

JOURNEY
THROUGH JOHN

40
DAYS
of
JOHN

A LENTEN DAILY DEVOTIONAL

by the pastors of First Presbyterian Church of Nashville

WEEK 4

SUNDAY

Take time today to reflect on the readings from this past week, reread some of the most meaningful passages, or catch up on any devotionals you missed. Rest in the grace of God that is freely and extravagantly given today and every day.

DAY 17

MONDAY, MARCH 16

READ

John 9:1-41

REFLECT

This is the sixth sign of John's Gospel, and it is a classic, "blind leading the blind" scenario. The Pharisees were so convinced of their rules and regulations around the Sabbath that they were certain Jesus could not be from God, despite his ability to give sight. They are blind to what God is actually up to in their midst. The once blind man must educate the religious leaders. This is the sort of text that ought to give any religious person pause. God is working outside the bounds. Jesus is working so far outside of what the religious people are comfortable with that they are convinced it isn't God. It is a consistent task of the faithful to be attentive to God's work, even when it goes against cultural norms, existing expectations, and religious rules.

RESPOND

Reflect on the question, "Where have I been blind to God's work?" Consider the question of the Pharisees, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Be curious about how God may be giving you, this community and beyond, sight.

PRAY

God, give me eyes to see, that I may proclaim the good news, "Though I was blind, now I see." Amen.

DAY 18

TUESDAY, MARCH 17

READ

John 10:1-21

REFLECT

In today's passage we have the third and fourth "I am" statements: "I am the door" and "I am the Good Shepherd." Both relate to the protection and guidance of sheep. Sheep are one of the earliest domesticated animals. Consequently, sheep are dependent. This dependency has led some to think of sheep as having a low intelligence. However, studies have shown that sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd, can be called by name, recognize facial expressions, and pick up emotions. Yes, they cannot protect themselves, easily panic, and fear isolation. In other words, they are high on the scale of relationships but low on ability to survive on their own.

Jesus is the door that keeps the thief and robber out, yet also the gate that leads to pasture and life. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who calls His flock by name and lays down His life for them so that they may have life. In these parabolic sayings, we are the sheep in need of protection and in need of life.

RESPOND

We are dependent on God just as sheep are dependent on the shepherd. In your prayers today listen for the voice of Jesus calling you. Recite Psalm 23.

PRAY

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, lead us this day on the paths of abundant life. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18

READ

John 10:22-42

REFLECT

If a child doesn't get the answer they want, then they just keep asking the same question over and over again. And so it is with adults, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Well, Jesus has been telling them that He is the Christ, the Messiah, the King of the Ages. They just don't like the answer they've gotten. Jesus as King is happy to bypass established pathways of power. Jesus as King has recruited common folks, a bit rough around the edges, as his inner circle of advisors. Jesus as King is populating his kingdom with some unsavory folks.

But the thing that pushes the religious authorities to the boiling point is this: "I," says Jesus, "and the Father are one." This is not the kind of Messiah they want, and so they go nuclear, "The Jews picked up stones again to stone him."

Here's the rub: the authorities are happy with Jesus' "good works". The problem is they don't like the idea of Jesus being the Son of the Father. We're often the same. We welcome Jesus for His good works, but we don't like to think of Jesus as the Son of the Father. Jesus as a miracle worker can be controlled and is useful. Jesus as God's Son is an authority above earthly control. Jesus as a miracle worker is someone to admire. Jesus the Son of God is to be worshipped.

RESPOND

Jesus is worthy of our fully devoted attention, love, and loyalty because He is God. As difficult as it is to imagine, worship is due to Jesus even if he never loved us. But since Jesus has loved us to the point of death on the cross, our love for him should be full to overflowing.

PRAY

Jesus, Son of God. Jesus, fully God. Jesus, who became like us, so that we might become like you. We worship and adore you. Help us to put down the stones of frustration that we throw at you for being who you are and not who we want you to be. Jesus, who you are as God's Son is our only hope in life and death. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 19

READ

John 11:1-27

REFLECT

What do you say to the bereaved? What do you say to people who are in the depths of grief? The truth is there are no words. Time and time again words fail. Martha runs out to meet Jesus, longing to be in the same space with someone else who is carrying this grief. Martha also runs out to say to Jesus, “Where were you?” Is this blame, curiosity, or something else? Blame is a handy tool we use to make sense of trauma. Have you ever asked Jesus that question? Have you ever wondered where your savior is in the midst of pain? As Martha and Jesus have this conversation they begin to talk about the resurrection. When someone says to you, what is the resurrection? How would you describe it? Many of us would say exactly what Martha says, *we will rise again on the last day*. But Jesus has more for Martha and more for us. “I am the resurrection and the life.” Jesus says. The resurrection is not just a moment in time; it is a person. The resurrection is not a date in the future; it is some one who knows us right here and right now. It is Jesus Christ. The resurrection has come to us to be with us, to comfort us, and to free us. How often do we confused who Jesus is for what Jesus does? Jesus doesn’t do resurrection, Jesus is resurrection. Because Jesus is the resurrection, death is no longer the end. Through Jesus Christ, the resurrection made flesh (literally and figuratively), death has been changed into something else. Jesus does not postpone death, He transforms it. We say this every time we speak the Apostle’s Creed. I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Jesus is the resurrection. Jesus is life everlasting.

RESPOND

Like Martha, have you believed that the resurrection is a moment in time rather than the person of Jesus Christ? What’s easier to understand, that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, that Jesus Christ is the resurrection, or both? Remember the words of the psalmist: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to obtain.” Take a few moments and reflect on this mystery of faith Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.

PRAY

God of resurrection and life, as you met Martha meet me. I confess the moments, relationships, and spaces where I don’t see you. Where are you Lord? Meet me there. Romance my soul with the mystery of your love. Provoke my passion with the Truth made flesh. I confess this knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to obtain. Expand the capacity of my soul receive more of the good news everyday. Amen.

DAY 21

FRIDAY, MARCH 20

READ

John 11:28-57

REFLECT

“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

In this powerful story of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead, one of the most important details is often overlooked. Up to this point we have found many of Jesus’ followers coming to belief in him because of what they’ve seen him do – the healings, the signs and wonders. Here, we find the order reversed. Martha *believes* her Lord can do anything. When she confronts him about not being around when Lazarus was ill, she was not upset because she wanted his company or comfort in a time of loss. She was upset because she believed in the incredible power of her Lord and his authority over her brother’s illness, and he was not there to exercise that power. But even her astonishing faith had a limit, for while she could imagine her brother being healed, she could not fathom him being called out of the grave.

Her vision, while set on Jesus, was still limited by what she thought was possible. Our journey through John is about to take a turn as we set our eyes on Jerusalem and begin to trace the passion narrative. Here again, we find Jesus’ followers excited about his rule and eager to welcome him as king but limited in what they thought was possible. They never imagined their king would have to suffer and die. They never imagined what they would find that first Easter morning standing before another empty tomb.

RESPOND

Where do you underestimate Jesus’ power in your life? What would it look like for you to truly believe, “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26)?

PRAY

Lord, we underestimate you. We allow our own plans, ideas, and agendas to box you in. Help us to believe even before we see. As we mark the halfway point through our Lenten journey, give us the grace to trust you a little more today and each day moving towards Easter. Amen.

DAY 22

SATURDAY, MARCH 21

READ

John 12:1-26

REFLECT

In his poem *The Sacrifice*, George Herbert utters from Jesus's lips this lamentation:

*For thirty pence he did my death devise,
Who at three hundred did the ointment prize,
Not half so sweet as my sweet sacrifice . . .*

This is bitter irony for Jesus. Judas valued more the perfume used to anoint Jesus's feet than he valued Jesus's own life.

The Book of Signs is concluding. Jesus's hour has come. The time has come for him to be fully revealed as Son of God. He will be revealed in death.

Now is the time to clear out the clutter of faith – faith grounded in abundant wedding wine or water from a well or extra helpings of bread and fish. As wonderful as those things are, they are signs that must give way to substance.

Jesus's work will be accomplished in his death. The gospel will spread not because of the signs, but because of the death. God's covenant people will become as numerous as the stars not because of the signs, but because of the death.

RESPOND

The arrival of non-Jews signals the arrival of Jesus's hour. He will draw not just his own people, but all people to himself at Golgotha. Knowing that, and though it may seem morbid, I invite you to turn your focus now to the cross. Leave behind, at least for now, his blessings, his wisdom, his heart for justice.

PRAY

Lord Jesus, clear away the clutter in my faith this Lent. Draw me to the one thing in you that sets you apart and saves me: your glorious offering of yourself for the world. Amen.



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