

HE HAS RISEN

Weekly Devotional

Join us for

EASTER

He is risen!



Prayer Request

Monday: Pray for the all who attended services this week that they might not just return to normal routines, but that Jesus' resurrection power and presence would be evident in their lives.

Tuesday: Pray for the Shepherd's Pantry, especially for those who are served by that ministry.

Wednesday: Pray for AWANA, youth programs at church, and the Good News Clubs.

Thursday: Pray for the Town Hall meetings and for churches around the United States to be a loving witness to the Lordship of Jesus in a society that so often compromises.

Friday: Pray for the Women's Refresh this weekend and for the dads who are home with their children.

**The quote on Thursday's devo, along with many thoughts from this week's devo, comes from Tim Keller's book, *Kings's Cross*. I am also indebted to Henry Nouwen, Larry Osborne and Mark Driscoll.



Monday

Read: Ephesians 1:15-23



One of the more famous Good Friday sermons of the last 30 years was given by an African-American preacher and made famous by Tony Campolo. It was a simple sermon. The preacher stood to preach and quietly whispers: "It's Friday, but Sunday is coming." (a little louder) "It's Friday...but Sunday is coming!" (with a little more emphasis) "It's Friday...but...SUNDAY, Sunday is coming!!!" The whole sermon went like this (same phrase with increased emphasis and volume) in true African-American style.

Sunday is here. Jesus has Risen. Everything about death in our lives has been defeated. What are the dead places in your life? What are the dead ends, the places of lost? What are the things that you have buried deeply? What are the dreams that are yet unfulfilled? What are the things of your life that you dare not face and you pray no one else sees or notices? The good news is that Friday has past. Jesus has taken care of all our guilt, all our past on the cross. He did it as a gift to each one of us. Because He loves like a Father, He did not want us to be burdened any longer. He wiped the slate clean. He took care of every one of our imperfections. And now...now He offers us His resurrection power so that we too might be reborn into a new beginning, no matter our age.

Today is a new day. This week is a new beginning. There is power to resurrect your lives, your dreams, your hopes. And His hope, His desire is that we live in that power, trusting Father God to do in our lives what He did with Jesus. What does that look like for you? What do you need to let go of? What do you need to look forward to? What dream do you need to give over to God's resurrection power? What does it mean for you to live trusting in God's power (rather than your own) in the midst of trials and defeats? What does it look like to live as a person of hope? We cannot bring about our own resurrections, but we can trust and hope that God will. In the meantime, we are called to live out His plan for our lives, living as He lived even to the point of dying to the moment—for Friday is past; Sunday is here!!!

Tuesday

Read: Matthew 27:54-28:20



Tim Keller, in his book *King's Cross*, pointed out that one of the first to believe in Jesus was the Roman centurion who crucified Him. The centurion was probably the least religious person present. The first ones to see the resurrected Jesus were women. If the gospel writers had tried to make up the story about Jesus' resurrection, they would never have had women as witnesses. The women though were at the grave because the disciples were hiding. They had run when Jesus was arrested. They had promised to stand by Him, but they ran, they failed. Jesus, though, instructs the women to tell the disciples that He has gone ahead of them to Galilee, and to go and meet Him there.

A centurion, women, failed disciples—they are the beginning of a movement that changed the world. How often do we disqualify ourselves or someone else because of our past, our perceived inabilities, or our position in life? How often do we think we need to prove ourselves, or require another to prove something before we step out? By the way, did you notice that the people whom Jesus did not reveal himself to were the religious ones? These individuals were so set in their ways that, rather than giving life, they instead had sown death, and will continue to do so. Jesus was doing a new thing, but they were not able to give up their old ways, even when these ways had lost all meaning. In many ways these men found their identity not in God, but in being religious, in being powerful.

But the centurion, the women, the failed ones—they were able to see something new. Often it is when all is lost and there is nothing more to lose that we are able to go in a new direction. Someone once gave me a bronze piece; it was two open hands, palms up, reminding me to always be willing to give up, always be willing to receive. What keeps you from seeing God? Past failure? Past traditions?



Wednesday

Read: Luke 24:13-35

I have always liked this passage, but I am not sure why. Two men in utter defeat. Everything they had hoped for is now gone, and they are returning home to...what...pick up the pieces? In the midst of their defeat, Jesus comes and walks with them. Henry Nouwen says this of the occasion: "Jesus did not say, 'It isn't nearly as bad as you think.' Instead he said something entirely new: 'The most tragic, the most painful, the most hopeless circumstances can become the way to the liberation you long for most of all.' You and I as rational people say: 'Death is death and must be avoided at all costs. The further we stay away from death and everything connected to it—pain, illness, war, oppression, poverty, hunger and so on—the better for us.' But Jesus makes us see human existence from a quite different angle."

The men recognized Jesus when He broke bread. Why did it take so long? He had been with them the whole day. Was it their grief or their disappointment that blinded them? Luke says that their hearts burned within them, and yet they still could not see. How often do I let my disappointments and my temper tantrums that come from my not getting what I want blind me to what God might be doing. How often do I miss the good of what could be because I am so focused on the bad that is now gone.

The disciples recognized Jesus when they saw his scars. The scars came about when all seemed lost, but the scars actually were the very thing that brought about new life. The scars were the very thing that saved their lives. Gerald Sittser lost his wife, mother, and daughter in a car accident caused by a drunk driver. He says that he often found himself running to try to keep the sun from setting into the ocean. One day he realized the fastest way to the light was to turn back into the darkness and walk towards the sunrise. Jesus has risen. The Son reigns. What is the Spirit inside of you saying?

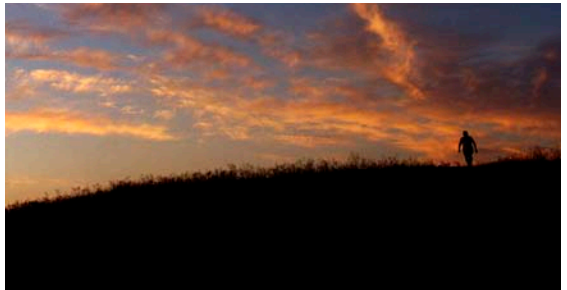
Thursday

Read: Luke 6:20-26

If you saw an old woman with a large purse that you knew was filled with money, what would prevent you from stealing it from her? Would it be that you did not want to bring disgrace on yourself (in case you were caught) or your family? Or would it be because you did not want to hurt the woman? For centuries most of the world made decisions based on what would or would not bring disgrace on their family or on themselves. Their morals were really “me-centered”; they thought of themselves first. In Jesus all that changed. In Jesus our questions become “other-centered.” What effect do my actions have on others? How might I help another?

John Sommerville, a professor emeritus of history at the University of Florida, once said: “An ethical system based on honor is a self-regarding ethic, while one based in charity is an other-regarding ethic. . . . With honor goes a concentration on pride rather than humility, dominance rather than service, courage rather than peaceableness, glory rather than modesty, loyalty rather than respect for all, generosity to one’s friend rather than equality.”** Because of the resurrection we are called to live under a new administration. We are called to live in a new Kingdom, God’s Kingdom, with different ethics; a Kingdom where we die to ourselves and live for others. What does this look like for you today? Without the resurrection I need to look out for myself; living with resurrection power means relying instead on God’s power and love.

In God’s Kingdom there is a reversal of values. The world values power, money, success, recognition. But God talks of weakness, poverty, suffering, rejection. If we live for the world’s values, we will find them controlling our lives. Our identity will be found in this life and if we lose money, a job, or recognition, we lose a sense of self. But if we live in God’s kingdom, losing all often means a resurrection is near. We are free to let go and let God. How are you trying to save yourself rather than let God save you?



Friday

Read: Ephesians 6:10-20



Recently I listened to a podcast where the pastor was talking about the battle we are in with the evil one. Speaking on one of the passages where Jesus cast out demons, he reminded us that we are in a battle and that with all battles there is no neutral ground. We might wish there were, but we are either on Jesus' side or the enemy's side. As he concluded, he quoted Mark Driscoll by asking three questions.

First he asked: Where is there evidence of the enemy's work in your life? He was not saying that as Christians we could be possessed by the evil one. What he was asking is where is the evil one trying to trip you up? Where in your life have you lost the peace, power, and joy that comes from being a forgiven child of God?

Then he asked: How have I been aiding the enemy? In what ways have I left the door open for deception? Where do I pick and choose what I want to believe about Jesus, or obey, as it concerns my following Scripture? Where have I allowed bitterness, unforgiveness or unloving relationships take hold?

Finally he asked: Do I really want to get rid of all the sin in my life? The presence of sin allows Satan to have a foothold. It sets me up for defeat. Jesus promises forgiveness, but we need to be honest with Him, and especially with ourselves. I can easily confess sin when my sin is exposed publicly, but am I honestly open to the Holy Spirit's correction?

If being a follower of Jesus was just about going to heaven some day, God could beam me up now. But it is more. We are in a battle for the souls of others. To do my part, I must throw off anything that entangles or hinders me and fight the battles that Jesus leads us into to His praise and glory. Find a prayer partner and answers these questions. And then pray for each other.



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