

**2024 ABCCR
LENTEN
DEVOTIONAL**



Bruised Reeds & Dimly Burning Wicks

Lent is the Rodney Dangerfield of the Church seasons. If you're too young to get that reference, it means that Lent gets very little respect. No one puts up decorative lights for Lent. There are no inflatable yard ornaments. The season begins by putting ashes on your forehead and is known for reflection, repentance, and fasting. It's just not very marketable and you'll probably not hear any songs at the mall about Lent.

It's not Lent's fault that it gets very little respect. The fact that we've pushed Lent to the fringes of our lives probably says more about us. So, what does it say about us? I think it boils down to this one statement: We have wandered away from home. Sometimes this wandering away is forced. Then it's called exile. But this wandering away can also happen without even realizing it. Without even realizing it, we find that we've wandered off and then can't find our way back.

What are some examples of a non-forced exile, this wandering away from home? Maybe it's when greed is renamed opportunity. Or when the accumulation of stuff is re-framed as success or security is determined by the ones having the most ammunition. It's when being important is measured by a busy calendar. Can you see how this kind of lostness happens? It's for this very reason I think Lent is so important for us today, and why we're offering you these reflections from different writers in the Central Region.

Just so you know I'm not just making all this up, consider these words from Psalm 137...

1 By the rivers of Babylon—

there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.

2 On the willows there

we hung up our harps.

3 For there our captors

asked us for songs,

and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,

“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

- Psalm 137:1-3

These are the words of people who wandered away and found themselves in exile. The only way they would ever find their way back home again was for God to help them realize just how far away they wandered.

As Psalm 137 begins, thirty to forty years have now passed. The exiles knew they were not where they were supposed to be and didn't know the first step to take toward getting back. So God helped them remember.

Years ago, I was forced to read the works of Richard Sibbes, an Anglican theologian who had an uncanny ability to describe this experience of wandering away. In his work from 1620, *The Bruised Reed and the Smoking Flax*, he gives hope to those who find themselves far away without a clue how to get back again. It's a rather intriguing book title coming straight from Isaiah 42:1-4...

1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

2 He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;

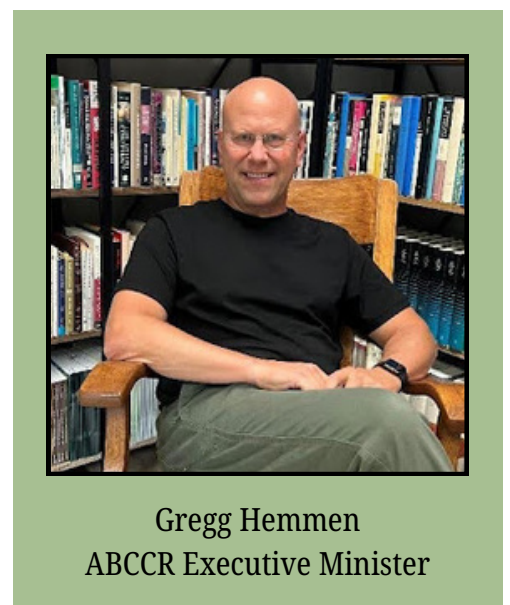
3 a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

4 He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

- Isaiah 42:1-4

This is not the language of the world we live in. We live in a “use-it-and-throw-it-away” world. This often ends up happening with people too. We don’t let people see our bruises because bruises are equated with failure and weakness. Any dimly burning people who aren’t the brightest stars, attract the biggest crowds, or draw attention to themselves are categorized as failures. The problem with idolizing only the unbruised and brightest lights of our world is that it leaves out 99.9% of people, and I might be generous with my estimate. We all have bruises, and our popular appeal has a short shelf life. We’ve wandered away from home.

The hope for all of us is that God is working from a different paradigm. God’s not going to throw you away and will protect whatever smoldering embers are left in your faith as long as it takes for that faith to rekindle. That’s good news - good news for all of us. So enjoy these Lenten reflections. Ponder their message of hope.



Returning To Dust

Ash Wednesday

Daniel 9:3 - Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

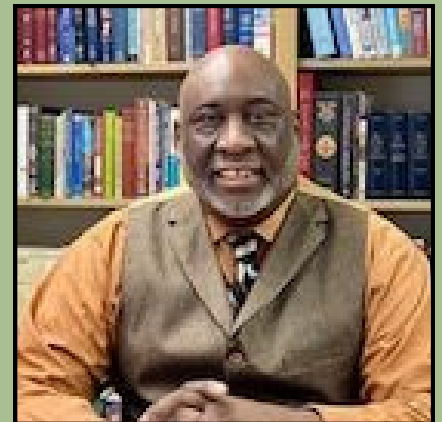
Greetings to all, and God's choice blessings to each of your households as we approach this season of Lent. As most of you know Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday, (My devotion topic), it ends on Holy Saturday. In the Christian faith the word refers to the fasting that characterizes the season of preparation for celebrating Easter. I have been asked to share my thoughts concerning Ash Wednesday. So I am here to give you a terminal diagnosis. Life is a condition you are not going to survive. How will you use the time that remains. Do you have a BUCKET list of things you would like to see or do before kicking the bucket, lol. I am so grateful to know that as Christians Ash Wednesday reminds us we're mere mortals, life on earth has an expiration date.

The Ashes that are placed on our foreheads remind Believers that from dust we were formed, and to dust we will return. Thanks be to God, those who are redeemed of the Lord, have more to the story. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. The ashes placed on our foreheads reminds all Believers In Christ, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Beloved, in a real sense, as we look at this in a practical way, not only will we return to the dust, but everything this world has to offer as well. and let me be the first to say there are some things that we've accumulated on earth that bring us joy, comfort and happiness, but as Dr. Tony Evans once said, "I've never seen a Hearse at a funeral procession with a U-Haul following behind it", we can't take our stuff with us. The only thing we can take to Heaven, is another soul that has been redeemed by our Lord and Savior. So lets STOP seeking prestige, power, position, and prominence, and rather seek, Gods presence, promises, protection, and His peace that last eternally, and will not be consumed by fire, and brought to Ashes.

So in conclusion, present to yourself this question. With the time I have left on earth, am I spending my time searching and seeking those things that in the end will burn and become ashes, or, am I seeking to lay hold of eternal treasures in heavenly places?

1 John 2:17 The world is passing away, and all the things that people want in the world are passing away. But whoever does what God wants will live forever.



Clarence Newton
New Life Baptist Church, Topeka

From Unfamiliarity To Connection:

A Baptist's Journey Through Lent

First Sunday in Lent

I didn't grow up in church. For most of my life, the season of Lent was nothing more than a word I associated with fabric and clothing. It seemed distant and unfamiliar, something that had no relevance to my understanding of faith. As I began my journey as a Baptist, at first I thought it was a religious season that my brand of Christianity didn't observe. Until I discovered that Lent was not only a significant part of the Christian calendar but also held a deep connection to my Baptist identity. In this devotional, we will explore how Lent, once a mystery to me, has become a meaningful and transformative season within the context of being a Baptist.

1. Embracing the Unknown:

As Baptists, we value personal faith and the freedom to explore and question. Lent offers an opportunity to step into the unknown and embrace a season that may be unfamiliar to us. It is a time to set aside preconceived notions and open our hearts to the transformative power of God's grace. Just as baptism symbolizes a new beginning in our spiritual journey, Lent invites us to embark on a fresh exploration of our faith.

2. Reflecting on the Wilderness:

One significant aspect of Lent is its connection to Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. This period of testing and preparation before His ministry holds deep meaning for Baptists. We believe in the importance of individual commitment and spiritual growth. Lent provides a dedicated time for self-reflection, examining our own spiritual wilderness, and seeking God's guidance. It is an opportunity to evaluate our priorities, repent of our shortcomings, and align our lives with God's purposes.

3. Embracing Spiritual Disciplines:

Baptists have a rich heritage of emphasizing personal spiritual disciplines as a means of drawing closer to God. While Lent may not be traditionally associated with Baptist practices, it aligns with our core values of prayer, fasting, Scripture study, and acts of service. Lent invites us to engage in these disciplines intentionally, allowing them to transform and shape us into the image of Christ. Through prayer, fasting, and the study of Scripture, we deepen our relationship with God and experience spiritual growth.

4. The Journey to the Cross:

At the heart of the Baptist faith is the Gospel message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Lent provides a unique opportunity to journey with Christ to the cross, meditating on His sacrifice and contemplating the depth of God's love for us. As we embrace the Lenten season, we connect with our Baptist identity by immersing ourselves in the story of redemption and renewal. Lent reminds us of the central message of our faith and the hope we have in Christ.

Though Lent may have initially seemed foreign to me as a Baptist, I have come to recognize its profound connection to my faith journey. It is a season that allows me to embrace the unknown, reflect on my spiritual wilderness, and engage in spiritual disciplines that draw me closer to God. Lent connects me to the core values of being a Baptist, reminding me of the Gospel message and the transformative power of God's grace. As we embark on this Lenten journey together, may we discover new depths of faith and experience a profound connection to our Baptist identity.



Joel Grizzle
First Baptist Church, Lyons

In The Wait

Second Sunday in Lent

“Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” Matthew 26:36-45 NIV

It doesn't matter which gospel account I read about Jesus' final time at the Mount of Olives, it is a poignant passage for me because it details the moments leading up to His death. It is on the heels of a repast with some of His closest confidants, a final Passover meal where He sacrificially washed the feet of men who, hours later, wouldn't even be able to sacrifice sleep to support Him.

As Matthew recounts the time between Jesus' prayers and His arrest, there is a visceral quality to the pain that Matthew describes and Jesus experiences. Jesus understood His assignment, and his sorrow was overwhelming. In fact, He asked to be reassigned (more than once), but would obviously move forward if that was God's will. He wanted to find comfort in the presence of others, and He asked for their support. Unfortunately, they were unable to change His circumstances or provide the assistance He needed. In His wait, He anticipated everything He'd ultimately experience.

This passage and Jesus' solitary experience reminds me of my mother's walk with dementia. While the timing doesn't align because her journey from diagnosis to death was just shy of a decade, the experience still resonates. On that cold December day of her initial diagnosis, I remember the quiet dignity of her walk as we traversed the parking lot from the physician's office back to the car. She didn't say a lot, but what we'd feared for many months was ultimately confirmed, and she knew that she'd received her assignment. As the months and years ensued, she'd often inquire what she'd done to cause this deprivation of memory and debilitating diagnosis, and if there was some way she could be restored to her original condition. Her desire was for the cup to pass from her, but she'd comply if it was God's will. In her later years after she'd accepted her assignment, she required the support of others to assist her in daily tasks. Despite her anguish in so much of the unknown, she prayed the most earnest prayers that God's will would prevail.

In each of these situations, we are able to see a posture of prayer and sacrificial supplication in a time of great distress. When was the last time that you hurt and your response was to lash out or move in a different direction from where the pain was emanating or to where God was leading? Pain is never pleasant and it's never over as quickly as we wish it to be. But, while you're in the wait, that time between your own personal tribulation and a resolution, consider pressing even further into God to transfer some of that pain to Him. He can handle it. What about belting out that worship song, even if it's off-key. It's a joyful noise to Him. What about positioning that problem in prayer; we can be vulnerable with Him. What about just relinquishing it all to Him.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, we rejoice in Your knowledge of everything because You truly are our all knowing El De'ot. In our times of painful waiting, we ask that you provide the comfort we need as we remember to lean in, hold on while we pray and praise our way through. Amen



Linessa Frazier
New Hope & Love, Topeka

Having Victory

Third Sunday in Lent

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. 15:57 ESV

Lent is the Opportunity To Think About Christ. To Think About His Suffering and His Achievements. To Think About the Work of Christ on The Cross.

Our Greatest Act of Worship Is To Say Yes To Christ. Yes To His Finished Work. Yes To His Call On Our Lives and Yes To The Truth That He Has Revealed.

Saying Yes To Jesus is Saying Yes to Victory. We Have Victory. We aren't Fighting For Victory, We Are Coming From the Position of Victory.

Having Victory Doesn't Mean Our Circumstances Are Good or Our Lives Are Going Well.

Having Victory Is About What Christ Did on the Cross and How He Overcome The Grave.

Having Victory is About the Fact that Death No Longer Has the Final Say In Our Lives.

Having Victory is About Us Being Reconciled to The Father and Knowing He is Fully Present In Our Lives.

Having Victory is About Being Created For a Purpose and Serving Him With Our Whole Hearts.

Having Victory is About Being Thankful Everyday That God is Making All Things Work Together For Our Good.

Yes You. You Got It. Because Of Jesus Overwhelming Victory is Yours. Walk in it Today. Speak Victory Over Yourself.

Be Thankful There Is Victory in Jesus!



DJ Dangerfield
First Baptist Church, Chanute

Embracing The Gift Of Grace

Fourth Sunday in Lent

At the beginning of Ephesians 2, Paul paints us a vivid picture of what our lives look like before we experience the life-changing power of God's grace. We were dead in our trespasses and being gripped tightly by sin. We were allowing the ways of man to influence us rather than the ways of God. We were bound by the passions of the flesh, living in disobedience, and acting as children of wrath. The picture that Paul is painting shifts dramatically in verses 4 and 5.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—"

This is mercy that we cannot earn but mercy given to us through God's love for us. These words are a beacon of hope, introducing us to divine intervention. God acts on our behalf, despite our sin. In our brokenness, he extends mercy and love, making us alive with Christ. This act of grace is beyond our comprehension.

Paul then emphasizes that our salvation is not based on our works but is a gift from God. This does not mean that we shouldn't do works but rather we should do them with thanksgiving and praise because of the mercy being given to us. How we serve the kingdom of God is a way we are called to extend the love He has given to us to others. This passage in Ephesians echoes the same sentiment as John 3:16-21, where the love God has for us is the driving force for giving His only Son as a sacrificial gift. Salvation is not earned through our faith and work but through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross.

In both Ephesians 2:1-10 and John 3:19-21 the concepts of light and darkness are prevalent. Ephesians speaks to the darkness that is our lives without Christ, enslaved to sin. John describes how the world rejects light and chooses darkness to hide evil deeds. Yet, the hope lies in the acknowledgment that those who come to the light, who believe in the Son of God, will be saved.

Ephesians 2:10 ties the two themes together, reminding us that that we are God's creation, designed in Christ Jesus for good works. We are called to live transformed lives, brought back from the brink of death because of our sin, to a renewed life of grace through Christ's sacrifice. We are called to be living testimonies of God's immeasurable kindness and transformative love.

During this season, let us embrace the reality of the gift we have been given. We were dead, but God, in His mercy and love, made us alive with Christ. Salvation is a gift, not a result of our works, and our lives are now dedicated to the good works prepared by God. May we walk in the light, living our lives as a testimony to the redemptive power of God's grace and mercy.



Morgan Bandy
ABCCR Staff

Christ's People

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Following the completion of the temple and his palace, Solomon knelt before the assembly and raised his hands to heaven and offered a prayer of dedication. Solomon, the king of Israel, humbled himself before the Lord, acknowledged God's greatness and brought his petition for forgiveness of the people. Throughout his prayer Solomon acknowledges the tendencies of the people to succumb to various sin which results in the Lord allowing a variety of consequences to afflict His people. The Lord appeared to Solomon and responded to his prayer.

The Lord made a promise, recorded for us in 2 Chronicles 7:14;

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (NIV)

This promise holds true for us today. Jesus provides the opportunity for all people to be “My People” and those who accept Jesus as Lord and savior can claim this promise. The acceptance of this promise requires action on our part. We must humble ourselves, submit to the Lord's authority, and follow his teachings. Through prayer we establish and maintain a relationship with the Lord, and as a part of that relationship we seek the Lord's face. We seek to know the Lord, to know His will for our lives. When we come to know the Lord, the Holy Spirit will reveal to us our sins and we can turn from our wicked ways. The Lord promises to hear our prayers and heal our land.

If we will humble ourselves, pray and seek the Lord's face he will reveal himself. If we turn from our wicked ways, he will forgive us. We as individuals can be a part of healing our land. If we seek to know the truth, then we can take a stand for the Lord and boldly but humbly share the Good News with others. Lent is a time of reflection; it is a perfect opportunity to reflect on what the Lord has done for us and prepare us to be a part of the work of His Kingdom on earth today.



Bill Poland
First Baptist Church, Hays

Breaking News

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday must have been exciting and somewhat jarring (Matt. 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-48; John 12:12-50). Imagine that you are enjoying a pleasant cup of coffee when a parade suddenly breaks out. There are people running through the streets, proclaiming that a certain Jesus of Nazareth is “the Son of David” and the foretold prophet like Moses. They begin laying their cloaks and waving palms as he passes through on a donkey. You might be confused by the spectacle but also intrigued by this Jesus.

I was always under the impression that Jerusalem itself embraced Jesus as her king at this moment. That’s certainly how the Jesus movies make it look! The text, however, suggests that people went into Jerusalem ahead of Jesus almost as if they were storming the city. They were his entourage so to speak. Matthew, for example, distinguishes between “the crowds going ahead of Him” and “those who followed” (21:9) with “all the city” who were “stirred” and asking “Who is this?” to which the crowds replied “This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee” (21:10-11).

In other words, Jesus and his followers break the news of his kingship to the city, almost like a king and his invading army. But, Jesus does not use violence to demonstrate his kingship. The crowds here represent the church: we follow Christ and are sent ahead of him to share the gospel of his kingdom through joyful praise and by engaging the questions of the people. Nonetheless, Jerusalem is not entirely persuaded. This explains why Jesus weeps over the city in Luke 19:41-44 when just before, in 19:28-40, the evangelist records his triumphal entry. There were those who still did not embrace him even though his disciples were proclaiming him and at least some momentum was apparently building in the city (John 12:19). Luke gives the impression that Jesus did not actually see his triumphal entry as a success, since even the Pharisees were still opposing him (19:39-40).

As I ponder these events, two thoughts emerge. First, Jesus deeply cares about those who do not embrace him. He does not shrug off the Pharisees, puffing his chest and taking comfort in his popularity. Jesus instead weeps for them, because it is good for them to partake in the celebration. Christ is not offended for selfish reasons here, out of wounded pride, but instead out of unreciprocated love. Second, these events stand in stark contrast to Jesus’ earlier secrecy about his identity (Mark 8:30). Jesus sees that it is good for people to recognize him and celebrate – not for his own sake but theirs. We often think that humility means we must go unnoticed, but Jesus shows that allowing ourselves to be appreciated can be good and uplifting for others. It need not be selfish.

In the end, I imagine Jesus looking upon the spectators in Jerusalem with totally selfless and other-regarding eyes. He is motioning towards them and towards you, inviting all to join this life-fulfilling celebration.



Suan Sonna
Harvard Divinity School

A Day To Remember

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday, what a day it was. The word “maundy” comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning “command.” It is where we get the English word “mandate.” The word ‘command’ specifically refers to a moment in time when Jesus shared with his closest followers the evening before he was to be crucified. In Exodus 12:1-14, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt to share one with another the Passover meal and to commemorate for generations to come. It was to be a “lasting ordinance.” Therefore, the followers of Jesus did not think this meal was anything other than a celebration of the original Passover meal. But how things changed with this meal.

Jesus was taking this one last opportunity, away from the crowds and noise to eat with his closest friends. I have often thought that celebrating one last time with his best friends must have been one of the hardest times in his life. He knew what was to come, that one of his followers would betray Him and He knew that His time on earth would be short lived.

But He loved us so much that He willingly fulfilled His vows to His Father. The time with His followers was all about them and not himself. Jesus knew He had come from God, and He knew He was going back to God. His capacity to love others was fully related to the knowledge that He was so loved by his Father. It was an extraordinary love, love that loves to the greatest extent possible. It exists in the person who knows God in such a way that they don’t need anything from those they love. Before the command to love others; it is about us. WE love because HE first loved us!

When Jesus broke bread with the disciples (see I Corinthians 11:23-26), those words must have seemed a bit strange to their ears. Hearing that there was to be a ‘new covenant’ and that they were to remember Jesus whenever they ate the bread and drank the cup and that whenever they did so, they would proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes, was confusing to them, I’m sure.

When you read John 13:21-32, you will see how fortunate we are that God loves us enough to commit His only Son to the cross, so that our sins would be forgiven and that we might have eternal life. The promise made to the disciples and to the world then, as bread was broken and wine was poured, was sealed by the broken body and poured out blood of our Savior. Although we may struggle in our daily lives, the love of our God endures forever. The promise made so long ago remains as strong and true as it was when first told to the disciples. The commitment that was made will always be strong and present. Unconditional love can never be taken away or destroyed. The promise, never broken or compromised, is with us always!



Lois Chiles
Judson Baptist Church, Kansas City

Pain To Praise

Good Friday

Have you ever felt forsaken by God, or felt that He was far from you? Have you ever gone through a situation and thought, why God? Why me? Why now? Did you feel like giving up? Well, David, in Psalms 22 felt the same way. He opens this psalm with a cry that shows his deepest anguish, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”. It doesn’t seem like God is listening to his cry for help, his adversaries who were vicious were mocking him and he felt surrounded. The emotional and physical pain was great. And this is not just the experience of David. It is the experience of all God’s people in the face of terrible trouble. We wonder how our loving heavenly Father can stand idly by when we are in such distress.

A thousand years before Christ, David saw the crucifixion of the suffering servant in Isaiah. Isaiah writes about the suffering servant, despised, and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. (Isaiah 53: 3). David led by the Holy Spirit writes very detailed and explicit account of the crucifixion of Jesus. On the cross, in his cry, Jesus quoted the very words that David said in Psalms 22.

But David did not allow his enemies to have the last word or plunge him into complete hopelessness. David turns his attention to his God and praise him. He went from calling on God to save him to proclaiming what God has done. He did not allow his circumstances to take away his knowledge of his God. He calls on everyone to praise and fear God. Psalms 22 begins with prayer of pain but ends with praise of a promise.

This reminds me of a time in my life that I was hospitalized several times for surgery. I did not understand why God would allow me to go through all these especially, at least from my viewpoint, I was promoting his agenda. But it was during one of those tough times, I chose to offer praise to God. My pain ended in praise because that is the time and place that I met my loving wife Eddah. At 4am, during a surgery appointment, I met Eddah for the first time and the rest is history. And Eddah is the reason why we relocated to the United States.

The pain that Jesus endured did not end in tragedy. It ended in praise. Yes, he died, and was buried, but even death did not win. Now we can hold unswervingly to the hope we profess because we have a sympathetic high priest. Jesus’s death produces joy and praise. Our sins were atoned for, and we have a savior. during suffering, let’s remember to pray and reflect on what God has done for us already. If nothing else, He has saved us from our sins, and because of that, there is always at least one reason to praise Him. His pain brought us victory.



Joel Odondi
First Baptist Church, Salina

This Is Easter

Easter Sunday

In a fog of grief, she made her way through the streets to be near him. Her soul could not stand to be away from him another moment...she had to be close to him...even if he was gone. So, she stumbled, numb in her sorrow, to the garden where she had watched the men hurriedly put him in the tomb. But there, in the darkest moments before dawn her heart stopped...the stone had been rolled back from the tomb...something had happened to her Lord.

She ran. Lost in tears and grief, she burst in on Peter and another...“they have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him! (Jn 20:2)” The men ran. They had to see for themselves...they prayed it was just a nightmare. But there, in the morning light, it was true. The stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty. He was gone.

Alone again and overcome with grief, she stumbled into the tomb. But it was not empty...two men were there. In her despair, she couldn’t see their glory and turned to leave. Another man stood in her way...“Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” [...] “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him. (Jn 20:15)”. She waited for his answer...praying it was all just a mistake.

And then, into the darkest and most hopeless moment, came the most beautiful sound...a voice that spoke her name...“Mary.” Like a sobering fresh wind blowing through a stagnant bog, the voice drew her from her grief-stricken stupor. The voice was familiar, it caused her soul to leap. That voice had spoken her name and called her from the darkness before. She was lost, like the proverbial sheep, and he had found her, saved her, and become her shepherd. She knew his voice. It was HIM...Jesus! Mary, suddenly caught up in the joy of this new reality, threw herself around his feet. “Do not hold on to me [...] Go instead to my brothers and tell them [...] (Jn 20:17)”

Mary ran. This time, tears of joy flooded down her face and gasps of joy escaped her lungs. She burst into the room once more, but this time crying...“I have seen the Lord!”

Every year, I walk out of Good Friday observance imagining the women clinging to one another as they stumbled home from the garden tomb in the deepest grief and despair they had ever known...carrying the weight of their own anguish as well as the collective grief of generations of hope destroyed. Every year, I walk this journey with Mary to the tomb on Easter morning...and I try to imagine these precious moments through her eyes. The confusion, the despair, the hopelessness that flooded her whole reality. And then, I imagine that moment when his voice spoke her name...the voice that speaks each of our names...that calls us from brokenness and death and suffering into this new reality of life and light and peace. The voice that not only calls us by name, but also names us “Son” and “Daughter”. In that moment, my spirit leaps, my heart beats faster, and my soul throws itself around my Lord. THIS IS EASTER.

And then, I finish the story. I cannot stop and stay. Easter is not just for me. I must go and tell others, “I have seen the Lord!”

Friends, I pray that today, you hear the voice of the Lord speaking your name. You are loved by God, you are desired by God. Jesus has conquered sin and death for us, he is calling your name to receive his grace today. May your soul leap with the Easter reality of life and love and peace. May your lips overflow with the good news, “I have seen the Lord!”

HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!



Jessica Henks
First Baptist Church, Stilwell