

Enough

Lenten Journal 2017



Enough: Journal Introduction

As many Christians from different traditions have noted, the number “40” is a significant number. Recall that in the Old Testament, some of the most significant narratives reference the number 40 as a part of the story:

- Noah and his family were in the Ark for 40 days and 40 nights. (Genesis 7:17)
- Moses experience the presence of God for 40 days and 40 nights on top of a mountain. (Exodus 34:28)
- As punishment for their rebellion and complaining, the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years.

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke) all include in their presentation of the gospel the story of Jesus spending 40 days and 40 nights in the desert:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. – *Matthew 4:1-2* (See also *Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2*).

Following this event in the life of Jesus, the early church adapted a practice of fasting, self-examination, repentance, renewal and waiting. While not originally 40 days in length, this practice was primarily followed by those preparing for baptism, leading up to an Easter celebration. Some trace this practice back to as early as the 2nd century C.E. and as late as the 4th century C.E. At any rate, this practice has been followed by Christians for nearly 2000 years.

Lent is a shorten form of the English word “*Lenten*” which means “spring”. Accordingly, this time represents an entering into a new season. During this new season, we enter a period where we abstain from things (fast) and we introduce new practices (discipline). Someone described Lent as “a season of preparation, self-reflection and repentance when we seek to literally ‘turn around’ and realign our lives and focus toward God. It is a time to give up things as well as take on new life-giving practices, helping us rid ourselves of distractions and our own selfish desires. By doing so, we seek to live and love as more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Our self-reflection will focus on simplicity and contentment. While taking inventory of the extravagant life God has blessed us with, we make a pledge that declares, “With God, we have more than **ENOUGH!**” Over the next several weeks, we pray that you will discover the fullness of God as your source of everything you need. Perhaps we will emerge from this experience with a fuller understanding of these words of Jesus: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”

This journal has been compiled and produced to accompany you on your Lenten journey. There are 40 days (Monday-Saturday) of readings from the Gospel according to Matthew. In addition, there are reflective materials that supplement the readings. Also, there is a space provided for you to respond with prayer and confession. Your engagement with this journal may serve as a practice that you introduce in your life over the next 40 days. You will note that there are no readings for the Sundays over the next 6 weeks. On Sundays, there is no requirement to fast since every first day is a feast day, celebrating the Resurrection!

I pray that you will open your mind & heart and consider traveling alongside the body of Christ in this Lenten journey.

I am grateful to those who shared their hearts and provided personal reflections. I am most grateful to Perry Brown who worked tirelessly to design and produce these journals for the benefit of the body of Christ.

- Dion Frasier



Where Does One Begin?

I will suggest that the most difficult piece of this journey will be remaining committed to a discipline of reading, reflecting and praying. Since during the season of Lent, we are fasting (giving up something), our anxiety to remain committed increases. So the first thing to do is to... relax. Lent is not a command from God nor is it another activity to gain favor from God. Start with this truth, "God loves you!" God loves you very much and he desires to spend time with you. So, as you encounter this Lenten journey, consider it time spent with the one who loves you the most. Hear Jesus as he invites you to come away with him,

During the next 40 days, you will be giving up something (fast). There are many benefits to fasting. For this reason, many choose to fast from sweets by eliminating sodas, juices and dessert from their diet through the duration of Lent. Others choose not to eat meat for the duration. While those restrictions will yield physical benefits, there are fasts that serve the mind and heart. In the 21st century, one of the most impactful fasts we can participate in is a fast from social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.). In 1 Corinthians, Paul suggests that there may be times set aside for married couples to fast from sex for a period of prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5) – *Trust me, he actually wrote that* 😊

Giving up something is only part of the season of Lent. You should also consider doing something new. You might want to take on a discipline of physically exercising or a discipline of daily prayer for a specific person. There may be an activity that you do over the next 40 days that helps to make our world a better place. You might consider walking a route in your neighborhood for the purpose of picking up trash. You could also choose to write an encouraging note (or send an email) to someone. The possibilities are endless.

Here are some other suggestions for your journey. When you are reading the gospel of Matthew and writing in your journal, try to find a place where you will not be interrupted. It is best to do this when you know no one will ask you for something that might disturb your time with God. Each day, there is a reading from the gospel of Matthew. The readings are not included in the journal, so you will need a copy of the text (your Bible, a printout or your electronic device). Before you read a single word of text, pray a simple prayer. Here is a sample prayer constructed by a 4th century prayer written by John Chrysostom (The first phrase) and a 16th century prayer written by John Calvin (second phrase):

Lord,

Shine within my heart, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of my mind that I may comprehend the message of your Gospel.

May the Lord grant that I may engage in the heavenly contemplation of the mysteries of God's heavenly wisdom with ever increasing devotion to God's glory and my edification.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Finally, one of the goals of participating in the Lenten season is to gain a deeper appreciation for Jesus. We are attempting to connect in richer ways throughout this journey. Therefore, we are considering the gospel of Matthew. Our understanding of the life and light that we have experienced as Jesus followers needs to be refreshed continually. The Lenten season is one of these experiences. I am praying for a rich and plush experience with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. On behalf of everyone who has participated in the production of this journal, I bid you Godspeed. Blessings!

- Dion Frasier



Ash Wednesday, Day 1

Wednesday, March 1st, 2017

Matthew 4:1-11

The "Urban Dictionary" has become quite the useful tool in the 21st century. For those of us who are getting older and are challenged to interpret the language of those who are younger than us, consulting the Urban Dictionary has been a savior. The Urban Dictionary provides definitions to some of the more popular slang terms. For instance, here is the definition of the phrase, "I'm good":

Rejection of and ridicule for an offered good or service by feigning satiation. When "No Thank You" just won't do."

"I'm good" is one of my favorite retorts in response to being offered something I don't want or like. When offered a food item with mayonnaise on it (which I hate!!!), I will often say, "I'm good!" As I read about Jesus' journey of 40 days in the desert and his responses to the Devil's temptation, I can't help but amuse myself by thinking that Jesus responded to the Devil's temptations with, "I'm good." Of course, Jesus repeated a refrain that has drawn our admiration. He repeatedly answers the Devil's temptations with "It is written..." In responding this way, Jesus declared what is the theme of our 40-day journey. In essence, Jesus told the Devil, "I have Enough!" To declare faith in God is to tell our appetite for more "stuff" that with God, we have enough. Another way of making this declaration is to say, "I'm good!" For the next 40 days, will this be your truth?

- Dion Frasier

Dear God:



Day 2

Thursday, March 2nd, 2017

Matthew 3:1-12; 11:1-19

I have very strong opinions about what I believe to be right and wrong. If I had to guess, I would say you probably do, too. Maybe not about everything - but there is a core of beliefs about which we are deeply convicted.

John the Baptist believed deeply that the long awaited Messiah was at hand. The message he preached was simple, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." He went about baptizing the repentant, and challenging the self-righteous. Yet toward the end of his life, he sent word from prison to Jesus asking "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" The very thing he believed and preached had come into doubt. Jesus did not try to reassure him with arguments, but rather pointed him to look at the readily observable evidence:

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." (Matthew 11:4-6)

I pray that we are correct in our beliefs. More so, I pray that we are open to the possibility that we may be wrong. Most of all, I pray that we will look to Jesus to answer our doubts and point us back to the readily observable evidence.

Will you pray today for God to reveal to you any areas where you need to change what you believe?

- Perry Brown

Dear God:



Day 3

Friday, March 3rd, 2017

Matthew 3:13-17

Before Jesus preached a word... Before he healed any lepers or touched the eyes of the blind... Before he cast out demons... Before he chose disciples to follow him... Before the crowds ran after to him to follow... Before it all, Jesus was baptized. We continue to be stunned by this featured story in the gospel because we view baptism as a cleansing from our sins. What did Jesus need to be cleansed of? He was the perfect Lamb of God (Agnus Dei). He was without sin. He was spotless! Since Jesus' baptism is one of the few narratives that made it into all four gospels our curiosity deepens.

I must warn you. For the purpose of this Lenten journey, do not get carried away trying to interpret this text. Listen to the text. Experience the text. Allow yourself to be transported to the shores of the Jordan. Witness Jesus receiving a cosmic bestowing of approval. The Father says to Jesus, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased." Since we, as Jesus followers have experienced baptism, it is not inappropriate to desire the same conferring of God's blessing.

So right now, quiet yourself. Eliminate the noise. Hear the Father telling you that you are his son/daughter and He is well pleased with you. You are his beloved. Perhaps you need reminding so repeat to yourself for the next minute: "I am God's beloved!" After a few minutes, record a prayer of gratitude for being God's beloved.

- Dion Frasier

Dear God:



Day 4

Saturday, March 4th, 2017

Matthew 4:18-25

My father was a very skilled mechanic. People from all over town knew my dad and his prowess with tools and the nuts and bolts of a vehicle. On several occasions, my dad would call my name, "Dion, come on and go with me. I'm going to fix _____'s car." I would hurriedly jump in my father's car to watch his mastery in fixing problems. The sad truth though, is that I rarely paid attention. I was off doing other things like playing with my transformer toys. You would think being the son of a master mechanic would mean that I am a master mechanic. Unfortunately, other than changing a flat tire and replacing the windshield wiper fluid, I stink at car mechanics.

I wonder how it felt to be called by Jesus to "follow" him. Peter, Andrew, James and John were blessed to be among the first ones called to follow Jesus as he "fixed" things. Those four saw Jesus preach, teach, heal and change lives. They had front row seats as they watched Jesus spread a message of hope and healing. Given the testimony of these early disciples in other texts in scripture, I've got to believe that they didn't waste time doing other things.

Reflect: If Jesus calls you to follow, will you leave everything? Will you follow and learn? Will you mimic what Jesus does? Do you feel he has given you enough to be fishers of people?

- Dion Frasier

Dear God:



First Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 5th, 2017

Matthew 6:19-34



Psalm 25:1-10

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause. Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good. Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.



Day 5

Monday, March 6th, 2017

Matthew 5:1-16

Growing up in the church, the beatitudes was a section of scripture that made its way into memory verse territory on more than one occasion. I learned to appreciate the tension enmeshed within the words of Jesus as representative of the contrast between our world and the Kingdom of God; however, my appreciation could only go so far, as I felt I was simply unable to relate or even empathize with the qualities listed in these verses. Not until more recently have I come to realize that these are not characteristics we do or do not inherently possess, but these are characteristics we take upon ourselves. We may not be born poor in spirit; mournful; or persecuted, but we are to become poor in spirit; mournful; and persecuted.

To become, though, requires a shift in perspective. It requires humility. It requires surrender. We must be willing to say, "Enough," if we hope to experience the blessings of Matthew 5. Our world works upon a principle that says we are blessed when we receive, but Jesus challenges this paradigm by saying we're blessed through our choice to give up.

Throughout this season of Lent, may you grasp spiritual heights never before reached simply through a willingness to become "less."

"I touch the sky, when my knees hit the ground." – *Hillsong United, Touch the Sky (2015)*

- Justin Kuhn

Dear God:



Day 6

Tuesday, March 7th, 2017

Matthew 5:17-48

In this section, Jesus provides six specific examples of what it looks like to fulfill the law, rather than simply to follow it. The list of examples is not meant to be comprehensive. It is meant to be illustrative; that is, to get our imaginations going about how rules function differently in God's kingdom than they do in the kingdoms of the world. Rules exist not to be followed, but to be fulfilled.

For instance: What would it look like for us to be more interested in reconciliation than we are in worship? (5:21-26) What would it look like for us to be so radically aware that every person we encounter is a person lovingly created in the image of God that what we see when we look at them is not how much they can be useful to us, but how much they are loved by God? (5:27-30) What would it look like for us to be so radically loyal, radically committed, radically faithful in our relationships that even when we have grounds for walking away, we choose not to? (5:31-32) What would it look like for us to be so trustworthy we didn't need contracts? (5:33-37) What would it look like to give to everyone who asks of you? (5:38-42) What would it look like to love your enemies? (5:43-48)

Or, again: more generally, what would it look like for you to fulfill the rules, rather than just to follow them?

- Naomi Walters

Dear God:



Day 7

Wednesday, March 8th, 2017

Matthew 6:1-18

Who have you told about your 40 day fast? Have you posted it on Facebook or Twitter? If you have already done that, there is no need to come down too hard on you. If you haven't, try to refrain from broadcasting your fast. Why? Because it brings attention to you. The purpose of fasting is that your awareness of God is deepened, refreshed and renewed. This is a season for God to broadcast in your life that He loves you and that He is all you need.

It may be the reason that Jesus taught his disciples to pray a simple prayer that is not full of elaborate phrases and intricate formulas. He teaches a simple prayer that declares one's allegiance to God's new world order and illuminates one's source of all their needs. Here is the Lord's Prayer from the Message translation:

Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are. Set the world right; Do what's best - as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil. You're in charge!

You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes.

This prayer perfectly sums up the theme of our Lenten journey. Because the Father feeds us, forgives us and protects us, we have Enough! In the space below, rewrite the Lord's Prayer in your own words.

- Dion Frasier

Dear God:



Day 8

Thursday, March 9th, 2017

Matthew 6:19-34

Why worry when you can pray? Worry ends where faith begins. Church sign messages. They worry me to no end. I worry even when I could pray because my teens live in a crazy, over-sexualized world! What is wrong with my faith and what 10 tips & tricks will help me fix it?! I mean. I really. Cannot. Even.

Church signs. They mean well. They want me to feel better. To turn to God. Give God my fears. But I just end up with more worries. Guilt. Shame.

I don't think God meant all that when he talks to us about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Drift for a moment on that image. A field far away. The breeze and sunshine envelopes you. All your cares wash away better even than with Calgon. Wait. Full stop. That's not what God meant either

For this reason, don't worry about the logistics of life. For what reason? For the ones listed directly before verse 25. Because you cannot serve two masters. God and money. Because your treasures are in heaven, not on this earth. Because you don't have to show out on your holy deeds. Because your treasures are in heaven where your Holy Father is.

God isn't trying to shame us out of our cares for our kids or into church to pray and be happy. He is not saying that only the faithless experience concern over the concerning. He is saying, don't worry about money and food and cars and houses and clothing. I got all that. I can feed birds and grow flowers. Surely, I can keep you warm and fed.

Surrender. God does not want us to worry more over our worry. He wants us to surrender.

- *Christine Parker*

Dear God:



Day 9

Friday, March 10th, 2017

Matthew 7:1-29

To be honest, I find it easy to trip quickly through Matthew 7 and move on. What does it have to do with me anyway? I know I have logs in my eye, so I just do not judge anyone at all for anything, and I'm all good. I'm a city-girl, born and bred. My swine come nicely packaged as spiral sliced ham from Kroger. And BOY howdy! I can out Golden Rule the best of the Golden Rulers! Let's get on to chapter 8 and some miracle making, shall we?

If only.

M. Robert Mulholland, in his book *The Deeper Journey*, describes the Believer's life in terms of a True Self and a False Self. The True Self, he says, is a mirror image of Jesus.

And as the mirror image of Jesus Christ, we are filled with the fullness of God.

Boy howdy. If we are gonna really do that, then we cannot skip-to-my-lou over Matthew 7. Here Jesus is describing people living out of what Mulholland describes as our False Selves. When we walk the path of the False Self, a wide and broad path indeed, we pride ourselves in our holy accomplishments and trust in our own resources rather than in the fullness of God in us. While seeing specks in the eyes of those around us, we are fond of our ability to lead them to better ways. We know we are the good parents giving our sons good gifts, and we take pride in the gifts our Good Father has given us, as we ponder the impoverished and their lack of work ethic. We marvel at the fruits of our VBS backdrops and the size of the crowds at our events, never stopping to wonder who gave a drink of water to the thirsty.

- *Christine Parker*

Dear God:



Day 10

Saturday, March 11th, 2017

Matthew 8:1-22

A popular statement says, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Anyone who has ever breathed air can attest to the fact that this is untrue. Words are powerful, and can bring life or death.

No word is more powerful than that spoken from the mouth of God.

Throughout scripture we see the Word of God bring life, light, and order. With his voice, God created the cosmos. With his voice, Jesus healed the sick. With his voice, the words “It is finished” brought an end to the reign of sin and death.

The same Word that brought the stars into existence; holds the oceans in place; and gives breath to a newborn baby, is the same Word that speaks into each moment of your life. Find peace in this truth. When God says it’s enough, it’s enough. No other voice has that power. Far too often we give up when we should not yet, or we keep chasing after emptiness... listen, and hear the voice that says, “Enough.”

During this season, may you experience renewal (life), hope (light), and peace (order) as you listen to the voice of God speak.

- *Justin Kuhn*

Dear God:



Second Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 12th, 2017

Matthew 8:1-17; 8:28-9:8



Psalm 22:23-31

You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.

The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him — may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him — those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!



Day 11

Monday, March 13th, 2017

Matthew 8:23-34

Almost twenty five years ago, the book “Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus” was published. It was and is a very popular book that looked at how men and women are fundamentally psychologically different. The book’s title meant to convey the idea that the differences are so great that it can be compared to men coming from one planet while women come from an entirely different planet.

This passage from Matthew kind of reminds me of that book title, only refashioned: “People are from Earth, God is from . . . everlasting to everlasting.” Jesus is very different from people — at least different from me. Jesus absorbs information from his surroundings very differently from me. Jesus is irritated by things that I almost certainly wouldn’t notice. Jesus draws conclusions and implements solutions that would not even occur to me. There is an uncomfortably wide gulf between his motivations and mine.

Acknowledging how different I am from God, yet trusting the descriptions of His love for me, I am challenged, humbled and encouraged to pursue Him.

- *Bill Johnson*

Dear God:



Day 12

Tuesday, March 14th, 2017

Matthew 9:1-34

When we read healing and conversion stories in the gospels, we anticipate the healing and the end of the story so much that we forget that the people healed were real people who suffered for years with their ailments. It's not as if the blind men lost his sight the day before and received their sight the next day. The Bleeding woman suffered for 12 years. I would imagine the paralyzed man couldn't walk for a long time. The tax collector didn't start his job last week. And even though the Centurion's daughter had just died, it would make sense that she had probably been sick for a while.

Learning to read the gospels, means learning to live in the tension presented in the stories. It helps you to identify the power of the miracle stories. You ever get something in your eye? What if you experienced that feeling for 5 years straight? You ever cut yourself and couldn't stop the bleeding? What if that went on for the next 60 days. You ever work in a job that is so demoralizing that you wake everyday wanting to stay in bed and to never see that place again? Reliving those experiences may help us to get a glimpse of what the blind men felt, or the bleeding woman felt or what Matthew felt as he collected taxes. All, I presume, wanted healing and wanted a change. Do you want healing? Do you want change? In the space below, write to God what you need healed in your life. Write to him what you need for him to change in your life. Don't hold back. The one who made the blind see and raised the dead to life wants to hear from you.

- Dion Frasier

Dear God:



Day 13

Wednesday, March 15th, 2017

Matthew 9:35-10:15

Jesus didn't play around when it came time to get about the business of shepherding the harassed and helpless. At the end of chapter nine, he tells his disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send workers into his fields. It's the same admonition that we hear from Jesus, but in our context the prayer that leaves our lips sounds more like a request to send outside reinforcements from some far-off, well-trained militia of super soul workers to undertake a task that we are neither equipped nor inclined to do. It does not resonate with the tones of Isaiah, "Here am I. Send me!"

But chapter ten goes on to explain in detail that it was his twelve disciples who were sent out. Not some other group at some other time from some other place. These twelve men who had families, and jobs, and ideologies. These twelve men who had spent time tracing a trail of dust with the one who held the universe together. These twelve men who had tasted the compassion and holiness of the Son of Man.

As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.
(Matthew 10:7-8)

Let us be diligent in asking the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. But let's not be surprised when he sets us to that very task. "Here am I. Send me!"

- Perry Brown

Dear God:



Day 14

Thursday, March 16th, 2017

Matthew 10:16-42

It's not uncommon for church leaders to have regular conversations about ways they can make their church more appealing to outsiders. With few exceptions, churches in the United States are growing smaller and the institutions many of us used to know are but a fraction of their former selves. Generally speaking, it scares us. And so we dream about ways we can make the unbeliever attend our services, miraculously giving their life to Christ, and helping give a shot in the arm of our, otherwise, flailing churches. We search for the right marketing images and strategies and even buy the t-shirts.

While there may not be anything inherently wrong with marketing the church and buying t-shirts, when it comes to passages like this, it sure gets difficult to assume there is some quick fix or easy selling pitch to get people to come to church. The reality is, the sales pitch of Jesus doesn't often make us feel all warm inside. Sometimes, like in this passage, we are forced to admit, it's not as easy nor simple as we sometimes make it sound. With passages like this, it's no wonder that Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said in *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him, come and die."

This is one of those passages that makes us really struggle to determine the depth of our own faith. These phrases deserve much reflection. "All men will hate you because of me." "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." "Anyone who loves his father and mother more than me is not worthy of me." With this in mind, it's a good day to consider your own faith commitment. How much have you wrestled with these statements lately?

- Adam Metz

Dear God:



Day 15

Friday, March 17th, 2017

Matthew 11:20-30

As a young boy growing up, sports were a huge part of my life, as they were for my dad. I played all the same sports he did, even the same positions in those sports. Many adults that knew my dad when he was younger would make comments to me like "you look just like your dad" when you throw the ball, shoot the ball, or run the bases. I was proud to hear those compliments, just as I was so proud to be my father's son.

In Matthew 11:25-30, Jesus explains that if you know Jesus the Son, you know God the Father. They both are completely in sync and perfectly reflective of each other. As Christians, we can be forever thankful for Jesus our Lord and Savior, and have complete trust that we now know God the Father, because of our faith and relationship in Jesus the Son.

- Kent Berry

Dear God:



Day 16

Saturday, March 18th, 2017

Matthew 12:1-21

There is nothing quite like a 30-minute power nap. It has been a long day. You come home, sit in your favorite location. Noting that you are the only one home, you close your eyes and you sleep. You wake 30-35 minutes later, perhaps with a bit of disappointment that it wasn't longer, but you let out an exclaim of relief. Now didn't that feel good? We realize more than ever after a power nap that we need rest.

The contentious conversation regarding the Sabbath is no small matter. Yet, as followers of Jesus, there are rarely conversations about the Sabbath in our Christian churches. There may be a cursory recitation of the Ten Commandments that includes a command to observe the Sabbath or we may find ourselves trying to breakdown Jesus' retort to those who accused him of disobeying the Sabbath command. Those are both well intentioned endeavors, but when I the last time you experienced Sabbath?

Our bodies were not created to operate like the Energizer Bunny. Sabbath was part of the creative mastery of God. He rested on the 7th day. If God rested, what makes us think we don't need rest? In the shadows of this confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees is an invitation for us to not get caught up in the legalities of a Sabbath, but to experience Sabbath and the joy of rest. The invitation is subtle in this text, and more explicit in the text that precedes it. Recall, Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). Contemplate why Sabbath is or is not a part your life.

- Dion Frasier

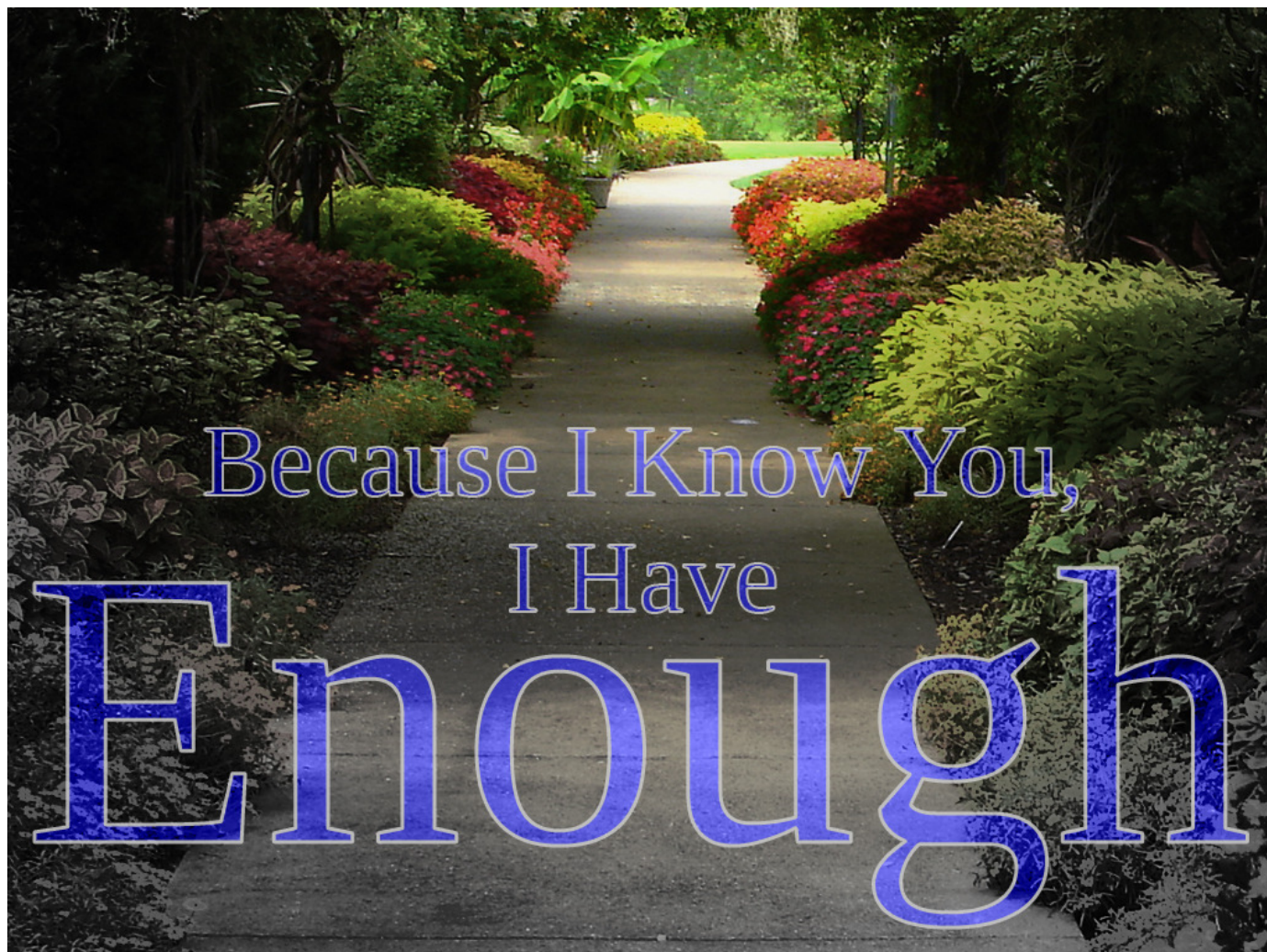
Dear God:



Third Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 19th, 2017

Matthew 11:25-30



Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.



Day 17

Monday, March 20th, 2017

Matthew 12:22-32

On this 17th day of our Lenten Fast, we encounter one of the many instances where Jesus was challenged by those who opposed him. It may be that as you spend time in reflection that your mind journeys to a place where you reflect on the people in your life who gives you trouble, heartache or that flat out annoy you. I can see how this particular attack on Jesus aggravated him. Many times, Jesus responded with witty retorts that left his accusers baffled and speechless. I see no difference here.

Out of this episode in the life of Jesus we encounter one of the most difficult passages in our Bibles. There are warnings against blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This passage has yielded the phrase, "The unforgivable sin." Is that the teaching of this passage? Doesn't that place limits on God's power to forgive all sins? Or, is this strong reaction by Jesus his way of saying that the staunch practice of calling good evil and evil good ultimately ends up nowhere.

In this Lenten journey, a full understanding of what Jesus meant here is not necessary, but it might be a place to consider the futility of equating that which is holy with that which is evil. Or it may be a place to take inventory of the evil that persists in our lives. What demons do you need Jesus to cast out of your life? Pray to God in the name of Jesus to purge you of the evil that refuses to vacate your life.

- Dion Frasier

Dear God:



Day 18

Tuesday, March 21st, 2017

Matthew 12:33-50

My niece and nephew are rowdy. Though, could anything else be expected of a five-year-old girl and a three-year-old boy? When they visited us recently with their mother, my expectation was that the kids would spend approximately as much time rough-housing as they would on timeout (for rough-housing, of course). However, my wife and I were shocked at how well-behaved they were. Their mother explained she and her husband had recently enrolled in a parenting class, where they learned effective strategies for training and disciplining their children.

She also told us of another couple in that class with some notoriously rowdy kids. It only took one week for that couple to discover that the class... well, it wasn't for them. "Whatever happened to just telling your kids what to do because you're the parent!" they asked. "What happened to demanding respect?" Well, judging by their kids, by the "fruit of their labor," I can only wonder; how well is that strategy working?

Perhaps Jesus' clearest and simplest teaching is one of the most difficult to put into practice. We find a sense of security in the words, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," but we're scared death of potentially facing the reality that "it" might be "broke." Today, pray for a renewed perspective. Ask God to open your eyes to the things He sees in you that may need to change.

*Give me eyes to see more of who You are.
May what I behold still my anxious heart.
Take what I have known and break it all apart,
For You, my God, are greater still.*

– Hillsong Live, *The Greatness of Our God*, 2010

- Jake Keefer

Dear God:



Day 19

Wednesday, March 22nd, 2017

Matthew 13:1-23

Parables are less like fables, and more like (early) M. Night Shyamalan-style twist-ending short films. They are less earthly stories with a heavenly moral, and more disruptive stories that call what we thought we knew into question. They start off simply enough, seemingly set in the world we know, dealing with comfortably familiar things: farmers and seeds, baking ingredients, real estate, fishing, etc. But then, if you're paying attention, you begin to suspect that there's something else going on in these stories. If you have ears to hear—if you have eyes to see, you start to notice that something is definitely up. Wait...That sower is just slinging seed everywhere! What kind of sloppy, irresponsible farming is that? Who in the world tries to plant seeds on a highway?

So what do we do with Jesus's curiously mind-bending stories? What do we do with these strange, twisty, little narratives that Jesus keeps offering instead of straightforward answers and bullet-points. To be blunt, we let them bend our minds. We let them call our assumptions into question. We let them break apart the certainties that we wear like armor to protect ourselves from having to re-think...from having question ourselves...from having to trust...from having to have faith. They expose the idols we have made out of our own ideas...the illusion of certainty that we so often worship instead of the living God, who is most clearly seen in Jesus. They free us from our smugness. They cultivate in us the kind of humility that is absolutely necessary for faith, discipleship, spiritual growth, awe, and worship. Well, at least they can do all of that, IF we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

- Adam Ellis

Dear God:



Day 20

Thursday, March 23rd, 2017

Matthew 13:24-58

If Jesus' followers never understood the Kingdom of God, it wasn't for a lack of trying on Jesus' part. Jesus provided great pictures of this kingdom, yet we still have difficulty making sense of it today. Perhaps we've tried so hard to make it look like our world today, that we've forgotten the most basic attribute of the Kingdom of God... the very presence of God. He always has been and continues to be present even in the mess of our lives.

Whenever God is present, we have an opportunity to experience him in a new way. Whenever we experience him, we are changed. Whenever we are changed, we become agents of change in our world. We are called to bring the Kingdom of God to the world around us, but it all must start with a recognition of God's presence in each moment of each day.

Do we recognize him and what he's doing, or have we become so used to and cemented in our perspective of God that his true message is no longer accepted here in his hometown?

May you learn to recognize and experience God in new ways during this Lenten season. When this occurs, we see that God's presence alone is more than enough.

- Justin Kuhn

Dear God:



Day 21

Friday, March 24th, 2017

Matthew 14:13-21; 15:32-39

Sometimes I think that in our time of such plentiful food, we miss the great power of the feeding miracles. Did you ever wonder how he did it – I mean, how these miracles actually unfolded before the eyes of the disciples and the crowds? When he gave thanks for the loaves and fish, they didn't suddenly multiply into great piles of food that stretched dozens of feet into the air. The miracle wasn't an instantaneous one that was immediately evident to everyone there.

No, it happened incrementally. When Jesus broke the loaves and fishes up and gave them to his disciples, each one had an amount he could carry in his hands – probably just the equivalent of a loaf or two and a fish or two. Then, as each disciple gave some to a group of people, the amount left as each person took a portion was increased in a way that seems to have been unnoticed by the people as it happened. In the end, this incremental increase provided all that the people needed – with more to spare than the amount Jesus had when he prayed!

That seems to be how God provides for us. I don't recall having my resources, talents, energy, etc., increased a thousand, a hundred, or even ten-fold when I had a need. But I do know that God has provided for me and my family as we had need – and usually with some to spare.

I wonder how long it took the disciples to notice that a miracle was taking place in front of them. I wonder how many people were fed before they realized that God was providing for them. I wonder how many satisfied stomachs it took for their faith to overcome their doubt.

During this Lenten season, I pray that you will look at the increase God has given to you and your family over the years, providing what you needed and more. May your journey fill you with faith and open your eyes to the power that He is using around you.

- David Pace

Dear God:



Day 22

Saturday, March 25th, 2017

Matthew 14:22-36

In our culture, we have thrown the phrase “walk on water” around so much, I think we sometimes forget how absolutely awesome this miracle is. Most of us have spent a good deal of time in and around water, so I want you to think about what it would be like to actually tread on a lake – picture it in your mind and try to imagine how it would feel to place your foot on the surface and be able to stand on the waves.

For a fisherman like Peter, this miracle had to impact him pretty hard – he had spent much of his life on this lake. And now he sees his friend and teacher walking on top of it! The fear that the disciples felt when they saw Jesus is certainly understandable – nothing like this had ever been heard of before!

Given the uniqueness of this miracle and Peter’s familiarity with the lake, his desire to come out of the boat is quite remarkable. It’s easy to criticize him when his fear began to overcome his faith causing him to begin to sink. But I want you to notice two things about Peter here: first, the text says that he began to sink, not that he actually dropped below the surface. So, somehow the faith he did have was able to keep his body from dropping into water completely (like it would if I jumped out of a boat). Second, as far as I know, only two people have walked on water – and Peter is one of them!

So, get out of the boat. Jump out and keep your eyes locked on Jesus – not on the wind and the waves around you. Shed your ideas of how things should work (like water & gravity or tradition or comfort or common sense), realize the power that God wants to unleash in your life, and get out of the boat.

- David Pace

Dear God:



Fourth Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 26th, 2017

Matthew 18:21-35



Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story — those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.

Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.



Day 23

Monday, March 27th, 2017

Matthew 15:1-31

As a kid growing up, I would cry when my hands were dirty. There was something strange about how things felt when my hands were dirty. I could never eat anything with dirty hands. Even as an adult, I wear gloves when I'm performing any task that would soil my hands. It still feels weird.

Washing my hands are of little significance when it comes to my relationship with my heavenly Father. Would I place more importance on my hands or on how I walk with Him? Do I understand not only how dirty my hands are but how dirty are the many things I try to do life? There is no way that I can wash enough to be clean before the Holy One. Thank you Lord Jesus.

My prayer is that we realize that we can't cleanse ourselves. We can't scrub the stains of our lives away. We need the grace and mercy of our Father. He sees the dirty hands, feet, noses, the bad attitudes, the selfish thoughts (and actions) and he still wants to embrace us (dirt and all). His cleansing agent is love!

So, I still like that clean feeling but more so now that I'm clean in Jesus.

- Clarence Campbell

Dear God:



Day 24

Tuesday, March 28th, 2017

Matthew 16:1-12

The opening of Matthew 16 smacks us in the face with irony if we allow it. The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus asking him to show them a sign from heaven. We can easily get lost in Jesus' suave reply and miss the bitter irony of the opening of this chapter. It is in the verses just preceding chapter 16 where Jesus feeds four thousand. Hello!? There's your sign! Now, perhaps the Pharisees and Sadducees happened to not be at that event, but surely it was all the talk of the countryside. Surely, they had heard what had happened.

It seems to me that Matthew is using a quite effective device in crafting these stories together. How I have prayed for God to give me a sign - if he would only make this pencil fall off my desk right now as I type. Then I would know that there is a God and he would finally and completely put my doubts at rest. Jesus reminds us in another place that those who do not believe will be "ever seeing, but never perceiving." Take a moment today and look for the signs that are all around. Stop talking so much and listen to the voice of God.

Right after his exchange with the Pharisees and Sadducees, it is the disciples who are misguided, still not "getting" the bigger picture. They slow down and think. They consider and... "Oh..." then they get it. It is difficult to imagine what Jesus' life would have looked like in our day and age, but certainly one of his chief goals would have been to get us all to slow down and to be still and know that the Lord is God.

- Adam Metz

Dear God:



Day 25

Wednesday, March 29th, 2017

Matthew 16:13-28

I used to think that the church was like a fortress, steadfastly withstanding the continual onslaught of the forces of evil throughout the ages as the remnant waited until Jesus returns in power to bring justice for the servants of darkness and reward for the servants of light. In my mind, I saw the church as primarily a defensive structure aimed at maintaining the number of the faithful few as we try to endure a great siege. From this passage, I viewed the church the church as the walled city that would survive the ravages of Satan – scarred, charred, maybe a bit battered – but still standing until the end of time.

I don't think I could have been more wrong.

The image Jesus uses here is not of the forces of evil attacking the gates of the fortress church – it's the exact opposite point of view! Jesus took his disciples to one of the most evil places in Palestine, a place where the most heinous aspects of idolatry had been practiced for hundreds of years. And he told his disciples that this place of evil would not stand against the attack of His church! The rock upon which the church is built will be hurled at the gates of Hades – and those gates will fall!

Church, it is time that we stop huddling in our fortress, acting as if we are a besieged people trying to last until the King arrives with his army. We ARE his army – and it is our calling to attack the strongholds of Satan in our time.

- *David Pace*

Dear God:



Day 26

Thursday, March 30th, 2017

Matthew 17:1-28

Sometimes, I really identify with Peter. I wish I could say it was during the “Upon this rock I will build my church” times, but mostly I identify with Peter when he does the kind of thing he does at the transfiguration. While I’m unclear how the disciples recognized who Moses and Elijah were, (Maybe name tags?) , they were clearly aware of the identities of these two heroes of their faith. The moment was undeniably holy; Jesus standing with Moses and Elijah. So what does Peter do? He interrupts. “It’s great to be here, Lord! Do you want me to build a tabernacle for each of you real quick?” As soon as Peter gets the words out of his mouth, a cloud forms around them, and they hear the voice of God: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

That’s us, isn’t it? For all our talk of grace, we still get so worked up that we miss the holy, even when it’s right in front of us. We have to say something. We’re still trying to give the right answers we know we don’t have. We’re still trying to earn what can only be freely given. We’re still posturing, frantically trying to show that we deserve to be loved by a God who loved us unconditionally in the first place.

Stop. Stop the posturing. Stop the frantic self-justifying. Stop...and listen to Him.

- Adam Ellis

Dear God:



Day 27

Friday, March 31st, 2017

Matthew 18:1-35

Unless You Change...

I love a new school year and seeing old friends and new faces. It's one of the joys of being a teacher. While on my first recess duty of the year with the Kindergarteners, one cute blond walked up beside me, told me his name, and then sincerely said, "I love you." I looked down into his sweet eyes and replied with the only adequate reply I could think of and told him that I loved him, too. He skipped away and left me standing there recalling the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:3, "Unless you change and become like little children..."

Someone asked recently where I see God and I thought of that child. I see God in the way children love. I see him in a love that isn't going to be jerked away if I fail. I see him in a bond that isn't going to be broken just because I might be. I see him in a relationship that isn't based on rules but an affection that was established long before I ever took my first breath. I see Him when I see them.

God looks at his broken people and calls us his holy, chosen, and dearly loved. We can take comfort knowing that we have been forgiven and redeemed. Let's make sure we use what God has given us to bless those around us and may we never forget that He is and always will be enough.

- Paula Harrington

Dear God:



Day 28

Saturday, April 1st, 2017

Matthew 19:1-15

There's an old adage that states "Hard cases make bad laws." The phrase means that an extreme case is a poor basis for a general law.

I almost feel like Jesus could have echoed this sentiment when it came to divorce. The Pharisees were wanting carte blanche to divorce their wives and pursue any sexual interests that caught their fancy, all with divine approval. Moses had required them to give certificates of divorce to their wives so that they couldn't reclaim her after having run off and satisfied their most recent whims – a particularly detestable practice they had adopted to skirt the charge of adultery. But Jesus points them back to God's original design and intent: that they would become one flesh, never to be divided. And he doesn't pull any punches that it would be easy to accept – which is certainly the case today.

This passage is ultimately redeemed by the story of Jesus welcoming little children. The contrast is striking. The Pharisees were looking for any cockamamie loophole to reject the wives they no longer desired, while Jesus was rebuking his disciples for preventing children from coming to him, and even holding them up as exemplary citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

How much better to be the accepted and radiant bride of Christ than the rejected bride of a discontent Pharisee.

- Perry Brown

Dear God:



Fifth Sunday in Lent

Sunday, April 2nd, 2017

Matthew 19:16-30



Psalm 51:1-12

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.



Day 29

Monday, April 3rd, 2017

Matthew 19:16-30

How do I get to heaven? What do I need to sell or give up? You want me to do what? This passage about the “rich, young, ruler” has us pondering these questions. But digging deep into what is asked and said, Jesus provides a dynamic response that should cause us to examine and reflect upon our lives and the motives for the things we do.

The initial question, ‘Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”’ appears to focus what things(s) we do for salvation. But Jesus’ response focuses on the “good” (good teacher) – and relates that only God is good – and therefore a response from Jesus is to hear the Word of God. But it also says that only God is good, we’re not, and the focus on gaining salvation only comes from WHO is good – God. The challenge for the young man is to examine his faith.

They examine the “law” – the young man from the thought of keeping commands from the common external fashion, but Jesus was bringing the challenge of the internal, the heart. This young man was challenged by his possessions – so get rid of them, sell them off, give to the poor. Jesus was giving him the example of where your heart is, there is your treasure. What “god” was possessing his heart. Our challenge in our walk is to “give up, rid” the things that control our lives, and go on the walk of faith with Christ as being our greatest possession, and in return, He will grant us eternal life.

- *Bill Schindel*

Dear God:



Day 30

Tuesday, April 4th, 2017

Matthew 20:1-34

It's a well-known fact that kids are often obsessed with the idea of fairness. Whether it's sharing a chocolate chip cookie, riding in the front seat, or doing chores... fairness is center stage. Fairness from the perspective of a child though is far from objective; rather, it's about perceived equality: "She got the bigger half, he always rides upfront," etc.

Unfortunately, this tendency diminishes only slightly as we mature into adulthood. Whether it's the small stuff (an incorrect to-go order) or larger concerns (the less qualified person gets the promotion), we are continually confronted with our own idea of equality.

This isn't the way of God. His economy doesn't fit our own.

God never promises equality. He does often seem to promote equity however, and he does promise that He will always be near and provide enough. Do we trust in him and are we satisfied with what he deems "enough," even if the world says we deserve more?

May you continue through this Lenten season finding fulfillment in God's kingdom, never being found empty, and sincerely desiring the best for others in your life.

- Justin Kuhn

Dear God:



Day 31

Wednesday, April 5th, 2017

Matthew 21:1-27

“Hosanna!” It means, “Save us, we pray!” It’s a cry for divine mercy. It’s what the people cried out to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. They scattered tree branches and their own cloaks across the path as a sign of loyalty, echoing the story of a famous king in the Old Testament, who was anointed king. Later, these same people who declared their loyalty and cried out for divine mercy would shout, “Crucify him!” If we who would follow Jesus today do not read this as a cautionary tale, may God forgive us for our arrogance and our gullibility.

For the times we haven’t let the church truly reflect Christ to the world because we were afraid or uncomfortable: Hosanna! Save us! For the times we’ve ignored Christ by ignoring the downtrodden, the outcasts, the poor, the widows, and the orphans: Hosanna! Save us! For the times we’ve let ourselves be so swayed by the voices of those who desire power over the kingdoms of this world, that we were unable to tell the difference between politically partisan agendas and the agenda of the Kingdom of God: Hosanna! Save us! For the times we have hardened our hearts by leaning on our own understanding rather than cultivating humility and letting ourselves be shaped into the image of Christ: Hosanna! Save us! For the times we’ve wanted grace and forgiveness for ourselves, while keeping score and withholding grace and forgiveness from others: Hosanna! Save us! For the times when we have tried to justify ourselves instead of living out the reality of the grace we proclaim: Hosanna! Save us! Amen.

- Adam Ellis

Dear God:



Day 32

Thursday, April 6th, 2017

Matthew 21:28-22:22

One day at work, my father stepped into the elevator and found himself standing next to Gabe Ikard, a former Oklahoma University football player and current offensive tackle for the Cleveland Browns. He described the encounter to me in a text, sharing a joke he told that got a laugh out of Gabe. So, I did what any millennial worth their weight in lattes would do. I took to Twitter and tagged Gabe in a tweet about the story. He responded with an appreciative recollection of the event and an invitation to my father to join him for lunch the next time he was in town.

America in 2017 is all about making an impression. Record a video on your phone at the right time. Get thousands of views, retweets, and "likes." Or, for my dad, tell a good joke to a celebrity. Basically, say the right things at the right time to have a shot at extraordinary opportunities.

In two different parables of Matthew 21, Jesus values the merit of faith, humility, and brokenness above pedigree and lip service. The dregs of society, he says, will inherit the kingdom of God ahead of the "chosen race" who rides the exaggeratedly righteous coattails of their forefathers. And the only way to be counted among those who receive the Kingdom is to be broken by this truth:

"The kingdom of God will be... given to a people who will produce its fruit."

Give me faith to trust what You say,
That you're good and Your love is great.
I'm broken inside, I give you my life.

Elevation Worship, *Give Me Faith*, 2011
- Jake Keefer

Dear God:



Day 33

Friday, April 7th, 2017

Matthew 22:23-46

As much as I appreciate sarcasm today, there was a time that I operated with a much more literal mindset. My mom tells a story about a time that I, as a child, was incessantly asking the same question over and over, and finally she simply said, "Drop it!" So from my perspective, the logical thing to do was to of course drop the toy that I had in my hand and continue asking my question.

I had missed the point. This example represents a harmless consequence to missing the point, but throughout my life I've missed the point to the much more significant gestures and conversations.

This passage represents three examples in a row in which the religious leaders in Jesus' day missed the point. Jesus spent so much time teaching about the Kingdom of God which he represented, you would think people would have caught on by this point. Rather than getting so hung up on insignificant questions, they only needed to recognize the answer was standing in front of them. We often wonder how they could have missed the point so badly that they didn't even recognize the greatest commands.

But doesn't this sound much like us today? Where is our focus? Have we truly proclaimed that Jesus is enough for us, or do we still seek all of the answers to insignificant questions? Scripture may not answer all of life's questions, but it gives enough: We are loved, and we are to love.

May you learn to live without all the answers... in faith... And don't miss the point...

May you walk as if you are loved and are called to love.

- Justin Kuhn

Dear God:



Day 34

Saturday, April 8th, 2017

Matthew 23:1- 39

I love Paul. The apostle. Called himself the worst of sinners. Knew everything. The WHOLE law. He murdered Jews who followed Jesus. Worst of sinners. PSHAW! Paul never met me.

I knew everything. I (with a capital "I") taught my first Bible class for teen girls at a summer camp when I was 17. That same summer, I taught a girls' class for Yosemite Family Encampment. West Coaster's will know what a HUGE deal YFE was! I was a missionary in a war zone by the time I was 21. I earned two Master's degrees from a foremost Christian seminary, both times achieving the place of Honor Graduate with the highest grade point. Through it all I raised two brilliant boys, had a fantastic marriage, and spoke at retreats and conferences. I had it all. I was It All.

Woe to me.

I let others call me Teacher. Leader. I called myself Teacher. Leader. I paraded behind those names. I believed them. I believed in my life. I did not set out to live this way — more for me and less for the One who was in Me. I never meant to love the place of honor at banquets.

And the greatest in my life was humbled — capital M Me.

One is my Teacher. One is my Father. Oh, the sweetness of broken surrender.

- *Christine Parker*

Dear God:



Liturgy of the Palms

Sunday, April 9th, 2017

Matthew 21:1-11



Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let Israel say: "His love endures forever."

Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad. Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.



Day 35

Monday, April 10th, 2017

Matthew 24:1-51

The 24th chapter of Matthew has long been a source of debate and theories on when God will bring this creation to an end. In my opinion, options range from what seems very reasonable to extremely absurd. It's unlikely that your opinion would be the same as mine if we were to discuss the options.

The two things that stand out, though, are the two direct statements, "Watch out that no one deceives you." (vs 4) and "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." (vs 42). This aligns perfectly with our Lenten theme of 'Enough.'

Our king has admonished us to not be deceived. So, I will look to what he has revealed in the bible, to where he continues to lead by the Spirit, and to whom he places in my life in the church. And I will have faith that together they will be enough to keep me from being deceived.

Our king has admonished us to keep watch. So, I will schedule my life around events that point to his return: I will observe the festivals, celebrations and seasons of the church calendar every year; I will take inventory of my attitudes and actions every month; I will commune and worship with my church family every week; and I will pray every day. And I will have faith that together they will be enough to keep me watching for my king's triumphant return.

- Perry Brown

Dear God:



Day 36

Tuesday, April 11th, 2017

Matthew 25:1-30

I have always loved the underdog. When the Cubs stood on the cusp of their first World Series in (how long?), I suddenly cared about baseball. When I read scripture, I often feel like the underdog gets a bad rap.

Those ten unprepared virgins. Silly little girls. Could not even have oil in their lamps when they KNEW there was going to be a wedding. What about that time I knew I was having houseguests and somehow did not have enough pillows. Seriously? Who does not have guest pillows? And the poor guy who buried his talent. Oh man does he get reamed when the boss got back! But what about my fears? My insecurities? My what ifs?

What if I try and look silly? What if I am ready to reap the harvest, but no one will go with me? What if others disagree with how God called me? What if I get the wrong oil for the lamps? Maybe safer to just be quiet. Maybe better to wait and see what others have in their lamps. Don't want to stand out.

Oh, if it were only about guest pillows. Wal-Mart is only four minutes away.

But it's not. It's about being poured out for others. Broken open so we can share our oil, water, food, clothes, pillows. Surrendered in Christ enough to see past our own brokenness to the brokenness of others so we will even know they need the oil, water, food, clothes, and guest pillows.

Surrender. It is the answer to our brokenness. Surrender is the way God uses us to answer the brokenness of others.

- *Christine Parker*

Dear God:



Day 37

Wednesday, April 12th, 2017

Matthew 25:31-46

According to this passage, in the kingdom of God the standard of judgment is pretty straightforward: It is our treatment of the least of these. It is *not* personal piety, doctrinal orthodoxy, or effective evangelism. It is service. You either do things for the least of these, or you don't.

But this passage also points out that this sort of action begins with who we see when we look at each other. Chances are, we are not looking for Jesus in the least of these; we are not looking for Jesus in the people we would rather not see at all. But our Savior hides himself in those who suffer. The Bread of Life lives in the hungry. The Living Water dwells in the thirsty. Christ the King lives in the prisoner. He is a king who celebrates not the victorious but the least of these. He is a king who identifies with his people in all of the mess, pain, and confusion that life brings. He is a king who walks with the homeless and understands poverty.

Who are these people for you? They are out there; people who actually are without food or drink, clothes or shelter, people in both literal prisons and prisons of their own making, people who suffer the indignity of racism, poverty, inadequate health care, and exclusion. Who are these people for you? And what do you have to give? Who are the people you would rather not see at all? What does your feeding, welcoming, and caring for these people look like? Evidently, quite a lot hinges on how you answer those questions.

- Naomi Walters

Dear God:



Day 38

Thursday, April 13th, 2017

Matthew 26:1-56

I can't imagine what was on Jesus' mind as he sat with his disciples for the last time to eat a meal. Was he anxious, knowing that there were a group of people plotting to kill him? Was his mind flooded with the emotion of the gift of a woman anointing him? Was his heart aching, knowing that one of his trusted companions betrayed him? Was he anticipating going to a garden to plead with his father for an alternative plan? Or was he gripped with fear of his impending arrest? I can't imagine?

Jesus could have excused himself from the table to take care of some other things. But he didn't. He stayed and he had supper. It was his last supper. Taking bread and taking a cup, he invited his disciples to eat and drink. It would be their last supper with Jesus. Included with the feelings of anxiety of his eventual trial, conviction and execution is this glimmer of hope - "I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (26:29) No matter how preoccupied Jesus was, he still had enough room in his heart and mind to think of the future. That future includes the person writing these words and the person reading them.

It's getting tense. It's starting to get dark. In this Lenten journey, you are anticipating what's to come next. Before you proceed to read the rest of the story, join Jesus at his table, and enjoy the best with him. You have been invited. Tell God how it feels to be at his table.

- *Dion Frasier*

Dear God:



Day 39

Friday, April 14th, 2017

Matthew 26:57-27:56

It's Friday. Jesus is arrested in the garden where He was praying. But Sunday's coming. It's Friday. The disciples are hiding and Peter's denying that he knows the Lord. But Sunday's coming. It's Friday. Jesus is standing before the high priest of Israel, silent as a lamb before the slaughter. But Sunday's coming. It's Friday. Jesus is beaten, mocked, and spit upon. But Sunday's coming. It's Friday. Those Roman soldiers are flogging our Lord with a leather scourge that has bits of bones and glass and metal, tearing at his flesh. But Sunday's coming.

It's Friday. The Son of man stands firm as they press the crown of thorns down into his brow. But Sunday's coming. It's Friday. See Him walking to Calvary, the blood dripping from His body. See the cross crashing down on His back as He stumbles beneath the load. It's Friday; but Sunday's a coming. It's Friday. See those Roman soldiers driving the nails into the feet and hands of my Lord. Hear my Jesus cry, "Father, forgive them." It's Friday; but Sunday's coming. It's Friday. Jesus is hanging on the cross, bloody and dying. But Sunday's coming. It's Friday. The sky grows dark, the earth begins to tremble, and He who knew no sin became sin for us. Holy God who will not abide with sin pours out His wrath on that perfect sacrificial lamb who cries out, "My God, My God. Why hast thou forsaken me?" What a horrible cry. But Sunday's coming.

It's Friday. And at the moment of Jesus' death, the veil of the Temple that separates sinful man from Holy God was torn from the top to the bottom because Sunday's coming. It's Friday. Jesus is hanging on the cross, heaven is weeping and hell is partying. But that's because it's Friday, and they don't know it, but Sunday's a coming.

- Originally preached by S.M. Lockridge

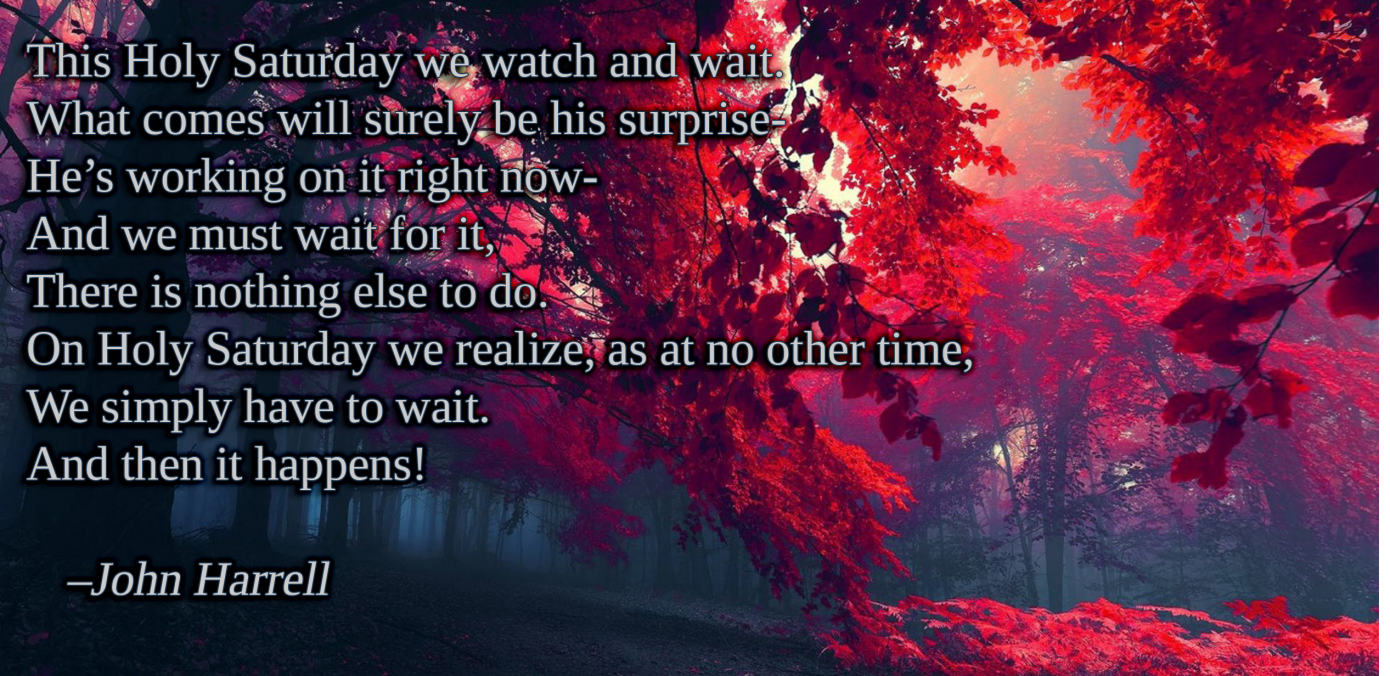
Dear God:



Day 40

Saturday, April 15th, 2017

Matthew 27:57-66

A photograph of a forest with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of red, orange, and yellow. The trees are dense, and the ground is covered in fallen leaves. The lighting is soft, creating a serene atmosphere.

This Holy Saturday we watch and wait.
What comes will surely be his surprise-
He's working on it right now-
And we must wait for it,
There is nothing else to do.
On Holy Saturday we realize, as at no other time,
We simply have to wait.
And then it happens!

-John Harrell

Dear God:



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