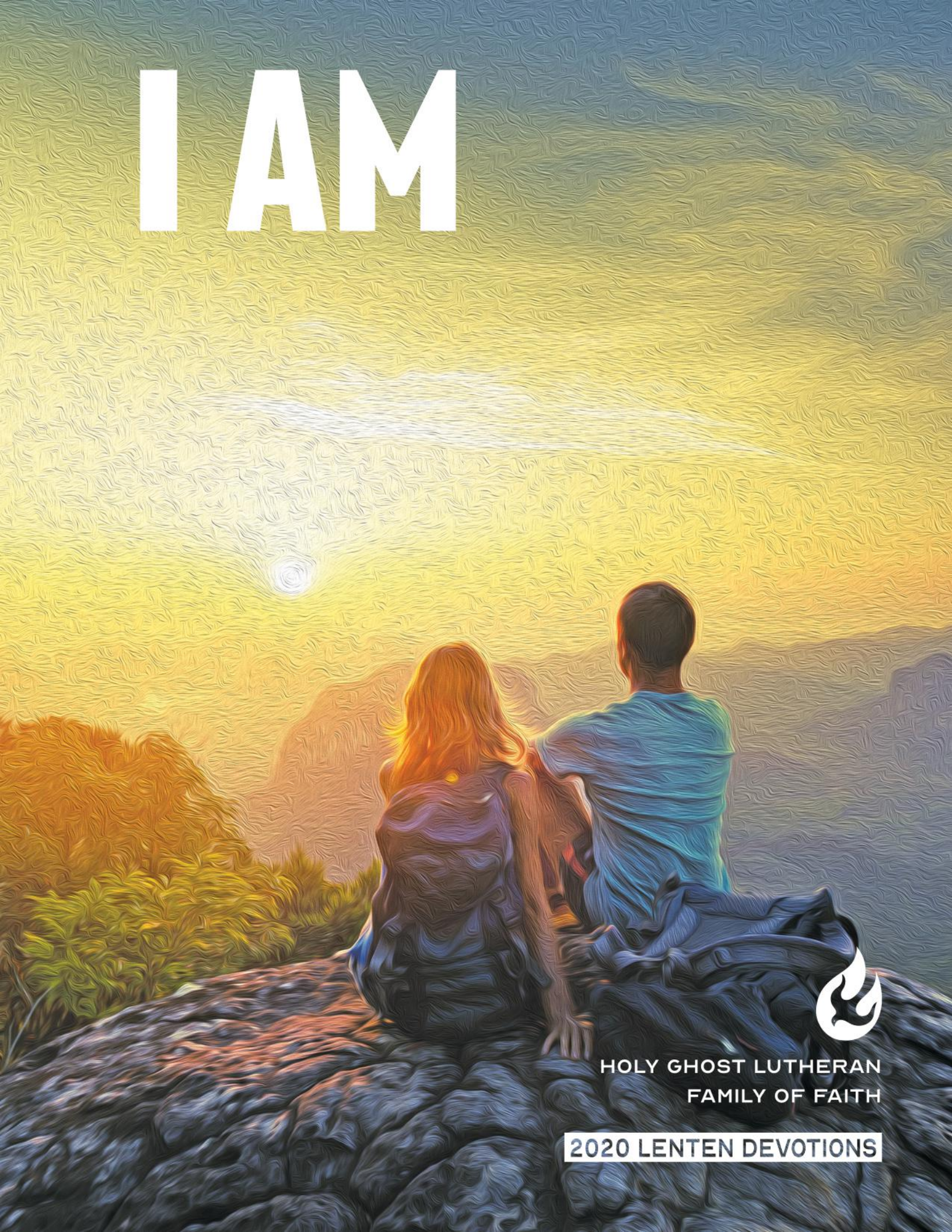


I AM



HOLY GHOST LUTHERAN
FAMILY OF FAITH

2020 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

The 2020 Lent series is **"I AM"**. It is significant that these are not declarations the Bible makes about God- nor are they testimonials others make of Him- but these are proclamations God makes of Himself! One statement the Almighty makes about Himself, followed by eight more Jesus uses to describe Himself, will lead us to Easter.

God the Father sets the bar high early in Scripture by simply yet profoundly stating, "I Am!" When the Lord calls Moses to lead the Children of Israel out of slavery from Egypt and into the Promised Land, Moses balks at the idea of his being the one God has chosen for this work. He questions the Lord by asking, "What if people ask what the name of this God is who desires to deliver us from bondage?" God's answer to Moses is, "Tell them I AM has sent you!"

If that isn't enough to raise at least a little hair on the back of your neck, then you need to check your pulse because God is basically saying, "He Is" and everything else pales to His eminence! More can't be said without giving away the message thunder for the first week in Lent, but all to say the Father sets the bar as high as it goes!

From there, with eight New Testament accounts of Himself, Jesus unfolds a whole array of images that help us understand His nature. He refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, the True Vine, the Way, Truth and Life, the Alpha and Omega, the Bread of Life, the Door, and the Resurrection and Life! These descriptions give us unbelievable insight as to who Christ is for us and how He works faith and salvation into our everyday lives directing us ultimately into eternity.

This series promises to be an exciting one! Content-wise, it will deepen our understanding of how we see God, the blessings that He offers, how He is accessible, and what God wants for us in this life and the next! With plain and simple earthly metaphors, God opens our minds and reveals Himself to us!

The following forty-seven stories are personal faith gems and testimonials written by Holy Ghost Lutheran Church members and friends that will help flesh out our individual needs, celebrations, joys, fears and hopes as we journey in life by faith. Some will walk us through the valley of the shadow, while others will lead us up the high mountain. All will in some way inspire us to continue to grow in our relationship with our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior.

May this Lenten season draw us into the richer and more abundant life which the Lord God intends for us as we walk closer with the Savior, discovering more about the identity of the One who calls Himself "I Am..."

Blessed Lent!



Pastor Bobby Vitek



I AM WHO I AM

Exodus 3:7-15

"The Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.'

Moses said, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'

God said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

But Moses said, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?'

God said, 'I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the Israelites, I AM has sent me to you. The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has sent me to you: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.'"

To continue the devotion, listen to **"His Name is Wonderful"** by **Kaoma Chende**.

Find it at this link:
youtu.be/GP7h8bNVQPc

When was the last time you told God "no"?

For me, I must admit it seems far too often. When I *hear* His voice and ignore the calling to give to a beggar. Or when I get the *feeling* to reach out to a total stranger and be kind. Even though I have never *seen* a burning bush like Moses, I know that God *speaks* to me in various ways. How does He *speak* to you? If you haven't heard from Him in a while, maybe you are not listening. He is always trying.

Back to Moses... Moses initially told God no and argued that God had picked the wrong person. Imagine that, God made a mistake. Of course, Moses finally agreed and accepted the call. In the scripture, it seems the turning point for Moses was when he heard God say, "I Am who I Am, the God of your Fathers." At that point, Moses quit making excuses and let God take over.

There is great power in His name. His name has the power to conquer armies, heal the sick, and drive away demons. His name allowed David to defeat Goliath. His name was used by Peter to make a beggar walk. When was the last time you used His name? Was it to glorify Him or was it not so flattering?

So today, I ask you to listen and then speak. *Listen* to hear what God has to say. *Speak His Name* when you are surrounded by fear or uncertainty.

Let God work in your life and see what happens.



David Bullion

May the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, bless you and keep you from sin, danger, and harm. May He wrap you in a blanket of His love and keep you in perfect health. May you rest assured that He is with you always, even until the end of time.

Amen

In these verses I hear these words:

limitless,
everywhere,
possibilities,
comfort,
and strength.

God gives us a firm foundation through His words. He has freed us from sin, and all He asks is that we put Him first. We all struggle with wanting to do what we want, when we want to do it. But when we make God our foundation or truth, it frees us to do what we want because what we want is what God wants for us. God isn't trying to restrict us. Rather God is trying to free us from the struggles that get us in trouble by not following the example Jesus set. All He asks is that we love Him above everything else. In return He offers us truth and love.

We are free to live Christian lives because God will take care of the rest. We just have to love Him above everything else. We get to concentrate on our relationship with God and how we take that relationship into this broken world. With God as our foundation, we give grace to those we feel have offended us. God rights all the wrongs, including our own. God is truth and light and love. God is infinite and overwhelming.

You are free to let the light of God shine through you.



Tricia Herrera

I AM WHO I AM

Exodus 20:2-3

*"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."*

Dear God,

Why do we complicate our lives with the love of money, things, and wasteful activities when we could find hope, comfort, joy, and strength in You? Help us to find the limitless options You offer us simply by loving You above all other things. I ask You to help us with the struggles of this world. Lead us to serve others in Your name. Give us the faith that all things are possible when we seek to follow You, Heavenly Father. In Jesus' name I pray,
Amen

I AM WHO I AM

John 18:36-38

"Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'

'You are a king, then!' said Pilate.

Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'

'What is truth?' retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, 'I find no basis for a charge against him.'"

How many of us have seen those social media posts that say, "live your truth" or something like that? They're always written in appealing fonts with pretty colors, and the phrase has a nice ring to it. Why wouldn't we be drawn to this message?

When I was in college, that was how I lived. Everything I did was fine and good because it was *my* truth. I spent money freely, I went to classes when I felt like it, and I made sure nothing I didn't want was included in my life. No money problems, no due dates, no nagging parents, and no feelings or thoughts about changing my lifestyle. No one could stand in the way of *my* truth, and if they did, I would reprimand them for stifling *my* truth.

Of course, you can guess how this turned out: my funds went dry, my grades suffered, I pushed away friends and family, and my relationship with my Savior was shallow at best. All because I was living *my* truth when I should've been living *the* Truth.

My truth is nothing- it doesn't exist. What exists is *the* Truth. It has always been, and will always be. It's not subjective, and it doesn't change with the times. *The* Truth is Jesus, the I AM- the answer to everything.

So often the world wants to tell us what the latest truth is, or to tell us to just sit back and live our own version of the truth, but that's not what Christ calls us to do. Jesus did not die on the cross for us to cheapen His sacrifice by us telling Him what it really means. We are called to take up our own cross, go into the world, and testify to His Truth, *the* Truth.

What is Truth? How do we live in the world while trying to figure out what Christ is telling us? Through study, prayer, the hard, hard task of following His examples, and the peace of understanding He will catch us when we stumble.

What is Truth? The answer is simple: I AM.



Daniel Hofmann

For a deeper dive, listen to **"Everything to Me"** by **Avalon**, available on Apple Music, Spotify, and Youtube.



(our hands we fold, our heads we bow, it's time to talk to God right now)

Dear Jesus,

You are the Truth. Be in our heads and hearts as we fight with the world and ourselves over Truth. Lean us against your mighty Word so we may stand strong, and always let us speak the Truth in Love. Amen.

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 29, 2020

I AM WHO I AM

John 10:10b

*"I came that they may have
life and have it abundantly."*

Initially when I read this, the word that stuck out for me was "abundantly". But as I kept reading, my thoughts went a whole different direction. I looked at the words "I came that you" and this passage seemed much more personal, both from what I was feeling and from what Jesus was saying.

In the verses before and even in the first part of this verse, Jesus is speaking allegorical- but here He speaks in the first person. "I came for you." I had the sense Jesus was in the room with me, reaching out His hand and pulling me into His arms.

I almost came to tears as I felt His presence and realized what He did for me, what He did for all of us. Most of the time I can't grasp the magnitude of what He did for me. But occasionally, I get a glimpse of the power of His death and resurrection and how personal that is for each of us.

I believe Jesus comes differently to those who take the hand He extends to us because He offers a very personal relationship with each of us. He knows what we need and whispers to us, "I came to give you _____. You fill in the blank about what you need. He uses the word "life." However you filled in the blank, it is part of your life. And He doesn't want you to have just a little of it but an abundance of it.

I only get glimpses of what the abundant life is, but I know I will understand fully when I finally see Him face to face.



Sandy Birdlebough

Dear Jesus,
Let us feel Your presence and take the life You offer us. Open our eyes so we can fully look at You and know the treasures You give.
Amen

For further reflection, listen to **"Death Was Arrested"** by **North Point Worship**, available on Apple Music, Spotify, and Youtube.



SUNDAY
MARCH 1, 2020

I AM WHO I AM

Psalm 145:8-9

*"The Lord is gracious and
compassionate, slow to
anger and rich in Love. The
Lord is good to all;
He has compassion on all
He has made."*

Grace, Compassion, Love, and Good.

Thank goodness in this verse, as throughout the Bible, there are more positive attributes listed about our Lord, than the one negative thing mentioned here... anger.

How many of us can say we are slow to anger? How about when someone cuts us off in traffic? How about the inattentive driver in front of you at the red light that sits though the green light, causing you to have to sit through another cycle? How about that crazy driver that is speeding and cutting in between cars? How about when someone breaks their promise to us? How about wanting to purchase some items at a store and discover the line is extremely long or is moving ridiculously slow?

These are the instances that come to my mind of when I am personally guilty of getting that nasty frustrated feeling that changes my mood in literally a heartbeat. Repeatedly, we make the choice to be quick to anger versus slow to anger. What if we could work harder at showing grace to the person that does not obey the traffic rules and have compassion that they may be under great stress and be rushing to get somewhere or be distracted on a personal matter that really needs their immediate attention? I have personally been responsible for these same traffic frustrations and it's not a good feeling. I cringe to think, that I have unintentionally made strangers mad or angry with me. We have all been responsible for causing an inconvenience to others and hope that they, like God, would be slow to anger. Day after day, we sin in thought, word, and deed by the things we have done and the things we have left undone. Yet, we are reassured that we receive forgiveness from God.

I challenge you today or perhaps this week, that as soon as you feel that nasty anger creep into your emotions, thoughts, or heart, for you to quickly and intentionally replace it with grace, compassion, love, or do something good and see how more blessed your day may become.



Amy Montgomery

Dear God,
Please help me to have more patience and to show more gratitude, compassion, and love to others. We are so undeserving of all the gifts You give us daily and it is hard to understand, but greatly appreciated, that You do not show more anger towards us. Thank You for that and for sending Jesus so that we could witness how we should be forgiving and compassionate to others.
Amen.

MONDAY
MARCH 2, 2020

One Sunday morning, Pastor Bobby told us about this upcoming Lenten Devotional, the subject of which is, "I Am."

Hearing this, I was almost brought to my knees by the thought of, "What if?"

What if...there was no 'I Am?'

What if...I did not have God's love?

What if...He did not send Jesus Christ to save me from my sins?

Or, what if...I could not feel His indescribable grace?

What if...I did not have a Father in Heaven?"

Pondering this reality of what might have been, my mind became dark with fear. So awful! Then I became filled with the light of my good fortune. I felt such overwhelming gratitude my knees again were weak...this time wonderfully so!

But there was some sadness involved. I know I can never be grateful enough to our Lord for what He gives me, especially since I often feel His presence in my life.

The presence of the great "I Am."



Lois Mavsar

I AM WHO I AM

Ephesians 2:3-5

"All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ -by grace you have been saved."

Oh, Great I Am,
I am humbled by Your presence and overwhelmingly grateful for Your Presence.
Thank You merciful Father.
Amen.

TUESDAY
MARCH 3, 2020

I AM WHO I AM

Matthew 14:22-33

"Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds. After He had dismissed the crowds, He went up the mountain by Himself to pray.

When evening came, He was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning He came walking toward them on the sea.

But when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter answered Him, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.'

He said, 'Come.' So, Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

Jesus immediately reached out His hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

And those in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"

For further reflection, listen to **"You Say"** by **Lauren Daigle**, available on Apple Music, Spotify, and Youtube.



The story of Peter walking on water is a story that paints a vivid picture in my mind. The words we read are descriptive and detailed, allowing us to become an observer. How many times in our lives have we witnessed something similar, standing on the sidelines, watching an athlete compete or seeing someone accomplish something great?

One of the first things that sticks out to me is in verse 23. To me, this makes Jesus, the Son of God, more human. I think often times, we see Jesus as this great and all powerful being. But this reminds us that even Jesus needs time to Himself to reflect and be away from the chaos of the crowds. As a camper and staff member at Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp, the first half hour of every morning is spent having "God Time." It is used as a time to reflect, pray, and listen to what God has to say. It was always a time for me to reconnect, just like Jesus did on the mountainside.

The second part of this verse when Peter begins his decent onto the water is much like the story of Thomas. After Jesus has risen from the grave, Thomas sees this man and doubts that he is Jesus. Jesus once again says, "Stop doubting and believe." How many times in my own life have I doubted that Jesus was with me? How many times have I ignored Him and brushed Him off, only for Him to say (maybe as he nods His head sarcastically) "You of little faith!?" What a slap in the face!

The song "You Say" by Lauren Daigle is a great reminder for all the Peter's and Thomas's or even the McKenzie's in the world. When we think we aren't good enough, or God isn't with us, God reminds us that we are His and that we should never doubt Him, no matter if we are observers or the ones walking on water.



McKenzie Moellering

Dear Heavenly Father,
Help us to be mindful that You are always with us, even in times of doubt, uncertainty, and fear, just as You were with Peter and Thomas. Guide us through this day. Thank You for the many blessings in our lives. We love You.
Amen

WEDNESDAY
MARCH 4, 2020

Have you accepted the life that God has to offer?

Our Lord Jesus is the good shepherd because no matter where we are or what we are doing, he tends to us day and night. Every single day, Satan will come to steal, kill or try to destroy us with all sorts of things.... alcoholism, cheating, stealing, gossiping, and the list could go on. But rest assured knowing that God is here to protect, love and save us from destruction by giving us eternal life. Jesus is not some kind of hired keeper who comes to just watch over us, as a shepherd would his sheep. He is completely committed to lay down His physical life for you and me.

Shepherds are kind, loving, patient, strong and self-sacrificing. Sheep are not the smartest: they have poor eyesight, can be stubborn, and tend to wander and get lost. Sheep can be rather stupid and foolish creatures, which is why they are a good symbol for us - because we tend to wander, dig our heels in and get lost. We need a Shepherd to watch over us daily. This does not mean that bad things are not going to happen to us or that we will be safe from everything. Even Psalm 23 which says, *"the Lord is my Shepherd,"* has both still waters and the valley of the shadow of death. Our God has promised that all things work together for good for those that love Him and are called according to His purpose. Having a good Shepherd means that God sometimes allows things we may not like for eventual good.

Rest assured knowing that Jesus knows each of us individually and is touched with the feelings of our infirmities. He knows you by name, where you live and who is there with you. At times in your life He has given directions to you to go to a certain street in a certain city, to find one of His sheep. He knows who you are inside and out, and when you gladly hear His call, He will bring you under His pastoral care. He says, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"* John 10:27.

Jesus cares for you so deeply - He will never leave you and will go to great lengths to search for you when you wander astray. Remember: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want!



Kim Wilson

Dear Lord,
Thank You for knowing every single thing about us. It is scary at times because we want to hide even our thoughts from You. Let us remember You are the Light of the world and have our best interests at heart.
Amen

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:11

*"I am the Good Shepherd.
The Good Shepherd lays
down His life for the
sheep."*

For a deeper dive, listen to
**"I Am Yours" by Lauren
Daigle**, available on Apple
Music, Spotify, and Youtube.



THURSDAY
MARCH 5, 2020

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:14-15

*"I am the Good Shepherd.
I know My own and My
own know Me, just as the
Father knows Me and I
know the Father.
And I lay down My life for
the sheep."*

When I first get stock show piglets, they are vulnerable and wild. I have to form a bond with them and be committed to the long hours and hard work it takes to train them. They depend on me to know their every need, from food and shelter to health and exercise. Pigs are very stubborn and downright difficult at times. As they grow, they very quickly outweigh me, and they think they can push me around. Each one is very individual and has different likes and dislikes; so, I have to *know* them and adjust their training.

Then comes Show Day. We leave the comfort and familiarity of our farm and head out to compete. I have been there before, but my pigs haven't. There are bright lights, lots of people and hundreds of not always happy pigs. This is a whole new world that can really stress them out. But guess what? I have their familiar food and water from their farm. I sit with them and calm them. They know they are safe because I am there providing for them. Then they perform and show so well because that's what we do. I am their constant and as I guide them through the work we have to do, they trust me and happily do it because amongst all the chaos this is what we do *together*.

So during our good show days and our difficult training days, let us not forget what our Good Shepherd provides for us. And when we are lost or overwhelmed, remember He is our constant, our comfort, our provider. He will walk with us and guide us always because that's what we do *together*.



Leah and Ridley Strackbein

Dear Lord,
Help us to depend on You, knowing that You will meet our every need. Guide us as we learn to trust in You.
Amen

FRIDAY
MARCH 6, 2020

"Go get the horses. We have to gather the sheep (or goats or cattle)."

Those words from my daddy made me feel like I won the lottery! I loved the adventure of riding out in the pasture on the hunt for the stock. As the pickup horn honked or Daddy did his call, most of the animals would come running and comply with heading to the barn. There would always be a few who ran back, circled around, and went back to their favorite spot or would lay way down in the grass and not move.

When we got to the barn it was counting time. Everybody counted and then we compared numbers. Invariably, we were missing some, which is when the real fun began. I would beg to ride along to search for the missing sheep (or goats or cattle). During these rides, I learned how to check the fences for signs of escapees, ride in the rough areas, and search like I was looking for Easter eggs. Sometimes this would go on for a couple of days. We would discover animals that had perished, or were sick or hurt, and we would have to continue searching into the neighbors' pastures. We would not quit until Dad was satisfied with his accounting. If there were too many sheep (goats or cattle), Dad noticed right away.

The secret was the markings or slits in the ears. Dad knew the markings that the neighbors used. He could tell who a stray belonged to most of the time. We would keep the animals that didn't belong to us and take care of them until the owner could be notified.



Rhonda Eckert

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:16

"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one Shepherd."

Father,
We are marked with Your cross through baptism. You still send for even those who are not yet baptized to be saved. Work through me to be a shepherd to find those who are lost and guide them to You.
Amen.

SATURDAY
MARCH 7, 2020

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Psalm 23:1

*"The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want."*

Many of us learned the opening line of Psalm 23 "back in the day" as, *"The Lord is my shepherd."* John 10:11 defines a good shepherd: *"the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* This comes one verse after Jesus' promise of abundant life.

We are fortunate to have those here in the natural world who will lay down their lives for others; our military, law enforcement, brave parents and occasional everyday heroes to name a few. But only one good shepherd can also provide abundant life, and only one hero's death can provide forgiveness for sins and everlasting life.

I spent some time on my family's sheep ranch in my younger years. If there were ever creatures in need of a Good Shepherd, it is sheep. They are gentle souls, nurturing parents, like to gather in flocks, and grow great meat and wool; however, they also are not the brightest or bravest in the animal kingdom. They are followers, and they have some interesting quirks. I have often seen sheep running through a gate, each one dutifully jumping over the same invisible tripwire because that's what the leader had done.

One of my favorite sights is a green wheat field in the midst of all the winter drab dotted by a flock of wooly sheep. These days the sheep are usually accompanied by a guardian - either a llama, donkey, or Great Pyrenees dog, because there are predators out there.

The sheep is a humble animal, and their humility reflects our own. No matter how rich, well-educated, well-connected, skilled or talented, we are all still sheep. We need to assess our companions, our leaders and our defenders - making sure we flock with other believers and follow the Good Shepherd. We also need to fully appreciate the sacrifices of our defenders -- our military and law enforcement, and most of all, our one and only Savior.



Cindy Johnson Harper

Father,
Thank You for the gift of Your Son, our Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. May we always hear His voice, may we all always be members of His flock, and may we be reminded daily of His suffering and sacrifice on our behalf.
Amen

SUNDAY
MARCH 8, 2020

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Isaiah 40:11

"He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep."

"I am the Good Shepherd."

These are very familiar words, which most of us heard as children. They remind me of pictures I have seen of Jesus holding a young lamb. They also remind me of a story in which Jesus was the shepherd. He leaves His flock in order to find the one missing sheep.

This refers to us being the sheep and Jesus as being the shepherd. Jesus is still giving people time to repent in order that nobody should perish but have everlasting life. Hence, the reason for the title: *"Jesus is the Good Shepherd."* He wants to rescue us so we can return to His flock.

In John 10:11, Jesus says, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep."* This reminds me of the sacrifice of Jesus' human life. He suffered a horrible death in order to save us.

Psalm 23 explained that relationship, *"The Lord is my shepherd. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me."* That is real protection and faithfulness.

Jesus is with us every moment, just like the shepherd is with His flock. He watches over us and protects us until the end of our earthly lifetime. We don't have to make our decisions alone. He is always there, and He is waiting for us to ask.



Jeanette Schneider

Heavenly Father,
Because of Your great Love, You freely bestow Your Mercy and Grace on us every day. May we humbly give You thanks and praise You for this free gift.
Amen.

MONDAY
MARCH 9, 2020

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Matthew 2:6

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

The first two times Bethlehem is mentioned in the Bible, the word "death" is in the same verse as the word "Bethlehem" (Genesis 35:19, 48:7). When it is brought up again in Judges 19, it is to tell the story of a Levite and his concubine whose home was Bethlehem. They stopped on their journey, and an old man offered them a place to stay the night. The story ends in heartbreaking and gruesome detail of the concubine's rape, abuse, and eventual murder. Her body was dismembered and used to initiate an intertribal war that resulted in the near destruction of the tribe of Benjamin. Let that sit with you for a second, because *that* is the place through which God chose to bring us the physical and literal Light of the World.

"But you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;" How could a ruler come out of something that is associated with so much violence and destruction? But then again, isn't that what God has done with almost every one of our lives? When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, it was an epic demonstration that although we have walked through darkness or there is destruction all around us, God can and will still use us! He used Bethlehem as the place to birth life into the world. A place formerly known for death, now known for the ultimate life. Trust Him to use you, a person formerly known for heartbreaking anguish, as a person now known for speaking light and truth. No matter what you have done or have been through, you still are not the "least among the rulers."

"For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." God can use you for life if you let Him Shepherd you. Shepherds in the Bible are associated with essentially the opposite connotation than that of Bethlehem. The first mention of a shepherd in the Bible is in Genesis 29:3, where we see shepherds tending to and caring for their sheep by ensuring that they have water to drink. More famously, "The Parable of the Lost Sheep" in Luke 15 recounts the story of the shepherd that would leave his 99 sheep to find that one lost sheep. God is a good shepherd: He will chase after us through all the darkness, and He will use it to form something life-giving. Let it go to Him today and see what light He will shepherd out of you.



Shelby Bullion

Dear Lord,
Let me not forget as I go about my day, the magnitude of the darkness that took on for me. I know that Jesus felt every sorrow and sadness when he died for my sins on the cross. Thank You for shepherding me daily and never letting me forget that I am useful to You no matter what darkness I have passed through. Shepherd me today and use me to project Your Light.
Amen

TUESDAY
MARCH 10, 2020

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Matthew 9:36

*"When He saw the crowds,
He had compassion for
them, because they were
harassed and helpless, like
sheep without a shep-
herd."*

Jesus went on to tell His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field." Sometimes, we have been in similar situations in church when we pray for workers; however, you need to be prepared for God to call you to fill that need, to help shepherd His flock and the Good Shepherd will be there to lead you.

This is something I have experienced. Our oldest son, Mark, was very special in many ways. One was that he had Down's syndrome and we were involved in programs for Mark and his peers. One of our ministers wanted to start a special needs Sunday School and invited anyone interested in the ministry to a meeting. Six of us who were teaching Sunday School classes went and we all began praying for God's leadership and someone to lead the ministry. We all probably prayed a similar prayer, "God let someone (besides me) be willing to lead this ministry."

While getting off the church van after visiting a special needs Sunday school department in another town, I told our pastor that if no one else wanted to be the director, I was willing to give it a try. He turned to the rest of our group and said, "Sue has finally heard what God has been telling us." One by one they told me, "we knew you should be the director and we have been praying for you." But I felt more like a lost sheep than a shepherd.

But God knew my connection to the families, our shared hopes for our children, and a desire to provide opportunities for those children, which gave me a unique advantage; the parents' trust. The first Sunday I shared my hope with the teachers that seven or eight families would visit our Open House; 15 came! Quite frankly, it was overwhelming for me. I prayed small; God answered big!

Later we started a Special Friends Camp that reached out to churches in our area, and again, God called shepherds for that flock of loving and trusting sheep.



Sue Gustin

Dear God,
Thank You for sending the Good Shepherd to look after us with compassion and love. He knows we are harassed and helpless sheep, needing Him to care for us, and He comes into each of our lives. Help us each day, moment by moment, to stay safely within the flock under His protection. Help us to prepare our hearts to hear Your voice and follow where You lead us. In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

To continue the devotion,
listen to **"The Baa Baa
Song" by Sibling Harmony.**

Find it at this link:
youtu.be/PGPQX3vQtU8

WEDNESDAY
MARCH 11, 2020

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 8:12

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the Light of Life.'"

Over Christmas break, I went on the Mexico mission trip. It was in that dusty village with no electricity, no running water, no air conditioning, and no toilets that I fully understood this verse, this famous quote: "I am the Light of the World."

Although nothing but stars and a campfire illuminated the cool night, I had never felt so blinded by the overwhelming light of God. Mothers and children, men and women, villagers and missionaries, Spanish speakers, English speakers, and infants too young to speak were brought together by the Truth of His Light confined by no language but love. Light shone through wide smiles, teary eyes, breathtaking sunsets, countless gifts, and a pure fellowship of people living hundreds of miles apart.

In John 8:12, Jesus says, "I am the Light of the World." Not just the light of the church, or the light of a prayer over dinner. Not just the light of the blessed, not just the light of the poor. He doesn't just shine for those who are sad or just those who are happy, not just for those who live in the north or south, east or west. Not just the light of Christians, but for every single one of God's children.

We are called to live as children of the Light. We no longer live in darkness; we have the greatest reason to celebrate!

Although we pass in and out of life's valleys of shadows, our light within cannot be dulled or extinguished. To me, light is a feeling of relief and safety after a dark period. It is a feeling of inner warmth and comfort that protects from the unknown and guides us to where we need to go.

God shines constantly in us; let us shine for others.



Claire Nevins

For further reflection, listen to **"Glow in the Dark"** by Jason Gray, available on Apple Music, Spotify, and Youtube.



Dear God,
Allow us to be comforted, warmed, and led by Your universal light as we shine for others. In life's struggles, give us the strength to step out of the darkness and into Your everlasting arms.
Amen

THURSDAY
MARCH 12, 2020

When I was looking over the verse, this is what jumped out at me: what could it possibly mean?

Suddenly, it hit me. I started a part-time job in October 2019. I was so excited to get a job because I had been looking for one for a while. After I got this job, I was scared as I was starting a new career at 50 years old.

Don't get me wrong, I was looking forward to getting out of the house and working again- not to mention earning some money. As always, God was there to guide my feet and light my path. God is always there for you and me.

Stepping out and learning something new at any age takes courage. Through the power of prayer and wrestling with the positives and negatives of new opportunities, hopefully you come to the point where your heart feels the peace you've been looking for, which makes the new opportunity easier.

Have you ever taken a risk and been surprised by the outcome? How do you fully give your trust to God? In your mind you may not trust your decision, but in your heart, you feel the peace you did. That alone takes courage. That new opportunity might be the greatest surprise of your life.

It's wonderful and scary, but it is the perfect thing for you.



Dana Moellering

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Psalms 119:105

"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Dear Lord,
Thank You for guiding me and lighting my path. I continue to need You to guide me in the rest of my life. Thank You for always being there for me and knowing when to push me to the right path. In Your Holy Name,
Amen.

FRIDAY
MARCH 13, 2020

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 4:16

"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned."

This verse is a reference to Isaiah 9:2 and represents yet another instance in which Jesus fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament.

On whom did the light dawn? It dawned on those living in darkness. The light did not dawn on those who were perfect or those who had completed a sufficient number of good works; it dawned on those who lived in darkness. The Galileans did not have to do anything to receive the light. Instead, the light simply came.

Jesus did not come to save perfect people - they do not exist. Nor did he come to save those who were without sin - they do not exist either, or those who had done enough good works to atone for their sins - nobody has accomplished this feat. Instead, Jesus came to save sinners. Period.

This same theme is repeated much later in Jesus' ministry as recorded in Luke 15 through the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. The sheep and the coin could do nothing to be found. The prodigal son arguably did not deserve grace.

Just like the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, the Galileans could do nothing to save themselves, and neither can we. All are under the burden of original sin. Still, while we were yet sinners, God sent Jesus to die for our sins. We can be assured that Jesus will be with us even in our darkest times and for all eternity. We can respond in faith by reflecting the light.



Robert Elder

Dear Heavenly Father,
Thank You for sending Your Light to us when we need it most. May we always reflect Your light to others so they also may come to know You as Lord.
Amen.

SATURDAY
MARCH 14, 2020

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Genesis 1:1-5

"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day."

Each morning is a new day, and we begin by thanking God for the gift of sunshine. Its radiance awakens us fully to the beauty of God's creation. Hovering above, around, and under us is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit.

"You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light. With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall."

2 Samuel 22:29-30

"Many, Lord are asking, 'Who will bring us prosperity?' Let the light of our face shine on us. Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound."

Psalms 4:6-7

Yes, that is what I feel when those first rays begin to burst through the blinds. They dispel the darkness, bringing in the warmth and beauty of Your "beyond my comprehension" joy for us, Your creation. It is no wonder that when You too first saw light, You said, "It is good."

For years, I have been blessed to see an abundance of sunrises and sunsets. But there is one that will remain with me. It was Sunday, October 21, 2018. My husband, Harvey, had passed the previous Thursday, and the need to be in church played heavily on my heart. As I crossed San Antonio Street at 7:45am, I looked to the east, and there was the most beautiful, beautiful sunrise I had ever seen. In fact, it so grasped hold of many, that I saw numerous Facebook posts of it thereafter.

For me, God had separated the darkness and made light. From His light - the sunrise - came warmth, beauty, and joy! God was sending me a message: All is good, all is well. Harvey is whole again.



Betty Eckert

Our Dear Heavenly Father,
Each night as we close our eyes, let us look forward to the morning light for the blessings of a new day.
Amen.

For a deeper dive, look up
John 8:12 in your Bible.

SUNDAY
MARCH 15, 2020

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

1 John 1:5-9

"This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The world we live in is full of darkness.

We often struggle with pain, loss and troubles of all kinds. To be honest, my prayers often include pleas for God to take away or relieve something that I feel is just too difficult for me or someone else to handle. But as the Lord told His disciples "In this world you will have trouble but take heart. I have overcome the world." Jesus was sent into this broken world to be a light for all who would believe and put their faith in His promises. I get myself in trouble when I think I can somehow have control over life's problems and worries instead of turning my trust and heart toward Jesus. In this world of sin, a close fellowship with Him, a daily walk close to my Lord, helps me to be stronger in my faith. I am reminded to set my hope on the promise of a problem-free, light filled life in heaven with God.

As we enter another Lenten season, I am reminded once more of the physical darkness Christ endured on that Thursday of Holy Week and the spiritual and emotional darkness He suffered through on the Friday of His crucifixion. All of the darkness of the world fell on Him who had no darkness in Him. All of this He did for us because we are all sinners in need of a Savior, and all we can say is Thank You, Lord, for such an indescribable gift! So, when the darkness of this world descends on us, and it will, hopefully as people of faith, we can seek out His will for our lives. He truly is our guiding beacon of light.

The following is a hymn I grew up singing in my Grandmother's church:

*Walking in sunlight, all of my Journey, over the mountains, through the deep
vale;*

*Jesus has said, "I'll never forsake thee," promise divine that never can fail.
Shadows around me, shadows above me, never conceal my Savior and
Guide;*

*He is the light, in Him is no darkness; ever I'm walking close by His side.
Heavenly sunlight, heavenly sunlight, flooding my soul with glory divine;
Hallelujah, I am rejoicing, singing His praises, Jesus is mine.*



Jane Remmert

Lord,
Help me remember that I am a child of the Light, Your Holy Light. Give me strength and courage to try daily to stay in close fellowship with You. Help me to keep my eyes and heart fixed on an eternity filled with Your light. All this I ask in Your precious name.
Amen

MONDAY
MARCH 16, 2020

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Psalm 27:1

*"The Lord is my light and
my salvation; whom shall I
fear?"*

*The Lord is the strong-
hold of my life; of whom
shall I be afraid?"*

I began the process of becoming a certified teacher through an alternative certification program in the summer of 2018.

The journey has not been an easy one, and I have encountered many roadblocks along the way. I am currently teaching a Kindergarten class. I have administrative staff walking through my classroom all the time along with the mentor person from the teacher preparation program. All these individuals respond very negatively to the happenings of the classroom. I do have some students with behavior concerns which are not being supported by the appropriate staff members.

I often feel very lost and overwhelmed on this journey. I question: "is this what I was really called to do?"

Our Lord works in mysterious ways, He always knows when to tug at my heart to read my Bible and come to Him. He somehow knows to guide my husband to remind me that I am a strong, faithful woman that relies on the Lord.

The other day my daughters and I were at Hobby Lobby. As I walked through the store, I saw prints everywhere that caught my eye. Many stated, "I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to give you hope," a version of Jeremiah 29:11.

Today, I do still question if my calling is to be a teacher. I am clinging to the Lord who is my stronghold and my light. I described my grandmother as a God-Fearing lady at her funeral, and I am so very blessed to have had her as my role model of strength and to turn to God in these times of questioning.



Nancy Sagebiel

Dear Most Gracious Heavenly Father,
You are my Light and my Salvation. Please guide with Your love and Your strength. Open hearts that we may see You take Your plan for our journey.
Amen.

TUESDAY
MARCH 17, 2020

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven."

Wow, I really didn't like these verses while growing up.

Even in young adulthood, keeping my head low and avoiding talk about religion was the norm for me. Not only did talking about religion seem crazily bold and against my humble nature (for which I am admittedly sometimes proud!), I was always uncomfortable with my parents' choice of denomination to which they are/were greatly devoted. Religion was a very private matter to me so better to guide the conversation elsewhere.

I much preferred another verse in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says in Matthew 6:6, "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Of course, not making a show out of prayer was the point he was making, but my lack of confidence gave more meaning and weight to Matthew 6:6 than is really there.

Then after years of searching I found a good Bible study at a more Bible-based church and decided to join it and get baptized. I was being filled with the Word by the Holy Spirit and, while the baptism itself wasn't a dramatic experience, my life did start getting dramatically better! I started making better decisions, met Misty my wife of almost 16 years, and had Grace and Margaret. Not that life became perfect and I became faultless and sinless- just ask my family, though no need to go into the details- but I have found a deeper contentment and joy ever since truly dedicating my life to Christ and living to glorify God, instead of myself. The little things no longer stress me out like they used to. What a joyful freedom that brings.

Now, out of gratitude, how can I not show the joy, the God-given light within me, to the world? We are His and, when living for Him, shouldn't be bashful about our faith, but show it and share it with all the world.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!



Jim Roeder

Heavenly Father,
Thank You so much for this light You've given us. For Your glory alone,
please guide us to share it generously and enthusiastically. In Jesus' name I
pray,
Amen.

WEDNESDAY
MARCH 18, 2020

I AM THE TRUE VINE

John 15:1-2

"I am the True Vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in Me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit He prunes to make it bear more fruit."

Usually, when I read this passage, I go straight from "Jesus is the vine" (verse 1), to "you are the branches" (verse 5). I miss verse 2 where Jesus says the Father is cutting off *His* branches and pruning *Him* to be more fruitful. Wait a minute?! How can this be?! What pruning could He possibly need?! He's JESUS! The cutting and pruning are meant for me!

But if you think about it, there are about 30 years that we know very little of Jesus' life. What was happening during this time? Was God cutting and pruning Him, preparing Him for the ultimate mission?

While it is impossible for us to comprehend, Jesus was both God and human. He was born like me (Luke 2:7). He hungered (Matthew 4:2) and thirsted (John 4:7) like me. He felt the loss of a friend and wept like me (John 11:35). I can relate to all these things. How amazing that the Son of God allowed Himself to come to this world to be just like me. But He was asked to do so much more than I will ever have to do. Probably even more than His own humanity wanted to do. In the garden, Jesus prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but Yours be done." (Luke 22:42). He knew what was coming. He could have walked away from it all. Angels from heaven could have rescued Him.

But His Father had prepared Him for what was coming. The human doubt that Jesus had was cut off like a branch that bears no fruit. And His strength, courage, and conviction were pruned and grew so that He could face the cross. Jesus had become man in full. By taking our place on the cross, He saved us in full.

Yet, He differs from us in a very important way: Jesus was sinless. He was perfect. The perfect Lamb that was sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins. The Lamb whose blood was shed on the cross. The blood that we taste when we drink the wine at communion. The wine that comes from the fruit of the vine...the one True Vine!



Doyle Moellering

Dear Heavenly Father,
Thank You for sending Your Son to be like me and feel the things I feel.
Help me to be pruned and cut to do Your will just as Jesus allowed You to cut and prune Him.
Amen.

THURSDAY
MARCH 19, 2020

I AM THE TRUE VINE

John 15:4

"Abide in Me as I abide in you.

Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me."

I've been reading *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* by Nabeel Qureshi. The author was a Muslim who loved his religion and often persuaded others to embrace Islam. He was influenced by a friend, David Wood, to evaluate both Christianity and Islam and in so doing, he came to believe in the salvation Jesus brought to mankind. I was curious about David Wood, and found he came from an extremely disruptive family. He was arrested for trying to kill his father and thrown into prison. His cellmate, Randy, was a Christian. To David, this did not make sense. Why would a Christian be in jail? Randy explained he had not always followed Jesus. He had committed terrible crimes and had been able to evade the law. When he found Jesus, he knew he not only needed to repent, but make restitution. So he turned himself in, made a complete confession, and was imprisoned. He knew God was in complete control. Randy eventually led David to Jesus and David was changed. He was let out of prison after five years, met Nabeel and loved him into finding Jesus.

I marvel at how once these men were grafted into the True Vine, God "pruned" their lives in order to produce fruit. John 15 tells us that Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. I am reminded though: pruning may require great pain and faith that the Vinedresser knows exactly what to do to produce the best fruit. God is the master gardener and often we do not understand what He does in His vineyard. Nabeel died at the age of 34 of cancer. He left behind many thankful friends and family whose faith in Christ was influenced by his message. David Wood married and had four sons. Randy turned himself in and went to jail. But look at the fruit that was produced for God's glory through these men! David leads his own ministry. Nabeel wrote several books and spoke to thousands before he died. I wonder how many in prison have accepted Jesus as Lord because of Randy. I have no doubt the Lord, the perfect Vinedresser, is still using these three lives to enhance the richness of His vineyard by bringing others to Christ and to cause Christians, like me, to consider my attitude when the Vinedresser starts pruning my life.



Roxanne Frantzen

Have thine own way Lord, have thine own way.
Hold 'ore my being absolute sway.
Filled with Your Spirit till all shall see,
Christ only, always living in me.
(Adelaide Pollard, 1907)

FRIDAY
MARCH 20, 2020

"I am the true vine." These five words introduce the relationship Jesus sought with His disciples.

To understand its importance, we need to understand how nutrients travel from the soil through the vine to the branches. Properly pruned and tended, the branches produce leaves (essential factories that turn sunlight and water into sugar), and buds which mature into the fruit (grapes) that can then be fermented into wine.

Without a healthy connection to the vine, the branch withers and dies. Without proper pruning and shaping, or if too much rainfall comes at inopportune times, the branch grows vigorously and produces engorged fruit. Skilled winemakers rarely select such fruit for wines worthy of celebration...the kind of celebration that our Lord intends each one of us to enjoy to His glory.

So, what does Jesus mean when He says, *"I am the true vine?"* Each of His first disciples, and those of us who seek to become His disciples in this day and age, must recognize His position as the source of our spiritual nutrition. Without a steady flow of essential spiritual nutrients during our "growing season," we will be unable to produce the leaves, blossoms, and fruit that He expects from us.

He is the source and He says He is the sole source. Who am I to disagree? We may seek other sources, but we do so at our own peril. Take a good look at a vineyard this Spring. Notice that even though there be row upon row of individual plants, each berry in each cluster has but one connection to the vine that provides the nutrients to permit its life to flourish. If the wind blows (or the vinedresser prunes) and the connection is broken anywhere between the vine and the berry, its lifeline cannot be restored.

Jesus blesses us, always welcoming us back into the loving relationship that allows us to flourish under His banner of Divine Love!



Mike Birdlebough

Almighty God,
You are all-powerful, all-knowing, and always present. You give freely of Your Spirit to be our conscience, mentor, and guide. You are the source and sustainer of Life itself. How selfish we are when we go about our busy-ness, presumptuous in our requests for Your blessing. Help us to welcome You into our hearts with joy and thanksgiving, rejoicing in the True Vine!
Amen.

I AM THE TRUE VINE

John 15:5

"I am the Vine, you are the branches.

Those who abide in Me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from Me you can do nothing."

For a deeper dive, look up **"For the One"** by Gateway Fellowship Church.

Find it at this link:
youtu.be/x_rDDRD4x1k

SATURDAY
MARCH 21, 2020

I AM THE TRUE VINE

John 15:7

*"If you abide in me, and
my words abide in you, ask
for whatever you wish, and
it will be done for you."*

What does God want of us?

Science can see no other planet that duplicates Earth. God's creation provides and protects all of us within an amazing design in both our home and all mankind's future. His work, mysteries, and miracles surround us and are within us; this "world without end" suspended in His infinite space.

On a mountainside the soil is thin and rocky. Yet trees of many kinds grow strong and straight. Within this thin soil their individual roots work themselves deep between the rocks for their own support. Those same roots of every tree also "branch out" and intertwine with all the other tree roots around them. Together they protect each other against all the elements that can topple them. Each tree, by God's design, receives all that it needs to grow and bear fruit within His divine plan for all of His creations.

Everything is mutually connected and supporting His plan for us within an unbroken chain of creation on this blue sapphire gem we call Earth. Accordingly, our own unseen roots are intended to intertwine with one another to support, grow, and bear fruit in this life. What God has given all of us and what we are to do for His plan of creation is our lifelong quest for understanding His plan and our place within it.

God created us unique from one another, yet of the same mold. We each have special gifts and abilities to contribute to the greater good. No matter the soil we are planted in, we will branch out to each other and bear His fruit.



Larry Davis

Lord,
Help us understand Your divine design and deepen our roots to support one another with opened eyes that see anew, with open minds to every possibility, and open arms to do Your work.
Amen.

SUNDAY
MARCH 22, 2020

I AM THE TRUE VINE

Mark 14:25

"Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."

I love spicy foods, especially hot sauce, double-especially Tabasco. I also grow peppers at home. As the peppers grow and develop, some of them fall off the stem, or vine. We all know that those peppers shrivel and die without the stem.

This can also be related to God. God is like a stem of a pepper plant; without God, we won't live. The stem of a pepper plant provides all of the food and water for the rest of the plant. In the same way, God gives us everything we need for life. The stem of a plant also provides support for a plant. If a plant were just leaves and flowers and fruit, it wouldn't last long. It would just flop around and die like a human without bones. God is similar, especially in instances like Gideon, the crossing of the Red Sea, and in saving Abraham's nephew, Lot. In all of these instances, God supported His people, like a plant's stem supports the rest of the plant.

The grapevine was an essential part of life in Biblical times. It provided wine, which was the most clean drink since water was often dirty. Because of this, vineyards became very important places in the towns and countries of the time. If the vines didn't grow and there wasn't access to clean water, then the area would be in deep trouble.

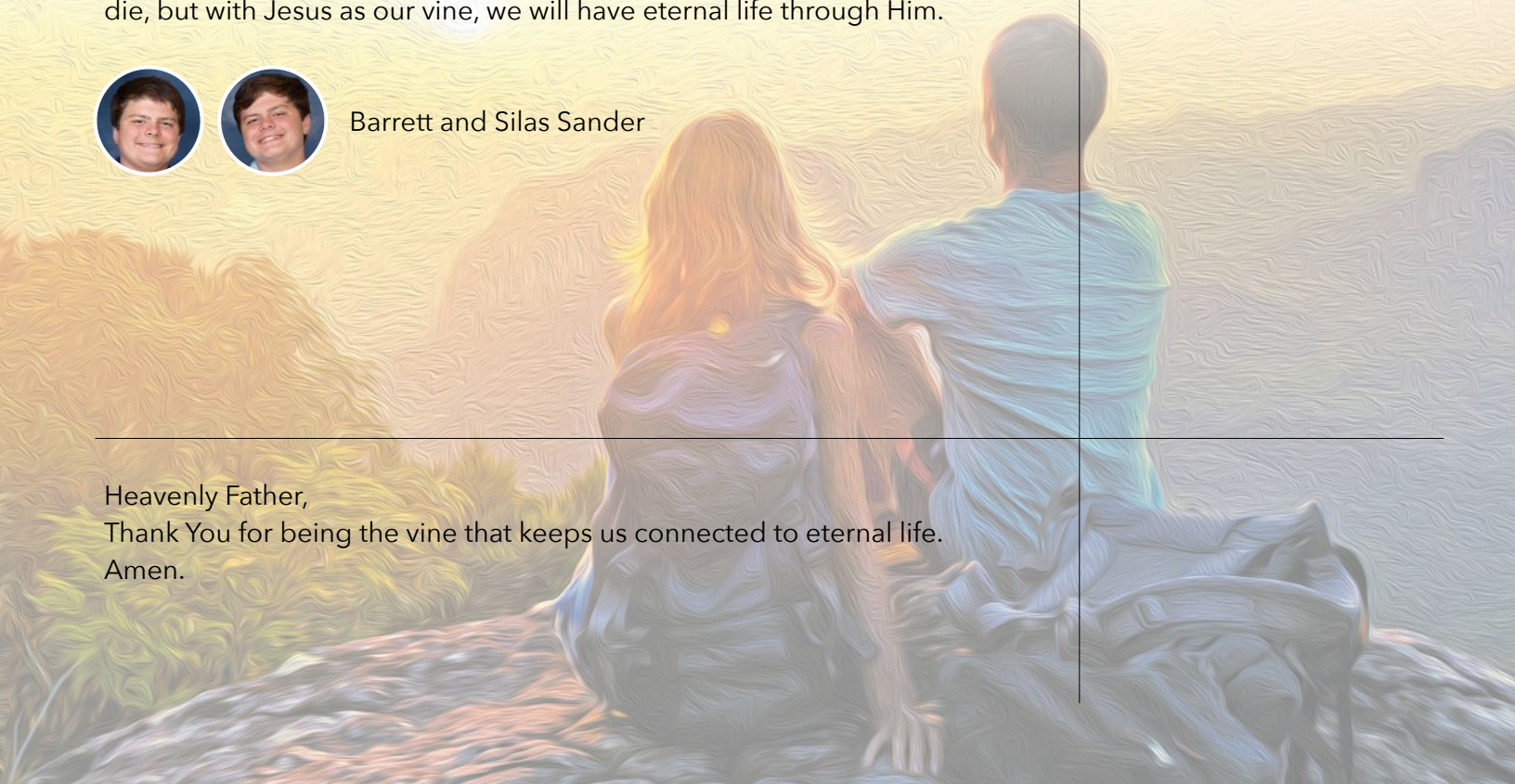
Our relationship with God is similar. God is the vine that provides for the whole universe, and without Him we couldn't survive.

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." When sin cuts us off the vine, we die, but with Jesus as our vine, we will have eternal life through Him.



Barrett and Silas Sander

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for being the vine that keeps us connected to eternal life.
Amen.



MONDAY
MARCH 23, 2020

I AM THE TRUE VINE

Genesis 2:9

"Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

From the beginning of our time on earth, God gave us choices.

He gave us these choices because He loves us and didn't want us to be slaves, but to have free will. In Genesis, God created a Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Even from the beginning, Adam and Eve had to choose their fate, choose a direction, and choose who they were going to obey.

What made the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil so tempting? Was it covered in queso? Was it encrusted in rubies? Did it come with a plush leather interior? Or was it strictly because God said NOT to eat of that tree?

Every day we are faced with a plethora of choices and God has instilled in all of us the ability to discern what is right and wrong. Somehow the serpent lives in our head and convinces us to double size the Whopper meal, choose work over self-improvement, or to choose to be busy instead of taking time to help a friend.

It is only when we seek Jesus as the True Vine, the Truth, the Light, and the Way, and we decide to follow Him, that we experience true joy and understanding. The multitude of everyday decisions in life can be hard and stressful, but when we start making more Christ-like choices we see a shift and experience what a Christ-driven, abundant life can look like.

The fruit from Jesus' vine is enduring, accessible to all and rich in love.

"I am the true vine, and my Father the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." John 15:1-2

We must pray every day for wisdom to discern His path for us. By simply choosing Jesus and choosing to love like Him, we are choosing to live the abundant life He promised.



Nick and Shayna Thompson

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for loving us enough to give us a choice. We pray for the humility to look to You in the choices we make, for the wisdom to understand Your will for us, and the strength to follow through on it. In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

TUESDAY
MARCH 24, 2020

I AM THE TRUE VINE

Revelation 2:7

"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the Tree of Life that is in the Paradise of God."

Over 20 years ago, I went through a deep depression- a horrible darkness of fear and anxiety. I can't even describe how scary it was. But at the same time, I felt God's presence, like a real being, always with me. In church, my heart ached so that I couldn't say the Lord's Prayer without weeping. My stomach clenched, and I said nothing- just cried.

But my stillness allowed me to hear the voices of the Church around me. It was like hearing the prayer for the first time! With feeling! It was the most beautiful sound! I felt lifted up- like I was "crowd surfing," being passed above everyone's head, with everyone's hands supporting the weight of my sorrows to the front, to the altar.

I still battle depression, but I feel victorious! God is always with me. I *still* use my ears during the Lord's Prayer to hear the Spirit in your voices. I *still* feel you carrying me, person to person, to the paradise of God.

Are you hurting and broken within? Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin?

Jesus is calling

Have you come to the end of yourself? Do you thirst for a drink from the well?

Jesus is calling

O come to the altar, the Father's arms are open wide

Forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ

Leave behind your regrets and mistakes, come today, there's no reason to wait

Jesus is calling

Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy, from the ashes, a new life is born

Jesus is calling

Oh what a Savior, isn't He wonderful?

Sing hallelujah, Christ is risen

Bow down before Him, for He is Lord of all

Sing hallelujah, Christ is risen

*Bear your cross as you wait for the crown,
tell the world of the treasure you've found*



Tammy Vitek

God,
We want to see You. We want to hear Your voice. Help us to be still and know that You are God.
Amen.

For a deeper dive, look up
**"O Come to The Altar" by
Elevation Worship**, available
to stream on Apple Music,
Spotify, and Youtube.



WEDNESDAY
MARCH 25, 2020

I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH THE LIFE

John 14:6

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

Via Verum Vita. Jesus answered, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life."

It was Thomas who asked the question, "Lord, we don't know where You are going, so how can we know the way?"

The believers of the early Christian Church were also known as followers of "the Way." Paul was in search of such believers of "the Way" in Acts 9:2. Had Paul known "the Way" he would not have persecuted those believers. It is difficult to reach your desired destination without knowing where you are going. If you were to corner most people with an ultimatum, I truly believe that 100% would say they want to go to Heaven. Even the non-believer will say he wants paradise. Jesus, in His compassion and love, gives the directions to Thomas and to all of us, saying, "Follow me. I am the Leader. There is only one way: *I Am the Way!*"

In our own minds, we are seldom wrong, aren't we? It is popular today to hear the modern application of situational ethics as "your truth". It goes hand in hand with the political correctness mantra that permeates every facet of our society. Many folks are deceived by these statements and the fact is, there is no such thing as politically correct - there is only correct, and MY Truth pales in the light of *The Truth*. Pontius Pilate in his pride was caught in this same dilemma in his cross-examination of Jesus when he asked, "What is truth?" while he was stared at the epitome, the definition of Truth, in the face! I had a friend who would say, "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." Why is that true? We are wired to live! The intention of the Creator was for us to live forever with Him, and then we blew it. God threw us out of His garden so we would never eat of the Tree of Life, for if we had, we would be immortally sinful! What love and mercy! It was for our own good that God provided the Way back...to Life!

This Lenten season, hang on to this promise from Jesus: "I am the Way - you can only get to Heaven and the Father by going through Me. I am the Truth- I am the absolute truth, and there is nothing false in me. I am the Life- in that Truth, there is Life for you- eternal Life- through Me."



Bruce Christian

For further reflection, listen to **"The Way" by Pat Barrett**, available to stream on Apple Music, Spotify, and Youtube.



Heavenly Father,
Thank You for Your grace and mercy and for providing a Way for me to get back to You. Create in me a faith that trusts that what You have revealed to me is the Truth and that I will cling to it forever. I praise You for the eternal Life that You have promised through Your Son, Jesus. Father, I believe. Amen

THURSDAY
MARCH 26, 2020

I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH THE LIFE

John 14:7

*"If you know Me, you will
know My Father also.
From now on you do know
Him and have seen Him."*

When I look back on my childhood and adolescence as an adult, I am often struck by how doubt-filled my very young faith journey was. By "doubt-filled," I don't mean I doubted God or His existence, but rather doubted myself, my salvation, and sometimes if I was even "enough" to be a child of God.

I grew up in a denomination that practiced believer's baptism and understood that, when the time was right, I could accept Jesus into my heart and be saved- which I did when I was seven years old.

Almost immediately, I started questioning that salvation. I doubted myself and would constantly think, "What if my salvation hadn't stuck or taken hold? What if Jesus wasn't really in my heart because I didn't believe enough or because I wasn't good enough at believing?"

At church camp, I'd pray the prayer to ask Jesus into my heart at every opportunity because I was convinced that if I could just ask once more, Jesus would really be there this time.

As an adult, I giggle a little bit at the angst and insecurities I had about salvation. Especially, because everything I needed to know was in a verse, I had heard so many times: *"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really know Me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him."*

Not only does Jesus tell us exactly what we need to do to be saved, he also promises that *from now on* we also will know God. God does not call us to worry about anything, let alone our salvation. He tells us all we need to know about salvation and all He asks is that we simply believe it; no ifs, ands, buts, or *enoughs* about it.



Katie Hofmann

Dear Jesus,
Thank You for the gift of salvation and for telling Your children everything we need know about it. Help us never to doubt Your promises.
Amen.

FRIDAY
MARCH 27, 2020

I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH THE LIFE

John 14:1

"Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God, believe also in Me."

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples prior to His difficult journey to the cross, for He knew the trials they would soon face, and the trouble that had overtaken their hearts. At a time when He should be anxious and concerned with His own impending pain and suffering, His focus was on easing the hearts and minds of others.

At some point in our lives, I am certain that many of us have felt like those disciples did; troubled by circumstances out of our control, and afraid of the uncertainty that lies before us. Some of us may be experiencing a troubled heart right now, but Jesus does not want this for us, just as He did not want His disciples to be anxious. Therefore, he gives us these words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

The word *let* implies that we somehow have control over the trouble in our hearts. But how? When you lose someone you love, receive a devastating health diagnosis, a looming divorce, or get laid off from your job, how does one stop the fear and anxiety that these circumstances create from overtaking one's heart? Jesus gave His disciples that answer, and it is here for us as well. Trust. *"Trust in God; trust also in Me."*

As Jesus approached His journey to the cross, He was not afraid. His heart was not troubled because He had complete and unwavering trust in the Father. He encouraged His disciples to do the same, and to continue to have faith in Him, though He would no longer be physically present. Shouldn't we do the same?

We will face many trials and hardships in life that we have little control over. We can *let* these circumstances trouble our hearts, or we can turn our hearts and troubles over to Jesus, trusting completely that He is the way, the truth, and the life.

What could be more comforting than that?



Megan Blizzard

For further reflection, listen to **"Trust in You"** by **Lauren Daigle**, available to stream on Apple Music, Spotify, and Youtube.



Dear Jesus,
You know the troubles that weigh heavy on our hearts. Help us to trust in You and Your promises. Let our hearts rest in knowing that You are with us always.
Amen.

SATURDAY
MARCH 28, 2020

Jesus had demonstrated to His disciples that He was a man who ate, drank, and slept but also had extraordinary God-like gifts and power unlike all other men. Jesus had told them that He was the Messiah.

The disciples expected that with these powers, He would correct the political situation they were in under the Roman Empire. Instead, He chose to instruct them about His mission, and teach, heal, and feed the crowds following Him. He performed many miracles without using His powers to rescue them from an oppressive government.

When Jesus told them that He would leave to be with God, the disciples were troubled. Why would He leave them, and what was next for them without Jesus? A troubled Phillip wanted to see God the Father and be convinced that Jesus was the true Messiah. He wanted verification to take away his doubts.

At times I am just like Phillip. Wouldn't it be thrilling to be able to see the Father God? Would I, as a sinner, be fearful of His justice? I know I would welcome any comfort given to me about this troubled world and my part in it. I too, would like some changes to our world. Would my faith be finally complete, or would I as a sinner still be short of perfect obedience?

I think it would be better to trust Jesus' answer to Phillip. God the Father, God the Son, with the Holy Spirit are all there for me. I can find them in my worship, my songs, my bible study, my Christian fellowship, and the love of and for my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.



Lyndal Remmert

I AM

THE WAY

THE TRUTH

THE LIFE

John 14:10

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"

The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own; but the Father who dwells in Me does His works."

Dear God,
Help us to believe Your words and trust Your promises. May the Holy Spirit strengthen our faith. May we be reminded that Jesus' death and resurrection is Your gift of love and mercy to us. We thank You for Your grace that ensures our salvation and eternity with You in Your glory. Help us to be effective witnesses of that grace to the world.
Amen.

SUNDAY
MARCH 29, 2020

I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH THE LIFE

Acts 9:2

"But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the syna-gogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

Saul of Tarsus was certain he knew God.

As a brilliant student of scripture, he had sat at the feet of gifted rabbis and received accolades from the chief priests for his scholarship and dedication to the Law. Why would he not think that he was indeed doing God's work?

Yet, how could Saul become the notorious persecutor of The Way and be ignorant of its message? As a devout Jew, he would have been in the city during festivals when Jesus was known to have preached. As a Pharisee, he would have a keen interest in an unconventional rabbi, whose ministry, as Paul tells Agrippa *"has not been done in a corner."* (Acts 26:26) So, how could this intellect, once exposed to the Truth, remain opposed to it?

Maybe it was in Saul's character as a Jew, whom God repeatedly refers to as "stubborn and obstinate children" (Ezekiel 2:4). Perhaps it was because spurious messiahs were not uncommon in those days (Acts 5:36-38). As Deuteronomy 21:23 states *"Anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse,"* likewise Paul writes *"Christ executed on the stake, to the Jews, (is) a cause for stumbling."* (1 Corinthians 1:23)

Or, maybe God chose Saul, the persecutor, to become Paul the Apostle to increase the power of His testimony.

This is just one of the questions I hope to have answered when the opportunity comes. It is dangerous to assume that we know the mind of God or to try and figure it out on our own. Maybe we should just let Him reveal Himself to us in His own good time.



Gil Becker

Father God,
We know that Your ways are not our ways. Your ways will often be mysterious to us and will be revealed to us as You will. Forgive us the sin of pride and protect us from the arrogance which leads us to wrong conclusions.
Amen

MONDAY
MARCH 30, 2020

I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH THE LIFE

John 8:31-32

"Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him, 'If you continue in My Word, you are truly My disciples; and you will know the Truth, and the Truth will make you free.'"

T rue Freedom...how awesome! This defines the word "discipleship." It is a declaration that discipleship is the only true path to freedom. If you want to be all that you were created to be, Jesus says this is The Way to become His disciple. This is the path to freedom. It is the only way to be all that you want to be.

Jesus tells us in precise detail how to obtain true freedom. It begins with belief: "Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him." They had not yet trusted Him, but they had believed Him. They had been intellectually grasped by His words, but they had not yet committed themselves to Him. Discipleship begins with belief; even intellectual belief; they were at the door, at the first step.

Then, He says, "if you continue in My word." Listen to Jesus. Does what He says agree with what you have found to be true in living life? The test of any religion is not whether it is pleasing, or whether you enjoy it. The test is: "Is it true? Does it accord with life? Does it fit what is happening? Does it explain what is going on?" This is the only one you can establish as you continue in His Word. Jesus suggests here that when you do that, something will happen to you. Jesus says: "If you continue in My word, you will truly be My disciple." If you read His Word and you continue in it, you will find it has grabbed you, and you will commit yourself to Him, making you a disciple. Then, He says, "You will know the Truth." What an objective! Everybody wants to know the truth. What then is the Truth? Again, I come back to what underlies all of life: Truth is the nature of things as they really are. Truth is seeing through all the illusions, the dreams, and the facades. Truth is getting down to the heart, the core, the reality—that which really is.

Finally, Jesus promises when you follow Him, hear His Word, and continue in it, a wonderful thing will happen - "the Truth will set you free." The Truth will deliver you, permit you to be all you were meant to be. It breaks the chains of bondage that limits us and grieves us. It allows us to experience all the fullness of the fruits of the Spirit of God. To experience true "Sonship."



Dan Gallini

Lord,
I want to experience the freedom You promise. Help me to continue in Your word and learn Your truth so that it can be a reality in my life.
Amen.

TUESDAY
MARCH 31, 2020

I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH THE LIFE

Mark 8:35

"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for My sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it."

Set a table for two.

Every morning I wake up, and I realize I am still alive; I take a deep and treasured breath. It is at this moment in time that I am committed to set a table for two.

I have a job that places me in the public eye on a day-to-day basis- many times in the eyes of the youngest and most influenced members of my community, youth. I am committed to the memories and devotion of time the many leaders of my community gave up for me during my youth. Not just leaders- Godly Christian leaders who, by giving of themselves, shared with me the joy and power of God's word.

The days are filled with many, many challenges and heartaches for others that I cannot fix and sometimes lead me to doubt myself and the mission I began. I know many people struggle with this, that I am not alone, and that doubt always will linger.

1 Corinthians 13:13: *And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these is love.*

It is at this moment I remind myself I must set a table for two at the end of the day - a table that allows my faith to give me the second wind to carry on throughout the day. I am able to stand tall with the faith and the hope God holds, and I am promised the greatest of love.

When the end of the day arrives and I watch my wife set things on the table, my family begins to come together at the dinner table. As my family of five gathers, I realize the joy of my commitment to setting a table for two - sharing my family with God and His Son Jesus.

It is at this time we pray for God and Jesus to join us for our meal. The table is now set.



Officer Chris Ayala

Come Lord Jesus, be our guest. Let these gifts to us be blessed. May there be a holy share, on every table everywhere.
Amen.

WEDNESDAY
APRIL 1, 2020

In Genesis Chapter 1, we learn everything God makes is good. And, in His description of Heaven in Rev: 21:5-6, God said, "He is making all things new" for those who "thirst for the water of life" (life with God). Therefore, we know that it will be good.

He gives believers this new life at no cost. It is a good gift. Wow, it is so simple! God is the only one who can guarantee such a thing to us. Money is of no use after our death. Powerful positions, beautiful bodies, a head full of hair - it doesn't matter. God will make all things new and good for us who thirst for the water of life.

We will have healthy bodies in a clean city with fresh air and water. There will be a lot of good, moral people all around us. Can you imagine all the joyful, healthy people you will see and befriend?

Am I one who thirsts for the water of life? Pause your reading: Do you thirst for the water of life?

If you keep reading in Rev. 21:6, "I am the Alpha and Omega," you realize He is with us even on Earth from our earthly beginning to our earthly end. Oh, what a relief that is to know! His spirit resides within us waiting for us to ask for His help and to acknowledge Him with thanks all along our thirsty journey.

After death we enter our eternal existence with God. Life is good! God is good! Heaven will be good!



Barbara George

Great Counselor,
Let Your Spirit stir my thirst for the water of life. Remind me often of what is important and what is not, as I journey through this earthly life, seeking and appreciating the good that God has made.
Amen.

I AM THE ALPHA + OMEGA

Revelation 21:5-6

"And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'

Also, He said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'

Then He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.'"

THURSDAY
APRIL 2, 2020

I AM THE ALPHA + OMEGA

Genesis 1:1-2

"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

Nothing stirs more controversy than the creation story.

Even among Christians of which there are several factions of "New Earth" and "Old Earth" believers. The "New Earth" people accept the literal biblical seven-day creation. The "Old Earthers" include not only Christians, but also the evolutionary atheists who agree that creation took longer than seven days. As an astronomy teacher, maybe I can provide insight.

First of all, the word used in the original text for God "hovering over the waters" is used elsewhere in the Bible as "breath." There is much debate about what this verse really means as the Earth is "devoid of form." The "waters" were separated into the heavens and the waters of the Earth on the second day, and land appeared on the third day.

What's a day? Herein lies the problem. A day on Earth has not always been 24 hours, and at that time the Earth was not formed. We know that friction has slowed the rotation of the Earth since its formation. At one point, a day was about six hours. As the moon moves farther away from us and the gravity that causes tides subsides, the friction of the water will increasingly slow our rotation until Earth will be "tidally locked," meaning one side of Earth will always face the sun. Dr. Hugh Ross, a Christian astrophysicist, is an "Old Earth" person. He proposes that we have misinterpreted the word for "day" because in other areas of the Bible it means an era, such as "days of Elijah." He contends that a different word is used elsewhere in the Bible for normal days. A visit to a "New Earth" website will often find counter-arguments. It is something worth investigating.



Craig Sander

For further reflection, look up these scriptures:

Psalm 8, Psalm 33:6, Job 26:13, Psalm 104:30, and Isaiah 40:13

Dear Lord,
Thank You for breathing life into our universe. However, You created the heavens and earth, we know it is not important to our salvation and that in due time, You will reveal it to us as You have "science" over generations.
Amen.

FRIDAY
APRIL 3, 2020

I AM THE ALPHA + OMEGA

Luke 1: 26-33

"In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end.'"

When I read this story about Mary finding out she was pregnant, I can't help but think of my own surprise story. I already had three children who were keeping me plenty busy. The oldest, Paul, was a twelve-year-old middle schooler. Mark, ten, was an elementary student, and Seth, the youngest, was five and had just started Kindergarten. I was past breastfeeding, changing diapers, and sleepless nights. I had fully moved beyond "I want to have a baby" urges and was totally enjoying being an "older boys" Mom. God, on the other hand, had other plans. When I found out I was pregnant with number four, Luke, I was in total shock.

Mark Hall, from the music group Casting Crowns, recalls in a behind-the-song video, a story from his childhood. As a young boy he was looking for the Santa float in the Thanksgiving Day parade. He was smooshed in the crowd on the curb, trying to see down the street. One float at a time went by; the Shriners on the toy cars, a marching band, and antique convertibles. All he really wanted to see was Santa. It seemed like the Santa float would never come. He thought if he could just get on top of one of the buildings and see the parade from above, he would be able to see how the floats were lined up and know that Santa was just a few floats away.

Mark then says, "The closer I get to God and the more time I start spending with Him, I start understanding that although things seem totally random, totally out of control, like they just popped up into the world...what is really happening is God is looking at my whole parade, and He understands. God says, "Mark, I know here's the Shriners, I know here's the band, and I know here's the convertible. And I know you don't know what is going on and none of it makes sense. But Santa is on the way, Bro, and I need you to go through this right now 'cuz we got stuff to do later."

At the time I found out I was pregnant with Luke, I felt like my world was flipped upside down. God's plan was for me to be Luke's momma, just like He had a plan for Mary. God is the Alpha and Omega. He sees our parade from the rooftop.



Stacey Moellering

Dear God,
We thank You for those gifts that take us by surprise. Help us remember You are in control. You know the beginning, You know the end. May we always have peace in Your plan.
Amen.

For a deeper dive, check out this video on Youtube:

"Casting Crowns - Behind the Song "Already There"

youtu.be/W99gAQ_FRzY

SATURDAY
APRIL 4, 2020

I AM THE ALPHA + OMEGA

John 11:21-27

"Then said Martha unto Jesus, 'Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.' Jesus saith unto her, 'Thy brother shall rise again.'

Martha saith unto Him, 'I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'

Jesus said unto her, 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?'

She saith unto Him, 'Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.'"

Martha is mainly known for the account recorded in Luke 10:38-42 in which her sister Mary sits at the feet of Jesus listening to His teachings while Martha is busy serving the guests. Martha has the audacity to say to Jesus, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me!" Jesus gently corrects Martha, telling her that Mary has chosen the one thing that is needed, and He will not take that from her.

Imagine for a moment someone speaking to Jesus, the Creator of the Universe, the way Martha did.

My paternal grandmother's name was Martha Marie. Some people called her Martha and others, including my mother, called her Marie. Grandmother told us grandkids that her parents named her Martha Marie so that she would be a "balanced" person: spiritual, but not so spiritual as to be of no earthly good.

Grandmother was a hard worker, and she once told us that she thought Martha got a bad rap. After all, if both Mary and Martha had sat at Jesus' feet, what would the guests have eaten, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches?

Fortunately, we also have the account recorded in John 11:21-27, today's text. Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus must have been pleased with Martha's profession of faith. Apparently, she heeded His gentle correction and had grown spiritually since that day when she had been too busy serving her guests. Maybe Martha HAS gotten a bad rap. She should be remembered for her strong profession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the Resurrection and the Life.



Kathy Rios

For further reflection, listen to **"Great I Am"** by **Phillips, Craig, & Dean**, available on Apple Music, Spotify, and Youtube.



Heavenly Father,
We thank You for Your Son, Jesus Christ, and for Your unconditional Love.
Help us to believe Your Word and to worship You in Truth.
Amen.

PALM SUNDAY
APRIL 5, 2020

I AM THE ALPHA + OMEGA

John 1:30

*"This is He of whom I said,
'After me comes a man
who ranks ahead of me
because He was before
me.'"*

I don't know about you, but the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End... these descriptors both comfort and terrify me!

They speak to me of the vastness of my God. He is bigger than big, stronger than strong, the Big Man, grand, glorious, just, wrathful, jealous, Almighty, all-knowing, all-seeing, the Most High.

Just like John, I recognize that this Jesus is eternal; "he was before me." And just like John, I am not worthy enough to even sneak a peek, to kiss His feet, or unstrap His sandals. Yet this Jesus, MY Jesus, became lowly, wrapped Himself in flesh, lived, walked, and breathed just as we do. Why? I ask myself that often... why would the Master of every universe stoop to my level? The answer - He loves!

He loves so fiercely, so completely, so perfectly that He became as we are, human.

It has been said that one's frame of reference is everything, and I agree. This undeserved gift of love assures me that even though He is the biggest, the grandest, the Alpha and the Omega, He knows my every strength and struggle from a human perspective. The view from above is vastly unlike the view from within. Here's the rub- He knows me from above, from within, from my first flaw, thought, action, and breath, to my last. AND still, He chooses to love me! Close your eyes, take a deep renewing breath, and let the amazing love of God soak in and settle all around you.

Today, as I face unexpected, worldly challenges that seem to swallow me up, I choose to look to my Savior with renewed awe and boldness, with reckless abandon, strive to love Him more.



Lisa Bullion

My King and Lord,
Teach me to love You longer, deeper, wider, and higher from the beginning
to the end of me.
Amen.

For a deeper dive, listen to
**"Reckless Love" by Cory
Asbury**, available to
stream on Apple Music,
Spotify, and Youtube.



HOLY MONDAY
APRIL 6, 2020

I AM THE ALPHA + OMEGA

Matthew 1:18-25

"Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins.'"

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall name Him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.'

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a Son; and he named Him Jesus."

We as Christians, tend to honor and praise Mary, the mother of Jesus, perhaps more than we do His earthly father, Joseph.

We know from what the bible tells us that God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus because He found "favor" with her. But He must have found "favor" with Joseph, as well, to be the earthly father of His son. What do we know about Joseph?

We know that He accepted Jesus as his son. He was a good husband, father and caregiver. He was honest, obedient, faithful, wise and a descendent of King David. He was a skilled carpenter that loved and taught Jesus his trade. He made sure that Jesus had a good spiritual upbringing in Nazareth and took the whole family on the yearly trip to Jerusalem for the Passover. Joseph knew Jesus was someone special from the moment he heard the angel's words. His strong belief in that fact and his willingness to follow God's leading, empowered him to be Jesus' chosen earthly father. God is the Alpha and Omega. Whatever God starts, He will finish! Joseph was the man entrusted to raise the Son of God.

As a mother to two girls, I have prayed since they were very little that God would provide a loving, caring, faithful husband to them and father to their children. I thank my heavenly Father for the wonderful, kind, loving, giving, hardworking, strong, honest father that he gave to me, Albert Ristau. I thank God daily for the terrific, loving, supportive, respectful, teaching, faithful, hardworking father he gave to my two daughters, Dwayn Boos.



Kathy Boos

Thank You Lord,
For the great fathers You have provided for us. I pray for those that do not have a father, Lord, that You will provide a loving, faithful man to encourage and care for them here on earth and to teach them about Your Son, our Savior and Your never-ending Love.
Amen

HOLY TUESDAY
APRIL 7, 2020

"I AM the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come, The Almighty!"
Revelation 1:8

God is the one constant in our lives and in all things. More so than even our parents, He, the Eternal Father, has been with us even before we were known to the world.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."
Jeremiah 1:5

Throughout the Bible He reminds us that He is the one true God; we are His, and He cares for us. We are a foolish people and what He offers us is never enough. So that we might really know Him, His power, and love, He sends Himself in Jesus Christ, to save us.

He has always been since the beginning of time, but now He is the Emmanuel, God with us here in divine flesh.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."
John 1:1-3

He walked and died among us, very ones He created, in His own image, in a world He created as well. He bled and died for us and we still turn our backs on Him. And yet He still loves us.

"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."
Matthew 28:20

He is the Alpha, the Emmanuel, and the Omega. He is God our Father, our constant. Do you know Him?



Ginger Burow

Lord,
Help us to remember that You have been and always will be with us. Help us to walk as though we hold Your hand and talk with You every minute of every day.
Amen.

I AM THE ALPHA + OMEGA

Isaiah 9:6-7

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:

and the government shall be upon his shoulder:

and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

HOLY WEDNESDAY
APRIL 8, 2020

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:35

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.'"

Bread is one of the oldest prepared foods in the world.

Each culture has a version: lefse (my Norwegian heritage is showing), bagels, pita bread, tortillas, sourdough. We speak of breadwinner, bread and water, the staff of life, breadbasket of the world. Bread and dough are slang for money. These all indicate the importance of bread. Remember just a few of the hundreds of scriptures about bread:

"Melchizedek, a priest of God, offered Abram bread and wine."

Genesis 14:18

"When in prison, Joseph interpreted a baker's dream about bread."

Genesis 40:16

"When Elijah was fleeing, fatigued, and in utter despair, God provided 'bread baked over hot coals.'"

1 Kings 19:6

Jesus performed miracles involving bread and crowds. (Matthew 14:19)

Jesus tells us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread". (Matthew 6:11)

Finally, the words that are so familiar to us: "Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it...saying, 'Take it, this is my body.'" (Mark 14:22)

Are we getting the picture? Bread from God nourishes, revives and strengthens. Jesus knows the value and importance of bread to us—physically and spiritually. Our physical bodies die if not fed. Likewise, our spiritual life will dry up without continual feeding on the Word of God. Daily, we need the bread that is Jesus. It is He who feeds us and invites:

Come! Believe! "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Psalm 34:8)

Share the bread!



Kathy Roberts

For further reflection, listen to the song **"I Am the Bread of Life"**.

You can find it at this link:
youtu.be/1CRMbh8ViUI

Dear Jesus,
Thank You for the bread You provide for our daily nourishment, physical and spiritual. Thank You for Your promise of eternal life. Help us to be the people You want us to be as we worship, listen and serve You.
Amen.

The latter half of this chapter has special meaning for me.

When you take verses from chapter 6 about hungering for Jesus, it can give you what I call a "Drive-By Prayer":

The beginning of the prayer gleaned from the noted verses is: FATHER, I GIVE (insert name) TO YOU. (verse 37)

The next part of the prayer: HELP THEM TO SEE YOU. (verse 40)

Next, HELP THEM TO HUNGER FOR YOU. (verse 51)

And then, ENABLE THEM TO COME TO YOU. (verse 65)

After that, HELP THEM TO LEARN FROM YOU. (verse 45)

Finally, AND BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE GOD. (verse 51)

I can fire that off when I see someone who seems broken that I don't even know, or someone I do know who faces difficulty.

Thus, the prayer is: "Father, I give You (insert name). Help them to see You, to hunger for You, enable them to come to You, to learn from You and confess Jesus as Savior. Amen."

If you have someone you are concerned about, pray for them and feel free to use the "Drive-By Prayer." I use this prayer at least once every day. You might say that you don't know if they are believers in Jesus or not, and so don't want to judge them. But think about it. Wouldn't you want someone to say this prayer for you? I would for me.

Maybe our prayer for others opens the door a little more for the Holy Spirit to stand at the door of their hearts, knock, and help the spiritually blind to see.



Pastor Alan Williams

Father,
Help us to pray for others that they may hunger for Jesus, the Bread of Life.
Amen.

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:51

"I am the Living Bread that came down from Heaven. Whoever eats of this Bread will live forever; and the Bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

GOOD FRIDAY
APRIL 10, 2020

I AM THE DOOR

John 10:9

*"I am the Door:
by Me if any man enter in,
he shall be saved, and
shall go in and out, and
find pasture."*

When I walked into a Saturday night service last year at Holy Ghost, I saw the words on the screen "I'm glad you are here."

In a moment, I was transported back in time to 1996. My father had passed away the previous fall and my mom had passed away eight years earlier. The moment had come when I realized my own mortality... when I realized that both my mother and father were gone, and I'm the next generation! It hit me like a ton of bricks- I had this deep dark hole in my soul that nothing seemed to fill. While living in Austin, I had a wonderful job, a dedicated group of co-workers, and an amazing group of friends.

What was I missing in my life? What door had I not opened? What door was still closed?

It had been about ten years or so since I had walked in the door of a church on a regular basis. Oh, I had visited numerous churches all over the Austin area and none of the churches seemed welcoming. I felt this deep longing to once again belong to a community of faith. Eventually, the Holy Spirit led me to a church in downtown Austin. Even though it was a 20-mile commute on Sunday mornings, I found the door to this large downtown church to be more welcoming than any other church I had visited in Austin. I heard the words again and again, "I'm glad you are here!"

Jesus is the Door. It is through this Door that we can be saved—to be kept safe, healed, or rescued from destruction. God had spent many years by the Door. He waited for me to come back that day. I entered!

As I read my Sunday School lesson, I thought how appropriate the following words were: "we hide parts of ourselves—certain feelings and thoughts—from God, ourselves, and others. To be whole, we need to express our true selves before God and within the *worshiping community of faith*."

This was absolutely true for me to fill this deep dark hole in my soul.



LaVerne Heiner Ondrias

God,
Thank You for waiting by the door until we are ready to come in. We know that You will be there when we are ready. Thank You for Holy Ghost and this amazing community of faith. Jesus, melt our hearts and let us be the person that says, "I'm glad you are here," when someone is standing by the door.
Amen

HOLY SATURDAY
APRIL 11, 2020

I AM THE DOOR

John 11:38-40

"Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.'

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to Him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.'

Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the Glory of God?'"

We have just observed the death and burial of Jesus on Good Friday. During His ministry, Jesus confronted death in many ways. Our scripture for today shows Jesus coming to the tomb of Lazarus. It was a cave with "a stone laid across the entrance" (a door). Jesus said, "take away the stone" (open the door).

When the stone was removed, Lazarus came out. In this interesting passage, Jesus actually became the Door for Lazarus to be alive, leave the tomb and be with Jesus. It also helps Martha understand who Jesus was.

Jesus had said in John 10:9, *"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."* Lazarus came through the (gate) door and was saved.

In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Again, Jesus is referring to Himself as the Door to eternal life. We know that Jesus died for our sins (Good Friday) and through Him (the Door) our sins are forgiven, if we repent and believe.

Tomorrow is Easter and we celebrate our risen Savior! In doing so let us not forget His sacrifices for us. Let us celebrate the fact that He is the Door to heaven.

"Knock and the door will be opened to you." -Matthew 7:7



Norm Nevins

Dear Heavenly Father,
Thank You for sending Jesus to show us the Way, the Truth and the Life.
Teach us to treasure this promise and to help others to seek and enter the Door to Heaven.
Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY
APRIL 12, 2020

I AM THE RESURRECTION + THE LIFE

Luke 24:1-12

"But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.

The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered His words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened."

E

aster victory!

Today is a day of great celebration for the victory Jesus won over sin, death, and the devil, by rising triumphantly from the grave early on that first Easter morning. Easter is the culmination of the "I AM" statements, and the pinnacle of God's plan of salvation put in place from the beginning of time.

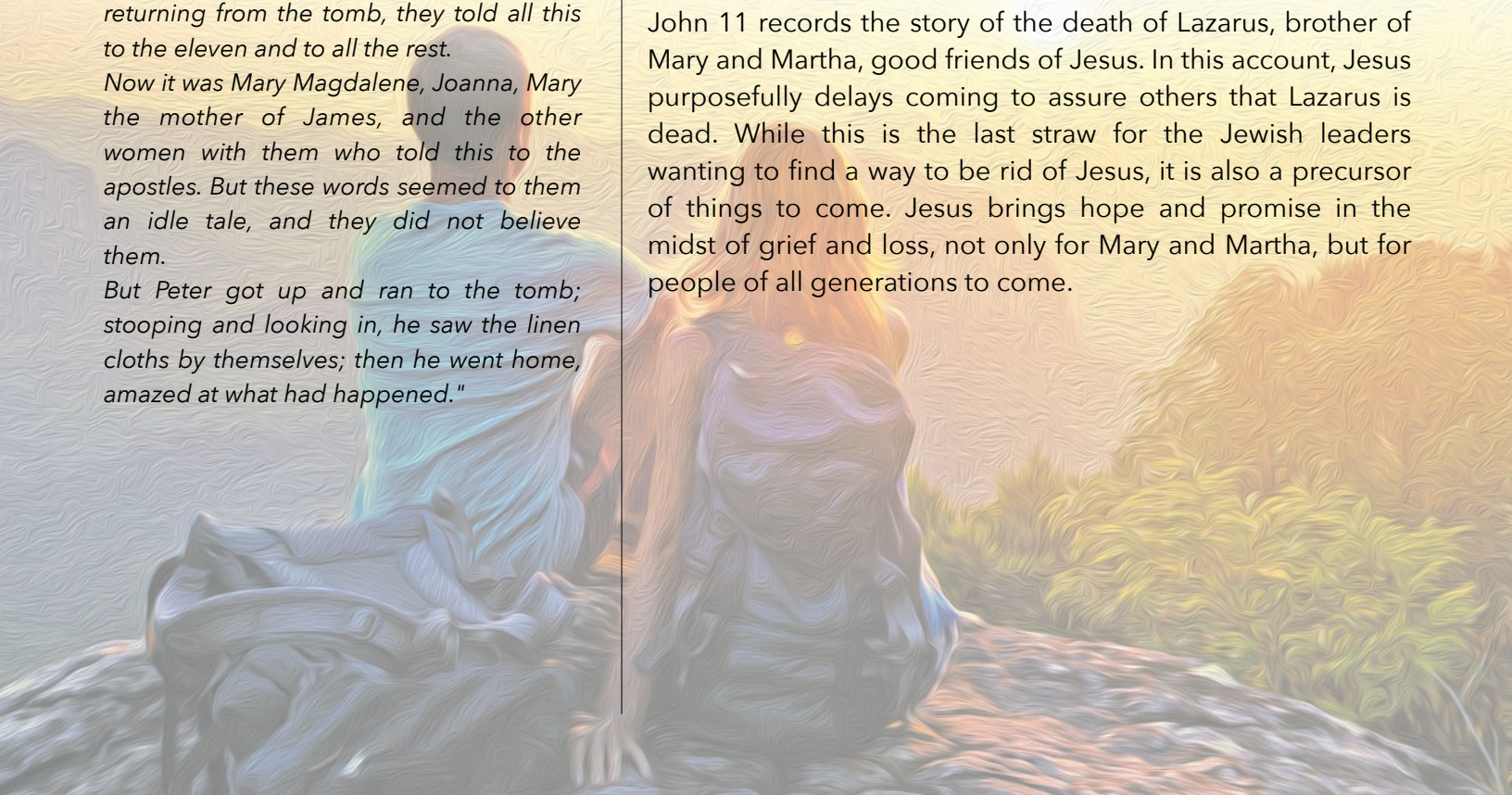
It is spoken of early in John's Gospel when Nicodemus, a respected Jewish leader, approaches Jesus with questions about baptism— what it means to be born again. Jesus responds with one of the most well quoted verses in all of scripture:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

John 3:16

Jesus was born to make the ultimate sacrifice, to die in our place on the cross. He paid the price so that we would not be lost for eternity. He paved the way so that we might also rise from death and believe without a doubt that we will be united with Him in God's Kingdom for eternity.

John 11 records the story of the death of Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, good friends of Jesus. In this account, Jesus purposefully delays coming to assure others that Lazarus is dead. While this is the last straw for the Jewish leaders wanting to find a way to be rid of Jesus, it is also a precursor of things to come. Jesus brings hope and promise in the midst of grief and loss, not only for Mary and Martha, but for people of all generations to come.



EASTER SUNDAY
APRIL 12, 2020

I AM THE RESURRECTION + THE LIFE

John 11:21-27

"'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'

Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'

Jesus said to her, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. Do you believe this?'

'Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'"

As Martha meets Jesus along the way, she cries out from her grief, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She knew that Jesus had the power to heal. And He had healed many. Jesus takes it a step further and proves that He not only has the power to heal, but the power over life and death. The climax of this story comes in Jesus' response to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

As Jesus conquered death by raising Lazarus, He points ahead to His own death and resurrection, and thus to our hope and belief that we too will be raised when we die. Jesus is the one, true, living God that death could not destroy. He conquered death and the grave so that we might be set free from sin and death, and receive those precious gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This message, *"I am the Resurrection and the Life,"* would be the heart of the gospel message proclaimed throughout the early church. When Paul was on trial in Acts 23 and 24, he makes his defense based upon this fundamental foundational statement of faith: "It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." As Christians, the heart of our faith and belief in Jesus rests on the one simple fact that *He is the Resurrection and the Life!*

And Jesus' question to us is the question He posed to Martha, "Do you believe this?" I pray that we can answer with a resounding "Yes, Lord, I believe!"

A Blessed Resurrection Day to you!



Pastor David Priem



LENT + EASTER SEASON @ HOLY GHOST LUTHERAN



FEB 25

**"FAT"
TUESDAY**

**FAMILY PANCAKE
DINNER**
6PM - 7:30PM

FEB 26

ASH WEDNESDAY

"ASHES-TO-GO"
7AM - 8AM
WORSHIP
11AM + 6:30PM

MAR 4 - APR 1

**MID-WEEK
WORSHIP**

WEDNESDAYS
11AM + 6:30PM

APR 5

PALM SUNDAY

WORSHIP
8AM + 10:30AM
SUNDAY SCHOOL
9:15AM

APR 6-8

**HOLY WEEK
BREAKFASTS**

MON: HGLC
TUES: ZION
WED: BETHANY
7AM

APR 9

**MAUNDY
THURSDAY**

WORSHIP
11AM + 6:30PM

APR 10

GOOD FRIDAY

WORSHIP
11AM + 7:15PM
PASSION DRIVE-THRU
5PM - 7PM

APR 11

**HOLY
SATURDAY**

EASTER EGG HUNT
@ BETHANY
10AM

APR 12

EASTER SUNDAY

7AM SUNRISE SERVICE
WORSHIP
8AM + 10:30AM
BUTTERFLY RELEASE
9:15AM

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