



2008 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

WEEK SIX

Learning How to Be Human: 40 days of Intentions

MONDAY – MARCH 10th

PSALM 136

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. *His love endures forever.* Give thanks to the God of gods. *His love endures forever.* Give thanks to the Lord of lords. *His love endures forever...*

My daughter Paige got her ears pierced for her birthday in January. The doctor told her to keep the starter earrings in her ears for six weeks. She said to me, "Dad, that is **forever!**" When we ask our son Devin to spend two minutes brushing his teeth, he says, "Dad, that is **forever!**"

My concept of time isn't much better. The time of silent prayer during the Wednesday evening Lenten Services is only four or five minutes (I know because Pastor Kris told us), but it seems like an eternity. I spend what seems like a fair amount of time in prayer then I start to wonder, "When is Kris going to wrap this up? We've been sitting in silence forever!"

The idea that God's love endures forever is huge; beyond what I can even begin to get my head around. How wonderful - how powerful, how high, how long, how wide, how deep is this enduring love. Not just yesterday, today and tomorrow, but all days. He loved me before I was born and will continue to love me after I've left this life. It's no wonder the Psalm writer repeated these words twenty six times. It's again and again.

Dear God, Thank you for loving me just as I am, forever. Amen.

Todd Campbell

TUESDAY – MARCH 11th

MARK 9:42-50

"For everyone will be seasoned with fire and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourself and have peace with others."
Mark 9:49-50

No one goes through life without being challenged by the fires of temptation, the ills of our world and personal problems. How we respond is our choice, we may yearn to be "the salt of the earth" but sometimes we feel the spice of life leaving us. We feel flat. What can we do?

Personally, I find healing in being one with the miracles of God's creation: studying the sky (yes, I see things in the clouds), watching the birds and the deer, enjoying the sparkle of sun on snow and eagerly awaiting the first signs of the rebirth of the Earth in spring.

Reading again the teachings of Jesus gives me a needed prod to face my problems with the resolve to follow him more closely.

Finally, that small spark of God's Spirit within me tells me that to be a peacemaker is what allows me to call myself a Christian – and I need to get on with it!

Dear God, We all need help to keep reaching up to be our better selves. We give thanks that your loving arms are always ready to reach down to us when we need your help the most. Amen

Jeanette Barclay

WEDNESDAY – MARCH 12th

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-3:6

Did you catch the article in the February 26th edition of the *Plain Dealer* that stated that 28% of American adults have left the faith in which they were raised? The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life also reported that 16 percent of Americans say that they are not members of any religious group. Of the latter category, about one third say that religion is either somewhat or very important in their lives. Rather than accepting the impending defeat implied in the report, I envision great opportunity for Christian communities of faith like ours to reach out to those who have "back slid", become disheartened, or become disillusioned with the world around them. Just as Paul did in his ministry, we must demonstrate real enthusiasm in the work of the Lord. May God bless us freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

Loving God, make us sufficient for the ministry ahead of us as a community of faith so that we can accomplish that which seems impossible.

Hugh Burkons

THURSDAY – MARCH 13th

MARK 10:17-31

From the two Scripture choices I was given, I selected to reflect on Mark 10:17-31, a section one study Bible called the "story of the rich young man." I've always felt that the word of God is something we understand in our hearts, not in our heads. While I've never been confident that my personal interpretations are necessarily correct, I was asked to share them so I'll try.

In this story, Jesus is answering a question from a rich young man about how to get into heaven. I think the actual question is "how can I be a real Christian?" Jesus tells him following the commandments isn't enough. Jesus says he must also give away, sell or somehow dispose of everything he has and "follow me." So, should we sell our homes, cars, clothing and give the money away, then wander the streets preaching? I don't think so. I think this means that simply following rules is not enough. We have to give everything we have to our faith.

In a Second Hour class years ago, one of our members suggested that we have to "take our faith to work" and that idea had a huge impact on me. I want to try to be a Christian all the time. I try to stop before speaking or acting and ask myself what the Christian response is. I try hard to apply my faith when dealing with people every day. And, sometimes, I even talk about it out loud. I'm not saying I'm successful all the time or that this is easy. After all, in the story Jesus compared it to a camel passing through the eye of a needle!

But I think that we have to try to live our faith with every breath, every day, every hour, in every situation we face. Coming to church once a week, giving some of our money, maybe even helping with a special church event once in a while isn't enough.

Giving "everything we have" to God will be hard but Jesus reminds us in this passage that "with God, all things are possible." And he also promises us that as much as we can give, we will receive back one hundredfold for eternity. So I keep trying.

Dear God, please give us the strength to be able to give everything to you and hold nothing back, as you never hold back your love from us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

Cathy Hakala-Ausperk

FRIDAY – MARCH 14th

MARK 10:32-45

I felt like a kid in the candy store after I read the above text, stumped as to what portion of the reading to select for this meditation. It begins on the road to Jerusalem where Jesus explains what awaits him; however, instead of rallying around him with support, James and John see this as an opportunity to make their move toward securing a higher position in the organization. Grant us what we ask, and let one of us be named to sit at your right hand and the other at your left. Since they were recruited early on in Jesus' ministry, perhaps they felt they were entitled to a promotion. These fellows believed in the old adage, "strike while the iron is hot" secure your future when you can – carpe diem, seize the day.

Jesus responds with the haunting question, "are you able to drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the same baptism I am baptized with?" They immediately respond in the affirmative "We are able" – no question about it, thus displaying their confidence and leadership ability. Jesus then informs them that it isn't up to him to grant the favored status they sought.

Now, the other disciples were really ticked off were when they got wind of the coup the brothers Zebedee had attempted. But Jesus does not let them stew in their anger; rather, he turns it around and provides a "teachable moment" to further instruct them, and us, on the true meaning of servant hood.

Lent is a time to reflect on what Jesus has done for us and how his sacrifice and resurrection impact on our faith and the ministries we engage in as an outcome of our acceptance. Are we willing to drink from his cup? That is a question I still wrestle with, so easy to say "yes" but so very hard to try and do.

On another level, don't we often feel privileged and entitled to more consideration, expecting benefits and perks to be directed our way because we are nice, well meaning, generous people? What about being servants? Is that a role we really aspire to fill by embracing it with vigor and deep humility? Even in a candy store the moment of truth occurs – we have to make a choice. What choice or choices are you making during this Lenten season in order to serve?

Holy One, help us to acknowledge, embrace and trust in your sacrifice on our behalf. Purge us of our pride in self, and humble our spirits, that we may serve you and others according to your will. Amen.

Bob Bruce

SATURDAY – MARCH 15TH

2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-18

It is so easy to lose sight of what is important and to know the right thing to do. In 2 Corinthians, Paul kept sight of what was important even though it was hard. "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Paul had the courage and strength to speak of his belief in the truth of salvation through Jesus, even though he faced suffering at the hands of those who did not believe. Every day something comes up in our lives that we choose to ignore or pass off to someone else because it is "just too hard". We focus on the difficulty of the task and the discomfort of the effort to achieve our goal instead of the ultimate goal itself. May be instead of asking questions of our trials, we should show faith and strength through our trials. "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". Have you ever gone to the store and seen something you just HAD to have? I sure have. I'm thinking of a pair of shoes that I thought I could not live without! Do you know where they are now? Long ago destroyed and thrown away. Material things don't last, but faith does. You can't see it, not like you see a flower, but you know it is inside you.

This is a new journey for me. I have found that, as I tell people in my life about this new and wonderful chapter in mine and my family's lives, there are varying responses. There are people excited for us and then there are those that are not. My journey to get to where I am and to where I want to be has not been an easy one. I struggled with thoughts of "Am I allowed to believe this?" I decided to say YES I am allowed to believe this. Although I will not face the difficulties of Paul, I am able to gain strength from his words.

Dear Lord, Thank you for touching our hearts with your strength and love. This world is not

an easy place, but we know that we can prevail because of you. You did what no one else could do; you sacrificed your only son for us. Help us to face the trials and bumpy roads are journeys will face, so that we can humbly stand in our presence. Amen.

Amy Biscoff

SUNDAY - MARCH 16th

The Secular Story of Christ's Crucifixion

Recognized by riotous Jews shouting "Messiah, Messiah" and placing palm fronds on the path opening before him, Jesus of Nazareth – the Christ – slowly sliced His way through the throngs of Jews converging on the city of Jerusalem in AD 31.

The occasion was the annual Feast of Passover wherein Jews worldwide would offer sacrifice in the Temple, the holiest shrine of Judaism.

The colossal commotion did not go unnoticed.

Caiaphas, the high priest of the highest secular and spiritual Jewish tribunal (the Sanhedren), fearing a revolt and harsh Roman reprisals, immediately communicated his grave concerns to the newly Sejanus appointed Procurator of Judea – Pontius Pilate.

But Pilate was preoccupied, in fact panicked about a life and death personal matter.

For Pilate's friend, mentor and confidant, chief administrator of the Roman empire – Lucius Aelius Sejanus – had been recently executed for plotting to assassinate Emperor Tiberius.

Unfortunately for Pilate, the Roman Senate reacted by killing everyone associated with the plot's ringleader – Sejanus, including his entire family.

It was only a matter of time. Pilate knew that his life was in jeopardy . . . that is, unless he could prove to the practical Emperor Tiberius that he could be useful. Just maybe he could exploit the Jewish celebration, Caiaphas' cowardice, and Christ's charisma in order to save his life.

He did.

Pilate pulled off the most monumental public relations stunt of all time. It was quintessential damage control.

With nothing but a cheap theatrical performance before a small gathering of rehearsed Jews, Pilate got rid of the revered Christ, who could have ignited a world wide revolution of Jews against their Roman oppressors. And he blamed his treachery on the Jews.

Pilate's plan was masterful.

Imagine his glistening fingers. Interlocked. Embracing a water drenched sponge. High above a golden basin.

Imagine a few frightened Jews, including Pilate's cowardly co-conspirator – Caiaphas – crammed into a heavily guarded, tiny courtyard.

Imagine countless Jews celebrating the arrival of their beloved Messiah. Not knowing that he was being sentenced to death in their name. Only a stone's throw away.

Imagine Pilate's execution oratory reverberating amid unsheathed Roman swords.

Little did Pilate know that his smart scheme would not only save his life, by impressing Tiberius, but it would subject Jews to shunning and death for all time, under the pretext of "avenging the blood of Christ."

"We want Barabas. We want Barabas."

If indeed these words were spoken, they never passed the lips of the thousands of confused Jews who loved Christ and did not turn on Him only a few days after welcoming Him to Jerusalem as their Messiah. Nor did such words reflect the feelings of the millions and millions of Jews who have beat their breasts, sobbed and stumbled with Christ step for step on their way to Calvary since that ancient dark day.

Amen.

Bill Hahn, Christian Catholic