



**M o n d a y**

**Psalm 118; 1 Peter 2:4-12**

God's people have often been persecuted. Part of the reason the Israelites sang this psalm on the way to Jerusalem was that it celebrated God's victories in their lives. The passage in 1 Peter was written to the Christians who were going through their own persecution at the time. I love the verse: "the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Jesus was rejected only to rise from the dead and become the cornerstone of God's new society, His church. Those who trust in that stone and those who build their lives on Jesus, His life, His death, His promises and on developing an obedient relationship with Him will never be put to shame, even if, for a period of time, they go through rejection and persecution. For those who trust the stone and build their lives on it, they become part of what God is building, a glorious people who will work with Him into eternity fulfilling God's original intentions for the world. But those who reject Jesus will find themselves stumbling, partly because they remain in their own sins, partly because they are left to try to navigate life on their own with their own limited resources, and partly because someday they will see Him face to face and will have to answer the question: "what have you made of this one life I gave you." Often we do not see God's full picture. On the Saturday following Good Friday, the only thing the disciples knew was loss. They felt deceived, confused, rejected and afraid. They felt like they were failures. But God had a resurrection planned. So, also, in our own lives. We often feel lost, rejected and like failures. But God is able to take our failures and turn them into resurrections. If you are in the midst of some dark place, re-read this Psalm over and over again substituting the specifics of your own situation. God's love endures forever. His love never fails. A Resurrection might only be days away.

**Daily Prayer**

*For those imprisoned, threatened and punished for putting their faith in Jesus, keep their faith strong.*

**T u e s d a y**

**Exodus 12:1-30; Leviticus 4; Hebrews 10:1-18**

I have always enjoyed Communion. As a child in the church where I grew up, I was not allowed to take Communion until I was in High School and had made an adult commitment to Jesus. The good news about being excluded was that Communion seemed special, holy, and something of great significance. Rather than having a sense of being left out, I was excited because there was more movement in the service (the sermon was not as long and people walked up and down the aisles). All of this made sitting through the service just a little less boring. When I finally was allowed to partake, I still didn't understand what Communion was all about or how I should receive the elements (other than eat and drink them at the appropriate times). I remember my father praying, and so I prayed. As I ate the bread, I prayed for myself and my relationship with God; as I drank the cup, I prayed for God's Kingdom work in the world and for other Christians. Going through seminary I grew in my appreciation of what a sacrament was all about. I began to understand that as I took the bread and cup, the Holy Spirit would do a work inside of me. The symbolism began to take on deeper meaning. Like an onion, as I pull back the layers and grow in my walk with the Lord, the table takes on more and more significance. I understood early on the symbolism of the blood. The blood covered my sins. As the Passover lamb and the lamb the priests would sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, Jesus had become the Lamb of God, one final sacrifice and totally sufficient. There is nothing left to do but to receive and rejoice. How often, though, I still try to do more. I still "work" at trying to earn the pleasure of men and of God. I still try to hide my weaknesses. Do you? Rejoice in the fact that Jesus has made up for everything you lack. You are forgiven, washed clean, given new life, loved and empowered.

**Daily Prayer**

*Help me to forgive those who have hurt me as you have forgiven me.*

**W e d n e s d a y**

**John 13:1-17**

The cup at the end of the meal is the Passover cup of thanksgiving. It reminds us to be thankful for the gift of forgiveness, the gift of new life and the gift of having all we want to hide covered. But what is the bread all about? When we take the bread, we say that this is the body of Jesus broken for us. Are we just being redundant? I don't think so. I believe what we are taught in the bread is that Jesus came to live in a certain way. He came to allow His life to be torn apart on behalf of others. When He says, "do this in remembrance of Me" He is not just asking us to remember the cross. He is asking us to remember how He lived, what His priorities were, how He left Heaven to become like us, that He might show us His love and that we might know the Father. In that remembering there is a call to live as He lived incarnationally. To live incarnationally is

to leave my place of comfort and spend my life on behalf of others. It is to allow my life to be broken that another might have life broken, even unjustly at times. On the Thursday before Easter we gather to celebrate communion. We call this date Maundy Thursday. Maundy comes from Latin which means "new commandment." Jesus gave us a new commandment to love one another as He has loved us. I remember when I was growing up of people speaking of JOY as an acronym: Jesus, Others, and Yourself. At some point when we were really into the old self-actualization movement, the stress was on the fact that if we did not love ourselves, we could not love others; and the acronym was changed around to, at best, Jesus, self and others, but more often self, Jesus and others. I believe that when we eat the bread, we remember that the nature of God is to serve. God is far more comfortable taking off the garments of authority and putting on the garments of a lowly servant. Am I?

**Daily Prayer**

*Show me someone this week that I can serve and bless.*

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**T h u r s d a y**

**1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

In the Presbyterian Church, great stress (almost too great at times) is put on the fact that the elements are only to be received in the context of a worship service. The Session actually votes on the times that we receive Communion (generally we do this once a year, but Communion is not suppose to happen without Session's prior permission). Unlike other denominations, if a couple wants to receive Communion at their wedding, it cannot just be served to them or to the wedding party. It needs to be served (or offered) to all who are present and again with prior permission of Session. This is more than some legalistic control issue. Why do we do this? The answer is seen, in fact, that there is one cup and one loaf of bread. Because we have so many people who need to partake and because of time limitations, we miss the stress that is put on the one cup and one loaf (most of us have the bread passed in trays prepared ahead of time and little cups that are prefilled. But again, this is a logistic thing). The emphasis on one cup and one loaf is to show our oneness with Christ and with each other. Communion is not an individual meal. Passover was never an individualistic meal. It was always celebrated in community. In Christ we are not just saved individually, we are saved into a community. We are part of a body. We need each other and are broken for one another. It is easy to understand that we need to be forgiven. It is easy to understand that I need to live my life to God's glory by being broken as I love others. But to live in community? Wow. That is how God set it up. How are you doing with this idea of community? Do you have relationships you have allowed to be broken in your life? Do you easily avoid people with whom you don't particularly get along? There is the saying that you can chose your friends, but you cannot choose your family. The folks at church are family. Do you view them as family or friends? If I am one with someone, I cannot walk away from them. By the way, there is great strength in diversity. But if the people I hang with all look like me, I am missing out on that strength.

**Daily Prayer**

*Help me to not be critical of the speck in another person's eye..*

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**F r i d a y**

**Psalm 42; 1 Kings 18:16; 1 Kings 19:18**

Have you ever felt depressed? I love this story about Elijah. He wins a great victory for the Lord only to find himself depressed and running away thinking that Jezebel has the power to kill him. It is really an irrational fear. If he could call down fire from heaven on a water soaked alter and if he could kill 400 prophets of Baal, why would he need to fear Jezebel? Often our fears though founded in earthly reality (Jezebel was a powerful queen) are ill-founded when seen from a heavenly reality. But like Elijah we are often too hungry and tired to see our situation from a heavenly perspective. Elijah's response though was good. He returned to where he had seen God before, to the Mountain of Horeb. There he saw God not in the spectacular, but in the still small voice that comes from waiting on God. Having been refreshed by God, having received His provision, Rest, and Word, Elijah returns to the work God gave him to do. The Psalmist is also depressed. From his place in Exile he longs for the good old days. His response is to reflect back on God's gracious acts in the past, to praise God and to wait on God knowing that God's work is not yet done. If you are reading this, God's work for you is not yet over. Every day we have is a gift from God; and if He gives us the gift of another day, He has work for us to do. Don't ever feel you have failed God, so much that you are no longer useful to him. And if you are tired and exhausted or if you need a fresh visitation from God, follow the lead of Elijah and the Psalmist: "wait on the Lord." Rest, reflect, read the word, praise God for His past work in your life and listen for the "still small voice of God." God's best work is often done not in the spectacular but in little ways. Oh, and remember that you might feel alone, but you are not. Maybe you feel that way because you have removed yourself from fellowship. Get back into the habit of weekly worship and meeting with a small group.

**Daily Prayer**

*God, I praise you for your great acts of mercy and grace.*

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# Psalm 118

Psalm 118 traditionally was used as the Israelites made their way to Jerusalem for one of their three annual feasts. It reads like a hymn with personal and corporate responses. It begins with a call to worship and moves into a confessional response highlighting God's mercy in the midst of distress and battle. It concludes with the entire congregation praising God and calling upon Him for mercy.

Remembering is important. It is said that if we do not remember History, we will repeat it. Remembering God's gracious acts, His intervention, His power, mercy and grace are important. For one thing, such remembering reminds us of who God is and who we are. Such remembering reminds us that we have what we have and are what we are because of God. Such remembering reminds us of the debt of gratitude we owe God. When we forget, we begin to think more highly of ourselves and we begin to depend on ourselves, we begin to take things into our own hands. Remembering also gives us confidence. If God had the power to act in the past we can be assured that He has the power to act in the present and future. When we remember we have renewed hope and our spirits are up lifted. As the people made their way to Jerusalem, they remembered. With each step of the way their confidence grew with the result that they entered Jerusalem full of praise and expectancy that God was their God, they were His people, and that His plan would yet be fulfilled.

When we come to the Communion Table we remember. We remember that without the cross we are doomed to carry the guilt of our past, but with the cross we have the gift of forgiveness and a new beginning. We remember that our sins have been washed away and we have been made completely clean. When we come to the table we remember the love of the Father that would rather allow His Son to go to the cross than spend an eternity without us. When we come to the table we remember that Jesus has risen, that He is coming back, that there is an eternity yet to be lived, an eternity that we can be a part of because of the cross. At the table we remember that we cannot do it on our own, but that Jesus in His mercy and Grace has done it all for us.

At the table we also receive. We receive the nourishment of Jesus' Holy Spirit. We receive fresh mercy and grace. We receive the gift of oneness with God and each other and the gift of community. At the table we are lifted up above our circumstances to receive confidence, hope and new marching orders. We receive orders with power to go out and love the Father, Love as Christ loves, and tell others about God's love.