

Devotions for April 18-24, 2011

Monday, April 18, 2011: Holy Week Monday Daily reading: Psalm 31:9-16 Psalm 31 is a lament sandwiched between prayers of praise for God's deliverance. Our text focuses on the lament. The psalmist begs for God's mercy and deliverance in the midst of great agony. He feels not only abandoned, but conspired against, in his moment of greatest need. God is his only hope, clearly expressed in 14-16. The connection between this psalm and this weekend's worship is the passion of Jesus. While the Gospel writers depict Jesus quoting verse 5 from the cross, some scholars suggest that Jesus prays this entire psalm. If that's the case, then Jesus expresses both the agony of human suffering and the hopeful longing of the faithful human spirit. We are all challenged to cling to hope in the depths of despair, believing that neither death nor life will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. What hope are you clinging to today? Pour out your lament to God, and trust that God will give you hope.

Tuesday, April 19, 2011: Holy Week Tuesday Daily reading: Matthew 26:14-19 This reading spans the Passion from Judas' betrayal through Jesus' burial. While each Gospel includes similar core elements, each also has a unique emphasis. Matthew stresses Jesus' innocence and the culpability of religious leaders, which is not surprising since Matthew's core audience is Jewish. Matthew also focuses on Jesus' Kingship throughout this ordeal. There are clear elements of a coronation service throughout this text (crown of thorns, purple robe, etc.). King Jesus is enthroned on a cross. This passage is the beginning of the end. Already Judas is preparing to betray Jesus. Jesus says his time has come, and the end is beginning. Knowing how this story ends, what do these words say to you today? Ask God to guide you deeply into the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Wednesday, April 20, 2011: Holy Week Wednesday Daily reading: John 13:21-32 Judas goes to the high priests and asked what they will give him to betray Jesus. The price is 30 pieces of silver, the cost of a common slave in that day (about \$25). This event may have happened on Wednesday afternoon of this week. It was typical to purchase the lamb for Passover on Wednesday afternoon to ready it for the Thursday evening Passover meal. The parallels between the Lamb of God and the Passover lamb are stirring. Judas was probably hoping that Jesus would go to temple on Wednesday, and that would be the perfect time for betrayal. But Jesus surprised him and rested in Bethany on Wednesday, waiting until Thursday to go back to Jerusalem for Passover. As you live out this week, feel the rhythms of your life as they connect with the rhythms of Jesus' last days. Ask God to connect you deeply to this Passion story.

Thursday, April 21, 2011: Holy Week Thursday Daily reading: John 3:1-17, 31b-35 John's Gospel is the only one that mentions the washing of the disciples' feet; Jesus performing the duty of a servant. As this action is connected to his command to love one another, the real nature of loving and serving is revealed. This is the beginning of what we call the "three days." We are called to follow Christ's example as we humbly kneel and serve another, especially those who are poor and disenfranchised. This is a calling to love God and one another. We will find great dignity in deep service, great power in humility. We will find greater love for God in our greater love for one another. This runs counter to the norm that society teaches. Jesus' actions during these three days runs counter to everything we might expect of the Messiah. Are you willing to experience deep humility and service? Pray for God's Spirit to allow you to live counter-intuitively.

Friday, April 22, 2011: Holy Week Friday Daily reading: John 18:1 – 19:42 Good Friday, what a paradox! "Of course, the church has always understood that the day

commemorated on Good Friday was anything but happy. Sadness, mourning, fasting, and prayer have been its focus since the early centuries of the church.” (From christianitytoday.com.) You can read more about Good Friday at this website. Today we proclaim Jesus as the triumphant King of a new Kingdom, enthroned on a cross. We don’t only mourn on this day, we celebrate Christ’s passion. “It is finished.” Christ’s mission is complete, and all that is necessary for our salvation is accomplished. Don’t just mourn today; celebrate as well. Pray throughout this day that the Holy Spirit would draw you into deeper understanding of Christ’s suffering and death.

Saturday, April 23, 2011: Holy Week Saturday Daily reading: John 20:1-18 The night before Easter sunrise; this is the time when the world moves from dark to light, bondage to freedom, death to life. The light of Christ (Paschal candle) enters the darkened worship space, and from this small flame bursts the glorious light of resurrection morning. Water is a sign of passage; from captivity to freedom, and death in sin to eternal life. We embrace the confusion of those first followers who see the empty tomb and wonder what happened. We empathize with the mind-blowing reality that what Jesus said might be possible. Jesus Christ is no longer dead. Really? How can this be? What proof might there be? Where can we find him? This is an evening of deep and profound questions. Ask God to open your heart to the mystery of this incredible event that we call resurrection.

Sunday, April 24, 2011: Easter Sunday Daily reading: Matthew 28:1-10 This is the day of days: Easter! There is no other day more incredible than this. In our culture, Christmas seems to have taken hold as the day of days, but as followers of Jesus we hold to Easter as the pinnacle of Christ’s story. Victory over sin and death is the once-and-for-all-time accomplishment of Jesus Christ. This day shattered human history from living in law to life in gospel hope. The arc of humanity now has hope as its end point instead of fear. Eternal life begins now as Jesus steps out of the tomb. The movie The Passion of the Christ ends with the profound vision of Jesus walking out of the open tomb. The narrator speaks these words: “and now it begins.” For us, as well, it begins now. Not sometime in the future or at our death; now. Now is the day of resurrection. Spend today celebrating resurrection in your prayers.