

The Daily Walk



Trinity Presbyterian Church

Berwyn, Pennsylvania

March 24 - April 20, 2008

Easter tide 2008

Dear Daily Walkers,

The season of Easter is the time to reflect on the meaning of the resurrection stories, and of the continuing presence of Christ in our lives. These reflections from our church members are based on the Scripture passages read each Sunday across the globe. As you read and reflect, you join the great conversation happening throughout the church. Enjoy the walk with this devotional guide.

In Christ,
Jay Wilkins



MUSIC NOTE



*"Celebrate Spring" Through Music
Jazz Vespers at Trinity
April 20 at 5:00 PM*



*Terry Kleinfelter – piano
Paul Kleinfelter – bass
Glenn Ferracone – percussion
Bob Meashey - trumpet*

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
March 24 – March 30, 2008

MONDAY, March 24: Psalm 16

So, today is the day after Easter. Are you still energized? Perhaps you have greeted this day with a hearty “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” Or perhaps, it is easier to fall back into familiar, pre-Lenten routines.

Today is a good day to start with a Psalm. Psalm 16 is a confession of faith, which is unusual for a psalm. Verses 3 and 4 seem to indicate that the Psalmist is distancing themselves from prior idolatry. Continuing at verse 5, the Psalm is quite lovely. The image of the cup is especially timely, following on our celebration of Christ’s last supper just a few days ago. Here, we can also imagine the cup as God providing what is needed for our lives, and the good things fill the cup to the brim. Verse 10 is also very timely, coming the day after we rejoice in Christ’s victory over death.

I invite you to re-read this Psalm each day this week, and see how some of the images and themes might repeat themselves in the gospel selection, the selection from the book of Acts, and the epistle.

TUESDAY, March 25: John 20: 19-23

I find the gospel lesson to be very rich. Therefore, I have chosen to split it into three parts, and study one part each of the next three days. (In the interest of full disclosure, please note that the following observations are paraphrased extensively from the Barclay Study Bible.)

The gospel lesson opens with the remaining disciples sequestered in what is likely the same room where they had eaten their last meal with Jesus just four days earlier. I imagine the room is dark and quiet, much like the disciples themselves. We know that they have gathered in terror, listening fearfully for the knock that might signal a visit from the Sanhedrin to arrest them. Then, in the midst of this quiet, uneasy terror, Jesus is quite simply among them, offering this greeting: “Peace be with you.” This means more than simply “may you be saved from trouble.” It means, “may God give you every good thing.”

Following this greeting, Jesus commissions the disciples, and the Church. Jesus says that just as God sent him forth into the world, so he too sends them forth. Barclay says there are three implications from this.

First, it means that Jesus Christ needs the Church. Jesus had been sent to the world with a message for all people, but it had not yet been delivered to all. The Church was to become the mouth to speak for Jesus, the feet to run his errands, and the hands to do his work.

Second, the Church needs Jesus. Any person that is to be sent out needs someone to send them. They need a message, and they need the authority to back up this message. Without Jesus, the Church has no message, and no power.

Third, when Jesus sends the Church out to the world, it parallels the sending out of Jesus by God. Therefore, it is instructive to look at the relationship between Jesus and God to discern clues for our relationship as Church to Jesus. The relationship between Jesus and God was continually dependent on Jesus' perfect obedience and perfect love. Jesus could be God's messenger only because he fully submitted to God. Therefore, it follows that the Church is fit to be Jesus' messenger only when she is perfectly obedient. Unfortunately, human beings, with all their frailties and faults, people the Church. There are many examples of the Church failing, when she has relied on her own wisdom and strength. But our failures do not invalidate the example that Jesus has put before us, nor our commission to continue trying.

Finally, in verse 23, Jesus breathes on the disciples and gives them the Holy Spirit, and then says, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." We must be careful to understand the true meaning of this saying. While it is true that no one can forgive another's sins against God, it is equally true that the Church is privileged to convey the message of God's forgiveness. The statement about forgiveness does not mean that the power to forgive sins was entrusted to any one person, but rather, that the power to proclaim God's forgiveness was entrusted to Jesus' followers, along with the power to warn that forgiveness is not open to the impenitent.

WEDNESDAY, March 26: John 20: 24-29

Today we read the familiar story of Thomas, ... the doubter convinced. While Thomas may have been a natural pessimist, no one could doubt his courage. Thomas was the disciple who loved Jesus enough that he was willing to go to Jerusalem and die with him, when the other disciples were hesitant and fearful. But once the expected had happened, Thomas was broken-hearted, and he could not bear his grief with the other disciples, and he chose to be alone.

Thus, when Jesus first returned, Thomas was not present. When confronted with the news, Thomas' natural pessimism kicks in, and he refuses to believe, unless he can place his hand in Jesus' actual wounds. A week later, he is given just that opportunity. When Jesus confronts Thomas with his very words, Thomas' heart fills with love, and he can only shout "My Lord and My God!"

So what can we learn from this. First, it is instructive to note Thomas's mistake; that in his time of stress, he sought loneliness rather than Christian fellowship. And because he was not with his friends, look at what he missed. I know that I too tend to withdraw during periods of intense sadness or stress. Don't we all at one time or another? I wonder what we may have missed?

The second thing we learn about Thomas is that he had two great virtues. First, Thomas refused to say that he understood what he did not understand. There is an uncompromising honesty about Thomas, and he would not ignore his doubts by pretending that they did not exist. As Tennyson wrote: "There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds." Thomas certainly lived by these words.

Thomas' second virtue is that once he was sure about something, he went the whole way. Thomas doubted in order to become sure, and then once he was sure, his surrender to the truth was complete. When a person fights their way through their doubts to the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord, they attain to a certainty that the person who unthinkingly accepts things can never reach.

THURSDAY, March 27: John 20: 30-31

These last two verses seem sort of innocuous. In fact, it even appears that these two verses, as originally intended, are the end of the gospel of John. Chapter 21 can be considered something akin to an appendix.

Verses 30 and 31 succinctly sum up the aim of the writer. It is clear that the gospels do not set out to give a full, historical account of the life of Jesus. Rather, they provide a selection from Jesus' life, which shows what he was like, and the kind of things he was doing. It is also clear that the gospels are not intended to be biographical records of Jesus' life, but are appeals to take him as Savior, Master, and Lord. The gospels are meant to give life, not information. "When we approach the gospels as history and biography, we approach them in the wrong spirit. We must read them, not primarily as historians seeking information, but as men and women seeking God."

FRIDAY, March 28: Acts 2: 14a, 22-32

Remember Psalm 16 from Monday? Peter uses verses 8-11 as part of his sermon text (Acts 2: 25-28). For some reason, I find the continuity of biblical texts across centuries to be reassuring. It sort of reinforces the idea that there is a plan that God is working.

Similar to Thomas, Peter is another disciple that has his share of strengths and faults. Peter is one of the most faithful apostles, but is also one of the most rash. Peter could also be considered as cut from a rougher cloth. He was a Galilean, who were not generally held in high esteem by the Jews in Jerusalem. Apparently, Galileans had difficulty pronouncing some of the sounds in the Hebrew and Arabic languages, and their dialect and manner of speech was considered inferior. Regardless, God's plan is for Peter to address the Jews from throughout the diaspora that had gathered in Jerusalem.

Maybe God selected Peter to underscore the message that God's Spirit, once thought to be bestowed only upon special people, like prophets and kings, was now being poured out on all people, men and women, free and slave.

Sometimes, it is good to remember that God finds a way to use all of us, regardless of our faults or shortcomings. How is God going to use me today?

SATURDAY, March 29: 1 Peter 1: 3-9

Similar to yesterday, we can see continuity in the themes of today's reading. Like the Psalm from Monday, 1 Peter uses language of inheritance to declare the source of hope and trust in God. Additionally, the words about loving and trusting without seeing remind us of the story of Thomas in John.

The writer of this epistle offers these words to help a scared community of faith find their voice and join in a doxology of praise for God. If the writer was indeed Peter, or one of the other disciples, they must have been able to empathize, based on their shared fear, as they were waiting in the room where Jesus first visited them after His resurrection. This letter offers hope amid the hardships. Hardships are part of everyone's life, but for those of us that share a new life in Christ, the hardships may offer something more – a chance to see how we respond in faith.

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
March 31 -- April 6, 2008

From Emmaus to Jerusalem, from a group of three to a crowd of 3,000, this week's passages address the various ways Christ is recognized. At table, bread is broken and eyes are opened. In Jerusalem, good news is preached and hearts are opened. The readings encourage us to think about our own personal encounters with the risen Christ as we experience, as the Easter people, the power of his presence.

MONDAY, March 31: Luke 24: 13-35

Two followers were walking to Emmaus, a seven mile journey from Jerusalem, trying to make sense of the events of the previous days with the trial and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Their hopes and dreams were shattered. "We were hoping that he was the one who was going to rescue Israel." In Christ's death and burial, their hopes and dreams were dead and buried, too.

Then Jesus appeared as a "stranger." He walked and talked with them along the way. He explained to them what the scriptures had said, from Moses to the prophets. He made sense of things. He accepted the invitation to come to their house for a meal. In the breaking of bread, Jesus was recognized by the two friends. Eyes were opened as they experienced the living Christ during a common meal in an ordinary home.

With joy in their hearts, the two followers walked back to Jerusalem to share the experience with the disciples, only to discover that the 11 disciples were talking about the fact that Christ had risen. In fellowship with each other, a common experience was shared.

Emmaus may be anywhere. Hearts burning and eyes opening do not occur on only one road, geographically or spiritually speaking. Emmaus comes into sight wherever a path leads us toward communion with God.

TUESDAY, April 1: Luke 24: 13-35

Two different moods were present around the table of the Lord's Supper. In the upper room, a solemn, introspective time was observed as participants anticipated the death of their beloved friend. In the home in Emmaus, the breaking of bread was celebrated as Jesus was recognized with an openness and great joy.

How do we experience the Lord's Supper? Is it observed as a time to remember and to reflect or is it celebrated as in a celebration of Christ's resurrection?

Luke suggests that the two might give meaning to each other: to remember Christ's death and to celebrate his resurrection.

WEDNESDAY, April 2: Acts 2: 14a, 36-41

Here we read a portion of an account of the first Christian sermon ever preached. This passage shows the effect of the cross. When people were shown just what had taken place in crucifying Jesus, their hearts were broken. Whereas on the road to Emmaus the hearts burned as they listened to Jesus' words, here the hearts of the listeners are troubled. In utter despair, the people wondered what they could do.

Peter appealed to them to repent: change their mind, turn away from sin. Be baptized. Receive God's gift of the Holy Spirit. A crowd of 3,000 people responded to the appeal, the invitation.

THURSDAY, APRIL 2: Acts 2: 14a, 36-41

Peter's sermon on Pentecost provides us with a model of invitation and response. The story of Jesus was central in Peter's proclamation. When confronted with the hard-heartedness toward Christ, the crowd was "cut to the heart." They were troubled. They listened and they responded.

God's invitation to the church gathered at Pentecost is to respond to the gift that has been given in Christ. He speaks to us today at Trinity. God calls us into relationship by being invited, chosen and called. It is an invitation at God's initiative and by God's grace. "For the promise is for you, for your children ... for everyone." What a wonderful message of love and acceptance for us and for our broken and troubled world. We are no different from the first Christians in our need to hear the grace of Easter today.

FRIDAY, April 3: Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19

This psalm shares with Peter's sermon a strong witness to God as One who saves. It has been stated that this psalm was written by someone who had been either very ill physically or had suffered a nervous breakdown. He cries out "O, Lord", a Jewish expression that comes out of pain.

In gratitude for his recovery and the loosening of his fear and anguish, he wonders how he can offer thanks to God. Take the cup of salvation. (The Good News Translation says "Bring a wine offering.") Accept new life and the joy it brings. Call on the name of the Lord. Witness to Christ's saving grace. Offer prayer. Praise the Lord! Appropriate responses for us all as people of faith and recipients of God's salvation.

SATURDAY, April 4: 1 Peter 1: 17-23

The first letter from Peter was addressed to Christians in exile, scattered throughout the northern part of Asia Minor, to encourage them as they faced persecution and suffering for their faith. It is a call to holy living: to revere God, to appreciate the price that was paid in the costly sacrifice of Christ to set us free, to fix your faith and hope in God, to love one another with all our heart.

Exile and revelation in Peter parallel aspects of the Emmaus story. The closing words about “the living and enduring word of God” speak not only of the word that burned the hearts of the two followers in Luke, but also of the word that opened the hearts of the crowd in Acts. In both cases, the living word brings faith to life. May it be so with us today as we daily walk the journey of faith.

Resources:

The Abingdon Preaching Annual, 2002 ed.

Barclay Commentaries

Psalms by George Wright

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

April 7 – April 13, 2008

Life in the early church community: what a glorious experience it must have been! New people were being added to the church each day. Living as a large family; sharing everything; selling what you had to add to the community's assets. Looking on God as the Good Shepherd who would provide all that was needed. Where are the parallels in our own Christian community? Do we have the faith, the enthusiasm, the dedication shown by those early Christians? Are things really so much different today?

MONDAY, April 7: Acts 2:42-47

Sure they're different. They expected Christ's return within their lifetime – maybe even tomorrow. We look back on some 2000 years and see that he hasn't yet returned. But does this really matter? Look at the things they were doing – teaching, breaking bread together, praying. All the things that we are expected to do! Whether we join in communal living or not, we are responsible for the well-being of the community.

TUESDAY, April 8: Acts 2:42-47

We are to love each other and care for the needy among us. We are also to spread the word of the gospel to those who haven't heard (or believed). We are to live lives that speak well of our professed Christianity and set a good example for others. It would be great to have the "goodwill" of all the people, so that they would want to experience what we have. Our greatest testimony to our church life can be the way in which we live in harmony.

WEDNESDAY, April 9: Psalm 23

This is perhaps one of the best known, widely used passages in the Bible. It is so familiar that we often read (or repeat) it in the old poetic style of the King James version. The shepherd (God) provides all the flock (we) need: nourishment, water, safety and direction.

THURSDAY, April 10: Psalm 23

The image of an overflowing cup indicates a sufficiency and an abundance of everything we need in life. God is all that we need, as individuals and as a faith community. We trust in God; that he will lead us to an abundant life. And that life is what we need to share with others

FRIDAY, April 11: 1 Peter 2:19-25

In this passage, Peter, writing in a time of persecution, talks of the justification of suffering for something that we, in one case did, and in another, did not do. Credit is due only for suffering for that which we did not do. Of course, this relates directly to Christ's suffering death for the sins of all people. The passage ends with reference to the Good shepherd. Peter does not shy away from the reality of suffering. In this, however, we have the example of Christ to guide us, and the strength of our community to uphold us in our need.

SATURDAY, April 12: John 10:1-10

Jesus is teaching the disciples about the relationship between him and the church, but the disciples do not understand the parable. We again see the use of the shepherd and the sheep in the attempt to get the message across in a manner the people could understand. The close relationship between the shepherd and the sheep is like the relationship between the people in the community and Christ, their good shepherd. Christ gives life and gives it abundantly.

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

April 14 – April 20, 2008

The passages this week are filled with images of stones: stones as a method of execution, living stones, a precious cornerstone, a strong fortress of stones, and a rock of refuge. Hear in the verses this week the challenge of what it means to be a community of Christians—living stones claimed, united, and used by God for great things. In what ways are we called to be a faithful witness to God by our words and actions?

MONDAY, April 14: Acts 7:55-60

If you have extra time, read chapter 6 of Acts and the beginning of chapter 7, because it is here that we gain a fuller picture of Stephen. He was selected and commissioned by the Twelve to share in the ministry to the widows and poor among them. Full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Stephen was well suited to this growing ministry of word and deed. However, there were those who stood in opposition to Stephen—those who felt threatened by his wisdom and power. So, they brought trumped-up charges of blasphemy against him. Stephen testified to the truth, using the Hebrew Scriptures to accuse his hearers. Their anger mounted, and Stephen's fate was sealed. The emotional rage turned into physical violence. Yet even in the midst of this persecution, Stephen continued to witness to his strong faith in Jesus Christ, entrusting the care of his spirit to his Lord and asking for God's forgiveness upon those who were stoning him. Notice the close similarities of his dying statements to those made by Jesus as he was crucified. Stephen died as he lived, as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Gracious God, strengthen our spirits. May we live in ways that are full of faith and the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

TUESDAY, April 15: Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

It is in God where we find true protection. We find refuge in the Lord as our rock and as our strong fortress. God does not keep us isolated and immune from the hardships, trials, and difficulties of life; rather, God is present with us in and through them. God turns an ear to our cries, and God leads and guides us through our suffering. Jesus and Stephen are our models of this confidence and assurance. We can trust that no matter what we are experiencing, God has endured it before us. God walks with us through the darkest valleys of suffering and despair. Notice the

psalmist's strong verbs of presence and protection: God delivers us, listens to us, rescues us, saves us, frees us, and redeems us.

I trust in you, O Lord. You are my rock and my refuge—a stronghold in times of trouble. I place myself into the protection of your loving care. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, April 16: 1 Peter 2:2-10

In these Sundays after Easter, we continue our reading of 1 Peter. Last week's lesson reminded us that Christ willingly suffered for doing good. Today's reading proclaims that the Lord *is* good. Not only did Christ do good, but Christ was good. Jesus Christ embodied goodness. Like newborn babies, we are being nourished on that goodness. As we feed on spiritual milk, we grow up steadily in our faith and salvation, trusting in God's goodness.

Tender God, we rest gently in your arms like newborn infants—protected, nourished, and loved. Feed us with your spiritual milk that we might continue to grow in the knowledge of our salvation. Amen.

THURSDAY, April 17: 1 Peter 2:2-10

Once we were not a community, but now, in and through Christ, God claims us as God's own. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation—a people belonging to and claimed by God! We come to believe in God as individuals, each like a living stone. However, our strength and identity as Christians come as we live out our faith within community. Surrounding ourselves with other people of faith, the living stones build upon one another to form one structure—a living temple. And Christ, rejected by those who did not believe, is the chosen and precious cornerstone of our sure foundation.

Dear God, give us the wisdom to claim Christ as our cornerstone. Amen.

FRIDAY, April 18: John 14:1-14

These verses are considered part of Jesus' farewell discourses. Jesus used the remaining time with his disciples to teach them, instructing them once again on the major themes of his message. In today's reading we hear Jesus reminding his followers to trust in him as the way and the truth and the life, because it is in seeing what Jesus is like that they also have seen what God is like. Jesus is the way for us to know the truth and life that come from a relationship with God. Also, trusting in Jesus

means abiding with him. God offers each of us a “room” or a dwelling place—a place to call home. It is a personal place, one prepared especially for each of us.

Lord, we trust in you as our way, truth, and life. And we thank you for your abiding presence with us. Amen.

SATURDAY, April 19: John 14:1-14

Today we continue to explore some of Jesus’ last lessons. “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus claimed. He made this claim based upon both his words and his works. As we listen to Jesus, we hear the truth and life-giving message of God. And as we watch Jesus, we see the healing and miraculous works of God. We can grow in our Christian belief and faith by listening and watching Jesus. Those who listened faithfully to Jesus heard him make an astounding promise—you will do even greater things than these. Ministries greater than those of Jesus? What a promise! As we come together as a believing community of Christians, with our foundation in and on Christ, everything that we pray in the name of Jesus will be done—an astounding promise, indeed.

Most good and loving Father, give us ears to hear Jesus’ words and give us eyes to see his wondrous works. Touch our hearts, causing us to believe in the power of Jesus’ name. Amen.