

LENT DEVOTIONS - 2021

ASH WEDNESDAY

“It’s All About Jesus”

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. MT 1:1

Jesus never wrote a book, and yet millions of books have been written about him. Jesus never painted a picture, and yet the world’s greatest art has Jesus as its inspiration. Jesus never traveled far from his birthplace, and yet his name has gone to the ends of the earth. Jesus only had a handful of followers, and yet today over 30% of the world’s population follow him.

To know Jesus is to trust Jesus; to trust Jesus is to love Jesus; to love Jesus is to follow Jesus. This Ash Wednesday we begin a series of devotions on Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew writes his gospel so we can know Jesus.

PRAYER: Jesus, let Matthew show me your might and mercy. AMEN.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

“The Son of David”

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David. MT 1:1

Sometimes politicians make crazy promises. In 2004, John Edwards said, “We will stop diabetes, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s.” In 2012, Newt Gingrich said, “By 202, we will put a colony on the moon.” In That same year, Michelle Bachman said, “I will pull American troops out of Libya and out of Africa.”

However, when we look at Jesus, we see a completely different kind of leader. He is David’s son. He is the fulfillment of God’s promise to save us. He is the Messiah or Christ.

Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which means “anointed one.” As David’s Son and God’s Messiah, Jesus comes to teach and preach, suffer and die – all so we may love and trust him all our days. What a wonderful King!

PRAYER: Jesus, rule and reign over my life. AMEN.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

“The Compassionate King”

“... by Tamar ... by Rahab... by Ruth... by the wife of Uriah MT 1:3-6

Matthew 1:1-17 reads much like a telephone book. I can imagine many of you can remember looking up someone’s phone number in a book. That is what these first verses of Matthew sound like – a big, fay, dull, dry, telephone book!

Yesterday we saw that Jesus is David’s Son – a King. Today we marvel that Jesus is a compassionate King. Christ doesn’t come to drive out enemies. He comes to bring in outcasts.

In the ancient world, people traced their ancestry through their fathers. It comes as no surprise then, that Matthew's genealogy is predominately male. However, do you see that Matthew also mentions four women? They aren't the sweethearts and darlings of the Old Testament like Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel. No! They are outcasts named Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. These women are all Gentiles!

The Jews expected a Messiah who would drive out their Roman oppressors and crush the Gentiles. Jesus doesn't drive out enemies. Jesus comes to welcome the outcasts. Jesus comes to welcome each of us!

PRAYER: Jesus, thank you for welcoming me into your kingdom. AMEN.

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

"A Rejected Kind with All Authority"

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. MT 1:1

Do you see what Matthew does? He places David *before* Abraham. David lived one thousand years *after* Abraham. What gives? Matthew places David before everyone else in Christ's genealogy to announce that Christ is King – *the King*.

But Jewish elites rejected Jesus. They thought he was the wrong kind of King. He associated with the wrong kind of people, preached the wrong kind of message, and carried out the wrong kind of mission. The whole thing comes to a head on Good Friday.

"Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matt.27:37). After Golgotha, there was Galilee, where Christ showed himself alive! Then he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18)

That's what we would expect of a King – to have all authority. Our King Jesus makes demands of us. But before he makes those demands, he gives everything for us. That's a king worth following all our days!

PRAYER: Jesus, I will follow you – always! AMEN

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

"The Son of Abraham"

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. MT 1:1

"Who is Jesus?" That is the most important question we can ever ask. Just *who* is Jesus? Matthew says that Jesus is the son of Abraham. Who is the most famous son of Abraham? Isaac. Isaac is the son of sacrifice. So is Jesus – even more so.

Just like Isaac, Jesus willingly took wood and marched up a mount – not Mt. Moriah – but Mt. Calvary. Yet, unlike Isaac, Jesus had no substitute ram. Arrested abruptly. Beaten brutally. Crucified barbarously. But risen triumphantly! Christ is alive, never to die again.

After Isaac was miraculously spared, Abraham didn't call the mountain "Mt. Impossible" or "Mt. Disaster" or even "Mt. I-Didn't-Ever Think-I'd-Make-It." No. Abraham calls the mountain "The Lord Will Provide." How do we know God provides for us? The son of Abraham. His name is Jesus.

PRAYER: Praise to you Jesus, for being the Son of Sacrifice. AMEN.

MONDAY – THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

“The Son of Solomon”

“And David was the father of Solomon.” MT 1:7

Let’s rank what Americans have difficulty finishing. Number one: Diets! Number Two: Exercise regimens! Number Three: Saving Money! What’s my point? It’s easy as pie to begin. It’s tougher than nails to finish.

Let’s face it: we *all* have unfinished business. Yet whatever it is that we want to finish, help is on the way! Jesus is the Son of Solomon.

Solomon began strong> When his father David died, rivals to the throne included his half-brothers Ammon, Absalom and Adonijah. Solomon had all three eliminated – with the greatest of ease. Anointed at Gihon Spring by the high priest Zakok as Israel’s third king, Solomon came out of the starting gate running like a greyhound after jackrabbits. It’s easy as pie to begin!

With time, though, it became difficult for Solomon to finish. Much of his later life became one huge mess.

Christ says, “Something greater than Solomon is here” (Matt 12:42). Jesus not only begins strong, Jesus finishes strong. For who? You and I! And for Jesus it was tougher than nails... literally.

PRAYER: Jesus, you took the nails for me; I will finish strong for you. AMEN.

TUESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

“Who Is Jesus?”

“All the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation of Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation of Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.” MT 1:17

Who is Jesus? Some say Jesus is a spiritual guru who says, “Imagine a world without religion and remember all you need is love.” Others say Jesus is a revolutionary who teaches us to rebel against the status quo and blame everything on the “systems.”

So... *who is Jesus?* Matthew’s genealogy answers that question. Matthew summarizes biblical history in three sets of fourteens – or six sevens. This is a story that lacks an ending. That’s Matthew’s point.

Jesus brings the biblical story to completion Jesus ushers in the final stage in God’s plan of salvation. Jesus also brings our story to completion. This is great news because we all know that something is missing. We all know that there has to be more to life than jobs, bills, and vacations. Jesus completes our life. Jesus is our Seventh Seven!

PRAYER: Jesus, your life and love completes me – forevermore! Amen.

WEDNESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

“His Name is Jesus”

“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” MT 1:21

Mary conceives Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Joseph is hesitant to believe it. We can't blame him! So God sends an angel who speaks to Joseph in a dream. Joseph is convinced. He believes the unbelievable.

Joseph and Mary live together and share a home. This certainly raised some eyebrows in their hometown of Nazareth. I can just imagine busybodies standing on the street corner, assuming that Joseph and Mary conceived their child during their engagement instead of waiting to be married. “What nerve, those two!” This sort of gossip traveled quickly.

The angel also tells Joseph the child's name: Jesus. Jesus is the English form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “Yahweh (the Lord) saves.” The child's name is Joshua/Jesus – because this Son will save people from their sins. Jesus will forgive all sin, for all people, for all time – lock, stock and barrel!

And we need it! O God, we need it!

PRAYER: All praise to you, Jesus, for you take away the sin of the world. AMEN.

THURSDAY – FIRST WEEK OF LENT

“Immanuel”

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means God with us). MT 1:23

“God with us” is the theme of Matthew's gospel. The promise appears in the beginning: Matthew 1:23. Then in the middle: Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three gather in my name, there I am in their midst.” Then at the end: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20).

Jesus, the Son of Mary, is Immanuel – God with us. Jesus is God, up close and personal. He enters our muck and mire, our chaos and our deep confusion.

We see it most profoundly on the day of deepest darkness. On that day we all grabbed hold of Immanuel, nailed him to a cross and cried out, “Leave us alone!” To this day, our every sin demands just that – for God to leave us alone forever. On the other side of Good Friday, though, Immanuel lives! There was the cradle and there was the cross. But, conquering death, Immanuel now wears a golden, kingly crown!

PRAYER: This day, Jesus, be my Immanuel through thick and thin, darkness and light. AMEN.

FRIDAY – THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

“Herod or Jesus?”

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem.” MT 2:1

Sunday school teacher, Brenda, was teaching Matthew to her class. “What do we call the wise men?” she asked. “The three magics,” replied a five-year-old. “What gifts did the *maji* bring to Jesus?” she asked. The same five-year-old responded, “Gold, Frankensteins and Smurfs.”

Matthew 2 doesn’t have any magics or Smurfs, but it does have a Frankenstein – King Herod. Herod married ten times and ordered the execution of two of his wives, as well as three of his sons. King Herod is the Frankenstein of the Bible!

According to a fundamental law of physics, the force of impact depends upon speed and direction. Jesus and Herod are both moving fast, from totally opposite directions; one is going up, the other just as intent on going down. Herod is a tyrant; Jesus is a servant. Herod manipulates, slanders, deceives and coerces. Jesus heals, cries, loves, bleeds and dies. Through the Holy Spirit, let’s follow the real King – Jesus!

PRAYER: Jesus, make me a servant, humble like you. AMEN

SATURDAY – THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

“Rejected”

“Joseph went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.” MT 2:23

Isaiah is one of the prophets Matthew refers to. Isaiah 53:3 says that Jesus would be “despised and rejected by men.” How does that connect with Nazareth? It connects because Nazareth was a place that people despised and rejected. Nathanael asks, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46)

Jewish leaders rejected Nazareth’s most famous son. It was a bloody mess. Soldiers pinned Jesus on wood with spikes hammered into his tender flesh.

We all know the pain of rejection. We slam-dunked the job interview, only to be told that the company is going in a “different direction.” We followed all the directions, but still things fell apart. We practiced so hard, but lost every game. We spent time with our child, going out of the way to give and give some more. She rebelled and will not talk to us. Being rejected damages our self-esteem, ignites anger, and erodes confidence.

Jesus knows. He’s from Nazareth.

PRAYER: Jesus, I give you all my pain of feeling rejected. AMEN.

SUNDAY – SECOND WEEK OF LENT

“No Picnic”

Jesus was lead up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” MT 4:1

It was a Sunday afternoon in July when some people had a picnic on a battlefield. That’s right – a battlefield! On July 21, 1861, folks from Washington, D.C., rode their horses and buggies to Manassas, Virginia, to watch Union soldiers bring an end to what they thought would be a short rebellion. Their intent was to sit on blankets, watch the battle, have a good time and enjoy a picnic.

It wasn't long, though, before reality set in. With the sound of gunfire, the sight of blood, and the screaming of wounded soldiers, people realized that this was neither the time, nor the place for a picnic.

Too often, you and I think the Christian life is a picnic. However, it takes place smack-dab in the middle of a battlefield! Jesus knows. On the battlefield, Jesus defeats the devil for us. How? Through God's Word. That's our weapon as well – the truth and grace of God's almighty Word.

PRAYER: Jesus, place your Word in my heart and mind.

MONDAY – SECOND WEEK OF LENT

“The Pursuit of Happiness”

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.” MT 5:1

Happiness is something we all pursue. Frequently we pursue happiness with “when-and-then thinking.” When I get more friends, then I'll be happy. When I fall in love, then I'll be happy. When I have more money saved, then I'll be happy. When I have more success, more good looks, more health, then I'll be happy.

Jesus began his sermon on the Mount by addressing our pursuit of happiness. Each of his eight beatitudes begins with the Greek word *markarios* - which means “happy.” Jesus says, “I'm going to teach you how happiness depends on not the right circumstances, but on the right attitude.” Like the disciples, let's listen!

PRAYER: Jesus, help me really hear what you have to say about happiness. AMEN

TUESDAY – SECOND WEEK OF LENT

“Poor in Spirit”

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” MT 5:3

There are two Greek words for poor. One means to get by, like earning a minimum wage. The other means someone who is completely destitute, deprived of every means of self-support. In his first beatitude, Jesus uses the second one. Picture a homeless person pushing a shopping cart with everything he/she owns in that cart. Picture that same person with a cardboard sign, asking for money.

When we're poor in spirit, we come before God like that. Jesus is our only hope. When I recognize my spiritual poverty, I say, “I haven't arrived.”

And the opposite of being spiritually poor? Jesus tells us. “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt.9:13). The righteous here are the self-righteous. Christ says, “If you are self-righteous, you will never be happy.” That's because humble and happy always go together.

PRAYER: Jesus, humble me to lift me up. AMEN.

WEDNESDAY – SECOND WEEK OF LENT

“Blessed Are Those Who Mourn”

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” MT 5:4

When we hurt, the great temptation is to fake it, to say that everything is “just fine,” to put on a face and put on a smile, to keep on keeping on.

But there is a better way! Jesus invites us to be honest. The Greek word translated “mourn,” means a sorrow that begins in the heart, takes possession of the entire person, and is outwardly manifested. This is no superficial, sentimental or syrupy sorrow.

No. The only healthy way to address pain is to go through it. “I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psa 23:4). God pours out immeasurable comfort and consolation on those who mourn, on those who dare to walk through their pain.

PRAYER: Jesus, walk with me through life’s sorrows and heal my broken heart. AMEN

THURSDAY – SECOND WEEK OF LENT

“Blessed Are The Meek”

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” MT 5:5

In his beatitudes, Jesus says that happiness is determined by what’s going on in us. This is good news because if we need all our problems solved before we are happy, we will never be happy. Jesus says that happiness does not depend on our circumstances. Happiness depends on our attitude. They are “be-attitudes.”

Today’s beatitude? The meek will inherit the earth. Doesn’t that sound ridiculous? To inherit the earth, we need to push and shove, climb over people, and step on whoever gets in the way. That’s how we inherit, rule and govern the earth. Right?

Wrong! Biblical meekness means strength under control. Just look at Moses and Jesus. They are the only people in the Bible called meek. Both couple their strength with love.

Do you want more peace in your home? Do you want to feel better about life? Do you want to experience more of God’s presence and power? “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Through meekness everything is ours. We inherit the earth.

PRAYER: Jesus, make me like you and Moses: very meek. AMEN

FRIDAY – SECOND WEEK OF LENT

“Blessed Are Those Who Hunger”

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” MT 5:6

Jesus says that the way to happiness is to long for God’s gift of righteousness that comes through his suffering and death, his shed blood and horrific execution. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, “He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Satisfaction comes through a righteous standing with God through Christ.

Our hope is built on nothing less, nothing more, and nothing else than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. “I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name!”

PRAYER: Jesus, help me hunger for more of you. AMEN

SATURDAY – SECOND WEEK OF LENT

“Blessed Are the Merciful”

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” MT 5:7

The first four beatitudes address our relationship with God. The last four address our relationship with people. This sounds a lot like the Ten Commandments. Commandments One through Three address our relationship with God. Commandments Four through Ten address our relationship with people.

The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes both take place on the mountain. Mt. Sinai and the Sermon on the Mount. On both mountains, God says that when we have a forgiven and growing relationship with him, we have a forgiven and growing relationship with people. Get our hearts right with God first, then our hearts will be right toward people.

What’s our first attitude toward people? Mercy! Why does Jesus lead with mercy? Because without mercy, our relationships with people end with resentment. That’s why we show mercy! Mercy has a name: Jesus!

PRAYER: Thank you, Jesus, for your mercy endures forever! AMEN.

THIRD SUNDAY of LENT

“Blessed Are the Pure in Heart”

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” MT 5:8

We don’t yet live in heavenly purity. No. We live in mortal pollution. We live in a culture of sights and sounds, touch and tastes and smells that tempt our hearts to lust. Lust? Lust is: a usual or intense sexual desire; or an intense longing.

The world has almost erased all boundaries. Our culture of lust attacks every sense that we have – our eyes, our ears, our touch, our taste and our smell. Lust is a psychological force producing intense desire for an object, or circumstance while already having a significant other or amount of the desired object. Lust can take any form such as the lust for sexuality, love, money, or power. It can take such mundane forms as the lust for food as distinct from the need for food. It is similar to but distinguished from passion, in that passion propels individuals to achieve benevolent goals whilst lust does not. That’s why we pray David’s prayer: “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psalm 51:10).

PRAYER: Jesus, purify my heart in your cleansing blood. AMEN.

MONDAY –THIRD WEEK OF LENT

“Blessed Are the Peacemakers”

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” MT 5:9

According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 42% of all American wartime casualties died in the American Civil War. Over 50,000 men died at the Battle of Gettysburg. 24,000 died at the First Battle of Bull Run.

Why are civil wars the worst? Because people know each other! For some reason, when we know each other, we're more likely to tear into each other. This is especially true in families. Jesus has something to say about all this.

He doesn't say, "Blessed are the peace lovers." Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are the peace fakers" or "blessed are the peace takers." Jesus says, "Blessed are the *PEACEMAKERS*" – those who actively make peace. How do we do that? Through the cross, where we receive this promise, "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

PRAYER: Jesus, with your peace in my heart, today I will be a peacemaker. AMEN

TUESDAY – THIRD WEEK OF LENT

"Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted"

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." MT 5:7

In the Midwest, spring has a predictable pattern. Wildly wicked tornadoes! Jesus says that if we live out the first seven beatitudes, there will be a predictable pattern. What would that be? Wildly wicked persecution!

People who are living according to the beatitudes suffer for it. Saul wanted David dead. Nebuchadnezzar threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace. Jewish leaders tossed Peter and Paul into prison. Paul, for his part, warns us, "Everyone who wants to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). Living a godly life leads to a predictable pattern – wildly wicked tornadoes! Painful persecution! That's why we need this promise: "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

PRAYER: Jesus, empower me to live ever, only, all for you AMEN

WEDNESDAY – THIRD WEEK OF LENT

"Persecuted"

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." MT 5:11

Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because they show no manners, because they rave like fanatics, because they are rude and obnoxious." The reason for persecution is because of Jesus – "on my account," this beatitude says. People turn against us because our hearts have been captivated by Jesus. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we are living out his beatitudes.

The cost of being persecuted is worth it. How so? The beatitudes – humility, mercy, peace, purity, and so on – create the best version of us and they bring great glory to Christ.

PRAYER: Jesus, today empower me to live and speak for you. AMEN

THURSDAY– THIRD WEEK OF LENT

“Panic or Pray?”

“Pray like this.” MT 6:9

When it’s all said and done, life boils down to two options. We can either panic or we can pray. Panic produces paranoia. Prayer produces peace. That’s what Paul says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

If that’s true (and it is!), then there are some urgent questions: How do we pray? What should we pray? When should we pray? Where should we pray? The Bible answers these three words: The Lord’s Prayer.

For the next several days, we will look at the Lord’s Prayer as it appears in Matthew 6:9-13. Here is an outline:

Part One: Introduction, God’s Name, God’s Kingdom and God’s will.

Part Two: God’s Provision, God’s Pardon and God’s Protection.

The first part calls attention to God’s power and great might.

The second part calls attention to our weaknesses and our desperate need.

PRAYER: Jesus, teach me to pray. AMEN

FRIDAY– THIRD WEEK OF LENT

“Our Father”

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. MT 6:9

Jesus shows us that God isn’t an angry tyrant or an impersonal force. God is a Father. God is *our* Father. When we were baptized, we went from being orphans, with absolutely no hope, to becoming children, with absolutely no rear. We have a Father in heaven.

We all know that earthly fathers can be unpredictable. The good news about our Father in heaven is that he is never moody. He never has a bad day. He never wakes up in the morning feeling bad, thinking, “Who am I going to zap today?” Our heavenly Father is always the same. He is dependable. He is loving. He is consistent even when we aren’t. How can we be sure? Because of Jesus!

PRAYER: Jesus, show me the kindness of my heavenly Father. AMEN

SATURDAY– THIRD WEEK OF LENT

“God’s Name”

“Hallowed be your name.” MT 6:9

Wives, what if your husband blurts out: “Pick up the kids at school, get the oil changed in the car, and get some money from the ATM – quick!” That’s not the best way to nurture a relationship! Yet that’s what we

often do when we pray. We pray as though we're ordering a burger and fries at McDonald's. "I'll have one solved problem and two blessings. Hold the hassles, please."

All of us need to learn how to pray. That's why we are looking at the Lord's Prayer. Today's focus is on God's name.

Yahweh is God's chief name in the Old Testament. It appears over 6,000 times. English translations render *Yahweh* with LORD –note all the capital letters. The most thorough definition of *Yahweh* appears to be in Exodus 34:6 where Moses writes, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." What wonderful gifts!

What is God's greatest name? Jesus. *Jesus* means "Yahweh saves." Because of Christ's cradle and cross, suffering and death, victory and resurrection, all of *Yahweh's* gospel gifts are completely and eternally ours!

PRAYER: Jesus, how excellent is your name in all the earth. AMEN

FOURTH SUNDAY of LENT

"Your Will Be Done"

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." MT 6:10

Stress is killing us. Here are some numbers: 60% of all illnesses and diseases are related to stress; 75% of all doctors' visits are connected to stress; 13% of all Americans between the ages of 18 and 54 suffer from acute stress; 44% of all Americans lose sleep every night because of stress. If you are 65 years or older, your number health issue is stress.

Why are we stressed? Because we pray – "If it's going to be, it's up to me!" We walk around with the world's weight on our shoulders, convinced that if we just work harder, life will be perfect. "Lord, if it's going to be, it's up to me!" This prayer is killing us!

Jesus gives us a better prayer. It's the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Your will be done." With this prayer we are saying, "Heavenly Father, rule in my heart, and in my home. Be the Guider of my past, my present, and my future." What a great stress reducer!

PRAYER: Jesus, I yield to the Father to give me peace. AMEN.

MONDAY –FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

"Give Us"

"Give us this day our daily bread." MT 6:11

Part one of the Lord's Prayer is about God's graciousness. Part Two addresses our great needs. The starting place in prayer is always acknowledging who God is. Once we recognize God's greatness, we can pray about our great needs.

The first of our needs is provision – "Give us this day our daily bread." We're going to look at this petition over the next three days. Today we consider the words "give us."

God is the great Giver. In the first chapter of the Bible, in Genesis 1, God gives us the earth, the sea and the sky, plants and animals, the moon, the stars and the sun. Then God calls it “very good” (Gen. 1:31). What a grand celebration of our giving God!

In Matt. 7:10-11, Jesus tells us how much God delights in giving us good gifts. “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?”

That’s why we can confidently pray, “Give us.”

TUESDAY–FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

“This Day”

“Give us this day our daily bread.” MT 6:11

After the Israelites left Egypt, for forty years God gave the manna every day – except on the Sabbath Day. Some Israelites, however, didn’t want manna for just a day. They wanted manna for a week, manna for a month, manna for many moons. So they collected mounds and mountains of manna. “Some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank (Ex. 16:20)

The temptation is to stockpile. That’s because we think stockpiles bring security. So we hoard. We accumulate. We amass money and stuff, just in case there is a rainy day.

Saving is a good idea. Yet there’s a difference between saving and stock-piling. Completely depending on stuff only causes us to worry – to no end! Why? Possessions can be destroyed. Economies can collapse. And manna can become maggots. When our survival hangs on a pile of stuff that can vanish in the twinkling of an eye, we spend our entire lives filled with worry. There’s a better way – PRAY!

PRAYER: Jesus, this day I trust you. AMEN

WEDNESDAY –FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

“Daily Bread”

“Give us this day our daily bread.” MT 6:11

For 1,900 years, Bible scholars didn’t understand the Greek word *epiousious*, translated in English to the word “daily.” Scholars couldn’t find *epiousious* anywhere else in ancient Greek literature. It only appeared in the Lord’s Prayer. But in the late 1940’s archaeologists figured out that *epiousious* means “for the current day.”

Christ doesn’t teach us to pray, “Lord, give us this day enough for the next fifty days.” Instead he teaches, “Give us this day enough for the current day.” *Epiousious!*

But then there’s Costco. Costco isn’t the size of a grocery store. Costco is the size of Rhode Island! You push a cart the size of a small Volkswagen. You don’t buy individual items. You buy cases and cartons, bundles, bags, bushels and boxes. At Costco, and at every other store we need to pray, “Give us this day *epiousious* – enough for the current day.”

How can we know that God answers this prayer? The extravagant God of Genesis 1 gives us his most extravagant gift of all: Jesus. God gives us all of Jesus – all of our Savior’s compassion, kindness and forgiveness.

PRAYER: Jesus give us enough for today. AMEN

THURSDAY –FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

“The Forgiven Forgive”

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” MT 6:12

Matthew 5-7 records Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. This passage represents the heart of Christ’s teaching. What is at this? The Lord’s Prayer. What is at the heart of the Lord’s Prayer? The message: the forgiven forgive.

Forgiveness is the foundation of everything Jesus teaches. Consider these two facts: First, after the Savior gives us the Lord’s Prayer, he says, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Mt 6:14-15). Second, no other theme appears more often in Matthews’s gospel than forgiveness. Matthew uses the word *forgive* 49 times, nearly one-third of the total number of its occurrences in the New Testament.

Jesus forgives freely, unconditionally and eternally. He also gives the power to forgive others.

PRAYER: Jesus, help me live out this truth: the forgiven forgive. AMEN

FRIDAY –FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

“Temptation”

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” MT 6:13

“Lead us not into temptation.” Does God really lead us into temptation? Matt. 6:13 is like Psalm 51:11-12. Both prayers state ideas in a negative-positive way. David prayers in Psalm 51, “Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.” The prayer begins with two negative statements and is followed with two positive statements. Negative – positive. This is the key!

God doesn’t cast us from his presence, or take his Holy Spirit from us. No! He delights in giving us grace. God restores the joy of our salvation and grants a willing spirit.

Just so, God doesn’t lead us into temptation. God doesn’t do that because he delights in giving grace. “Lead us not into temptation,” then, is the negative part of the prayer. The positive part of the prayer is this, “Deliver us from evil.” It’s a negative-positive prayer and we’re to focus on the positive part, not the negative. In Christ, God is gracious to deliver us – always!

PRAYER: Thank you, Jesus, for your delivering grace. AMEN

SATURDAY – FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

“Deliverance from Evil”

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” MT 6:13

On July 11, 1804, Alexander Hamilton underestimated his enemy. It happened on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River. Aaron Burr, the sitting vice president of the United States, challenged Hamilton to a duel. The two were ready to shoot each other at ten paces. Hamilton fired first and, by all accounts, aimed high to strike a branch of a tree above Aaron Burr. Hamilton figured that Burr would do the same and bygones would be bygones. However; Aaron Burr took aim, shot straight and killed Hamilton.

Alexander Hamilton isn't the only person to underestimate his enemy. We also forget that we're locked in mortal combat with a deadly foe. He goes by different names – they include Lucifer and Liar. In Revelation 9:11 he is called Abaddon and Apollyon – both words mean “destroyer.” Our enemy is also called the ancient serpent, the devil and Satan.

We need Christ's prayer of protection, “Deliver us from evil.” Jesus will answer that prayer and deliver us – every single time!

PRAYER: Jesus don't let me underestimate the devil's power. AMEN

FIFTH SUNDAY of LENT

“First Things First”

“Seek first the kingdom of God.” MT 6:33

When I toured Israel, I often saw people selling jewelry, postcards, purses, pictures, trinkets – you name it. They would say, “One dolla, one dolla... for your, for you!” If you went into a shop, they would say, “Take a look! It doesn't cost you anything to look!” Sometimes you would get the line, “You're my first customer today... so special price, just for you! I make nothing!”

You would hear all kinds of responses. “Just give me your best price, and I'll pay for it.” Sometimes the customer might appear to not be interested, ignoring the ploys. Or they might offer a much lower price, and when it was rejected, begin to walk out the door. The shop owner often would counter back a little and the game was then on! What was the goal – for the purchaser, it was “never pay full-price!”

Thank God, Jesus paid the full price for our redemption. We in turn, seek first his kingdom. By his grace we are willing to pay the price for his glory.

PRAYER: By your Spirit, Jesus, I will seek first your kingdom. AMEN

MONDAY – FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

“Follow Me”

“As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’” MT 9:19

Has anyone ever invited you to follow them? Maybe it was a hotshot on water skis who invited you to ski – on your bare feet! Maybe it was snow skiing in the Rockies. Or scuba diving off the coast of Jamaica.

Jesus says, “Follow me.” He doesn't say, “Follow your feelings,” “Follow your dreams,” “Follow the crowd.” Jesus says, “Follow me.” When we follow Jesus we get off the bench and onto the field. We get off the couch and into the game.

Matthew was a Jew, working as a tax collector for Rome. Matthew made his living by forcing Jews to fork over their hard-earned money to despised Romans. And if the Jews didn't Matthew had the authority to throw them in jail, or worse – violators could be crucified. That's why Jews considered tax collectors to be like lepers and prostitutes – unloved, unwanted and unrighteous!

You're Matthew. So am I. But, miracle of miracles, Jesus loves us and wants us. Jesus forgives us and declares us his own. Jesus calls us to follow!

PRAYER: Lead me, Jesus, and I will follow. AMEN

TUESDAY –FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

“Selection”

“He called him his twelve disciples.” MT 10:1

My grandmothers were pros when it came to fruit and vegetable selection. They could, with a thump of a thumb select a mouth-watering watermelon, sniff out the ripest pineapple to make a fruit salad, even date the death of a banana with a single glance!

Selection. It's a major part of our lives. We squeeze tomatoes and kick tires on a car. Every day we make choices about money, the financial market, even simple decisions about which is the best deal on grocery items.

Whom does Jesus select to be his disciples? First century Jewish rabbis would select men who kept the 363 prohibitions and 250 commandments in the Mishnah, or “Tradition of the Elders.” Anyone who didn't keep these 613 laws was called a “sinner” and never, ever be selected!

None of Christ's twelve disciples kept the 613 Traditions of the Elders. None of them had prominent places in the synagogue. What in the world did they bring to the table? Nothing. And that's the point. Jesus selects those who have nothing so that he can be absolutely everything for them.

PRAYER: Jesus, nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to your cross I cling. AMEN

WEDNESDAY –FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

“THE STRONGER MAN”

*“How can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man?”
MT 12:29*

The strong man is the devil. The Greek word for “devil” is *diabolos*. *Diabolos* comes from the Greek verb *diaballein*, which means “to split.” The devil is a splitter, a divider, a wedge driver. The *diabolos* first divided Adam from Eve, then Jacob from Esau, and Absalom from David. The *diabolos* divides spouses, families and friends.

When did Christ plunder the strong man's goods? Remember Matthew 4:1-11? The devil tempted esus in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. Three times the Savior pushed back saying, “It is written!” There, in the wilderness, Jesus plundered the strong man's goods – his lies and his wicked temptations.

Jesus had an even greater victory over the devil when he died on the cross. In John 12:31-32, Jesus says that when he is lifted up from the earth, the prince of this world will be cast out. The Savior's shed blood means victory over the devil and his demons. Christ's forgiveness and love plundered the strong man – all for you!

PRAYER: Thank you, Jesus, for your victory of the *diablos*. Amen

THURSDAY – THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

“Sowing Seeds”

“He told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow.” MT 13:3

What year was Johnny Appleseed born? 1774. In what state? Connecticut. What was his real name? Johnny Chapman. What did he wear for a hat? A tin pot. What year did he die? 1845.

In 1801, Johnny Appleseed began planting apple seeds in Ohio. Five years later he navigated west along the Ohio River with two canoes tied together, carrying tens of thousands of apple seeds. His goal? Plant apple trees throughout the new American West.

That's what the parable of the sower is all about. In spite of great danger and turmoil – just like Johnny Appleseed – this Sower, Jesus, keeps sowing his seeds.

The parable describes four types of people. Hard-soil people have no interest. Rocky-soil people have no conviction. Thorny-soil people have no priorities. Good-soil people have no compromise.

No compromise because God's love in Jesus compels them to display the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23 – Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

PRAYER: Jesus align my life with your great goal for me. AMEN

FRIDAY – THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

“Lasting Hope”

“The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.” MT 13:31

In his book, *The Grand Essentials*, Ben Patterson describes a sunken S-4 submarine. A deep-sea rescue diver heard tapping on the steel wall of the sunken sub. As he placed his ear against the vessel, he heard a sailor tap out a question in Morse code. What was the sailor asking? “Is there any hope?”

Jesus says, yes! God does big things with small stuff. Example “A” – a mustard seed. In the parable, the mustard seed stands for God's Word. It starts small and becomes huge – “larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree.” (Mt. 13:32)

This points to the cross: Christ's friends ran away. Christ's garments were gambled away. Christ's Father turned away. Christ's strength ebbed away. Everything ended, “crucified, dead and buried.” End of story? No way! How so? God does big things with small stuff. Christ is risen! Death is dead! We have hope!

PRAYER: Thank you, Jesus, for your gift of lasting hope. AMEN

SATURDAY – THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

“The Person in the Parable”

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field ... The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls.”

Who is the man in the first parable? Who is the merchant in the second parable? Many say that we need to be that person. But that’s wrong.

Here’s the right interpretation. Jesus is the person in both of today’s parables. How so? First there are seven parables in Matthew 13 and the other five are about what Jesus is doing. Why would these parables break the pattern? Second, the word *kingdom* appears twelve times in Matthew 13. The kingdom has to have a king. Who would that be? Jesus! Third, when “kingdom of heaven” parables have just one person, that person always (and I mean always) stands for Jesus. When there are multiple people in the kingdom parables, the central person is always (and I mean always) Jesus.

Put it all together and what do we have? Jesus went looking for us, found us, and paid his life for us.

PRAYER: Jesus, thanks for making me your treasure and fine pear. AMEN