**PRAYING FOR OUR VISION**

***Seeking God’s Direction Through Prayer, Listening and Fasting***

**INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to Praying for Our Vision, a five-week congregational season of prayer, listening and fasting, focusing on the major petitions of the Lord’s Prayer as we seek His leading and direction for Richmond First United Methodist Church for the coming year. Our goal during these 28-days is to seek God’s guidance for our next steps as a community of believers. Where do we go next? What is God calling us to do? And as a church, what does He want us to become? What direction is His will for us? As we pray and seek answers to these questions for our church, may we also ask them for ourselves, too. As we pray for a renewed sense of spiritual passion and commitment within our church community, let us also pray for personal revival, deepening faith, and a commitment to living a Christian life.

Through a concentrated season of prayer and listening with the Lord’s Prayer as our focus for meditation, may we find answers to these questions as we listen for His voice through prayer, meditation and Scripture. We will begin on January 12 and conclude on February 16 with a church-wide celebration and Thanksgiving Unity Service and potluck in the MMC.

**The Devotional Book**.

The petitions of the Lord’s Prayer ~ Our Father, Thy Kingdon Come, Our Daily Bread, As We Forgive, and Deliver Us ~ will be the foundation for the Daily Devotions and Bible Readings. The Lord’s Prayer teaches us how to live faithfully, and whole-heartedly trust in God as the source of all good things. Daily Bible readings include a Scripture, a short story or devotion, questions for self-reflection and thought, followed by a prayer. The sermon messages during these five-weeks will focus on the Lord’s Prayer and will coincide with the weekly devotional readings and Scripture. As you read through each daily devotional, spend time in prayer for that week’s focus. The outline for the weekly prayer focuses and petitions is listed below.

* **Week 1:**  **January 12-18, 2025.**
	+ **Our Father.**
		- **Prayer Focus:** As God’s people, where do we find our identity?
* **Week 2: January19-25, 2025.**
	+ **Thy Kingdom Come**
		- **Prayer Focus:** As God’s people, what dreams should we dream?
* **Week 3:**  **January 26-February 1,2025**
	+ **Our Daily Bread**
		- **Prayer Focus:** As God’s people seeking His kingdom, where do we turn to find what we need?
* **Week 4 : February 2-8, 2025**
	+ **As We Forgive**
		- **Prayer Focus**: As we hear God calling us forward, what sorts of people do we need to become?
* **Week 5: February 9-15, 2025**
	+ **Deliver Us**

**Prayer Focus:**

What temptations are built right into the life of following Jesus?

Everyone is encouraged to journal and write down their reflections and personal insights from Scripture and what they hear from God. There will be opportunities to share with the congregation what you’ve heard from God via a *“sticky note”* board. Jot down what you heard God speaking to you, or a “nudging” from the Holy Spirit, or simply an idea that others need to hear. In the sanctuary and at Thrive, there will be a board where you can place what you’d like to share via a “sticky note”. You are free to include your name on the “sticky note” although it isn’t a requirement to post on the board. Colors are optional! Be creative!

At the end of the season of prayer, fasting and listening, the “sticky notes” will be gathered and organized into themes to be shared at the celebration and Thanksgiving service on February 16. If you need “sticky notes”, please contact the Front Office and there will some available to use.

**Individual and Corporate Prayer Time**

**Individual Prayer Time.**

During this five-week congregational season of prayer, listening and fasting, you are encouraged to pray the devotional readings from the Devotional Book along with your daily prayer devotions and quiet time with God. Praying the daily Scripture and prayer will enable our church family to be in one accord as we seek God and His vision for our church. In addition to a *morning prayer time*, you are encouraged to include an *evening prayer time* using the **Examen Prayer.** This prayer is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It's an attitude more than a method, a time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has five steps which most people take more or less in order, and it usually takes about 15 to 20 minutes per day. The prayer is designed to help you become aware of God’s presence as you review the day with gratitude, paying attention to your emotions. And you may choose a feature of the day and pray from it as you look forward to tomorrow. Additional information on the Examen Prayer can be found at [www.ignatianspirituality.com](http://www.ignatianspirituality.com). Included with the Devotional Book is copy of the Examen Prayer. On the back of the card, you will find prompts to lead you in prayer and reflection.

**Corporate Prayer Time**.

Corporate prayer plays an important role in the life of the church. The Bible provides many examples of corporate prayer. For example, corporate prayer unifies believers; praying together helps being about the unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17:22-23. Corporate prayer creates a sense of fellowship, a unique bond that’s found nowhere else. Praying together can be a way to learn from each other, too.

The Monday Night Prayer Group meets from 5:30-6:30 pm in the MMC Chapel. Everyone is welcome! If you feel led during this time of seeking God’s direction for our church to start a small group prayer group, feel free to do so! Please let the church office know the time, date and location of your meeting so that others who are interested in participating in a small group may be a part. During Sunday School classes, small group gatherings, committee meetings or any time members are gathered during this season of congregational prayer, please include a time of prayer to hear from God as we seek His leading for our church.

**Fasting and Prayer– Biblical Principles**

Biblically, prayer is fundamental to a relationship with God, while adding fasting to our prayers creates one of the most powerful of all Christian activities. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is taught in the Bible (Matthew 6:16-18). These are God-prescribed methods of dealing with urgent needs, asking for breakthroughs, growing our faith, and seeking God’s leading for our lives and our church. Prayer and fasting helps to posture our hearts in humility with God. The practice of fasting is to help us surrender to God, to help us worship God, to help us reconsecrate our lives to God and to help us seek fresh revelation of God and of God’s work in the world.

***During this time of prayer and listening, the practice of the spiritual discipline of fasting may be included, but it’s not required.***

***Before starting any fast, you are encouraged to consult with your healthcare provider before starting a fast especially if you have any pre-existing medical conditions*.**

**What is fasting?**

In his book*,” 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting -A Fasting Guide for Spiritual Breakthroughs” (2017),* Gary Rohrmayerprovides an excellent introductory guide to the basics of fasting in an easy-to-read language. Here are some excerpts from his book. According to the author, *fasting is deliberately abstaining from the normal routines of life. Its purpose is to spend focused time in prayer and the study of God’s word, seeking to align our lives with God’s will. Fasting is more about replacing than it is about abstaining – replacing normal activities with focused times of prayer and studying the word of God. In fasting, we do not bend God toward us but through fasting we bend our hearts toward him*. The book is available on Amazon if you wish to purchase a copy. Another excellent reference is by John Piper titled “What Is the Purpose of Fasting?” The five-minute podcast can be found at found at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). You are strongly encouraged to listen to this podcast if you want to know more about the spiritual discipline of fasting and prayer.

**Why prayer and fasting?**

Biblical accounts show powerful results of praying and fasting by Daniel (Daniel 9), David (Psalm 35), Anna (Luke 20) and Paul (Acts 14). Jesus tells us how to pray and fast in Matthew 6 ~ instructing us to do so quietly, humbly and without any pride.

Scripture is full of encounters of great leaders who prayed and fasted as they were seeking God for a fresh encounter or divine intervention (Rohrmayer, 2017).

* + Moses, in seeking a spiritual breakthrough spent 40 days alone with God without eating or drinking until he received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 24:38).
	+ King David sought a personal breakthrough as he fasted to keep himself humble (Psalm 35:13).
	+ Queen Esther used her position as queen to rescue the Jewish people from destruction (Esther 4:13-14).
	+ Ezra was seeking a breakthrough as he called God’s people to fast and pray for protection against their enemies (Ezra 8:21-23).
	+ The apostle Paul fasted as he pondered his breakthrough encounter with the risen Lord Jesus and what it meant for his life (Acts 9:9).
	+ The leaders of the church in Antioch worshiped, prayed and fasted together as they sought missional breakthrough for their thriving church (Acts 13:1-3).
	+ Our Savior, setting the supreme example, entered 40 days of fasting before launching into his public ministry (Matthew 4:1-2).

**Types of Fasts.**

There are several types of fasts mentioned in the Bible that are typically limited to abstaining from food. Often cited is the Daniel Fast, consuming only fruits, vegetables, legumes, and water (based on the biblical story of Daniel). There are partial fasts ~eating only one or two meals on a specific day or abstaining from certain kinds of foods (e.g., no meat, sweets, or snacks). Fasting may extend beyond abstaining from food. Consider for a moment what are the priorities in your life. Ask yourself what you cannot live without each day. Coffee? Social Media? Netflix? Video games? *Fasting is unplugging from anything that might take our time and focus away from God. He yearns to be the top priority in our lives.* Prior to beginning a fast, ask Holy Spirit to lead and guide you in choosing the fast that is right for you. Remember that is it the attitude of a heart sincerely seeking Him to which God responds with a blessing (Isaiah 58, Jeremiah 14:12, 1 Corinthians 8:8).

Thank you for your prayers and commitment to seeking God’s leading during this congregational season of prayer, listening and fasting.

May God richly bless you and your family.

# Week One: Our Father

Jesus begins his model

prayer with the words

“Our Father…” As we

seek direction in our life

and ministry,

our best first step might

be to ask ourselves

who we are.

 Monday:

John 17:24-26

*24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

*25 “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”*

What was God doing before the world began?

This may sound like one of those angels-on-the-head-of-a-pin questions. The kind of question monks contemplate until their brain throws a breaker and they slip into a transcendental state of conscious- ness. It’s a question that you would initially think cannot have an intelligible answer.

In fact, though, the question *does* have an answer, an answer which we find on Jesus’ lips in the Gospel of John.

Before the world began, God the Father was loving the Son.

Think about it. Before anything else existed, God existed in a state of loving community. Love is God’s resting state, what he does when he is otherwise alone and unoccupied.

When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he instructs us to call God “Father.” Doing so invites us into the center of an eternal relationship of profound love.

Questions for Meditation:

What is my “resting state?”

How do I most vividly experience the love of God in my life?

Prayer:

Father, help me hear your heartbeat, today. Help me to know you as a loving God whose love knows no beginning and no end. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### Tuesday:

Exodus 4:21-22

*21 The Lord said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I told you, “Let my son go, so he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go...’”*

We associate the idea of calling Jesus “Father” with Jesus, but God has identified himself as father to his people from very early in the scriptural narrative. When his people were hurting in Egypt and cried out, he heard them. He saw their pain and was moved to action on their behalf.

The God of deliverance searches for language to tell the world how he feels about his people and settles on the image of “first born son.”

Like a father, he comes to their rescue, guides them, embraces them as his own.

Questions for Meditation:

What language would you use to describe your relationship with God?

In what part of your life do you feel the deepest need for guidance?

Prayer:

Father, I need you. On my own, I am too small for the world I live in. Show me your strength and guide me to the places you wish me to go.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

### Wednesday:

Luke 15:20-24

*20 So he got up and went to his father.*

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

*22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So, they began to celebrate.*

These words comprise what we often think of as the “happy ending” of the Prodigal Son story. The wayward child has seen the error of his ways, laid aside his broken way of life, and come home to his father. In turn, his father runs out to meet him and declared a celebration.

The story doesn’t narrate the sleepless nights, anger and resentment that was almost certainly central to the father’s life in his son’s absence. We are not made privy to the nosy or thoughtless questions leveled by the townspeople.

Instead, we are invited into the moment of celebration caused by a life turned around, a relationship renewed.

Both the pain and the exultation are part and parcel of the father’s love. In the end, though, the story becomes worth telling because of the party at the end.

Questions for Meditation:

Marvel in the steadfastness of God’s love!

How can we best celebrate being received as God’s children?

Prayer:

Father, I know that my life has not been lived continuously to your glory. I sense your tears when I have pulled away from you. And I thank you that when I felt unworthy to be called your child, you continuously rejoiced in being my father.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### Thursday:

Luke 15:28-32

*28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’*

*31 “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he is lost and is found.’”*

This is the real ending of the Prodigal Son story. Up until now, the Prodigal story has been much like the two which preceded it. A sheep is lost, found, and celebrated. A coin is lost, found, and celebrated, a son is lost, found, and celebrated.

But now, Jesus goes off script. There is another son who has never wandered to a far country. Now he is disturbed that his wayward brother is at the center of a celebration. Why, he wonders, has nobody ever celebrated my faithfulness?

The father is brokenhearted. He hears echoes of Cain’s frustrated cry and knows all too well what crouches at the door.

Questions for Meditation:

Which brother in the Prodigal story do I most resemble and identify with?

Are we prepared to celebrate with those God has chosen to bless?

Prayer:

Father, I want to be faithful and steadfast. In my sense of duty, though, let me never grow to resent your mercy towards others.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### Friday:

John 1:9-13

*9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural de- scent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.*

To call God Father is to tell a story of profound grace. God’s family is not one born by natural means or even declared through the actions of the court system. It is by gracious invitation, a gift.

The upshot of this work of grace is that no one of us has any claim to special privilege. We all come into God’s presence through the same miraculous means. God studiously ignores any claims we make to claim any place of privilege based on our own goodness or righteousness.

To enter into God’s family on equal terms demands that we see one another differently than we are prone to do in our own wisdom. We are all children of God. Brothers. Sisters. Regardless of station in life or accomplishment or worldly status.

This piece of theology at the beginning of John’s gospel sets the stage for Jesus’ high priestly prayer towards the end of his gospel: “Father make them one…”

Questions for Meditation:

Our nation is founded on a philosophy of equality. Where do we see this equality best realized? Where , as a nation, have we struggled in this?

What steps do I need to make in my own life to celebrate the love and Unity of Christ’s church?

Prayer:

Father, thank you for claiming me as your child. By your grace, may I see those around me as your children, members of my family.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### Saturday:

Galatians 3:26-29

*26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Abraham enters the Genesis story in Chapter 12. From the very first mention of him until he exits the story in Chapter 25, the driving question in the narrative is the question of inheritance. He takes action to help secure the inheritance of his brother, Haran. At one time or another, his heir apparent is Lot, Ishmael, Eliezer of Damascus, Isaac, or perhaps even no heir at all. He faces the dilemma of whether or not the children of his second wife will inherit.

The stakes are high, not just because of the culture in which he lived or his great wealth, but because he passes along to his heirs not just a material inheritance, but a divine promise. Paul steps into the world of this story to suggest, through Christ, the children of God are also the children of Abraham. I suppose that means that somewhere there might be a camel wandering around that rightfully belongs to me. More to the point though, we are heirs of the promise that God gave Abraham to pass down to his children.

We are destined to be like the stars in the sky, to become a blessing to the world at large, and to rule together with God in the age to come, in a land that he will show us.

Questions for Meditation:

What characteristics or traits would you hope to have inherited from your family tree?

In what ways can we begin to be a blessing to the world around us?

Prayer:

Father, speak words of blessing to me today so that I may become a blessing to those around me.

In Jesus’ name, Amen

# Week Two: Thy Will Be Done

The first three petitions

of Jesus’ model prayer

are parallel statements,

each using nuanced

language to say very

much the same thing.

At the heart of our

prayer must be a desire

to seek the will of God.

**Monday: Hallowed Be Thy Name...**

Psalm 8:1-2

1Lord, our Lord,
    how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory in the heavens.
**2**Through the praise of children and infants
    you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
    to silence the foe and the avenger.

Our God is greatly to be praised!

One of the essential works of the church when we come together in worship is precisely this. We name the name of God and attribute to that name glory and honor and majesty and power.

To be clear, it is not for God’s sake that we do this. Our God is not an insecure child who needs to be constantly reminded of the high regard in which he is held. He will not wither away without our daily compliments.

The work of praise is accomplished within us as a community of believers. It acts as a reminder to us of the story in which we live, and of who the hero of that story really is.

Questions for Meditation:

What method of praising God’s name is most meaningful to you, personally?

What ways might you praise God that would strengthen and edify the faith of those around you?

Prayer:

Mighty God, to you I give thanks and praise today. You have done great things. You are doing great things. I lean forward in wonder to discover the great things you will do next. In Jesus’ glorious name, Amen.

### **Tuesday: Hallowed Be Thy Name...**

Ezekiel 36:23

*23 I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.*

God had a bone to pick with the people of Israel. He had called and set them apart to be his holy people, a light to the nations. And yet they had failed him, turning to idols and ignoring the cries of the needy in their midst. Because of their disobedience, he exiled them to Babylon.

While this was the fitting and promised consequence of their sin, it created further problems of its own. Now a people who called themselves by his name were scattered into the world dragging his name through the mud. The lives were dishonoring him.

It is good and fitting to sing praises to God’s name, to bring him glory with our worship.

But his name is also to be honored by the way that we live as we scatter from the Sunday sanctuary into the world of the nations. We are not called so much to spend time in our sacred spaces as to create sacred space wherever we walk.

Questions for Meditation:

What parts of my life fail to bring glory to God?

Is God glorified by the conduct of our church between Sundays?

Prayer:

Holy God, make me aware each day that, as one who has attached myself to your name, I bring you honor or dishonor with each word and deed.

Blessed be the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Wednesday: Thy Kingdom Come...**

1 Samuel 8:5-7

*. 5 They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”*

*6 But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. 7 And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.”*

Jesus’ model prayer asks us to cry out for the coming of God’s kingdom. In church, these words roll smoothly off our tongues. It is almost as though we are unaware that we are speaking a foreign language.

The Kingdom of God is not our heart’s native tongue. Like Israel in the days of Samuel, we cry out for some other answer, an alternative regime. We want to serve the kings whose subjects seem to have the good life.

When, in the verses that follow, Samuel tells the people the price tag connected to the sort of King they wish to serve, they are undeterred. They see what their neighbor has, and it is shiny.

Good for food, pleasing to look at, and desirable for gaining wisdom.

Questions for Meditation:

What would my life look like if I gave God full control?

What would our church look like if we chose God as king?

Prayer:

Sovereign God, tame my spirit. Turn my eyes to you for all wisdom and guidance. Let me not wait for a life beyond this one to see you enthroned.

In the name of Jesus, who reigns with you both now and forever. Amen.

### **Thursday: Thy Kingdom Come...**

Matthew 5:3

*. 5 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew spends the first four chapters of his gospel setting stage for this message. We have learned of his birth, baptism and temptation. We are told that he begins to preach but given the scantest possible outline of his message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” He gathers a handful of disciples.

Now he speaks. He tells these misfits that they are blessed. Poor, meek, hungry, thirsty, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted; all blessed. When people insult and persecute them, they are blessed.

They are salt. They are light. They are a city on a hill.

There is something strange about it all. If this is supposed to be a kingdom, where are the trappings of royalty, the riches and might.

His disciples will need to get used to this landscape. They now follow a man who says that the first will be last and the last will be first, who responds to his call as the Lord’s anointed by stooping to wash feet, whose coronation features thorns and nails.

And somehow, his disciples are compelled to follow.

Questions for Meditation:

In Ephesus, the apostles are called “these men who have turned the world upside down.” In what ways does praying for God’s Kingdom seek to turn the world on its head?

How does our church live out Christ’s blessing on the misfits?

Prayer:

Humble Christ, show me the beauty and dignity of those who the world brushes aside. Show me the majesty obtained through humble service and the awesome victory that comes through surrender. Amen.

### **Friday: Thy Will Be Done...**

Luke 1:35-38

*.35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will over- shadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.”*

*38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.*

It’s unclear to me exactly when Mary believed that what the angel told her was true. She certainly had questions at first. On the other hand, when Elizabeth hails her as the mother of the Messiah, she breaks into song. I tend to believe that between these two moments she needed a sign. A sign would match the pattern Luke has set for us in the other stories at the beginning of his gospel. Perhaps Mary’s need for a sign is why the angel mentions Elizabeth’s pregnancy. If God has worked one miracle, why not two?

So, Mary goes to Elizabeth’s home and discovers that the angel told the truth about Elizabeth’s pregnancy. In response, she finally allows herself to believe in her own.

This makes her obedience all the more profound. Before she is fully convinced that God was going to give her a child, she has already submitted herself to whatever obedience might be required.

Questions for Meditation:

When have you been willing to step out in faith, to obey before you even know why, or if it will matter?

What steps of obedience does God seem to need from our church?

Prayer:

Master, grant me an obedient spirit. May I seek to do your will even when the outcome seems uncertain. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Saturday: Thy Will Be Done...**

Matthew 26:36-39

*36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”*

*39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*

We may sometimes find it difficult to be obedient when the outcome of our actions is uncertain. What if I’ve misunderstood God’s will? What if I follow through and nothing happens at all? Will I look like a fool?

Doubt and uncertainty can be the enemy of obedience.

But sometimes knowing the outcome makes obedience even harder.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray “Thy will be done” as part of his model prayer, he must have known this moment would come. Sometimes obedience comes at a terrible price. It’s all well and good to pray for God’s will in the abstract, from the safety of a church pew.

 But sometimes Kingdom prayer drags us to Gethsemane.

Questions for Meditation:

When did you last choose sacrifice over safety in the name of God’s will?

When the path towards God’s will makes itself clear, what would you be willing to surrender to move forward?

Prayer:

God of Gethsemane, we have too often fallen asleep at your side instead of joining you in your suffering. Give us courage, we pray to be awake to your call placed before us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

# Week Three: Our Daily Bread

When at last Jesus’

model prayer finally

gets around to me

asking for something

for myself,

it turns out to be for

nothing more than daily bread.

The simplicity of this

petition deserves our

attention.

As followers of Jesus,

what does it mean to

rely on God’s

providence?

**Monday: Manna**

Exodus 16:11-15

11 The Lord said to Moses, 12 “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning, you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am

the Lord your God.’”

*13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning, there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.*

It is easy to identify with the Israelites in this story. They have been delivered from the frying pan to the fire. Their life in Israel had been hard, but it was, after all, *life.* Their new reality looked more like a slow, lingering death. First no water, now no food.

Moses’ little speech promised things would be better tomorrow.

Right. Tell me another one. It’s not like bread just falls out the sky. We’re starving here.

As is often the case, when God keeps his promise, it is surprising. The miracle that comes takes the people so unaware that, at first, it does not even register on them what is happening. The word “manna” is Hebrew for “What is this?”

It is bread.

It is a rainbow

It is a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths.

It is resurrection.

It is God showing off.

Questions for Meditation:

Think about a time in your life when God met a need in an unexpected way.

When the church moves forward in obedience, what will God need to provide for us?

Prayer:

Great Provider, grant us faith that you will provide for us each step of the way. Forgive our grumbling spirits when we doubt, or when we ask for more. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Tuesday: Manna**

Exodus 16:18-20

*18 And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed.*

*19 Then Moses said to them, “No one is to keep any of it until morning.”*

*20 However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell.*

Jesus’ prayer is not for silos of grain in reserve. He prays for daily bread.

God sought to teach Israel this lesson in the wilderness. He provided for them daily. When they sought to secure more than that, it just didn’t work. God does not want us to be relational camels, to stock up on his providence so that we can skip a day now and then. He wants us to rely on him daily.

For many of us, this kind of living simply feels irresponsible. Life’s misfortunes are inevitable. We should plan ahead for them and do everything we can to soften the eventual blow.

There is wisdom in this.

But “What if” can become a tyrant in our life, a false ruler in a world that already has a king.

Questions for Meditation:

What sorts of emergencies do you plan for in advance, and how do you prepare for them?

What does “daily bread” look like in the life of our church?

Prayer:

Great Provider, grant us faith that you will provide for us each step of the way. Forgive our grumbling spirits when we doubt, or when we ask for more. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Wednesday: Not By Bread Alone**

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

*2 Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.* 3 *He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*

In this section of Deuteronomy, Moses is urging the Israelites to obedience by reminding them of God’s providence. He seems to be telling the Israelites that the manna itself was not just a blessing, but a test of what was in their hearts, a test of obedience.

Chuck Swindoll once quipped, “There are two times in life when we are tempted to turn way from God: when things are going bad, or when things are going good.”

In bad times, we wonder if God has abandoned us. In good times, we wonder if we still need him.

God provided food for the Israelites. With bellies full, would they realize that they still needed the providence of their God?

Questions for Meditation:

Have you ever enjoyed such a moment of success that you were tempted to rely on your own strength rather than on God’s providence?

What would “success” look like in our church? Would we be able to survive it in faithfulness?

Prayer:

Great Provider, give us wisdom to remain hungry when our bellies are full, to thirst when our parched throats have been satisfied, to seek you still when we have received all that we thought we needed.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Thursday: Loaves and Fishes**

Mark 6:30-34

*30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”*

*32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, he began teaching them many things.*

The disciples have just returned after being sent out by Jesus in pairs to minister in the countryside. In the verses ahead, we will read the now famous story of the feeding of the five thousand. In the moment, however, they are simply overwhelmed.

And hungry.

This small narrative detail is often overlooked. Those who are called to feed are themselves as yet unfed. Those called upon to minister comfort and peace are themselves longing for Sabbath. From this place of pain, they become aware of the pain of those around them.

*“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them…”*

Questions for Meditation:

What are the places of longing in your own heart? How might that longing be transformed into a calling?

How alert is our church to the needs in the world and community around us?

Prayer:

God of Comfort, may we be made aware of the needs of those around us, even if this means experiencing something of their pain.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Friday: Loaves and Fishes**

Mark 6:30-34

*35 By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. 36 Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”*

*37 But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”*

As the day wears on, Jesus’ disciples, perhaps because their own bellies had started to rumble, realize that the crowd surrounding them is surely hungry. The italicized caption above this story in my study Bible reads: “Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand”. In fact, he does no such thing.

Instead, he has simply instructed his disciples to do so.

I hope you will open your Bible and read this story through to the end. In it, the disciples object to feeding the crowd from a place of scarcity. They don’t believe that they have enough money to buy food for this mass of people. Perhaps they were thinking that if they had money to buy food, they should certainly feed themselves first.

In the gospel of John’s version of this story, there is a boy with five loaves and two fishes. In the version we are reading from Mark, this pittance seems to belong to the disciples themselves, the last of their own victuals.

The leftovers in this story are important, not just because of the symbolic meaning of the number of baskets they filled (twelve), but because it was the leftovers from which, after everyone else was filled, Jesus’ disciples ate.

Questions for Meditation:

What happens to the leftovers in your house?

How well does our church prioritize the community we serve?

Prayer:

Great Provider, we repent that often you are the recipient of our leftovers, rather than our loaves and fishes. Forgive us, we pray and make us a more generous people. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Saturday: Crumbs**

Mark 7:25-27

*25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an im- pure spirit came and fell at his feet. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.*

*27 “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”*

*28 “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”*

Jesus and his disciples have travelled to the west from Galilee, into pagan gentile territory. There he is confronted by a foreign woman, requesting a miracle on behalf of her daughter. What happens next is jarring, even problematic to many of us. It’s hard to treat his response as anything but rude. He tells her she should wait her turn while he tends to more important people. He seems to be comparing her and her daughter to dogs.

In context, he probably means that he came to preach first to the Jews, and then to the gentiles. Whatever he meant, the woman calls him out. And here’s the second problem with the story: Jesus changes his mind. Jesus not only grants her this miracle, but from this point forward in his ministry, he goes out of his way to minister to the gentiles. It seems as though he stands corrected.

Questions for Meditation:

Who are the people you tend to think of as undeserving of your time and attention?

What would it look like for our church to grasp and live out the truths in this story?

Prayer:

God of All, without even knowing it, we often brush aside one person in favor of another. Heal us, we pray, of standing in your place of judgement.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

#  Week Four: Forgive

When we accept our

calling as God’s people,

we also accept our

need to be reshaped

in Christs’ image

through confession and

pardon.

**Monday: Even Though**

Genesis 8:20-21

*20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. 21 The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.*

Here, in the aftermath of God’s greatest act of wrath, a moment of simple worship moves God’s heart. The idea of God changing his mind is troublesome to our modern way of thinking. It seems to happen often, however, within the Bible’s stories, as it does here. God’s wrath in the flood was fully justified, but in this moment, God decides he will never act in this way again.

God’s commitment to keep humans around is not founded in our intrinsic goodness. To the contrary, God’s opinion on that matter has not changed. “Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.” In spite of our brokenness, God’s heart is moved when we reach towards him.

Questions for Meditation:

How do you feel about God’s characterization of the human heart as bent towards evil?

How might we respond to his mercy with worship?

Prayer:

God of Grace, in our own power, we cannot offer you goodness. We can only offer you worship as a heartfelt response to your heartfelt mercy. May our hearts find each other in the new world provided by your grace.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Tuesday: Clueless**

Luke 23:32-33

*32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

Maybe he was talking about the thieves. That must be it. The thieves were the subject of the previous sentence, after all. Maybe they’re the ones who “do not know what they’re doing.”

Or it could be the Romans. Pagans. They can’t really be expected to understand a God of love and compassion. They don’t need to understand. They are good soldiers just taking orders.

Or maybe the Jews who had schemed to eliminate Jesus as a thorn in their side. Surely if they had understood they were dealing with their Messiah they would have behaved differently. Or maybe the roaring crowd who had chosen to spare Barabbas instead?

Who could he be thinking about in this moment? And how can he find the strength to forgive when he has suffered so much pain?

Surely Jesus, as he hung on the cross, could not be gazing across the centuries, beyond the horizon to unknown lands, piercing the great culture divide. Surely, he could not mean us?

Questions for Meditation:

Think about a time when you did the wrong thing because you didn’t understand the situation.

What things have we done, perhaps in ignorance, that cause Christ pain?

Prayer:

God of Light, illuminate us. Cast your light into all of the dark crevasses of our spirit. Bring your cleansing power. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Wednesday: Golden Calf**

Exodus 34:1-2

*1The Lord said to Moses, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. 2 Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain.*

The book of Exodus doesn’t end where we would like it to end. The movie makers get it right. Show us the great action sequences of the plagues and the escape from Egypt. *Maybe* let us see Moses coming down the mountain with the Ten Commandments.

Instead, the book seems to drone on, listing detailed ordinances, plans for the Tabernacle, descriptions of the priestly garments… and *then* the reader is dismayed to discover we are reading big chunks of the book for a second time. Not the good stuff, mind you, but the mind-numbing parts about laws and building plans and wardrobe requirements.

All this repetition tells its own story, though. These two nearly identical blocks of detail are placed to either side of a story about a golden calf. God’s people had received the big block of text, sworn to obey it. Then, while Moses was up on the mountain again, they absolutely demolished their promise to God by creating a golden idol to worship. Moses is livid upon his return, shattering the tablets God has given him as a sign that the covenant has obviously been broken.

But then God and Moses meet on the mountain again, starting over, rewriting every word. God for- gives his people’s unfaithfulness and renews his covenant with them.

Questions for Meditation:

In what ways have we failed to be God’s faithful people?

What would it mean to rediscover his plans for us?

Prayer:

Merciful God, we have fallen short of what you have created us to be. We have found other gods, other priorities. In your patience, you offer us to start anew. May we become more fully your people. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Thursday: Intercession**

Exodus 32:30-32

*30 The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”*

*31 So Moses went back to the Lord and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”*

When Moses discovers the Israelites have made themselves a golden calf to worship, he is livid on God’s behalf. He throws the stone tablets to the ground, breaking them. He burns the idol and makes the Israelites drink the ashes mixed into their water. He gathers the Levites and gives orders for those responsible for the idolatry to be punished. It is perhaps notable that God did not ask Moses to do any of this, though God has himself announced that he will no longer accompany the Israelites.

Then an odd thing happens. Moses goes to God on behalf of the people. He puts his own pain and anger behind him and begs God to spare the Israelites, offering his own life to spare theirs. As Moses learns to forgive, he implores God to forgive.

And God relents.

This is not the first time God has done so, nor will it be the last.

Questions for Meditation:

What is your first reaction when you encounter others doing wrong in the eyes of God?

What role do God’s people play in bringing about forgiveness in a sinful world?

Prayer:

Merciful God, we have come to love your ways and are wounded when we see evil or injustice in the world. Grant us some measure of your own patience and steadfast love. Hear us when we call out on behalf of those around us.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Friday: “...As We Forgive Our Debtors...”**

Matthew 27:23-27

*23 “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.*

*26 “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.*

“Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” This was Jesus’ reply when Peter asked how many times, he should forgive somebody who had wronged him. Then he told a story about an extremely merciful king, one who forgave even the most extravagant of debts.

The merciful king is obviously a picture of our forgiving God, a great comfort to those of us who have trouble measuring up to the glory of God in our own lives. Unfortunately, this is only the beginning of the story. As the tale unfolds, a forgiven servant goes out and confronts his own debtors, cashing in all of his favors with great ruthlessness.

When the king learns of this, he erupts. He calls the unmerciful servant back before him and opens a fresh can of vengeance.

God intends his merciful character to be imitated rather than exploited.

Questions for Meditation:

We rely on God’s forgiveness for our very souls. Can others rely on *our* forgiveness?

Who are the people in your life to whom you need to extend mercy?

Prayer:

Most Holy God, we know that if you held our sins against us, none would stand. Grant us grace and courage to be not only forgiven people but forgiving people.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Saturday: Betrayal**

Mark 14:17-21

*17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”*

*19 They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”*

*20 “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 21 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”*

A stunning revelation. One of Jesus’ own disciples was about to betray him. The disciples ask the obvious question: “Which of us could do such a thing?”

Jesus’ answer does not seem to narrow the field: “One who dips bread in the bowl with me.”

John’s gospel tells us that Jesus gave Peter a secret sign that he was talking about Jesus. The other gospels seem to leave the disciples in suspense, only knowing that somehow, whoever partook of the bread was on the list of suspects, a possible betrayer.

In the very next verse, Jesus takes the bread, breaks it, and offers it to his disciples as a sign of his atoning sacrifice.

Questions for Meditation:

In what ways do even we, as Christians, sometimes betray Jesus?

What might it mean to think of the loaf of Communion as both a symbol of betrayal and a symbol of

grace?

Prayer:

Gracious God, we know that we have often betrayed your deepest desires for us. We thank you, that you bore the price of our betrayal and somehow transformed it into victory.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

# Week Five: Deliver Us

This final petition in the

Lord’s prayer poses a dilemma.

We ask God not to lead

us into temptations, and

in the same breath

ask him to deliver us

from temptation’s

snares.

As Jesus’ own life

demonstrates,

faithfulness to God

comes with its own set

of built-in temptations.

**Monday: Bread and Circuses**

Matthew 4:1-4

*1Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”*

*4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

Perhaps the most striking feature of theses few lines is the observation that Jesus’ temptation is not initiated by Satan, but by the Holy Spirit. Something God-shaped is happening in this story. Temptation is obviously not a result of weakness, but of something else. It comes not as a *failure* of faithfulness, but precisely as a *consequence* of faithfulness. Satan is not pitted against God, in this story, but acting out God’s will in shaping Jesus for the work ahead.

The first temptation is to make bread from stones. Jesus’ reply shows us that he sees this temptation as an echo of the Exodus story, in which God sends manna from heaven to feed the people. Satan invites Jesus to become the Messiah who feeds the masses. In due time, of course, Jesus will do exactly this.

But not *only* this. He resists the temptation to become a people-pleaser, to make his ministry about making people happy. The Kingdom of God must be about so much more than people’s bellies.

Questions for Meditation:

What role does meeting the perceived needs of others play in the Christian Walk?

As a church, we are committed to the ministry of fish and loaves. What temptations attach to this ministry?

Prayer:

God of the Wilderness, we want to love well. Teach us your ways, even when lessons can seem harsh. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Tuesday: Bungie Jumping**

Matthew 4:5-7

*5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:*

*“He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”*

*7 Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

Jesus’ second temptation is a temptation to recklessness.

Obviously, radically trusting in God is not a bad thing. There are times and spaces in which it is absolutely necessary. When Jesus encounters these moments, his faith will be strong, and he will seldom hesitate.

But this moment in the wilderness is not one of those moments. This is a moment of preparation, a moment not to be bypassed with a prayer and dramatic flourish.

The leap from the tower would be a stunning spectacle demonstrating my own praiseworthiness as a person of faith. The stairs are just as effective, and draw less attention to me, leaving the praise where it belongs.

 Questions for Meditation:

When have I been tempted to leap rather than climb? To lay aside faithfulness in the name of faith?

What preparation is required for our church to respond to God’s call in the world around us?

Prayer:

Faithful God, may our trust be only and always in you. May we trust you enough to serve you patiently and faithfully. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Wednesday: Means and Ends**

Matthew 4:8-10

*8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”*

*10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”*

In our tradition, we end our recitation of the Lord’s Prayer with the words “...for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever…” This is God’s end game, to bring about a divine kingdom under the authority of Jesus Christ. Satan offers Jesus nothing new, only what God has already set into motion. But with a short cut, a road that bypasses all the messy in-betweenness.

If Jesus’ tower temptation was in some ways about abdicating human responsibility in favor of trusting that God will do all of the hard stuff, this mountain-top temptation might represent the other extreme. It presents an option that bypasses God altogether. “Let’s be honest,” Satan seems to be saying to Jesus. “We all know how kingdoms are made. Let’s not quibble over this business of ends-and-means. Let’s get down to business and do what we both know is necessary to get the job done quickly.”

Nothing in life is as tempting as a good short cut. Especially if the mapped route goes through the cross.

Questions for Meditation:

When have I been tempted to take the wrong route to reach a desired outcome? To lay aside means in the name of ends.

What values will we hold sacred as we move towards what God wants for our church?

Prayer:

Eternal God, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, show us a vision of what you desire of us. Give us grace to arrive in this new place in your time and in your way. In Jesus’ name, Amen

### **Thursday: The Lord’s Other Prayer**

Mark 1:35-38

*35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. 36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”*

*38 Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”*

Jesus was a big hit in his early ministry. After his baptism and temptation, Jesus begins to preach, heal, and cast out demons. After John the Baptist’s arrest, Jesus settles in the town of Capernaum, a place of relative safety near the Galilean border with Syria, at the very edge of Herod’s jurisdiction. His teaching is well received, and people begin to stream to him with their sick and infirm. The ministry is beginning to thrive.

Satan does not appear in the passage above, nor does the word “temptation.” Nevertheless, the impulse to nest here in the north, where he is successful and beloved, must have been strong. Certainly, his disciples assume he will do so. As the crowds gather in the morning, they come looking for Jesus. It’s time to start another exciting day.

When they find him, Jesus is praying. No words for this prayer are recorded. We do not know what Jesus said, or precisely how God responded. We do, however, know that Jesus arose from that prayer with new marching orders: to leave Capernaum behind and move into places where his future and acceptance were unknown.

Questions for Meditation:

How open am I to the possibility that God may be calling me to something new?

How does our church measure success? What would it mean to find new ways of obedience and ministry?

Prayer:

O God Who Speaks, give you children ears to hear and courage to obey. May we not become so comfortable in our success that we cannot move on to something new. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Friday: The Road Not Taken**

Mark 15:25-30

*25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: the King of the Jews.*

*27 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!”*

In 1988, Martin Scorsese directed the controversial film *The Last Temptation of Christ.* The highly controversial film was based on a novel of the same name by Nikos Kazantzakis, which explored the inner life of Jesus as he journeyed toward the cross. In the fictional narrative, Jesus finds himself tempted to turn away from his coming death to go back to Galilee and live out a normal married family life.

At the time of the film, such a flight of fancy was found sacrilegious by many. In fact, though, it seems that many around the cross wondered why he didn’t choose to do something of the sort. In Gethsemane, Jesus wrestles with the possibility of letting the cup pass him by, choosing some path other than the one God had called him to embrace.

We love God’s will when it takes us to pleasant places, but obedience becomes more challenging when the cross comes into view. It is tempting to choose a “good” path rather that the path God has set before us.

Questions for Meditation:

How willing would I be to follow Jesus into a place of darkness and sacrifice?

Would our church be willing to follow a difficult path to find our way into the center of God’s will?

Prayer:

O Giver of Life, grant us grace to lay aside every good thing in order to surrender ourselves fully to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Saturday: Spectators**

Matthew 28:16-20

*16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

It boggles the mind. The disciples are gathered in Galilee after Jesus’ resurrection. There they see their miracle-working, risen-from-the-dead master in the flesh. They worshiped him.

But some doubted.

Certainly, this statement is nothing but nonsense if we think the disciples doubt the truth of the resurrection, or that this resurrected man must be an instrument of God. All of the things we think we’re supposed to believe to be good Christians are on display in this scene. What is left that the disciples could possibly doubt?

Perhaps the answer to this question is the very thing that Jesus addresses next: their own part in his unfolding mission.

It is one thing to believe in Jesus as an instrument of God’s will. It is another to believe in ourselves.

 Questions for Meditation:

Do I behave like a person who truly believes that Jesus has called me to be a part of God’s unfolding kingdom?

What would a church made up of this kind of believers look like?

Prayer:

Resurrected Savior, we believe; help our unbelief! May we respond whole-heartedly to your call. In Jesus’ name. Amen.