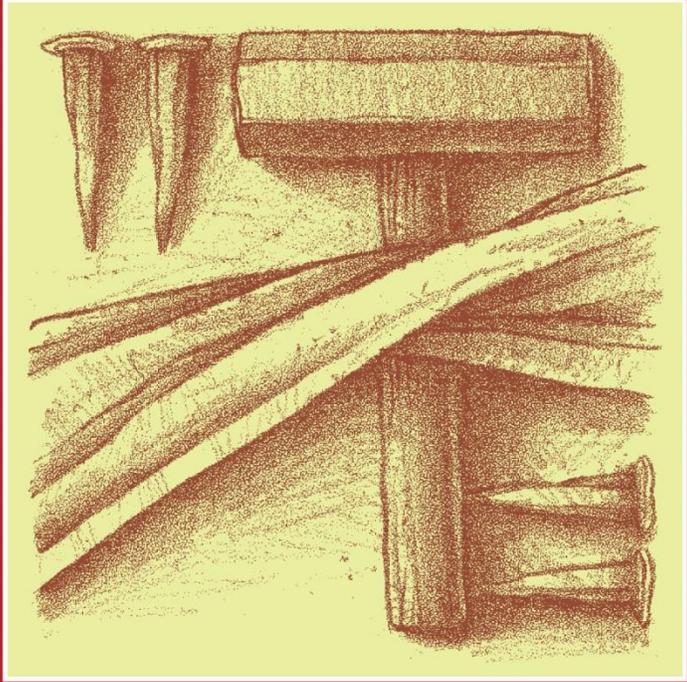


Reflections on the Cross

Daily Devotions to Prepare Your Heart for the Celebration of Easter

✕ WHY HAVE YOU ✕

“MY GOD, MY GOD,
FORSAKEN ME?”



✕ MATTHEW 27:46 ✕

2016

Easter is the most important celebration of the Christian church – Jesus Christ rose from the dead! It is the foundation for our faith. If it were not true, then there would be no reason for us to gather each Sunday. Yet, as this important celebration comes around, do we really stop and prepare our hearts? When Christmas comes around, there are so many things that we do to celebrate His birth, but far too often Easter can sneak up on us and we don't truly get the impact of the celebration. In reality, we cannot truly appreciate the resurrection of Christ until we stop and consider His death on the cross. This 2 week devotion series was compiled by our staff to help you focus in on Christ's death on the cross, so that we can have a deeper appreciation of His resurrection.

– Pastor Charles, Kay, Jim, Tony and David

Sunday March 13, 2016

By Charles Jackson

Forgiveness, Received or Ignored?

"Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots." – Luke 23:34

Jesus has just received the most torturous abuse and scorn ever experienced on a human person and his body. I can still see the visual images that were played out on the large screen when the movie "The Passion of the Christ" was shown. If the desire was to very visually portray the abuse, scorn and horrible torture that poured out upon Jesus Christ and to burn that experience into your memory, it succeeded. As Jesus became the focal point of every act of sin that ever had been thought of and committed or ever would be conceived through the totality of human experience; as He personally bore the brunt of all sin of all time; as the sinless Son of God became sin in our place; He could still call out, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." What a cold response to His offer. "And they divided His garments and cast lots."

As we go about our everyday activities, do His still fresh words, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do," stop us in our tracks? Do they possibly even cause us to fall to our knees in grateful appreciation for His wondrous sacrifice and gift of salvation? If we find that the pernicious presence of sin is creeping back into our life, do we stop then and there and denounce the works of darkness and call upon Christ's ever fresh offer of forgiveness and restoration? Or do we blindly continue our life unaffected by Christ's loving offer?

Pray: Father, help me to pause and think about Christ's death on the cross and help me examine what sin is in my life that I need to get rid of.

Monday March 14, 2016

By Jim Barnett

Old Rugged Cross

"On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, The emblem of suff'ring and shame; And I love that old cross where the dearest and best For a world of lost sinners was slain. So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, Till my trophies at last I lay down; I will cling to the old rugged cross, And exchange it someday for a crown."

This is the first verse and chorus for the hymn "The Old Rugged Cross" by George Bennard. This hymn describes the cross both from the viewpoint of the world (suffering, shame and death) and the viewpoint of the followers of Christ (Jesus' death to pardon and sanctify sinners).

Crucifixion was the ultimate punishment for crimes committed against the Roman Empire. Because it was a slow, agonizing execution that was carried out in public view it was also designed to deter others from breaking the law or defying the Empire. Yet, for Jesus the cross was the means for carrying out the main purpose of His ministry - His resurrection and defeat of death for all who follow Him. What the Romans used for a humiliating and agonizing death, Jesus used for His glory and as a means of defeating Satan and his forces of darkness.

For us as followers the cross is a symbol of hope and Jesus' glory, whereas the world views it as a symbol of shame and agony. It is a reminder that Christ takes things the world views one way and turns it in a different direction to both teach us of what is really important to God and to glorify Himself.

As believers, we are reminded that our struggles in this world are our cross, but that we also know that at the end of our earthly life we will exchange that cross for a crown in our new home - heaven. As we celebrate this Easter season let's remember the hope that the cross brings us.

Pray: Ask God to help you focus on the hope that Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection brings to you.

Tuesday March 15, 2016

By Tony Keene

Love Even When It Hurt the Most

“Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’” – Luke 23:43

Picture the scene...over the last 12 hours of the life of Jesus; he has gone from celebrating the Passover with his disciples to being the Passover Lamb himself. He has endured betrayal, ridicule, beatings, scourging, denial, and soon would face death. He has been sentenced to die by the most heinous method of his day; death on a Cross. Added to the humiliations he has already endured, one of the criminals dying near him hurls insults at him and questions his claim of being the Messiah. Out of the chaos though comes the voice of the other criminal. He rebukes the first criminal and with full contrition and remorse, asks Jesus to remember him.

In Jesus’ reply, we see the full magnitude of Jesus as Messiah. Despite all of the horror Jesus has faced over the last 12 hours, despite the agony he is currently enduring, and despite the pain of the sin of the world descending upon him for the final victory to be won, Jesus takes a moment to establish an eternal relationship with a single individual. This is the victory of the Cross to me! When Jesus answered the criminal’s request, he answered mine as well...and he answered yours if you ask him to be your Savior. Jesus told the truth to that criminal because Jesus IS the Truth. Jesus remembered the criminal on the Cross that day and he remembers us as well.

Pray: Even when in the darkest moment, Jesus still was thinking of others. Lord, help me see others as you see them.

Wednesday March 16, 2016

By David Cook

When Love Ran Red

“At the cross, at the cross I surrender my life

I’m in awe of You, I’m in awe of You.

Where Your love ran red and my sin washed white

I owe all to You, I owe all to You, Jesus.”

These are the words of the chorus by Chris Tomlin, and it strikes me how he uses the phrase “where Your love ran red.” What a way to look at the crucifixion. We are so familiar with the story, and we all know that Jesus loves us, but we tend to associate love with a warm feeling or emotion. A picture of blood and love at first seem so contradictory, and yet, Jesus went all the way to death on the cross. What makes it all the more amazing is that Christ died on the cross while we were still sinners. We were still His enemies. We had done nothing deserving of this act of grace. We deserved what was coming to us, which was death and hell – yet Jesus loved us. It wasn’t a warm fuzzy feeling, but an emotion put into action that He was willing to do whatever it costs so that we could be reconciled to the Father.

What devotion! What an example for us to follow! Do we love Jesus til it hurts? There are people every day whose devotion to Jesus is so great that they actually shed their blood. Do we love Christ that greatly? Or is our love for Christ dependent on the circumstances and when it is convenient? What if Christ’s love for us was like our love for Him – would He have died on the cross? It makes me stop and think how much I am truly in awe of Him, and how much I truly owe it all to Him.

Pray: Thank the Father that Christ’s love for us was so much greater than we can comprehend. Examine your love for Christ, and ask that your love will be ever deepened and increased during these next few weeks.

Thursday March 17, 2016

By Kay Shelby

Task Completed

"When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." – John 19:30

These last words of Jesus are significant in a variety of ways for us as we look back at the Cross on that first Good Friday. First, we should observe the sequence. There is deliberateness. Jesus was fulfilling scripture even in these last moments of his earthly body.

When he had received the drink. It wasn't necessarily that Jesus was thirsty, although that was quite likely, but vs. 28 indicates he said this so that scripture would be fulfilled. Having done so, then he declared, *"It is finished."* followed by *bowing his head*, and finally *giving up his spirit*.

What was finished? Well, Jesus had a specific task to do. Redeem mankind. Jesus accomplished this by living a sinless life. In spite of temptation and trial, physical pain and bodily suffering, Jesus had overcome the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. (1 John 2:16) Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah had been fulfilled. Old Testament law was abolished and replaced with a new commandment to love one another as He had loved. He had borne the weight of all sin. He knew what he was born to do, and he didn't stop until he had done it. Jesus' body had done all it could, so at the proper time, Jesus declared, "It is finished."

Then he bowed his head. Most of those who were crucified lifted their heads as they gasped for air. Only after they died did they bow their head. Jesus bowed his head before dying perhaps as an act of submission or an element of worship. And finally he gave up his spirit. This certainly implies a complete act of will and volition.

Intentionality is a philosophical concept and is defined by the [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) as "the power of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for, things, properties and states of affairs," (Wikipedia), whereas intentionally indicates an action done deliberately (American Heritage Dictionary). I think both terms apply well to us post-modern Christians. Like Jesus, we, too, have a job to do, a task to complete. Our duties vary, but we are never in a place that we can disengage from service. There is no retirement age for a Christian. There is always something for us to do, a casserole to bake, a call or visit to make, a card to send, or a prayer to pray. Only when we are through with everything God wants us to do, can we, like Paul, say that "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." 2 Timothy 4:7

Prayer: What is at least one thing I can do for You today, Father God? What can I do that will enlarge the kingdom and bring You glory?

Friday March 18, 2016

By Charles Jackson

Forsaken

“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?’” - Mark 15:34

These words are first recorded in Psalm 22. Take a few minutes and read the entire Psalm. Notice particularly the parallels found in verses 1-21 to what was happening during the time of His crucifixion. We do not know the situation that prompted David to write these words of sorrow and anguish, but note how perfectly they speak to the sufferings of our Lord. How sadly they speak of his abandonment by the Father as the Sinless became the Sinner, representing us in our sin before the judgment of the Father.

Consider the times that you felt most alone and abandoned. Perhaps you were separated from your parents in the store. Maybe your friends ignored you or took off without you just to be mean. How horrible if that feeling of aloneness were to extend through all eternity. That is what Christ suffered through on our behalf so that you could be saved from the aloneness of sin and brought into the family of God. This is a togetherness that will last through all eternity. Rejoice!

Pray: Father, I can't imagine what it must have been like for Christ to have felt forsaken, yet Christ did that so I would not have to know that. Help me understand that and not take it for granted.

Saturday March 19, 2016

By Jim Barnett

Were You There?

*"Were you there when they crucified my Lord?...Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"*

The first verse of this hymn gives an overview of the events that took place at Calvary on that Good Friday. The next two verses are more specific. Verse two asks if we were there when they nailed Him to the tree? Verse three asks if we were there when they laid Him in the tomb?

These verses remind us that not only did Christ die for all our sins but that each one of us participated in His crucifixion. As Acts 2:23 states "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Although Peter was addressing the Jews in Jerusalem we all stand convicted by these words. Through our sinful nature we all have had a hand in Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus sacrificed Himself to atone for all our sins throughout time but it took direct action on the part of others to carry out the deed. Thus we have all participated in His execution.

But the hymn doesn't stop there. Verse four asks "Were you there when He rose up from the grave?" This verse indicates the hope that Christ's resurrection gives us. When Peter was addressing the crowd in Jerusalem he added in Acts 2:24 "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." We as believers have the hope of eternal life because the tomb - death - could not keep its grip on Christ and, by extension, on His followers. Christ's resurrection not only atoned for our sin but gave us the chance to reestablish a close relationship with God for eternity in heaven.

Pray: Thank you Jesus for your unselfish act of love in sacrificing yourself to atone for our sins. We thank you also for the hope of eternal life that you have given us through your resurrection from the tomb. Lord, we know that though we were not physically present at the events at Calvary we are still just as guilty as those actually present. We thank you and praise you for your gift of grace. Amen.

Sunday March 20, 2016

By Tony Keene

Thirsty

“Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said ‘I am thirsty.’” – John 19:28

Jesus is now moments away from death. He has endured all he can to fulfill his mission on earth. Contrast this scene with the image of the babe lying in a manger. He had grown up as a “normal” Jewish boy, he had followed his earthly father into the carpentry trade, and he had spent the last 3 years doing the work of his Heavenly Father. Less than a week earlier, he had been welcomed into Jerusalem as royalty, yet now he was within a breath of dying the death of a criminal. The “Scripture” he is fulfilling now has often been viewed as Psalm 69:21, “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.” In this Psalm, David is in despair and is pleading with God to show him mercy and save him from his enemies.

As we see so often in the Gospels, Jesus shows us his humanity and his divinity in a simple sentence. He has been on the cross now for several hours and yet he is in full control of himself. His whole life has led up to the sacrifice he is about to make. His humanity is in despair and he has cried out as David did in Psalm 22:1a, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” His human body craves relief from his thirst, but in spite of his agony he knows that he must fulfill the mission of his Father. Though despair may be a constant companion for us, Jesus has won the victory. May we find our strength in Him.

Pray: Take time to thank the Father that Jesus stayed with the mission and won the victory.

Monday March 21, 2016

By David Cook

Lead Me to the Cross

“Lead me to the cross where Your Love poured out,

Bring me to my knees, Lord I lay me down,

Rid me of myself, I belong to You

Oh lead me, lead me to the cross”

This is the chorus to a song by Brooke Fraser, and as we sing this song I can see myself coming and standing in front of the cross. I myself need to be reminded that Christ died for my sins so I can be reconciled to the Father. There wasn't anything that I did to earn it – it was something Christ did for me. When I start to get full of myself, I need to be reminded that it's not about me, it's not about what I want, but it's about the Father and His will.

In Russia, the Baptists observe the Lord's Supper every first Sunday of the month. The whole service is focused on the death and suffering of Christ. Growing up in America, I was used to the Lord's Supper once a quarter, and when it happened the sermon usually wasn't about the death and suffering of Christ. Then, I began to truly appreciate how often the Russians observed the Lord's Supper because there was a focus on the cross. When I look to the cross, I realized that when I was in Russia serving with the IMB because Christ died on the cross and rose again. If it weren't for that, there would be no reason for me to be in Russia. Even now, I find it good to take a moment and reflect on the cross – it reminds me of why I am where I am and what is truly my main focus in life.

We need to go to the cross. We need to fall on our knees and rid us of ourselves and our selfish motives and look to Him. We need to be reminded that we belong to Him – our money, our time, our work, our pleasure – it's all His. The same is true as with our church – as we are preparing for a time of interim and searching for a new pastor. Our church belongs to Him and He will take care of it, and we need to come as a church before the cross and remember that it's not what we want in a new pastor, but ask God what it is that we need. Father – lead us to the cross!

Pray: Look to the cross. Isn't it strange how priorities change when we focus on the cross? Take time to think about the cross, and then ask the Father to purify your thoughts and your actions.

Tuesday March 22, 2016

By Kay Shelby

Relationship

“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, ‘Woman, here is your son.’” - John 19:26

Historians describe crucifixions as brutal. Certainly, this was no event a woman would choose to attend, and yet, how could a mother not want to be near when it was her child's death sentence? Hovering nearby, Mary apparently watched silently as her son was dying on the cross. Of The Twelve, apparently only one remained, John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. In his agony, Jesus looked down, saw these loved ones nearby and spoke to her. “Woman, here is your son.” Like others who believed that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, Mary was watching at possible personal peril. Not wanting to draw attention to her, Jesus calls her “Woman.” Scholars tell us this is not a term of disrespect.

Jesus wasn't just bearing the weight of his body on the cross as the two thieves were; he was also bearing the weight of every sin of every person for all time. And yet, Jesus' humility, selflessness and love for others is still evident. *Relationship* is surely the theme of this verse. Don't you see in scripture that like many of us, Jesus and Mary had a typical mother/son relationship? When his parents couldn't find him on the journey home after a trip to Jerusalem, didn't Mary act like you or I might? “When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.’” (John 2:48) Do you really think Mary “said” to him, or could “scolded” be a better term? And, like me, can you hear the slightest bit of disappointment in his voice as he replies, “‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. 'Didn't **you know** I had to be in my Father's house?’” (Luke 2:49) - emphasis mine. Perhaps, you can also hear a little exasperation in his voice as he replies to the information the bride and groom have no more wine. “‘Woman, why do you involve me?’ Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.’” (John 2:4)

We don't know what happened to Joseph, but we do know that Jesus was caring for his mother and making provision for her future. Oh, to have such love and compassion for others when our own soul is torn asunder by pain, grief, stress, fatigue, time demands or other stress points to “honor thy father and mother.” This is also a perfect example of Psalm 68:6, “God sets the lonely in families.” I can't imagine doing life now without my son's friends. If he were not able to care for me in my old age, I feel confident one of his top five friends dating back to high school would look out for me. But more than that even, when I moved every couple of years as a twentysomething, God always provided an older couple to share life with. They were surrogate mothers and fathers, mentors, advisors, and friends.

We live in a community where temporary residents abound. Are there students or other young adults you are sharing life with? Is there a widow, widower or a senior single adult with no family nearby for you to invest in?

Prayer: Father, I ask that you show me to whom I can be a son or daughter, father, mother, or friend, and that I respond sacrificially to their needs.

Wednesday March 23, 2016

By Charles Jackson

Soul Resignation

"Jesus shouted, 'Father, I put myself in your hands!' Then he died." – Luke 23:46

Jesus' earthly life and eternal purpose are about to meet together in His death. Everything that His Father had willed that He accomplish during His physical life was completed. The eternal purposes accomplished through His sacrificial death were also complete. All of Jesus' pain, sorrow and sufferings were at their completion. In full assurance of His work and mission complete, he could step aside from this earth and place Himself, fully in His Father's hands.

May Jesus set such an example for us. At the conclusion of our life may we be able to echo His words of soul resignation. How good if we can look back on our life and feel, that to the best of our ability, we have seen God's will accomplished through our life. How sweet to be able to honestly say as the heart beats its last and the final breath is taken, "Father, I put myself in your hands!"

Pray: Help me to live each day to make it count so I can look back and say I lived for you.

Thursday March 24, 2016

By Jim Barnett

What Wondrous Love is This?

"What wondrous love is this That caused the Lord of bliss To bear the dreadful curse for my soul."

This is a line from the early American Folk Hymn of the same name. The hymn goes on to state that while I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown, Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.

In His preaching and teaching time of His ministry, Jesus often spoke of lambs and shepherds in comparing ourselves to Him. Shepherding was a major industry in that region of the world at that time and by using that comparison most people could begin to understand, albeit in a limited fashion, what Jesus was referring to. A good shepherd would do anything to protect his flock from danger and to keep them safe, sometimes even from themselves. That also included making sure that none of the flock would wander away from the rest and, if they did, bringing them back safely. Many times this would put the shepherd in harm's way to do his job.

Jesus considered Himself to be the shepherd and humanity his flock. Ultimately, He sacrificed Himself to protect His flock - us. To do so meant that He had to lay aside His crown in heaven and come down to earth to accomplish this. Paul, in his letter to the Romans states in Ch. 5 v. 8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." The Heavenly Shepherd loved us so much that He was willing to become man to bear the burden of our sins in order to restore us to the Heavenly Father.

The hymn is sung in a mournful key to simulate the emotion of grief that Jesus' followers must have felt at the moment of His death. However, the last verse states, "And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be; and thro' eternity, I'll sing on." Oftentimes, the last chord in the hymn will end on a major key signaling the joy we experience because of Jesus' resurrection. If there had been no resurrection our response would have been one of grief that an innocent man died. But since Jesus rose from the tomb to conquer death we have the joy of eternal salvation.

Pray: Thank you Jesus for your wonderful love for us that you willingly sacrificed yourself for us your lost sheep. We also thank and praise you for your resurrection and the hope it gives each of us to enjoy eternity with you.

Friday March 25, 2016

By Tony Keene

Wounded for Our Transgressions

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” – Isaiah 53:5-7

What a heartbreaking picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross. When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, sin created a separation between us and God. God was bound by his perfect nature to require not only a penalty for sin, but ultimately a payment for sin. The penalty was death...eternal separation from God. The payment was his Son...the means of restoration for what had been lost in Eden. Jesus took upon himself the sin of all of history and of all of the future.

The most heart wrenching part of this passage for me is the last 6 words...“he did not open his mouth”. In order for my sins and your sins to be forgiven and our relationship with God restored, Jesus willingly and quietly laid down his life. In spite of the pain, the agony, and the horrors he endured on our behalf, he hung on the cross with love in his heart for me and for you. When we are tempted to complain about things in our life, let’s consider what Jesus did in order for us to enjoy eternity in the presence of God the Father.

Pray: Today is Good Friday – the day we observe Christ’s death. Thank you, Father, that You sent Your Son to die for me on the cross.

Saturday March 26, 2016

By David Cook

Lift Your Head Weary Sinner

“All who strayed and walked away unspeakable things you’ve done

Fix your eyes on the mountain let the past be dead and gone

Come all saints and sinners you can’t outrun God

Whatever you’ve done can’t overcome the power of the blood.”

One of the most amazing things is that when Christ shed His blood on the cross, all our sins were forgiven – past, present and future. It seems like sometimes people are one of two extremes – one is where we feel that we can keep on sinning because Christ has forgiven all our sins. That is quite ridiculous and spits on Christ’s sacrifice. The other extreme is where we feel that Christ can’t truly forgive us of a certain sin. Maybe we think it makes us sound spiritual when we start to say “Well, Christ can’t forgive me of that sin.” In reality, we are probably actually saying that we can’t forgive ourselves. I like the words in David Crowder’s song “Lift Your Head Weary Sinner” as it says that nothing can overcome the power of the blood. NOTHING! Christ died on the cross for our sins, all of them, and when we confess our sins He will forgive those sins and NOT hold them against us. (1 John 1:9)

That’s the power of the blood – He will cleanse us from our sins and destroy the chains that hold us back – He can create something new and beautiful out of something that has been destroyed by sin. Sometimes, though, we can love our sin more than we love Christ. I had an aunt who would justify sin in her life by saying “We all have our pet sins.” It’s an attitude that tolerates sin and doesn’t view change as desirable. The problem with a pet is that it needs to be fed, and when we feed our “pet sin”, it grows, and grows, and it never stays something little – eventually it controls our life. The only way for that sin to not control our life is by getting rid of it, and the only way that can be done is through the power of the blood of Jesus.

Pray: Examine your life. Do you have a “pet sin”? Is there sin that you tolerate and justify in your life? Is there sin that maybe you think that God can’t forgive? Take it to the cross. Confess that sin and seek His forgiveness. Let yourself be cleansed by the blood of Christ, and let Him change your life into something beautiful.

Sunday March 27, 2016

By Kay Shelby

He is Risen!

“In their fright the women bowed down with 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; he has risen!’.” – Luke 24:5-6a

Previous verses tell us early in the morning, the women had gone to the cemetery to embalm the body of Jesus. They had found the stone rolled away from the mouth of the cave, but upon entering, they did not find Jesus' body. The new tomb was empty. Suddenly, scripture tells us, two men appeared in clothes that gleamed like lightning. The women's first reaction was fear, bowing down with their faces to the ground. This worshipful response was often the reaction when angels appeared and interacted with people, and verse 23 confirms their identity. The men then spoke to the women with first a question “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” then a proclamation, “He is not here; he has risen!” They posed the question possibly as a reminder. If anyone had heard Jesus say that he would die and rise again, these women would have been within earshot. The assurance followed that neither their eyes deceived them, nor were their brains addled. Jesus' body had not been stolen. It had not been moved. He had risen from the dead!

This might not have been too surprising to them. After all, could they have been part of the many Jews who had gone to Bethany to comfort Martha and her sister Mary when their brother Lazarus had died? Perhaps they were present when Jesus called him to come out of his tomb. Hope must have seized their hearts in wonder and amazement. If it were true that Jesus was risen from the dead, then everything else Jesus had said would be true also.

You probably aren't going to the cemetery or the morgue, but like the women looking for the Living Lord, could you be looking for life in the dead zone? Where are you looking for The Living? Are you searching for life from dead poets, philosophers, or scientists? Perhaps you're trying to amass pictures of dead presidents or you're listening to dead head music. Maybe you've even bought into the counterfeit idea the dead speak to the living through a medium such as TLC's *Long Island Medium*, Theresa Caputo.

Have you noticed you keep searching? There's never quite enough. Like the Rolling Stones, you just can't get enough satisfaction. It is one elusive step away. There is no life in these pursuits. That step of satisfaction, peace, and completeness actually can be found on the outside of the tomb, not inside it. There is only true life in Christ. I confess, I do not understand how Jesus bearing my sins, dying on the cross, and arising from the dead appeases a just God of me having to bear my own punishment for my own guilty deeds, thoughts and actions. I do not understand exactly, but in inexactness, I have faith that what the Word of God says is true.

Jesus is not on the cross. He is not in the tomb. He has indeed risen!

Pray: Thank God that Jesus is not dead, but alive!