



Walking in the Light
A Devotional Guide to Easter

February 24 - April 12, 2009



From the Faculty and Staff of
MB Biblical Seminary

Tuesday, February 24, 2009

Jeremiah 1:11-19

*J*eremiah prophesied in a time of crisis. The Assyrian empire is being wiped off the map. The Babylonians, like swarming sharks, are coming up to feed. And so they do. Judah falls. Jerusalem is burned to the ground. The Israelite elite are taken into Babylon. Why is this happening? Has Yahweh fallen before Marduk, the chief Babylonian God? Or has he simply turned on his own people?

First, as Jeremiah explains, God has not fallen before Marduk. He is still sovereign over the nations. Babylon is God's Rottweiler summoned to put an end to gross injustice. Second, there is nothing arbitrary about God's actions. Redemptive love is at the root of it all. The Babylonian onslaught is part of an elaborate plan to *rescue* Judah from the jaws of self-destruction. Israel is like a dying patient. God is the physician.

The treatment may seem cruel, but it is Israel's only hope. Without God's intervention, Israel will cease to exist as his distinct people. This can't be allowed to happen, for Israel plays a critical role in the development of the cure that plagues humanity.

This is a mystery: God has chosen to work through a nation, Israel, to create the conditions necessary for our salvation. If Israel as God's people disappears, it tolls the end of history, the failing of all hope. But God has been faithful to his promises. The treatment was successful. Five hundred years later, a savior was born. The cure is now available to all. An ocean of men and women from all nations and walks of life will one day sing the glories of him who died on a cross and rose again.

Jeremiah's message is for all of us. May God also give us the confidence and the audacity to resist the ideological idols of our times and proudly proclaim the redeeming message of Jesus Christ.

Pierre Gilbert, PhD

*Program Coordinator for Winnipeg Centre for Ministry
Studies and Associate Professor of Old Testament*

Monday, April 13, 2009

Matthew 28:16-20

Jesus has risen! Life is new. Jesus concludes his time on the earth by calling his people to continue his mission. The disciples, in obedience to Jesus' message to the women (Matthew 28:10), gather in Galilee. Galilee is their home, the place where Jesus first called them to follow him. In Galilee Jesus calls them, and us, to begin anew with resurrection power.

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 springs from the authority of the risen Lord. Jesus has the power to issue this command. The orders are simple words: Go . . . make disciples . . . baptize . . . teach obedience to the commands of Jesus. The church seeks to obey these words.

During the season leading up to Easter, we have had the privilege of reflecting together on Jesus' words. Now we are commissioned to put the words of Jesus into practice. In this last message to you, I want to give a personal invitation to partner with us at MB Biblical Seminary in fulfilling the Great Commission. Our mission is to continue Jesus' mission. We seek to inspire and equip men and women to live as disciples of Jesus and to live and serve in the church and in the world. This is kingdom work. We are "teaching them to obey everything I [Jesus] have commanded you." If this devotional series has blessed you, we invite you to join us in this mission.

Your gifts of prayer and finances enable us to prepare leaders for the church. Please consider a gift today. You can send a check/cheque to MB Biblical Seminary, 4824 E Butler, Fresno, CA 93727, or choose from online giving options on our website (www.mbseminary.edu/donate).

Thank you for joining us in "Walking in the Light." God bless you.

Lynn Jost, PhD
Acting President

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Luke 18:9-14

I lead a weekly Bible study at the Fresno County Jail. I regularly leave impressed by the men's depth of sharing. They speak of fears, struggles, sins and hopes with a vulnerability I rarely encounter in other Bible studies. Why? Perhaps in part it is because they all wear red jump suits with the word "prisoner" stamped boldly on their backs. There is no possibility of their standing up like the Pharisee in this parable and declaring their righteousness. They do not wear the label of "good Christians" and therefore share without worrying about damaging their status.

Some of you may identify with the prisoners even if you do not actually have the word on your back. Others, however, feel the opposite. Some, like me, might even have a title like "missionary" or "seminary professor." Like the Pharisee, and unlike the tax collector or the prisoners, many of us stay on the right side of the lines that lead others to view us as "good Christians." There are risks associated with that location. Not only might it hinder the openness and transparency I observe in the jail, it might lead to the self-righteous judgmentalism of the Pharisee in the parable. Using certain actions and beliefs as lines to define status as Christians produces shame and alienation and hinders relational connection.

Rather than focusing on God, the Pharisee focused on the line that separated him from others and that led him to not be able to see how out of step he was from God's ways. In these 45 days of reflections may we focus on Jesus and may God reveal how we are out of step with God's ways. May we risk vulnerability with God and others, confident that like the tax collector God will embrace us mercifully.

Mark Baker, PhD
Associate Professor of Mission and Theology

Thursday, February 26, 2009

John 1:29-34

This passage follows a conversation where John, surrounded by large crowds, was questioned whether he is “the One.” In response John confesses, “I am not the Christ.” (v. 20) and indicates that his ministry is very different than the ministry of “the One” who would come after him.

The next day Jesus, after being tempted, emerges from the wilderness of Judea on his way to Galilee (1:43) and is met by John. This time only his disciples are with him as he recognizes Jesus coming towards him. This meeting seems designed for one thing: that Jesus can be adorned with John’s testimony – “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*”

John’s bold declaration deserves a closer look. “The Lamb” points to the sacrificial character of Jesus’ death on the cross. The Jews knew all about the daily sacrifices in the temple—one each morning, one each evening, double on Sabbath. But by calling Jesus “the Lamb of God,” John says something startling. Jesus is being specifically identified and lifted up as “the One,” ordained and accepted by God as the sacrificial offering for sin.

Any doubt about what John means to say is eliminated by the last part of the sentence, “...*who takes away the sin of the world.*” This is not about individual sins of a few people. By using the singular, “sin,” John points to the collective burden of sin laid upon Jesus. The Lamb would carry to the cross all our sin and our burden of guilt and shame. Wow! What a glorious announcement! John points us to the one who will remove all that is offensive to God’s holiness and all that is destructive of human happiness. “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*”

Aldon Loeppky, MA
Advancement Officer for Alberta and British Columbia

Sunday, April 12, 2009

John 20:1-23

On the evening of the first Easter the brief narrative begins with a strange situation. The disciples have locked themselves in. In fearful circumstances the church responds in a typical way, commentator David Buttrick tells us. We lock ourselves away in fear of conflict with the world.

Let’s review what the resurrected Jesus does to set the disciples free from this lockdown to fear: First, Jesus stands among the disciples. The risen Lord is present in the midst of the church’s fear. Next, Jesus speaks a word of peace (shalom), a dynamic word of assurance in the face of fear. Then, Jesus shows the disciples his wounds. Death cannot hold its prey. The lock of fear has been broken. The wounded Crucified One has been raised.

Amidst the disciples’ joy Jesus commissions the community to join his “new-life” mission. A second time Jesus declares “peace.” The disciples’ God-given mission means peace for the world. In his high-priestly prayer in John 17 Jesus had indicated that the disciples would be *in* the world but not *of* the world. He had also spoken of their being sent *into* the world. Jesus sends the disciples to complete the mission that he had begun. The mission of God has become the mission of God’s people. As Jesus gave himself *for* the world, the church’s mission is also *for* the world.

Jesus empowers his followers with the Holy Spirit. In the power of the Spirit the Christian community declares good news—the forgiveness of sins. On this Easter Sunday we, the church of Jesus Christ, are commissioned to break through the lockdown of fear. We must go into the world through the power of the Spirit with the good news of forgiveness and new life.

Lynn Jost, PhD
Acting President

Saturday, April 11, 2009

Romans 8:1-11

As a child somehow I got the idea that it was important for Christians to re-experience the passion of Jesus. Mel Gibson's popular movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, reinforces this notion. In re-living Jesus' death it felt almost sacrilegious to laugh or play on Holy Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The Eastern Orthodox Christian observation of Holy Saturday commemorates the "resting" of Jesus and concludes with a processional at midnight that takes the form of a funeral service for Christ. Some Christian tradition also includes the conjecture that on Saturday Christ raised the souls of the pre-Christian dead from Hades to Paradise.

The tradition described above seems foreign to Romans 8. This text invites us to celebrate the good news: In Christ Jesus we are no longer under condemnation for sin. Christ, God's sin offering, condemned sin. Jesus liberated all who have their minds controlled by the Spirit of God.

This is the good news of salvation: God sent the Son to be a sin offering. The Son redeems humanity (and all creation) through his life, death, and resurrection. The Spirit gives life to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8 describes two powerful force fields. The old power structure of sin and death holds captive all who live according to the sinful human nature. Christ's redemptive act brings life. Through Christ humanity can be set free from captivity to the old sin-force-field. In Jesus we are freed to walk in the power-field of the Spirit.

Today we celebrate the life we enjoy through the Spirit of Jesus. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead gives life to us. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Lynn Jost, PhD
Acting President

Friday, February 27, 2009

John 1:35-42

Everyone who follows Jesus has a starting place. Maybe more than one.

When I tell my faith story, I start in a Christian home with parents, pastors and Sunday school teachers who taught me about Jesus. I say that at age seven, after an evening service with a guest evangelist, I prayed to accept Jesus as my Savior, kneeling with my mother by my bedside. And I say that during my sophomore year at Tabor College I met Jesus and submitted my life to Him as my Lord. Determining which starting place is the real starting place for my walk with Jesus is not as important as the starting itself... and the starting again.

John's version of Jesus calling His first disciples is different from how the other gospel writers tell it. In our text it appears that Andrew and another disciple (possibly John himself) were first followers of John the Baptist when they met Jesus. Mark 1:14 says that after John the Baptist was put in prison Jesus left the Jordan where John had been baptizing and went to proclaim the good news in Galilee. It was there that he ran into Andrew and his brother Simon Peter again, and Zebedee's boys too, calling them from their boats to follow him and fish for others.

At the end of John's gospel he tells how Jesus called Simon Peter away from his boat again to "feed my sheep." Another starting place.

How many starting places do you have in your faith journey with Jesus?

Is today a day you'll start again?

Jesus, how long did you call me before I heard and came and followed you? You're calling me even now, aren't you? Help me to hear. Help me to trust. Help me to start following you again today.

Mark Isaac, MDiv
Advancement Officer for U.S. West Coast
Director of Advancement and Constituency Relations

Saturday, February 28, 2009

John 1:43-51

Our text today explains the call of Christ to two of his disciples. Finding Philip, Jesus extended a simple invitation, “Follow me.” Philip accepted the invitation to follow with both life and belief. He believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah spoken of by Moses and other prophets. Philip himself acted upon the belief and invited Nathanael to join him. But Nathanael doubted. When Jesus approached Nathanael, he met him at a different starting point—“Nathanael, you are a true and sincere man.” Nathanael’s doubts and inquisitive nature were met gently by Jesus with a genuine character compliment. Jesus did not lecture nor scold Nathanael for doubting but rather gently entered into conversation and relationship. Both men came to embrace Jesus, but Jesus met each of them at different points drawing them to himself.

Throughout many years as a pastor there have been a variety of entry points to point people to Jesus. Sometimes a strained marriage relationship or concern about a child was the entry point of the conversation. Occasionally starting with someone’s previous religious background became the starting point. Even discussing one’s personal failure can be the entry point for conversing about Jesus.

Over the course of this Easter season, we will have opportunities to interact with many people. They will be at different places in their spiritual journey. Yet, Jesus’ example is to enter their lives at their point of need, rather than where we want to enter. In our relationships we are called to embrace people with both faith and doubts as we gently model Jesus. Jesus still calls people to a relationship with himself. Through our relationships with others, Jesus continues to call people to follow him.

Steve Prieb, MDiv
Advancement Officer for the Midwest U.S.

Friday, April 10, 2009

John 17:1-26

“I’m praying for you.” How often do we say those words? It is one thing to have my brothers and sisters in Christ praying for me. It is another to remember that Jesus himself prays for us.

Just before his arrest Jesus took time to pray for us. “My prayer is . . . for those who believe in me . . .” (John 17:20). Jesus prays for us. Amazing! The Lord of the universe prays for us!

It was no coincidence that Jesus prayed for us just before his passion. Jesus knows that we will face hard times, so he asks God to “protect them by the power of your name.”

It would have been enough if Jesus had ended his prayer at that point, but he asked for more. He asked “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 20:21). Jesus prayed for our unity.

That prayer does not seem to be answered yet. There is disunity in the church. Deep hurts divide us. Too many relationships seem beyond repair. I am praying that God will work in the hearts of all who read this today to answer Jesus’ prayer that “all of them may be one.”

Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by one Spirit, that the world may believe in whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

- From the Book of Common Prayer

David Bruce Rose, PhD
Associate Professor of Marriage, Family and Child Counselin

Thursday, April 9, 2009

John 13:1-17

*J*ohn 13 opens with a somber declaration. Jesus knew that the time had come; his death was at hand. Misunderstood and betrayed by those closest to him—that would be the manner of his departure from the world that he loved. Still, Jesus perceived that after his death and resurrection his disciples would begin to look back on all that Jesus had done and said. And so Jesus instructs his followers in the way that they must follow—and he does so with a towel.

Peter, always the first to announce his unwavering loyalty to his Lord (see 13:36-38), objects to this inappropriate act of humiliation on Jesus' part. When Jesus corrects him, Peter turns full circle and asks for a complete, ritual washing. But he has the wrong idea again. Jesus is doing something different—a symbolic act of loving service and self-giving, foreshadowing the ultimate expression of love which was nearly at hand.

We might imagine an awkward silence as Jesus moves around the circle, his outer garment cast away and a towel wrapped around him, the disciples murmuring disapproval or bewilderment. Perhaps they were also trying to determine which one or ones of them were “not clean” according to Jesus' words. As he finishes wringing out the now-soiled towel which still clings to his waist, Jesus looks up at those who have journeyed with him longest, those who will nevertheless fail him shortly. This is the time for famous last words. Jesus' actions speak louder than words: “I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

Matt Regier
MB Biblical Seminary Master of Arts student

Sunday, March 1, 2009

Mark 2:18-22

*W*ho could have predicted it? Banks, insurance companies, investment firms, and auto makers all in financial collapse. Chaotic times remind us that Jesus is the center of our world. We can depend on him.

Jesus says, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast when he is among them?” It would appear that Jesus expects that his presence will cause us to rejoice. Yet sometimes life is hard. Someone has said, “Life is pain. Anyone who tells you otherwise is just selling something.” But Jesus says, “The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.” Jesus uses images of feasting and fasting, of patched clothes and wineskins, to describe the radical, costly “already-but-not-yet” reign of God.

When I served in my first church, a farmer told me about how, during the depression, his family reminded themselves of God's provision even in times of loss and fear. At the end of the summer when the wheat was all but ready to harvest, a tremendous storm blew though. The family ran for cover in the storm shelter. When the hailstorm had ended, they emerged to discover their crop flattened. A year's work destroyed in an instant. As the tears began to run down the cheeks of the family, the grandfather took a bucket and began to fill it with the ice that fell from the sky. “Come on,” he said. “Let's not waste this. We have plenty of ice. Let's make ice cream.”

As we prepare for Easter let's remember that, while Good Friday reminds us that evil is real and powerful, Easter proclaims that God is greater than any evil. We may fast now, but when the bride groom is with us, we will feast!

David Bruce Rose, PhD
Associate Professor of Marriage, Family and Child Counseling

Monday, March 2, 2009

John 2:1-12

“*W*hat have I to do with thee?” In a few fleeting years, his life poured out on the cross for the salvation of all, Jesus would thirst—but not this day in Cana. His time had not yet come. In the celebration before suffering, his first recorded, seemingly inconsequential miracle was a foreshadowing of his mission. He had come to transform.

“What have I to do with thee?” Clay pots of ceremonial water can wash away the visible, the external—sweat, grime, and the dust of the journey. We can cover our odors in perfumes and pretend that we are clean. But ceremonial water can do nothing for the stains of our souls. Who is able to cleanse us of our greed, doubt, and malice? Who has the power to change that which is within? Jesus, the substance of our ceremony.

“What have I to do with thee?” I am also fragile clay, my heart inadequate to change itself, to save itself. There is nothing new to draw from this old cistern until the touch of God transforms my essence. Jesus’ time has come, and now our earthen vessels pour forth treasure.

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

- 2 Corinthians 4:6, 7

Mary Shamshoian, LMFT
Director of the On-Site Counseling Program

Wednesday, April 8, 2009

John 12:27-36

*T*he story of the crowd’s confusion about the voice from heaven strikes a chord in my heart. Marvin Hein, the prince of Mennonite Brethren preachers for a generation, preached this text at my father’s funeral. Tragic news, whether the death of a friend or the loss of a dream, can sound like a thunderstorm. Lightning flashes. The thunder clap startles. Storms destroy. Sometimes, in an attempt to encourage us, well-wishers seek to speak with an angel voice. Though intended to soften the blow, ill-chosen words stab like a dagger. In John 12 God encourages Jesus in the face of death.

When God speaks, the crowd is divided as to whether the heavens thunder in theophany or angels speak. Neither interpretation is correct. Rather God speaks through this hour, the hour of Jesus’ death. His death has atoning power. Jesus through service and death to self releases God’s power to drive out the ruler of this world. The evil prince is unseated by the glorious lifting up of the Son of Man.

This chapter of John’s Gospel acts as a boundary text between Jesus’ miraculous signs of John 1-11 and Jesus’ “glorious” death described in John 13-19. The image of being “lifted up” reminds us of the image in John 3:14 (“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up”). The way to glory, the way to eternal life, the way to being lifted up, and the way to fruit is the way of surrendering one’s life to death. The disciple is to learn from Jesus and to imitate him.

Lord Jesus, I want to learn of you. May God’s glory shine as you are lifted up in my life. Help me to trust in your light.

Lynn Jost, PhD
Acting President

Tuesday, April 7, 2009

John 12:20-26

Some worshipping Greeks wished to see Jesus who was at the height of popularity following his recent Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. They approached Philip with their request.

But unlike modern politicians and movie stars surrounded by crowds of paparazzi, Jesus did not embrace his popularity, self-promotion, and the satisfaction of the interview. Instead, he embraced “the hour . . . for the Son of Man to be glorified” (v.23). It was his resolute purpose to focus on his coming death.

To focus on death is not easy. Last fall I met with an attorney to prepare my will—a task which should have been done years ago. Even after I met with him, it took a couple of months before I completed the questionnaire form that he needed in order to put the document together. When I finally dropped off the form, I apologized for taking so long, stating that “death preparation does not easily rise to the top of my to-do list!”

Yet Jesus embraced “the hour.” He knew that his purpose would be accomplished through death. He knew that to die would reproduce multiplied spiritual fruit. And so he walked away from the earthly accolades to embrace his death.

“Whoever serves me must follow me,” Jesus said (v.26). As we prepare for Easter, we too, are called to turn away from what this world offers. Like Jesus, we are called to die to self-interests. To honor the Father and glorify the Son, may we learn to die to self.

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Steve Prieb, MDiv
Advancement Officer for the Midwest U.S.

Tuesday, March 3, 2009

John 2:13-22

As we draw nearer to Easter, we prepare for the reality of God bringing life from death. It is important to remember that the hard work of clearing the way must precede the celebration.

Jesus enters Jerusalem during Passover and clears the Temple. Many in the crowds recognize the significance of Jesus’ action and teaching. The Jewish leaders, however, cannot read the signs. John has just told the story of Jesus’ first sign (turning water into wine), and here are the Jewish leaders asking for a sign. *What gives you the right to judge the activities of the Temple? Who do you think you are?* Jesus responds, “Destroy this Temple, and I will raise it up” (2:19). God is doing a new thing. Jesus is the Temple rebuilt.

When Jesus clears the Temple, he says, “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” Jesus echoes Zechariah’s prophesy of the Day when everyone on earth will worship God in his Temple (14:21). He recalls as well the prophecy that those on the margins find inclusion as God’s kingdom comes (Isaiah 56). When those who are stepped on are lifted up and those who are vulnerable are cared for by the community, God’s kingdom comes (Jeremiah 7). When *all* can freely come and worship, when justice prevails, that day will be the Day when God’s kingdom comes.

With the resurrection, God validated Jesus’ life of serving the outcast and challenging the powers that forgot them. Like the disciples who understood the sign after the resurrection, we bring our anticipation of Easter into this story. May we not find ourselves in the shoes of the Jewish leaders who demanded a sign even though a sign was right in front of them. Let us stand alongside those who follow Jesus in his ministry.

Michelle Ferguson, MA
Registrar

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

John 2:23 – 3:15

Today's text shows Jesus challenging a leader of God's people, a Pharisee named Nicodemus. In this way it is very typical of what we read about Jesus' ministry—he spent most of his time in and among those who were trying to follow God but had lost their focus. “Are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” Jesus asks Nicodemus. When Jesus appeared among the people, they were seeing God's very self, present among them. But they did not recognize him and love him as one might expect. They loved darkness instead. Having come face to face with God, they didn't know what they were seeing. They preferred to go on living their normal way of life.

This seeing is not achievable by human effort, however. In order to see the kingdom, Jesus says, one has to dive into God so deeply and reemerge as one who is “born” of God, just as Jesus was. Because Christ himself was born of God, knowing him is to enter into communion with God, allowing us to see in the kingdom.

The question for us is whether we are continuing to let Jesus usher us more deeply into God's heart. As we go about living our Christian faith, where is our focus? We can easily get distracted. Nicodemus and Israel's leadership were distracted from God's kingdom by many things, chiefly making boundaries to distinguish faithfulness from unfaithfulness. Sometimes we become distracted, too—whether by movements for one social issue or another, or by national politics, or by perfecting Christian religion. But in the midst of it we run the risk of taking our eyes off the person of Jesus, who shows us God. May we continue to seek after Jesus, who leads us to the heart of the Father.

Matthew Insley

MB Biblical Seminary Master of Divinity student

Monday, April 6, 2009

Matthew 21:12-17

Our family made it a point to witness the changing of the guard in three capitals. The changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington Cemetery near Washington, D.C., impresses with military precision. The massive parade of redcoats in front of the capitol in Ottawa flashes thrilling pageantry. The guard at Buckingham Palace speaks of pomp and circumstance worthy of the queen. The “purpose” of the changed guard at all three sites is to release the tired old guard and bring on fresh faces.

The leaders of the old religious establishment see themselves as guardians of the Temple. Jesus' triumphal entry sweeps out the old guard. The Temple, an icon of God's presence among God's people, has been liberated. The Exile resulting from Israel's disobedience is finally over. In Jesus God will now bring in a new administration of right and justice.

With the changing of the Temple guard and the end of the Exile, the ones who formerly were forbidden entrance move to center stage. Jesus makes clear that there is room for the blind and the lame in God's presence. When God rules, God's people sing praise and Jesus brings healing to those on the margins.

As we move closer to Easter, Jesus calls us to gather near him in his house of prayer. As followers of Jesus, we are moved to pray for the weak and marginalized. As we pray, Jesus calls us to move closer to the weak ones. We are called to extend Jesus' healing to those in need.

Lord Jesus, we worship you by entering your house of prayer. Show us your healing power. Give us the energy to extend your healing to all in need.

Lynn Jost, PhD
Acting President

Sunday, April 5, 2009

John 12:12-19

In the heyday of Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's hold on power as the Iron Lady of Great Britain, my wife and I were surprised to find ourselves walking upstream into a friendly but boisterous political march sponsored by the loyal opposition Labour Party. The marchers waved signs and chanted political bravado: "Maggie, Maggie, Maggie. No! No! No! Maggie, Maggie, Maggie. Go! Go! Go!"

In the triumphal entry of Jesus to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds are shouting scriptural salvation slogans. With words from the psalms and the prophets they speak hope for a discouraged people. The exile has ended. God has defeated the evil empire. God in Jesus transforms darkness to light. Greater than modern political slogans, these shouts of praise inspire hope within the community of God's people. "God saves!"

On the other hand the entry of Jesus disheartens the opposition of the religious leaders. Discouraged, the Pharisees' language reflects defeat. "This is getting us nowhere," they admit. "The whole world has gone after Jesus!" Good has triumphed over evil.

Jesus' triumphal entry sets up the climax of the gospel story. The Pharisees have evaluated the scene and, ironically, predicted that Jesus' mission would reach the entire cosmos. As we shall see in John 12:20-26, the approach by the Greeks fulfills the Pharisees' unwitting prophecy. The whole world was coming to Jesus. We too join this great world-wide mission of God. Jesus saves! Hosanna!

Lord God, may our words today give witness of the good news to our neighbors and friends. Hosanna! God saves!

Lynn Jost, PhD
Acting President

Thursday, March 5, 2009

John 3:16-21

John 3:16 is the most extraordinary sentence ever uttered in the history of the world, but for most people these words have no traction. For some, the words are just too familiar and so have lost their power to amaze and inspire. For others, their earth-shattering significance is hidden under a veil of self-delusion and indifference.

The notion that God loves the world is unique to the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the ancient world, the gods did not love anyone. Human beings were no more valuable than insects. Humans had been created to serve the gods. Period! Men and women were truly cosmic orphans "without hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12).

The gods of old may have vanished from Western culture, but the ideologies of death and chaos they incarnated have not. Ultimately, men and women do not worship statues of wood or metal; they worship ideas. We also have our ideologies of chaos. The *myth* of evolution has robbed human existence of all ultimate significance. Postmodernism is aggressively and gleefully negating the very possibility of meaning and purpose. Secular humanism is viciously eroding the very notion of intrinsic human worth.

The problem is not just that bad ideas destroy cultures and civilizations. They also destroy the souls of men and women. When I was a teenager, I was one of those who did not understand the words of the apostle John. I was truly without hope and without God: a lost soul in a sea of meaninglessness. Providentially, I met a pastor who explained my condition and offered me the only cure there is for the illness that afflicts every single one of us. My encounter with the living Christ changed my life. The resurrection of our Lord is the promise that I will live on for all eternity. I am forever grateful.

Pierre Gilbert, PhD
*Program Coordinator for Winnipeg Centre for Ministry Studies
and Associate Professor of Old Testament*

Friday, March 6, 2009

John 3:22-36

A popular worship chorus begins with the phrase “It’s all about you, Jesus.” These words are simple to verbalize, yet difficult to live. I was reminded of this reality while conversing with the dean of another seminary. His school requires all incoming students to complete a psychological examination. Roughly 80 percent of these students score higher than average in the area of “narcissism.” Stated simply, pastoral ministry has a way of attracting people who enjoy being the center of attention.

In today’s text we find the attention of the Jewish people beginning to shift from John the Baptist to Jesus. Conceivably, we could imagine John resenting the fact that he is no longer in the spotlight. However, John recognizes that the attention of the people rightly belongs to Jesus (v. 29). He even expresses that Jesus’ growing popularity has caused him complete joy (v. 29). John proclaims that “He must become greater; I must become less” (v. 30). These words reflect an unwavering commitment to the conviction that Jesus is heaven’s true hope for the world (v. 31).

John the Baptist’s example challenges us to examine our own motivations. Perhaps an honest evaluation of human nature might cause us to conclude that “pure” motives are rarely achieved. Even on our best days, we may struggle against our desire to join Jesus at center stage. However, the world does not need more of my personality. What the world needs is Jesus. May we be willing to make less of ourselves that others might see Jesus and that he might receive the praise.

Lord, I renounce my desire for human praise, for the approval of my peers, the need for public recognition. I deliberately put these aside today, content to hear you whisper, “Well done, my faithful servant.” Amen.

- Anonymous

Cory Seibel, PhD candidate
Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministries

Saturday, April 4, 2009

Hebrews 5:1–10

On our journey toward Easter, knowing the outcome as we do, we have an opportunity to explore its significance. In today’s reading, the writer argues that Jesus’ ministry stands out for two reasons—his vocational identity and the order of his priesthood.

For five years I coached high-school volleyball. Over the years I met athletes who were naturally gifted—quick, smart, strong, balanced. Then there were those who were not as gifted, but hard workers—always giving 110%, never missing a practice, always on time. Those who were both naturally talented *and* hard working were always fewer. They were rare; they stood out, as if of a different order.

Jesus had a vocational appointment as God’s Son that was unique. Yet, Jesus’ vocational identity still needed to be confirmed in order to become viable. It was not automatic; Jesus chose to respond to God’s appointment with obedience. Thus, he was designated a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not of Aaron. Why? Because Jesus tapped into an order that was from an older era, from the dawn of time.

Jesus’ death was not a sacrifice like the kind administered by Aaron and his descendents; it was of a different order—new and yet old. It actually undid a practice of tit-for-tat justice! Jesus’ self-sacrifice drained evil’s imperial culture of its power to accuse and launched a justice model where peace with God finally became possible.

At Easter, Jesus’ perfect humanity “became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” Jesus’ Melchizedekian priesthood was “made perfect” in that it finally became possible for all who identify with Jesus to realize the purpose with which God had launched creation in the first place.

As Easter approaches, let us again confirm our identity in Jesus’ new order.

Jon Isaak, PhD
Associate Professor of New Testament

Friday, April 3, 2009

John 11:1-27

I hope you read today's passage from John 11. With two settings (the village of Bethany and the countryside across the Jordan) and so much dialogue between so many people, it provides several opportunities to enter and experience the scene along with its characters.

I chuckle as I arrive with Jesus and his heel-dragging disciples at verse 16 to hear Thomas' dry quip about the group's dreaded return to the vicinity of Jerusalem: "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

And having been a pastor to people awaiting the death of a loved one, I feel for Mary and Martha who watch their sick brother linger and die without word from his friend, Jesus, who even missed the funeral! I get why Martha sounds uptight in verse 21 and why Mary repeats her in verse 32.

And before Lazarus makes his amazing exit from the tomb wrapped in grave clothes in verse 44, I have paused near Jesus at verse 35, watching his tears and wondering at how this one with the power to give life still weeps with sincere love at his friend's death, however temporary he knows it is.

But usually I identify with Martha in verse 24. Unlike some around her, she believes in the resurrection of the dead. So when Jesus tells her Lazarus will rise again, she agrees but with little enthusiasm—"I know he'll rise again in the resurrection at the last day." I'd have said the same thing.

Without a pause I imagine Jesus turning to face Martha (and me) eye to eye. His meaning is never clearer: "I AM the resurrection and the life."

The good news is not just a good story. The Good News is God's Son.

Our hope is not a creed. Our hope is Jesus.

Mark Isaac MDiv
Advancement Officer for U.S. West Coast
Director of Advancement and Constituency Relations

Saturday, March 7, 2009

Psalms 37:1-18

It is generally expected that good and upright people will enjoy a good life and those who indulge in deception and violence will be punished. While this is not an unreasonable belief, the rule doesn't always hold up. Some years ago, Rabbi Kushner, who had lost a son to a devastating disease, *progeria* ("rapid aging"), wrote a book entitled: *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. The issue in this book touched a raw nerve, for the book quickly became a bestseller with over four million copies sold since 1981.

Now while it may be difficult to live with the reality that good people will sometimes experience painful setbacks, I am convinced it is even more irritating when some people seem to be able to "get away with murder," so to speak. This is the issue that is uppermost in Psalm 37:1: "Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong." When the wicked prosper, it is the moral foundation of the entire universe that seems to be slipping from under our feet. The temptation then is for the righteous to either give up or give themselves over to evil.

The Psalmist exhorts the reader to do neither. The prosperity of the wicked is smoke and mirrors. Ultimately, the just will prevail, for God is the one upholding the universe, physical and moral. In the end, those who embrace chaos will be swallowed by it. When Christ died on the cross, it seemed as if the powers of darkness and death had won. And while Jesus was in the grave, it was as if the universe had reached a moral tipping point. Rubbish! The old Psalmist was right. Chaos could never have the upper hand. Life swallowed death. Christ rose from the dead the first of millions who one day will live forever with him.

Pierre Gilbert, PhD
Program Coordinator for Winnipeg Centre for Ministry Studies
and Associate Professor of Old Testament

Sunday, March 8, 2009

Mark 3:31 – 4:9

Today's text is about a new family and a new vision of God's Kingdom – new and astonishing! Only we have become so accustomed to these verses, they no longer astonish us. In a world where family and clan defined one's whole existence, Jesus announced a new "family by choice." As followers of Jesus our existence is defined by our relationship to our Heavenly Father and by the community that forms around him. Jesus called that community his "brothers and sisters and mothers."

In a world that expected the Kingdom of God to arrive with fanfare, Jesus said its coming was more like seed-planting. His contemporaries expected God's Kingdom to come when marching armies, OR an unprecedented religious revival, OR the descent of a heavenly city would transform the world in an instant. Jesus said God's Kingdom was already arriving for he was preaching the Word, scattering seeds that would germinate in receptive soil.

Other would-be Messiahs promised magnificent victories, successful programs, divine interventions, political revolutions. They gathered around them powerful influential people. That's what worldly revolutions are made of! Jesus promised that the Word he spoke would some day produce a great harvest, and so he gathered around him ordinary people who would hear and obey that Word. He called them his "brother and sister and mother." That's what God's Kingdom is all about.

We are moving gradually towards the Easter season, and we remember Jesus' word: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (John 12:24) Let us remember that the same miracle happens in us as we receive with responsive hearts that Word that has the power to multiply in our lives, in our churches and ultimately in this world that God loves. And, until Jesus returns, that is how God's kingdom is coming. Astonishing.

Timothy Geddert, PhD
Professor of New Testament

Thursday, April 2, 2009

John 10:19-42

The Family Olympics is an important part of our Sunday school class's annual picnic. A series of fun, competitive events helps to determine which family wins the gold medal. The craziest of these events is the "Mommy Call." Moms are blindfolded and lined up at the starting line. Each one's children are positioned at the finish line. When the whistle is blown, the kids begin to call out "Mommy!" loudly. The moms must recognize the voices of their own children and find their way to them. The first mother to do so wins.

One might expect that recognizing the voices of one's children would be a challenging task in this situation. Nonetheless, the mothers demonstrate an amazing capacity to gravitate toward the calls of their own children. A mother's daily commitment to remain attentive to the voices of her children surely helps make this possible.

In John 10:27 Jesus tells us that his sheep know his voice and follow him. In truth there are times when remaining oriented to his voice can be as challenging as participating in the "Mommy Call." Each day we are confronted by numerous competing voices that call out loudly in an effort to gain our attention. By contrast Jesus often chooses to speak to us quietly. These other voices have the potential to drown out the voice of Jesus and draw us away from him. However, we are called to follow Jesus alone. It is essential that we cultivate the daily discipline of listening to him. May we listen for the voice of Jesus today.

I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice, and it told Thy love to me. But I long to rise in the arms of faith, And be closer drawn to Thee.

- Fanny Crosby

Cory Seibel, PhD
Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministries

Wednesday, April 1, 2009

John 10:1-18

Jesus is the gate that opens the way to salvation and an abundant life. Our society presents us with various definitions of the full life. Surrounded by gates that promise to open the way to an abundant life, we would do well to ask how the demands of those gates and the full life they promise compare with the life to which Jesus calls us. During this season what are ways that we might better attune our ears to the call of Jesus, the one gate to the truly abundant life?

In the multilayered imagery of this passage Jesus also identifies himself as a shepherd who cares so deeply for his sheep that he is willing to lay down his life for them. It is a dramatic scene. The wolf attacks and the hired hand abandons the sheep and runs, but Jesus the good shepherd does not flee from the wolf. He gives his life to save the sheep. We immediately think of the cross. Yet Jesus' defence of the sheep did not begin at the cross. Rather it was the culmination of a life lived in defence of the sheep. As you think over Jesus' life, what were times when "wolves" attacked and Jesus did not flee? When stakes were at their highest and all forces and factions united against Jesus and threatened him with death, he did not abandon the sheep. Rather than turning aside from the way of life he had lived and the message he had preached, Jesus remained faithfully obedient to God the Father and lovingly committed to the sheep—to the point of death. Jesus loved us so much he was willing to die for us. Let us reflect anew on those familiar words and let the love they represent filter to the depths of our being.

Mark Baker, PhD

Associate Professor of Mission and Theology

Monday, March 9, 2009

John 4:1-26

In his travels from Judea to Galilee, Jesus goes right through Samaria rather than around it as another Jew might have done. At Jacob's well he requests a drink from a Samaritan woman—a woman with five husbands who is living with her latest boyfriend but is as yet unmarried. This woman expects to be alone at the well in the middle of day; she is an outcast among her own people. Her confusion is honest and straightforward, and she asks Jesus what he is doing asking her for a drink.

Jesus tells her exactly who he is and what he has to offer. He is the Messiah for whom she has been waiting, and he offers living water, God's gift of eternal life. It's bizarre really—that the Messiah would not only treat a Samaritan woman with respect but that he would offer her the gift of God!

The gospel of John begins by saying that the Word was with God and the Word was God and that he was revealing the Father's glory (John 1:14-18). This story of Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman explains God's grace extended through his son. The narrative shows Jesus offering salvation to a woman of low status.

I want to revel in this grace encounter. I feel thirsty for such grace. I want to receive the Messiah's living water. At the same time, I want to offer this living water to others. We can look for ways to extend God's grace, to live in his welcome, to be attentive to one another. May we be present at the well as the Samaritan woman, trusting the arrival of the Messiah. And may we offer the living water to others, especially those who may least expect it.

Sarah Bergen, MA

Admissions & PR Assistant

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

John 4:27-42

*J*ohn 4 relates how various people were affected by Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. Their reflections and musings range from astonishment that he would speak with a woman to her impassioned "Come see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" Meanwhile Jesus is so taken up by the encounter that his bodily needs of food, water, and rest are totally subsumed in his reflection on what it means to be engaged in doing the will of the one who sent him. He is also struck by how much remains to be done and seizes the moment to share with his disciples some of his reflections on what it means to reap and sow for eternal life. The townspeople from the city found the woman's comment so convincing that they believed and then came to Jesus asking him to stay with them with the result that many more believed because of his word.

When you have an encounter with Jesus or hear others' testimony of their encounters with Jesus, do you take time to ponder it in your heart? Do you run out and tell everyone in your town what you have seen and heard? Do you reflect on its meaning for your life? How have you shared your faith with others? Who has believed because of your testimony? What fields in your own life (and in your town) are ripe and ready for harvesting? Perhaps a trusted friend, pastor, counselor, or therapist could help you to reflect on your encounters with God. Conversations with Jesus change us.

Lord Jesus, help us to share our testimony and our encounters with you so that others may believe. Thank you for those who help us stop and reflect on our encounters with you. Amen.

Delores Friesen, PhD
Professor of Pastoral Counseling

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

John 9:18-41

*I*n today's reading, another healing creates controversy. First, the Jews refuse to believe that the miracle of restored sight even happened. Second, the man's parents claim that they don't know who opened his eyes, and then because of their fear of the Jews, they duck the questions by saying, "Our son is of age, ask him." It did not seem worth risking being put out of the synagogue! So, when the Pharisees call the man and question him once again, they try to convince him that Jesus is a sinner and then begin to revile him and finally cast him out of the synagogue.

The man himself is amazing—clear, forthright and willing to stand up to the religious authorities. He tries to teach them, shares his experience, and holds on to what he knows and believes. "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. . . . If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (v.30, 33).

This passage leaves me wondering how it is that those who think they see may become blind and how those who do not see may see. The greatest danger of spiritual blindness is that we don't realize that we are missing the mark. Today's Scripture opens our eyes to our own blindness.

O Jesus, open my eyes that I may see others as you see them. Help me to believe and worship. Take away my judgmental spirit that wants to decide who is in and who is out, who is right and who is wrong. Give me courage to speak the truth in love even to those in places of authority. Take away my blindness. Let me see clearly how to love you and how to love others. Amen.

Delores Friesen, PhD
Professor of Pastoral Counseling

Monday, March 30, 2009

John 9:1-17

While living in Honduras I frequently heard people labelling an illness as a punishment from God, and I would refer them to John 9. I used this text to challenge what others thought they knew about God. More recently I returned to this passage and asked, “What might I learn from John 9?” I observed that the disciples thought they knew something, that sin caused this man’s blindness, and they were wrong. The Pharisees thought they knew something, that Jesus was not from God, but they were wrong. So perhaps this is a word of caution to us about being too confident in what we are sure we know; it is an invitation to recognize God may be different than what we think. It reminds me of the lyrics from an early U2 song: “We thought we had the answers, it was the questions we had wrong.” I appreciate their honesty, humility and willingness to be self-critical.

Are there things that you *know* that God may be inviting you to re-think, to take a new look at? The reality is that as finite humans all of us fall short in our understanding of God. But the good news that this passage points us to is the reality that God is better, not worse, than what we think we know about God. Jesus shocked and surprised the disciples and the Pharisees. We too might be surprised by ways God is different from our ideas about God, but that is good news—ask the blind man!

Mark Baker, PhD

Associate Professor of Mission and Theology

Wednesday, March 11, 2009

John 4:43-54

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were in desperate straits and called on God for help? Perhaps it was at a time of serious illness, a financial crisis, a job loss or a difficult family matter. Just when you felt that you could not carry on there was an unexpected resolution and the crisis passed. Was that resolution coincidence or God’s miraculous intervention?

In today’s scripture we read of a government official, a gentile, who travelled from Capernaum to Cana in order to seek out Jesus who had just arrived there from Samaria. He came to plead with Jesus for the life of his dying son. When Jesus advised the official to, “go back home, your son will live” (John 4:50), he returned home and was given the good news that his son had miraculously recovered. Inquiring further he discovered that the son’s recovery had begun at the very hour that Jesus had given him those words of promise. In response, that official and his entire household believed in Jesus.

There are at least two clear lessons we can draw from the reading of this account. First, God does intervene and extends grace into our lives in miraculous ways. When he responds to our cries for help, these responses are not mere coincidence. We then need to acknowledge them as from God and thank him.

Second, these divine interventions occur for our benefit. They resolve the pressing crisis, but they also present us with the opportunity to respond as this official and his household did. They are given as opportunities to strengthen and deepen our faith in Jesus.

Thank you, God, for your active intervention in our lives, especially in times of personal need or family crisis. Help us to respond with a deeper faith commitment to you. Amen.

Dave Teigrob, MA

Advancement Officer for Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario

Thursday, March 12, 2009

John 5:1-18

People often come to my therapy office with longstanding, difficult problems. Some come with problems which have lasted even longer than the thirty-eight years this man was lying at the pool of Bethesda. The roots of systemic illnesses often are very deep and very difficult to remove. Things that happened in childhood, injustices that were experienced, even words that were said can paralyze the mind and the heart as well as the body.

In this story Jesus healed a person paralyzed by fear, illness, dependency and despair. Where do you need healing? What is paralyzing you and keeping you from moving forward in your spiritual life, church, home, business, or work? Where are you lying down and waiting for someone else to take action on your behalf? Do you feel that everyone else has it better than you do, that someone else is always getting there ahead of you? Where do you need to take a stand; what do you need to pick up before you can be healed?

It is interesting that the man did not even know who Jesus was (v. 13) or who had healed him. No sooner had the healing happened, however, than both he and Jesus began to get into trouble. Sometimes getting well, taking a stand, or calling God our Father may create a misunderstanding, bring persecution, cost us friends, or get our healers into trouble.

What might it cost you to be healed? Who stands in need of your healing touch or words? Why has the church so often criticized the ministry of healing and counseling? How can we confront and change learned helplessness, paralysis, addictions? What kinds of support and understanding do those who face chronic illness need? How do you answer Jesus' penetrating and provocative question, "Do you want to be made well?"

Delores Friesen, PhD
Professor of Pastoral Counseling

Sunday, March 29, 2009

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

As a free man Paul voluntarily became a "slave to all," submitting to the various cultural patterns of the people he hoped to win with the gospel. Why? Because Christian freedom gets its shape from Jesus, the one who lived and proclaimed a message of freely-given, self-sacrificial love. Jesus served others *and* called them home in the self-disciplined manner of an athlete on a mission.

Just over thirty years ago I was baptized, becoming a member of the North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This was a significant step of identity for me. I was declaring that I wanted to be identified with God's people gathering in that particular location. To commemorate the occasion, my parents gave me a chain with a cross to hang around my neck. I still wear that cross. It reminds me of whose I am and of the cruciform shape of our mission.

In today's reading, Paul reminds the Corinthians, embroiled in congregational conflict, that it is the cross-shaped pattern of Christ that shapes their interaction with one another—both their freedom and their responsibility. While Paul is not "under the law," that is, not trusting the Torah to liberate him from the power of sin (it is simply not strong enough), he is "under Christ's law," that is, liberated from Sin's grip and obligated to love all people as a member of the new humanity that the Lord Jesus initiated as the first born of the new creation.

Ancient athletes persevered in self-disciplined training to receive the perishable wreath of celery leaves at the city games. The reminder for us as we journey toward Easter is that the mission characterizing our existence is Jesus' imperishable mission, a cross-shaped mission. What cruciform patterns do you see taking shape today?

Jon Isaak, PhD
Associate Professor of New Testament

Saturday, March 28, 2009

John 8:48-59

There is nothing like a test to reveal what we know and what we do not.

Just prior to the first week of college I thought I would “test out” of Chemistry I. With a knowing smile my professor gave me the exam. And on the first day of classes he wore the same smile as he welcomed me to his class. I had a lot to learn about chemistry, and about myself.

In our text the Pharisees seemed to know quite a bit about quite a lot. At least they seemed quite willing to say what they thought they knew. They said they knew that Jesus was demon-possessed, that Abraham was dead and gone, and that Jesus (at less than 50 years of age) could not possibly have met Abraham (who walked the earth about 2000 years earlier). They said they knew, but none of them did. They were guessing or presuming or thinking logically, which is not the same as knowing.

What Jesus knows, he says: I am not possessed by a demon, I honor my Father whom I know and who glorifies me, I was before Abraham, and he was glad to see my day. Unless we believe who Jesus is, these statements seem preposterous and silly. Believing who Jesus is, they match the truth.

“Test day” came and went for Jesus and the Pharisees—his resurrection revealing the truth of who really knew what. Jesus knew what he was talking about.

These are days of testing for us, with more to come. If you have ever failed a test of your faith before, then you know it is best not to assume that you have learned all you need to know from God’s Word, no matter who you are.

Grab your Bible, and welcome to class!

Mark Isaac MDiv
*Advancement Officer for U.S. West Coast
Director of Advancement and Constituency Relations*

Friday, March 13, 2009

John 5:19-29

Many who identify with the Christian faith increasingly apologize for that very same faith. Less than a year ago, Reverend Greta Vosper, an emerging leader in the United Church of Canada, published a book entitled *With or Without God*, in which she argues that all references to Jesus and the resurrection should be excised from the Christian faith and replaced with a renewed sense of optimism and belief in the human spirit.

Ms. Vosper is not expressing anything new. She is simply saying what many church leaders have believed for years: that there is a fundamental problem with the Christian faith and, to put it bluntly, that problem is the New Testament portrayal of Jesus Christ.

With all due respect, the Jesus of the Bible is a tad embarrassing. For instance, he talked a great deal about Truth—not just your truth or my truth, but Absolute and Overwhelming Truth.

That some Christians may wish to eliminate Christ altogether or find refuge in some politically correct view of Jesus is not surprising. Nothing new here! Who Christ is, our Christology, is and has always been the major battlefield of the Christian faith. Everything else is small potatoes.

As comfortable as that may be, to believe, as many do, in Jesus as a great moral teacher is simply nonsense. C. S. Lewis put it most succinctly: “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher but a lunatic, on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg.... Either he (Jesus) was a raving lunatic of an unusually abominable type, or else He was, and is, precisely what he said. There is no middle way.”

On the third day, Christ arose from the dead, proving that he indeed was who he claimed he was. Christians should be the most joyful people on earth.

Pierre Gilbert, PhD
*Program Coordinator for Winnipeg Centre for Ministry Studies
and Associate Professor of Old Testament*

Saturday, March 14, 2009

John 5:30-47

In today's passage Jesus asserts that he is not out to satisfy his own aims. Rather, he is devoted to doing only those things that please the one who sent him (v. 30). Jesus offers some potent evidence to support this claim. First, he notes that John the Baptist has testified in his favor (vv. 32-35). Second, Jesus insists that his own works demonstrate that the Father has sent him (v. 36). Finally, Jesus asserts that the Father himself has testified through the Scriptures (vv. 37-39) regarding who Jesus is.

This evidence is quite compelling. For me personally Jesus' claim that he is doing the very work that the Father has given him to finish (v. 36) has had a particularly lasting impact. Around my 33rd birthday, it occurred to me that this was the same age at which Jesus completed his earthly ministry. Jesus' singularity of purpose had enabled him to finish the work that the Father had given him to do.

This challenged me deeply. Though I knew that Jesus had sent me into the world as his disciple (John 20:21), I was aware that I all too frequently strayed from the works that he had called me to do. I sensed Jesus challenging me to strive toward a consistency of character and conduct that would demonstrate his likeness. In my life this process of becoming like Christ continues.

How does our conduct testify to the one who has sent us? Oh, to be able to say that we are doing precisely the things Jesus has called us to do!

"You're writing a gospel a chapter a day, by the way that you live and the things that you say. People read what you write, distorted or true. What is the gospel according to you?"

- Anonymous

Cory Seibel, PhD candidate
Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministries

Friday, March 27, 2009

John 8:33-47

William Wilberforce is one of my heroes. His dedication to the abolitionist movement in England 202 years ago inspires me almost daily. Imagine spending your time, money, passion and very self all for the freedom of people you may never meet, but must care for deeply! I suspect Mr. Wilberforce got just a taste of Jesus' life and heart.

In these verses we see clearly that Jesus is an abolitionist, too. He did not endeavor to free hundreds of thousands though. His goal was only everybody. Imagine, for a moment, Wilberforce encountering one of the slaves for whom he was fighting to preserve his/her dignity and gain freedom and this slave blindly telling Wilberforce, "What are you talking about? I am free." This is the direct answer Jesus heard when he was with some Jews.

Jesus never meant that they were slaves in the sense that many Africans were (and many still are). We too fall into the same category as these confused Jews. Sin is our master and Jesus is fighting for our freedom from Sin, the corrupt slave driver. In fact, the Father has already purchased us with his son's very blood. Yet, so often we live as if we are still under the rule of our former master.

I wonder how we must look to Jesus. Like the slave telling Wilberforce he was free. Only now, not only does Jesus tell us that we are slaves to sin, but he follows with the truth that the Son can set us free. He already purchased our precious freedom. Our response? Well, the Jews present for this conversation desired to kill the one who had come to redeem them. We often forget that we are free and live as if we are still under the yoke of Sin. Let us choose today to live in the freedom Jesus grants us.

Mandy Young
MB Biblical Seminary Master of Arts student

Thursday, March 26, 2009

John 8:21-32

We are, all of us, slaves to sin. In John's Gospel Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." Jesus words come in response to the "Jews who had believed him" and claimed "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone." Like those Jews who put their faith in Jesus, we too often lay false claims to our own freedom and independence. We are free to choose to sin or not to sin. Like those ancient followers of Jesus, we assert that we are slaves to no one. But Jesus disagrees with us. "I tell you the truth," Jesus says, "You're addicted to sin and there is nothing you can do to change your own condition." We are hopelessly entangled in sin's far-reaching web. Jesus continues, "A slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever." For us, however, our condition as slaves to sin is not ultimate. "If you hold to my teaching," Jesus tells us, "you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." There remains a problem however, despite Jesus offer of freedom. What is the truth?

Rather than some intellectual proposition that we must uncover that would enable us to stop sinning, Jesus offers us a resting place in our hurried search for "truth." "If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed." Jesus himself is the Truth – a truth not that we must understand but that is alive among us. We find our Easter hope and a place in God's family solely in the risen Lord's offer of freedom.

Ben Schmidt

MB Biblical Seminary Master of Divinity student

Sunday, March 15, 2009

Mark 5:1-20

"A man . . . came . . . to meet him!" (Mark 5:2). When we meet Jesus, things happen. The man who meets Jesus in Mark 5 is pretty clear evidence of that. Before that meeting he was in very bad shape. According to the religious rules of his day, everything around him is unclean – he lived in Gentile territory, among the tombs, among the pigs. Everything inside him was also unclean. A legion of demons tormented him, making him self-mutilating and suicidal. He was naked and alone.

And then he meets Jesus. Jesus drives out the forces of evil and restores him to wholeness and sanity. Soon he is "sitting there, dressed and in his right mind." And soon after he returns home to friends and family, telling everyone what Jesus did for him.

Meeting Jesus always transforms people, whether their problems are similar to or very different from those we read about in this text. Sometimes the changes are dramatic; sometimes they are more gradual. Sometimes our outer circumstances are turned around; sometimes we are given perseverance and grace to accept and thrive in difficult situations. And when we are transformed by Jesus, it is never for our sake alone. We are called to return to family and friends and "tell them how much the Lord has done for us."

As we move closer to Easter celebrations, let us be inspired by the restored man from Gerasa to meet Jesus, be transformed, and bear witness. Let us reflect on the price Jesus paid to make us whole, receive the great benefits of Calvary – forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation. Let us respond obediently to the Easter challenge – to be transformed and then to "go and tell." That is what Easter is all about.

Timothy Geddert, PhD
Professor of New Testament

Monday, March 16, 2009

John 6:1-15

John's account of the "Feeding of the Five Thousand" provides another glimpse into Jesus' journey. Through this story we are reminded of the care and faithfulness that Christ exemplifies. The imagery and themes that are presented are worth revisiting. We see Jesus communing with his disciples (v.3); a time of fellowship and feast (v.4); Jesus taking time away to rest and pray (v.5); Philip (a disciple) summoned to serve and lead (vv.5-7); doubt regarding financial capacity (v.7); reliance on community and minimal resources (v. 8); Jesus as host extending comfort to the guest (v.10); the miracle (v. 11); good stewardship of resources (v.12); God (the King) glorified in the end (v.15). Reflecting on my childhood in the northern coast of Honduras, I'm reminded of how culture plays an important role in our perspective. My experience and understanding of life from this culture involved being around people, having conversation and sitting together for meals. It involved gathering clothes and other items to distribute to those with fewer resources within the neighborhood. It involved running to the house of our neighbor, Don Pedro, to help with raking leaves and cleaning the yard. It also involves sharing my lunch with my public school classmates-- Juan, Rudolfo, and Nico, who otherwise would not have eaten during the day. It was not a duty or a service project for me; it simply was how we did everyday life.

As Easter approaches, John reminds and encourages us to take time for rest and prayer, to commune and eat together, not to fret about our financial burden in the midst our nation's economic crisis, to be a good steward of our resources, to expect miracles, to extend a serving hand to those around us, and joyfully to give glory to God.

Mike Rea
Assistant Director of Ministry Quest

Wednesday, March 25, 2009

John 8:12-20

In this interaction with the Pharisees, Jesus makes a bold claim: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Notice that he does not say anything about following his doctrines or rules or any specific religion. Jesus claims that in himself, through relationship with him and knowledge of his heart, we are led into the light of life.

The leaders of Israel want to know how he can say such a thing. What proves it? Where are the Old Testament texts that prove him correct? Or maybe there is someone who could testify that this is true. But Jesus claims that God testifies on his behalf, to which the Pharisees respond, "Where is God, then?" It is clear that the Pharisees do not trust Jesus, for they don't really know him, and thus they have shown that they don't know God either.

While we may have some rather convincing arguments for Christian faith—whether philosophical, or experiential or ethical—our faith is ultimately about relationship with Jesus. We have come to walk in the light—we have met God—through this crucified carpenter! People who do not trust Jesus will never be convinced until they trust him, place faith in him. Our best testimony to non-Christian neighbors, friends, and co-workers is to live in the light that Christ leads us into. When they want to know how we can say we "know" God, we can simply point to Jesus. The testimony of his life and ministry and ongoing presence in the world is enough. Because we have placed our trust in Christ, we no longer have to ask, "Where is the Father?" We no longer walk in darkness, for we have the light of life!

Matthew Insley
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Tuesday, March 24, 2009

Jeremiah 3:6-18

*J*eremiah never minced his words. In this passage, he is accusing Judah of acting like an adulterous woman, and a stupid one at that. The Judeans are well aware of the disaster that struck their sister nation Israel a century before. And yet, here they are, like fools, doing exactly the same thing.

If the living God were like an ordinary man, he would turn his back forever. But Yahweh is no mere mortal, an accountant who keeps track of every offense. His love and humility are infinite. Yahweh doggedly calls his people to return to him, and some will. To these he promises an enthusiastic welcome, radical transformation, and an unimaginable future. The Incredible News is that this promise is not limited to the Israelites and their descendants. In time, the living God will also invite the nations to join the party. Here, I can't help but be reminded of Paul's words in Romans 11: 11-15:

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! ... For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Our Lord has died and risen from the dead. The Kingdom is now at hand. The curtain is, even as we speak, coming down. The night is almost over. The sun is about to burst on the horizon. Something huge is coming. I pray and yearn for that great day when everyone will see our Lord for who he is, and when the sons and daughters of our Father and king will come into their own.

Pierre Gilbert, PhD

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Tuesday, March 17, 2009

John 6:16-26

“O Lord, show me something,” I begged yet again, staring at the hundreds of stars screaming God's glory above me, listening to the calm waves gurgle more than rush from my serene spot by the lake. You would think the clear night and the heightened sense of his being not only powerful but a beautiful creator would be enough. How often do we hear ourselves utter such statements though? I wanted the answer to *my* question. The only sensation I felt was that in the stillness he was there. No answers, just presence.

“Jesus, when did you get here? How did you get here?”* That was the quest of the seekers. I wonder if they knew it had to be by some miraculous transport or if they expected to hear that some boat had come while they were not paying attention. Jesus seems to understand that they want more proof that he is something special. He responds not to their question, but with this heart-penetrating statement: “You think you want me because of my miracles, but really it is so much more than that. You deeply desire for me to continue to fill you. I want you to pursue everlasting fulfillment. The Son of Man is the one on whom God has placed his seal. Seek that one.” He doesn't even say “Seek *me*.”

We have the benefit of reading the Gospels after they were completed while the characters were living these events. They do not yet know the end as we do. We claim Jesus is the Christ while they are still left in wonder. Yet, we still want to see the same miracles. I think Jesus is saying to all of us seekers, “I AM right here! You are asking the wrong question...”

**All Scriptural quotations are paraphrased by the author.*

Mandy Young

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Wednesday, March 18, 2009

John 6:27-40

We were driving through the southern end of Paraguay when our bus stopped along the roadside and a *Chipa* girl got on. She wore a colorful blue skirt and freshly pressed blouse and balanced an enormous wicker basket on her shoulder. It was piled high with *chipas*, a type of Paraguayan bread that looks like a bagel and is made from manioc flour. They were carefully wrapped in a pale blue cloth and she served them in small paper bags. As she worked her way through the bus, people eagerly reached into pockets and purses so that they could buy the freshly baked *chipas* she was selling.

Whether it comes in the form of *chipas*, tortillas, *zwieback* or freshly baked loaves, bread is eagerly received by hungry people. It sustains life.

When the people pestered Jesus for a miracle (“What will you give so that we might see it and believe?”), they reminded him that Moses had provided manna, “bread from heaven,” during the wilderness flight from Egypt. They were looking to be fed. After all, Jesus had already multiplied the loaves and fishes and fed the hungry crowds of people. Why shouldn’t he feed them again?

Jesus seized the moment to help them understand who he was and how their hunger could be permanently satisfied. Using the image created by their own words, Jesus called himself the “true bread from heaven” sent by God the Father to give life to the world. “I am the bread of life,” Jesus said. “He who comes to me will never go hungry.”

For all people, believing that Jesus is sent by God for the salvation of the world is to be well and truly fed.

Valerie Rempel, PhD
Associate Professor of History and Theology
Dean of Students and Enrolment

Monday, March 23, 2009

Romans 5:1–11

Jesus’ life and ministry was all about mission, access, and homecoming. As Paul notes in today’s reading, Jesus’ advocacy made it possible to access our true identity—our true home.

Access is one concept that you do not fully appreciate unless you are deprived of it. Hans Kasdorf, retired seminary mission professor, has his own story of denied access and loss of homeland. In his autobiography, *Design of My Journey*, Kasdorf describes his family’s flight from Siberia during Stalin’s oppressive reign of terror. They finally managed to reach Brazil, having to surrender their passports to Soviet officials as they left. Eventually, after years of complicated travel and “stateless status,” Kasdorf was able to secure a passport, giving vivid meaning to terms like access, home, and identity.

Jesus refused to abandon God’s mission of bringing creation home, even if it meant misunderstanding and execution at the hands of hostile forces. Paul states the significance of Easter simply as “peace with God.” That is, Jesus’ victory provided a way back home, a way out from under the self-inflicted tangle of sin that has enmeshed us all.

This is something to get excited about! God has not left us alone in our homeless, rebellious, alienated state. Paul uses some stark comparisons to bring out the significance of Easter. He says that rarely would anyone advocate “to the death” for an ordinary, upright person, but perhaps for an esteemed, generous person. The magnitude of Jesus’ self-offering exceeds this norm on two counts—Jesus advocates on behalf of rebellious sinners and treacherous enemies! This is good news.

We are reminded again at Easter of the magnitude of God’s access-making love, a love that reaches “to the death” to include all those choosing to respond to the homeward call of Jesus. Thanks be to God!

Jon Isaak, PhD
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Sunday, March 22, 2009

Mark 8:11-21

Mark 8:11-21 has puzzled scholars and mystified ordinary readers. Jesus refuses to perform a miracle for the Pharisees, then warns his disciples against their “yeast.” The disciples don’t get it. So Jesus quizzes them about two recent feeding miracles. They remember the details but don’t have a clue what it all means. “Do you still not understand?” asks Jesus. But he never explains things. What’s going on?

Here’s my proposal. The disciples have experienced lots of amazing miracles—healings, a resurrection, rescues at sea, two times when Jesus multiplied loaves. Now they’re in the boat on a calm sea, a perfect situation for a picnic on the lake—if only they hadn’t forgotten to bring the food. One tiny loaf for thirteen hungry men! Then someone remembers that Jesus can multiply loaves.

And Jesus says, “Watch out!” He’s just refused to produce miracles-on-demand for the Pharisees. Now he will refuse a frivolous miracle for disciples who want a picnic on the lake. Instead he warns them against the Pharisaic demand for a sign. And he calls his disciples to recognize the true significance of God’s mighty works. They need “hearing ears” and “seeing eyes” more than another miraculous meal.

Interestingly, Mark surrounds this passage with two notable miracles. With great effort Jesus heals a deaf man in Mark 7:31-37 and with equal effort a blind man in Mark 8:22-26. Jesus really can make people hear and see—the physically deaf and blind, the disciples who just don’t get it, the readers who also struggle to learn from texts like this one and from Jesus who has the power to do miracles but sometimes refuses because there more important things he wants to accomplish in us. Isn’t that what the story of Jesus’ passion is all about? Think about it!

Timothy Geddert, PhD
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Thursday, March 19, 2009

John 6:41-51

In John 6, Jesus again makes a seemingly outrageous claim. “I am the bread of life,” he says. It is an audacious remark. How can anyone claim to be bread? Unless it is manna, how can bread come down from heaven?

Jesus persisted, trying once more to help the people understand his special relationship with the Father and especially God’s desire for the people to be saved. Then he took it one step further. “This bread is my flesh,” he explained, “which I will give for the life of the world.” His words speak of what is to come, his sacrificial death at the hands of the very people he came to save. It is in laying down his life that Jesus made it possible for us to gain eternal life. His own body is the bread that gives true life.

The bakery is one of my favorite places at my neighborhood grocery store, and I often walk through it even though I don’t need anything. The freshly baked loaves of French and sourdough bread are piled into large open baskets, often while they are still a bit warm. Hand-shaped loaves of whole grain bread, Italian *focaccia* and other specialty breads are attractively arranged in well-lit display cases. There are tongs and large paper bags conveniently placed near the bins holding various kinds of rolls and bagels. If I am especially lucky, there are samples on a nearby counter. The space is warm and inviting; the sights and the scents entice me.

It doesn’t really matter how beautifully the bread is displayed. Unless the bread is broken it cannot feed me.

Valerie Rempel, PhD
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Friday, March 20, 2009

John 6:52-59

We had been touring the city on a warm Paraguayan summer evening. Pleasantly tired and hungry, we stopped for something to eat at a café next to the town square. Soon a poorly dressed child, dirty and thin, appeared at the street-side table we were occupying.

“What have you eaten today?” my friend asked.

The boy shrugged. A quick shoe shine for one of our companions, a few words exchanged in a local language, some coins carefully tucked into his bag and he was off.

Our food was eventually delivered and gratefully consumed. Warm *empanadas* filled with various meats and cheese were broken apart and shared around the table. We sat for a long time visiting about the city and our plans for the next few days. As we got ready to leave, my friend scanned the crowded tables around us and then confessed that she had been looking for the boy. She had offered to feed him if he would return for some food. Unfortunately, he never came back.

In today’s passage of scripture Jesus tells the people that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to receive eternal life. The words shock. Who wants to “eat flesh” and “drink blood”? Yet Jesus insists that this is the way to eternal life. Unless we grab hold of this living bread that is broken and offered to us, we die. But if we believe that true life is found in him, Jesus promises to keep us and raise us up at the last day.

It is not enough to simply be offered food. Life is only sustained if we take it and eat.

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Saturday, March 21, 2009

John 6:60-71

Life is filled with experiences that are sometimes difficult to understand, that cause people to hesitate or stumble in their walk with God. Most of us have experienced a crisis of faith moment, or at least know of someone who has. Often such crises are brought on by suffering: a painful illness, a terrible tragedy, a dreadful natural disaster, a brutal act of violence, suicide by a loved one, infertility, sudden unemployment. The pain and loss resulting from such difficult experiences often raises questions about God’s goodness, about his ability to protect people.

The New Testament contains numerous statements by Jesus that are known as “hard sayings.” The complaint uttered by the disciples about the difficulty of Jesus’ teaching comes immediately after a series of provocative comments by Jesus in which he declares himself to be the “bread of life” and claims that eating his flesh and drinking his blood is the source of eternal life. One can hardly blame those listening to Jesus for finding some of his statements difficult to comprehend and even scandalous and offensive.

Jesus is keenly aware of the confusion and conflict that his teaching is causing even among those disciples closest to him. In our passage Jesus openly addresses their complaints: “Does this offend (or hinder) you?” he asks. Jesus’ question signals his recognition of human frailties and the difficulties of faith. Being a faithful follower of Jesus is not always easy, but it is the way of life. And thankfully we do not need to walk the journey of faith alone. Jesus was not only fully present with his disciples; he remains, through his Spirit, fully present with us also.

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