



The Good Shepherd

A Lenten Devotional for 2010

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Fellow Pilgrims,

Speaking of the splendor of salvation in Christ, which comes through faith, the man of prayer, Charles Spurgeon, once wrote, “Grace is the first and last moving cause of salvation; and faith, essential as it is, is only an important part of the machinery which grace employs. We are saved “through faith,” but salvation is “by grace.” Sound forth those words as with the archangel’s trumpet: “By grace are ye saved.” What glad tidings for the undeserving!”

In what follows, I have prepared a collection of meditations, Scripture readings, thoughts, and stories to aide in your Lenten journey, as you celebrate the grace of God which has come in Jesus Christ. I have created this devotional primarily in a weekly format though key days and the Passion Week have devotions for each day. It is my strongest desire and most earnest prayer that this little book will aide you in connecting with God in increased ways during this most sacred season in the life of the Church.

In the Grip of His Grace,

Rev. Christopher D. Surber, M.Div.

Ash Wednesday (February 17)

Reflection: We live in a broken world. We hear the crashes of wars raging between nations. We see the collapse of families and marriages as they are torn asunder. The pressures and the storms of life wage war against our internal peace and well-being. *We live in a broken world.*

The season of Lent is a picture of the 40 days of temptation which Jesus underwent in the Judean Desert in preparation for His earthly ministry. These 40 days culminate with the ultimate purpose of His ministry; to be betrayed by broken humanity, as characterized by Judas, and crucified as an example of man's inability to receive perfect love. Then we celebrate His triumphant resurrection to reign as the triumphant Lord of Glory.

We live in a broken world but praise our Great God and King, light has broken into our darkness! Life has conquered death! The love of Christ has defeated evil. Through faith in Jesus Christ we, who were once shackled by sin, bound in the chains of our brokenness, have been set free. Halleluiah! The coming of Christ and the full measure of His sacrifice demonstrate to us how desperately we are in need of the very grace which has come unto us in Jesus Christ.

Indeed, we do live in a broken world but praise God, the healing power of Jesus our Redeemer is offered freely to all who will receive it. The brokenness of this world need not weigh us down or destroy our confidence. The gift of God is peace in the midst of chaos. The Lord offers truth in the midst of lies. *He offers healing in the face of brokenness.*

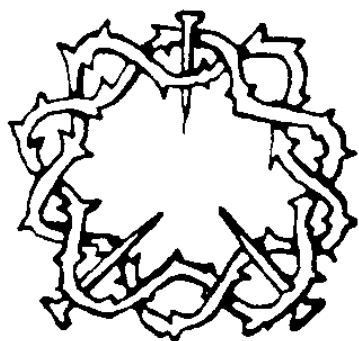


“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” (1 John 5:19-20)

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn’t be a great moral teacher. He’d be either a lunatic—on a level with a man who says he’s a poached egg—or else he’d be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.” – C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

Remainder of Ash Wed. Week (*February 18 – 20*)

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:6-11)



Reflection: Have you ever showed up to a store just a few minutes after they had closed? Perhaps you really needed to get a suit or dress dry cleaned and upon arriving at the cleaner’s realized that it was the other day of the week that they were open for an extra hour? While God does not keep “business hours,” the Bible admonishes us to “seek Him while He may be found.” The point of this biblical statement is to recognize the earnestness of seeking God! One day the hours of our life will end. Call on Him today, while He may be found, so that we may be found in Him!

Prayer: O God, our refuge and our strength: You have raised up men and women in every generation to renew and restore the Church in the light of the truth of your Holy Word. Make us steadfast in our own day, that we may be used by your sovereign hand to share in your work of the redemption of humanity. Make us servants of humanity through the love of Jesus residing in us. Make us stewards of the Word of Truth, may we abide in it. Today God, make me a servant as I seek sanctuary in you alone. Amen.

“We get no deeper into Christ than we allow him to get into us.” – John Henry Jowett (1864–1923)

Week 1 (Sunday February 21 – 27)

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." (Psalms 91:1-2)

Reflection: Jesus is the Good Shepherd who layed down His life for His sheep. It is a curious thing to be called a sheep by God, so often in the Bible. While it is comforting to know that God cares for us just as a shepherd cares for His sheep, being sheep is not a terribly flattering idea! Sheep are stubborn. They often wander off on their own. They routinely need to be saved from certain disaster if they should wander into a deep crevice or ditch, as they are not able to save themselves. When I am honest, I know intuitively that I do have very much in common with sheep.

Prayer: Divine Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to guide me according to the eternal love displayed at the Cross. Thank you for the Cross which, like a shepherd’s crook, directs me in the way that I should go; the way of charity; the way of love; the way of the Master of Mercy. Strengthen my faith that I might find shelter beneath your shadow, as I am drawn ever nearer to your side. Amen.

When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I’m lost
In wonder, love, and praise.

- Joseph Addison (1672–1719)

Reflection: There is but one Lord, one Savior, one who gave all that He had to give for you and for me; the man Jesus; the Messiah Yeshua; the Son of God; the reflection, manifestation, communication, and compassion of God Almighty veiled in human flesh; Jesus the divine Logos; God the Son!

Prayer: O God, the maker of heaven and earth, give your humble servant the boldness to confess Jesus Christ as King and Savior, and steadfastness to live for his faith; Give us grace, to share the cup of Christ and rise to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“As the print of the seal on the wax is the express image of the seal itself, so Christ is the express image—the perfect representation – of God.” – Saint Ambrose (c. 340–397)

Week 2 (Sunday February 28 – March 6)

“LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.” (Psalms 15)

Reflection: While it is very true that the grace of God is given freely to who receive it, equally true is the reality that God has called those recipients of His grace to high standards of holiness and uprightness. While the Old Testament Law was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, its ultimate provision, we have not been let “off the hook” with regard to moral responsibility. We have been called to an even higher standard; the Law of Grace! The Law of Grace asserts that the right endeavor is to keep the ultimate spirit of the Old Testament Law; *the*

love of God in holiness and reverence. The beautiful part of this is that we have likewise been granted the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us and the blood of Christ which covers us, even now, when we fail to live up to this standard.

Prayer: Gracious God and Redeemer, make me worthy of the sacrifice of Christ, according to your grace alone, through the gift of faith alone. Grant that I may see clearly the way of the Master in my life. Grant that I may hear your voice in the circumstances of my life. Give me the grace necessary to proclaim Christ love in word and deed. Amen.



“God works powerfully, but for the most part gently and gradually.”
- John Newton (1725–1807)

Reflection: The slow working of God in our lives is very much like the shaping of a gorge by a great river. It is steady, intentional, and incredibly powerful. It is interesting, though, the workings of the natural world. In accordance with the design of God, the slow work cannot always be seen for what it is; *however the results are obvious*. There are many things in our lives which may feel very much like inconveniences, troubles, or simply nuisances. These may be the very things which God is currently using to shape humility, patience, perseverance, and godly character in our lives, to His ultimate glory and our ultimate good.

Week 3 (Sunday March 7 – 13)

“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” (Luke 13:1-5)

Reflection: The biblical doctrine, or teaching, about the importance of the blood of Christ is, admittedly, a difficult concept to understand. How is it that any man’s blood can atone or account for the sin or transgressions of another? How can it be that through the death of Jesus and His resurrection that we can be forgiven and granted eternal life with God? *How these things can be?* Our hearts cry out and our minds are left to wonder. It is precisely because Jesus was not just a man from Palestine; a Jew from Nazareth. He was not simply another wise teacher or even a prophet of God. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us! Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Jesus is the compassion of God incarnate. He is the mystery of divinity mingled with human flesh. The beauty of the reality of Jesus Christ is far more than our minds can fully comprehend. The truth is that intellectual assent will not bring enlightenment to the fullness of who Jesus is. It is only in encountering Christ that one can understand. Only those who have bathed in the waters of a cool mountain stream truly know of the refreshment which it brings. The truth of Jesus blood covering our sins is a truth so sacred that it can only be fully revealed from the spirit of God unto us. Dear child of God, today do not harden your heart to the unrelenting power of His love! Ask for understanding; receive the free offer of love in Christ that you may bath in the fount of grace!

Prayer: Precious Lord, hear and now, I relinquish the claim to my own life; use me according to your own good purpose and pleasure, that in dying to myself I may no longer be a slave to foolish ambition; vain notions of self; free; alive in the freedom which Christ brings through the peace which is so far beyond my ability to comprehend it. Amen.

“A great many people are trying to make peace, but that has already been done. God has not left it for us to do; all we have to do is to enter into it.” – D. L. Moody (1837–1899)

Week 4 (Sunday March 14 – 20)

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" – and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!” (Psalms 32)



Reflection:

How blessed it is to have your sins forgiven! How

wondrous to bask in the grace of the Most High God of all creation! God is not far off as though He were consumed with things other than that which He has created. In Romans 8:16-17 the Apostle Paul tells us that we are children of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Just as a loving father is attentive to the needs of His children, so too, our Celestial Father surrounds us, indwells us, and binds us together in His love. If we will but receive the free gift of life in Jesus Christ, our hearts can cry out, “O the bounty of grace; the beauty of salvation!”

Prayer: Almighty Redeemer, Sovereign God and Gracious King, who in the entire universe is like you? None other are so full of compassion; so ready to forgive. Grant that in a world of earthly treasures, that whatever I may possess in this world, I might possess steadfastly the gift of faith necessary to receive the riches of my inheritance which you offer through your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and forever. Amen.

“All his glory and beauty come from within, and there he delights to dwell, his visits there are frequent, his conversations sweet, his comforts refreshing, and his peace passing all understanding.” - Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380–1471)

Week 5 (Sunday *March 21 – 27*)

“When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.” (Psalms 126)

Reflection: God has done great things for us. He has provided redemption and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. He has granted us the right to be called sons and daughters. Let us dream the dreams of the Most High. Let us set our minds not on the passing things of this world but upon the eternal things of the God of our salvation, provision, and hope!

Prayer: Pour your grace into our hearts, O Lord, that we who have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ, announced by an angel to the Virgin Mary, may by his cross and passion be brought to the glory of His resurrection by the power of your Holy Spirit dwelling within our hearts. Amen.

Palm Sunday (March 28)

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

Prayer: Divine Father, I bend my knee to the power of your might; to the glory of your Son. I came to you bent low, shackled by sin, sorrow, shame; you have heard my prayer and redeemed me from the pit! To you have I cried and you have heard my prayer from your Holy Mountain and healed my affliction! There is healing in your hands; mercy in your arms; be praised, Lord Most High. Amen.

“Assailed by scandal and the tongue of strife, His only answer was a blameless life.” – William Cowper (1731–1800)

Passion Week (Mon. March 29 – Wed. March 31)

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Reflection: There are some things in this life that are bittersweet. When Sebastian was very small he loved to eat raw lemons. I could never understand what it was about that lemon that tasted so good to him, but he enjoyed it wholly. There are many things in this life which are bittersweet. The sour taste of the lemon satisfied a craving in little Sebastian. Likewise, the peace with God is something so desperately sweet that inherent to the human condition is a craving, a longing deep within the soul of each person to realize it.

Though peace with God is sweet, it was won for humanity at the terribly bitter price of the death of Jesus Christ. The Cross is a sign of triumph and joy but O how that joy is mingled with sorrow! Just as men of war are often compelled to pay terribly high prices to achieve peace, much more so did the Son of God pay a high price for the peace which is now offered freely to us through faith!

Prayer: Gracious God, bring me to the Cross, where my redemption was won; where, through the warfare which was waged upon sin through the shame of its suffering; I was redeemed! Amen.

“If we are wise, we will do what Jesus said: endure the cross and despise its shame for the joy that is set before us. To do this is to submit the whole pattern of our life to be destroyed and built again in the power of an endless life. And we shall find that it is more than poetry, more than sweet hymnody and elevated feeling. The cross will cut into our lives where it hurts worst, sparing neither us nor our carefully cultivated reputation. It will defeat us and bring our selfish life to an end.” – A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

Reflection: The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the defining events of the story of humanity, they are the defining events in the life of the Church, and if we allow them to be, by faith, they will be the defining events of our very lives.

Maundy Thursday (April 1)

“I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. I believed; therefore I said, “I am greatly afflicted.” And in my dismay I said, “All men are liars.” How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from my chains. I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD.” (Psalms 116:1, 10-17)

Reflection: When we cry out for mercy, who shall hear our prayer? The Lord harkens unto the cry of His children. Dear child of God, we may not always understand our circumstances but know this; we know the one who knows the beginning from the end and He calls us precious child, my creation; beloved.

Prayer: Lord, teach my heart to gaze only to the Cross and the empty tomb. Amen.

“To forsake Christ for the world is to leave a treasure for a trifle . . . eternity for a moment, reality for a shadow.” – William Jenkyn

Good Friday (April 2)

“When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him." The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "*You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.*" From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified." (John 19:5-12; 15-18)

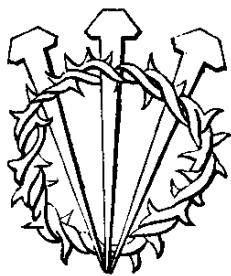
Reflection: A sign in a convenience store read, "Check Cashing Policy: to err is human; to forgive, 10 bucks!" It's a funny way to recognize the fact that we make mistakes, but it's also evidence of the way many people think about forgiveness. To forgive is to accept within you the consequences of the sins of others. It means that you choose to accept the pain, the problems, and the burden that comes when someone sins against you. In other words, forgiveness begins as a willingness to bear another's faults and then to move from that place to an offer of mercy. Forgiveness is neither an easy nor a frequent gift, but, when unwrapped, it is a gleaming beauty.

This is what God has done for us, "... For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:18-19) What did God give for your forgiveness? It wasn't money or anything of wealth or value in worldly terms. He gave His Son who was willing to accept and bear our faults at the Cross to purchase redemption for us with His own life and then, through the adoption of God, give that life to us, as sons and daughters of the Most High; joint heirs with Jesus Christ!

Prayer: Create in me a heart that longs to worship, O God. In my weakness magnify your strength. In my unbelief, manifest your glory. In my foolish pursuits, reveal the wisdom of your ways in me, precious Lord. In the folly of human wisdom, reveal to me truth. In the joys of this life, give me a heart to praise you. Amen.

"True have his promises been; not one has failed. I want none beside him. In life he is my life, and in death he shall be the death of death; in poverty, Christ is my riches; in sickness, he makes my bed; in darkness, he is my star, and in brightness, he is my sin; he is the manna of the camp in the wilderness, and he shall be the new corn of the host when they come to

Canaan. Jesus is to me all grace and no wrath, all truth and no falsehood; and of truth and grace he is full, infinitely full.” – Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892)



Holy Saturday (April 3)

“When Israel came out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion. The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back; the mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. Why was it, O sea, that you fled, O Jordan, that you turned back, you mountains, that you skipped like rams, you hills, like lambs? Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water.”

(Psalms 114)

Reflection: The Lord exercises dominion over His creation. What is miraculous and unbelievable to us is well within the providence of Him who created all that is, ever was, and ever shall be. The historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ speaks to us of the immutability and sovereignty of God over all of the affairs of His creation; to include even the fine details of our lives.

Prayer: Gracious God, who, according to the power of your might, raised Jesus on the third day, grant that I may know the power of the resurrection in the gentleness your grace; in the tranquility of your mercy; in the power of your mighty strength! Amen.

Easter Sunday (April 4)

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”

(Luke 24:1-6a)

Reflection: I have stood in Jerusalem in the place where these women stood. My feet have trod the ground where the angels proclaimed the greatest words ever spoken on this earth; the most beautiful utterance ever given; the tomb is empty! Hallelujah! The Lord is raised! Since He is alive today, I can face whatever comes tomorrow. Dear saints of God, He is alive in you and in me!

Prayer: O God, who shined the light of Christ into our darkness; grant that we may know and be known by the power of the resurrection. Be praised in my heart, as in the sanctuary, precious Lord of all holiness, redemption, and glory! Amen.