

Good News Daily

APRIL 2 – MAY 6, 2017

Volume XVII

April 2-8, 2017

Number 14

Sunday, April 2

Psalm 118 *Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever.* (v.1 NLT)

One of the most important parts of prayer is thanking God for His bountiful blessings, yet so many of our prayers are only asking. I like to use my five fingers to keep my prayer life balanced. I call them my tips for action in prayer: (a-c-t-i-p)

Adoration—bless & worship God

Confession—ask forgiveness for my sin

Thanksgiving—gratitude for all my blessings

Intercession—requests for others

Petition—my needs

God loves to hear our words of thanksgiving as well as our requests. He longs to bless us. The story is told of the man who goes to his heavenly mansion and sees many gifts packed in a corner. When he asks St. Peter about these many presents, Peter answers that they were gifts that God had for the man but he had never prayed for these blessings. Remember, Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given you” (Matthew 7:7). In the words of the old hymn: “Count your many blessings, name them one by one, see what wondrous things God has done.”

Prayer: Forgive the times I have only asked in prayer. Please help me have a well-balanced prayer life.

Jeremiah 23:16-32, 1 Corinthians 9:19-27, Mark 8:31—9:1

Monday, April 3

Psalm 31 *I find protection in you alone.* (v.4b)

As I write these devotionals our community has suffered many tragic losses: A young singer was shot signing autographs after her performance at a musical venue I often attend. Then late Saturday night a terrorist gunman killed 49 and wounded 53 at a downtown nightclub. Most of the injured were taken to the nearby hospital where my son was born. A little boy from Nebraska (where I was born) was killed by an alligator at Walt Disney World, where I've often taken my children and grandchildren.

Then a dear Christian brother (in my Bible study group) was killed in a freak accident while working on his truck. It was almost too much to endure. I could only lean on God's everlasting arms and remember that Scripture says, "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isiah 53:4).

Many prayer vigils were held, thousands lined up to give blood. Restaurants gave food and water to those waiting in line to do so, plus the police and FBI doing the investigative work. Florists provided flowers for memorials, sports teams held moments of silence to honor the victims. Morticians gave discounted services, the city gave free burial sites, and a man from Illinois made 49 wooden crosses and brought them to Orlando. People around the world sent messages of prayer and remembrance.

Prayer: Lord, please heal our pain.

Jeremiah 24:1-10; Romans 9:19-33; John 9:1-17

Tuesday, April 4

Psalm 121 *I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there? My help comes from the LORD, who made the heavens and the earth!* (vv.1-2)

Part of our summer vacation was spent at Glacier National Park and Yellowstone. The mountains (and valleys) there are awesome—some sheer rock, others covered with many trees, all many hundreds of feet high. Our Creator God has made us a planet of much beauty and grandeur!

The psalmist continues, reminding us that "The LORD himself watches over you The LORD stands beside you as a protective shade" (v.5). What a great comfort!

As we traveled out west and saw many cattle and wild animals, we also witnessed a double rainbow. My two grandsons were so excited and tried to take pictures with their cellphones to remember this happy event. Everywhere we looked we were reminded of our everlasting God and His wonderful love for us.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for keeping watch over us as we come and go, both now and forever (v.8).

Jeremiah 25:8-17; Psalms 120, 122, 123; Romans 10:1-13; John 9:18-41

Wednesday, April 5

Psalm 119:145-176 *I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure.* (v.162)

It is such a blessing to read Scripture and experience how each time one reads a passage new meanings emerge. The psalmist expresses so many emotions—if you are sad or upset or happy you can find your feelings expressed in Scripture.

The Psalms assure us that those who love God's law have great peace (v.165). Through reading the Bible I receive the discerning mind God promised (v.169). We are reminded of God's great mercy (v.156) and are assured that all His commands are true (v.151). As we study His word, the Holy Spirit guides our understanding and increases our faith.

Prayer: Thanks for the treasure we have in our Bibles, dear Lord.
Jeremiah 25:30-38; Romans 10:14-21; John 10:1-18

Thursday, April 6

John 10:19-42 *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me."* (vv.27-28)

Jesus uses this illustration to assure his hearers that they will be safe in his keeping. He will lead them to green pastures (Psalm 23:3). The hired man will run away if he sees a wolf coming, but Jesus gives his life to care for his sheep.

Today's reading and the story Jesus told in yesterday's reading (John 10:1-18), was something his followers could easily understand. I'm sure many 21st century pet owners can also understand the loyalty of the animals and their master toward one another.

We are blessed to have a Savior who cares about all the big and little events of our lives and wants the best for us. He wants close fellowship with us and will protect and care for us. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we need fear no evil, for he is with us (Psalm 23:4)

Prayer: Thank you, Good Shepherd, for loving and caring for each of us.

Jeremiah 26:1-16; Psalms 131, 132, 133; Romans 11:1-12

Friday, April 7

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-13 *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."* (v.11)

The prophet Jeremiah writes this letter to the exiles in Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar, to let them know they will be able to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it after 70 years of captivity.

Jeremiah's words are also for those of us living in the 21st century chaos with wars, killings, rebellion, and violence. His words are for the high school student trying to decide which college to attend, for the recent college grad trying to decide on a career path, for the young married couple trying to decide how many children to have, for the mid-career couple trying

to plan for retirement, and for those of us in retirement coping with health issues.

Recall the reminder from Psalm 23: “He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name sake” (v.3b). We need only to commit our ways to the Lord and He will direct our paths.

Prayer: Thanks, Lord, that You promised that when we pray You will listen and when we look for You in earnest we will find You (v.13).

Psalm 22; Romans 11:13-24; John 11:1-27

Saturday, April 8

Psalm 144 *He is my loving ally and my fortress, my tower of safety, my rescuer.* (v.2a)

We all need love—from our spouses, parents, children, grandchildren, and even pets! God teaches us how to love.

I see love in our church between couples who have been married many years and still look at each other with loving eyes. I see love in the young couple proudly bringing their new-born for the sacrament of Baptism. I see love in the friends and family bringing their loved one in a wheelchair to our healing service. I see love in the Sunday school teacher gathering the boys and girls to learn a story about Jesus and then having fun doing arts and crafts. I see love in our “Love Wins” team packing and delivering boxes of food each month to almost 100 needy families. I see love in the beautiful flower arrangements at the altar each Sunday, made by our Flower Guild. I see love at each worship service by the messages brought by our clergy as they faithfully study and preach God’s word.

Our church is a love-station—we come to be filled with God’s love each Sunday so we can take His love out into our hurting world.

Prayer: Thanks for teaching us how to love, dear Lord.

Jeremiah 31:27-34; Psalm 137; Romans 11:25-36; John 11:28-44

by Jacqueline Littleford

Volume XVII

April 9-15, 2017

Number 15

Sunday, April 9

1 Timothy 6:12-16 *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...* (v.12a NIV).

You and I are going to have to fight this week. We are going to have to fight to remember that we are in the midst of a particularly sacred time—Holy Week.

The world around us will not be helpful. It will encourage us to go about our daily tasks as if this is just another wonderfully normal April week. But it is not. Don't let yourself be sidetracked. For the Christian, this is the holiest of times. It is in this week that we see echoes of ourselves in the actions of the crowd—hailing, then cursing. We see ourselves, too, in the actions of the disciples who pledged their very lives one moment only to flee when the chips were down in the next moment.

But more importantly, this is the week that we observe the path of Jesus to the cross. We are given the opportunity to re-experience that journey and consider again what our salvation cost. We are able to see anew just how great the love of God is for His people.

Fight for this week.

Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalms 24, 29; Matthew 21:12-17

Monday, April 10

John 12:9-19 *“Look, the world has gone after him”* (v.19b).

Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time. He enters in triumph, being hailed by the people. The Pharisees are indignant and frustrated that the world seems to have been taken with Jesus.

But if you notice, the crowds have largely gathered because of the raising of Lazarus (vv.17-18). They were impressed by Jesus' power but, as we will observe, they had missed his personality. They were star-gazing, wanting to see a great man, but they were missing the deeper truth of Lazarus' miracle—just who it was in their midst.

It would take the disciples time, following the resurrection, to understand these events. They were in the presence of power. They were in the presence of a king. They were in the presence of true greatness. They only had a hint, however, of what greatness and power they were witnessing.

As Holy Week gets underway, ask yourself if you have perhaps underestimated God's power and greatness. When we stop and consider just who it is riding that donkey, we might find ourselves stunned with awe as we stand Friday at the foot of the cross.

Jeremiah 12:1-16; Psalm 51; Philippians 3:1-14

Tuesday, April 11

John 12:20-26 *“If anyone serves me, he must follow me;”* (v.26a)

One of the biggest lies in popular Christianity is that it is easy. In an effort to appeal to the masses, many people have said, “Become a Christian and your life will be better and more secure. Your business will prosper;

your house will be full of nothing but happiness and your social circle will always be full.” In whatever form this approach comes, it is a lie.

Jesus says that those who serve him must follow him. So, where was he going? Calvary. Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior, was heading for a brutal death on the town garbage dump. This is where he says we are to follow—to the place of sacrifice.

The Christian life is a bit of a paradox. Yes, life is better as a Christian—I wouldn’t want to go through life without the love and grace of our God. However, Christianity is demanding—Jesus is demanding. Nothing less than all of our life is required. And, as Scripture reveals, nothing else but true life is gained.

Jeremiah 15:10-21; Psalms 6, 12; Philippians 3:15-21

Wednesday, April 12

John 12:27-36 “*But for this purpose I have come to this hour*” (v.27b).

This is an amazing statement. When you consider all that Jesus did—all the kind acts, all the healings, all the miracles—it causes us to sit up and take notice when he finally reveals the real reason he has come. But what is this purpose?

Jesus is talking about his death. Through his death and resurrection, the way will finally be clear and, as he says in verse 32, he will draw all people to himself. Jesus’ death was not a random act of mob violence or religious corruption (albeit those played a role). Jesus’ death was a willful act of love. It boggles the mind and breaks the heart. But through this death, we are in all senses of the word, “saved.”

In his book, *Authentic Christianity*, John Stott observes, “[Jesus] did not regard the death he was about to die as bringing his mission to an untimely end, but as actually necessary to accomplish. It was only seconds before he died (and not till that moment) that he would be able to shout ‘Finished!’”

It was for you and for me.

Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14-17; Psalm 55; Philippians 4:1-13

Thursday, April 13

John 17:1-26 “*Holy Father, keep them in your name...*” (v.11b)

When we read this, we may tend to envision this prayer happening in the Garden of Gethsemane. We may think this is a private prayer between God and Jesus. But it isn’t. They don’t depart for the garden until the end of this prayer (John 18:1). This prayer was said in front of the disciples, *for* the disciples.

How amazing and touching! Jesus' concern on the eve of his death was that the disciples be sustained and remain in unity—together. Do you realize that this is Jesus praying for them and for us? Look over at John 12:20 where it says, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."

Jesus had you and me in mind on the eve of his death. He was praying for us! We might envision a Jesus that commands us, or calls us, or disciplines us. But imagine and take confidence—for our Savior also prays for us.

Jeremiah 20:7-11; Psalm 102; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32

Friday, April 14

John 13:36-38 *"The rooster will not crow until you have denied me three times..."* (v.38)

How unlikely this must have seemed to Peter, "The Rock"! Peter is the one who proclaims, "You [Jesus] have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68). Peter is the one who boasts that he will lay down his life for Jesus. And still this is the one who will deny he ever knew the Lord? Yes, it is.

There are moments in each of our lives where we feel unstoppable, confident, completely "alive" and fired up about our faith. Peter reminds us that none of us are insulated from falling. Even Peter, who lived and learned at the very feet of Jesus, was shaken by his master's betrayal. Afraid of meeting a similar fate, he swore he didn't know Jesus. And he did it three times.

Humility is the hallmark of the Christian. It is a difficult lesson to learn, as Peter could testify. But it is necessary. Don't despair when you fail; remember Peter. Remember that Jesus restored him and sent him out to labor for the kingdom. But some lessons were needed first.

Genesis 22:1-14; Psalm 22; 1 Peter 1:10-20

Saturday, April 15

Hebrews 4:1-16 *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (v.16).

This is a dark day. Holy Saturday is the in between time. What a day this must have been for the disciples!

Remember, they were not marking the time until Sunday. They didn't know for sure what was going to happen next. For them, Jesus was

dead, betrayed by the very people he had sought to love and to help. They were in hiding, afraid and alone—very alone.

That is where we should be this day. We should strive to enter into their experience of pain and loneliness—only to remind ourselves of the great pain our Lord endured and what his absence from the world would mean. What hope is there if there is no resurrection? What hope do we have if Jesus was simply a nice teacher who died a criminal’s death? If that is true, then it is truly a dark day.

But we know there is a new day coming. With daybreak, we will rise to the proclamation that “He is risen!” Nothing will ever be the same again. Then, we can truly draw near to the throne with confidence, not in ourselves, but in the one who has defeated death once, for all (Hebrews 10:10).

Job 19:21-27a; Psalm 88

by Chris Finley

Volume XVII

April 16-22, 2017

Number 16

Sunday, April 16

John 1:1-18 *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* (v.5 NIV)

It is Easter Sunday, the pinnacle of our Christian faith, the essence of our beliefs. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He has overcome death. While today is Easter, I am actually writing this in June, about nine months ago. My personal world has been touched profoundly by death in the last few weeks. First, my father died, followed exactly seven weeks later by my mother’s death. They both lived full, wonderful lives into their nineties, surrounded by a large, loving family. It’s a sad time, a different time, but my heart and those of my family are full of gratitude and love for having been blessed with them such a long time.

Four days before Mom died, my Orlando community and the world were stunned by the senseless tragedy and mass shooting at a nightclub that took 49 innocent lives and injured more than 50 others. The pain and the wounds are deep. While talking with some of my fellow Orlando Health colleagues during a support group, the horror of that night was felt but, more importantly, the goodness, the love, the compassion, and the empathy that brought strangers face to face shone through. Truly, Christ was there and the

Light continues to shine through the darkness. Darkness did not and never will overcome the light of Christ. Thanks be to God!

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalms 148, 149, 150

Monday, April 17

John 14:1-14 *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.* (vv.1-2)

As I mentioned in the previous reading, both my parents have recently died. Their strong faith sustains me and our family. Neither voiced any fear of death, but rather gratitude for having been blessed so much during their lives with the love of family and friends. Fifteen years before Mom's death, she wrote the following in a little book I'd given her called *A Grandmother's Wisdom for Her Grandchildren*. The topic was "Death, a time to contemplate life..." and these are some of her thoughts: "Parting from those we love is the only sad aspect of death. For many it is a release from a sick body and pain—a crown after a life of hardship. It is an inevitable adventure and I'm 'dying' to know what the next world is like...I trust God to make it all okay...I'm surely not worried about it...This world is a land of the dying—the next is the land of the living—and if it's eternal, let's hope it's interesting. It better be good!!" My mother's joyful spirit, strong faith, and her own words of wisdom continue to bring me comfort. May they bless you as well.

Jonah 2:1-9; Psalms 93, 98; Acts 2:14, 22-32

Tuesday, April 18

John 14:15-31 *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* (v.27)

The first verse of chapter 14 in John's gospel says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" and those same words are repeated in the 27th verse. That's a good reminder that these are powerful words Jesus wants us to hear and inwardly digest. "Do not let your hearts be troubled"—so much easier said than done, but what peace comes when we let go of fear, doubt, anxiety and look to Jesus for comfort. One of our priests, Fr. Russell, reminds us we are "Kingdom people" who have received the message of hope and freedom from despair. We are to bring God into every situation. He promises to be with us always and will never abandon us. He is with us to the end. What good news! That is the peace that only comes from God and truly is beyond human understanding.

Isaiah 30:18-21; Psalm 103; Acts 2:26-47

Wednesday, April 19

John 15:1-11 *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”* (vv.1-2)

Pruning can be done gently or drastically, but it must be done to optimize the health and future growth of your trees and plants. Just as our yards need pruning, so do our lives. We learn lessons on this journey called life, and some of the most important ones stem from the difficult chapters—illness, divorce, death of loved ones, job loss. How we manage these “prunings” can bring restoration and life lessons that will serve us well. Change is inevitable but God’s love is forever. Hold on to His promise and unwavering love during the difficult passages of life.

Micah 7:7-15; Psalms 97, 99; Acts 3:1-10

Thursday, April 20

Psalms 147 *He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.* (vv.3-5)

I am a prime example of God’s mercy and healing. Years ago I was brokenhearted as my long marriage ended. I felt defeated, hopeless, afraid, and full of self-doubt. Despite knowing God loved me without condition, I don’t think I loved myself. Failure became the way I defined myself.

Over the years God healed my broken heart. He did not “cure” my marriage but He certainly healed broken relationships and restored my sense of self-worth and purpose. Through the love of family, friends, my faith community, the healing ministry, and counseling, I became a new creation in Christ. The God who created the universe and yet knows each of us personally and individually, took me into His loving arms and bound up my wounds. It didn’t happen overnight. I learned that He wastes nothing and uses all the broken pieces to bring restoration and new beauty to a broken soul. For that I am eternally grateful.

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 146; Acts 3:11-26; John 15:12-27

Friday, April 21

Psalms 136 *Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever.* (v.1)

I received one of my fundamental life lessons through the words of the late John Claypool in his book *The Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*. As a minister who was dealing with the death of his young daughter from leukemia, he struggled to find meaning in his grief. Ultimately through his faith and the Scriptures, he concluded that “Life is gift.” That he had had his

precious daughter at all was an undeserved gift from God. That changed his life and it also changed mine, helping me embrace gratitude and being thankful for all of life, its blessings and its trials.

Gratitude overshadows sorrow. It is a decision, a choice, and in Philippians 4:6 we're told to "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

During a recent visit to see my grandchildren, my sweet little six-year-old Charlotte said grace. She began by giving thanks for our food and then gave thanks for our family, the trees, the flowers, and the birds, and then she asked God to be with her great Granny and Granddaddy and their dog, Cruiser, all now in heaven. I was so touched by her awareness of God's gifts and blessings. She is learning to give thanks at an early age, a gift of great benefit that will help her build a solid foundation for life's journey. Thank You, Lord, for my many blessings.

Daniel 12:1-4, 13; Acts 4:1-12; John 16:1-15

Saturday, April 22

John 16:16-33 *"A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy."* (vv.21-22)

I so remember the day I became a mother. As Jesus said, it was a day of new and unbelievable physical pain replaced in an instant with pure joy as Merrill was born. All the prenatal and Lamaze classes could not prepare me for the depth and dichotomy of emotions that were experienced that day. It still seems so vivid. So, too, grieving the loss of my parents in such a short time has been difficult, but knowing they are together with Jesus brings me great peace, real comfort, and deep joy. We can trust Jesus' words that He has overcome the darkness, conquered death, and replaced our sadness with hope and joy. I am so thankful.

Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 145; Acts 4:13-31

by Suzanne McKee

Sunday, April 23

John 14:1-7 *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”* (v.1 NIV)

Do not be troubled, trust in me.
 I hear the Savior tenderly,
 inviting me to rest in him
 when I will leave this world of sin.
 He's gone to heaven to prepare
 a life for me that's free from care.
 He'll come again to rescue me
 and give me peace eternally.
 He is the life, the truth and way
 out of the hopeless stressful fray.
 Beyond this world I have a place
 because of God's amazing grace.
 (tune: Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow)
 Isaiah 43:8-13; Psalms 146, 147; 1 Peter 2:2-10

Monday, April 24

John 17:1-11 *“They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.”* (v.6)

Lord, I am amazed that I belong to Jesus.
 You have given me to him because You love me so.
 That is no small wonder as I think about it.
 Jesus, Your Son, is fully one with You.
 Lord, I am most grateful life is found in Jesus.
 He who claims the throne Your own will never be denied.
 Guide me as I serve him, as I seek to please him.
 Jesus, Your Son, who's fully one with You.
 Lord, this world reminds me I am far from heaven.
 Just as Jesus didn't fit, I know I don't belong.
 I need Your protecting arms to wrap around me.
 I need Your presence as I carry on.
 (tune: Holy, Holy, Holy)
 Daniel 1:1-21; Psalms 1, 2, 3; 1 John 1:1-10

Tuesday, April 25

John 17:12-19 *"I have given them your words and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world."* (v.14)

I am prone to be discouraged in a world I don't belong.
But my Lord has asked my Father to protect my soul from wrong.
In His Word I find my compass. I will never lose my way.
I will reach my destination in a land of endless day.
I've been called to be a blessing among those who think I'm odd.
But I know that I will fail unless my courage comes from God.
From His Word I'll gain the power to reach out with acts of grace
as I make the time to serve Him meeting people face to face.

(tune: Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee)

Daniel 2:1-16; Psalms 5, 6; 1 John 2:1-11

Wednesday, April 26

John 17:20-26 *"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me..."* (v.23)

O God, the words of Jesus leave me wondering,
if what he prayed for will be ever true.
Will Christians join as one and be united?
Or will we always seek what "we" must do?
Our world is waiting for what Jesus asked for.
But it will never come except for You.
If we could let our differences be sidelined,
if what we all agree upon was key,
our non-believing world would seek our answers.
While seeking truth, our friends would finally see
that in Christ Jesus sin can be forgiven,
that in the Savior they can be set free.

(tune: Be Still My Soul The Lord Is On Thy Side)

Daniel 2:17-30; Psalm 119:1-24; 1 John 2:12-17

Thursday, April 27

Luke 3:1-14 *He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* (v.3)

One dressed in camel skin came preaching all have sinned.
His name was John.
Just as Isaiah said, this one who'd lose his head,
would make all sinners dread but point to Christ.
He called a spade a spade refusing bribes some paid
to still his tongue.

This one kept preaching on, from late night until dawn.
There was no stopping John. He knew his call.
I would be more like John, steadfast and focused on
pointing to Christ.
Lord, take my fear away. Help me to just obey
as I would show the way
to God's own Son.
(tune: My Country Tis of Thee)
Daniel 2:31-49; Psalm 18:1-20; 1 John 2:18-29

Friday, April 28

Luke 3:15-22 "*I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come...*" (v.16)

Some thought that John was Israel's messiah,
Preaching repentance, judging the king.
He was arrested. His faith was tested
after he baptized the Holy One.
The true one baptizer is God's Beloved.
Taking John's water, adding his flame.
Giving the Spirit to all who'd share it.
He is the Father's most precious Son.
If you've been baptized, then you've been marked by
the Holy Spirit sent from above.
God will equip us if we will just trust
for like our Savior, He favors us.
(tune: Morning Has Broken)
Daniel 3:1-18; Psalms 16, 17; 1 John 3:1-10

Saturday, April 29

Luke 4:1-13 *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert...* (v.1)

Christ was led into the desert, fully God but fully man.
Fasting forty days, he wandered in accordance with God's plan.
Satan tried to trick our Savior.
But he would not be deceived.
Tested, tried and terribly hungry, Jesus longed to savor food.
But he knew that his survival was derived from God's own Word.
Ploys for power failed. Refusing to be hailed,
Jesus would not sell his soul.
We like Christ are often tempted by the very Evil One.
Satan knows our point of weakness and most likely has begun

to beguile our trust and that is why we must
focus always on the Lord.
(tune: Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence)
Daniel 3:19-30; Psalms 20, 21; 1 John 3:11-18

by Greg Asimakoupoulos

Volume XVII

April 30-May 6, 2017

Number 18

Sunday, April 30

John 21:15–25 *Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. However, Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”* (v.23 NIV)

This question from Jesus took me back to the time when my two daughters were growing up and were competing for my approval. There is so often rivalry among siblings, family members, and even close friends. Asking me questions to make sure I was not playing favorites or leaving one out was a constant quest on their behalf. These little girls could not be more different from one another, yet so very competitive. One loved fancy dresses and dancing while the other loved blue jeans and horses. Yet their competitive ways seemed never-ending.

It comforts me today to know Jesus needed to handle a similar situation, doing so with charity and clarity. I can just imagine him saying these words with a twinkle in his eye so Peter got the message, yet knowing of his love for both. He could correct these two very different men with such gentleness, yet making his point. He knew the gifting of each and the plans he had for them. I was not always so wise.

Daniel 4:1-18; Palms 148, 149, 150; 1 Peter 4:7-11

Monday, May 1

Psalms 25 *O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.* (v.2 NRSV)

We often have no choice about the things we must wait for—job interview results, a medical diagnosis, and all too often an answer to a prayer request. However, we can decide how we wait. God gives us the free will to channel our hearts and minds in a way that will help our roots to grow deeper in Jesus or to giving in to our human nature by retreating into fear and worry. It is not wise to listen to an inner voice that says, “I’m just that way, I can’t behave any different.” That is an enemy within. We can

allow him to bring defeat into our spiritual life or we can make a better choice, knowing our beliefs can lead to a peaceful action.

I am finding these pauses in my life can be helpful times to undergo rigorous self-examination so I can stop being a victim of my past and believe God can give me a better future. I am in God's waiting room right now and am finding these pauses are helping me draw closer to my Beloved while trusting Him more.

Daniel 4:19-27; 1 John 3:19—4:6; Luke 4:14-30

Tuesday, May 2

Psalm 26 *Test me, O LORD, and try me; examine my heart and my mind.* (v.2 NIV)

Have you ever had the Lord examine your heart and mind? No one knows the true heart like Jesus. Many years ago my husband brought home for dinner a fellow attorney who was very distraught, having been asked for a divorce after only 6 months of marriage. We thought we would cheer him up and let him know we cared. After dinner, I leaned over to him, with a cigarette in one hand and bourbon and water in the other, and said, "What you need to do is go to church."

Instantly, the Holy Spirit came upon me revealing my hypocrisy and many other sins. I also immediately knew that I had become like the parents I had judged years before. I left the room to be by myself and allow the examination to continue, which it did for several hours. God truly examined my heart and mind and it wasn't pretty. I did agree with his assessment and my life turned around from that night. That was the first of several; but none as deep as that time.

Sometimes we need to ask for this humbling of our spirit, but there are times God will show up without being invited.

Daniel 4:28-37; Psalm 28; 1 John 4:7-21; Luke 4:31-37

Wednesday, May 3

Luke 4:38-44 *At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them.* (v.42)

Are you like me? Using productivity and popularity to obtain self-worth? Do you get an adrenaline high when you can scratch off everything on your daily "to do" list? I don't believe Jesus was rejoicing inwardly about their wanting him to remain with them: "Oh they like me I think I will stay longer." He made time to be alone with his Father important and often, so he could hear what his Father wanted him to do next. I can't imagine Jesus

making up a daily “to do” list. He was able, therefore, to be more flexible with greater peace along the way. After all, he was on his Father’s time table, not his. He simply listened to his Father. What an example for us to follow.

I have stop making lists, except for grocers and, instead, I make every effort to let the Lord lead me. I am finding that what needs to be accomplished, most often does. Not surprising, my days are more peaceful. I care less about what others think of me as I can feel Jesus being pleased with my efforts to follow him more closely.

Daniel 5:1-12; Psalm 38; 1 John 5:1-12

Thursday, May 4

Psalm 37:1-18 *Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong.* (v.1)

This psalm speaks to the question people sometimes raise: “Why do evil people prosper?” From my perspective, the ones I have seen clearly do not—and according to God’s Word, He agrees (v.2). My husband had a father who was clearly an evil man and made life miserable for his family and ours. So I did much fretting when I discovered he had inappropriately touched our youngest daughter as well as other family members. There continued much anguish in the family because he continued to deny any wrong doing. Since I believe God would not tell us to do something without telling us how, I sought His help. God led me to this verse and I immersed myself in the study of this whole chapter. I learned what it meant to trust, to delight, and to commit. Applying these words enabled me to trust God with peace rather than with anxiety. This, in time, led to forgiveness—so important to my own relationship with my *Abba*.

He ended his life filled with bitterness and much pain that he chose not to endure.

Daniel 5:13-30; 1 John 5:13-21; Luke 5:1-11

Friday, May 5

2 John 1-13 *And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.* (v.6)

When seeking God in prayer, I sometimes notice that His voice is not the loudest voice in my head. Others thoughts all too often interfere and prevent me from hearing Him. Instead, I might hear, “Tell this person you have been praying for her. There you go trying to sound spiritual again.” I seem to have a committee in my head with different names, depending on their agenda. I have named them so when I am intent on getting rid of them I

can escort them out of the door of my mind. There is The Critic, The Stupid Kid, and The Rescuer, to name a few. If you have these committee members in your head, don't be discouraged—it is only a sign you are human.

These voices do not want us to “walk in love” and will try very hard to distract us and keep us from obeying the Golden Law of Love. But in order to walk in love, my experience is that I must walk with God. Thus the need to keep my mind set on Him and not on me. Then I can get filled with Him and transfer what I have received to others along the way.

Daniel 6:1-15; Psalm 105:1-22; Luke 5:12-26

Saturday, May 6

Luke 5:27-39 *But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”* (v.30)

Jesus scandalized the religious leaders because he was challenging their social values and, as we would say today, he was not politically correct. He ignored their boundaries and hierarchies, which was so important to their culture. Anyone transgressing these customs consistently would become an enemy of that culture. It has been said that Jesus got himself killed because of the way he ate.

As one who has traveled internationally for several years, I can relate to this. I quickly became aware that, in whatever country I was in, I had better follow the customs if I wanted to be heard. While in Communist Russia, our group was told we were being treated to a special breed of meat. It became obvious they were attempting to show honor to us. We would dishonor them by refusing to eat whatever was served. After poking around on my plate, I saw it was grizzly and very tough. It was horrible, but I got through one piece, felt sick, put the remainder in my napkin. In privacy, our group shared our secret way of feigning our appreciation for the meal. We thought we had obeyed the custom; but after returning to our hotel, our doors were locked behind us and the promised evening's entertainment was canceled.

Daniel 6:16-28; Psalms 30, 32; 3 John 1-15

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