

CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Book of Devotions

for Holy Week 2024

For people of faith, Holy Week represents a roller-coaster of emotions: from Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to him tossing over the tables in the Temple to the events of the "Last Supper" to his arrest, beatings, trial, and crucifixion – and ultimately to His resurrection on Easter Sunday. This week is a foundation of the Christian faith and at the core of what we believe.

I hope that this book of devotions, developed by members of your community here at CPC, gives you some peace, some joy, and some things to contemplate during this week.

My thanks to all who contributed – very well done!

Gary

ON PRAYER

⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. ⁷ And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. Philippians 4: 6 - 7 (Good News Translation)

Prayer opens possibilities for us that we may never have imagined. Overtime, I've learned to share with God what is needed through prayer and then trust him to supply the answer. There are days when all the answers I can think of are inadequate, if I have any answer at all. Some of God's answers have truly surprised me! Through prayer, God can teach us new ways to look at our problems and bring new people and resources into our lives that help in ways we couldn't think to ask for.

Prayer

Lord, I'm thankful that you are mighty and faithful in hearing my prayers. Teach me to ask and to be open to the creative working of your Holy Spirit. Amen

Carolynn Baer

FOCUS ON WHAT IS GOOD

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. (Philippians 4:8 New International Version)

There is so much noise about us all the time, with 24-hour news cycles spouting disasters, war, and hatred. This passage, written by Paul to the people of Philippi, reminds them of God's peace underlying everything and assures them that they can focus on what is noble and lovely. Reading this passage gives me hope and helps me think about all the good things that occur but are rarely publicized. There is love. There are good people. I can see God working despite the terrible events and nasty people that call for our attention. This does not mean one should be ignorant or a Pollyanna. But it gives me hope that there is much that is excellent and praiseworthy.

Prayer

Lord, Thank you for the things noble and true, admirable, and lovely that demonstrate your love and blessings for us all, whether seen or unseen. I pray that I may ponder these things amidst the cacophony of daily life and feel your presence in the world in all that is good. Amen

Jim Baer

LOVE ONE ANOTHER!

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another. John 13:34–35, NKJV

We know from the scripture that, as the disciples gathered with Jesus in the upper room for their last meal together, Jesus announced something startling. One of them will betray him. Judas, who leaves the dinner party to do the unthinkable: turn Jesus, his friend, over to those seeking to take his friend's life.

But after Judas leaves, Jesus gives a new commandment to “love one another” — to love no matter what others might do to you. Although it seems an impossible commandment to see through, yet we must do it. It is not an option, but a mandate.

Love is a mandate, and that love requires reconciliation. And reconciliation requires inner work to seek peace and forgiveness. It also requires an action focused on justice and a restitution of wrongs.

When two parties are at odds with one another, typically there is a side that needs to forgive the wrong that was done and a side that requires justice of the wrongdoer. Of course, every relationship is unique, yet justice can always be found in the hard work of restoring what was once broken.

Let us walk in the Spirit and be led by our God to bring this justice to a world that so greatly needs it.

Loving one another as Christ has loved us is the work that we as believers have been called to do. We have a chance to bring love and reconciliation into our own lives and within our own communities.

Prayer

Dear God, as each of us want to be your disciple and be recognized as one, let us remember Jesus' words about loving one another. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Maximilien Onga Nana

ABUNDANT LIFE

"I came that [you] may have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:10

The greatest gift that God gave us was eternal life through Jesus Christ. But until we get to heaven, we have been put here on this planet, at this time, in this place. And life here can be hard. And scary. And frustrating.

But, we have Jesus! Jesus came to make the lives of those who follow Him abundant ... plentiful, generous, full of goodness! As believers, we can let go of our burdens because Jesus promises to carry them for us. We don't have to worry because Jesus said that God knows our needs and loves us completely and deeply, no matter what, so we can trust him with our lives. Jesus teaches us how to treat others so that our relationships will be built on love and kindness, and He encourages us to give and share what we have to help others and thereby find joy.

Yes, we have much to look forward to at the end of our days. But in the meantime, each and every day here on this Earth is an amazing opportunity grow closer to Jesus and serve Him well. Seek Him, trust Him, and experience the abundant life that comes with following Him.

Prayer

Lord, help me to trust that you know me better than I know myself. Help me believe that you want nothing but the best for me and that you know exactly what that is. Help me to use all that you have given to me to glorify you and be grateful for each day and each breath. I want the abundant life you promise, Lord, but I need your strength and patience and faith. May I feel your presence, hear your voice, and follow your lead. I love you, Jesus. Amen.

Lisa Mears

THE ROCK

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18

Roy always plays inspiring music (and of course he plays wonderfully!), and I always appreciate the thoughtfulness behind his selections. I was particularly pleased when he played "Upon this Rock" a couple of weeks ago. This song was a big hit back in the 1980s for contemporary Christian singer Sandy Patti, right when I first began my Christian walk with the Lord. And it's always been one of my favorites. Hearing this song again (and singing along, which of course I can do when I'm muted online 😊) reminded me of how important music has been for my faith journey. This particular song has always touched my heart, as it makes me remember a time when I was such a new Christian and was just beginning to get a glimpse of God in my life and in the world.

The chorus to this song is based on Matthew 16:18:

*"Upon this rock I'll build my kingdom, upon this rock forever it shall stand
And all the powers of hell itself shall never prevail against it
For Satan's thrones are built on sinking sand
Upon this rock of revelation I will build a strong and mighty nation
And it shall stand the storms of time, upon this rock"*

I love the entire song, but a couple of lines are particularly inspiring to me:

"When others say I'm [Jesus] just a man who likes to dream his dreams, when others call a miracle a myth, You'll listen for eternity in moments as they pass and see with spirit eyes what others miss."

I pray every day for the Holy Spirit to give me ears to hear and eyes to see, and I feel so blessed whenever I get those glimpses of God.

Marilyn Dorn

THE GRACE OF GOD

⁶ And if by grace, then it [God's Love] cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (Romans 11:6)

God's grace surrounds us. It is always there. It's been there since the beginning. We can see it in the beauty of all of creation – in a sunset, in the joy of friends sharing a meal together, and in the opportunity that each new day represents.

This grace is a love we do not need to earn. The scholars call this “prevenient grace,” the grace given to us by God that precedes any act of faith we may demonstrate. Again, it is a love that we do not need to earn, but it is a love to which we must respond.

If someone says to you, “I love you,” that statement demands a response. And if you don't respond when someone says, “I love you,” well, that is a response in and of itself. The same is true with God's love, God's grace. God is forever saying “I love you” to us. How will we respond? It doesn't need to be a perfect or consistent response, that's the point of grace, but we need to respond. So, what is our response going to be? God, like anyone who says, “I love you,” is hoping for the response that says, “I love you too.”

Let us all take the time to see God's grace all around us. To be grateful for the many gifts and blessings that come to us by God's grace. And let us respond with, “I love you too!”

Prayer

Thank you, God. You show your love for me in so many ways. Let me not take these blessings for granted or convince myself that these are blessings that I have earned; no, let me be grateful. I can see your love for me Lord, “I love you too.”

Gary Mears

THE LOOK

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. Luke 22: 59-62

It may have been with that very look from Jesus that the molten lava of Simon Peter's heart turned into the solid rock of which Jesus had spoken when he gave Simon his nickname: "Peter", ... "Petra", ... "Rock". Maybe this was the point that Peter's soul had everything it needed in order to do what was needed. Maybe this was when his vision became clear... and the church was, indeed, built upon that rock.

Earlier that same evening when Jesus said that Peter would soon deny him three times, Peter couldn't imagine ever doing that for any reason. Sometimes we also sin without prior knowledge that we would ... almost like Peter. The difference is that Peter felt that his life would be at risk if he didn't deny Jesus. That's not normally our excuse.

I wonder what Jesus thinks when He looks at me. What are we in His eyes?

Prayer

Lord, God, thank you for giving us your beautiful son, who died on the cross so that we might live with you in peace, love, and understanding. Even though we sin and are far from worthy of your love, we pray that you look upon us in a light that is acceptable to You. AMEN.

Jay & Janet Lough

THE SUPREME SACRIFICE

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16

This scripture emphasizes the most powerful aspect of the Bible. God so loved the world that he sacrificed his only son. If our Lord and Savior were not born, we would all perish. This scripture shows the powerful and profound love that God has for humankind by allowing his son to be crucified for our benefit. Jesus' death created a way to bridge a loving relationship to God the Father through Jesus His Son. God did not want anyone to perish, so you only have to believe by faith that Jesus died for your sins and that he is your Lord and Savior. God did not make this complicated, you simply have to believe.

Prayer

"Jesus, thank you for the supreme sacrifice that you made for each and every one of us so that we, as your believers, may have everlasting life." Amen

Jenny Florence

STRENGTH THROUGH FAITH

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory.” The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing your labor is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15: 55-58

This scripture means a lot to me because it tells me, if you have strong love and faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord, you have nothing to fear, not even death. Equally important is that loving and believing is not enough. We must do more. We must put our love and belief into practice and deeds every day. Not just up and down when it feels good but regularly on a constant basis.

Prayer

“Father, I pray in the name of Jesus, that my love and faith will always be steadfast and immovable. I pray that you will give me the strength to help others know and trust you. I pray that my actions and words will always honor and please you. Amen.”

Mike Florence

WHAT IS GRACE?

This is a word that I have used my whole life, but I really don't know exactly what it means. I know my family "says grace" when we gather for a meal. I also know that a ballet dancer, for instance, dances with "grace." But what does it mean to be in God's *grace*?

Google, the source of all knowledge, tells us that "grace is the basis for the Christian faith. We believe we are saved by faith through grace. God's grace is usually defined as *undeserved favor*. Grace cannot be earned; it is something that is freely given. We count on God's grace and the bridge he built in our relationship with him."

I'm not sure that clears it up completely. If *grace cannot be earned*, why do we strive to be good Christians in order to secure a place in heaven? The simple answer might be: *faith*.

But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved through grace.
Acts 15:11

Prayer (slightly paraphrased from the hymn by Harry Emerson Fosdick):

God of grace and God of glory, on thy people pour thy power; crown the ancient church's story and bring its bud to glorious flower. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour.

Nancy Jones

WE ARE NEVER ALONE ON A GARDEN PATH

⁴Show me Your ways, LORD, teach me your pathways. . . .¹⁰ All the ways of the LORD are mercy and truth for He is good to all who keep His covenant and His testimonies. (Psalm 25:4,10)

These verses tell me that as God is our loving Father, He takes care of us all in so many ways: teaching, guiding and being with us every day to follow Him. I especially find Him on the paths in my garden, feeling His peace and loving kindness, which led me to write this poem:

Renewal

*The cottony cloud forms are cutting like races through the air.
The weeping willows are swinging, the wind full in their hair.
The bare-branched plum tree is blooming from sunshine kisses rare.
The riotous robins are nesting among the blossoms there.
The daffodils, too, are dancing their yellow faces fair.
The perky primrose is peeking for a leafy laden lair.
The wavy waters are washing over the stream rocks with flair.
And each creature, somehow matching, has now become a pair.
Yes, Spring is joyfully swinging into my garden where
The Lord will bless my beginning each new day with prayer.*

Shirley Moore