

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Monday, March 29

Listen

John 20:16a

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

Some time ago, a little boy was in a busy shopping mall. He was interested at the toys in the window and the next thing he knew his mother was gone. So, he did what he was told to do. His mother had told him to, “Go to the fishpond and watch the fish. I will come and pick you up.” So, he did. Sometime later over all of the chattering and noise in the Mall he heard his name and he knew who it was. It was Mom, just as she had promised. God does that in our lives too.

Mary had gone to the tomb to anoint Jesus after His death, but the stone was rolled away. Someone must have stolen the body of Jesus. She tells the Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loved and they see the empty tomb and go home, not understanding that Jesus must rise from the dead. They return to their homes dejected. Mary still didn't understand and she wept. Even though Mary looked into the dark tomb again, saw two angels who asked her, “Woman why are you weeping?” The world was spinning and she was lost. Until, Jesus revealed who He Is in one word. “Mary!”

We like to think that we are educated and intelligent, yet everything remains a mystery until the Holy Spirit reveals who Jesus is in our lives. For many it happens in the waters of baptism. They grow up knowing who Jesus is and they learn his promises in Sunday School. For others it's as abrupt as a word spoken to them. In a moment, everything makes sense! All the world stops spinning and with utter clarity they know Jesus is real! He is Alive! Everything has changed!

Here's the power of God at work through the Holy Spirit. Jesus (The Word) He created all things in the beginning with God who spoke all things into existence, (John 1:1-4,14, Genesis 1:1-31) except man. (Genesis 2:8) It is God who, ⁴ **...determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.** ⁵ **Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. (Psalm 147:4-5)** He knows all of the stars by name, He knows everything about us, every thought we have and all of our ways, even before we speak, He know what we'll say (Psalm 139) Jesus knows you and calls you by name. We see that in John chapter 10.

¹⁴ **I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,** ¹⁵ **just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)** ²⁷ **My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.** ²⁸ **I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:27)**

Mary understood in God's timing which is perfect. Jesus had risen from the dead! Only God can do this. He enters into our simple lives and gives us hope. He reminds us we are not alone, but He has come that we might have life abundantly. (John 10:10) Every day we open the scriptures we see the promise again. He has come that we might have life in His name.

Almighty God, with You all things are possible! (Matthew 19:26) Although, we may not understand it, You are at work in our lives, helping us to understand what it means to listen to Your voice. Help us to be attentive to Your guidance through Your Holy Spirit today that we may trust You in all things. Amen

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Tuesday, March 30

Pray

1 Corinthians 15:3

³For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures...

We turn on the news today and hear all the things happening at home and around the world. Did you ever stop to think what we consider news worthy? Something that is news worthy must affect our lives in some way. If the event affects how we feel about something in our lives it may potentially change how we look at the future. Sometimes the news we listen to is focused on our fears and other times it's on our ideals, principles and emotions. What we listen to can change our perception of how we see the world around us.

Paul lays it straight. ***“Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ²through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)*** Everything in the world pales in comparison to what Paul has told them about Jesus Christ. Paul gives us the gospel pure and simple, **1) Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures** (just as it says in the scriptures), **2) Jesus was raised on the third day** (just as it says in the scriptures) **3) He appeared to Cephas, then the twelve disciples, then more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, then James and all the apostles, and last of all to me (Paul). If you missed it 5) Jesus Is Risen! So many people have seen it. It's real! He Is Alive. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords!** Paul doesn't tell us about what's happening in the world, everything else means nothing, don't get me wrong. We are to “love our neighbor as ourself.” Our problem has never been loving ourselves, it's be loving others as much as we already love ourselves. We are still called to treat others as we would like to be treated. We are still to work for truth and be just. The most important news of all is that Jesus died for our sins on the cross and He rose again. It's through faith in Him that we receive the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life with Him.

This is different from the news that is meant to make us afraid, or consider how it might affect our livelihood or may interrupt our lives. The Good News of Jesus Christ is about having **“real life”** in His name.

When you think about what is important to you what if Christ came to be part of every aspect of your life. What if He wants to be more than just one hour of your life each week? What if He wants you to know that He walks with you every second of everyday and is there to guide you and give you strength, so you may know you are never alone.

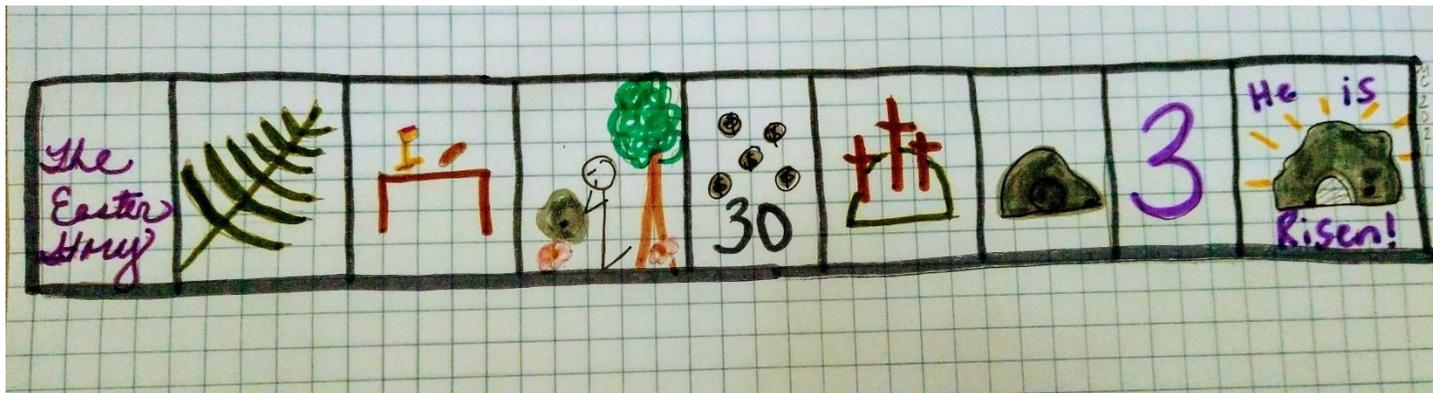
Take 2 minutes consider what God has been teaching you as you pray:

Feel free to end your prayer in this way

Heavenly Father, open my heart that I may understand how You want to be part of every aspect of my life. Teach me to listen to Your voice in the Scriptures that I may recognize Your work in my life and the world around me. Help me see with the eyes of faith today. Amen

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Wednesday, March 31



The time is drawing nearer. Last week we journaled about Palm Sunday and in church this past Sunday we waved our palm branches as we worshiped Him.

I have had the honor of teaching some wonderful children over the last five weeks, preparing them for taking their First Communion. They are ready. Similarly, Jesus was ready for the events that would happen during this week that we call Holy Week- His last meal, instituting Communion, and being betrayed, convicted, and crucified. He knew what needed to happen and as it is written, it did.

Let's spend the rest of this week reading from the book of Matthew. Feel free to journal your favorite verses or to doodle the events of the week (see the picture for an idea).

Matthew 26:17-30 (Maundy Thursday)

Matthew 26:31-27:66 (Good Friday)

Matthew 28:1-10 (Easter Sunday)

Activity idea: Draw a series of pictures to help you retell the story of Easter.

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Thursday, April 1

Study

John 20:17

17 Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

It's not easy to drop off a child at day care, at school on the first day or even at college. Will everything be all right? Will they need your help? Are they going to adjust? Or maybe the one fear we all have, are we going to see them again? You've seen it time and time again. The long-extended goodbyes. The long hugs and tears shed. Or maybe the stoic awkward goodbyes with volumes said without a word spoken.

Mary held onto Jesus needing to feel His presence once again. Over joyed to see Him alive in astonishment and disbelief, and afraid of losing Him again, she held on to Him not wanting to let go. How many things do we hold onto without realizing they were never ours to have? We lose sight of what really matters. It isn't things, or moments, it's the unconditional love that only God can give that makes a difference. Mary was still learning the magnitude of what was happening. Jesus said, ***"I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."*** (John 20:17e,f) Jesus knew he was going to the Father in Heaven and he longed to be with Him again, yet there were still a few things He needed to do on earth.

Even before the Festival of the Passover, ***"Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."*** (John 13:1) ³***Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,"*** (John 13:3) He got up from the Passover table and began to wash the disciple's feet even Judas. He was teaching us that we are to be a servant of the servant and love one another with an agape love that was unconditional as He loves us with an agape love that is unconditional. Now He calls us to treat one another as He has treated us. To serve one another with a love that knows no limits and has no end.

We try to hold onto things in this world as a way to control the world around us, but it's impossible. Love, unconditional *agape* love is learning to let go and trust that God is there to guide and lead you even in the pain of having to say goodbye. We know that everything is placed into the hands of our Heavenly Father who has a plan so divine that we can't fathom its length, and width, height and depth in our lives. We have to learn to trust in Jesus' promise and to love one another unconditionally, as Jesus our Savior and Lord has loved us unconditionally.

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) "As the Father has (*agape* loved me unconditionally) loved me, I have also loved you (*agape* loved you unconditionally); abide in my love (*agape* unconditional love)." (John 15:9) He has called us to remain, dwell, stay, live, remain in His love and to be obedient to the will of God in Christ Jesus.

So, we are encouraged to let go of the things we want to hold onto, knowing that God's plan is beyond our understanding, but always filled with His unconditional *agape* love for us and His plan and will for our lives is perfect.

Heavenly Father, Your love and will for us is perfect and complete in every way. Open our hearts that we may abide in Christ's love and bear fruit that lasts. "In You we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28) Teach us to let go of the things that limit Your work in the world, that we may remain in Your unconditional love. Help us to love others unconditionally as You have called us to be a servant to all. Amen

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Friday, April 2

Hymn Devotion: Beneath the Cross of Jesus

Scripture: Philippians 2:7-11

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

History: Author, Elizabeth Clephane, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1830 and lived most of her life in the village of Melrose. Her father was the county sheriff. She was a woman acquainted with grief, but never let that stop her. Her parents both died while she was young, and she was never very healthy herself. Nevertheless, she was one of those cheerful people who brighten every corner. Elizabeth loved poetry and wrote several hymns, including Beneath the Cross of Jesus, which was not published until 4 years after her death.

Devotion: This is one of my favorite hymns that I have sung this song since I was a little girl. It was a song that I loved to sing harmony to, and it always brought me into the mood of the Lenten season. However, even though the melody always stirred up emotion in me, it wasn't until I truly looked at the words I was singing that I found and even deeper meaning in this song.

1 Beneath the cross of Jesus
I long to take my stand;
The shadow of a mighty rock
Within a weary land,
A home within a wilderness,
A rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat
And burdens of the day.

2 Upon the cross of Jesus,
My eye at times can see
The very dying form of one
Who suffered there for me.
And from my contrite heart, with tears,
Two wonders I confess:

The wonder of his glorious love
And my unworthiness.

3 I take, O cross, your shadow
For my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
The sunshine of his face;
Content to let the world go by,
To know no gain nor loss,
My sinful self my only shame,
My glory all, the cross.

In these lyrics, Elizabeth alluded to many Biblical passages that describe where we can find refuge from troubles. This is even more fitting as we have worked through a year like 2020. We feel the need of a mighty rock, a home, and a rest upon the way. Elizabeth says that, for her, Jesus' cross is that resting place. For her, Jesus' cross is her home within the wilderness, her rest upon the way. It's not too often we would think of the "cross" as a resting place. But it is in the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on that cross that we are able to feel secure and safe. So, now as I sing this song, I see the deep meaning each verse carries. In the first stanza, the cross is depicted as a desert oasis – a stop along the way where we can recover from the stress of life. The second stanza reminds me of the great cost of that oasis – Jesus suffered and died a tortuous death because of His great love for us – and how little we are worth in comparison. The last stanza echoes what Paul wrote to the Philippians: "whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:7-8a, ESV).

Prayer: Heavenly Father. We thank you for the cross that gives us our refuge in this wilderness. As we turn our eyes to the cross, help us to recognize all we have in life is because of You and Your great sacrifice for us. May see your abundant love and experience the joy of your resurrection during this Easter season and always. AMEN.

Sources: www.hymnary.org
 www.sermonwriter.com

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Saturday, April 3

Prepare for Worship

Acts 10:43

⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

These are the final words of Peter's first sermon to the Gentiles. We know that he had a hard time coming to terms with the fact that what Christ had done was not only for the Jews, but for the whole world! God eventually got through to him and sent a group of people over to Peter so that they might hear the gospel. When we come together for worship, this is what we are coming to hear. We are coming to hear how God has forgiven us through the name of Jesus Christ. Of course, after these Gentiles heard the Gospel, they began "speaking in tongues and extolling God," (Acts 10:46). When they heard the good news, they couldn't help but worship God. We look forward to worship knowing that our praise hangs on the very Word of God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, we would have never worshipped you before hearing the Good News that you have lavished us with love through Jesus Christ. But, now that we believe, our hearts desire to worship you. Keep our ears open to hear from you we pray, in Jesus' name, Amen

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Easter Sunday, April 4

Praise

Psalm 118:17

**¹⁷ I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.**

Amen! What more needs to be said now that our Lord has defeated death, the devil, and overcome the world? This Psalm 118 could've been found in the mouth of Jesus before he was crucified. He knew that there was joy following the tragedy of the cross. He knew that he would have good news to share about what God was going to accomplish. But, the wonder of the cross, the joy that we receive in knowing Jesus has risen from the dead, comes along when God makes these words our own! "We shall not die, but we shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord!" Now we can rejoice with the same words that the psalmist uses to close this hymn, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"

Prayer: Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, we praise you for raising Jesus Christ from the dead for our salvation. We know that our sin has been completely dealt with. We know that you are out to treat us with loving kindness and faithfulness. We praise you this Easter for all that you have done! Amen