

I GIVE UP

6 Week Devotional

Booklet



GLEN MAR UMC
Praising God. Growing as Disciples. Serving the World

~I Give Up Fear~

The weight of fear often immobilizes, paralyzes, or change the ways that we “walk” our journey of faith. What if we could “unpack our bags” of fear so that we can walk in our liberty through God’s grace? Journey this week as we give up fear so that we can give ourselves to God, others, and ourselves.

Monday, March 7th – Taking Off Our Masks

Scripture Reading – Romans 8:31-35

One of my favorite poems is by Paul Lawrence Dunbar entitled “We Wear the Mask.” He wrote this well before pandemic where we would wear masks to protect us from severe illness, but it is about the figurative masks People of Color wear to hide pain and trauma. It says that “we wear the mask that hide our cheeks and shades our eyes...with torn and bleeding hearts we smile.” This is very true to the Black experience. And at the same time, there is something true about this for most all of us. We try to cover up our true selves often because we do not think other people can handle our pain. They cannot handle our weeping. They cannot handle our weaknesses or imperfections. We are often afraid of the cost of taking off the masks. What if you see the true me and don’t like it? Have you ever had the click in your throat stop you as you are about to get “too real?” We find ourselves apologizing when we are too honest when someone says, “how are you doing?” There are times when we want to share all of ourselves but stop short of sharing it. Believe it or not, we wear masks before God hoping that our masks will somehow fool God. We sometimes wonder if God will ever truly accept us as we are. We cover up our lamenting, we pretend we are not angry, we cover up our pain with jest and smiles, and only share superficial pleasantries with others and God. We are afraid to uncover the masks for fear that others may think they see a beast underneath. But God is inviting us into a complete relationship. Not one of masks or veils but one that is true. The masks that we wear covering up our true selves, our pain, our burdens, our trials, our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities, and ourselves is heavy. God invites us to pull off our figurative masks to be in full relationship with God and each other.

Unpacking the bag: What masks have you been wearing? What has it been covering? Take off your mask and uncover yourself—all of you!! Who is there? A beloved child of God.

I Give: Create a donation pile---Do you have any unused (but in good shape) kitchen appliances cluttering up your cabinets? Put them in the donation pile. If you do not have an item for the donation pile, take time to have a genuine conversation with someone (listening and sharing).

Tuesday, March 8th – The “If” Game

Scripture Reading: Luke 4:1-13

I have many fears. Most of my fears are totally irrational. I am afraid of heights—well I’m more so afraid of falling from heights. Because I’m afraid of heights I’m often afraid of bridges. I often play the what if game. This what if game is completely ruled by my fears. What if there’s a bridge and it hasn’t been maintained? What if I fall? What if, what if, what if???!

Wilderness experiences bring out many of our deepest fears. We most often think of wildernesses as dangerous places of isolation. We think of them as the “lions, tigers, and bears--oh my!” places. And because it is the wilderness, our fear brings out the “if” game. When Jesus was in the wilderness, Satan tempted Jesus with the “if” game before his public ministry. Satan used statements such as, “if you are the Son of God...” or “if you then will worship me.” The temptations echoed those of the Israelites in the wilderness where they groaned about food and water, made their own golden calves, forgot that God was with them. They were enslaved by the “what if” game and so Satan tempted Jesus to be enslaved by this same “what if” game.

We become enslaved by the “if” game that we play in our heads about the unknown. What *if* there are lions, tigers, and bears? What *if* we are alone? What *if* we find harm and despair? What *if*... We can what if ourselves out of our own liberation and freedom. We can “what if” ourselves out of blessings, growth, and happiness. In result, we often stay stuck in situations of bondage and burden. But perhaps we need to play the what if game a little differently.

In our passage, Jesus changes the game. For every negative *what if* Satan presented, Jesus finished the statement with ***God is with me***. God is often calling us into the unknown; places for us to be liberated, grow in faith and relationship with God, use our gifts, and prepare for living out our purposes. Wilderness experiences do not have to be scary if we remember that God is with us.

Unpacking the bag: Let’s play the what if game a little differently. Instead of following the what if with something negative, let’s follow with “God is with me.” What if I fail? ***God is with me***. What if I lose? ***God is with me***. What if I fall? ***God is with me***. What if I feel alone? ***God is with me***. Feel free to use your own fears and follow them with “God is with me.”

I Give: It’s cold out there! Take a look through your coats and see what you can pass along. Take to a local clothing bin. If you do not have a coat to give, create a donation jar and put \$1 into it.

Wednesday, March 9th – Is It Safe to Fly?

Scripture Reading - John 10:1-10

I am not a huge fan of flying. In fact, I could consider it a fear. As the plane begins to pick up speed and begins to ascend, I feel the sweeping feeling of panic. There is no ground beneath the plane. I can hear the wind whipping against the metal of the plane. I become keenly aware of all the sounds a plane makes as the wings adjust to the wind. I notice the sound of the wheels going inside the plane. I feel the plane tilting from side to side as it maneuvers into the right pathway for the destination. I am mildly holding my breath through this process. I worry about the plane crashing. Then I hear the ding sound saying that we can now take off our seatbelts and then the pilot comes onto the speaker. The voice of the pilot assures me that we are in the air, it is safe, and I can now relax. The pilot tells us what to expect for the rest of the journey and we're all comforted even if things get a little bumpy along the way. Despite my fear of flying, I fly all the time because I know that a part of experiencing new things, going places, and truly living I have to get off of the ground.

The ground feels like such a safe place to me. I know it and it feels stable. Even if nothing special, extraordinary, or spectacular happens at least it feels safe. So, we live our lives afraid to ascend; we live life grounded. This is what living life with the fear of happiness is like. We are afraid to live completely for fear that something terrible is going to happen, or we feel guilty for living and being happy, that happiness keeps you from being focused, or that it's selfish. Our passage discusses the thief coming. Sometimes our fear of happiness makes us think the thief or bandit comes when we're happy because our happiness somehow kept us from being on alert and thereby inviting the thief. This is a lie.

The voice of fear comes to kill, steal, and destroy. It tells us that we should not rejoice, tells us that we should stay grounded, that we should not ascend or fly, that we shouldn't raise our arms in praise, and that we cannot live. But our good shepherd, Jesus Christ, reminds us like the pilot that it's safe even while we're ascended. Our happiness does not invite the bandits and thieves of life so why not allow ourselves to be happy knowing that even when they come, our pilot and shepherd is there. It's safe to live, rejoice, be happy without fear of crash or disaster because we have Jesus who is with us not only when we're on the ground but also when we ascend.

Unpacking the bag: What fears have you grounded? Imagine what it might feel like to let the fear go so that you can ascend? What might it feel like to allow yourself to truly feel happiness?

I Give: Pray for those in our community who are cold and without housing.

Thursday, March 10th – Heavy Bags

Scripture Reading – Matthew 11:28-30

There was a time when book stuffed bookbags were a thing because books were not accessible on tablets. The world of information was not accessible through smartphones. I loved books so I had additional books in my bookbag beyond the required books needed to complete homework assignments. Every day I put a very heavy bookbag on my back and walked 2-3 miles home. This is not meant as one of those “when I was a kid, I had to walk 5 miles to school uphill in a blizzard”—I promise. This is a true story of what it was like carrying around a heavy bookbag full of books. In time, carrying that heavy bookbag began to cause back problems and it impacted my posture and even the way that I walked. I didn’t notice how it was causing my back to curve a bit and me to slump when I stood. Even though my heavy bookbag was causing me pain, it was difficult to put it down or even to find another way to carry the books without harm because they were mine. They were *MY* books.

Many of us are carrying heavy burdens upon our spirit. We are carrying things that have changed the way that we walk, have kept us from standing up straight, and have caused us much pain, yet we find it difficult to let them go. It’s difficult to let go even those things that are harmful to us because they belong to us. They are familiar to us. Often, our identity is wrapped up in those things that we carry and to let them go leaves us wondering who we are without them. Also, carrying them even while damaging gives us a sense of control. It’s only when the heavy bag is let go do we realize the control and burden it had over us.

In the passage, Jesus shares that he is the fulfillment of the law. The Pharisees had used the law as a system of burden and placed them upon the people’s backs as a burden. It had become an oppressive system. So, Jesus was saying that in him you can find rest. In Jesus, you can lay the heavy bag down. All the weights of self-righteousness, control, pain, suffering, hatred, and fear—we can lay them down and find rest. Through Jesus, we can stand up straight and walk in liberty.

Unpacking the Bag: Think about a time when you carried something very heavy and what it felt like to put it down. What are those things that you are carrying in your spirit that is weighing you down? What books are you carrying?

I’ve been carrying _____, and now I am setting it down.
(Repeat as many times as you need)

I Give: Toothbrushes and toothpaste go fast. Grab a few and add them to the donation pile that you created.

Friday, March 11th – Getting Stuck

Scripture Reading – 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Have you ever gotten your car stuck in the mud or in the snow? You notice the back tires spins, but the car does not move. It is stuck. Sometimes, we think if we only press a bit more on the gas, then the tire will become unstuck but instead the wheels continue to spin with no movement. Our fear of failure is much like this. Our mind like the wheels spin; spinning with fear, worry, anxiety, and even panic. And so, we often become stuck. Our fear immobilizes us.

The truth is if we do not want to fail then we must decide that we will never try and/or ever move. The moment we choose to move, we take the chance on failure. The moment you take a step, there is risk of falling—and that's okay.

My son had to learn that lesson when he took his first steps. When he took his first steps, we celebrated, and he fell down on his bottom. We are not certain if it was our cheering him on or simply his falling that made him decide for a time after that to not take another step. Despite our encouragement, the sting of his first steps experience made him decide to stop trying to walk. Having already taken steps, he didn't seem willing to go back to crawling also. So, he had to make a decision--would he stay stuck in place or would he risk the chance of falling but getting to exploring new places and experiencing new adventures. He eventually decided to take the chance at failure and falling so that he could move towards his life's adventures. We only celebrated slightly just in case it was our cheering that had scared him—haha!

We do not know what gave him the courage to press on and take the steps, but I think he could count on knowing that we were with him wherever he was; while he sat stuck and when he took courage to walk. We were with him. So even in his falling, he was not falling alone because we were there to help him try and get back up. God is a far better parent than we'll ever be and just as we are there for our children when they fall, fail, or make mistakes, how much more is God? God's grace is more than enough. Where fear tries to keep us from moving, grace liberates us. It is not through our own strength but through Christ Jesus. We have been empowered to walk in our liberation. The fear of failure suggests that we believe we are perfect. It suggests that we are operating only on our own strength. But if we were perfect and expected to be strong than what would be the need for grace? Because of grace, there is no failure though Christ Jesus.

Unpacking the bag: Has fear of failure immobilized you? What have you decided not to try in fear that you may fail? What are some things you would have done if not for the fear of failure? How might your understanding of grace help you to overcome this fear?

I Give: Protein is important, and almost everyone will eat PB & J. Add some peanut butter and jelly to your donation pile. If you do not have peanut butter and jelly, then add \$1 to you donation jar.

Saturday, March 12th

I Give: Give up your time. Cook a favorite meal for someone you love
(even if that person is yourself.)

Sunday, March 13th

Rest. You've done good work!

~I Give Up Chasing
Approval~

We're all running races. We have others running races alongside our own races. Our great cloud of witnesses are in the stands cheering us on along our race. On your mark, get set, GO! Wait, don't forget to put a heavy bag on your back. The goal line is ahead of us. It doesn't take long before we're exhausted running the race with the heavy bag of needing approval on our backs. Before long, your sprint becomes a crawl. Chasing approval exhausts our mind, body, and spirit. What if we could run without a heavy bag upon our backs? Journey this week as we give up chasing approval so that we can love God, others, and ourselves.

Monday, March 14th – Being a Sponge

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139

Being a sponge is usually a characteristic that is celebrated. We say things like “that kid is a sponge.” It means that a person can take in a lot of data easily and retain it. It’s all external data. These people that can be a sponge are exceptionally intelligent people. It is often a trait that we admire or a trait for which we aspire.

The truth is that we are all sort of sponges. We are all taking in a great deal of data from outside and absorbing it. We then take that information and process it for a use. We continue doing this all the time. Often, we are being sponges unbeknownst to us. We are taking in societal norms, ideas, objectives, value systems, traditions, and pressures without ever really knowing it. Not all of it is bad but many times we are absorbing value systems that only build our feelings of not being valuable or enough.

We have heard of the term “mommy-guilt.” While this is ascribed most often to women, I think it is the sense that parents feel that they have not quite done enough or that we’re failing in some way. There’s a sense of pending doom. So, we try to do extra things---perhaps buy a toy, get something indulgent, or just be plain “extra” to alleviate the feeling. And so, we keep this cycle going trying to prove to someone that we’re good enough. But it’s not just in parenting, it’s most every aspect of our lives. We have absorbed data about our value, and it often computes to not enough. It tells us that A is not enough. Our bodies are not enough. Our intellect is not enough. Our gifts are not enough. Our voices are not enough. But what if we simply absorbed “we are enough” because we are loved.

Our scripture reading reminds us that we matter to God. We are enough in God’s eyes. There is not a prerequisite for God’s love. We do not need to chase after God’s love and approval. While we chase after value systems that tell us we have no value, God chases after us to tell us we are loved and matter. We have been “fearfully and wonderfully made.” That “fearful” is not meaning scared but the level of care in making us. God carefully and wonderfully made us, concerned to know us, and walk alongside us as we journey. So, if God carefully and wonderfully made us doesn’t that make us enough? God’s own incarnation and willingness to take on our horrors so that we might have life more abundantly is evidence that we matter and are valuable to God.

Unpacking the Bag: Look into a mirror and repeat “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Then repeat, “I am enough.”

I Give: In poverty, basic household cleaners can be a luxury. Pick up a few all-purpose cleaners and add them to your donation pile.

Tuesday, March 15th – Leaving the Distant Country

Scripture Reading – Luke 15:11-24

In my junior year of high school, I put together a list of all of the schools to which I would apply. I researched the requirements of each school and set my checklist of completing them. Although I broke out in hives due to stress, I completed my SATs and got more than what I needed to get into all the schools that I wanted. I wrote countless essays according to each school's admission question. I completed application upon application. And get this—I mailed them to each admission department that I wanted to apply. This is a huge deal for me since I have always been terrible at mailing things.

Waiting for acceptance letters was so stressful. What if I'm not accepted? What if no one accepts me? I played that "what if" game. I wondered what this will mean for the rest of my life should no one accept me. I cycled through these questions in my mind day after day and night after night. Until acceptance letters came in and I was accepted to every school to which I applied except for one university. It's funny how the acceptance of all the others meant nothing to me because there was that one school that said, "you are not accepted." I couldn't help but wonder why, what requirement I did not satisfy, and what was wrong with me. The funny thing is that this wasn't even my #1 school. It was my fallback school.

The truth is that we all desire to be accepted. We try to meet the requirements of others in hope that we can be accepted. The problem is that acceptance requirements often change, based upon actions, scores, deeds, or even indeterminate factors unbeknownst to us.

The younger son in the parable of the Prodigal Son was willing to squander his inheritance in pursuit of finding acceptance in the distant country. Having lost it all, he was starving in the distant country. Yet he came to his senses and remembered his father's house where acceptance had no contingencies. He was willing to go back even if he only received a probational acceptance. Yet when he returned his father ran to him, put a cloak upon him, and put on the signet ring. The signet ring said that he was not accepted probationally or with conditions, but he was fully accepted as a member of the family. The father in this parable represents our God, the Father and the parable illustrates the kingdom of God where we are all accepted as beloved children of God.

Unpacking the bag: What requirements have you been trying to meet to gain acceptance? What has been your "distant country"? What have you lost while in the "distant country"? How/where have you experienced God's kingdom of acceptance and love? How have you experienced the "Father?"

I Give: Too many shoes in the closet? Set aside the rarely worn ones in good condition for donation at a local clothing bin. If you do not have shoes to donate, put \$1 into your donation jar.

Wednesday, March 16th – People Pleasing

Scripture Reading – Mark 8:27-33

I remember begging my mom for a Cross Colours shirt. I know I'm dating myself because some will read this and have no idea what this brand of clothing was, but it was everything to my younger self. It was the epitome of cool. Well before long that fad had ended and Cross Colours was no longer in, and the next designer was on trend. Of course, that was when I got my Cross Colours from my mom. But I now needed the next designer. My mom would never be able to keep up nor could most people. It was exhausting. In people's efforts to keep up, they started buying the "knock off" or "fake" version of the designer and it became the thing to check the tag of people's clothing to expose who was fake.

People pleasing is a lot like this, we keep saying yes to please others and to gain their approval. It is exhausting trying to keep up with the insatiable requests of others especially if we are unable to say no. We must ask ourselves, why must we always say yes? Do we think we are the only person that can help? Are we afraid to disappoint others? Are we afraid that we may be exposed as a fake? And in our efforts to please others, do we become fake?

One of my favorite Christian rappers, Lecrae, says in an interview that "if you live by other's acceptance you will die from their rejection." He goes on to say, "Don't ever lose yourself in a bid to find someone else's acceptance. Most times, in a bid to find other people's acceptance, we neglect the most important thing in life---finding yourself." I would say that we neglect to be ourselves. We live a life afraid that someone will check our tag and expose us. We often want people to believe that we are a type of Messiah but when we put ourselves in that role, we will always be exposed as a fake.

In our scriptural passage, Peter was asking Jesus to be the people pleasing Messiah. Everyone had their own idea of what it meant to be Messiah and there was a satisfaction in Jesus the healer, Jesus the provider and miracle worker but not the Messiah that was willing to die for the people's liberation. Peter could not see that the miracles were not the end but only a foretaste of salvation. Peter wanted Jesus to please him so that he did not have to grieve Jesus' death. He didn't want Jesus to suffer. He did not want Jesus to leave him. He simply did not want him to die so Peter pleaded for Jesus to please him and not continue the path that would lead to his death (nor his resurrection). He was asking Jesus to be a fake Messiah. But Jesus' mission was not of people pleasing. People pleasing is temporal, but Jesus' Messiahship was eternal. Jesus, one with the will of the Father, was not interested in people pleasing but liberating people through God's grace.

Unpacking the bag: Have you felt the need to be a people pleaser? If so, why? How has people pleasing hidden your true self? What "tag" are you wearing? How might saying "no" or living a life without people pleasing be liberating? Feel free to say "no" sometime this week and/or only do things (not for the sake of people pleasing) simply out of love. And the word "no" can be a part of doing something simply out of love.

I Give: Are you feeling guilty for falling behind on giving. Knock that off. Pray for a fresh start.

Thursday, March 17th – Dust it Off

Scripture Reading – Mark 6:1-13

I remember the first time that I experienced rejection. There was a boy in my neighborhood that I thought was so cute. Remember the nerdy girl type that was ignored by the athletic/cool guy in those Romcom movies of the 90s and early 2000s that would get the attention of the whole school once she got the makeover of life? Well, I was that nerdy girl type before the makeover. Let's just say that my cool guy crush did not see my potential. So, when I told my friend to tell him that I liked him, I could hear the chuckles from across the street as he looked at me. I will never forget that feeling of rejection. The feeling of shame, confusion, hurt, and sadness rushed over me and so I ran into the house crying. I had put myself out there and was rejected.

I am not the only one that can remember times when having faced rejection. It could have been after not getting that dream position for which you applied, opening a new business and no one attends on opening day, losing out on a part in a play, not getting accepted into a music or dance company, or not being invited to a party that everyone seemed to have gained admission. The truth is that as surely as we risk falling when learning to walk, whenever we put ourselves out there or take risks of any kind, we risk rejection. We do not give up on walking because falling is a risk even though falling does not feel good. We get up, dust ourselves off, and take another step. Yet it seems more difficult for us to dust off rejection.

Jesus' ministry was all about rejection; he was the rejected cornerstone (Mark 12:10-11) that welcomed the rejected. Jesus was rejected in his hometown, in the synagogues/temples, amongst religious leaders, and the ultimate rejection was the cross. He was rejected for everyone that felt shame, confusion, hurt, sadness, isolation, and for those that were sent away and said to be unworthy. Jesus sent out his disciples and prepared them that they too would be rejected for the rejected. Jesus sent them to put themselves out there knowing that there was a risk of rejection. And Jesus essentially said, "brush your shoulders off" and keep going. It is not to say that we do not acknowledge our feelings of rejection as we face them but to not allow it to paralyze us. Keep going! We cannot let the fear of rejection paralyze us and keep us from going where we are called to go, being who we are called to be, and doing what we are called to do.

Unpacking the bag: Think of the times when you have faced rejection. How did it feel? Take time to lament those feelings and situations. Pray to help you dust off the feelings of rejection and the trauma that it has caused.

I Give: It's not glamorous, but we all need toilet paper. Add a few packs to your donation pile. If you do not have toilet paper to give then add \$1 to your donation jar.

Friday, March 18th – Get Connected

Scripture Reading – Luke 15:1-17

It's hard to imagine but I remember a time in the near distant past (the late 1900s) when social media was not a thing. I often laugh at the Facebook posts that show the things used in the 80s and 90s that youth today would have no idea what they are today. I remember a time when I could only connect with family and friends through either the telephone that was attached to a cord or cordless but with minimal battery life or spending time at each other's homes. I remember the way to connect and meet new people was to get a ride or take the train to the mall. Today, you can connect with people in your friend circle and well beyond. My husband's band page has members from all over the world. My friends' list connects me to people all over the country. I can catch up with friends and family from many miles away. We are able to keep up with each other's milestones and day to day life in ways that wouldn't be possible if not for it. I am most astounded when I see mutual friends that I have no idea how their paths crossed. Our church services are watched on Facebook by people all over the country. Some would consider themselves Glen Martians, yet they have never stepped into our church building. They feel connected. This is the great thing about social media. We can be connected.

The not-so-great side of social media and our need to be connected is the ways that this need has been exploited and monetized. The lengths that many go through to get likes. And how many of us find ourselves chasing the likes. It gives us a sense of approval and belonging, an overall sense of connection. The more likes we get, validates our sense of connectedness. It becomes dangerous when those likes create algorithms that only show things that it has determined that we like until a unique world of our liking has been created. The irony of this attempt at connectedness is that in time we become less connected to each other. Our worlds become at war with other worlds until everyone sort of live in their own siloes; isolated and disconnected from one another.

This represents different types of vines. On the one hand, there is the vine that offers connection and bears some beautiful fruit and the other needs to be completely pruned and/or cut off. The scripture reading talks about real connection; it is connection of love. Jesus as the vine is love and the branches are connected to love so the fruit that it bears is love. That is the connection that we are all seeking. We settle for likes when we really want love. Like is the synthetic form of love and so it is never truly satisfying. It is the reason that we must keep chasing after it. Yet true connection is rooted and nourished in and by love. If love is not the fruit borne of a connection than it should be pruned.

Unpacking the bag: What are the roots of your connections? How are they being nourished? Are there things that need to be pruned or cut off?

I Give: Meals-in-a-can (like heavy stews or ravioli) are easy options. Add a few of your favorites to your donation pile. If you do not have meals-in-a-can then add \$1 to your donation jar.

Saturday, March 19th

I Give: Give up your time. Turn off all screens for three hours (or as long as you can manage).

Sunday, March 20th

Rest. You've done good work!

~I Give Up Exhausting
Myself~

Taking a hike is one of the most beautiful ways to connect with God's creation. When that hike leads to a mountaintop or elevation, it is icing on the metaphorical cake. However, when taking hikes uphill while carrying heavy bags of expectation, overwork, and/or those things that are exhausting our mind, body, and spirit, the journey becomes quite the feat. What if we could unpack those bags so that we can journey in our faith freely? Journey this week as we give up those things that are exhausting ourselves so that we can connect with God, others, and ourselves.

Monday, March 21st

Scripture Reading - Matthew 4:1-2

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.”

Forty days of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry. One thing we often overlook is that Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Can you imagine Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness? There is not much description other than he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. I would imagine Jesus walking in the wilderness, waking up with the beauty of a sunrise, and lying down on the cold, hard ground looking at the thousands of stars in the night. I cannot imagine Jesus going through 40 days without steadfast, empowering and encouraging conversation with God.

This is the 3rd Lent after the pandemic began, and there is a war happening on the other side of the Earth making our hearts tired and weary. After the 40 days of fasting, Jesus was surely weak and famished. However, Jesus was not tempted, but rather became strong and determined to show the devil and the world how to live as God's beloved child in God's kingdom already here with him, and yet to come.

Written by Rev. Narae Kim

Tuesday, March 22nd

Scripture Reading - Exodus 20:1-4

“Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

The Ten Commandments were not like the laws in the land of Egypt. There, people of Israel had to serve Egyptians. The Ten Commandments didn't say to them to serve Moses, or to be loyal to Aaron. Their service and loyalty were only for God. Then, they were able to be free from other people. One didn't have to be superior to the other. One person may have had more money and power than the other person, but the other person didn't have to be intimidated because God was the one who was to be worshiped. Social class was there, but that was not supposed to take away a person's dignity.

The people of Israel didn't have Sabbath in Egypt. No holiday. No resting day. Because they had to do what their master, Egyptians, told them to do. They received this gift, Sabbath, from God as a free people. Free people do not cause slavery again. Free people do not discriminate. Free people do not exclude others. Free people of God, the children of God, are to be inclusive because their God is. What God says to God's children is this, “you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.”

The Ten Commandments has its preamble just like the Constitution. The preamble shows the intent of the Constitution. Exodus 20:2 is I think the preamble of the Ten Commandments; “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”. It was God who ordained and established the Ten Commandments. This God was one who brought you out of the land of Egypt. This God brought ten deadly plagues upon Egypt. This God destroyed the army of Egypt in the Red Sea. So, this God must have hated anything from Egypt. Slavery, oppression, exploitation, discrimination, injustice, greed, manipulating people by fear, intimidating people by violence. ‘I'm God who brought you out the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not make yourself another Egypt.’ The Ten Commandments were not for those things.

“I am the Lord your God.” - “The Lord” is an English translation. In Hebrew, it is God's personal name. We call it Yahweh. Four vowel letters; yod, he, vav, he. Knowing a name implies having knowledge and power over the name we know. Once your name is known to somebody, you are in a vulnerable position. We still reveal our names when we establish a relationship. God was putting Godself into a vulnerable position to have a relationship with the Israelites. ‘I'm Yahweh. I'm your God. Which means you are my people.’

God wants to have a personal relationship with us. That is, I believe, the intent of God's discipline.

Wednesday, March 23rd

Scripture Reading - John 3:14

“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up”

When I'm worn out, I tend to take out my cell phone, turn on the screen and look at it, reading news, watching YouTube, or whatever to avoid the reality. However, it makes me more exhausted and unhappy. Then, I look more on my phone. It's a vicious cycle.

In the book of Signs, you are saved by what you see. “As the ‘looking’ at the serpent caused Israel to ‘live’, so the ‘contemplation’ of the Son of Man in His exaltation brings life eternal.” (Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 247).

What are you looking at?

Thursday, March 24th

Scripture Reading – 1 King 19:11-12

“Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.”

It was a death threat that made Elijah want to die. Although Elijah said to God to take his life, God kept saying, “Get up and eat.” The other repeated conversation between God and Elijah is this. God: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah: “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

Elijah got up, ate, drank, and talked himself out before listening to God in the sound of sheer silence. All those images are very symbolic. I picture that Elijah was in despair, so discouraged and depressed. He retreated into the wilderness, encountered God and somehow regained the strength to continue what God told him to do.

I love that God was not in those grandeurs.

Where are you? What are you hearing?

Friday, March 25th

Scripture Reading - Genesis 47:7-9

“Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him before Pharaoh... Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are the years of your life?” Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life.”

Jacob said “few” compared to his ancestors who lived much longer according to the story. “Hard” is a good word to describe his life. He was a wanderer, many times fleeing in fear. His family was dysfunctional. He strived for survival. His life was like a refugee’s. Towards the end of the story, Jacob met Joseph whom he thought was dead. He said, “I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive.”

I wonder why and how Jacob kept his faith despite his hard life. At the same time, I think the story of Jacob would not have survived if his life was easy and prosperous. God was not on the stage in Jacob’s story except in his dream and the wrestling at Peniel where Jacob became limping. God gave him a new name, Israel, and blessed him. We don’t know the content of the blessing, but we can assume it from the following story.

Jacob was no longer able to fight. He had no option except bowing himself to the ground seven times even from a distance while Esau was approaching. “But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept”. (33:4) There were no words of excuse or explanation between the two arch enemies, but they became brothers again.

Saturday, March 26th

I Give: Give forgiveness to yourself and others. Bring reconciliation to exhausting relationships.

Sunday, March 27th

Rest. You've done good work!

~I Give Up

What is Killing Me~

Our sins--habits, tendencies, egotistical self-protection--are killing us. The weight of them distorts our image. They harm our relationships with God and other people. But, because of grace, we are freed from those sins and are given the capacity to live in full and right relationship. What if we could unpack our bags filled with those things that are killing us? Journey this week and give up those things that are killing us so that we can give of ourselves to God, others, and ourselves.

Monday, March 28th

Scripture Reading - Deuteronomy 34:10-12

“Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.”

Obituary is the public announcement of death, and most of the time it includes an account of the person’s life. Our life, long or short, is summarized in a few sentences by others. Deuteronomy 34:10-12 is I would say Moses’ obituary, and it summarizes. Although it’s just two sentences, the writer squeezed Moses’ life well into that.

What strikes me the most is that the first sentence talks not about what Moses did, but who he was before God. It says God knew him face to face. What does it mean?

Nobody really knew deeply about Moses because he was a person in between. Between Egypt and Israel and later between God and Israel. He was born in a Hebrew family but adopted to an Egyptian princess. He was raised by the Hebrew mom but given the Egyptian name. He killed an Egyptian to save the Israelites, but they didn’t see him as their savior, but a murderer. So, he fled to another country, Midian. There he married Zipporah, and it was an international and intercultural marriage. Who was this person Moses really? An Egyptian? An Israelite? A Midian? Nobody understood who he was, including Moses himself.

However, God knew him face to face. When God called Moses, Moses gave God an excuse why he shouldn’t follow God’s call. “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” He had to learn three different languages in his life, and he wasn’t good at that. By the time he was called by God, he had spent 40 years in Midian speaking the language of that land. And God wanted him to go back to Egypt to speak Egyptian to Pharaoh and Hebrew to the Israelite. No way, he couldn’t do that.

However, God said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.” I read it as such; ‘Moses, I know you. I know your concern. I understand you are not confident because you don’t speak any languages very well. I understand you are anxious and frightened because you don’t know who you really are. You don’t really belong to anybody. You are not Egyptian. You are not Israelite. You are not Midian. However, you belong to me. Your true identity is grounded in me. You are a man of God. I know you face to face.’

Tuesday, March 29th

Scripture Reading - Luke 16:19-31

Lazarus was a poor man who lay at the gate of the rich man's house. He was covered with sores. Dogs came to him and licked his sores. The story does not tell us why he was poor. I'm guessing that he was poor because of his illness. He was weak. He was not able to work. His poverty made him sick more, the vicious cycle of poverty. All he could do was waiting in pain, longing to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table. On the contrary, the rich man was dressed in purple and fine linen. He feasted sumptuously every day. This sharp contrast continued in Hades but reversed. Lazarus was comforted in Abraham's bosom. The rich man was in agony in flames. In Hades, it was not just a gate that divided Lazarus and the rich man, but a great chasm that they could not cross.

The rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to cool his tongue. The rich man's wish for a finger dipped in water shows that he was in agony. Abraham told him that it was impossible to send Lazarus to him. Then, the rich man wanted Lazarus to be sent to his siblings, so that they would repent. But this request was rejected as well because they had Moses and the prophets. If they did not listen to Moses and the prophets, they would not listen to one who rose from the dead.

Lazarus and the rich man are the two extremes, and most of us would fall in between. This story was told for people who were like the siblings of the rich man. The rich man wanted to warn his siblings to repent. Repent! Turn around your old way of living. Do not stick to the wealth you have. Don't be ignorant of the poor at your gate. Do not tolerate others' misfortune while you enjoy your fortune. Otherwise, your position will be reversed in Hades.

One day, I went to Costco for groceries. I bought the usual stuff such as milk, fruits, bread and a hotdog to eat on the way home. Driving and eating the hotdog, I saw a person standing at the signal, holding a sign "Help". I felt strange. There was just a car door and thin transparent window between the person on the street and me. Inside the door, full of groceries and me eating the hotdog. Outside the door the person on the street holding the help sign. The person outside could not open the door, but I who was inside could.

Just like Lazarus and the rich man. What separated them was the gate. Inside the gate was the well-dressed rich man eating sumptuously. Outside the gate was Lazarus covered with sores, hungry to death. The gate that the rich man was able to cross became the great chasm in Hades, and the rich man was in agony there.

The message is clear. Open your gate. Open your door. Let Lazarus in. Let those who are at your gate in. Or let your wealth flow out from your house. Share your wealth with those who are less fortunate than you. So that you can be in Abraham's bosom in Hades. Listen to Moses and the prophets who told you to do so. You even have one who rose from the dead. Jesus Christ is telling you the story.

Wednesday, March 30th

Scripture Reading - Genesis 9:8-17

Noah represents us all. God establishes a covenant with Noah after the great flood. The covenant covers all living creatures on earth including us. It's a covenant, not a promise. It's mutual. So, when God says, no destruction by water, it's up to God, and at the same time, it's up to us as well because we are the other party of the covenant. God will do God's part. And we have a responsibility to take care of our earth to keep the covenant. The rainbow becomes the sign of the covenant.

Now I wonder why God is doing all this. It was God who caused the great flood, and then, all the people and all the animals on earth died except Noah's family and those animal pairs in the ark. Why no more destruction by flood?

I guess it's because God was sorry for the destruction. God was sorry for all the death and loss. What? Didn't God know that there was going to be death all around if God caused the great flood? Yes, God did know that. Then, why did God do that? Because God had been sorry for the wickedness of humankind. Being sorry is God's motivation, God's attribution. God is sorry.

What does it mean that God is sorry? It means that God is influenced by humankind. It means that God is connected to us. It means that our life affects God. It means that God and we share life together.

Suffering and pain is our reality. And God is sorry for that. Evil, sin and death are our reality. And God is sorry for that. Empathy is the heart of God. And God created us in God's image. So, in the core of our being, there is the ability of being sorry. What makes us human is to feel the pain and suffering of others. Empathy is the core of humanity and divine.

We know from Jesus how God deals with our reality. Jesus had encountered a lot of sickness, but he didn't heal all the sick people. Jesus had met many demon-possessed, but he didn't cast out all the demon-possessed. Jesus had fed the hungry, but not all the time. Jesus had faced suffering but he neither fixed them nor walked away. Instead, he walked through it. He was sorry for our suffering. Our suffering became his.

We want God to fix our problems right away. We want God to finish our pain and suffering instantly. But that's not the way God is revealed to us in the bible. Our God is an empathic God. God feels sorry. God becomes alike. God becomes incarnate. God becomes one of us.

Thursday, March 31st

Scripture Reading - Exodus 33:12-23

Do you know what comprises the largest proportion of the book of Exodus? It's not ten plagues. It's not Passover. It's not crossing the Red Sea. It's the tabernacle. Chapters 25 - 31, God gave the instruction how to build the tabernacle. God's explanation is really detailed and specific. For instance, God told Moses what oil to use for a lamp in the tabernacle. It was pure oil of beaten olives. Throughout chapters 35 - 40, it describes the Israelites building the tabernacle. The book of Exodus invests 13 chapters out of 40 in the tabernacle.

What does it mean? What's the point? Exodus 25:8, "And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them." Chapter 29 verse 45, "I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God." Verse 46, "And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God." It was God's home. God intended to live together with the people of Israel. The creator of the universe wanted to live in a manmade tent to live among them.

But then, the people of Israel made an idol, the golden calf made of Egyptian gold. And it ruined everything. Worshiping the golden calf was the betrayal of God's yearning to be with Israel.

In the Bible, God continues to be betrayed from the beginning. Adam and Eve. They were given everything in the garden of Eden except the tree of knowledge. But they ate it. During the time of Noah, God grieved in God's heart because of the wickedness of humankind. In the days of the judges, it was the repeating cycle of the Israelites abandoning God. It was the same thing when the Israelites had kings. King after king, they did what was evil in God's eyes. What about Jesus? He was the light of the world. But people didn't like the light, so they killed him.

Each betrayal, God responded differently. God kicked out Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. God killed all the people except Noah's family. God put the Israelites into the hands of their enemies, and then, raised up judges to deliver the Israelites. God sent prophets to the kings to correct them and make them repent. But the kings rarely changed. Instead, they killed the prophets. At last, Jesus came and killed.

I see God's response to the betrayal had been getting weaker. From killing everyone to some, and then, providing deliverance, and then, sending messengers nudging repentance (and the messengers got killed), and then, Jesus came, rejected and killed. I also see God's perseverance. God will never give up. God will keep coming. God will continue to knock at the door of our hearts. Betrayal, rejection, killing and death cannot stop God from coming to us, pulling us out from worshiping a golden calf. And I see God's longing. God longs for communion with us. God wants to dwell among us. God yearns for fellowship with us.

When Moses prayed to God for the Israelites, he prayed basically for what was in God's heart. 'God be with us. Walk with us. If you are not with us, we are not going, we are not moving any further. It's important to get to the promised land, but we are not going unless you are with us. I know we are sinful, and you are holy. But I also know you are merciful and gracious. Without you, we are just like Egyptians. You are the ground of our being. We are your people.'

God responded to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

Friday, April 1st
Scripture Reading - John 13:31-35

It was Jesus' last wish. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Chapter 13 begins like this. "Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." Jesus took off his outer robe, tied a towel around himself. He poured water into a basin and washed the disciples' feet. Jesus' voice was tender and soft, filled with warmth and love. Jesus' touch was gentle and kind. It is paradoxical that we see Jesus' vivid and tangible love together with the plan of Judas' betrayer and the foretelling of Peter's denial in the same chapter. The love of Jesus is juxtaposed with human weakness. However, Jesus loved them to the end, telling at the same time, you love one another just as I have loved you.

I don't think Judas betrayed Jesus for money. Rather, he did it because he was disappointed in Jesus. He wanted a messiah who would defeat the Roman empire and bring peace and justice to Israel. It seems that Judas knew there was injustice, exploitation, oppression, poverty, terror, and discrimination caused mostly by the dominating power. He wanted somebody who would uproot this unfair system. He wanted someone who would take revenge. Jesus was one of strong candidates because he was popular, he performed miracles, he healed the sick, he was a friend of sinners, he himself was a lowly class. But soon, Judas realized that the kingdom Jesus preached on was different from one that Judas wished for.

How many times we want justice whenever we read news about crime, war, terrorism, abuse, or corruption. We want God to be in action visibly and instantly. I want God to judge and punish those corrupt politicians, those greedy corporations, and those inhumane criminals. However, Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It is like treasure hidden in a field. Jesus said he was going to die and told us to bear our own cross. Jesus said we should love one another. In that way, everyone will know we are his disciples. The kingdom of God is among us. The kingdom of God has already come. God is at work changing our heart, not their behavior.

Unlike Judas, Peter did follow Jesus from a distance until the court where Jesus was sentenced to death. There, Peter denied Jesus. He tried hard not to be seen as a Jesus' disciple. He was afraid. He feared being eaten up by death. It seemed that he would die if he kept following Jesus. So, he ran away. He gave up. He went back to his old way of life.

In the later story, chapter 21, Jesus appeared to his disciples. It was early in the morning. The disciples were working hard to get fish all night. Jesus himself made fire and breakfast for his cold and hungry disciples. The Bible says, "When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread." Jesus said to his disciples, "Come and have breakfast." When the breakfast was over, Jesus asked Peter, 'Do you love me?' three times. The Bible says, "Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?'" First and second time, Jesus asked Peter "ἀγαπᾷς με;" which means, 'do you love me with full and complete love?' Peter answered "φιλοῦ σε;" which means, 'I love you, but my love is not perfect, my love for you is just friendship.' Sometimes, I ask my wife, 'do you love me?' When I do that, it is not merely a question, but also a confession that I love her. Jesus confessed his full and perfect love for Peter, but Peter confessed that he couldn't love Jesus the way Jesus loved him. In third time, Jesus used the word Peter had used, "φιλεῖς με;" do you love me? Jesus stepped down to Peter's level. It seems for me that Jesus is telling Peter, 'It's okay, Peter. I know your limit. Nevertheless, I love you with my whole self. I'm happy with the way you love me. So feed my sheep. Love one another.'

Saturday, April 2nd

I Give: Give your love to yourself and others. Confess your love to them
in many ways.

Sunday, April 3rd

Rest. You've done good work!

~I Give Up
What Used to Work~

The seasons change and presents an opportunity to do new things. Each day gives us the same opportunities. Yet, we often find ourselves clinging to do things the ways we have always done them. The Holy Spirit continuously works to re-new us and yet we resist holding onto our bags of “what used to work.” What if we give up the weight of the bags of “what used to work” to be renewed? Journey this week and give up “what used to work” to look at things with new vision so that we can renew our relationship with God, others, and ourselves.

Monday, April 4th – Out of Season

Scripture Reading - Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

It can be hard to accept that life comes in “seasons,” yet we know this to be true. There are the seasons of our chronological life—the learning of childhood, the impatience to grow and the independence of adolescence, the seeking for meaning of adulthood, etc. There are also “seasons” for relationships and vocational things, and for ideas and projects. Have you ever had a really good idea that was clearly not right for the room, or for “right now?” It’s not that it was a bad idea, it’s just an idea that is “out of season.”

Unpacking the bag: What are some hallmarks of this season for you? For our church? What is it “time” for you to do, and for us to do together? What “used to work” in a different season that you need to give up now? In prayer, ask God for guidance.

I Give: Clean clothes are a source of dignity and needed to keep a job. Add some laundry detergent to your donation pile or some change or a dollar to your donation jar

Tuesday, April 5th – New Ways to Love

Scripture Reading - Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah paints a picture of what he thought used to work, the way the world was supposed to be. It was a world where God laid down the rules and the people were expected to measure up and obey. This new word of hope comes to God's people while they are in exile, and a time they think they have no future, no hope. He describes a new covenant that God will write, not on stone tablets but on the heart. It is a reminder that God's love is steadfast, even when our love fails and that we have a God that is willing to find new ways to love us and reach us and be in relationship when the old ways aren't working.

Unpacking the bag: Ask God to reveal what God would have your heart to know. How can you move past "what used to work" to enter into deeper relationship with God?

I Give: It's easy to over-accessorize. What "like new" gloves, belts or bags might be looking for a new home? Is there a donation bin for clothing near your home or school to share these? If not, consider adding some change or a dollar to your donation jar.

Wednesday, April 6 – You Have Heard It Said

Scripture Reading - Matthew 5:38-48

Here we have Jesus explicitly lifting up old ways that we thought worked just fine, in favor of a higher vision of relationship. Not “retaliation” but “relationship.”

Unpacking the bag: If you have time, make a drawing, that depicts the “you have heard it said” part and another drawing with the “but I say to you” part. Pray as you draw. When you are finished, pray for the people in your life and world that Jesus is calling you to love in these passages while looking at the second set of drawings (the “but I say to you” part).

I Give: Pray for those who work in the agencies that will receive these items and money, for their encouragement and strength in the face of great need.

Thursday April 7 – A New Thing

Scripture Reading - Isaiah 43:18-21

God's word to a people in exile is that God is doing a new thing. I was drawn to the verb tenses and how they are past, present and future. "I am about to do a new thing.... Even now it springs forth...I will make a way in the wilderness." God operates outside the strictures of human time and space, and so has always acted, is acting, and will act.

Unpacking the bag: Pray about a time in your past when God did a "new thing" that blessed you, surprised you, loved or saved you. Pray about a new thing God is doing now. And ask God what God is about to do. Give thanks for all these gifts.

I Give: Deodorant makes a huge difference. Throw a few bottles in your donation pile or add some change or a dollar to your donation jar.

Friday April 8th – Blessed Beyond Measure

Scripture Reading - Acts 9:1-16

Saul's conversion from a persecutor of the church to its greatest evangelist (Paul) is a great story of someone who gave up "what used to work." Paul had everything worth having according to the way his world measured success. He was a pharisee and a Roman citizen and had a golden ticket to a life of comfort. As a Christian he was persecuted and jailed at every turn. Yet he was adamant that he considered himself blessed beyond measure ("more than (a conqueror" Romans 8) by his encounter with Christ. He said he considered all those things that he thought were so valuable to be "rubbish" compared to what he had gained in knowing Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Unpacking the Bag: How is God using this Lenten time to pull you closer to God and to put "what used to work and who you used to be" into perspective? Pray to this God who meets us where we are and calls us to become new.

I Give: Canned vegetables and fruits are staples. Add a few to your donation pile or toss some change or a dollar in your donation jar.

Saturday, April 9th

I Give: Give up your time. Write a note or card to another member of the congregation.

~Holy Week~

Journey this week to the cross that liberates us from all that weighs us down. Looking onward to our Easter resurrection!

Monday, April 11th – Suffering Servant

Scripture Reading - Isaiah 42:1-9

Christians read passages like this one through the eyes of their Christian faith to identify Jesus as the servant that God identifies through Isaiah. The arbiter of justice for the nations is none other than the servant who preserves even the bruised reed and the dimly lit wick...not a booming, loud demagogue but a suffering servant. God's "justice" defends the weak and oppressed and so often dispenses mercy when we would rather there be punishment. God's "new thing" is linked to this future, where the Servant will judge the nations.

Unpacking the bag: Pray for this God who has "taken us by the hand and kept us" to take God's place on the throne of our hearts and lives this week.

I Give: Do you have unused furniture languishing in your home? Consider arranging for a pickup/donation or throw some change or a dollar in your donation jar.

Tuesday, April 12: Our Refuge

Scripture Reading - Psalm 71:1-14

This is a beautiful psalm asking God to be our refuge. Read it slowly and prayerfully.

Unpacking the bag: What words or phrases stand out to you? What is God wanting you to know? What do you need to say/express/give to God?

I Give: As spring beckons, are there winter clothing items you did not wear? Consider a donation to a nearby clothing donation bin in your neighborhood or throw some change or a dollar in your donation jar.

Wednesday, April 13th – Great Cloud of Witnesses

Scripture Reading - Hebrews 12:1-3

This passage reminds us about that “great cloud of witnesses” that surrounds us and the suffering that our Lord endured for our sake, so that we “do not grow weary or lose heart.”

Unpacking the bag: Who are those that are in your “great cloud of witnesses”? If they could speak to you now, how would they help you to “not lose heart?” What would they tell you to help with your weariness or discouragement? As you pray to this God who loves you, what do you sense God telling you?

I Give: Pray for those who will receive the items or funds you give.

Thursday April 14th (Maundy Thursday) – Love One Another

Scripture Reading - John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

This is Jesus washing the disciples' feet and giving them a new commandment, to "love one another as (he) has loved (them)." This represents a big change in the old commandments, which started off as "an eye for an eye" and moved into "love your neighbor as yourself." Now, Jesus calls us into sacrificial love for one another, to love each other as Jesus as loved us, which is love to the highest measure of all.

Unpacking the bag: Come to Maundy Thursday service tonight at 7:30 as an act of worship. Have a footwashing time where you wash the feet of your spouse, sibling, child, grandchild, pet or friend.

I Give: Today is Maundy Thursday. Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Buy some lotion and add it to your donation pile or add some change or a dollar to your donation jar.

Friday April 15th (Good Friday) - Proclaiming God's Praise

Scripture Reading - Psalm 22

This Psalm is made famous because Jesus cried its opening words from the cross. As you read the entire Psalm, it might be helpful to know that when Jesus cried out the opening words, the people hearing him would have known the whole thing—and crying out part of it was a sort of shorthand for the whole. Looking at the Psalm in entirety, it is deep lament, utterly honest in its despair and anger, but interspersed with many reminders of God's presence and faithfulness. "Yet you are holy..." It ends, not in the dust of death, but in proclaiming God's praise, that will be shared with future generations. What does reading the entire Psalm reveal about Jesus' passion to you? Read Psalm 22 and then Psalm 23 back-to-back.

Unpacking the bag: What do you learn if you pair these together? Give thanks to God, your Good Shepherd, who knows what it is even to feel forsaken by God. Go to worship tonight as an act of worship if you can.

I Give: Today is Good Friday. Choose a shelf-stable item or ingredient that you really love even if it's expensive and add it to your donation pile or toss some change or a dollar in your donation jar.

Saturday, April 16th

I Give: Christ is in the tomb. Give up your time. Do not make plans today or worry about tomorrow. Also, give yourself time to simply be.