help with basic needs. I think of the many blessings I know I take for granted every day (food, home/shelter, clothes, family, etc.). Those basic necessities of life represent the very words Jesus gave us in Matthew 6:11, "Give us today our daily bread." Not a new car, or new gaming system, or the latest fashionable design to wear, or even the newest house with all the amenities, but just basic necessities. We must remember to be ever grateful for these basic blessings so graciously given to us by our heavenly Father. He provided for the Israelites for their time in the wilderness consistently and will provide for you and yours as well.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your continued providence in my life. Help me to not overlook the daily bread that You give to me so that I can, with a heart full of thankfulness, help the other people around me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Wilderness: Part Three

AUTHOR: Isaac Going

READ: EXODUS 17:8-13

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 17:12-13

When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

It's tempting to feel as though we can do everything alone. We don't like to admit that we need help, even though more often than not, this is an imminent reality that sometimes can slap us across the face. We simply cannot do everything alone. From hugging, to playing tennis, to finding someone to blame (OK, maybe we shouldn't do that one, but you get my point), life is easier when we have people to turn to. This reality of community is a sovereign thing that God has ordained for us to experience. We are called to follow Jesus' example, but we often can't do what He wants us to do without learning and turning to other Christians for guidance.

In Exodus Chapter 17, we see this dynamic of community come to the forefront of the Israelites' livelihood. Since departing Exodus for the Promised Land, the Israelites had made lots of enemies. They were constantly being threatened by tribes and peoples inhabiting the lands through which they passed. In our reading, we see that Amalek, which is described in the Bible as a nation that staunchly persecuted the Israelites, had come to fight. Amalek was a nation of fearsome warriors who were sure to finish off any tribe who got in their way. It is fair to assume that the Israelites were afraid as they went into battle.

Moses, however, received power from God to be able to give the Israelites an advantage. Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of a nearby hill. While Joshua fought with the Amalekites, The Bible says that whenever Moses' hands were raised, Israel was winning the battle, but that whenever his hands fell, the Israelites would be losing. This worked great at first, but eventually Moses started becoming tired as his hands remained raised. Realizing his fatigue, Aaron and Hur made it possible for Moses to sit down. They each took one of his arms and raised them so that Moses could maintain his stance without growing fatigued. Our verse of the day says that "[Moses'] hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword" (Exodus 17:13). The Israelites ended up winning the battle through the power of the Lord and because of the support of Aaron and Hur to Moses. Moses could not have done it alone.

As much as we like to believe that we are self-sufficient and omnipotent, this is simply not true. We need companions in our faith because we ultimately fall short. As humans, we cannot perfectly fulfill God's plan for our life alone, but we can get a whole lot closer with a good pal to pick us up when we fall.

Father, You know that we can't pick ourselves up on our own. We need a friend. In our times of weakness, please show us that two is better than one. And when we feel alone, remind us that it was Jesus' hands that were held up by nails for our salvation, so that Your Son can be with us forever. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 18:1-23

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 18:14

When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?”

Jethro was the father-in-law of Moses. They apparently were very close. Jethro, along with Moses' family, had just made a special trip to reunite with Moses as he had been leading the Israelites to freedom away from the ruling Egyptians. Though Moses was eager to share all the good work the Lord had been doing through him, it became evident to Jethro that Moses was carrying too much of the workload himself. Moses was not only subjecting himself to potential burnout, but he was also neglecting to teach others how to uplift and serve others as well. People were having to wait in long lines to have their problems addressed.

Have you ever felt like Moses at home, work, community, or within activities at church? Or have you ever felt like Jethro watching a family member or friend carrying out Moses-like leadership?

My wife Cheryl and I are raising 3 daughters. We often find ourselves doing things for them instead of patiently teaching them how to do things on their own. I recall hearing the phrase, “give a person a fish and feed them for a meal; teach them to fish and you can feed them for a lifetime.”

Many years ago I was also in a conversation with a wise mentor who stated, “Doing the good work God has not called you to do prevents you from doing the great work He has called you to do.”

Now Moses was clearly doing good work by being a judge for disputes among the Israelites, but was he preventing himself from doing great work that could be more impactful? Was he preventing others from jumping in who also had the similar spiritual gift of discernment to help settle disputes? Proper delegation can help multiply effectiveness as well as give others the chance to grow as well.

Remember, the Apostle Paul asked Timothy, Titus and others to help spread the Gospel in the early years of the church. Paul also tells the Christians living in Ephesus to always be about “equipping his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12). If that is not enough to drive home today's lesson, keep in mind that even the Perfect One, Jesus, called twelve Disciples to assist in His ministry here on Earth. He clearly could have done it Himself!

Dear Lord, help us all to reflect on where we can best serve others in our community. If I am being a Moses then kindly send a wise Jethro to tell me so. If I am a Jethro, may I not hold back in providing wise advice to a Moses in my life. And finally, if I am neither a Moses or Jethro at this time, reveal a role that aligns with my God given talents so that others can come to know You and see You shine as I attempt to uplift and serve others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 19:1-8

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 19:5-6

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

In 2007, my wife Julie and I were youth leaders for a small congregation in Tennessee. That summer we had the privilege of chaperoning eight high school students to the LCMS Youth Gathering in Orlando, Florida. This was not only a first for me, but the first for the church. The group was a mix of lifelong Christians and those new to the faith. The theme verse for The Gathering that year was 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Peter, in that verse, borrows imagery and wording from the book of Exodus in our verse of the day. “Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). Reflecting on the words “royal priesthood” and “holy nation” and “chosen people” during the LCMS Youth Gathering, and meditating on God’s words spoken to the Israelites through Moses in Exodus warms my heart just knowing God has gifted each of us with many talents. Just as God’s covenant called the Israelites to be a kingdom of priests to spread and be a conduit for the people to God, so too are we called to be conduits, bringing God’s grace to others by using our talents to grow His Kingdom.

That summer, one of my talents was to be a chaperone for the youth and help them to grow in their faith. That was evident when I found out many years later that one of the boys followed God’s call to become a pastor.

Fast forward to present time, my talents have changed, just as my daily job has changed from that time. However, I am still continually amazed at how God finds ways to use the talents He has gifted me to help in His Kingdom. Knowing that God has gifted you with multiple talents, I leave you with this question: How can you use your talents to help in His Kingdom?

Heavenly Father, thank You for how You have gifted me, help me to use those gifts to be a blessing to others in coming to know You for the first time or grow in their faith, sharing in Your saving grace. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

First Commandment: The Gift of God

AUTHOR: Maggie Kamman

READ: EXODUS 20:1-6

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 20:3

You shall have no other gods before me.

With this devotion, we start looking at the Ten Commandments God gave His people. We begin this series of devotions with the ultimate Commandment – not to put anything else in our lives ahead of God. God begins in Exodus 20:2 by saying “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” Before God commanded anything He reminded Israel what He had done for them. This sets a clear foundation for the Commandments: because of who God is and what He has done for us, He has the authority to tell us what to do. The First Commandment then logically flows from this understanding – because God just brought us out of slavery and defeated our enemies for us, nothing is to come before God and He is the only God we worship and serve.

To me, this Commandment is likely the one most of us think that we keep daily. We quickly dismiss our risk of worshiping anything except God. Why is this? Many of us put ourselves back in the time of the Exodus where we imagine an idol worshiper bowing before a carved image. In the ancient world, people worshiped aspects of the physical world like the sun, moon, stars or animals. That is not as prevalent in today’s world. Yet, this command is much broader than that. Idols can be many things. Any idea, habit, philosophy, object or person that has your primary loyalty and concern, or decreases your loyalty and trust in God by any degree, should be considered an idol. Because of this, this Commandment addresses a very human struggle that is unavoidable even to the most faithful. Each and every day we are tempted to look outside of God for something the world promises to give us. This Commandment is a warning against putting anything besides God first in our lives. Anything – people, places, activities, objects – that tempts us to find happiness and peace outside of God is a lie that will end up failing us.

I often think of the many things God has blessed me with in my life. But there is no blessing bigger and more important than the Source of the blessing. God is worthy of honor, praise, devotion and adoration. No one and nothing else are more worthy of being worshiped, adored or trusted than God. That’s why He is number one in our life.

Almighty God, You are worthy of all glory and honor. Help me cling to the First Commandment to love and rely on You more than anything or anyone else. May my life bring glory to You, today and always. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 20:7

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 20:7

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

At the base of Mount Sinai, after freeing them from the Egyptians, God gave His people the Ten Commandments. God does not force us to follow His Commandments, for God just took His people out of forced labor in Egypt. Rather He asks us to live a life that is within the beauty of His laws.

The Second Commandment is "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God." God's name is a holy gift that we should always cherish. Jesus makes this clear when He gave us The Lord's Prayer, in Matthew 6:9 He says, "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'" The Second Commandment seems simple enough, respect the name of your Lord and Savior and do not use it in vain. The phrase "in vain," means to use improperly or in a useless irreverent fashion. As simple as the Second Commandment may seem, common language is filled with foul use of our Lord's name.

The devil works hard to diminish our attention on the Commandments that God set for our lives so that we lower our guard and fall into his evil trap. In today's society, Christians and non-believers alike misuse the Lord's name so commonly that it goes without notice. You know our guard is down when we do not even blink at the sound of the Lord's name being taken in vain. Similarly, to that of a terrible smell that your nose becomes blind to over time, we do not even smell the stench of using our Lord's name out of its holy context. It happens as commonly as the numerous phrases foolishly said when we stub our toe, when our favorite team misses free throws at the end of a close game, or when frustrations abound at work. Like a sickness, the devil has flooded our speech and made us numb to the sin of taking the gift of God's name out of its holy context that is meant for praise, worship, prayer, and identity.

God's name defines us, and we are His children in our baptismal waters. He refers to Himself in many holy names throughout the Bible in different contexts. He is the Messiah, the Alpha and the Omega, our Father, Almighty, and I AM. Many of His names come from the different ways He loves us, created us, and blesses us. Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; those who run to it are safe." This safety finds its culmination in the name of Jesus, which means "God saves." God saves you—every time you remember His name or not. God saves you—every time you glorify His name or not. God saves you—every time you keep God's name holy or not. Our focus as Christians is to share the great gift of God's name with others while we use our speech to point to "God saves."

God, we come to You and call on Your holy name. We thank You for the great gift of Your name. As we go today, help us to be intentional with our speech and to keep our words pleasing in Your sight. Let us find peace in Your holy name, God, and share that with others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Third Commandment: The Gift of Rest

AUTHOR: Terri Ernst

READ: EXODUS 20:8-11

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 20:8

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

When I was growing up, I'd say that I spent at least half a dozen birthdays at my local Chuck E. Cheese restaurant. Of course, to a kid, a Chuck E. Cheese birthday party was just as cool back in the 80s as it is to a kid today! The main reason I spent so many birthdays at that fine (pizza) dining establishment and arcade was that in one of the rooms for the parents to eat was a large singing animatronic lion that doubled as an Elvis impersonator, sequin jumpsuit and all. My Elvis-loving dad listened to an endless track of his favorites by "The King," while my siblings and I would run around with cupcake-infused chaos, tokens and tickets crammed in our pockets.

My favorite game to play there was Whack-a-Mole. You've played this one before, right? There are about six slots where a mole will suddenly appear and you get to bash his head with a mallet and make him duck back into his hiding spot. The more moles you whack, the more tickets you earn, and the more accomplished you feel in a matter of forty-five seconds.

These days, doesn't life seem to feel like one extensive game of Whack-a-Mole? With all the busyness of our lives, with all the endless to-do list items, we handle each daily task we are given and move on quickly to the next one. Many times, our tasks do not require much thought, it's routine and muscle memory takes over. We work each day to whack whatever agenda item we can and often, we do not take the time to think about why we do what we do.

Thankfully, by His grace, the Lord has provided us with a set of commands that help us complete our daily tasks with a positive mindset. The Third Commandment comes from Exodus 20: 8-10: "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God."

The Sabbath Day is a day of rest and worship. The Lord gives to His people a full day each week to unplug the game and make that mole hibernate. His desire is strong for us to come to worship, to pray, to listen, to be forgiven, to give thanks to Him along with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Indeed, the preparation for our worship time may not always be easy (parents of little ones especially know what I mean), but coming to worship and receiving all these gifts our Lord so freely offers allows us to grow in our faith and will give us rest. May your day of Sabbath draw you closer to the Lord and may that day be completely mole free.

Heavenly Father, thank You for providing us a day of rest, to be recharged by the Holy Spirit and to dwell in Your house, with loving people You have placed all around us. Please help us keep our minds focused on You as we complete our daily tasks, and look forward to deepening our faith as we worship You on the Sabbath Day. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Fourth Commandment: The Gift of Parents

AUTHOR: Abby Collins

READ: EXODUS 20:12

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 20:12

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”

The Fourth Commandment talks about the gift of parents. Sometimes it is hard to agree with or get along with your parents. Maybe you have chores that you don't enjoy doing, like cleaning the dishes, cleaning the bathroom, or maybe even cleaning your bedroom. Maybe your parents don't like the people you hang out with, or maybe it's just the slight bit of attitude in your voice when you say something that they hear and you don't.

For kids in general, you don't know what it is like to be a parent, to take care of your own kids and be there for them, but also discipline them and make sure you are raising people that will love and respect God and others. Kids just want to be respected, loved, heard, and understood. And actually, I would say the same goes for parents. Ephesians 6:1-3 says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise— ‘so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’” In these verses it says that if you honor your father and mother, you will enjoy life to its fullest. This makes sense, because parents want what is best for their children. But we aren't supposed to just honor them for the rewarding life that we receive, but we are to honor our parents with love and respect for who they are.

So, kids of any age, respect your parents, whether you are an adult and you have moved out of the house, or you are just a little kid learning about the world. Your parents want what is best for you. Even if you don't understand now, you will learn that they love you and only want what's best for you and your life.

Sometimes I find it hard to cope with my parents when I'm tired or I just want to lay down. Doing stuff you don't want to do at that moment can be difficult. But most of the time I respect my parents, in what I say and in what I do. They help me understand things I didn't before and I owe it to my parents for who I am today.

If I owe it to my parents for who I am today, how much more true can that statement be of our Heavenly Father? Our Heavenly Father continually only wants what is best for us. He looks to discipline us, love us, and form us into the people He sees we can be. We receive all the riches of His kingdom through an inheritance given to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. I can't wait to live long in the land God is going to give us—eternal life!

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the parents You have given us. But most importantly, thank You for giving us Your Son so we may be counted as Your children. Please help us to love and respect You and our parents in all we say and do. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

THIS IS MY STORY

Fifth Commandment: The Gift of Life

AUTHOR: Gary Goshorn

THIS IS MY SONG

READ: EXODUS 20:13

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 20:13

You shall not murder.

God's Fifth Commandment is the gift of life. While many of us may think that we keep this Commandment every day, Jesus teaches us to look at this Commandment differently. Life doesn't come only in not killing, life also comes in our words and actions. Jesus says in Matthew 5:21-22, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment."

God has always had a vision for how mankind should treat one another. His desire has been for us to love our neighbor as ourselves and to do unto others as we would have them to do unto us, both in our actions and our words. The Bible has many passages instructing us on how important it is to show love for all people, no matter their situation in life. According to Jesus, not showing love is life and death.

But many times with our actions we choose death and not life. When we fail to express love to our fellow brother or intentionally choose hatred (i.e. retaliation, slander, contempt, outrage, physical harm, revenge, or worse) it is sin in God's eyes and all sin is unacceptable. Hateful words and actions are not God's plan for His people because it hinders their witness of the Gospel to others. Jesus died for all—this Commandment tells us to value others in that light.

God's intent is for us to demonstrate acts of grace, kindness, dignity, understanding, forgiveness, patience, good will, mercy and generosity. How do we know this? Because each one of these are fulfilled in the work of Christ on the cross. He is the One who gives us grace, kindness, dignity, understanding, forgiveness, patience, good will, mercy, and generosity. But God doesn't leave us to accomplish this huge list on our own. He sent us the Holy Spirit so that we, by our actions, can help fulfill God's plan for the world around us. May our actions play a role in bringing life to all our earthly brothers and sisters.

Dear God, thank You for giving us the gift of life through Your death. Thank You, God, for directing us to Your pathway of love and assurance. Through Your Spirit, spur us on to give the gift of life through our words and our actions to our brothers and our sisters. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Sixth Commandment: The Gift of Commitment

AUTHOR: Jon Nolting

READ: EXODUS 20:14

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 20:14

You shall not commit adultery.

Our sermon series in Advent, *A Dysfunctional Family Christmas*, taught us that the Bible has no shortage of explicit or R-rated material. Researching this commandment, I was directed to some passages in Scripture detailing harsh penalties for dealing with sexual immorality. For example, in Leviticus, it lists several family members for which sexual relationships would result in death. Matthew 5:27 tells us that if your lust-filled eye causes you to sin it's better to gouge it out than to be tempted and cause your whole body to sin. The five simple words in this Commandment are clearly not to be taken half-heartedly in their most literal sense.

I'm sure you've heard the over-simplified adage "sex sells." Turn on your TV or open your social media and it won't take long to stumble across some sort of sexually explicit or inappropriate content. Temptation is literally everywhere in our tech-filled world. But marital fidelity is more than just resisting "sex sells" urges.

It's easy to get entangled in the "don't lie, cheat, or be a creep" explanation of this commandment. But what's not as easy is understanding the part of marriage and commitment that doesn't sell as well or get as many clicks; the true commitment and selfless giving to your spouse. It's one thing to be 100% faithful, it's equally important to be utterly committed to and selflessly supportive of your spouse every moment of your life.

Marriage is truly a reflection of our relationship with God. Genesis 2:24 tells us "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." God wastes no time in Scripture and tells us that marriage is the union of a man and a woman into one flesh. Notice it doesn't say "A man leaves his mother to be united to his wife but calls back home to complain every once in a while." No marriage is perfect because of our sin, but it is our duty to work tirelessly to reflect God's love in our relationship. It's not always easy, but it truly must be a commitment full of sacrificial giving from both individuals.

God's perfect union with the church is to be our shining example of marriage to our spouse. The relationship of Jesus to the Church is often referred to in words of marriage: the Church is His Bride and He gave His life for it (Ephesians 5:25). Since we can never completely follow His example, we His Bride can take comfort in the forgiveness He has provided through His life, death, and resurrection. Marriage is more than just "not committing adultery," it's a daily commitment to always put the needs of our spouse ahead of our own.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of marriage. Help us to glorify You by demonstrating our love and commitment to each other through the gift of marriage. Strengthen and encourage those who may struggle with the temptations of adultery to remain steadfast in their vows. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Seventh Commandment: The Gift of Giving

AUTHOR: James Thomack

READ: EXODUS 20:15

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 20:15

You shall not steal.

As we have been seeing while going through God's Ten Commandments, not only does each Commandment tell us what we as Christians should not be doing, it also hints at another side of what we should be doing and the Seventh Commandment is no different. Insight into these Commandments reveals a deeper truth that behind every negative prohibition lies a positive implication. So, as we explore the prohibition against stealing, we further uncover the call to radical giving.

Everyone is aware of the surface level use of the Seventh Commandment, you can't steal stuff. When little Johnny realizes that his brother's new lava lamp is the coolest thing in the world and then decides to take it as his own, that is clearly wrong. However, this command extends beyond material goods to include stealing of any form be it trust, dignity, or opportunities. In this Commandment the Lord in His wisdom calls His people to uphold justice, honesty, and integrity in their dealings with one another.

Furthermore, Martin Luther, a church reformer, encourages us to dig deeper. If we are to refrain from stealing, then we are also called to mirror this command and give enthusiastically. The opposite of taking is giving, and the Christian life is marked by a spirit of generosity. The act of giving is not merely a suggestion; it is woven into the fabric of our faith. It mirrors the very essence of God's love.

At the heart of Christianity is the ultimate act of giving, the sacrificial gift of Jesus Christ. God, in His boundless love, gave His Son to be our salvation and Jesus, "being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8). This act of selfless giving becomes the cornerstone of our faith.

As followers of Christ, we are called to emulate this divine generosity, our lives should reflect what we have received. We give not out of obligation but out of gratitude. In giving, we mirror the sacrificial love of our Savior. We become vessels through which God's love flows into the lives of others.

The positive implication of the Seventh Commandment transcends the mere avoidance of theft. It beckons us to embody radical love, a love that goes beyond refraining from theft to actively seeking the well-being of others. This love compels us to give generously, share abundantly, and become beacons of God's love in a world that thirsts for grace.

Dear God, thank You for giving Your Son up to death on a cross to assure us salvation. Please help us to give exuberantly and love unwaveringly. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THIS IS MY STORY

Eighth Commandment: The Gift of Reputation

THIS IS MY SONG

AUTHOR: Kyle Shipp

READ: EXODUS 20:16

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 20:16

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

In the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:16 shines as a beacon of truth. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” is not merely a calling; it’s a sacred covenant inviting us into a life of honesty focused on our neighbor. At its core, the Eighth Commandment urges us to be custodians of truth in our relationships. It’s an acknowledgment that falsehood corrodes the fabric of trust that binds communities together.

Can you imagine a world where honesty is the cornerstone of every relationship? This vision aligns with the divine wisdom explained in Exodus 20:16. The Commandment challenges us to be not only truth bearers, but people who seek to uphold the reputation of each and every person. In a society quickly drowning in trying to keep up with the advances of AI; trying to figure out what is real (truth) and what is fake, the Eighth Commandment can be a tough task. You see this Commandment isn’t just about avoiding lies: it’s a commitment to transparency and a life lived devoted to the well-being of your neighbor. When we uphold truthfulness and the goodness of others, we create a space where those people feel safe to be themselves. But this Commandment doesn’t just stop with face-to-face communication, the invitation to uphold our neighbor’s reputation extends to the keyboard of our computer or phone. Lies or false information, however they are spread, fracture the sacred trust we’re called to uphold.

In contrast, Jesus tells us “I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). Jesus lived a life of preaching and proclaiming the truth about Himself to others. But this truth for Jesus left Him surrounded by false witnesses at His trial, and nailed to the cross for the forgiveness of each and every one of those same people. And Jesus extends that same forgiveness to you today. And as you go on in your life as a forgiven child of God know that honesty doesn’t merely restrain us from falsehood; it allows us to live in the light of the Gospel. When people know that we are authentic and truthful, we have the opportunity to witness to the truth of the Gospel, Jesus Christ.

Dear God, thank You for Your forgiveness. Help me live in that forgiveness as I love my neighbor. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Ninth and Tenth Commandments: The Gift of Contentment

THIS IS MY STORY

AUTHOR: Maddie Beyer

THIS IS MY SONG

READ: EXODUS 20:17

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 20:17

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

In a world where everyone is perfecting their Instagram worthy lives, it is so easy to be overcome with jealousy. It becomes so easy to want the things, relationships, and lives of other people as they curate perfect social media feeds. Jealousy is a real thing. We have to remember that God has placed the Ninth and Tenth Commandments in our lives to remind us to not compare ourselves with others. Paul admonishes us, "When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12).

While jealousy is hard to overcome, the steps to contentment begin with being grateful for the gifts God has given to you. While the latest trendy water bottle, pair of clogs, or new jeans seem like the answers to some void we have in our lives, we forget to celebrate the gifts we already have been given. "Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God" (Ecclesiastes 5:19).

The truth about things is they break, tarnish, or become so last year. Our focus for filling some void that we think material items will fill has to shift to more lasting things: faith, hope, and love. The apostle Paul reminds us of the greatest gifts in 1 Corinthians 13:13, "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." The love of our Heavenly Father is the ultimate lasting possession. And the love of our family and friends will last longer than our latest BeReal post.

Once we can truly be content with our blessings, no matter how different they are from our neighbors', then the gift of the Ninth and Tenth Commandments are ours and our relationship with God will also be strengthened. For our blessing of eternal life through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection is not fleeting. "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). And what is unseen, at least currently? Your faith, Christ, and eternal life. But there will come a day when even the unseen things will be seen!

Heavenly Father, help us find contentment in our blessings You have so richly given us, both the seen and unseen blessings. We focus our hearts and our minds on the unseen blessing of eternal salvation. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The Blood

AUTHOR: Daniel Meadows

READ: EXODUS 24:1-11

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 24:8

Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Imagine you’ve been hiking for the last three months, pretty intense by any measure. But equally as intense, would be the smell coming off you and everyone around you. God grants His people two days to prepare and wash their clothing to receive His commands. For the first time in several weeks, you can stand close to your fellow Israelites and not be overpowered by the stench of sweat and body odor that comes with hiking through the desert.

As you are enjoying your clean clothes and fresh smells of others around you, several fluid droplets land on your skin. Droplets land in your hair and onto your freshly washed clothing. Is it raining? No, that’s blood...It’s certainly not what you expected on your freshly washed clothes and you can’t help but think: “This will add another layer to the horrible stench of sweat that will likely return in a few days.”

Exodus 24:8 not only makes you sniff unpleasant smells, it also can certainly make you picture unpleasant images, almost something from a horror film with blood spattered on people’s skin and painted across their clothing. However, this verse paints (pun intended) a very powerful message. In Exodus 24, Moses took half of the blood from the sacrificial offering and sprinkled it on the altar. He then used the other half of the blood to sprinkle onto the people saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with these words” (Exodus 24:8).

This covenant, or promise, made between God and His people was sealed with blood. For me it brings to mind similarities to a “blood oath” often shown in movies as a way to signify an important and unbreakable bond between characters. God had just laid out His covenant to His people and wanted to signify its importance with the sharing of the sacrificial blood.

As the Old Testament progresses, we see the Israelites eventually break this covenant. However, God alludes to making a “new covenant” in Jeremiah 31:31. And continuing to fast forward a bit more, we see Jesus use almost the same verbiage during the Last Supper by saying, “This is my blood of the covenant” (Matthew 26:28).

It may not have helped the Israelites keep their garments clean, but this cleansing power of blood had significant ties throughout the Bible with both the original covenant as well as to the covenant that Jesus gave us, which we’ll be celebrating in the week to come.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the cleansing power that the blood of Jesus has given us, and thank You for the covenant and hope in Jesus. Help us to follow You today and always. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 25:1-8

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 25:8

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.

Our verse of the day is one of the many directions that God gave to Moses. It sounds pretty simple, right? Especially considering that the other directions provided to Moses included the exact blueprint to what this sanctuary should contain, how it should be laid out, and even the exact color scheme. Every detail was dictated to Moses. All he had to do was execute the plan. In the times of Exodus, this direction from God was straight forward: make a place on Earth that is for Me exactly as I have commanded you. Do this and you will have a place where I can be with you. An actual place to be WITH God. How amazing is that?

As God's kingdom on Earth grows, He knows that this dwelling cannot be an actual place of stone, acacia wood, and fine linen and yet His simple direction "make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" is just as valid. What changes? The materials for which He is asking us to use changes. The blueprint changes. What are the materials now? Only Jesus. Jesus is the material. Jesus is the blueprint. Jesus is the sanctuary. Jesus is the plan.

The Lord is relentless in His pursuit to show us His plans. The plan is still simple and straightforward. God wants to be with His people. The crazy part is that for us it is easy. All we have to do is, by faith, receive the gifts of God through Jesus. Jesus provides directions to us in teachings that will enable each of us to build beautiful sanctuaries of our lives (1 Corinthians 6:19).

As we enter Holy Week on Palm Sunday, let us take a moment to be thankful to the followers of Jesus that welcomed Him into the city of Jerusalem. They may not have known it at the time, but they were opening the door for all of us. Jesus remains on the doorstep to all the children of God, ready and willing to share the blueprint to the sanctuary.

We may not be able to sit in the physical sanctuary that Moses built to be with our Lord, but if we follow Jesus and His blueprint for our lives, we become the sanctuary that God Himself will be dwelling in, giving us an actual place to be WITH God. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). How amazing is that?

Dear Heavenly Father, please help send Your Holy Spirit into our homes, hearts, and minds so that we may learn from You the blueprint to sanctuary and salvation. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

READ: EXODUS 25:10-22

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 25:22

There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

Christmas morning my son opened up one of his presents to find that he had gotten one of those marble maze sets. This was not the regular marble maze sets, but the “ultimate” one which had a lot more pieces to it. The goal of the marble maze is to start from the top, make the marble go through a bunch of obstacles, and make it to the bottom. When we opened it up to set up the track, we found it had a very long, detailed set of instructions. As my husband was putting it together, he would stop and test out the track. This way he could see if he had accidentally missed anything. If he did, he would fix it then, instead of finding out if it didn’t work when it was all put together. We wanted to make sure the marble maze was set up exactly how we wanted it. After being patient and following all the precise guidelines from the toy’s manufacturer we were able to set it up correctly and get the marble all the way to the end of the course.

As you read through Exodus 25-31 you will find that God gives very specific details about how to construct the tabernacle. Yesterday we looked at some of the blueprints for the sanctuary. Today we are looking at Exodus 25:10-22 where God explains how He wants the Ark of the Covenant built. God goes into details about the specific wood and metal that the Israelites were to use and even the exact direction in which the cherubim faced. Why? The exact same reason there were strict directions on how to build the marble maze. If the Ark was rushed and Moses didn’t follow the directions, the outcome wouldn’t have been what God wanted.

As we are in Holy Week, know this: God did not rush into planning anything this week. His details were very thought out. He had been planning this event since Genesis 3:15. All the details of this week are in the hands of your Heavenly Father. From Jesus’ travel into Jerusalem (Matthew 21: 1-11), His last meal with His disciples (Matthew 26:20-30), and the crucifixion of His Son (Matthew 27:32-61) every detail was in God’s plan. This week, watch God’s craftsmanship as He methodically and meticulously puts together the plan for your salvation and your life to come.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the detailed directions You have provided in Your Word. I ask that You give me the patience to listen and follow all the path You have laid out for me and my life. During this season of Lent allow me to give everything to You and allow myself to hear You speak Your will for me. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 32:1-10

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 32:7-8

And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’”

In the midst of all of the instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle, the narrative of Exodus takes an abrupt shift to tell us a different story. In Exodus 32:7-8, we encounter a mournful moment when the Israelites, in the absence of Moses, turned their attention away from God and His commands and succumbed to the allure of materialism. The passage reflects a common real-world tendency to become fixated on tangible possessions and personal desires, often at the expense of our spiritual health.

The Israelites, waiting for Moses to descend from Mount Sinai, grew restless and insecure. Today this can be prevalent in our day to day lives when our “prize” is not within immediate reach. Driven by impatience and a desire for tangible representations of security, the Israelites requested Aaron to create gods for them—a golden calf that they could see and touch. This act represents a stark deviation from their covenant with the one true God, as they sought comfort in the material rather than trusting in the everlasting promise of protection and guidance.

The inclination toward materialism is not confined to events in the Bible; it resonates with us today. In a world filled with constant distractions and a relentless pursuit of material success, it’s easy to lose sight of our spiritual foundations. The golden calves in our lives may not be literal idols, but may manifest themselves in the form of possessions, status, or achievements that we prioritize over our security in God.

Yet, among these prevalent distractions, God remains steadfast in His promises. This story underscores the enduring nature of God’s promises and His willingness to forgive and redeem His people when we return to Him. It serves as a reminder that our fixation on material things need not define us or sever our connection with Him. God’s promises are not contingent on our perfection but on Jesus and His love for us, His people.

In our modern lives, muddled by the pursuit of material wealth and societal validation, we can find comfort in knowing that God’s promise remains unshaken. May we recognize the uselessness of golden idols and hold highest the unwavering promise—Jesus with you.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the prosperous world we live in and the many things we have at our disposal. Help us to prevent them from becoming false idols. As we move through our daily lives, help us to keep our focus on You, as You are our one almighty God. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Holy Week: Does Prayer Matter?

AUTHOR: David Fugill

READ: EXODUS 32:11-14

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 32:14

And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

There have probably been times when each of us have wondered “Does God really answer my prayers?” We wonder this because there have been times when we think our prayers have gone unanswered, our prayers have not been granted, or things just don’t go the way we would like them to. This can range from the most insignificant, mundane task to things much more serious. We may plead to the Lord, “Please, God, don’t let this work meeting, that could have been an email, last more than an hour,” or it could be, “Please, God, let my father’s cancer be healed.”

When our prayers are answered as we wish, we tend to praise and thank God. However, when things go the other way, we often find ourselves confused, down-trodden, and angry at God. It makes us wonder if He’s even listening or if our prayers are doing any good at all. The thing is, our prayers won’t always be answered in the way we desire. We can’t see the whole picture; we don’t know the whole plan. Only God sees and knows that.

For example, take a basketball game. Before the game begins, players on both teams pray to God for their team to win the game. However, without even seeing how the game ends, we know that one of those team’s prayers won’t be answered as they want. Only one team can win the game.

Sometimes, our prayers won’t be answered to our liking, not because God is mad at us or He isn’t listening, and not because He won’t change His plan ever. Rather, He has greater things in store with His plan. We just can’t see it yet.

With that said, prayer does work. God does change His plan for us sometimes. For instance, take Exodus 32:11-14—we see Moses pray to God on Israel’s behalf. Moses implores God to relent from His anger that burns against His people. God was ready to send Moses away and wipe the people of Israel off the face of the Earth. That was His plan, but then Moses stepped in and advocated on the people’s behalf. He pleaded with God to spare the people of Israel, “Yes, they sinned, and yes, they should atone for their sin, but You shouldn’t kill them. Remember your promise that you made to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.” And it worked! God changed His plan because of Moses’ prayer and spared the Israelites from His wrath.

So, should we still pray to God? Absolutely! Prayer does make a difference, and God always answers our prayers because we have a Mediator even greater than Moses who advocates on our behalf: we have Jesus!

Heavenly Father, please help us to accept the plan that You have for us, even if it may not be what we are wishing for and we may not see the whole plan. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Holy Week: Maundy Thursday

AUTHOR: Adam Everroad

READ: EXODUS 33:12-23

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 33:16

“For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

Think of a time when you did something for someone else you cared about? One of the first ones that pops in my head is something that happened a few months ago. Every year Trinity Lutheran High School puts on their annual musical in November. When I was at Trinity, I performed in every musical they did and thoroughly enjoyed it. However, this year was different. I couldn't be in the musical since I had graduated earlier in May. However, I still wanted to attend the performance. After all, it would be one of the final shows for one of my best buddies. A problem then arose. How would I go see his play when I'm almost six hours away at college with my busy college schedule? The answer to that was simple. I drove six hours to come and see my friend's musical. Was it an absolutely exhausting trip to drive that far and then immediately have to go back the next day? Yes. Do I regret doing it? No. I wouldn't have changed a single thing. I care for my friends and wanted to be with them during their performance. That made a sacrifice on my part an easy decision.

However, while I care for my friends, no one quite cares for us like our Heavenly Father. How has God interceded for us? I think that's a pretty easy question that most people can answer. The answer is Jesus, since God sent Him down to die for our sins. However, in this text, Moses also intercedes for the people of Israel. In the previous chapter, the Israelites had just built a golden calf, which of course was blatantly against God's commands. Since Israel had disobeyed God's commands, God was ready to punish them. However, as Moses had done several times before, he interceded on the people's behalf. I think this action should not be taken very lightly. Not many people have done this before or have been willing to interpose themselves for God's people in the Bible. Moses in this instance is like someone else who has interceded on our behalf. That person is of course Jesus.

The verse of the day from Exodus 33:16, it brings up the point of how we are distinct from the other people on this Earth. The Israelites were distinct from the other nations of the earth because they had the presence of YHWH dwelling with them. We are different from other people because of Jesus. We too have the presence of YHWH with us. Jesus died for us. Jesus loves us. Jesus calls us to love, worship, and glorify Him. Tonight we celebrate that in a very special way we have the presence of God with us in His true Body and true Blood for the forgiveness of our sins. This is how God goes with us and this makes us distinct from others.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for having Your Son intervene for us so that we may be saved and live with You forever in Your presence. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Holy Week: Good Friday

AUTHOR: Sarah Nolting

READ: EXODUS 26:31-37

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 26:33

And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy.

Have you ever heard the saying, “it’s weighing on me?” It’s a saying that we likely don’t think twice about when using, but its meaning, to feel burdened or oppressed, is a real feeling that many of us experience. At times it can feel like a mental load, where it’s all we can think about, where it takes up all the space in our minds. It could even feel like a physical weight, where layers of worry, anxiety, or fear continue to pile on top of us to a point where it’s almost unbearable. Imagine if we wore the weight of our sin. If every time we performed an immoral act or did something that brought shame to God, another layer of weight would be added to our backs. How heavy would that weight be, and how long could you carry it?

The curtain, described in Exodus 26:31-37, was also heavy; measuring somewhere around thirty feet long, thirty feet high and thirty feet wide. At nearly four inches thick, this curtain was used as a separation. Separating us from God, the curtain was hung for a reason. Why? Because God is holy and we are not. We couldn’t be in the presence of God because of the weight of our sin. It was a weight that we couldn’t carry, or at the very least a weight we couldn’t carry alone. Which is why Good Friday changes all of that.

Good Friday is described as good, because it’s the day that Jesus paid the penalty in full for all of our sins. On that day, Jesus took the weight of our sin off of our backs and He carried it with Him. Jesus bore the weight of our sin on the cross and through pain and turmoil, He made the ultimate sacrifice for me and for you.

When Jesus spoke His last words on the cross, God tore through the curtain and granted us access to the Most Holy Place; to Him. On that day, God promised that we no longer would bear the weight of our own sin. God paid the ultimate sacrifice. His presence is yours today because of the death of His Son.

So when you are faced with anxiety or fear, and that weight begins to pile onto your shoulders, turn to Him. Because starting on that Friday and for the rest of time, God made a promise. A promise that we would never walk alone, that He would carry the weight for us, and that He would always be with us.

Dear God, You made the ultimate sacrifice through the death of Your Son. You tore through the curtain, washed us of our sins, and granted us a life alongside You. May we always be grateful for Your presence. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 34:1-7

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 34:6

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

As people, we like to use adjectives to describe how we feel. Words like happy, sad, rich, poor, funny, etc. However, most of us would not describe ourselves as merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and definitely not abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. If I heard a peer of mine describe themselves in that way I would be lost. In our verse of the day we see our God use those exact words to describe Himself, and they are nothing but the truth. God gives us an example of His character in this particular passage where the Lord God commanded Moses to create two new stone tablets to replace the ones that were broken. The Lord came down before Moses on Mount Sinai again and proclaimed these words to Moses.

For some context, two chapters before in Exodus 32 the Israelites had rebelled against God and created the golden calf and turned their faces away from God. How many times in our lives have we done the same thing? How many times have we said, "You know what God, I think you are wrong so I am going to do it my way." How many times have we thought, "I don't need God because something else is my 'god' like money, sports, or even other relationships." This was the situation that the Israelites had put themselves in, however the God of the universe again showed His steadfast love and faithfulness to them. He showed the Israelites mercy and grace even when they turned away from Him.

We see the ultimate example of this during Holy Week. God sent His one and only Son down to this world to die and rise again three days later out of mercy, grace, not getting angry, and abounding in His steadfast love and faithfulness for us. God could have said, "You wicked people, I am done with you because time and time again you fail Me." But that is not our God. Our God loves each and every one of us not because of anything that we have done or will do, but because we are His children. No matter how far we try and run, He will always seek us out and be there for us. So, as we go through this day, Holy Saturday, waiting to celebrate Christ's triumphant resurrection from the grave, let's take time to remember that this is only possible because God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6).

Dear God, thank You for choosing love, even when we do not deserve it. Thank You for sending Your one and only Son to this Earth to pay the ultimate price for our sins. Today as we wait for Your Son's return on Easter Sunday we remember and thank You for this love that You show us every day. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

READ: EXODUS 40:17-38

VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 40:38

For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

As we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ today, we rejoice in the outpouring of God's presence in our worship as we joyfully proclaim:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen Indeed! Alleluia!

In these last verses of Exodus, we read that Moses willingly and obediently finished the work of building the Tabernacle "just as God had commanded him." God dwelt with His people in a cloud by day and a fire by night. His glory filled the Tabernacle! The Israelites had been freed from Egyptian slavery to the very presence of God. They were in a good place.

In God's perfect plan and time, "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14) Jesus came to Earth and tabernacled with sinners. He came to fulfill the promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15. In the past few days, we have pondered the great exchange, that is: "Jesus who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Like Moses, our Lord Jesus Christ willingly and obediently finished His saving work on the cross. Like the Israelites being freed from slavery, Jesus has liberated all believers from the bondage of sin. When we confess our sins, we receive His forgiveness. We are "set free to become slaves of God...and the result is eternal life" (Romans 6:22). Again, because of Jesus alone, we are in a good place.

Today, on this Resurrection Sunday, we rejoice that Christ's death completely satisfied His Father and His resurrection brings us new life! He is victorious over sin, death itself, and Satan. The tomb was empty. His body resurrected. Jesus. Is. Alive! This day in history changes everything. The presence of God is not found in a building but in ordinary people who have put their faith and trust in Jesus. Ten days after Jesus ascended back to His Father, the promised Holy Spirit came not only to dwell WITH believers but also IN them. His very presence is IN us as His dearly loved and forgiven children. God's powerful presence and glory now fills His Church! Like the Israelites at the end of Exodus, because of Jesus, we have a living hope and are now in a very good place.

Heavenly Father, praise be to You, God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In your great mercy, You have given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! Thank You for the gift of Your very presence always with us in our joys and sorrows. Thank You, Lord, for the hope and blessed assurance that we too will be resurrected in Your set time and will dwell with You forever. Until that day, Lord, we thank You for leaving us Your Spirit, growing us into deeper intimacy with You, sanctifying and transforming us to be a living sanctuary for You and for Your glory alone. In Jesus' resurrected name we pray, Amen.

UPCOMING WORSHIP



ASH WEDNESDAY

February 14 at 12:15 PM and 7 PM Imposition of Ashes and Holy Communion

WEDNESDAYS OF LENT

February 21–March 20 (7 PM only; March 13 at The Den mezzanine)



WEEKENDS OF LENT

February 17–March 24

Saturday, March 2 at 6 PM (Night of Praise at The Den)

PALM SUNDAY WEEKEND

Saturday, March 23 at 6 PM

Sunday, March 24 at 8 AM & 10:45 AM

MAUNDY THURSDAY, MARCH 28 at 12:15 PM & 7 PM with communion

GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 29 (school and church offices closed)

Traditional at 12:15 PM & 7 PM

Contemporary at 6 PM in the Den

(Note: There will not be a worship service on Saturday, March 30)

EASTER SUNDAY, MARCH 31

Traditional Sunrise at 6:30 AM

Traditional at 8 AM and 9:30 AM with communion

Contemporary at 11 AM with communion

WEEKEND AFTER EASTER

Saturday, April 6 at 6 PM (Night of Praise in The Den)

Sunday, April 7 at 8 AM with communion

Sunday, April 7 at 10:45 AM

Wednesday, April 10 at 7 PM with communion



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