

Devotions – March 20 - March 26, 2016

*Devotions by Pastor David Murphy,
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We've come this far, but a little further we must go. As we enter Holy Week, with the cross on the horizon, we are invited to pause and ponder the mysteries of God's love for us, and the power of God in the cross. Let each day this week be a time to reflect on what the cross of Christ does for you and for the world each and every day.

Sunday, March 20

Philippians 2:5–11 “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Verses 5-11 of this letter to the people of Philippi are often called the “Christ Hymn”. It is adapted from what was probably an existing hymn, by the Apostle Paul, to encapsulate the story of the Incarnate Son of God. In this text, Paul reminds us of the incredible lengths that God went to on our behalf in order that we might be redeemed. This starts with God coming down from Heaven and “taking the form of a slave” so as to experience the brokenness of our world firsthand. It then culminates with Jesus, the Incarnate Son, humbling himself “to the

point of death”. Paul’s words are a stark reminder of the cost involved with the promised hope of new life in Christ. However, those same words also remind us of how deep and endless God’s love truly is for us.

Prayer: O God, we give you thanks for your Son who, in coming down to us, emptied himself and endured the ultimate darkness of our world. Let the cross stand as our reminder this day and always, of your endless love for us. And let our response be to confess always, that Jesus Christ is Lord. In his name we pray, Amen.



Monday, March 21

John 12:1-8 “Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor? (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

Judas expresses concern for the money being wasted by Mary in her

anointing of Jesus. After all, why does Jesus need his feet anointed when the poor could have much more with the money spent on perfume? We'll read more carefully the last sentence. Jesus says, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." Might this text be more about remaining Christ-centered in our lives, than on wasteful spending? We do always have the poor with us, along with the hungry, homeless, grieving, sick, etc. Yet at times our "noble serving" of those who need help can become an idol just like money. But if Christ remains the focus, our response to him should take care of the rest.

Prayer: Loving God, you came down to us so that we would know your presence as the source of all life, and yet we struggle in remaining focused on you at the center. Help us to hear your call so that our response is one of love, not of our own will, but of yours. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Tuesday, March 22

1 Corinthians 1:18, 26–29 “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one

might boast in the presence of God.”

The cross is truly foolishness. It is a symbol of death but not just death, death that is brutal beyond words. It is death in the worst way and reserved for only the lowest of the low. And yet it is through this ridiculous instrument of barbaric torture that God chose to exhibit God’s power. God took what was the weakest of the weak and made it a symbol of the unwavering strength of God. The cross, once a symbol of death, is now the symbol of eternal life in Christ. But it is not by human choosing that this happens, but rather by God’s. God chose the cross and God chooses each one of us. It is foolishness “to those who are perishing” but by God’s grace and our faith in God’s promise, the cross is the power and love of God.

Prayer: Merciful God, we thank you for transforming the ugliness in our world into the Light of Christ. Guide us to always look upon the cross as your power, but also as your steadfast love for us. And let us respond in loving kindness to others. In Christ we pray, Amen.



Wednesday, March 23

Psalm 70 “Be pleased, O God, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me. Let those who seek my life be put to shame and confounded; let those who take pleasure in my misfortune draw back and be disgraced. Let those who say to me "Aha!" and gloat over me turn back because of their shame. Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; let those who love your salvation say forever, "Great is the LORD!" But as for me, I am poor and needy; come to me quickly, O God. You are my helper and my deliverer; O LORD, do not tarry.”

The psalmist exclaims, in prayer to God, pleas for deliverance and help from all that cause affliction. But in those pleas are also cries of hope and joy. For "Great is the LORD!" cries the psalmist, but then continues, "I am poor and needy". How often do we see ourselves as too poor or needy for God to bother? How often do we wonder if we are unworthy of God's grace and love? On the cross, we get our answer. We are all worthy, no matter how poor or needy we may feel, because "Great is the LORD!" God is pleased to deliver each one of us, and through the cross we see that love and promised hope most clearly.

Prayer: Gracious God, you hear the cries of your people and you answer our prayers; for that we give you thanks and praise. Be with us always and remind us of the hope that comes through your Son on the cross, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, Amen.



Thursday, March 24

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

I am given for you. Share this meal to remember me always. My blood

seals a new promise, for life eternal, which I make with you. It's as simple as that. Jesus says I am given for YOU. Not some who are special. Not some who pay for it. Not others, excluding you. Everyone. Always. You too. This is a promise from God, sealed by the blood of the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. We cannot change it, amend it, break it, or hide from it. Christ gives himself to each one of us because Christ chooses to do so. What a glorious gift of grace and love!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in the bread and the wine we receive the body and blood Jesus himself gave to us. For this meal and for your Son we give thanks and praise. Lead us always to the table of mercy where we can share the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.



Friday, March 25

Psalm 22:1-2 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer; by night, but I find no rest.” Hanging from the cross, Jesus quotes these words from the psalm, and with them, the Son of God is torn from the Father and experiences the depths of hell. Being completely and utterly separated from God is what hell is. Because being completely separated from God means that the source of all life is completely absent. And Jesus wants to know why he is feeling this. Yet we are ever grateful that he does. Because in his death, his descent into hell, and in his rising from the dead, Christ fills every dark, gloomy, and broken place we could ever imagine. Even

in what seems like the depths of hell to us, Christ has already been there. As hopeless as we might feel, in Christ there is always hope. In his death, Christ made sure that never again would we know a complete separation from God, and though we may feel like we do, Christ himself will be there to meet us. He's already been there, and he knows the way out. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: My God, my God, thank you for not leaving me. In you I put my trust and to you I will look for hope. I know that the darkness cannot win because of you, the Light; shine in all times and in all places. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Saturday, March 26

Romans 6:3–5 “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

Most of the time you don't want to join someone in an experience like death. There is permanence to it, which is prohibitive to the rest of your life. But yet in baptism we are called to do just that, join Christ in his death. And while this may seem counter-intuitive, it is in fact completely necessary. Just like Easter cannot come without Good Friday, new life in Christ cannot come without death of our old life. And in baptism we see a beautiful symbol of that cycle of death

into life. As we descend into the water, or have it poured across our head, we drown out the old. Then when we rise up out of the water and are dry, we rise into the new. In our baptism we proclaim our faith in Christ and the promise of new life in him. And because of that faith, God promises to us a resurrection like Christ's, even though we die. Death does not win. Death no longer holds power. Life in Christ reigns.

Prayer: Holy God, we give you thanks that in our baptism we are claimed as one of your own. As we await the coming of the resurrection dawn, keep us safe, give us strength, and lead us in doing your will throughout the world. In Christ we pray, Amen.