

PREPARING FOR EASTER



*A daily devotional
to draw near to God.*

Sunday, April 9

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

Let all Israel repeat: "His faithful love endures forever."

Open for me the gates where the righteous enter,
and I will go in and thank the Lord.

These gates lead to the presence of the Lord,
and the godly enter there.

I thank you for answering my prayer
and giving me victory!

The stone that the builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing,
and it is wonderful to see.

This is the day the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Please, Lord, please save us.

Please, Lord, please give us success.

Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

The Lord is God,
shining upon us.

Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar.

You are my God, and I will praise you!

You are my God, and I will exalt you!

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

Matthew 21:1-11

As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. "Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them."

This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,

*"Tell the people of Jerusalem,
'Look, your King is coming to you.
He is humble, riding on a donkey
— riding on a donkey's colt.'"*

The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it. Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

*"Praise God for the Son of David!
Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Praise God in highest heaven!"*

The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. "Who is this?" they asked.

And the crowds replied, "It's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Isaiah 50:4-9

The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom,
so that I know how to comfort the weary.

Morning by morning he wakens me
and opens my understanding to his will.

The Sovereign Lord has spoken to me,
and I have listened.

I have not rebelled or turned away.

I offered my back to those who beat me
and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard.

I did not hide my face from mockery and spitting.

Because the Sovereign Lord helps me,
I will not be disgraced.

Therefore, I have set my face like a stone,
determined to do his will.

And I know that I will not be put to shame.

He who gives me justice is near.

Who will dare to bring charges against me now?

Where are my accusers?

Let them appear!

See, the Sovereign Lord is on my side!

Who will declare me guilty?

All my enemies will be destroyed
like old clothes that have been eaten by moths!

Psalm 31:9-16

Have mercy on me, Lord,
for I am in distress.
Tears blur my eyes.
My body and soul are withering away.
I am dying from grief;
my years are shortened by sadness.
Sin has drained my strength;
I am wasting away from within.
I am scorned by all my enemies
and despised by my neighbors
— even my friends are afraid to come near me.
When they see me on the street,
they run the other way.
I am ignored as if I were dead,
as if I were a broken pot.
I have heard the many rumors about me,
and I am surrounded by terror.
My enemies conspire against me,
plotting to take my life.
But I am trusting you, O Lord,
saying, “You are my God!”
My future is in your hands.
Rescue me from those
who hunt me down relentlessly.
Let your favor shine on your servant.
In your unfailing love, rescue me.

Matthew 26:14-27:66

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the leading priests and asked, "How much will you pay me to betray Jesus to you?" And they gave him thirty pieces of silver. From that time on, Judas began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

The Last Supper

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?"

"As you go into the city," he told them, "you will see a certain man. Tell him, 'The Teacher says: My time has come, and I will eat the Passover meal with my disciples at your house.'" So the disciples did as Jesus told them and prepared the Passover meal there.

When it was evening, Jesus sat down at the table with the Twelve. While they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one, Lord?"

He replied, "One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with me will betray me. For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!"

Judas, the one who would betray him, also asked, "Rabbi, am I the one?"

And Jesus told him, "You have said it."

As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body."

And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant[d] between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive

the sins of many. Mark my words—I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.”

Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial

On the way, Jesus told them, “Tonight all of you will desert me. For the Scriptures say,

‘God will strike[e] the Shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there.”

Peter declared, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you.”

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

“No!” Peter insisted. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” And all the other disciples vowed the same.

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, “Sit here while I go over there to pray.” He took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. He told them, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, “My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, “Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour? Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!”

Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, “My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.” When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn’t keep their eyes open.

So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again. Then he came to the disciples and said, “Go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. But look—the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Up, let’s be going. Look, my betrayer is here!”

Jesus Is Betrayed and Arrested

And even as Jesus said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the leading priests and elders of the people. The traitor, Judas, had given them a prearranged signal: “You will know which one to arrest when I greet him with a kiss.” So Judas came straight to Jesus. “Greetings, Rabbi!” he exclaimed and gave him the kiss.

Jesus said, “My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for.”

Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. 51 But one of the men with Jesus pulled out his sword and struck the high priest’s slave, slashing off his ear.

“Put away your sword,” Jesus told him. “Those who use the sword will die by the sword. Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?”

Then Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I some dangerous revolutionary, that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn’t you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. But this is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures.” At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Jesus before the Council

Then the people who had arrested Jesus led him to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of religious law and the elders had gathered. Meanwhile, Peter followed him at a distance and came to the high priest’s

courtyard. He went in and sat with the guards and waited to see how it would all end.

Inside, the leading priests and the entire high council were trying to find witnesses who would lie about Jesus, so they could put him to death. But even though they found many who agreed to give false witness, they could not use anyone's testimony. Finally, two men came forward who declared, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?" But Jesus remained silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

Jesus replied, "You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Blasphemy! Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?"

"Guilty!" they shouted. "He deserves to die!"

Then they began to spit in Jesus' face and beat him with their fists. And some slapped him, jeering, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who hit you that time?"

Peter Denies Jesus

Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant girl came over and said to him, "You were one of those with Jesus the Galilean."

But Peter denied it in front of everyone. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

Later, out by the gate, another servant girl noticed him and said to those standing around, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.[k]"

Again Peter denied it, this time with an oath. "I don't even know the man," he said.

A little later some of the other bystanders came over to Peter and said, "You must be one of them; we can tell by your Galilean accent."

Peter swore, "A curse on me if I'm lying—I don't know the man!" And immediately the rooster crowed.

Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind: "Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me." And he went away, weeping bitterly.

Judas Hangs Himself

Very early in the morning the leading priests and the elders of the people met again to lay plans for putting Jesus to death. Then they bound him, led him away, and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, realized that Jesus had been condemned to die, he was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he declared, "for I have betrayed an innocent man."

"What do we care?" they retorted. "That's your problem."

Then Judas threw the silver coins down in the Temple and went out and hanged himself.

The leading priests picked up the coins. "It wouldn't be right to put this money in the Temple treasury," they said, "since it was payment for murder." After some discussion they finally decided to buy the potter's field, and they made it into a cemetery for foreigners. That is why the field is still called the Field of Blood. This fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah that says,

"They took the thirty pieces of silver—

the price at which he was valued by the people of Israel,
and purchased the potter's field,

as the Lord directed.”

Jesus’ Trial before Pilate

Now Jesus was standing before Pilate, the Roman governor. “Are you the king of the Jews?” the governor asked him.

Jesus replied, “You have said it.”

But when the leading priests and the elders made their accusations against him, Jesus remained silent. “Don’t you hear all these charges they are bringing against you?” Pilate demanded. But Jesus made no response to any of the charges, much to the governor’s surprise.

Now it was the governor’s custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner to the crowd—anyone they wanted. This year there was a notorious prisoner, a man named Barabbas. As the crowds gathered before Pilate’s house that morning, he asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you—Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” (He knew very well that the religious leaders had arrested Jesus out of envy.)

Just then, as Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him this message: “Leave that innocent man alone. I suffered through a terrible nightmare about him last night.”

Meanwhile, the leading priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be put to death. So the governor asked again, “Which of these two do you want me to release to you?”

The crowd shouted back, “Barabbas!”

Pilate responded, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

They shouted back, “Crucify him!”

“Why?” Pilate demanded. “What crime has he committed?”

But the mob roared even louder, “Crucify him!”

Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. The responsibility is yours!"

And all the people yelled back, "We will take responsibility for his death—we and our children!"

So Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

Some of the governor's soldiers took Jesus into their headquarters[f] and called out the entire regiment. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted, "Hail! King of the Jews!" And they spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

The Crucifixion

Along the way, they came across a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. And they went out to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). The soldiers gave Jesus wine mixed with bitter gall, but when he had tasted it, he refused to drink it.

After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there. A sign was fastened above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!"

The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. “He saved others,” they scoffed, “but he can’t save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.

The Death of Jesus

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

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

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

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

And many women who had come from Galilee with Jesus to care for him were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

The Burial of Jesus

As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out

of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching.

The Guard at the Tomb

The next day, on the Sabbath,[n] the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, “Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: ‘After three days I will rise from the dead.’ So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we’ll be worse off than we were at first.”

Pilate replied, “Take guards and secure it the best you can.” So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

Monday, April 10

Isaiah 42:1-9

“Look at my servant, whom I strengthen.
He is my chosen one, who pleases me.
I have put my Spirit upon him.
He will bring justice to the nations.
He will not shout or raise his voice in public.
He will not crush the weakest reed
or put out a flickering candle.
He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.
He will not falter or lose heart
until justice prevails throughout the earth.
Even distant lands beyond the sea
will wait for his instruction.”
God, the Lord, created the heavens
and stretched them out.
He created the earth and everything in it.
He gives breath to everyone,
life to everyone who walks the earth.
And it is he who says,
“I, the Lord, have called you
to demonstrate my righteousness.
I will take you by the hand and guard you,
and I will give you to my people, Israel,
as a symbol of my covenant with them.
And you will be a light to guide the nations.
You will open the eyes of the blind.
You will free the captives from prison,
releasing those who sit in dark dungeons.
“I am the Lord; that is my name!
I will not give my glory to anyone else,
nor share my praise with carved idols.
Everything I prophesied has come true,
and now I will prophesy again.
I will tell you the future before it happens.”

Psalm 36:5-11

Your unfailing love, O Lord,
is as vast as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths.
You care for people and animals alike, O Lord.
How precious is your unfailing love, O God!
All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings.
You feed them from the abundance of your own house,
letting them drink from your river of delights.
For you are the fountain of life,
the light by which we see.
Pour out your unfailing love
on those who love you;
give justice to those with honest hearts.
Don't let the proud trample me
or the wicked push me around.

Hebrews 9:11-15

So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever. Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God.

For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.

That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him. Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, "That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.

Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

When all the people heard of Jesus' arrival, they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus.

Tuesday, April 11

Isaiah 49:1-7

Listen to me, all you in distant lands!
Pay attention, you who are far away!
The Lord called me before my birth;
from within the womb he called me by name.
He made my words of judgment
as sharp as a sword.
He has hidden me in the shadow of his hand.
I am like a sharp arrow in his quiver.
He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel,
and you will bring me glory."
I replied, "But my work seems so useless!
I have spent my strength
for nothing and to no purpose.
Yet I leave it all in the Lord's hand;
I will trust God for my reward."
And now the Lord speaks—
the one who formed me in my mother's womb
to be his servant,
who commissioned me
to bring Israel back to him.
The Lord has honored me,
and my God has given me strength.
He says, "You will do more than restore
the people of Israel to me.
I will make you a light to the Gentiles,
and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."
The Lord, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel,
says to the one who is despised and rejected by the nations,
to the one who is the servant of rulers:
"Kings will stand at attention when you pass by.
Princes will also bow low because of the Lord,
the faithful one, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Psalm 71:1-14

O Lord, I have come to you for protection;
don't let me be disgraced.
Save me and rescue me,
for you do what is right.
Turn your ear to listen to me, and set me free.
Be my rock of safety where I can always hide.
Give the order to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
My God, rescue me from the power of the wicked,
from the clutches of cruel oppressors.
O Lord, you alone are my hope.
I've trusted you, O Lord, from childhood.
Yes, you have been with me from birth;
from my mother's womb you have cared for me.
No wonder I am always praising you!
My life is an example to many,
because you have been my strength and protection.
That is why I can never stop praising you;
I declare your glory all day long.
And now, in my old age, don't set me aside.
Don't abandon me when my strength is failing.
For my enemies are whispering against me.
They are plotting together to kill me.
They say, "God has abandoned him.
Let's go and get him, for no one will help him now."
O God, don't stay away. My God, please hurry to help me.
Bring disgrace and destruction on my accusers.
Humiliate and shame those who want to harm me.
But I will keep on hoping for your help;
I will praise you more and more.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say,

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise
and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.”*

So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all nonsense. But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God’s weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, “If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord.”

John 12:20-36

Some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration paid a visit to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee. They said, “Sir, we want to meet Jesus.” Philip told Andrew about it, and they went together to ask Jesus.

Jesus replied, “Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.

“Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But this is the very reason I came! Father, bring glory to your name.”

Then a voice spoke from heaven, saying, “I have already brought glory to my name, and I will do so again.” When the crowd heard the voice, some thought it was thunder, while others declared an angel had spoken to him.

Then Jesus told them, “The voice was for your benefit, not mine. The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” He said this to indicate how he was going to die.

The crowd responded, “We understood from Scripture that the Messiah would live forever. How can you say the Son of Man will die? Just who is this Son of Man, anyway?”

Jesus replied, “My light will shine for you just a little longer. Walk in the light while you can, so the darkness will not overtake you. Those who walk in the darkness cannot see where they are going. Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light.” After saying these things, Jesus went away and was hidden from them.

Wednesday, April 12

Psalm 70:1-5

Please, God, rescue me!
Come quickly, Lord, and help me.
May those who try to kill me
be humiliated and put to shame.
May those who take delight in my trouble
be turned back in disgrace.
Let them be horrified by their shame,
for they said, "Aha! We've got him now!"
But may all who search for you
be filled with joy and gladness in you.
May those who love your salvation repeatedly shout,
"God is great!"
But as for me, I am poor and needy;
please hurry to my aid, O God.
You are my helper and my savior;
O Lord, do not delay.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.

John 13:21-32

Now Jesus was deeply troubled, and he exclaimed, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me!"

The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom he could mean. The disciple Jesus loved was sitting next to Jesus at the table. Simon Peter motioned to him to ask, "Who's he talking about?"

So that disciple leaned over to Jesus and asked, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus responded, "It is the one to whom I give the bread I dip in the bowl." And when he had dipped it, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. When Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered into him.

Then Jesus told him, "Hurry and do what you're going to do." None of the others at the table knew what Jesus meant. Since Judas was their treasurer, some thought Jesus was telling him to go and pay for the food or to give some money to the poor. So Judas left at once, going out into the night.

As soon as Judas left the room, Jesus said, "The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him. And since God receives glory because of the Son, he will give his own glory to the Son, and he will do so at once.

Thursday, April 13

Exodus 12:1-14

While the Israelites were still in the land of Egypt, the Lord gave the following instructions to Moses and Aaron: “From now on, this month will be the first month of the year for you. Announce to the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each family must choose a lamb or a young goat for a sacrifice, one animal for each household. If a family is too small to eat a whole animal, let them share with another family in the neighborhood. Divide the animal according to the size of each family and how much they can eat. The animal you select must be a one-year-old male, either a sheep or a goat, with no defects. “Take special care of this chosen animal until the evening of the fourteenth day of this first month. Then the whole assembly of the community of Israel must slaughter their lamb or young goat at twilight. They are to take some of the blood and smear it on the sides and top of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the animal. That same night they must roast the meat over a fire and eat it along with bitter salad greens and bread made without yeast. Do not eat any of the meat raw or boiled in water. The whole animal—including the head, legs, and internal organs—must be roasted over a fire. Do not leave any of it until the next morning. Burn whatever is not eaten before morning. “These are your instructions for eating this meal: Be fully dressed, wear your sandals, and carry your walking stick in your hand. Eat the meal with urgency, for this is the Lord’s Passover.

On that night I will pass through the land of Egypt and strike down every firstborn son and firstborn male animal in the land of Egypt. I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, for I am the Lord! But the blood on your doorposts will serve as a sign, marking the houses where you are staying. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt. “This is a day to remember. Each year, from generation to generation, you must celebrate it as a special festival to the Lord. This is a law for all time.

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

I love the Lord because he hears my voice
and my prayer for mercy.
Because he bends down to listen,
I will pray as long as I have breath!
What can I offer the Lord
for all he has done for me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and praise the Lord's name for saving me.
I will keep my promises to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.
The Lord cares deeply when his loved ones die.
O Lord, I am your servant; yes, I am your servant,
born into your household;
you have freed me from my chains.
I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.
I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people—
in the house of the Lord in the heart of Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord!

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it." For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.

John 13:1-17, 31-35

Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end.

It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."

"No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you." For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

As soon as Judas left the room, Jesus said, "The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him. And since God receives glory because of the Son, he will give his own glory to the Son, and he will do so at once.

Dear children, I will be with you only a little longer. And as I told the Jewish leaders, you will search for me, but you can't come where I am going. So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Friday, April 14

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

See, my servant will prosper;
he will be highly exalted.

But many were amazed when they saw him.
His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human,
and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man.

And he will startle many nations.
Kings will stand speechless in his presence.
For they will see what they had not been told;
they will understand what they had not heard about.

Who has believed our message?
To whom has the Lord revealed his powerful arm?
My servant grew up in the Lord's presence like a tender green shoot,
like a root in dry ground.

There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance,
nothing to attract us to him.

He was despised and rejected—
a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.

We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.
He was despised, and we did not care.
Yet it was our weaknesses he carried;
it was our sorrows that weighed him down.

And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God,
a punishment for his own sins!
But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole.
He was whipped so we could be healed.
All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our own.
Yet the Lord laid on him
the sins of us all.

He was oppressed and treated harshly,
yet he never said a word.
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.
And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.
Unjustly condemned,
he was led away.

No one cared that he died without descendants,
that his life was cut short in midstream.

But he was struck down
for the rebellion of my people.

He had done no wrong
and had never deceived anyone.

But he was buried like a criminal;
he was put in a rich man's grave.
But it was the Lord's good plan to crush him
and cause him grief.

Yet when his life is made an offering for sin,
he will have many descendants.

He will enjoy a long life,
and the Lord's good plan will prosper in his hands.

When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish,
he will be satisfied.

And because of his experience,
my righteous servant will make it possible
for many to be counted righteous,
for he will bear all their sins.

I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier,
because he exposed himself to death.

He was counted among the rebels.
He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels.

Psalm 22:1-25

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.
Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

Our ancestors trusted in you, and you rescued them.
They cried out to you and were saved.
They trusted in you and were never disgraced.
But I am a worm and not a man.
I am scorned and despised by all!

Everyone who sees me mocks me.
They sneer and shake their heads, saying,
“Is this the one who relies on the Lord?
Then let the Lord save him!
If the Lord loves him so much,
let the Lord rescue him!”

Yet you brought me safely from my mother’s womb
and led me to trust you at my mother’s breast.
I was thrust into your arms at my birth.
You have been my God from the moment I was born.

Do not stay so far from me, for trouble is near,
and no one else can help me.
My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls;
fierce bulls of Bashan have hemmed me in!
Like lions they open their jaws against me,
roaring and tearing into their prey.

My life is poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart is like wax, melting within me.
My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay.
My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.

You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.
My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
an evil gang closes in on me.
They have pierced my hands and feet.
I can count all my bones.

My enemies stare at me and gloat.
They divide my garments among themselves
and throw dice for my clothing.
O Lord, do not stay far away!
You are my strength; come quickly to my aid!

Save me from the sword;
spare my precious life from these dogs.
Snatch me from the lion's jaws
and from the horns of these wild oxen.

I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.
I will praise you among your assembled people.
Praise the Lord, all you who fear him!
Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob!
Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!

For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy.
He has not turned his back on them,
but has listened to their cries for help.
I will praise you in the great assembly.
I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you.

Hebrews 10:16-25

*“This is the new covenant I will make with my people
on that day, says the Lord:*

*I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds.”*

Then he says,

*“I will never again remember their sins
and lawless deeds.”*

And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

John 18-19

After saying these things, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees. Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with his disciples. The leading priests and Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove.

Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. "Who are you looking for?" he asked.

"Jesus the Nazarene," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said. (Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.) As Jesus said "I am he," they all drew back and fell to the ground! Once more he asked them, "Who are you looking for?"

And again they replied, "Jesus the Nazarene."

"I told you that I am he," Jesus said. "And since I am the one you want, let these others go." He did this to fulfill his own statement: "I did not lose a single one of those you have given me."

Then Simon Peter drew a sword and slashed off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's slave. But Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Shall I not drink from the cup of suffering the Father has given me?"

Jesus at the High Priest's House

So the soldiers, their commanding officer, and the Temple guards arrested Jesus and tied him up. First they took him to Annas, since he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest at that time. Caiaphas was the one who had told the other Jewish leaders, "It's better that one man should die for the people."

Peter's First Denial

Simon Peter followed Jesus, as did another of the disciples. That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest's courtyard with Jesus. Peter had to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who

knew the high priest spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in. The woman asked Peter, "You're not one of that man's disciples, are you?"

"No," he said, "I am not."

Because it was cold, the household servants and the guards had made a charcoal fire. They stood around it, warming themselves, and Peter stood with them, warming himself.

The High Priest Questions Jesus

Inside, the high priest began asking Jesus about his followers and what he had been teaching them. Jesus replied, "Everyone knows what I teach. I have preached regularly in the synagogues and the Temple, where the people[e] gather. I have not spoken in secret. Why are you asking me this question? Ask those who heard me. They know what I said."

Then one of the Temple guards standing nearby slapped Jesus across the face. "Is that the way to answer the high priest?" he demanded.

Jesus replied, "If I said anything wrong, you must prove it. But if I'm speaking the truth, why are you beating me?"

Then Annas bound Jesus and sent him to Caiaphas, the high priest.

Peter's Second and Third Denials

Meanwhile, as Simon Peter was standing by the fire warming himself, they asked him again, "You're not one of his disciples, are you?"

He denied it, saying, "No, I am not."

But one of the household slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Didn't I see you out there in the olive grove with Jesus?" Again Peter denied it. And immediately a rooster crowed.

Jesus' Trial before Pilate

Jesus' trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor. His accusers didn't go inside

because it would defile them, and they wouldn't be allowed to celebrate the Passover. So Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, "What is your charge against this man?"

"We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!" they retorted.

"Then take him away and judge him by your own law," Pilate told them.

"Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone," the Jewish leaders replied. (This fulfilled Jesus' prediction about the way he would die.)

Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him.

Jesus replied, "Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate retorted. "Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?"

Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world."

Pilate said, "So you are a king?"

Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true."

"What is truth?" Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime. But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this 'King of the Jews'?"

But they shouted back, "No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a revolutionary.)

Jesus Sentenced to Death

Then Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they put a purple robe on him. "Hail! King of the Jews!" they mocked, as they slapped him across the face.

Pilate went outside again and said to the people, "I am going to bring him out to you now, but understand clearly that I find him not guilty." Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said, "Look, here is the man!"

When they saw him, the leading priests and Temple guards began shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

"Take him yourselves and crucify him," Pilate said. "I find him not guilty."

The Jewish leaders replied, "By our law he ought to die because he called himself the Son of God."

When Pilate heard this, he was more frightened than ever. He took Jesus back into the headquarters again and asked him, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave no answer. "Why don't you talk to me?" Pilate demanded. "Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?"

Then Jesus said, "You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above. So the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin."

Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders shouted, "If you release this man, you are no 'friend of Caesar.' Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar."

When they said this, Pilate brought Jesus out to them again. Then Pilate sat down on the judgment seat on the platform that is called the Stone Pavement (in Hebrew, Gabbatha). It was now about noon on the day of preparation for the Passover. And Pilate said to the people, "Look, here is your king!"

"Away with him," they yelled. "Away with him! Crucify him!"

“What? Crucify your king?” Pilate asked.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the leading priests shouted back.

Then Pilate turned Jesus over to them to be crucified.

The Crucifixion

So they took Jesus away. Carrying the cross by himself, he went to the place called Place of the Skull (in Hebrew, Golgotha). There they nailed him to the cross. Two others were crucified with him, one on either side, with Jesus between them. And Pilate posted a sign on the cross that read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that many people could read it.

Then the leading priests objected and said to Pilate, “Change it from ‘The King of the Jews’ to ‘He said, I am King of the Jews.’”

Pilate replied, “No, what I have written, I have written.”

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes among the four of them. They also took his robe, but it was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. So they said, “Rather than tearing it apart, let’s throw dice for it.” This fulfilled the Scripture that says, “They divided my garments among themselves and threw dice for my clothing.” So that is what they did.

Standing near the cross were Jesus’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, “Dear woman, here is your son.” And he said to this disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from then on this disciple took her into his home.

The Death of Jesus

Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. When Jesus had tasted it, he said, “It is finished!” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

It was the day of preparation, and the Jewish leaders didn't want the bodies hanging there the next day, which was the Sabbath (and a very special Sabbath, because it was Passover week). So they asked Pilate to hasten their deaths by ordering that their legs be broken. Then their bodies could be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they didn't break his legs. One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out. (This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account. He speaks the truth so that you also may continue to believe.) These things happened in fulfillment of the Scriptures that say, "Not one of his bones will be broken," and "They will look on the one they pierced."

The Burial of Jesus

Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away. With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought about seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes. Following Jewish burial custom, they wrapped Jesus' body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth. The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before. And so, because it was the day of preparation for the Jewish Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Saturday, April 15

Job 14:1-14

“How frail is humanity!

How short is life, how full of trouble!

We blossom like a flower and then wither.

Like a passing shadow, we quickly disappear.

Must you keep an eye on such a frail creature

and demand an accounting from me?

Who can bring purity out of an impure person?

No one!

You have decided the length of our lives.

You know how many months we will live,

and we are not given a minute longer.

So leave us alone and let us rest!

We are like hired hands,

so let us finish our work in peace.

“Even a tree has more hope! If it is cut down,

it will sprout again and grow new branches.

Though its roots have grown old in the earth

and its stump decays, at the scent of water

it will bud and sprout again like a new seedling.

“But when people die, their strength is gone.

They breathe their last, and then where are they?

As water evaporates from a lake

and a river disappears in drought,

people are laid to rest and do not rise again.

Until the heavens are no more,

they will not wake up nor be roused from their sleep.

“I wish you would hide me in the grave

and forget me there until your anger has passed.

But mark your calendar to think of me again!

Can the dead live again?

If so, this would give me hope

through all my years of struggle,

and I would eagerly await the release of death.

Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

O Lord, I have come to you for protection;
don't let me be disgraced.
Save me, for you do what is right.
Turn your ear to listen to me;
rescue me quickly.
Be my rock of protection,
a fortress where I will be safe.
You are my rock and my fortress.
For the honor of your name, lead me out of this danger.
Pull me from the trap my enemies set for me,
for I find protection in you alone.
My future is in your hands.
Rescue me from those who hunt me down relentlessly.
Let your favor shine on your servant.
In your unfailing love, rescue me.

1 Peter 4:1-8

So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin. You won't spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God. You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy—their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols. Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you. But remember that they will have to face God, who stands ready to judge everyone, both the living and the dead. That is why the Good News was preached to those who are now dead—so although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God in the Spirit.

The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.

Matthew 27:57-66

As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching.

The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise from the dead.' So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first."

Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

Sunday, April 16
Resurrection of the Lord
To be read in the morning

Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

“And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, not to the general public but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.”

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

Let all Israel repeat:

“His faithful love endures forever.”

The Lord is my strength and my song;

he has given me victory.

Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly.

The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things!

The strong right arm of the Lord is raised in triumph.

The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things!

I will not die; instead, I will live

to tell what the Lord has done.

The Lord has punished me severely,

but he did not let me die.

Open for me the gates where the righteous enter,

and I will go in and thank the Lord.

These gates lead to the presence of the Lord,

and the godly enter there.

I thank you for answering my prayer

and giving me victory!

The stone that the builders rejected

has now become the cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing,

and it is wonderful to see.

This is the day the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Colossians 3:1-4

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

John 20:1-8

The Resurrection

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

"Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

"Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.

Sunday, April 16
Evening Reflection

Isaiah 25:6-9

In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven's Armies
will spread a wonderful feast
for all the people of the world.
It will be a delicious banquet
with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat.
There he will remove the cloud of gloom,
the shadow of death that hangs over the earth.
He will swallow up death forever!
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away all tears.
He will remove forever all insults and mockery
against his land and people.
The Lord has spoken!
In that day the people will proclaim,
"This is our God!
We trusted in him, and he saved us!
This is the Lord, in whom we trusted.
Let us rejoice in the salvation he brings!"

Psalm 114

When the Israelites escaped from Egypt—
when the family of Jacob left that foreign land—
the land of Judah became God's sanctuary,
and Israel became his kingdom.

The Red Sea saw them coming and hurried out of their way!

The water of the Jordan River turned away.

The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs!

What's wrong, Red Sea, that made you hurry out of their way?

What happened, Jordan River, that you turned away?

Why, mountains, did you skip like rams?

Why, hills, like lambs?

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob.

He turned the rock into a pool of water;
yes, a spring of water flowed from solid rock.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Don't you realize that this sin is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old "yeast" by removing this wicked person from among you. Then you will be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast, which is what you really are. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. So let us celebrate the festival, not with the old bread of wickedness and evil, but with the new bread of sincerity and truth.

Luke 24:13-49

The Walk to Emmaus

That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days."

"What things?" Jesus asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.

"Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said."

Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the

bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

They said to each other, “Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, 34 who said, “The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter.”

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

“Why are you frightened?” he asked. “Why are your hearts filled with doubt? 39 Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.” As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet.

Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched.

Then he said, “When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, “Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’ You are witnesses of all these things.

“And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.”