



Northminster's  
Daily  
Devotions

Vol. 34 No. 3

April 9-28, 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is risen! We have the tremendous opportunity as Christians to not just be the same old, same old, but we can be Resurrection people with Easter in our hearts each and every day! This transformation begins for us as we continue to dedicate ourselves to the daily reading of God's Word. These devotionals are written to complement our continuing discipline of reading through *The One Year Bible* - join us!

Thanks to our dedicated team of writers, we have this daily devotional resource to share with you. We could also use more people to use their God-given talents to spread out more the ministry of writing. If you are interested, call the church at 520-327-7121 and talk to me or Publications Editor, Jim Peck. This is a very flexible ministry and can be done from anywhere!

Also, I hope that as small groups finish their commitment to meeting together through Lent and the 40 Days of Community, you might continue meeting together, using the Sunday Study Guides that have been provided here for small group, family or individual use. They complement Sunday morning worship at NPC, and are a launching point for going more in-depth into the Bible reading for the morning.

Don't forget...this entire resource is on our website [www.godmorning.org](http://www.godmorning.org) - so don't forget to tell your friends.

In Christ,



Pete Seiferth  
Associate Pastor  
Spiritual Formation and Church Life

*The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, April 29, 2007.*

# *The Best Kind Words*

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by Marshall Worden

Monday  
April 9, 2007

Deuteronomy 33:1-29  
Luke 13:1-21  
Psalm 78:65-72  
Proverb 12:25

*An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.*

*-Proverbs 12:25*

*The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms, ...  
Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD?*

*-Deuteronomy 33:27a, 29a*

Worry and anxiety can often plague us and become a terrible barrier to enjoying our day, work, friends and even what are supposed to be times of relaxation and fun. The writer of Proverbs reminds each of us that we can be an antidote to another person's fears simply through kind and cheerful words. I've been blessed in my sometimes tension-filled work life to be surrounded by friends, both at work and here at Northminster, who seem quick with words of encouragement and kindness.

I, however, and unfortunately, am not always a fast enough source of kind words to those who are anxious in my office. Perhaps others can identify with this shortcoming.

Andy challenged us some months ago to consider which virtue or fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:23-24 we needed most to have built up. One of those Christian character virtues is, of course, kindness or, as Eugene Peterson puts it, "a sense of compassion in the heart."

But where we may fall short, the best kind words come from God and his word. Here in Deuteronomy Moses reminds us exactly who our God is:

He loves us and holds us in his hands

He is our protector, helper and security

He is our eternal refuge and our Savior.

**Young People:** What kind words can you say to your friends when they have fears?

**Adults:** How are you doing on your kindness factor? Are you getting more kindness than you give?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us your loving kindness. Build us up to have a compassionate heart and speak kind and cheerful words to others. Amen.

# An Absolute Priority

by Deb Van Scoyk

Tuesday  
April 10, 2007

Deuteronomy 34:1—Joshua 2:24  
Luke 13:33—14:6  
Psalm 79:1-13  
Proverb 12:26

*He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!" -Luke 13:24-27*

One of my most cherished friends is a very busy, overly burdened, owner of a prominent and growing business. He's a devoted husband, married for over 30 years and the father of four children, ranging in age from 23 to 4. I have marveled, on numerous occasions, at his ability to juggle a hectic and demanding professional life with the challenges of, not just maintaining, but developing and nurturing a growing marriage, thus establishing an enviable example for his children to emulate.

Knowing that life is not always as it appears, however, I once quizzed my friend about his seemingly effortless ability to keep it all together. His answer will stay with me forever. He reached beneath the stack of papers on his desk and extracted a tattered Bible which he handed to me as he sheepishly smiled and said, "I've yet to encounter a question, a challenge, a struggle, a dilemma for which there is no answer. It's all here - in this book and yours for the taking - but you must make your time with the Lord your *absolute* priority. Do this, and the rest will fall into perfect order, and I mean order forever - through eternity!"

**Young People:** God wants to be your friend. He wants you to know him and share with him, as you would a best buddy. Can you think of ways you can interact with God every day?

**Adults:** Our daily, personal time with our Lord can so easily be moved to the back burner in favor of what may seem like more pressing matters. Let's challenge ourselves to examine our priorities! Should we be planning how we'll spend next week or preparing for the glory of eternity?

**Prayer:** Lord, expand our focus. Bring us outside the boundaries of our immediate challenges, if only for a few precious moments daily, that we might grasp the depth and importance of your Word. Help us to devote time to you as our absolute priority in preparation for the wondrous gift of eternal life with you. Amen.

# Telling Stories

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by Scott Coverdale

Wednesday  
April 11, 2007

Joshua 3:1—4:24  
Luke 14:7-35  
Psalm 80:1-19  
Proverb 12:27-28

*He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'" -Joshua 4:21-22*

When I was four years old, I lived in the mountains of southern California. My father drove a 1960 Volkswagen Beetle down the mountain to work, then up the mountain home. I was told to stay away from the back of the car when he got home - that the tailpipes were hot. One day I decided to test that theory, and after my father had walked up the steps into the house, I grabbed the tailpipe of a very hard-working Volkswagen.

My mother had recently become a Christian, and was not very sophisticated in her faith. She took a howling boy with a badly burned hand up to her room and prayed to her heavenly Father, who she knew loved her and loved her son; knew that he would heal the injured hand. Immediately, I stopped crying, and there was no trace left of the burn.

This is part of my story, and in the passage from Joshua, the people are instructed to recount the story of how the Lord has worked in their midst. The story of God's work is different for each one of us. We all have a story, and those stories are a jumbled up complexity of joy and pain, confusion and doubt and faith. Mine is that way, too. But we are to tell others about the work that God has done and is still doing in our lives, as a testimony for those who come after us. Not because the work of the Lord is ancient history, but because God is going to work in the lives of all of us, whether we are crossing the Jordan into the promised land or praying for our child or grieving over loss or basking in the beauty of the earth. Write it down, tell a young person, listen to the stories of others. It is, after all, his story.

**Young People:** Ask an older person that you know, what God has done in their life.

**Adults:** Write down a story of God's work in your life. Share this with a younger person.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, please give us eyes to see the work that you have done in our lives, and thank you for the work that you are doing still. Amen.

# The Running Father

by Dick Leon

Thursday  
April 12, 2007

Joshua 5:1—7:15  
Luke 15:1-32  
Psalm 81:1-16  
Proverb 13:1

*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. -Luke 15:20*

In our day men and women start running to stay in shape when they reach a “mature” age of 30, 40, 50 or maybe even 60. In Jesus’ day no grown-up man would be caught dead running. To be a grown-up meant you slowed down, walked in a stately manner, and preserved your dignity.

The Father in the story of the Prodigal Son is the most stunning figure in all of Jesus’ parables. His son has insulted him beyond imagination by asking for his inheritance (*it means: “I wish you were dead”*) and leaving home (*it means: “I want no part of my family”*). Nevertheless, the Father cannot stop waiting and watching in hopes his son would come back.

So, seeing him still far off, the father ran to greet his lost son. The whole village would have stared in wonder at a Running Father ... and then they would have followed along to watch what they fully expected: that the father would beat his son, reprimand his son, disown his son, and extract justice toward his son at last. But, no! This Father has “compassion,” he embraces his son, kisses his son, forgives his son, restores his son and calls everyone to a party for his son who “was lost and is found.”

We are all like the son. We have left our Father’s protective love and care, we have squandered our inheritance, and if we are wise at all, we have “come to ourselves” and recognized our failing, and humbly started the long and embarrassing journey home. But, surprise! We find not the justice we deserve but the gracious and generous love of a Father whose heart was broken when we left and whose heart is bursting with joy when we return home. Such is our sin and such is God’s mercy to us all!

**Young People:** How many times have you felt like turning from your parent’s love? Hasn’t your parent’s remarkable and enduring love won your heart?

**Adults:** Can you see your life story in the Prodigal’s journey? Have you found the Father’s mercy in coming home?

**Prayer:** Teach us to see ourselves in this powerful story ... and to see your love in the Running Father. Through Jesus. Amen.

# Do You Count Your Blessings?

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by Frank Shallenberger

Friday  
April 13, 2007

Joshua 7:16—9:2  
Luke 16:1-18  
Psalm 82:1-8  
Proverb 13:2-3

*Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law — the blessings and the curses — just as it is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.*

*-Joshua 8:34-35*

By our prayers we recognize that God is involved in our lives. When we thank God for our food our prayer implies that we believe God had something to do with supplying this need. But God is not just a God of blessings; the same God who promised blessings under certain conditions to his people also promised curses under certain conditions.

In Deuteronomy 11:26-29 God himself says to us “Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God ... That is the choice open to us, to obey or not to obey the Lord.

How can we know when God blesses us? Was the blessing I just received because I was in the right place at the right time or was God’s hand really in it? We are often convinced that the good things in our lives come about through pure coincidence. Remember that “coincidence” means God is working quietly in the background. He has his hand in every part of our lives; to encourage us, to comfort us, to inspire us, to test us, to challenge us, and yes, to chasten us.

**Young People:** Do good things happen when you do what your parent tells you to do? Are you punished when you disobey? Treats are like God’s blessings and punishment is like God’s curse.

**Adults:** Do you look upon every good thing in your life as a blessing? David tells us “all good things come from above”. And what about the adversities of life? Are they a result of bad choices?

**Prayer:** Father, we come to you seeking wisdom that we may be better able to see your hand in all that occurs in our lives and in the lives of those whom we love. Help us to not only rejoice in the blessings you shower upon us but also to rejoice in the trials and difficulties which befall us. Help us to use those tribulations to develop perseverance, character and hope that we may be a light and an inspiration to all who see us. In Jesus precious name we pray. Amen.

# Couch Potato?

by Dick Leon

Saturday  
April 14, 2007

Joshua 9:3—10:43  
Luke 16:19—17:10  
Psalm 83:1-18  
Proverb 13:4

*The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied. -Proverbs 13:4*

I love the Proverbs. They make such great teaching tools to all of us, but especially to the young. If you still have young ones in your home, try reading from this book of wisdom several nights a week.

Today's Proverb affirms the worth of diligence, or hard work. This is true in every dimension of life. Sports is an obvious example. The premier athletes are the ones who work the hardest. We've all heard of the work ethic of Tiger Woods, so it is no wonder he excels. Before the Super Bowl, I read that Peyton Manning had his center dunk footballs in a bucket of water and hike them to him over and over again. No wonder he did so well in the torrential rain!

In contrast, the sluggard craves but gets nothing. Couch potatoes do not do well in life. We see it all the time. I have been part of the planning for my 50<sup>th</sup> college graduation reunion. We have contacted members of my fraternity and have asked each of them to write a "post graduation bio-sketch." It is great fun reading what these last 50 years have meant to everyone. Without naming anyone, it is also evident that those who sat around playing poker or hanging out at the tavern have had a significantly different post-graduation life than those who were diligent in their studies!

One wag put it this way: "When I was young I set my goal to be someone, now I think I should have been more specific!"

It seems to me the hinge on which this issue of being diligent or a sluggard swings is our motivation to a cause larger than our personal ego or comfort. I believe it is God's call to serve him and his Kingdom that is the greatest single factor separating couch potatoes from diligent disciples in service to the Lord and our world!

**Young People:** How do you feed your diligence and discourage your tendencies to being a couch potato?

**Adults:** Can you be a sluggard and also an obedient disciple of the Lord?

**Prayer:** Help us Lord to rise above our bent toward being sluggards by giving us a fresh drive to serve you and your Kingdom. Amen.

# Sunday Study Guide

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Sunday  
April 15, 2007

Joshua 11:1—12:24  
Luke 17:11-37  
Psalm 84:1-12  
Proverb 13:5-6

*Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid."*

*-Matthew 28:9-10*

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.



## Connect Together

How can we connect better together as Christ's family?

1. How did you celebrate Easter as a child?
2. Who is the first person you are going to look up when you get to Heaven.



## Grow Together

How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?

1. Read **Matthew 28:1-20**
2. How do the following react to the resurrection of Jesus: The women? The guards? The chief priests? The disciples?
3. What significance is there that Jesus appeared to the women first?
4. Can you identify with the emotions of being "afraid yet filled with joy?"
5. What response does Jesus' simple, "greetings" elicit?
6. What affect do you think Jesus word's "Do not be afraid" have?
7. Upon seeing the risen Jesus, how do the disciples respond?
8. What place does doubt have in accepting the Christ's resurrection?



## Serve Together

How can we serve better together both each other and the church?

1. Is there a way that your group has identified to serve together on a regular basis?
2. The All-Church picnic is coming up on April 22 - is there a way you can help with making it happen?



## Share Together

How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?

1. Read together Jesus' great commission in verses 18-20.
2. How does a fresh reading help you think about following Jesus' command?



## Worship Together

How can we worship God better together through prayers and songs?

1. Is there a simple song or hymn that you can sing together?
2. Share prayer requests and close in prayer.

# The Lord Keeps His Promises

by Marie Ruiz

Monday  
April 16, 2007

Joshua 13:1—14:15  
Luke 18:1-17  
Psalm 85:1-13  
Proverb 13:7-8

*“Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! ... Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance.” -Joshua 14:10,13*

Today’s Scripture readings are a reflection of the faithfulness of God’s promises. Not only did God provide for the Israelites as he led them to the promised land, but then gave Joshua clear instructions as to which parcel of land would go to each tribe as their inheritance.

God had a plan for his people from the beginning and his instructions for dividing the land were ordered by the Lord. Even though the Israelites had their doubts along the way, God always proved faithful in his provision for his people.

God, indeed has a plan for all of us. We sometimes doubt along the road of our life just as the Israelites did as they wandered in the desert. But God had his hand on his people and forgave them taking them the next steps in order that the promised land would be safely apportioned to each tribe.

God uses the circumstances of life to draw us to him. Some of us experience great hardship, but reap great teaching and understanding that draws us closer to God and ultimately gives us peace. The peace that I’m referring to is found in Psalm 85:8: *“I will listen to what God the Lord will say; he promises peace to his people, his saints - but let them not return to folly.”* Peace is in short supply today. There is unrest in every direction we turn. However, we can be assured of God’s promise of peace by listening to what God says through his Word and through our pastors and teachers. Let us not grow weary in our sometimes struggle for the peace that God has promised us.

**Young People:** God has promised to lead and guide you in the way of truth as you grow. Ask God to help you do the right thing each day.

**Adults:** Have you received your inheritance from God? He wants to bestow his promises ordered just for you. And in addition, He’ll give you peace!

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for the order you bring to our chaotic lives. Your ways are better than any we could choose for ourselves. Help us to rely on your wisdom for our lives and let us rest in your peace. Amen.

# Elevator 86

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by Andy Ross

Tuesday  
April 17, 2007

Joshua 15:1-63  
Luke 18:18-43  
Psalm 86:1-17  
Proverb 13:9-10

*Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. -Psalm 86:4*

Do you like elevators? Are you the kind of person who enjoys escalators? And how do you feel about those glass elevators on the sides of tall buildings!? It's amazing, when you think about it, how we have such engineering marvels that can whisk us up flights and flights, like a bird in flight!

For several years, when I was young, I worked at a gas station that also offered mechanical servicing and repair. I was always captivated by the strong lifts back in the garage. Once you parked the car or truck in the right spot, and positioned the heavy iron tabs on the lift - you then operated the hydraulic lever to begin a massive hoist. It was an amazing feeling of power to see such strength lifting a heavy vehicle, seemingly effortlessly, into the air. And then, I observed, it was only while lifted that you could do so many critical repair jobs on a car! From engine-work, to mufflers and tires - you've got to be lifted up to get the job done!

Psalm 86 is a lifting, hydraulic kind of psalm. The author reminds us that, although we may be "poor and needy", we can lift our souls to God. It is there, in the "shop" of prayer and quiet reverence, that we find repair and strengthening for daily life.

**Young People:** What are ways you find yourself lifted to God for strength and help? How might you do that today?

**Adults:** Is there a specific burden you need to lift to God today? Try bringing your intercessions to God, by using Psalm 86 in your prayer.

**Prayer:** Thank you God, for providing the lift we need - for strength, healing and help. Hear my prayers. Amen.

# Can You See Him?

by Dick Leon

Wednesday  
April 18, 2007

Joshua 16:1—18:28  
Luke 19:1-27  
Psalm 87:1-7  
Proverb 13:11

*He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. -Luke 19:3*

When I was at Princeton Seminary we heard a lecture by the very famous editorialist for the New York Times, James Reston. He had the perfect opening line for a talk to seminarians. He said his favorite verse in the Bible was Luke 19:3, which he quoted in his version this way: *“but on account of the press he could not see who Jesus was.”*

We don't need to be short of stature to find it hard these days to see “who Jesus really was!” He is distorted from our view by so many factors: by the press, by movies, by books, by music, by TV, and maybe more tragically by religious people who embarrass us all with extreme and unloving words and deeds often expressed or done in his name!

The Bible is our most reliable source for knowing Jesus. And stories like this tell us that he wants to get close to “sinners” like Zacchaeus by coming to their homes for dinner. All who get close to him are transformed. At the end of this story no one stands taller than this tax collector who had gone out on a limb to see Jesus. His “conversion” is not phony for he confirmed it with acts of generosity to any he may have defrauded and acts of mercy to the poor.

Indeed, “salvation” came to that house that day because Zacchaeus saw Jesus for who he really was!

**Young People:** Have you ever gone out of your way to find out who Jesus really is? You will not be disappointed when you do!

**Adults:** Every day you must run across people who have a distorted view of Jesus. Have you found good ways to help them see him?

**Prayer:** Lord, forgive us for any way we have made it hard for others to see the deep goodness, mercy and love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

# ***Jesus is Our Strength and Refuge*** 13

by Frank Shallenberger

Thursday  
April 19, 2007

Joshua 19:1—20:9  
Luke 19:28-48  
Psalm 88:1-18  
Proverb 13:12-14

*Then the Lord said to Joshua: "Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood." -Joshua 20:1-3*

There are times in our lives when we find ourselves in situations entirely beyond our control. Sometimes we make bad choices. When we do, we can suddenly find ourselves unwelcome at our place in the world. God is always there for us at times like that. He ordered the Israelites to establish Cities of Refuge where his people could come when they were deeply concerned and fearful for what they had done. Psalm 46 starts out with these words *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble ..."* How many times have we read those words and rejoiced in the comfort that they provided? Matthew 11:28 repeats the words of Jesus: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* When we turn our lives over to Jesus Christ we know that he never leaves us once we become his no matter what we do. Just as the Israelites of old knew that there was always a City of Refuge close by, we too have the assurance that Jesus himself is always there beside us. Since he purchased our salvation through his death and resurrection he himself has been our refuge and our strength. All who find a refuge in him are saved forever from the judgment of a holy God.

**Young People:** When you find yourselves in trouble with the neighborhood do you find refuge in running to mother or dad?

**Adults:** When you find yourself in a serious situation of your own making do you take your problems and share them with your spouse or with a friend for solace and comfort? Or do you take them immediately to Jesus who has given you assurance that He shall always love and shield you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, so many times in my life I have created situations unintentionally which have caused problems for others and the burden and guilt overwhelms me. I know that you have told me that you will always be there for me, that no force in Heaven above or under the earth below can seize me from you. You are my rock, my fortress, a place of refuge. In your love and mercy I trust. Ease my burdens and help me to turn my life around so that I too may be a lighthouse for you. Thank you Lord Jesus. Amen.

# Our Starting Point

by Dick Leon

Friday  
April 20, 2007

Joshua 21:1—22:20  
Luke 20:1-16  
Psalm 89:1-13  
Proverb 13:15-16

*The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it. -Psalm 89:11*

What is your starting point for building a wholesome, useful and truthful world view?

Up until the period in Western history called the “Enlightenment” the starting point was God. The general assumption about life began with the belief that the heavens and the earth, the world and all that is in it, all started with God. God created the universe and God created us. So human identity and destiny started with the awareness that we came from God, we belong to God, and we will, in the end, return to God.

When Rene Descartes tried to build his philosophical system on a solid foundation he shifted this fundamental and primary focus from God to the human self! His formula is familiar to many: “*Cogito ergo sum*” - “I think therefore I am.” The human self became the starting point for it all!

I believe one of the core distinctives between Christians and others in this modern culture stems from this shift of starting points. Moderns are taught to consider the “self” as the main, if not ultimate, “reality.” We test life by whether it pleases us, or fits our thinking, or appeals to our senses.

Christian thought reverses this and starts with God. “*The heavens are yours and the earth also*” ... and so are we! So, what is your will, O God? What is your plan for my life, O God? What is your standard for right and wrong, O God? And one of the countless benefits of this approach to a world view is that we know we live in a world that is under the sovereign rule of a God who is all love and in the end, it will be that love, not this tormented world filled with terror, that wins the day!

**Young People:** To whom does your body and mind belong? Just to you? Or the crowd? Or, better yet, to the God we know in Jesus?

**Adults:** Check your world view by this text and see if you have made the shift to build your life on God’s Lordship (*ownership*) over it all.

**Prayer:** Lord, it is easy to fall into the ways of this world and leave you out on the edges. Help us to place you squarely in the center! Amen.

# He Knows

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by Scott Coverdale

Saturday  
April 21, 2007

Joshua 22:21—23:16  
Luke 20:27-47  
Psalm 89:14-37  
Proverb 13:17-19

*The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD, do not spare us this day. -Joshua 22:22*

In the passage from Joshua, there is a crisis among the people of Israel because the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh had decided to settle in a different land than the others, and this was seen as treasonous by many of the people. To prove their loyalty to God and the other tribes of Israel, the tribes that split away built a monument that would testify of their loyalty, and this reassured the people that they were not abandoning their people or the Lord.

In the verse above, the “He knows!” refers to the fact that God is the one who truly knows the motivation and condition of a person’s heart, however misunderstood by others they may be. I think this is a comfort and a warning to us. It is a comfort because we can rest in the assurance that God knows our hearts even when we are misunderstood by people around us. This knowledge gives us the freedom to live by our own convictions, by our own conscience before God, without being captured or controlled by the opinions of others. It is also a warning to us not to be quick to judge another person who we perceive to be in some sort of rebellion. It is God who knows the heart of a man or a woman or a teenager - not us. This is not to excuse real rebellion against God. That can only bring grief to us and those around us. But God does speak differently and have different purposes and plans for all of us, and we need to recognize that God may have a different path, a different calling for one of our brothers or sisters or children or friends.

**Young People:** Have you ever felt that your actions were misunderstood by others who felt that you were going astray? How could you reassure those other people that you were still being loyal and faithful, only that you were responding to your own calling?

**Adults:** How does the truth that God truly understands the motivations of our hearts free us? What are the conditions for this freedom?

**Prayer:** Mighty One, God, the Lord: You know! Please help us to live with our hearts open and honest before you, and then give us courage to live free in the assurance of your love for us. Amen.

Sunday  
April 22, 2007

Joshua 24:1-33  
Luke 21:1-28  
Psalm 89:38-52  
Proverb 13:20-23

*He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"*

*-Luke 24:17*

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.



## Connect Together

How can we connect better together as Christ's family?

1. Are you one who likes surprises?
2. When you are down, do you like to be alone or with others?



## Grow Together

How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?

1. Read **Luke 24:13-34**
2. With Jesus' approach to the disciples, why might they be kept from recognizing him as he asks the question in v. 17?
3. What emotions and tones might be accompanying the words of explanation in vv. 18-24?
4. Why did Jesus do a scripture study instead of just revealing himself to them?
5. What is the significance of the disciples insistence that Jesus not keep walking and join them for the evening?
6. Why do you think eyes are opened at the breaking of bread?



## Serve Together

How can we serve better together both each other and the church?

1. Is there a way that your group has identified to serve together on a regular basis?
2. How does talking about God's love relate with showing God's love?



## Share Together

How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?

1. How has Jesus opened your eyes to himself and the Scriptures?
2. What opportunities do you have as you "walk along the road" to share a witness of God's love in your life?



## Worship Together

How can we worship God better together through prayers and songs?

1. Is there a simple song or hymn that you can sing together?
2. Share prayer requests and close in prayer.

# End Time Talk

17

by Dick Leon

Monday  
April 23, 2007

Judges 1:1—2:9  
Luke 21:29—22:13  
Psalms 90:1—91:16  
Proverb 13:24-25

*Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the Kingdom of God is near. -Luke 21:31*

Blaise Pascal, the 17<sup>th</sup> century scientist, philosopher, mathematician, lay theologian, has a great line about eternity. He notes that many people give no thought to eternity even though this life is but a moment and death, whatever its nature, will last forever. Then he adds: therefore we condemn those who give no thought to the future, “as if they could annihilate eternity by turning their thoughts away from it.”

I love that quote. We live in a world that does turn our thoughts away from the meaning of death and whatever may lie beyond this life - as if we could annihilate eternity by just not thinking of it!

Jesus’ words have been greatly abused by people who build elaborate schemes of the “end times.” Remember Jesus, himself, said that no one knows when the end will come, not even the Son of Man. So we are wise to be suspicious about those who know too much.

Here is the point I think we can take from Jesus’ talk of the end times. God is in control of the end and we can trust God to bring this world to a close at a time and in a way that will be consistent with his stern love and his generous grace. *How* and *when* this world will end remains a mystery, but *that* God will end it and usher in his Kingdom is for real!

Bottom line: this world is not the only world and this life is not the only life. We should shape our life today, which is but a moment in the span of time, by whatever it takes to be welcomed into God’s good eternal kingdom. If we are in doubt about how to do that, stay as close to Jesus as possible, he is the one who ushers in God’s end times!

**For all of us:** This world makes eternity seem so distant we can easily neglect it. But Jesus teaches that “now” is always the time to receive him.

**Prayer:** Mighty God, it is easy to be impressed with all you have said and done through your Son but feel no need to do anything about it because it seems like there is no hurry. Bring us all to faith in Jesus, regardless of our age or circumstance, so that none of us miss out on the joy of your eternal kingdom. Amen.

# God's Embrace

by Dick Leon

Tuesday  
April 24, 2007

Judges 2:10—3:31  
Luke 22:14-34  
Psalms 92:1—93:5  
Proverb 14:1-2

*And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." -Luke 22:19-20*

Have you noticed how all the big events in life have some ceremony that enables us to celebrate? What is a wedding without a ring? What is a birthday without a cake and candles? What is a Super Bowl victory without a barrel of Gatorade dumped on the coach? What is a quality opera without a bouquet of roses at the final curtain call?

We are all sacramentalists to one degree or another. It is the same with our faith. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to provide a re-presentation of his gracious presence in our lives and a reminder of his sacrifice on the cross. In contrast with other life ceremonies, this sacrament is far more than just a symbol. It is "an outward expression of an inward reality." Something really happens in the Sacraments! God comes to embrace us again and again and again through this sacred meal.

I find the power of the Lord's Supper in the physical reception of the bread, as Christ's body, and the cup, as Christ's blood. By consuming these simple elements from daily life into my body I can better visualize that Christ has come to dwell in me.

God speaks to us in the preached Word and God embraces us in the shared Sacrament. Word and Sacrament - two powerful means of God's grace in our lives!

**Young People:** What are the important events in your life that are marked by some ritual or symbol?

**Adults:** Do you take the sacraments seriously? As we receive the Supper on the first Sunday of each month, think again about the power of what God is doing in us.

**Prayer:** Mighty Lord, refresh us each month by this Sacrament that we may trust more in your saving sacrifice and live more by the power of your indwelling presence. Amen.

# Jesus Christ As Man

19

by Deb Van Scoyk

Wednesday  
April 25, 2007

Judges 4:1—5:31  
Luke 22:35-53  
Psalm 94:1-23  
Proverb 14:3-4

*Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. -Luke 22:39-44*

Each year, as we worship together through Lent and celebrate another Easter, I find myself feeling ever closer to Jesus as I reflect, once again, on his human characteristics. To read that he experienced doubt, was overwhelmed with anticipation, lived as a man through periods of anguish, and worried about his disciples, makes my relationship with him so completely different than it would be were he to have existed in an unidentifiable form that would forever remain beyond the realm of my imagination's grasp.

As a young Christian, I recall hearing others speak of their "relationship with Christ", and I struggled to comprehend one's interaction with a "Supreme Being." And, while I worshipped at the feet of a symbol, whose portrayal in a Bible my child-brain interpreted as powerful, awesome and perfect, my heart remained untouched. It was not until I encountered Scripture, such as today's lesson, that I began to relate to Jesus the man.

How awesome is our God - to create so perfectly within our human parameters of understanding! He first brought us this wondrous man so we could ultimately come to *know*, on human terms, our Jesus. And now, we *experience* the joy that fills our lives' deepest voids - the Jesus who speaks to our hearts as no other friend can and lovingly nourishes and overwhelms our souls with grace. Imagine - a perfect friendship that is interminable.

**Young People:** Can you think of Jesus as your friend? Do you talk to him every day? He wants to know you and he especially wants you to know him.

**Adults:** Let's rejoice in the fruits of our growing relationship with Jesus the Christ - those moments we experience of absolute quiet, calming peace.

**Prayer:** Oh, Lord, your gift of Jesus completely overwhelms us. For this, we praise you today, and we live with great anticipation of the perfect joy we will share with you through eternity. Amen!

# The Lord Reigns!

by Marie Ruiz

Thursday  
April 26, 2007

Judges 6:1-40  
Luke 22:54—23:12  
Psalms 95:1—96:13  
Proverb 14:5-6

*“Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.” -Psalm 95:1-2*

Today’s Psalm is clearly a song of joy and thanksgiving. How else could we possibly sing these wonderful truths? I can’t help but play through my mind all the songs/praise choruses that have been written in response to these Psalms. Never forget that this Psalm sings God’s praise in worship. Would you sing along with me now:

*For the Lord is the great God ... King above all gods ...*

*The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.*

*Come let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker,  
for he is our God ...*

*Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth ...*

*proclaim his salvation day after day ...*

*For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise ...*

*Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name ...*

*Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him,  
all the earth ...*

*The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity.*

*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound,  
and all that is in it;*

*let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them.*

*Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;*

*they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.*

*He will judge the world in righteousness and peoples in his truth.*

God only asks that we acknowledge he is God and spend the rest of our life in worship of him. We don’t have to worry about the injustices in our lives. He has already taken care of them in his time.

**Young People:** Look up to the heavens, look at the trees and everything around you on the earth. Thank God for all he has created.

**Adults:** You don’t need to be a singer to praise God in song. The Psalms are your song of joy.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us never take for granted all that you have given us in creation. Let us bow down in worship and come before you, our Maker for you are our God and we are the people of your pasture. Amen.

# Never Was Grief Like That

21

by Dick Leon

Friday  
April 27, 2007

Judges 7:1—8:17  
Luke 23:13-43  
Psalms 97:1—98:9  
Proverb 14:7-8

*When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."*

*-Luke 23:33-34*

George Herbert is my favorite Christian poet. An Anglican priest in the early 1600s he wrote a massive collection of 185 poems called *The Temple* in which he tells the story of our Christ. One of the most moving poems in the collection is called *The Sacrifice*. Here are a few samples:

*Oh all ye who pass by, behold and see;  
Man stole the fruit, but I must climb the tree;  
The tree of life to all, but only me:  
Was ever grief like mine?*

*Now heal thyself, Physician; now come down,  
Alas! I did so, when I left my crown  
And father's smile for you, to feel his frown;  
Was ever grief like mine?*

*Betwixt two thieves I spent my utmost breath,  
As he that for some robbery suffereth,  
Alas, what have I stolen from you? Death!  
Was ever grief like mine?*

How that cross has become our "tree of life" remains a mystery that will we will never fully understand for it is bound up with a God whose ways are not our ways. He sent his Son "down" to feel the frown that belonged to us, and "stole the death" that we all deserved. Never was a grief like his!!

**Young People:** Can you imagine anyone dying for you?

**Adults:** Through the crucifixion God appeals not to our mind, but to our heart, so we may respond to his amazing love with our love.

**Prayer:** Mighty Lord, your sacrifice totally confounds us. Deliver us from trying to understand it so we may fully give ourselves over to you in loving devotion. Through Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

# God Rules

by Andy Ross

Saturday  
April 28, 2007

Judges 8:18—9:21  
Luke 23:44—24:12  
Psalm 99:1-9  
Proverb 14:9-10

*But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you." -Judges 8:23*

*Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. -Luke 24:12*

Do you ever find yourself asking: "What just happened?!?"

In the ancient stories of Gideon's triumphs over Israel's enemies, the people still had trouble seeing that God was behind the victory! They were tempted to give all the credit it to Gideon, nominate him for "man of the year" and promote him to immediate kingship. And just as they're reaching for the confetti, "Hip, hip, hoo- WHAT?" Gideon stops the fanfare and reminds the adoring crowd that only God rules in this world. Gideon will not be king. Only the Lord is truly King.

Peter had trouble getting it too. What just happened? How could this be? Even though Jesus had patiently explained how he would be brutalized, crucified and then rise again - Peter walks away from the empty, beautifully empty, tomb - wondering.

Are you wondering still? Only God really rules in this world. And only God's sovereign, all-mighty power will save us from death and give us victorious hope.

Know that for all the battles you're facing: God rules!

**Young People:** What does it mean for you that God is not just your friend and guide, but also the powerful ruler of your life and this world?

**Adults:** In what ways do you need to call upon God's power today? What battle are you facing that needs God's strength and power?

**Prayer:** O God, you are the Ruler of all; come, and rule my life this day ... Lead me today in your Easter parade of hope and worship! Amen.





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