

Website Devotions - April

April 1, 2010 "Elijah's Cup"

Luke 22:17-18

Then Jesus took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves, for I say to you I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

Today is April Fool Day and Maundy Thursday. When we read this passage of Jesus blessing the "cup", we fail to realize that this passage refers to Elijah's cup placed in the center of the Passover table. For Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, was to precede the Messiah. This cup was not to be lifted until the Messiah arrived. Can you imagine the started look on the disciples' faces when Jesus passed this cup around the table? How foolish! The disciples had been with Jesus for more than three years and didn't realize who Jesus really was. Fool dining at the Lord's table on April Fools Day. Join the crown.

Prayer: Omniscient Spirit, unveil the real meaning of Maundy Thursday in our midst and hearts. Take away the foolish worldly notions and unveil to us in the breaking of the bread and the drinking from the cup that Jesus is Messiah and Lord. Amen.

April 2, 2010 "Jesus, remember me"

Luke 23:39-43

Then, the criminal said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

When was the last time you did something expecting nothing in return? People do good deeds all the time, but I bet most of those people do those deeds with an expectation that they will be rewarded in some way- money, establishing a relationship that may benefit them down the road, feeling good about themselves.

As we read this passage about the two criminals on the cross, we see a man (the second criminal) who chastises the first about ridiculing Jesus. Here is a man condemned to die, knowing that only death awaits him, and yet standing up and speaking out for Jesus. There was no hope on his part of any reward or any rescue from his fate. And yet, this man, this criminal, was a witness to the first through his words and actions. This passage reminds us that we are called to be witnesses; not because of any reward we might receive, but because Jesus commands this from all of us.

Prayer: Dear God, remember us when you come into your kingdom. Help to remind us that we can always be witnesses to your life and to your love in any situation. Amen.

Jill Rode

April 3, 2010 "Centurion's witness" Mark 15:33-39

So when the centurion, who stood opposite Jesus, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God."

My human event professor last semester loved this question: how do you know what you know? The Roman soldier in this passage would have known what he knew from hard experience.

A "centurion", he was a man in charge of 100 other soldiers. More or less like a master sergeant, he would have been a career soldier, older than the men he led, and battle-hardened. The centurion would have witnessed more than his fair share of crucifixions, and would have known what to expect when a man was crucified. But Mark records that when the centurion heard Jesus' cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" In one moment, the centurion realized exactly who that man on the cross was, and made sure those around him realized it, too. At a time when Jesus' own disciples were hiding

in fear, this Gentile freely identified him as the Son of God. The soldier may not have understood the Holy Spirit at work in him, but what he knew, he knew, and what he knew, he told others. For me, the word 'witness' always described a nerve-wracking and complicated task that involved explaining big words like "redemption", "justification," "righteousness", and so on, to people who only saw the technicalities and did not see the love. But the centurion seems to follow a two step plan: 1) Recognize Jesus as the Son of God and 2) tell others. God is already on your side, and it is through His Holy Spirit that faith is inspired. So let me ask you, how do you know what you know? When was *the* moment that you realized, "Surely this man [is] the Son of God?" What is the story of you and God? What does His love mean to you? And lastly, will you join me in telling it to others?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the sacrifice Your Son made for us. Please strengthen our faith in You, and give us the courage to tell the story of how you saved us to those around us. We pray that you would work in their hearts to receive the news of Your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Eric Lehnhardt

April 4

Resurrection

John 11:25

²⁵Jesus said to Mary, "I am the resurrection and the life.

Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die;

²⁶and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Unless you've been there, you cannot really understand. We have heard these words many times regarding accidents, close encounters and more. Jesus asked Mary if she believed in the resurrection. "Do you believe this?" grasps the heart of our being as we celebrate Easter. For "Easter" means "spring" and

"spring" means new life and growth. Your answer to Jesus' question flavors this special and powerful day. Christians loudly proclaim: "He is risen! He is risen, indeed!" and the truth inspire them in the knowledge that Jesus offers new life. For each day is Easter in our hearts and minds.

Prayer: Resurrected Lord, you overcame sin, death and the devil on this day. Overcome us with the awesome wonder of your love and power. For by faith only do we grasp the victory on this Easter day. Amen.

April 5 Resurrection Matthew 27:51-53

⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵²and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

How mysterious! How frightening! How enlightening! A gamut of emotions and questions probably flooded the minds of the people of Jerusalem as the dead walked among them. "I thought he died last year?" "Did we bury here in the cemetery and place the stone in front of the tomb?" Jesus' death unleashed the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' resurrection unleashed hope beyond words. **"The bodies of many holy people"** walked in their midst to verify Jesus' power. We confess in the Apostles' Creed that we believe in the "communion of saints." Yes, they walk among us as Jesus walks among us.

April 6, 2010 Folded Hands John 20:15

Jesus asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the **gardener**, she said, "Sir, if you

have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Today the church calendar lifts up the name of Albrecht Durer. This famous painter vividly painted the folded hands of his roommate and colleague. The story tells of two young artist barely surviving. When their food ran out Durer's friends stated that he would secure a job and pay for expenses while Durer painted. One day he arrived home and Durer noticed his mangled hands. He sacrificed his career for his friend. Durer painted his hands as they prayed over their dinner. Today the painting points to grateful hearts thanking God in any circumstance.

Prayer: Lord, with folded hands and thankful hearts let us ever be mindful of Jesus Christ and what he has done for us. Amen.

April 7, 2010 Preparation

Luke 24:1

Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.

Preparation is essential in my scenarios of life. During our first year in seminary BP251 required a paper on either the Gospel or the Old Testament lesson for the day or a homily. Preparation was essential in order to keep up with the class. The grind was relentless and many nights were spent with little or no sleep. Yet, I thank the Lord for the grueling schedule. In the end the benefits outweighed the pressure. As the women walk to the tomb they are prepared for death, not life. What are you prepared for?

Prayer: Glorious Savior, keep us steadfast in your grace as we prepare for today believing tomorrow will always be in your hands.

April 8, 2010

Surprise

Luke 24:2

But the women found the stone rolled away from the tomb.

Expect the unexpected. A very secure and quiet life is sometimes relished. Some people love the unexpected and relish in the surprise. On our 25th anniversary Gerry was surprised by family and friends venturing from Ohio, Illinois and other states to Wayne, Nebraska. Our friends traveled miles to celebrate with us. On Easter morning the women were surprised. For the stone at the entrance of the tomb was not a factor. Neither is death anymore. Time to celebrate!

Prayer: Resurrected Lord, thanks for the open entrance into your grave and your opening the doors to heaven for us. Amen.

April 9, 2010

Startled

Luke 24:3

Then the women went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

What we receive is not always what we expect. Yes, the women entering the tomb were startled by the empty tomb. The key work is "empty". One day I was driving to visit a friend and noticed the gas gauge was on "empty." My brother had borrowed the car and didn't tell me about the empty tank. How humbly I knocked on the door of a house to ask for gas. How humbly Jesus gave his life and emptied himself on the cross for us. Are we startled by His love?

Prayer: Great Teacher, at times we are like the women at the tomb and don't listen to your words. You promised to suffer and die and rise again. Keep Easter in our hearts. Amen.

April 10, 2010 Perplexed Luke 24:4

And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold two men stood by them in shining garments.

The 1994 movie, **Angels in the Outfield**, pictures a forelorned baseball team attempting to survive another season of futility. A young boy is blessed with a sense for angels. The guardian angels for each baseball player assist in the miracle of winning the pennant. Angels assist with the celebration of Easter. You can't miss the angels. They are the ones in "shining garments."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, angels are in our midst. Keep us aware of their presence and their roles in our lives. We thank you for the perplexing of the women entering the tomb. Perplex us with the sight of angels in our midst. Amen.

April 11, 2010 Fear Luke 24:5

Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, the angels said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

The word "fear" means "to respect in the highest." In my youth we were required to walk through the cemetery to arrive in downtown Lowellville. We respected the graves and wondered about the people whose names were on the headstones. How much more our respect for Jesus as we walk through the cemeteries in our lives and realize that our fellow believers are not among the dead but among the eternal! Hallelujah!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in the Apostles' Creed we confess the communion of saints. We thank you for your resurrection. May we hear the question of the angels, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" and believe you are the answer. Amen.

April 12, 2010 Risen Luke 24:6a

He is not here, but he is risen!

"But" changes the entire thinking process! We can state facts and arguments but when we use the word "but," the previous is nullified. The women expected a dead body but the angels told them about the "risen Lord." What did Jesus look like? Where did Jesus go? What does "risen" mean for me when I standing here with spices to embalm?

Prayer: Risen Lord, dwell among with power and purpose. Change out thinking process about sin, death and the devil. For through your power we are victorious. Amen.

April 13, 2010 Remembrance Luke 24:6b

Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying. . .

I remember words spoken by my father and grandfather. Grandpa Bell would place his hands on my knee when he wanted to get my attention and if I didn't listen, he squeezed until I paid attention to his words. The angels are not knee squeezers but jog the memories of the women in regard to what Jesus told them. Pay attention and remember Jesus' words when he said. . .

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your words are recorded in the Bible in red letters to catch our attention. Send your Spirit in our

midst so that we might remember you and feel your presence.
Amen.

April 14, 2010 Sayings Luke 24:7

Saying, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."

A rich Irish man named Shaun was riding on his horse through his land and came upon one of his hired peasant, McKenzie, eating his lunch of dried bread and cheese. His hands were folded as he gave thanks. Shaun stated that he would not thank God for such little pit tons. McKenzie told Shaun that he dreamt that the richest man in the county was going to die tonight. Shaun laughed off the dream. The next morning a messenger came to Shaun's door and told him that McKenzie had died last night. We are truly rich when we believe "the Son of Man was delivered into the hands of sinful men" for our sake.

April 15, 2010 His Words Luke 24:8

And the women remembered Jesus' words.

Today is income tax day. Unless you file for an extension, you have only to midnight. How much we remember certain days in our lives: birthdays, anniversaries, etc. The women remembered Jesus' words and they became etched in their lives. This Easter day will not tax their souls but send their spirits soaring as they remember Jesus and what he had done for them.

**Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep us in your word and keep us mindful of your love and grace in our lives. Stretch our imaginations with awesome possibilities as you came to save us and all.
Amen.**

April 16, 2010 Good News Luke 24:9

Then they returned to the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to the rest.

Does good news spread faster or slower than bad news? When I started the ministry in Nebraska, my first home communion was to see Trientje. Trientje was over 90 years old and still vibrant for the gospel and a visit from her pastor. At my second visit I was greeted with "I've been expecting you." I was startled and asked, "How did you know I was coming today?" "Trientje called." In the few minutes to travel two blocks all of Pickrell knew the pastor was coming. How much more incredible was the good news to the followers of Christ on Easter day! He is risen! He is risen, indeed!

Prayer: Spirit of the risen Lord, move us in this Easter season to share the good news of Jesus' power over sin, death and the devil. Amen.

April 17, 2010

Women

Luke 24:10

It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles.

During my tenure at Christ Lutheran in Nebraska the council meetings were often times to reflect on vision and outreach. Most of the members were related and understood the needs of their neighbors. At one meeting of the five male council members I acknowledged the insights and thoughtfulness of the visions. The chairman of the council said, "Do you think we men have these great ideas? Well, we pass it on from our wives." Yes, women were the first instruments of sharing the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

Prayer: Resurrected Lord, add us to the list of women and men in the scriptures that testified to the you as risen from the dead. Amen.

April 18, 2010

Idle Tales

Luke 24:11

And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they did not believe them.

One day I was contacted by members of the church that a member had died. After arriving at the home and seeing Emma's body, I ventured to tell John. John was shocked and didn't believe me. He said that he needed to see for himself. When the apostles heard the good news they didn't believe. So we read in the scripture the many times Jesus came into their midst to verify the fact that we was alive. The idle talk turn to vibrant faith.

Prayer: Savior and Lord, send your Spirit in our midst so that we believe in our hearts and minds that You are alive and will return on the final day. Amen.

April 19, 2010

Marvel

Luke 24:12

But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.

The old story of the Sunday school teacher who gave her plastic pantyhose container to the class on the Sunday prior to Easter echoes from Peter's example. Each child was asked to place something in the container that represented Jesus' resurrection. On Easter she opened one container and it was empty. The class laughed. The little boy said that is exactly what Peter saw when he looked into the tomb: nothing! The tomb was empty. And we like Peter walk away marveling.

Prayer: Resurrected and reigning Lord, only the burial clothes accented the tomb. We thank you for the empty tomb and the joy of knowing through faith that Jesus is risen. Amen.

April 20, 2010 "Remember Jesus Christ" 2 Timothy 2:8-13

2 Timothy 2:10 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

This passage is a letter from Paul to Timothy. He tells him to always remember Jesus Christ. Paul is suffering to the point of being "chained" like a criminal. Even though he is chained, "God's word is not changed." Everything he does is for everyone to find salvation in Christ, and that frees him. If we die with Jesus, then we have given ourselves up for him and we'll live with Jesus. If we endure hardships, we will reign with Jesus. If we disown Jesus, he will disown us, but if we ask for forgiveness and remain faithful, God will never disown us.

Prayer: God, give us the strength to endure hardships. Give us the strength to die with Jesus and help us see your light in the darkest times. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

April 21, 2010 "Remember his words" Luke 24:1-9

Luke 24:8 And they remembered His words.

It's easy to forget what we have heard in church and even what we know in our hearts to be true. In this passage, the women had already heard that Jesus would be resurrected before they witnessed it. However, when it happened they became frightened and confused. Though they had heard the story, they were not prepared for it to occur. That can happen to us as well. We do not

always fully believe that the story of Jesus is true, and we are not always prepared for His coming.

An important part of this passage is verse nine. This is when the women go back to the disciples and tell them about what they saw. At first they were unsure, but once they were reminded of the Good News they were free to spread it. This story shows us that it is human to doubt or forget about the Gospel, but there are always reminders that help guide us to the correct path. The important part is what we do with our knowledge and our faith after we are reminded.

Prayer: Lord, please help us to remember Your Word and Your Good News, even when it may be hard. Help us to share the love and the peace that we know from you with others.

Haley VanErem

April 22, 2010 "Do this in remembrance" Luke 22:19-20

Luke 22:20 Likewise he took the cup after supper saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."

Did you notice that Luke reverses the order of blessing the cup and bread? Actually were the entire text here you would see that Luke alone includes two cups; one before the bread and one at the meal's conclusion. In Passover meals four cups of wine are used. Jesus is taking an ancient Jewish religious meal and connecting it to himself. But we see why in the last verse of our text today. Jesus does this *for us*. The cup, like the life of Jesus, is poured out for us. We are to remember Jesus. We are to remember Jesus in prayer, in worship, in our discipleship, and as we gather around Jesus' table every Sunday morning. We are to remember Jesus not because Jesus' ego needs remembering but so that we can remember what God has done for us in Jesus. And so we can recall that our discipleship is to take us forth from that table

and tell others what God has done in Jesus so that they too can remember. Our faith, our prayer, our service; we do these things in joyful remembrance of Jesus.

Prayer: Loving God, you pour out yourself into our world. May we who eat and drink at your table receive strength to pour ourselves out into our world. May we who eat and drink at your table enable others to remember Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Gary McCluskey

April 23

Promise

1 Corinthians 10:13

1 Cor. 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. God is faithful and He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so you can stand up under it.

We all struggle with temptations. So many times we fall into the pit of not seeing the way out is only a prayer away. We need to let our faith in God's power win the battle's and not try so hard on our own. The Devil loves to keep us busy and off focus. Get busy with the Lord's work.

Prayer: Thanks be to God for provisions. When we are lost in temptations and struggles we are not their on our own. Help us to open up to You and seek You in all that we do and not loose sight of that promise. We give thanks to You for Your love for us is so amazing. You never change regardless of how we feel. Amen

April 24, 2010 "Christ came to serve" Matthew 20:24-28

Matthew 20:26 Yet it shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

Today we live in a culture, like many before us, in which competition and status are important. We want to excel in school, our careers, athletics, music, politics...the list goes on. People often want to make an impact and know all the "right people." In the time of Christ, human nature was no different--the twelve disciples wanted status and power just like anyone today might. In the verses prior to this passage, the mother of James and John has asked Jesus if her sons may sit at his left and right hands in the next life and he has declined, saying it is not for him to decide. The remaining ten apostles are upset, but for selfish reasons. They don't want James and John to be honored any more than they are, and Jesus responds with wise words that penetrate to the heart of the issue: the kingdom of God is not like earthly government. Serve others, and put them before yourself.

Easy on paper, but difficult to practice. Jesus sets a supreme example by humbling himself and serving us through his self-sacrifice, while simultaneously reminding us of our feelings towards those who lord their authority over us. While we will never be perfectly selfless, this passage encourages us to consider both Christ and our fellow men and women as we strive towards living a more generous life.

Prayer: Heavenly father, we spend our days in a world where people work towards status and recognition for self-serving ends. Help us, O God, to put others before ourselves, and help those in power to see the needs of all people and keep them in the forefront of their hearts.

Elise Deringer Wendte

April 25, 2010 "You did it to me" Matthew 25:31-40

Matthew 25:40 And the king will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me.'

I often think about times where I have served others where as much as the satisfaction of doing the service feels great, hearing praises from others about my service felt even better. I know I have been guilty of this in the past. What good does it do to serve if no one can see me do it? What good does it do that I do this single act of service with no direct benefit to anyone else? This passage of Matthew 25:31-40 reminds us that even the smallest bit of service, is still service to God. In a nutshell, serving others is serving him. We may not think that giving our leftover meals to someone is serving God or the time when I gave a hot chocolate to someone on a chilly morning was service to God but this passage reminds us that it is. "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me". This passage reminds us to serve selflessly; even to those who you may think don't even deserve it.

Prayer: Dear God, please encourage me to serve selflessly and to remind me that serving others is serving you. Because I am able to give to others, I should with my whole heart. Thank you for always reminding me to serve, even to the least of my brothers, by this example in Matthew 25. Amen.

Christa Steiner

April 26, 2010 "The role of a servant" John 13:1-15

John 13:7 Jesus answered and said, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."

Sometimes serving others isn't exactly what we expect it to be. Often, when we do community service we expect to feel better

about ourselves, and we anticipate thanks from the people we have served. When we do a favor for an acquaintance, many times we expect something back in return. Though we may have good intentions, we rarely do good deeds solely for the person being served. However, Jesus shows us how to be true servants. Because he was called Teacher and Lord, few probably expected Him to humble Himself so much as to wash the feet of others. However, His actions showed that everyone, no matter what his or her place in life, should be a servant. And did Jesus want something for Himself in return? No. All He wanted was for His disciples to wash one another's feet. He expected that, in return for His service, they would live out His example and serve others.

Prayer: Lord, please help us to humble ourselves to serve You and others selflessly. Help us to show Your love to others through our service. Amen.

Haley VanErem

April 27, 2010 "Live for him who died" 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

2 Corinthians 5:15 And he died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

2 Corinthians encourages us, in view of Christ's love, to live for Him. That directive can seem so abstract, though. How can we apply it? One way to live for Christ is to simply live for others. Jesus says in Matthew 25:40, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." When we see people as Christ's representatives through whom we have the opportunity to live for Him, our task is so much clearer. Consider: would you really ignore a phone call from Jesus? Would you try to beat him to a spot in the parking lot?

It's easy to profess a desire to live for Christ in general, but not as simple to actually follow through on the ideal. Living for Christ through others presents us with specific ways in which we can do it. It's our loving response to his love - a love that took Him to the cross -- and overflows into the moments of class periods or work shifts that we share with everyone around us, as we live for Him, through them.

Prayer: Lord, help us to understand how loved we are through Christ's death on the cross, and help us to respond to this love by living for You through the people around us. Amen.

Lori Amundson

April 28, 2010

"Post Note"

1 Corinthians 15:1

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand.

Post notes are so practical. We write ourselves little reminders and place them in the proper places to jog our memory. Here Paul post notes the Corinthians to remind them of the old gospel, the gospel of Jesus first given to them. If they are in conflict with this gospel, they are in error. They are called to embrace the gospel and stand in its grace. The gospel is to determine their spiritual position as well as their conduct. For the post note above all post notes points to the resurrection of Christ.

Prayer: Counselor, remind us that we are Christ's and His alone. For Jesus came to earth to save us from our sins and resurrect us to eternal life. Amen.

April 29, 2010

"Starting Point"

1 Corinthians 1:2

By which you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain.

Mazes have always interested me. How interesting to attempt the journey through a maze and make the right choices. For the final goal is coming out the other side and celebrating. Paul affirms the power of the gospel by stating to the Corinthians that **"you are saved"** in the present tense. Yes, right now! Believe in Christ! For other beliefs in other gods for salvation are mazes that leads us in vain. "Hold fast" to Jesus and Jesus holds you in His arms.

Prayer: Loving Lord, each day you love and affirm that we are you children. For we are saved by your amazing grace through faith. Shield us from false beliefs. Amen.

April 30, 2010

"Delivered"

1 Corinthians 1:3

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for your sins according to the Scriptures,

UPS and FedEx are familiar names in our society. They ring the bell and in a blur are in their trucks driving away. God's Word in print was difficult to find to find for first century Christians. Oral transmission was the primary means. Yes, hearing the Word from one of the first apostles was a great and treasured gift. One person at a time then passed on the stories of Jesus to another and to another and. . . The original UPS spoke of Jesus and was labeled Uniting People with the Savior.

Prayer: Empowering Spirit, as the days move toward Pentecost, open our ears to the Word alive today in our presence. Call each person through the Word alive in our midst. Amen.