Lent Meditations

· 2018 ·

FOREWORD

It is fascinating how words, written thousands of years ago, can jump out of its pages to speak to the heart of its readers. All the more so with the word that is God-breathed – the Word of God that is alive and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. The Word that pierces between soul and spirit, between joints and marrow, and exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

This season of Lent is a great opportunity for us to slow down and carve out time to dive into that Word. The Word that became flesh and made His home among us, to reveal the heart of God so that we may be restored and transformed into the kind of worshippers that the Lord seeks – those who worship Him in spirit and in truth.

It is for this purpose that the Board of Worship & Music has published Lent Meditation 2018. The reflections are penned by members of our very own TRAC family, based on the Lectionary readings for the 40 days leading up to Easter. It is our prayer that these reflections will take us forward in our understanding and application of the Word. But more importantly, we pray that it will help us hear from the Word Himself, deep in the core of our hearts.

Many thanks to Kelvin Wee for taking the lead in this project, to the team of writers for their prayerful contributions, to Rev David Loo and Melissa Joy Choong for adding their artistic flavours to the weekend readings, and to Dr David Tan for going over everything with razor-sharp eyes.

Let us dive into the Word with a hungry heart. Holy Spirit, give us a fresh encounter in the next 40 days and beyond – that we may walk in newness of life, may grow into His likeness, and may evermore dwell in Him, and He in us.

Come, Follow, Become Like Jesus!

Juwita Suwito
Chairperson
TRAC Board of Worship & Music

Day One, February 14, Ash Wednesday
Title: Genuine or Fraud?
Bible Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Key Verse:

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Devotional Commentary

Almsgiving, prayer three times a day and fasting were three pillars of the practice of the Jewish faith. Here, Jesus warns his listeners to beware of making an outward show of these practices, "to be seen by men". To do so would be pure hypocrisy. A hypocrite is essentially an actor, pretending to be someone he is not. Elsewhere in Matthew, "hypocrisy" is used in a more derogatory manner, particularly of the Scribes and Pharisees, in the sense of "a fraud". Why a hypocrite? Why a fraud?

Religion is always a matter of the inward and outward, and both must be in alignment. True religion begins from within: a right disposition towards God. This, in Jesus words, is "loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength" for in Him we "live and move and have our being". It begins with our disposition but never ends there. It must flow outwards to what Jesus says: "loving our neighbour as ourselves". Righteousness then is a right relationship with God expressed as right living in the world before God.

Acts of mercy and charity, prayer and fasting (signifying repentance) are spiritual disciplines – one outward and two inward. Practiced rightly, they reflect who we are, and draw us closer to God. Practiced wrongly, purely to be seen and applauded by the world, they make us hypocrites and draw us farther away from the heart of the Father.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent. Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. Lent gives us an opportunity to get ourselves right with God, to re-align our will with His and to become people after His own heart. May your Lenten journey be a blessed one.

Over to You

In what ways are you "playing at religion" rather than living out of a right relationship with God? Reflect and pray.

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, forgive me for pretending to be who I am not. Strip away from me the veneer of hypocrisy, so that I will reflect You both within and without. Amen.

Day Two, February 15, Thursday
Title: Following or Denying Jesus?
Bible Reading: Luke 9:18-25

Key Verse:

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

Devotional Commentary

"Who do the crowds say that I am?" John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. "But who do you (my disciples) say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16). Then Jesus spoke of His imminent passion, death, and resurrection (9:22). Jesus' identity was indivisible from his mission. His words and actions were consistent with His identity. His life was the natural consequence of His being.

Jesus's call to us to deny self, take up our cross daily and follow Him is nothing less than what He did. If being Jesus' followers is our identity, then our journey must mirror His. "For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal." (Philippians 2:6-8).

If we claim to be followers of Jesus, we must be prepared to walk in the footsteps of our Master. We must be willing to give up being who we are and be who He wants us to be. And the ultimate hallmark of that discipleship is a willingness to suffer for Him, to be fools for Christ, to be rejected by the world because of Him, even being a martyr for Christ. But remember. The journey of the cross is also the journey of the empty tomb. It was never suffering and death alone. It is always Life! And that is blessed assurance! When we die to self, we live to Him, in Him! Hallelujah!

Over to You

What are some obstacles to your following after Jesus? How can you move on from where you are to where Jesus wants you to be? Reflect and pray.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, forgive us for often choosing the path of comfort and convenience. Your Son, our Saviour, went to the cross for us. Teach us how to walk that same journey, with courage and humility, for your sake and your glory. Amen.

Day Three, February 16, Friday
Title: Jesus or Pharisee?
Bible Reading: Matthew 9:10-17

Key Verse:

It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick…For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Devotional Commentary

As Jesus was walking along, he saw Matthew the tax-collector sitting at a tax booth. He called out to him, "Follow me." Without hesitation, Matthew got up and followed. A tax collector was certainly not the poster boy of Jewish society. He was hated for collecting taxes – often collecting more than what was required. Indeed, tax collectors and sinners are often mentioned together the Gospel. What happened then was truly amazing: amazing that Jesus would bother with someone so despised and hated; amazing that Matthew should take Jesus at his word, leave everything and follow Him; amazing that Jesus had this authority over a tax-collector, and finally, amazing that Matthew's life was transformed after this.

A dinner followed in Matthew's house, with Jesus and many other tax collectors and sinners present. In the eyes of the Pharisees, this was scandalous – a rabbi mingling and eating with sinners in the unclean house of a tax-collector! The Pharisees were Jews who were concerned with the meticulous practice of the law, with special emphasis on matters of ritual purity, tithing and Sabbath observance. Jesus heard their talk even as he knew their hearts and said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come not to call the righteous but sinners."

Jesus's words to the Pharisees to "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' rings true for us too today. A blinkered pre-occupation with ritual purity - the tenets and symbols of our faith - may blind us to what true religion must be - a genuine compassion for outcast and sinners, those unlike us, the riff raff of society, migrant refugees, even crooked politicians and those hostile to Jesus. For these and more, Jesus died to show them the love of the Father. Can we do less?

Over to You

In what ways are you like the Pharisees (exclusive), or Jesus (welcoming)? Reflect and pray.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, expand my heart to care for and reach out to those who are not like me. Jesus died for "the world". Help me find a place for them in my heart and life too. Amen.

Day Four, February 17, Saturday
Bible Reading: Luke 5:27-32

Come Follow Me
Come follow Me, the Master calls out clear,
Your name is Levi, despised, disputed, lone.
And Matthew you shall be, the Gift of God so dear;
Levy no more taxes; Martyr, shall you be known.

Noble born, yet hated so, wealthy yet so poor in name;
Taxing people, in their poverty, for the sake and wealth of Rome
Fellow Jews would spurn you as a pawn in Caesar's game;
Yet Jesus would accept to fellowship with you at home.
Arise then, Noble Matthew, and claim the Cross of Christ;
Your very own possession and none else would you need.
Proclaim the Gospel True, when welcomed or despised;
For God has chosen you to preach with word and deed.

The people whined and chaffed at Christ's poor indiscretion
In being part of such a crowd as Matthew's gang in usury.
Why do you eat and drink with sinners, please entertain our question;
Why do you cause us pain with holy injury?

The strong have no need for a doctor, nor salving, soothing balm;
They handle well each challenge of coping with much ease.
The sick need healing of the body; the soul and mind need calm;
With Hope renewed and sins forgiven, they shall their Saviour please.

February 18, 1st Sunday in Lent
Bible Reading: Mark 1:9-15

Day Five, February 19, Monday
Title: Sheep or Goats?
Bible Reading: Matthew 25:31-46; Daniel 7:13-14

Key Verse:

Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me

Devotional Commentary

Three things are certain!

Firstly, The Son of Man has come (John 1:14). He took our nature upon himself. He lived among us, spoke our language, and had a special heart for the lost and the least – tax collectors and sinners, the widow, the woman caught in adultery, children, the sick, and the grieving. And he died our death, even worse, the death of a common criminal on the cross. He identified with us, to show us the love of the Father.

Secondly, the Son of Man will return in glory! (25:31) His coming will be sudden, unexpected, and decisive. How will he find us when He returns? Caring for "the hungry, thirsty, the stranger, naked, sick, and those in prison"? He did it. He commanded us to do it. And if we are who we say we are – His followers - then we must do the same, to demonstrate the love of God the Father.

Thirdly, the Son of Man will come to judge. Not just Jews and Christians but "all the nations will be gathered before Him" and eternal destinies determined. He will separate the sheep from the goats – those who love Him, and those who do not. And the visible mark of our said love for Him is the love we have shown to others. 'Truly I tell you, just as you ***did*** it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' 'Truly I tell you, just as you ***did not do*** it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

Genuine love is always tangible. God gave us His son. Jesus died for us. And if we say we love Jesus, then we must live it by reaching out to others, generously and sacrificially.

Over to You

How will Jesus find you if He were to return today, unexpectedly? In what tangible ways are you expressing your love for Jesus? Reflect and pray.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, forgive me for being pre-occupied with I, me and myself. Help to me to look beyond to the needs of others, and share generously as You did to me, and commanded me to do the same. Amen.

Day Six, February 20, Tuesday
Title: Praying or Play-acting?
Bible Reading: Matthew 6:7-15

Key Verse:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Devotional Commentary

Why do you pray? Just to be seen by others as religious? That's superficial, pure play-acting! Public prayer has its time and place; but even then, it must be for the ears of God, and not the eyes of man. In prayer, we stand naked before the God "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden", and it's best then to be in the private place, the upper room. There, alone with Him, unhindered and undisturbed, we speak with Him and He with us; we commune with Him and bask in His presence.

How do you pray? With many words, babbling incoherently, thinking that God will hear you because you are talking at length? God is not hard of hearing that we should shout at Him. God is not dull of mind that we should heap up empty phrases before Him. God knows all even before a word is uttered, or a thought formed. Silence may be our prayer, spirit to Spirit. Even tears may be our unspoken words to the Father. But when we pray with words, speak simply, intelligently, and transparently.

What do you pray? God first! "His kingdom come, His will be done" must ever be our paramount focus and desire. We pray for our heavenly Father's rule to be recognised by and realised in us and all humankind. In humble submission to His rule over us and childlike trust in His benevolence toward us, we then approach His throne of grace in confidence with our life-giving requests – for our daily needs to be met, for forgiveness from our sins, and for deliverance from temptation. He will hear us. He will meet with us. And He will respond to us, according to His will.

Over to You

What do you pray? How does that reflect what is deepest in your heart?

Prayer

Bapa kami yang ada di syurga, dikuduskanlah nama-Mu. Datanglah kerajaan-Mu, jadilah kehendak-Mu, di atas bumi seperti di dalam syurga. Amin.

Day Seven, February 21, Wednesday
Title: Sight or Blindness?
Bible Reading: Luke 11:29-32

Key Verse:

For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation.

Devotional Commentary

We live in tumultuous times, evil times. While there is much that is good, one can't help but notice the stench of evil all around - blatant and covert, individual and institutional, random and systematic. And we despair, we lose hope. We wonder what the future holds for us. Choking death or blossoming life?

Jesus had just cast out a demon from a mute before their very eyes. Still, some questioned the source of His power. "He casts out demons by Beelzebub - the ruler of the demons." Even His ability to do so was doubted, with others persisting in demanding from Him "a sign from heaven". The evil of their hearts had blinded them to the fact that this was the promised Messiah, the Son of God!

So, as Jonah was sent to preach judgement and repentance to Nineveh, Jesus was sent to them and to us. Unless you turn from the wickedness in your hearts and the folly of your selfish ways and return to God (5:32), God has already judged you and found you wanting (13:1-9). "All have sinned have fallen short of God's glory." "The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I am Jesus, the sign from heaven. I am Jesus, the Messenger. I am Jesus, the Message. Yet, when He came into the world he had created, the world failed to recognise him. He came into his own creation, yet his own people would not accept him. How blind we are! "This generation is an evil generation." But if you turn to Jesus, He will take you from darkness to Light, death to Life, from outcast sinner to beloved children of God!

Over to You

In what ways are you blind to who God is, and what He has done? Reflect and commit it to Him.

Prayer

Open the eyes of my heart Lord that I may see myself as I am and who I can be in You. Break the hardness of my heart that I may bow down to You. Amen.

Day Eight, February 22, Thursday
Title: Image of God – What is yours?
Bible Reading: Matthew 7:7-12

Key Verse:

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!

Devotional Commentary

Jesus came to reveal the Father. In the Lord's Prayer, we are taught to address God as "Our Father in heaven." He often demonstrated such intimacy with the Father. He did so when "very early in the morning … he went off to a solitary place, where He prayed." He did so as He "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" even though the people's needs were great and His "fame" or "popularity" spread. He did so when He looked "up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves." His union and communion with the Father was the most significant and compelling in His life, ministry and mission for mankind and the world in which we live.

It is said that the way we think about God is the most important thing about us. It determines how we relate to Him and our inward posture as we "ask", "seek", and "knock". Therefore, let us ask ourselves this fundamental question, "What is my image of God?" Do not hurry past this question. If we have a faulty concept of God, we will relate to Him in unhelpful ways – and our relationship with Him will suffer. Instead, if we have a right understanding of God, our relationship with Him will give us life.

Tony Horsfall (author, spiritual director, and mentor) points out three images which Christians have of God:

- A heavenly policeman – always on the lookout for our mistakes and ready to prosecute us for the slightest error of judgment.
- A demanding taskmaster – always wanting more from us and never satisfied with what we achieve.
- A spoilsport – only interested our performance, and not at all concerned for our well-being.

My own fallen humanity and negative experiences with my earthly father distort how I view God. God, on the other hand, is everything we would want to see in a father: loving, caring, supportive, protective, someone who provides for us, someone who will discipline us with love and for our good.

Over to You

Which of the above imagery resonates with you? What image of God which you have needs to be healed and renewed?

Prayer

Father, please forgive me for I have perceived You incorrectly. Gracious and compassionate Father, would You come heal and renew my mind and heart particularly my image of You and enable me to live in freedom knowing You as my Abba Father? In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Day Nine, February 23, Friday
Title: Why look at me and not the other?
Bible Reading: Matthew 5:20-26

Key Verse:

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Devotional Commentary

Misunderstandings and conflict will occur in our relationships. Our culture teaches us to avoid confrontation, but when we sweep problems under the carpet, communication breaks down and relationships become estranged, frayed, fractured, strained and unhealthy. If we are not careful, wounds in relationships will fester, preventing us from contributing to the well-being of others. We become a weight and a burden instead of a brother or sister in Christ.

It is wrong to think that we can compensate for the wrong that we do to others with the "good" we do through sacrifice and service in the name of our Lord. No amount of doing good for or offering sacrifices to God is going to fix the hurts I have caused to my brother or sister if I do not reconcile with them. It is not going to remove the anger we harbour in our hearts. We need to repent of the idea that we can be right with God without being right with our fellow human beings.

Relationships are important to the Lord. Thus, He says be reconciled to your brother and then come present your gift to the Lord. Pursue peace with all men, as well as holiness, without which, no one will see the Lord. For this to happen, we need to pause and ponder and allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts.

"Spiritual care does not want to bring about competence, build character, or produce certain types of persons. Instead, spiritual care uncovers sin and creates hearers of the gospel."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Spiritual Care

The Holy Spirit is still transforming lives today. Will you let Him encounter you and change you in His transforming presence and the light of His life-giving Word by doing what it says? "Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and obey it."

Over to You

What might the Holy Spirit wish to bring to light concerning your relationships with others during this season of Lent?

Prayer

Father, I long for the courage – to move toward rather than away from those with whom I have conflict. The uncertainty scares me. But I also believe the promise that You will be with me. I ask that this journey in which I find myself becomes a path of revelation – a place in which I encounter You and myself – in a new way. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Day Ten, February 24, Saturday
Bible Reading: John 15:1,6-16

I am the Vine
I am the Vine, you are the branches; Hold on, cling on, live free and grow;
I am the Life, you are the vessel; leave Me and you will never know
The Miracles that come in asking while trusting My Words given to you;
Faith is for Life, and Life is to follow the Saviour you know so True.

A burning awaits the branches so lifeless, with no fruit to show, and bare;
But if we remain with Him there is Life, His Love covers us in His care.
The Saviour is faithful, He kept the commands that God gave for Him to obey;
When we love each other, true Friends we will be, and Followers of The Way.

Lay down your life; give it for others; and Life you will find once again;
No more as servants will you be addressed, but Friends of the highest order and plane;
For what Christ has known from God is now known to you and His Friends everywhere;
You did not choose, but Christ chose you, to make you fruitful, and answer your prayer.

Love each other, reach out to all; count not the acts of hate seen each day;
Forgive and release the wrongs done to you; for Love keeps no record come what may.
For He is the Vine, and we are the branches, to bless the world where we live;
And living is dying to self so that we might live on for God, that all might believe.

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February 25, 2nd Sunday in Lent
Bible Reading: Mark 8:31-38

Obedient even unto Death

Day Eleven, February 26, Monday
Title: From Foe to Friend
Bible Reading: Luke 6:27-38

Key Verse:

But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you…. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Devotional Commentary

Sometimes the enemy whom you and I face come from the most unlikely place. The family in which we are raised and brought up is supposed to be one where care, love and trust is nurtured and exhibited. However, my experience of growing up in my own family was very different.

My growing up years were difficult, trying and painful. Though we were wealthy, it was a dysfunctional family. My father's prolonged drinking habit and weakness for alcohol left an indelible mark in our lives emotionally. It was difficult to face the public humiliation his drinking caused. Over time, my fear for my father turned into hatred and my heart was filled with anger, resentment and unforgiveness.

When the incredible mercy of God, His irresistible grace and the overwhelming love of Jesus invaded my life, He brought forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration and a measure of healing in my relationship with my father. That healing is still taking place as I yield my hurts, wounds and pain to Him who bore my pain and exchange for His healing grace – wholeness, completeness and freedom in Christ.

"In the New Testament our enemies are those who harbour hostility against us, not those against whom we cherish hostility, for Jesus refuses to reckon with such a possibility. The Christian must treat his enemy as a brother, and requite his hostility with love. His behaviour must be determined not by the way others treat him, but by the treatment he himself receives from Jesus; it has only one source, and that is the will of Jesus."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

How has my Heavenly Father shown His mercy towards me? "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household" – my parents and my siblings have come to a saving knowledge of Christ. I am truly grateful to my Heavenly Father, the Merciful One.

"God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Over to You

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you concerning "enemies" in your life? What wrongs do you need to let go so that you may experience the resurrection power of Christ in your life?

Prayer

Father, I cannot love my enemies but Your Spirit who lives in me can. Have mercy on me and may I, in turn, show mercy to others. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Day Twelve, February 27, Tuesday
Title: Who is Your Real Father
Bible Reading: Matthew 23:1-12

Key Verse:

And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.

Devotional Commentary

Jesus tells His audience that these law-experts and their followers fall short in three respects:

1. They lack sincerity, sympathy and humility; they pile heavy loads on men's shoulders but when it comes to themselves they are unwilling to move these burdens with so much as a finger.
2. They are unsympathetic for they do not try to lighten men's load.
3. They are show-offs – they try to impress men with their piety. They love places of honour, and they yearn to be addressed as "rabbi." Jesus is here condemning the yearning for rank, for special recognition, for distinctions and honours above one's fellowmen, and unrelated to the glory that is due to Christ.

Jesus is saying that the attention of His followers must not be fixed on human titles and distinctions but on God in Christ, worthy of all reverence, praise and honour.

These law-experts and their adherents did not know the Father in heaven. When Jesus warned against calling another human being father, He was not speaking about the physical or earthly fatherhood, but rather about spiritual fatherhood.

I lacked a healthy and wholesome father-son relationship, and was unconsciously looking for a "father" in someone else in order to fill the void within me. I longed for acceptance, affirmation and admiration. All my life I yearned for older men to father me – men whose lives and values impress me because they had attractive traits that were lacking in my life. I aspired to be like them.

However, while understandable, seeking the perfect father figure in another human being leads to disappointment. Even the best of human father figures is a fellow sinner who will fail, disappoint, and misrepresent the Father's love.

The three most basic human needs – significance, self-worth and security – are met when we know God as our Father in heaven and experience His unconditional love. Then we can cease to strive and begin to live freely as God intends for us – because I know myself to be loved.

Over to You

Who do you look up to and put your trust in? There may be good men and women who are admirable, but only God will never disappoint.

Prayer

Father, help me know that you are indeed my Father. Help me look to you as the one in whom I can put all my hope and trust.

Day Thirteen, February 28, Wednesday
Title: Divine Grace in Our Salvation
Bible Reading: Matthew 20:17-28

Key Verse:

As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside privately and told them what was going to happen to him.

Devotional Commentary

When was the last time you were aware of Jesus calling you aside privately to say something important to you? Did you pause to listen to what He wanted to say to you? How did you respond to His "interruption" in the midst of your busyness?

Jesus makes the third and explicit announcement of His sufferings, death, and resurrection. He does not announce this for the whole world to hear but speaks to His twelve disciples. He confides in them.

"The Lord confides in those who fear Him." He desires to disclose His heart to us because He loves us and values the relationship He has with each one of His children. Alas, we are often too busy to hear. Unless we intentionally slow down and come away to be with Jesus, we miss the all-important words which He intends to speak to you and me.

Jesus sets His face like flint to do the Father's will in spite of the abuse, humiliation, mockery and cruellest torture which He will have to endure. The Messiah King is betrayed and made a criminal. The Suffering Servant is "led like a lamb to the slaughter." On the third day, the Father vindicates His Beloved Son, the Resurrected King.

Grace of God reaching me
when He found me despairing.
Blood of Christ cleansing me,
bringing me joy to my sorrow.
Praise to the Lord for His love to me,
Love to me forever.
Joy and peace undeserved,
day by day and forever.

Over to You
Take time to pause and quietly ponder what the Lover of your soul went through on your behalf in order for His enduring love to reach you. Then, let your soul speak in loving response to what He is saying to you.

Prayer

May this beloved child of Yours know how indebted I am for Your divine grace in my salvation. May the depth of my relationship with You be characterised by our intimate friendship, and my service, servanthood after my Lord and Master to whom alone I give my heart and soul.

Day Fourteen, March 1, Thursday
Title: The Rich Man and Lazarus
Bible Reading: Luke 16:19-31

Key Verse:

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day…[He] died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

Devotional Commentary

Chapter 15 of Luke tells us how much God values people. Chapter 16 begins with Jesus telling how we ought to use material wealth to bring people into God's kingdom. In contrast, this parable describes a man who did not care for the poor at his doorstep but kept his wealth for himself. The "rich man" of this parable was "highly valued among men," but because of his selfishness was "detestable in God's sight."

He was rich. So, too, were Abraham and Joseph of Arimathea and many others. The Bible does not judge them for being rich. However, unlike Abraham and Joseph, the rich man was lavishly dressed, wasting his days in conspicuous consumption, and had no regard for the beggar at his door. He was a show-off, a strutting peacock who displayed his wealth. He was so full of love for himself he had no love left for the poor. His utter selfishness and self-centeredness is clear to see.

It was my rest day and I wanted to be alone. As I was driving home, an elderly woman who was standing with an outstretched arm on the opposite side of the road caught my eyes. I hesitated and continued to drive on as though I did not see her. A little further down the road, I felt this prompting in me to turn back in case the woman genuinely needed help. When I reached the location, she was gone. I honestly felt lousy about myself on my way home. I asked for God's forgiveness for my reluctance and hesitation – I had the means to help but I lacked the heart.

One lesson is clear through this parable: the rich man's failure to care for Lazarus was a sin – and this sin brought judgement. We are called to seize every opportunity to help those in need for the glory of God.

Over to You

Who is the Lord drawing your attention to? What opportunities is He giving you to show His love in action to the one in need?

Prayer

Father, guard my heart from becoming proud – selfishness, self-centredness, self-preservation, and indifference; give me eyes to see and a sensitive and response heart to the world in which I live to the Your praise, honour and glory.

Day Fifteen, March 2, Friday
Title: The Noble Vineyard Owner
Bible Reading: Matthew 21:33-43

Key Verse:

What shall I do? I will send my beloved son.

Devotional Commentary

Honour was very important to Jesus' listeners. When the vineyard renters abused the owner's servants they also insulted and dishonoured the servants' Master. This was a serious insult. But, it did not stop there. The renters not only renters refused to pay the owner, but wanted seize ownership of the vineyard instead. Such callousness is shocking to us – and would have been shocking to Jesus' audience. How should the owner respond? Certainly, he would be justified in treating the renters just as they had treated his servants.

In this parable, the owner chose not to retaliate with force or violence. Instead, he sent his beloved son to the vineyard where his servants had been beaten, insulted and thrown out. Even if they did not respect his servants, surely, they would at least honour his son.

The renters respond to the owner's mercy by murdering his son. Such is the depth of sin.

The parable shows God's willingness to give Himself through His very own Son. He came, vulnerable, to draw God's people back to Him. Instead, the offer of love was rejected and the Son killed.

God showed His Love, costly love, through Jesus. He came call all, even His wicked opponents, to be reconciled to the Father. The Father restraints his anger and vengeance in costly demonstration of unexpected love and grace – so that we would have the opportunity to repent and turn back to Him.

Over to You

Reflect & meditate on the Owner's costly act of love, grace and reconciliation.

Recall a time in your life where you experienced God's love and grace. Reflect on it and talk with the Lord.

Prayer

Gracious Father, speak to as I meditate on the parable. Help me see afresh Your abundant love and overflowing grace and marvel at it. Help me know this, not just with my head. Rather, help me experience Your love, grace and purpose more and more.

Day Sixteen, March 3, Saturday
Bible Reading: Luke 15:11-32

Two Sons and a Father

O, Father I have sinned;
I disobeyed the Laws of God and brought great shame on you.
No longer worthy could I be your son, I need your love anew.
Please take me back and call me as a servant or a slave;
And I will change, and I will live with Love that selflessly you gave.

A Father had two sons, his joy the world could see;
His wealth known far and wide; the love he shared was free;
Alas, a son rebelled, and claimed his rightful share
Of what would one day be his own as he was rightful heir.

Just give me what is mine, he said, I want it right away;
I want to live a wanton live, I want to have my way.
Then he did leave from home, and squandered all he had;
And soon he had to feed among the hogs, his life had turned that bad.

How many of my Father's slaves live better than I do;
How foolish I have been to spurn his love for me so true.
I will arise and humbly beg that he would take me back;
To right the wrongs I've done; to learn the things I lack.

O, Father I have sinned;
I disobeyed the laws of God and brought great shame on you.
No longer worthy could I be your son, I need your love anew.
Please take me back and call me as a servant or a slave;
And I will change, and I will live with Love that selflessly you gave.

The Father had been waiting each day for ages long;
With hope that he might see his son before his days were gone.
And what great Joy when from afar he saw the form of one;
Who had become a stranger though he was still a son.

With loving arms he held him close and kissed him, yet unclean;
But such is Love when sinful ones repent from what they've been.
Bring out the festal robe, the ring of favour and new shoes;
He lost his way, he has returned; my love he'll never lose.

Now while the people sang and danced with joy to celebrate;
The Elder Son was hurt his father forgave and not berate
The prodigal one, the one who squandered what he had so flippantly;
While he had faithfully been good and followed all orders instantly.

O, Father I have sinned;
I disobeyed the laws of God and brought great shame on you.
No longer worthy could I be your son, I need your love anew.
Please take me back and call me as a servant or a slave;
And I will change, and I will live with Love that selflessly you gave.

My Son, my Son, all that I have has always been at your disposal;
The son I'd lost has now returned, so this is my proposal:
Come Celebrate, Rejoice with us: one who was lost has now been found;
Walk from the path of righteous hate to Love's own hallowed ground.

DTCL 5 Sept 2017

March 4, 3rd Sunday in Lent
Bible Reading: Mark 8:31-38

This is my Father's House

Day Seventeen, March 5, Monday
Title: Speaking Truth
Bible Reading: Luke 4:23-30

Key Verse:

I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

Devotional Commentary

Nazareth was an all-Jewish town. When Jesus spoke in the synagogue, he was speaking to a Jewish community whose lives were shaped by the hope of a Messiah who would save them from the Gentiles that had occupied their land and destroyed their temple. When he read the Messianic promise from Isaiah, expectations would have been raised.

But, Jesus told two stories – neither of them about Jews. Rather, these were stories of Gentile heroes of faith. Jesus could have talked about Abraham or Moses or David. Instead, he talked about a Gentile widow and a Syrian general, Naaman.

In His reading from Isaiah, Jesus stopped before the sentence about the "day of vengeance of our God," the day that God's judgement would come upon the Gentiles who had oppressed His people. Jesus was saying that the Gentiles would receive God's blessings in the new age of the Messiah. That was not what His Jewish audience wanted to hear!

Jesus' announcement of his ministry of proclamation, justice, and compassion for all was hard for the Jews to receive. The prejudices and biases of the listeners blinded them to the message of the New Covenant. Still, Jesus spoke the truth anyway. Truth is not always well received. Yet, like Jesus, we need to be people who speak the truth in love. The world has always struggled to accept truth – and this is no less true in our post-modern age. We as Christians, however, must not be afraid of truth.

Over to You

Truths are not always welcome. What prevents you from hearing truth?

What prevents you from sharing truth? What are the possible consequences? What would it take for you to become a person who speaks truth knowing that it will not always be well received?

Prayer

Dear Lord, sometimes I struggle with speaking the truth and hearing truth. Help me to be open to Your truth. Grant me wisdom and courage, and teach me how to speak the truth in love.

Day Eighteen, March 6, Tuesday
Title: Because I am Forgiven Much
Bible Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

Key Verse:

I have cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

Devotional Commentary

Jesus told this parable in response to Peter's question, "How many times should I forgive my brother?" The master forgives the servant's enormous debt: 200,000 years of wages! But, even though this tremendous debt was cancelled, the servant refuses to forgive his fellow servant a debt for of a few thousand dollars.

The word 'debt' in this passage is also used in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew. It refers to unfulfilled obligations toward God and our fellow human beings, that is, those things we have left undone. Sometimes we know the right things to do but fail to do them. At other times, we know that something is wrong, but still do it.

Our lives are filled with actions that are not in harmony with God's will, and with unfulfilled responsibilities to Him. We need forgiveness for the many sins we know we have committed and many more we are not even aware of.

We need His forgiveness, forgiveness for ourselves and forgiveness for others. As Jesus prayed, forgive them for they know not what they do; we too do not know what we do.

Are you aware of your sins? Are you aware of how much debt the Father has cancelled for you?
How you understand your relationship with God will shape your relationship with your neighbours.

Over to You

Spend some time pondering on your sins, of commission and of omission.

What debts has God cancelled for you? What debts do you need to cancel for others? Bring them in prayer before the Lord.

Prayer

Gracious Father, help me realize the depths of my sins that I may appreciate your love and forgiveness more and more. May I learn to live in gratitude and grace.

Day Nineteen, March 7, Wednesday
Title: Growing in Obedience
Bible Reading: Matthew 5:17-19

Key Verse:

Whoever sets aside the least of these commandments and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

Devotional Commentary

These three verses link the Beatitudes with Jesus teachings on the Law and the Kingdom of Heaven in chapters 5-7. Jesus holds a high view of the Old Testament Scriptures – the Law and the Prophets – upholding its validity and authority. Not a single item of the Law or the Prophets will pass away until everything is accomplished.

Jesus warns that those who set aside the least of these commandments will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven. That's a sobering thought. How can anyone live so that they do not break the least of the commandments? Jesus makes clear the standard of righteousness that He demands.

In the Beatitudes that precede this passage, Jesus teaches that poverty of spirit is necessary to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. We may be quick to ask for forgiveness when we have sinned without realising just how poor in spirit we really are. It is only when we realise how much we need God that we will desire the transforming power of His Spirit to become more like Christ.

Over to You

Are you aware of your poverty of spirit? Invite the Spirit of God to search your heart and to speak to you as you review your week.

Prayer

Abba, thank you that though I fall short of your standards, your love is greater than my shortcomings. Help me know my poverty of sprit and desire your Spirit's transforming work in me.

Day Twenty, March 8, Thursday
Title: The Stronger One
Bible Reading: Luke 11:14-23

Key Verse:

But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Devotional Commentary

Everyone agreed that Jesus had cast out a demon. However, there was a dispute on the source of Jesus authority. Had Jesus' cast out the demon through the power of a greater demon, Beelzebub? Some were accusing Jesus of being in league with Satan!

Jesus speaks of a stronger power than that wielded by Beelzebub. The strong man occupying the 'castle' can only be defeated by one who is stronger. Jesus work of exorcism was a struggle between the dominion of Satan and the dominion of God. God's victory was on display in this exorcism.

Jesus is the stronger one, who brings liberation to the demonized man. Jesus' ministry on earth, narrated in the gospels, demonstrated His supremacy in bringing God's salvation plan. His Kingdom and His reign had come. Now, Jesus challenges His listeners to respond.

What is your response to Satan's apparent dominion in the world? When we read news of wars, corruption, destruction and injustice, it is easy to grow discouraged, disheartened and angry. We wonder if there is hope. Jesus claims power to save. What is your response?

Over to You

What are some doubts you have about God's supremacy and salvation plan for this world?

How are you tempted to live, make choices and solve challenges as though Jesus has not defeated evil?

Prayer

Our loving Father who is Supreme and Sovereign, help me grow in the knowledge of who Jesus is and His victory over sin, death, and evil. Help me know You better, trust You, and align myself with You.

Day Twenty-One, March 9, Friday
Title: Love For God and Man
Bible Reading: Mark 12:28-34

Key Verse:
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Devotional Commentary

We are all familiar with the Greatest Commandment. It is the first and the greatest. It is the heart-beat of the entirety of the law. In John 14:15, Jesus says, "if you love me you will keep my commandments." What that means is if we truly love God, we will keep all the other commandments as well as this greatest one.

"Love" means different things to different people. We too often understand "love" as a mushy, feel-good feeling or think it is expressed with material gifts. Likewise, we often think that so long as we have that same feel-good feeling about God and give to the Church, we have fulfilled the Greatest Commandment. That, however, is not a Biblical concept of loving God.

Really loving God means honouring Him, revering Him, and paying close attention to His desires. And, more importantly yet, obeying His commands.

We say we love God, but do we love the people He has created? Do we instinctively limit our love and concern for others? Do we save it for the people who like us, and for the people whom we like? Are we are selective of our neighbours and are picky about those for whom we will go the extra mile?

On the contrary, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells us that anyone who is in need - regardless of race, politics, class, and religion - is our neighbour. Not everyone is our brother or sister in faith, but everyone is our neighbour, and we must love them.

If we love God, we will not settle for some a minimal level of concern for neighbours. Rather, we will reach out to them. If we do not show love to others, we cannot claim to love God. With God, our love must be whole or it is not love.

Over to You

Am I in full compliance with the Greatest Commandment or do I straddle the fence? How do I demonstrate my love to God and to people?

Prayer

Lord, teach me to look beyond colour, race and creed. Teach me to love because You first loved me.

Day Twenty-Two, March 10, Saturday
Bible Reading: Luke 18:9-14

Two went into a House of Prayer and they began to pray;
One boasted of his pious life; he knew the words to say.
Pleased with himself, he boasted of his pedigree;
He thought that God would nod, and would with him agree

That here is one impeccable, the pride of all believers;
Whose holiness is such, all others cringe in shivers
Of shame, when placed beside this faultless man
Whose ego knows no bounds, whose heart, a rubbish can.

The other, bowed with guilt, and beating on his chest,
Cried out for Heaven's Mercy, a Sinner seeking rest
From running far from God, and needing to return;
Before the fires of Hell, his soul already burned.

My sins are e'er before me; O Lord, forgive me please;
Redeem my soul, repair my life; O Lord, You hold the Keys
To Love, to Peace, to Heaven and Life anew;
I will arise from here and live for only You.

Ahh, know this now, that sinless men need no salvation;
And sickless persons seek no cure nor palliation.
But one from here would go home justified;
Another knew not Heaven's Joy, his obstacle, his pride.

March 11, 4th Sunday in Lent
Bible Reading: John 3:14-21

Day Twenty-Three, March 12, Monday
Title: The Aladdin Lamp
Bible Reading: John 4:43-54

Key Verse:
Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.

Devotional Commentary

Have you cried out to God in an emergency? Maybe you have a loved one facing a serious health problem. Perhaps you have faced a financial crisis or a family crisis. We cry out to God and promise that if He "fixes" the situation, we will follow Him more obediently and trust Him more fully.

Do we keep Jesus on the shelf, like Aladdin's lamp? Do we pull Him off the shelf only when we need him, try to rub Him the right way, and ask for His help? Do we, once the difficulty passes, place Him back on the shelf and get on with life without Him until the next crisis? Do we pray when we are not in the midst of crisis?

The Lord doesn't want us to seek Him merely for deliverance from our troubles. Christ wants to be worshiped as Lord, not used as Aladdin's lamp. He wants us to trust and follow Him because of who He is, not just because of what He can do for us.

While the Lord often graciously meets us at our point of need, He wants us to believe in and follow Him not only because He rescues us from our problems, but also because He is the only Saviour and Lord. He is worthy of our trust because of who He is.

Jesus' reply to the official's desperate cry for help and the crowd watching on seems harsh (4:48). Jesus wanted to see if the man - like the crowds – was looking for a wonder, not seeking Him in truth. Jesus wanted him to desire more than an "Aladdin lamp" faith to genuine faith in Him. Praise be to God, "he and all his household believed."

Over to You

The real test of our faith is not how sincere we are in crying out to God during our moment of need. Rather, it is how we live when the pressure is off.

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for the shallowness of my faith. I believe, help my unbelief that I may truly experience the joy and peace of Your saving faith

Day Twenty-Four, March 13, Tuesday
Title: Do You Wish to Get Well
Bible Reading: John 5:1-18

Key Verse:

See you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.

Devotional Commentary

The life of a paraplegic today is not easy. Just imagine what it was like in the 1st century. The invalid had been paralyzed for 38 years. All that time he waited by the pool — hoping for a miracle.

Jesus knew his situation. Jesus *chose* to approach the man. He did not have to. He approached the man the same way he approached the Samaritan woman. Jesus moved towards a need; towards broken-hearted sinners.

After the healing, when Jesus found the man in the temple, He told the man: 'See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.'

It was not just the man's physical health at stake, but also his spiritual health. Jesus told the man, sin no more. Stop! I have healed you to make you holy. I healed more than your body. I healed your soul.

Just as He knew the invalid, Jesus knows us perfectly — knows everything about us, inside and out, all we have ever felt or thought or done. Just as He bestowed His gift of healing on the invalid, He also gives us a foretaste of His healing power.

It is our choice: to allow His healing power to make us whole again or to wait by the pool, day after day and year after year, trying to get in by ourselves.

Over to You

Do you wish to get well?

Prayer
Lord open my eyes to know Jesus personally, as the One who knows me, and Who has compassion on me. Help me to accept His sovereignty over my body and my soul, and recognise that His saving and healing power is for the sake of my holiness.

Day Twenty-Five, March 14, Wednesday
Title: Model of Discipleship
Bible Reading: John 5:19-29

Key Verse:

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself, he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

Devotional Commentary

Despite knowing that the Jews were seeking to kill him, Jesus adds fuel to the fire by making one of the most empathic statements of His unity with the Father.

Jesus claims to be God.

Jesus challenges the Jews to explain – if He were not God –how He could do the works they had seen. He promises to do even greater things. He claims power over death and the ability to give life. He claims that He will raise all men from the dead and judge them.

Yet, Jesus the Son and who alone has seen God, is also the model of true humanity. He is thoroughly open to God, humble, doing nothing on his own. Jesus' whole life, everything he does, reflects the Father. And, everything the Father does is reflected in Jesus' life.

Jesus is the full revelation of the Father. His life is entirely at the disposal of the Father. He is the ultimate model of true discipleship.

If this is how Jesus lived, we too must live like this. God was pleased with His beloved Son's self-denial to live for the Father. He will look for the same in us. He will look at our life—not for perfection but for evidence that we are abiding in the vine—trusting, resting, receiving, drinking from Him and being satisfied in Him and bearing the fruit of love.

Over to You

Against whom do I model my discipleship?

Prayer

Father, Lord, I know that true discipleship is tough. Help me keep my eyes trained on you that I may abide continuously in you so that, like Christ, my life can be reflective of You.

Day Twenty-Six, March 15, Thursday
Title: The Desire for Approval
Bible Reading: John 5:30-47

Key Verse:

How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?

Devotional Commentary

Jesus identity was foretold in prophesies and validated by signs and His work – all confirming Him as the Messiah, the Son of God. Yet, the Jews would not believe and take Jesus at His word. Why? Because their desire for human and societal approval overrode all else – even desire for approval from God.

People have not changed since Jesus' day. Our desire for human praise and love of glory for ourselves often overtake our desire for Christ and God's glory. We want to be the centre of our existence. We want to be exalted. We love being somebody. And, we reject Jesus when he comes in conflict with these things. Our love of human approval and self-glory get in the way of our faith and our obedience to God.

In Romans, Paul says that Abraham "grew strong in his faith giving glory to God." When we come to Jesus in faith, we surrender the right to claim any glory for ourselves. Jesus came into the world to set us free. This includes freedom from slavery to the approval and the praises of others.

He is the Living Water from which we can to drink for the satisfaction of our souls. And when we are satisfied with Him, the enslaving power of the craving for human glory is broken. Broken by the power of a superior satisfaction.

When we have tasted God's beauty and approval, we are free.

Over to You

Am I living my life as abundantly as Christ promises? Who controls the fount of my life?

Prayer

Lord please open my eyes to the glory of Christ. Awaken in me a continual desire and spiritual taste for Your living water so that our faith grows and we will be free.

Day Twenty-Seven, March 16, Friday
Title: Yes, You Know me
Bible Reading: John 7:1-2,20,25-30

Key Verse:

I know him because I am from him and he sent me.

Devotional Commentary

Jesus cried out while teaching in the temple courts, "Yes you know me, and you know where I am from." Imagine yourself this morning at the Feast of Tabernacles, amongst the cynical crowd who were intrigued by this Great Teacher and yet sceptical that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah, the anointed Christ.

Why did Jesus cry out? He knew his time was coming and he had a mission to fulfil. Despite opposition and the threat of violence against him, Jesus still taught in the temple. He would not allow himself to be distracted from doing his Father's will. His lived a life of obedience in the face of growing adversity.

Yet, these chosen people of Yahweh had closed hearts and trapped minds. We see here God's grace and love at work. It was a cry of compassion from Jesus for His people to see the truth, for them to encounter their Messiah. Yet, hearts were still hard. They still wanted to hurt him for disrupting their world, for radically challenging their culture and traditions. Who is this Jesus?

Over to You

Recall your encounter with Jesus when you acknowledged Him as Lord of your life, your Redeemer and Saviour. What was that moment like when you first believed? How real is Jesus in your life today?

Prayer

Abba Father, you search my heart and you know my inmost being. How can I hide or run away? With a grateful heart, I give you all praise and glory. Thank you for teaching me today the power of your truth and your saving grace through Jesus Christ. What joy and blessed assurance it is to have a God of love and mercy, who seeks His beloved out and reveals the truth of His Kingdom, of life eternal through Jesus the Christ, the Messiah.

Day Twenty-Eight, March 17, Saturday
Bible Reading: John 7:37-52

Come, Thirsty Ones, do come to Me and drink;
Clear Living water flows abundant, to be yours.
Many try to brave life's storms; they flounder and they sink;
The soul that drinks of Me, his Faith takes wing and soars.

The Spirit is this Water that flows and washes clean;
Your joy springs fresh and new, from wellsprings ever deep.
The Spirit pours out Grace and Gifts that none have ever seen;
To show God favours those who come repentantly and weep.

Lord, You must be the Prophet, Messiah from on High;
That You can prophesy such truths and touch our lives today.
Yet others say You are Galilean, a common man, they sigh;
We need a King, a Warrior who will our sworn enemies slay.

Oh Lord, Your Words, they bring such hope, such terror
To different ears and various hearts around;
Some turn and leave their foolish ways and error;
While others in their blinded ways, they wallow, and abound.

"No Man has ever spoken the way that this Man does;"
"No, He deceives, and Pharisees do not believe."
But Nicodemus firmly stands, benighted faith finds light because
The Lord has cleared his mind and cleansed his heart of grief.

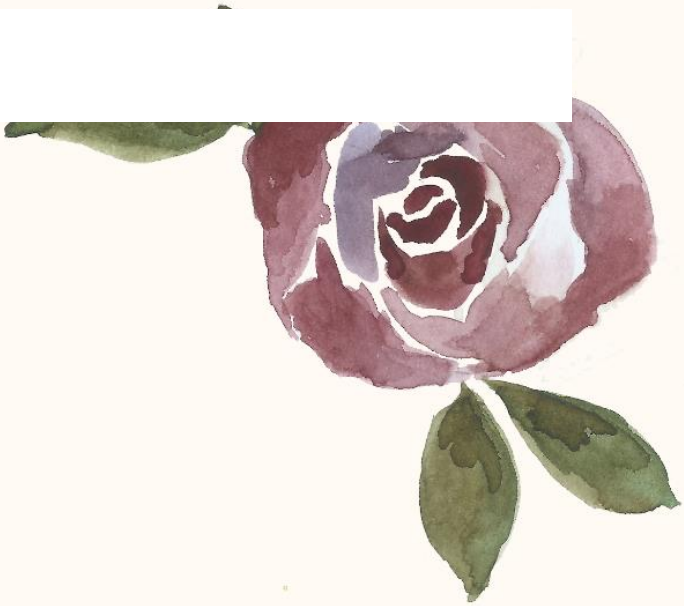
None stands condemned of guilt until he has been heard;
Give Him a chance to plead His case before our judges true.
Then mete to Him a judgment from conscience clear, unseared;
I stand with Him; He stood by me when I was searching; for He knew
My heart, as nothing has been hidden from His Eyes;
Yet He did not condemn nor judge as one Who bent the Law.
He led me to the Truth and Truth has led me to His wise
And loving Heart, and cleansed me from all sanctimonious flaw.

It matters not that Galilee is my birthplace, my village home;
While some are born into great wealth in some important town
A Saviour walked in Galilee, a mad man reigned in ancient Rome;
A man is blessed whose heart is right, or cursed with crass renown.

So come, you thirsty ones; and drink while it is free;
While there is yet the freedom available and freely given.
For comes a Time when men seek Life but only see
Eternal separation of those condemned and those forgiven.

DTCL
4 Sept 2017

March 18, 5th Sunday in Lent
Bible Reading: John 3:14-21



He took the fall ...

... and thought of me

Day Twenty-Nine, March 19, Monday
Title: In My Father's House
Bible Reading: Luke 2:41-52

Key Verse:

Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?

Devotional Commentary

Jesus was twelve years old when he went with his parents to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. As they journeyed home from Jerusalem in a large group, it took a day for Jesus' parents to realize He was missing. Like any parent, they were alarmed and frantic. They returned to Jerusalem, where it took them there days to find him. They saw their boy in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. People were amazed at his understanding and answers. Mary and Joseph were astonished. While relieved that they had found their son, Mary couldn't help but confront Jesus, "Son why have you treated us like this? You father and I have been anxiously searching for you." Those of you who are parents can surely identify with the anxiety Mary and Joseph felt.

Jesus was calm and composed. He didn't seem to miss his parents. Even at that young age, He was clear that His priority was to obey the will of His Heavenly Father. Jesus showed his divinity and mission. In his response to his mother, he referred to the Temple as "My Father's House". Mary, overawed by all that she had witnessed, remembered these things in her heart. For her and Joseph, this child was indeed special and perhaps there were times of tension for them as they tried to understand the humanity and divinity of their son, Jesus.

Those who listened to Jesus were amazed by his wisdom and maturity. This was the first introduction of the boy, Jesus, to Jewish society since his birth and presentation as a baby at the Temple. This encounter filled all with amazement, amazement that would in the next 20 years turn to hostility, rejection and ultimately punishment in the cruellest way – death on the cross.

Jesus, subsequently, obeyed his parents and returned home to Nazareth. We are told that he grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. A benchmark for every disciple today in as we progress in our pilgrim journey.

Over to You

How set is your heart on obeying and doing the will of your Heavenly Father? Jesus taught in the Temple. Where is God calling you to serve in your local church?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that in Jesus Christ, there is Eternity. We long for that day of reunion with you and all in our Father's House. As we walk this pilgrim journey, may each day be one of communion with you, of love, trust and unwavering faith. In good and bad times, in pain and suffering, may we be ever mindful that you journey with us and that your will for us, is always perfect. We have nothing to fear.

Day Thirty, March 20, Tuesday
Title: Knowing Jesus
Bible Reading: John 8:21-30

Key Verse:

When you have lifted the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

Devotional Commentary

Jesus continues to capture the imagination of the world today as he did two thousand years ago when he walked the land of Israel. How can it be that the son of Joseph the carpenter in Nazareth claims himself to be the Messiah, the Promised King of Israel? This constant dispute over Jesus identity was a daily preoccupation of the crowds whom Jesus engaged with. The radical Jesus was destabilizing the Jewish nation. Here was a man claiming Yahweh as his Father and that he was the embodiment of divine truth. In our time, such teaching could be classified as a national security threat. No one could be neutral about Jesus' claims. They either believed or rejected the truth from God, revealed through Jesus.

At the end of the reading, we see a growing acceptance of who Jesus is, despite the large opposition. "Even as he spoke, many believed in him." – John 8:30. Jesus was making life very uncomfortable for the Jewish leaders and teachers. In their view, He was tilting the balance and committing blasphemy. But God was at work, giving grace and freedom to the humble believer, the ordinary folk, the captive in spirit.

Are you standing up for Jesus today? Affirm the truth of Jesus' testimony as the Son of God who came to die for the sins of the world, that he was truly the Messiah, Redeemer and Saviour. Encounter the Living Christ today and go tell everyone the news that God's Kingdom has come!

Over to You

Jesus said, "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." Is this true of your own life?

Prayer

There is no greater joy than knowing you Jesus! You are my Lord, you are my King! I confess the many times I prioritise myself instead of You. Forgive me Lord, for my transgressions. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Open my eyes to see your truth, my ears to listen to your voice, bless me with steady hands to do your work and willing feet to go where you lead me.

Day Thirty-One, March 21, Wednesday
Title: The Truth Will Set You Free
Bible Reading: John 8:31-42

Key Verse:

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me.

Devotional Commentary

The real disciples are those who hold on to the teaching of Jesus for they know the truth and have been set free by it. Jesus clearly defines here who his followers were: they are those who are free.

Jesus used the picture of slavery to sin and contrasted it with the freedom gained by believing in the truth revealed by the Son. He asserted once again His relationship with God the Father. Because Jesus knew the people were out to kill him, He was direct. When the Jews declared that Abraham was their father, Jesus said this could not be true because Abraham's children would not plot to kill the Messiah from God. This riled up the crowd who declared boldly that God was their only Father.

But, this was not true. Jesus made clear that God's children would love Jesus and believe His words – the words of the one sent by God. Instead, they were slaves to sin.

Over to You

Slavery to sin comes in many forms. Some are clear, while others are so woven into the fabric of our lives that it is difficult to recognise. Often, we choose to ignore rather than confront that which is not pleasing to God. What keeps us away? Carefully examine your life today and ask God to break those ties that hinder your faith and weaken your trust in God.

Prayer

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, I come to you with broken hopes and dreams, yet by your grace and mercy, you have freed me from the slavery of sin and through Jesus, I am your child, freed and ready to serve you in your Kingdom. Forgive the moments when convenience and selfish desire have kept me from doing what is pleasing to you. Strengthen my spirit, grant me wisdom and courage. Above all, embrace me with your love to celebrate life with joy, knowing that Eternity awaits the faithful believer.

Day Thirty-Two, March 22, Thursday
Title: Jesus, Giver of Life Eternal
Bible Reading: John 8:51-59

Key Verse:

If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me

Devotional Commentary

The people became angry with Jesus and wanted to stone him. He slipped away from the temple grounds. It was all too much for the Jewish people. They could not fathom what Jesus was telling them about freedom from death. After all, Abraham and their fathers had all met with death. They scoffed at Jesus for daring to say that he existed before Abraham!

It was heated as the Jesus' listeners reacted against Him. It was the culmination of their constant questioning of Him, of their doubts about who this man Jesus was. A man who performed miracles, who healed the blind and the lame, who fed the hungry, who cast out demons and raised the dead. The crowds following Jesus had seen and heard it all. But, they were still puzzled by His teaching and resistant to accepting Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah. Believing in Jesus would rock the heart of Jewish belief. They couldn't betray their father Abraham and all their patriarchs.

As they turned against him, Jesus engaged with them by remaining true to his mission, declaring to them that he knew his Father and obeyed his word. The powerful proclamation of "I am!" to the people had great significance and it enraged the Jews. "I am!" was the very name of God. It could not possibly belong to this man Jesus, could it?

But, who other than God could claim that obeying their word would give life?

Over to You

Knowing God as your Father and obeying His word should be the pulse and heart of your spiritual life. How can you enhance your spiritual walk and enjoy greater intimacy with God?

Prayer

Almighty God my Father, I come to you today confessing that I need to surrender all of my life to you. Forgive my selfish, foolish ways. I come to the cross of Christ today and offer myself to you as a living sacrifice. Use me as you will and equip me to be your loving disciple to a fallen, wounded world. May we be ever faithful as we await your coming again as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Day Thirty-Three, March 23, Friday
Title: Who do You Say Jesus is?
Bible Reading: John 10:31-42

Key Verse:

But Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"

Devotional Commentary

The Jews were confronted with Jesus' claims. The well-educated residents of Jerusalem take offence with Jesus' claims that He is the Son of God, that He and the Father are one, that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him.

Consider the situation of the Jews in the 1st Century. God had been silent for 400 years. Now, a man comes along performing miracles – the sick are healed, the lame walk, the blind see, the dead raised. Whilst Jesus had not publicly revealed who He was earlier in His ministry, He was now very open about who He is. The Jews were confused. Was Jesus a mad man possessed (vs 19-20)? They told Him to stop keeping them in suspense and be clear if He was the Christ (vs 24). But, many outside Jerusalem, those beyond the Jordan, believed in Jesus (vs 42).

The Jews in Jerusalem were unable to accept that a man could be God despite the many miracles that they had seen and heard of. Jesus confronts them: "even if you don't believe me, believe in the miracles that you may know and understand that the Father in in me and I in the Father."

We have the benefit of hindsight of the 2,000 years since Christ came, but we are still confronted by Jesus' claims. We may have acknowledged Jesus' claims as the Son of God, but is that acknowledgement merely intellectual – believing with our mind but not our heart? Truly believing that Jesus is the Son of God is supposed to impact our earthly lives – to see ourselves as God's holy people set apart for His purpose (vs 36), eternity minded, exhibiting grace, love and truth.

Over to You

What does it mean for you to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is in the Father and the Father in Him, and that He and the Father are one?

Prayer

Lord, I confess that I have often been a hearer but not a doer of the Word. I don't live my life as one who really believes from my heart that you are the Son of God and are God Himself. Please give me wisdom to know what it means to believe that you are the Son of God. I need Your strength and courage to do what is right. My heart's desire is to live a life that reflects that You are God indeed.

Day Thirty-Four, March 24, Saturday
Bible Reading: John 11:45-53

Let One Man Die

Let one Man die, that others might survive;
Let One be sacrificed that many live and thrive.
So said old Caiaphas, so old, so tired and despairing;
His world of comfort fading; the cries for blood kept blaring.

If this one Man could just but disappear;
Oh, let me rule the hoi polloi and make them fear
The power of the Faith's elite, the glory of religious thrones;
(The whitewashed tombs where found within are rotten dead men's bones).

But they would not be silent; they seem to love Him so;
This carpenter of lowly class, how could He seem to know
My thoughts, my wants, my lame ambitious pride
That even I would loathe, as I enjoy the ride
On my high horse, the sound of my own voice,
As I proclaim decisions from my sleeves in which all should rejoice.
Alas, my wealth and pomp, mere veneer covering my death;
Though I still move and talk, such empty wisdom with each breath.

Sanhedrin, come, and counsel me with laws so deep entrenched
In customs passed through ages old, meticulously drenched
in spittle from much talk , with hardly any care;
Apart from jots and tittles put in place just over here and there
To make the script look good, devoid of faith, or love, or hope;
The duty of believers is to hear, obey and sorely cope.

But silence as demanded by the noble hierarchy
Has given way to freedom from the staid patriarchy
As more and more encounter this strange Man of Galilee
Then One must give His Life that others might be free.

This Man whose words can cleanse deep seated septic scars;
And those once blind, would see, and dance up to the stars.
What shall we do, this Man He threatens our position so?
He must not live; He rules the crowds, we must not let Him go.

We shall conspire to deliver Him to the cruel Romans;
Our hands be clean of blood, of safety from the omens.
Ah, Caiaphas, you plot, connive and scheme, but all in vain;
The Son of God, betrayed and crucified, shall rise yet once again.

For nothing can confound and void the Will of God;
Be shamed, be changed, be worshipful, be awed.

DTCL
4 September 2017

March 25, Palm Sunday
Bible Reading: Mark 15:1-39, [40-47]

Day Thirty-Five, March 26, Monday
Title: How Much is Jesus Worth to You?
Bible Reading: John 12:1-11

Key Verse:

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair.

Devotional Commentary

In the days leading up to the Passover, Mary, Martha and Lazarus welcome Jesus and his disciples into their home for a meal. As Jesus reclines at the table, Mary comes and washes His feet with perfume and dries them with her hair.

In Jewish custom, having your feet washed was a sign of honour for the guest, but doing the washing was a lowly task. It was usually reserved for the lowest house servant. Here, Mary uses perfume costing almost a year's salary on Jesus' feet. It is no wonder that Judas Iscariot's finds this gesture extravagant, saying that the money could be better well spent on the poor and needy (though he also had an ulterior motive). Mary used her hair, which signified a woman beauty, to dry Jesus' feet.

Mary was showing through her actions, how much Jesus meant to her and to her family. Nothing was too much for honouring a person who had done so much for them – including raising of her brother from the dead. Jesus was worth everything she had, and more. There was nothing she would count as beneath her if it honoured this man. Mere words could not convey what her actions showed.

Over to You

The importance of a person or thing is reflected by the resources we devote to them. Our time. Our money. Our effort. How much then does Jesus mean to you? Consider how much time, money, and effort you spend on Jesus – and how much you spend on the other things in your life.

Prayer

God, I confess that I have treated you with contempt and have taken You for granted. I live my life as though You don't exist and only run to You when I am in trouble and need help. Often what I give to You are leftovers instead of my best. Open my eyes Lord, to see how much You mean to me. Help me to delight in you like Mary.

Day Thirty-Six, March 27, Tuesday
Title: Death Brings Life
Bible Reading: John 12:20-36

Key Verse:

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds

Devotional Commentary

The faithful were coming to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Word of Jesus' miracles was– especially the recent raising of Lazarus from the dead – spread quickly among them. Jesus knew the time had come for to fulfil His primary mission. Jesus was human and divine. He knew what awaited Him and was troubled. This weighed on Him even on fateful evening at the Garden of Gethsemane after the Last Supper. Yes, our Lord understands fully the many emotional upheavals in our lives.

And yet, He knew that unless He was willing to do what He was sent by the Father to do, His mission would fail. Only His death would bring life. While Adam's sin brought death – spiritual and physical – Jesus physical death would bring life. It would restore to us all that Adam and Eve had lost when they sinned.

God, our Creator, designed us to be in relationship with Him. The fullness of that relationship results in a fruitful and abundant life. It is a life that is fully dependent on the Father just like Jesus. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We can only experience this full and abundant life when we willingly submit to follow. We cannot hold on to both God's way and our own way. They are in opposition. We have to die to ourselves before we can experience life. It is hard. But, we have the example of our Lord, Jesus.

Over to You

The things of this world that satisfies our desires are often in conflict with God's ways. Are you willing to die to self in order to experience and enjoy the new and abundant life that Jesus promises?

Prayer

Lord, I confess that I have allowed my selfish goals and desires to dictate my life instead of trusting You, my Saviour and my God, who desires the best for me. You are my Creator; You know what is best for me. You have already prepared in advance good works for me to do. Forgive me for rejecting that and thinking know what is best for myself. I repent of this. Help me to die to self each day so that I can live Your Life.

Day Thirty-Seven, March 28, Wednesday
Title: Am I Betraying Jesus?
Bible Reading: John 13:21-32

Key Verse:

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."

Devotional Commentary

To betray a person the ultimate act of disloyalty. Judas' decision to sell Jesus for thirty pieces of silver did not happen in the spur of the moment. He had met with the temple officials and negotiated a price. He knew what he was doing. Did he have a choice not to betray Jesus? Was he chosen to be the fall guy, the one who drew the short straw in God's scheme of things?

God is all-knowing. Before creation, He knew how things would turn out in this world. He is the Alpha and the Omega. Our finite minds will never be able to comprehend God's infinite ways, how His sovereignty and the free choice of man interplay with each other. However, the Scripture is clear that that God has given mankind freedom to choose obedience or disobedience. The choice to do right or wrong is ours. Regardless of circumstances and pressures of life, we are answerable before God.

If we claim to be believers of Jesus, we have chosen to be His followers and to obey Him. We have freely claimed Him as Lord. We must live accordingly. When we fail to do so, when we put ourselves ahead of Jesus, we, like Judas, betray Him.

Over to You

Do you live a life that honours Jesus or a life that betrays Him? We face this decision daily. Do you choose to honour God?

Prayer

God, I have betrayed You in many ways. I often live my life as though You don't exist. My selfish ways keep Your love from being lived out through my life. Make me the salt and light You have called me to be.

Day Thirty-Eight, March 29, Maundy Thursday
Title: Glorifying God through Service and Love
Bible Reading: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Key Verse:

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you…By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Devotional Commentary

As Jesus death draws near, we are reminded that God had left everything into Jesus' hand. Thus, Jesus had to decide whether He was willing to go through all that had been set before Him and then return to the Father. He knew that by His willingness to die, He would bring glory to the Father and that He Himself would be glorified in and through the Father.

To help the disciples understand what it means to love in the purest form, Jesus demonstrates His willingness to descend to the level of a slave and wash His disciples' feet. It was customary to have water available at the entrance of a Jewish home for guests to wash their feet before entering the house. Only the rich and important would have their feet washed by a slave. Jesus' action confused the disciples, as we see in Peter's refusal. Jesus told them that they were right in calling Him Teacher and Lord. If He, their Teacher and Lord, had washed their feet, they too must humble themselves and do likewise. There is nothing too lowly in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Such love is not mere abstract emotion, but acts:
to serve others,
to consider others as more important,
to go the extra mile,
to offer the other cheek,
to embrace the rejected,
to forgive the unforgivable,
to accept others without pre-conditions,
to lay down one's life for another.

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Over to You

When we follow Jesus and His commands, you bring glory to God. Do your actions bring glory to God? How do you serve others in love?

Prayer

Teach me Lord to serve others in love and not expect to be served. Teach me to be humble before You and others. Jesus, You have shown the way. Grant me strength to follow You.

Day Thirty-Nine, March 30, Friday
Title: Who was Responsible for Jesus' Death?
Bible Reading: John 18:1-19:42

Key Verse:

If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected.

Devotional Commentary

Who indeed was responsible for Jesus' death?

Was it Judas Iscariot? If he had not agreed to betray Jesus to the high priest, all this might not have happened. In his greed, he betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Was it the priests? Jesus was challenging their spiritual authority over the Jewish people. They wanted Him dead. Because they did not have the authority to crucify Jesus, they petitioned Pilate.

Was it Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea? He could have rejected the wishes of the Jewish authorities. He knew Jesus was not guilty but did not free Him. He tried to wash his hands of Jesus' crucifixion, but was the one who permitted it to take place.

Was it Jesus Himself who was responsible for His own death? After all, the Father had given all things into His hands.

Was it Adam and Eve? If they had not disobeyed God, no sacrifice for sin would have been unnecessary. Mankind would already be in paradise, living in the presence of God.

Was it me? My sins caused Him to die so that I could be reconciled to the Father.

Over to You

Jesus' love for us, human beings made in God's image, was what compelled Him to die willingly that we may regain what Adam and Eve lost. Jesus came to give life – that we might fulfil our purpose and our calling. If we ignore this, we make His death out to be meaningless. Why has God put you in this time and place in His story? Why are you here?

Prayer

Jesus, I thank You for giving Your life for me. I confess that I will never fully understand why. I don't want Your death to be in vain. I ask that You continue the good work You started within me so that I can live a life that will bring honour and glory to You.

Day Forty, March 31, Saturday
Bible Reading: Matthew 27:57-66

Heaven's Love Lies Dead

Sir, give to me His Body; you have no need of Him;
I have a place to let Him rest, away from all so grim.
I'll place Him in my tomb, His final resting place;
He suffered shame enough; such pain, such sad disgrace.

I'm Joseph of Arimathea, a simple man of faith;
My tomb shall be His own; my linen be His swathe.
He cared for me; He healed my Life with Love;
This little I must do for Him, The One sent from above.

So many things to ask; so many things to know;
Now, He is gone, and I am left with only faith to show.
But I believe with all my heart; He made my life anew;
He owns my Life, my Wealth, His Glory I pursue.

Come, Servants, wrap His Body, and place Him over here;
And roll this stone to shut the entrance, so none can venture near.
He died, let none disturb the peace He paid for with His Blood;
Our tears shall flow like rivers; our grief a gushing flood.

Come women, brave and true; you stayed while others ran;
You stood beneath the Cross; and now you grieve beside The Man,
The One who died that we might live, set free from sin and shame;
I grieve with you, and wait right here, we cling to His Great Name:

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

DTCL
4 Sept 2017

April 1, Easter Sunday
Bible Reading: John 20:1-18

Hallelujah!

ABOUT *– Writers, Poet, Designer and Editor:*

LIM SIEW LAN works with DUMC and desires to support and guide others in their journey in Christ. Her main ministry passion lies in the area of formation and developing intimacy with Christ. She enjoys taking walks in nature, reading and is trying to learn not to rush through life.

CELINA MAY BENJAMIN worships at Christ Methodist Church, Ampang. Values moments of quiet listening over a well-brewed kopi. Finds cooking therapeutic and reading Christian classics a balm for a weary soul. On the road to retirement and wondering what next on this pilgrim journey.

SAMUEL ONG is a servant of God, a family person and a doctor of hearts, both physical and spiritual. Blessed with many talents by God's amazing grace, he is active in many different arenas of life. He has a passion for young people, the All Blacks and hymns, and now, he is active in photography, capturing God's creative wonders. He served as Trinity Annual Conference Lay Leader from 2007-2012 and established Whispering Hope. He is married to Loo Ling and they have three lovely daughters (Ming, Xian and En).

MELISSA JOY is an ardent lover of God and the life He has graced her with. She is passionate about the creative and scientific arts, and believes that life is meant to be experienced to its fullest. To that end, she has tried her hand at many different pursuits in a variety of life arenas including music, painting, calligraphy, photography, and teaching. Her aim is to use all the gifts and talents that the Father has given her to glorify Him in return, and to bless others wherever possible. She has served in various capacities in the worship ministries in Trinity Methodist Church, Penang and subsequently, in Whispering Hope Methodist Church KL. She is excitedly stepping into the lifelong journey of marriage with Jeremy Lim.

MEI K KUAN worships at Whispering Hope Methodist Church. She is a pilgrim in progress who hopes that by God's grace she will complete her journey as a true disciple in time to come. When she is not working or busy attending to the needs of her three four-legged fur kids, she travels across the globe marvelling at God's wondrous creation.

PASTOR GAN JIN LEONG Since his first sabbatical in 2010, Gan Jin Leong has been learning the importance and value of spiritual companionship/accompaniment. He views the contemplative spirituality as the missing jewel in our evangelical and charismatic traditions particularly in Malaysia. He is part of the pastoral ministry and one of the trainers in the School of Leadership under Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC). He also leads people in small group spiritual retreats. Prior to joining on staff with DUMC 1998, he worked in the marketplace for 13 years.

REV DAVID LOO started his Life of Ministry as a Director with Youth For Christ in 1970. He obtained his Diploma and Theological Degrees from the Singapore Bible College and Trinity Theological College, Singapore. In a service that spans more than 40 years, David has served in various ministries. His keenness is in Evangelism and Music. Since his retirement from Pastoral responsibilities in 2008, David spends his time writing Songs and Poems, Visiting and Preaching in the smaller Churches, and conducting Seminars on the Needs of the Aged, with a Vision towards setting up Retirement Communities in various parts of the Peninsula.

DAVID TAN is a member of Whispering Hope Methodist Church. He is trained as an engineer, works as an urban health researcher, is a part-time seminary student, and a full-time child of God. When not reading or writing, he may be found brooding intensely over a board game or stumbling about on a badminton court.