

2021
LENTEN
DEVOTIONAL

JESUS SPEAKS
FROM
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

FEBRUARY 17 (ASH WEDNESDAY) - JOHN 10:11, 14-15

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... 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."

Often, our Lenten focus has been on us; our Lenten practices often take the shape of what we plan to "give up for Lent," or what we might take on. This devotional, on the other hand, invites us to follow and reflect upon the very words of Jesus: his identity, his relationship to the Father, his work and mission and its impact on the human community and throughout creation. As we follow the very words of Jesus in John's gospel, we are invited into the reality of Jesus as both human and God, and particularly in the manner in which Jesus' divinity takes shape in His love for humanity and the created world in which we live. In the above reading from John 10, Jesus refers to himself as "the good shepherd," defining this identity as "laying down his life for the sheep." As we enter into this Lenten season, may we give considerable thought and reflection to the life that Jesus lived and gave up "for us," the far-reaching eternal embrace of God's love for us, when death issues new life.

FEBRUARY 18 (THURSDAY) - JOHN 1:51

"Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

In the person of Jesus, the vision of heaven takes on earthly reality. Heaven is opened to us in and through Jesus, enabling us to "see" the true nature of God and God's promises. In Jesus, we become able to "see" and follow faithfully what God has in store for us, a heavenly vision of the eternal embodied in the life of Jesus. Believing enables us to truly "see." By faith, what are you able to "see" in your Lenten observances?

FEBRUARY 19 (FRIDAY) - JOHN 3:3, 5

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above... Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."

In Jesus, we are invited to a “rebirth,” into a new experience of life brought forth, not by biology and chemistry, but through the heavenly gift poured out upon us by the very Spirit of God and enacted through the new birth water of baptism. By the work of God’s Spirit, we emerge from the waters of baptism with the ability to “see” God’s eternal vision and plan at work in the life of Jesus, a life of promise that leads peace and salvation. How are you able to “see” your baptism connected to the life work of Jesus?

FEBRUARY 20 (SATURDAY) - JOHN 3:13-15

“No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

In Jesus, heaven and earth are connected fully to God’s eternal wisdom and plan. God’s wisdom had been revealed in the instruction given to Moses following a long, treacherous journey through the wilderness, instruction that intended to bring a people together in faith and obedience, combating evil and issuing hope. Now in Jesus, God’s wisdom is fully in display, a wisdom that will take the faithful to the cross of Jesus, a place whereby the whole world will be able to “see” the full extent of God’s love and to embrace the eternal as God’s gift to us in Christ Jesus. What do we “see” as we gaze upon the cross of Jesus?

FEBRUARY 21 (FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT) - JOHN 5:19-21

“Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes.”

Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of his special and unique relationship with the Father. Jesus reveals that what he says and does is but that of His Father’s desired will. He does no more or no less; he is the full embodiment of God in the flesh. Jesus is the full embodiment of God’s love, a work that astonishes in the manner in which this love is put into practice, a love that overcomes even death and brings to the faithful a “true” appreciation of life. How

are our lives measured by the span of the cross of Jesus, and how do we remain astonished that the dead are raised in Christ?

FEBRUARY 22 (MONDAY) - JOHN 5:22-23

“The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”

Jesus understands that he has been given the authority to fully carry out God’s will. Judgment is both the perception and the enactment of God’s will that is revealed in the life of Jesus on behalf of the world, for only in Jesus, can anyone truly understand how life is to be lived in thought, word, and deed that honors God and respects the dignity of life for all that God has created. Judgment, therefore, is the life of Jesus reflected upon our own thoughts, words, and deeds. Do we believe what Jesus says and do we follow what he calls us to do?

FEBRUARY 23 (TUESDAY) - JOHN 5:24

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

It really is as simple as “believing.” The life that God offers to us in Christ Jesus is a life received in faith and trust, and this life is measured eternally, that is, it is not constricted by temporal and spatial limitations. Nevertheless, this “believing” is more than a conceptual awareness, more than an emotional response of the heart. This “believing” that Jesus speaks to is a way of life, a way of living that fully trusts God’s way in Jesus and commits to following Jesus step-by-step. Do we find ourselves “in step”?

FEBRUARY 24 (WEDNESDAY) - JOHN 5:25-27

“Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.”

Life is a gift; life is precious and fragile. We experience life in blessing and brokenness, as possibility and potential, as consequence and confession, a

reflection of the past and hope in the here-and-now for a future. Our embodied presence imposes upon us limits of life; we are unable to go back in time nor are we able to jump ahead to a distant future. Life is in the now. The now of our lives is also the hour of Jesus' presence with us, a presence that enables us to move beyond the strictures that lead to death, and to hear the voice of God that grants life in Jesus that is eternal. How are we able to understand that we are now living in the hour of Jesus' judgment of calling the "dead" in whatever form to new life?

FEBRUARY 25 (THURSDAY) - JOHN 5:30

"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

The judgment that Jesus brings reflects the wisdom and will of God the Father, a judgment that in itself brings justice to the world. Represented in Jesus' life and mission, the true character of what God intends humanity to be is manifest. Thus, to follow the ways of Jesus is to live in such a manner that honors God's will and brings justice to the world. How does the just judgment that Jesus presents in his words and deeds bear upon our words and deeds as well as the manner in which we may judge one another?

FEBRUARY 26 (FRIDAY) - JOHN 5:36-38

"The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent."

Jesus understands that the work he came to do is true and consistent with God's eternal will; his life reflects the reason and purpose of his presence. More so, Jesus' presence and his word comes to us that we may believe. Belief moves us to not only believe in Jesus and what he does, but moves us to also find our purpose, the reason of our life's existence, by living according to the manner revealed by Jesus himself. Jesus was sent by the Father into our world that we may live as God intends for us, that we may trust God's plan for each and every one of us. How does the word of Jesus abide in us in ways that demonstrate that our beliefs are manifest in our words and deeds?

FEBRUARY 27 (SATURDAY) - JOHN 5:39-44

“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?”

God has given us the Holy Scriptures as a tool to enhance our understanding of God’s promised will. Scripture attests to the ways in which God has already intersected with humanity, to reveal attitudes and behaviors that bear witness to faithfulness, and to promote trust in God’s promised future. But our knowledge of scripture in and of itself is not to be an end in itself; rather attention to scripture is but a means to help us in our awareness of God’s eternal presence in Jesus that we may move from offering human glorification, particularly that of self-glorification, and enter into the gift of the eternal, a life that in the now truly understands and follows the way of Jesus and his love. How is our understanding of eternity related to the love that Jesus reveals and the love that we are called to act upon in the here-and-now?

FEBRUARY 28 (SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT) - JOHN 6:27

“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

Food is essential to our living. The food that we eat on a daily basis is grown, is harvested, is hunted and fished, is raised in pasture, is cultivated, is processed, is more and more bio-engineered, is packaged, is commodified, is consumed. And in numerous ways subject to decay and waste. Food provides us with nourishment; it sustains us. Often, in our purchase of such food, it comes with a seal, a seal of authenticity, of standard, of approval. But only the food that Jesus offers is beyond a shelf life. The food that Jesus offers has the seal of God which is eternal. How are we to understand this food that Jesus offers- figuratively? metaphorically? spiritually? sacramentally? corporally? conceptually?

MARCH 1 (MONDAY) - JOHN 6:29

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

Jesus understands that he is the work of God; he is the work of God in human flesh. As the work of God, Jesus reveals to us how we are to understand what God has in-store for us in the unveiling of God’s eternal will played out in our lives. We are called to believe that God’s eternal will can and will be able to be comprehended in the manner in which we follow the way of Jesus. How does our belief in Jesus guide us to “see” and act upon the work of God in our experiences, our relationships, our hopes?

MARCH 2 (TUESDAY) - JOHN 6:32-33

“Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

During their arduous forty-year journey in and through the wilderness, the Israelites were offered, as a gift from God, manna from heaven to sustain and nourish them on their journey. This food from heaven remained only for a brief period of time. The bread that the Father now offers, the bread that is Jesus and his work, has no temporal limitations. In what ways do we “feed” off the bread of heaven which is Jesus and the life that he offers that is also beyond temporal limitations?

MARCH 3 (WEDNESDAY) - JOHN 6:35

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

We know what it is to be hungry and thirsty. Because of our affluence and food availability, we often misconstrue cravings and preferences for hunger. But for many people throughout the world, food insecurity is a daily concern. How in our time-and place do we hear and resonate with Jesus’ words that as we come to him, we will never hunger? How do you imagine those who experience daily a lack of food hearing these same words? And as followers of Jesus, how might we respond to the places and people whereby hunger is a daily reality?

MARCH 4 (THURSDAY) - JOHN 6:37-38

“Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.”

In Jesus, we have an abiding trust and presence that will not depart from us, for in him the will of God abides, and abides with those who are with Jesus. The heavenly will of God takes shape here on earth in the life of Jesus as well as the community of faith. God in Christ Jesus attaches to us as we are eternally attached to his promise and presence. Do we ever imagine that we might be separated from God’s presence and promise, even as we hear that Jesus will never drive us away?

MARCH 5 (FRIDAY) - JOHN 6:39-40

“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”

Jesus, in fully carrying out and forth God’s will, understands that he will not lose any to which he was called to offer love and hope. In Jesus, we come to acknowledge that death will not lead to “nothingness.” In Jesus, our hope is a resurrection hope, a hope that rings eternal. The reference to “the last day” has been understood by the church in a range spanning from an individual’s last day culminating in death to a time in the future in which everyone at a singular time will be raised, a general resurrection of the dead. In whatever way that we might interpret this “last day,” belief in Jesus, in his words, and his call to follow him enables the believer to already have full awareness of eternal life. How do we “see” eternal life in our lives today?

MARCH 6 (SATURDAY) - JOHN 6:44-48

“No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day... Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.”

From this perspective in John's Gospel, we are unable to come to Jesus, to come to faith, on our own accord. God the Father who sent Jesus to us takes the initiative in matters of faith; faith is a gift as we become drawn to Jesus by the Father. As we hear, we learn, but it is a learning different from all other types. Our learning in and of Jesus is an empowerment given to us by God that we may come to know eternal life and feed of the bread of life which itself is eternal. How is our understanding of faith connected to being "drawn by the Father to Jesus"?

MARCH 7 (THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT) - JOHN 6:50-51

"This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 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."

The heavenly will of God favors life. In Jesus, God provides the bread that nourishes and sustains life, life that reaches beyond a perceived finality, of death. Jesus is the "living" bread, and our "eating" of that which Jesus offers reaches into the forever. How are we to understand a relationship between that which is eternal and of that which goes on forever? In other words, how is life measured in the work of God in Jesus?

MARCH 8 (MONDAY) - JOHN 6:53-55

"Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink."

Throughout the church's history, some have concluded a sacramental tone to this passage, referencing Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist. Be that as it may, Jesus offers his whole self to humanity and invites his followers to take into themselves all that is Jesus, his body, his blood, his mission, his message, his sacrifice. He invites his followers to fully participate in and as the body of Christ. Our regular and active participation in the Lord's Supper prepares and equips the faithful to experience the blessing of eternal life in the here-and-now and envision the reality of resurrection. How do we make the connections between our participation in the Lord's Supper with what is to be experienced as eternal life?

MARCH 9 (TUESDAY) - JOHN 6:56-57

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.”

Jesus’ promised presence comes to us in word and sacrament, in the fellowship of the church, in our communal presence as sisters and brothers in Christ. Jesus promises to be present with and for us as we continue to bear witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and serve the world and one another with the gospel, a message of hope that is eternal. Jesus’ presence is an abiding one in which he attaches himself to us in his full identity as God and person and brings to us the full measure of life. How do we understand our lives as gift and response to Jesus’ abiding presence with and for us?

MARCH 10 (WEDNESDAY) - JOHN 6:58

“This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

Food is a necessary ingredient of life. Even the food given to the Israelites by God on their wilderness journey was necessary for their living. But as Jesus indicates, that food and that journey were subject to historical referents, bound in place and time. But the food that is Jesus, the food that he offers, spans the bounds of time and place, and even death itself. How do we gaze into the “forever” in our walk with Jesus?

MARCH 11 (THURSDAY) - JOHN 6:63, 65

“It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life... For this reason, I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

The Spirit that is Jesus is the Spirit that gives life. Our humanity consists of body, spirit, soul and relationships. God breathes God’s Spirit into us that we may live, and live as God intends for us. But, at times, we live, not by the Spirit of God, but by our own wants, ambitions, and motivations. These things may pull us away from God. But in Christ Jesus, God the Father grants a return. In what ways do we feel that God is drawing us near to Jesus?

MARCH 12 (FRIDAY) - JOHN 7:16-17

“My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.”

Jesus does and continues to do the work that God has sent him to do. As Christians, as followers of Jesus, we are able to learn from Jesus each and every day how we are to live by faith, and to share with others the holy will of God expressed in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Christian living entails continuous learning from Jesus. How do we demonstrate that we are keeping up with that learning?

MARCH 13 (SATURDAY) - JOHN 7:18

“Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.”

We speak; words flow from our mouths. And what we say makes a difference. Jesus cautions us to be careful of what we say. When speaking, do we convey our own wants and perspectives, or do our words reflect the way of life presented before us by Jesus? Is God’s truth revealed in what we speak? When we speak before others, will they be able to experience the glory of God in that communication?

MARCH 14 (FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT) - JOHN 7:28-29

“You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.”

When we talk about our knowledge of Jesus, what do we exactly mean? What do we intend when we refer to his identity (as God and person), his mission, his teaching, his presence in the here-and-now, the future in his hands? Do we say that we know things about Jesus? Or are we able to confidently say that we know Jesus? And how does our “knowing” Jesus impact the way we live and relate to one another and the world in which we inhabit?

MARCH 15 (MONDAY) - JOHN 7:37-38

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

As we have moved through these days of Lent, we are often reminded of daily concerns and needs, those affecting ourselves and those experienced throughout the world. In many corners of our inhabited world, numerous people have little to no water available to them, or water that is unhealthy for consumption. This lack of safe water adversely affects life and often contributes to early death. We all need “good” water. But Jesus also offers himself as one from whom to drink from the “well waters of life.” Jesus is “living water,” an availability ever present. How are we able to relate to Jesus as an ever present “living water” in comparison with the need for physical water that is often in short supply in many places in the world?

MARCH 16 (TUESDAY) - JOHN 8:12

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.”

In the first chapter of John’s Gospel, the narrator states in reference to Jesus, “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” Jesus is the light of and for the world. Undoubtedly, we have all experienced darkness at some point(s) in our lives. But Jesus offers himself as the light that will enable us to “see” a path forward into his love, his eternal promise, his ever-present care for us. How might we reflect that same light to others in their times of darkness?

MARCH 17 (WEDNESDAY) - JOHN 8:14

“Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.”

Jesus truly knows who he is and what he is called to do. He knows his origin in the Father and he knows what is to be accomplished in the Father’s name. His actions testify to this truth. But Jesus also reveals that some have not received this truth even as it has been offered to them. How do we testify to the truth that is Jesus?

MARCH 18 (THURSDAY) - JOHN 8:15-16

“You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.”

The Father and the Son see and understand the world and us from an eternal perspective of love and hope. They judge the world and us from a will directed in the way of peace, and not according to the desires of the flesh which are often broken in thought and deed. From John’s Gospel perspective, the judgment revealed in Jesus’ words and actions has more to do with his selfless, sacrificial love directed to the world and us as he gave his life for us than on our collective human shortcomings. In Jesus’ judgment, we are more than the sum of our thoughts and deeds. Does this understanding heighten our awareness of the manner in which we might judge as contrasted with the way that Jesus judges?

MARCH 19 (FRIDAY) - JOHN 8:17-18

“In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.”

In the Old Testament, verification of truth in the human community was a matter of collaboration of at least two people; truth was not solely in the hands of any one individual. Therefore, there were those who questioned the validity of what Jesus spoke. The truth of Jesus though is represented in the divine communication of Father and Son; they speak as one voice, a voice of truth with eternal validity. How do we understand the testimony of Jesus’ words and actions having impact on our understanding and implementation of God’s truth?

MARCH 20 (SATURDAY) - JOHN 8:23-24

“You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am (he).”

In the person of Jesus, the heavenly nature of God the Father reaches into our world with everlasting love and hope. Because of God’s reach in Jesus, humanity is not therefore forever consigned to the deathly consequences of sin. This hope of new life is in Jesus; believe! Where will our faith and hope lead us?

MARCH 21 (FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT) - JOHN 8:26, 28-29

“I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him... When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am (he), and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.”

Even though they followed in his steps and heard his words and witnessed his actions, many of Jesus’ followers had difficulty in truly understanding who Jesus is and what he accomplishes. Nevertheless, Jesus continued to do that which the Father had called him to do. A view of Jesus lifted up on the cross would present a clear picture of Jesus’ identity and his relationship to the Father, revealing the love that the Father and the Son has for each and every one of us. How does our view of Jesus on the cross reveal the Father’s and the Son’s love for us?

MARCH 22 (MONDAY) - JOHN 8:31, 34-36

“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free... Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in household; the Son has a place there forever. So, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

Jesus reveals that apart from God, humanity has become a slave to sin and its consequences. But that enslavement to sin need not be a forever conclusion. The truth that is Jesus can and will set us free, free from the burdening chains of sin. How do we understand this freedom from sin that we have in our relationship with Jesus? What shape does this freedom take in our discipleship?

MARCH 23 (TUESDAY) - JOHN 9:39

“I came into the world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”

Jesus judges by the way he helps us to refocus on the manner in which we are called to live according to the will of the Father. Are we able to “see” one another and the world as Jesus wants us to “see”? And in Jesus, what do we really “see”? In what ways do we still seem to be “blind”?

MARCH 24 (WEDNESDAY) - JOHN 10:7-10

“Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

We are familiar with Jesus’ expression that he is the “good shepherd.” In this section Jesus refers to himself as the gate for his sheep. This image presents Jesus as the one who is able to “keep out” that which would be harmful or dangerous to his sheep. Additionally, the image presents Jesus also as the entry point into the way of salvation, a way of abundant life. How are we able to understand Jesus as both our way into salvation as well as protection from that which is potentially harmful and dangerous?

MARCH 25 (THURSDAY) - JOHN 10:17-18

“For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

The power of God’s love, the love of Father and Son, is most preciously demonstrated by the way that Jesus lays down his life for us. The power of God’s love in Jesus is predominate over all forces, religious and political alike, that sought to bring harm to Jesus. Again, we know that the power of God’s love is selfless and sacrificial; Jesus’ love for us overcomes all forces of evil and that which threatens life. This power of Jesus’ love also overcomes death; his love embraces resurrection and eternal life. How are we able to see and participate in the power of Jesus’ love in our time and place?

MARCH 26 (FRIDAY) - JOHN 10:25-30

“The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me, but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

The life that we have in Jesus is life assured of an everlasting future into God’s promise of salvation and peace. The life that we have in Jesus bears witness to the very words and deeds of Jesus. It is a life that is offered in ways beyond all human effort and imagination; it is a life of everlasting protection. It is a life of greatness above all else. It is a life to be believed because of the relationship of Father and Son, a unity of promise and fulfillment. In what ways are we able to “hear” the voice of Jesus, and follow him into all that he offers us?

MARCH 27 (SATURDAY) - JOHN 10:37-38

“If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.”

Jesus taught. Jesus healed. Jesus welcomed. Jesus provided. But not everyone believed that he was doing the will of God the Father. His words and deeds provoked opposition. At times, he was accused of blaspheming God; he was blamed for being a source of divisiveness rather than promoting holiness. His manner of reaching out with love and care to some segments of the population, the marginal and the needy, led some to believe that he was a danger to the perceived norms of society. But Jesus continued to do the will of the Father even as he faced opposition; he did so without fear. In what ways are we called to follow Jesus and do the works that Jesus did?

MARCH 28 (PALM/ PASSION SUNDAY) - JOHN 11:25-26

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Our Lenten focus on Jesus, his words, his actions, his death and resurrection, all serve our faith understandings of life, life's purposes within God's holy will and promise, and the manner in which we are called to live without the fear of death and separation from God. Even as Jesus entered Jerusalem amidst the shouts of "hosanna, hosanna in the highest", he witnessed to the power of God's love in all that he faced. In Jesus, we come to know the meaning of life as given by God, and we bear witness to the promise of resurrection. In what ways do we live out life as a gift from God, and trust in the promise of resurrection?

MARCH 29 (MONDAY) - JOHN 12:23-26

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor."

Jesus lived his life not for his own glorification; he lived his life for us, knowing that even in his death, the love and promise of God would continue to "bear much fruit." As followers of Jesus, we continue to "bear much fruit" in and through our faith, our faithful actions in which we act according to God's promised will, and our sharing of the gospel in all that we say and do without restraint and resistance. Each and every moment of life, we are presented with choices; the choices that we make reflect our understanding of life. Do the choices that we make bear witness to our service to God?

MARCH 30 (TUESDAY) - JOHN 12:31-32

"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Life in this world is often one of competing allegiances. The powers that be in this world often direct us to live in ways that are contrary to that which God has revealed in Jesus. Often, the ways of the world are self-serving, deficient and delinquent to the promise of abundant life for all. But Jesus indicates that when he is "lifted up", he will draw all people to himself, an act that will drive out all the false representations of power in the world. What shapes our view of the cross?

MARCH 31 (WEDNESDAY) - JOHN 12:44-47

“Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness. I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.”

Again, Jesus reminds us that he is “light”, the light to bring us out of darkness, so that we may be able to “see” clearly the promised will of God and to act accordingly. Holy Week presents before us an opportunity to inventory our thoughts, words, and deeds and to “see” whether or not they abide with the salvation promised and provided by Jesus, or if they continue to reflect judgments born in darkness. How do the lives we lead measure with the salvation offered and received in Jesus?

APRIL 1 (MAUNDY THURSDAY) – JOHN 13:34-35

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In the last meal that Jesus shared with his followers, he demonstrated his love for them by washing their feet, and he called upon them to love as he loves. This commandment to love is both invitation and opportunity, modeled by and from Jesus’ own actions. It is a “Jesus-love” that we are called to share. In what ways does our love imprint “Jesus-love” in relationships with one another?

APRIL 2 (GOOD FRIDAY) - JOHN 14:1-3, 6

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also... I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

In the world in which we live, our hearts seem troubled by so many things- illness and disease, fractured relationships, fears associated by threats and terrors

birthed of hate and discord, fears born out of isolation and hopelessness, uncertainties of what tomorrow will look like. Jesus has come to us and for us to not only help us in the here-and-now, but also for us to receive and hold on to the promise that we shall surely share a place with Jesus in the fullness of God's providential and everlasting care. On this Good Friday, from our vision upon the cross of Jesus, we see the path of love and forgiveness, of God accepting and receiving us in the stretched-out arms of Jesus. How is "the way, the truth, and the life" that we have in Jesus being revealed to us this day?

APRIL 3 (HOLY SATURDAY) - JOHN 14:11-14

"Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

Jesus promises to be with us, promises to listen to us, promises to respond to our concerns and needs. Jesus shows us the work that he does and through the gift of faith empowers his followers to do the very works that he himself has done, and more so. Throughout this Lenten season, we have been reminded of the relationship of Father and Son, of the manner in which Jesus lived and died for us, of the promise of God's light and love received in Jesus, and of the gift of eternal life. The Father and the Son communicate life and all that is in service to life abundant, and as followers of Jesus, we are invited to communicate this life which is eternal in all that we say and do. How do we plan to enter into this Easter season communicating the life eternal that we have in Jesus?

APRIL 4 (THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD- EASTER) - JOHN 15:1-5, 7-13

"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. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 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 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..."

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! He laid down his life for us, the way of the fullness of divine love. He was raised for us that we may continue to walk in his ways. Where will this walk take us today, tomorrow, and into the forever as we abide in his love?