

running
the *race*

staying
the *course*

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A 40-DAY DEVOTIONAL FOR
VANCOUVER CHINESE
BAPTIST CHURCH

FEBRUARY-APRIL 2010

INTRODUCTION

When I was much younger I ran cross-country in school. I loved it. I especially loved running on hills, golf courses, through the streets of the town. But I soon realized that not everybody stays the course or finishes the race. Some people drop out because they get injured or tired because they are out of shape or some simply decide it isn't worth all the pain and effort. Some people cheat. I remember once that because the course ran through a wooded area some people decided to take a short cut rather than stay the course.

In the same way, the Christian Life is like a race. The writer of the book of Hebrews invites us to “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). As we begin our Lenten Journey this year we are doing it at the same time as the Winter Olympics. All around us we are reminded that athletes from all over the world have come to Vancouver to take part in the many events. They have trained hard for this experience and have made sacrifices to be able to be a part of the games.

Hopefully, none of the athletes will cheat or be disqualified for not staying the course. But it is possible for us as believers to drop out along the way, to find that the going is too rough, the demands too high, our resources too little. If we are to run the race and stay the course and finish, we will need to pay attention to our spiritual health (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). This is one of the purposes of the season of Lent, that period of about 6 weeks that ends with the Easter celebration. Lent is a time to focus on our spiritual condition. It is a time to do some soul-searching, take inventory and recommit ourselves to the discipleship journey. Like conditioning for the games, it requires spending time and effort.

This devotional guide you hold in your hands is your training manual. It will help you to tone up those flabby muscles, tune your reflexes, and increase your strength for the journey.

The beginning and end of the Christian faith is Grace (Ephesians 2:8-10). God calls us in grace, God showers us with grace as we seek to live in relationship and fellowship with him, God welcomes us into grace when we reach the end of our journey. Faith/trust is a response to this gift that God gives to us. The Apostle Paul knew how challenging the race of life can be (2 Corinthians 11:16-33; Philippians 1:27-30; see also his ministry in the Book of Acts) but also knew the reward for those who complete the course (2 Timothy 4:6-8). In 1 Corinthians 9:25- 27, Paul writes:

Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

Pastor Jeff Sharp

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

THE FORMAT OF THE DAILY JOURNEY

Each day will include a short Bible reading selection and places to journal our response to God's word. We will also keep a daily journal of what we see God doing in our life. Each day's session ends with you writing a prayer, it can be long or short. Just express your heart to God. Your faith will mature and be made stronger as you see God responding and answering your prayers.

During this Lenten Journey we also encourage you to join a Congregational Life Group (i.e. Sunday morning or weekly study class, a home group, or mid-week groups like men's, women's, small groups, fellowships, prayer meeting etc.). Connecting with a Congregational Life Group is a powerful way to strengthen your spiritual growth as well as help you connect with other believers.

Are you ready to get started?

As you begin your journey may God bless you and encourage you along the way. If you miss a day or two, don't quit or feel guilty. Begin again with the next day's assignment and start fresh.

DAY 1: FEBRUARY 17

ASH WEDNESDAY | REND, RETURN, RECEIVE

JOEL 2:12-17 | COLOSSIANS 2:13-14 | 1 JOHN 1:9

Today we embark on a Lenten journey designed and directed by the love and grace God has shown to us in Jesus. It is an invitation to rest, reflect, repent, and receive. It is a time to slow down and take our spiritual pulse and check our temperature.

Jesus reminds us that there are two ways to go in life. “Enter the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14).

The Poet Robert Frost once wrote:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

What is the narrow way, this less traveled way, the more excellent way (to use the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13)? The way is the way of the Cross, it is the way of love, it is the way of sacrifice and service, and it is the way of joy and ultimate fulfillment. It is the way of Christ, who said: “I am the way” (John 14:6). The way is God revealed in Jesus and his reconciling, recreating, redeeming, forgiving work seen in his life and on the cross. We walk on this way of love through the presence of the Risen Christ in our hearts.

Through the obedience of faith in the unconditional love of God in Christ, we walk the way of love.

The way of love begins with ashes and repentance. So marked with the cross of Christ, we begin and end each day with surrender to God’s way of love.

The Lenten journey helps us to refocus and sets us on the way that leads to a fuller and more abundant life. The journey is not always easy because it means being honest with ourselves as we seek to be honest with God and that can be painful. But as we return to God, we find that He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Lord, come into our hearts with your presence that we may die to our self-centered ways and be made alive by your grace to walk in the way of love. Amen.

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 2: FEBRUARY 18

ISAIAH 55:1-13 | AN INVITATION TO THE THIRSTY

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 3: FEBRUARY 19

PSALM 65:1-13 | THE GIFTS OF GOD

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 4: FEBRUARY 20

ROMANS 8:18-39 | MORE THAN CONQUERORS

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21

MATTHEW 13:1-23 | EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED

A young girl was heard praying, “Lord, make the bad people good and the good people nice.” There is real insight there. Every sane person prays for the good to triumph over the bad. But the young girl senses something beyond bad and good—nice.

Good is not good enough. When coupled with pride and anxiety, our virtues become vices. That is why Jesus says, “Your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees” (Matthew 5:20). The Apostle Paul says to the Corinthian Christians, “But strive for the greater gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

What is nice? Certainly not sweet, saccharine, weak-willed. Rather gentle, kind, patient, understanding, respectful. Yes, but even more. Nice means full of grace in the girl’s prayer. She asks that the God of grace who gave his son to die for us would fill our hearts with grace so that all that we do becomes “grace full.”

Love is God’s greatest gift because love fills with grace all the other gifts. And it is that gift of God’s grace that not only makes nice people, but also liberates and empowers and brings joy. And once we have experienced that grace and learn to live in it, we come to expect the unexpected. Each and every day is full of miracles and expressions of God’s care and presence. We are able to expect the unexpected, because we have come to live lives that are “grace full.”

Lord, we ask that you will make us aware of the great gift of love you show us in Christ and want to give to us. As we look out on life we so often expect difficulties, challenges and disappointments. Help us to expect the unexpected, those places where you seek to reveal yourself to us and what you want to do in our lives. Father, help us to live “grace full” lives. Amen.

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 5: FEBRUARY 22

ACTS 1:12-14 | THE COMFORT OF PRAYER & COMMUNITY

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 6: FEBRUARY 23

PSALM 27:1-14 | THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 7: FEBRUARY 24

1 PETER 4:13-19 | SUFFERING AS A BELIEVER

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 8: FEBRUARY 25

EPHESIANS 1:3-14 | SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 9: FEBRUARY 26

EPHESIANS 2:1-10 | FROM DEATH TO LIFE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 10: FEBRUARY 27

EPHESIANS 2:11-22 | FROM NO HOPE TO HOPE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28

JOHN 17:1-11 | ETERNAL LIFE

This passage is part of a longer prayer of Jesus. This is the real “Lord’s Prayer”. In it Jesus prays for himself (vv. 1-5), for his disciples (vv.6-19) and for those who would believe as a result of the testimony of his disciples (vv. 20-26), in other words, you and me.

This passage contains a definition of eternal life. It is eternal life to know God and to know Jesus Christ whom he has sent. In Greek, the word “eternal” doesn’t have to do so much with duration of life, but its main emphasis is quality of life. Eternal life is sharing the life of God. It is to possess it, to enter into it, to experience it here and now, as well as in the future. It is to know something of the splendour, majesty, joy, peace and holiness which are characteristic of the life of God.

It is also to experience intimacy with God; an intimacy of heart, mind, and soul. To “know” God is not merely to have intellectual knowledge of him; it is to have an intimate personal relationship with him, which is like the nearest and dearest relationship in life. Without Jesus such intimacy with God is impossible. To know God is to know what he is like, and to be on the most intimate terms of friendship with him; and neither of these things is possible without Jesus.

What about you? Do you know God in that intimate sense? The Lenten journey is a way of cultivating that relationship, of growing in it, of learning how that relationship with God, that participation in the eternal, impacts all areas of life.

The gift of eternal life, the invitation into an intimate relationship with God is a gift that Jesus gives, but our responsibility is to receive that gift and to develop that relationship. How are you doing?

Father, thank you for your Son and for the intimacy of knowing you as my Father. As I travel this Lenten journey help me to be honest with you and with myself. Help me to cultivate those habits and practices that deepen my relationship with you. I love you. Help me to grow in that love. Amen.

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 11: MARCH 1

JEREMIAH 20:10-13 | FROM FEAR TO TRUST

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 12: MARCH 2

PSALM 69:1-3, 13-18, 29-33 | GOD HEARS & ACTS

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 13: MARCH 3

ROMANS 5:12-17 | HOW MUCH MORE!

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 14: MARCH 4

PSALM 16:1-11 | FULLNESS OF JOY

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 15: MARCH 5

ACTS 4:1-22 | BOLDNESS

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 16: MARCH 6

EPHESIANS 6:10-20 | STRONG IN THE LORD

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

SUNDAY, MARCH 7

MATTHEW 10:26-33 | ONE THING TO FEAR

The truth hurts. That is why we so often avoid the truth. We prefer living with illusions, playing games, wearing masks.

In the Gospel story, the governor Pilate sets aside the truth when he asks cynically, “What is the truth?” (John 18:38) The truth is clear: Jesus is innocent and crucifying him as a traitor to Rome would be a lie. But that truth would hurt Pilate.

Yet, the Apostle Paul says, “Love rejoices in the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6). Rejoicing in the truth is possible when Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The ultimate truth is full of the grace of God in Christ. This is the truth of God’s perfect love that casts out fear, that is stronger than death, that never ends.

We rejoice in the truth that we are saints in spite of the truth that we are sinners. We rejoice in the truth that we have eternal life in spite of having to die.

The truth frees us to walk in love, seeking the truth and doing the truth on our way. To rejoice in the truth means that we know that the fear of God, the awe of God, the reverent respect we have for the power and judgment of God frees us from all the other fears of life, especially the fear of what others might do to us or think of us because we have come to know the truth and life in Jesus.

Lord, we ask that you will open our hearts and minds to the truth of your awesomeness, your grace, and your love we find in Jesus. May this liberating, transforming, comforting truth free us from playing games, wearing masks, living with illusions. Help us to rejoice in this truth. Amen.

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 17: MARCH 8

1 PETER 1:13-25 | A CALL TO HOLY LIVING

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 18: MARCH 9

LUKE 5:27-32 | FACING REALITY

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 19: MARCH 10

ROMANS 6:1-4 | THE RISEN LIFE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 20: MARCH 11

JOHN 13:1-17, 34 | STAYING IN LOVE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 21: MARCH 12

2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-21 | CONTROLLED BY LOVE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 22: MARCH 13

EPHESIANS 5:1-20 | LIVING AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

SUNDAY, MARCH 14

MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18-23 | HOW DO YOU RESPOND?

God's love for us is everlasting; it existed before we were born and will exist after we die. It is an eternal love in which we are embraced. Living a spiritual life calls us to claim that eternal love for ourselves so that we can live our lives as a reflection or refraction of God's eternal love. This means that all of our other loves—for parents, brothers, sisters, friends, spouses, children, neighbours and strangers—are expressions of our experience of God's eternal love for us. But no father or mother can love their children perfectly. No husband or wife can love each other with unlimited love. There is no human relationship that is not broken somewhere. No human love is the perfect love our hearts desire, and sometimes human love is so imperfect that we can hardly recognize it as love.

When our broken love is the only love we know, we can easily feel discouraged, but when we learn to live our broken love as a partial reflection of God's perfect, unconditional love, we can forgive one another and enjoy together the love we have to offer. The source of all love, as 1 John tells us, is God's unlimited love (1 John 4:7-21).

But the ability to love this way and live this way is a result of the way we respond to the unlimited, unconditional love that God gives to us. In the imagery of today's scripture passage, it is the fruit of God's seed taking root in us and growing. Being rooted in God's love transforms all loves and transforms our life. The question is: How do you respond? Are you willing to accept God's unconditional love or do you still insist that you must do something in order to earn it? Do you allow the unlimited love and grace of God to work its transforming power in your life or do you resist it? How do you respond?

Father, we thank you for your unconditional, eternal love. We often feel like we don't deserve this love and we don't understand it, but your word tells us that it is true. Help us to respond to your love in a way that honours you and transforms us and our love. May your perfect love take root in our lives and bear the fruit that you desire to see. Amen.

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 23: MARCH 15

GALATIANS 5:1-15 | FAITH AT WORK IN LOVE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 24: MARCH 16

1 JOHN 4:7-12 | CRUCIFIED LOVE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 25: MARCH 17

1 JOHN 4:16-21 | LOVING LIKE GOD

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 26: MARCH 18

1 CORINTHIANS 12:31-13:13 | THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 27: MARCH 19

MATTHEW 9:35-10:4 | COMPASSION & MINISTRY

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 28: MARCH 20

EPHESIANS 4:1-16 | BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

SUNDAY, MARCH 21

MATTHEW 25:31-46 | CARING LIKE JESUS

After World War II, when workers repaired an English cathedral which had been seriously damaged by bombs, they decided to restore a large and much loved statue of Jesus. This statue had outstretched arms and it bore the familiar inscription from Matthew 11: “Come unto me all you who suffer.” When they tried patching together the pieces, they realized that the hands of the statue were missing. They had been destroyed by the bomb fragments. A discussion followed. Should they reshape the hands? The workers reached a decision that still stands today. The statue of Jesus has no hands, and a new inscription reads, “Christ has no hands but yours.”

As we move through the season of Lent we are called to pause and reflect on the life that Jesus calls us to. In this passage from Matthew we are reminded that we are to care for those who are the least and the lost. We are to care like Jesus. To do that, to be like that means that we not only imitate Jesus, but we learn his heart and mind. We also resolve to “be” Jesus’ hands in our world, to heal, to strengthen, to care, to comfort, and to serve in any way that we can.

Father, help us to be hands for your son, Jesus. Give us compassion and courage to reach out beyond our comfort zones to bless those who need your blessings, to help those who need your help, to care and love those who need your care and love in whatever way we can. Amen.

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 29: MARCH 22

PSALM 63:1-11 | GOD'S LOVE IS BETTER THAN LIFE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 30: MARCH 23

ROMANS 12:1-21 | A TRANSFORMED MIND, A CHANGED LIFE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 31: MARCH 24

EPHESIANS 4:17-5:2 | A NEW SELF, A NEW ATTITUDE

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 32: MARCH 25

EPHESIANS 1:15-23 | “ENLIGHTENED” EYES

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 33: MARCH 26

EPHESIANS 3:14-21 | THE POWER TO GRASP

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 34: MARCH 27

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 | THE RIGHT PERCEPTION

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

SUNDAY, MARCH 28

PALM SUNDAY | MATTHEW 16:21-27 | MAKING PROGRESS

So many terrible things happen every day that it is easy to start to wonder whether the few things we do ourselves make any sense. When people are starving only a few thousand miles away, when wars are raging in various places across the globe, when countless people in our cities have no homes to live in, our own activities look little. Such reflections can paralyze and depress us.

Here the word “call” becomes important. We are not called to save the world, solve all problems, and help all people. But each of us has our own unique call, in our families, in our work, in our world. We have to keep asking God to help us see clearly what our call is and to give us the strength and wisdom to live out that call with trust. Then we will discover that our faithfulness to a small task is the most healing response to the illnesses of our times.

But at the heart of that call is an even more basic call, it is a call to follow Jesus; to realize that as important as it is to be faithful in the world, it is more important to be faithful to Jesus. In fact, only as we are faithful in our relationship with Jesus will we be able to discern what we should be doing in the world. So making progress in our spiritual lives makes it possible to make progress in our ministry in the church and in the world.

What about you? Do you feel like you are making progress in your spiritual life? Are there things you can point to that show you are growing more Christlike and because you are, you are beginning to have a clearer picture of what God would have you to do in his world?

Lord, help me to follow you. Help me to make those changes that reflect your will and desire for my life. Rescue me from wanting to gain the world, but lose my soul in the process. Amen.

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 35: MARCH 29

LUKE 9:23-26 | CARRY THE CROSS

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 36: MARCH 30

MATTHEW 20:17-28 | DRINKING FROM THE CUP

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 37: MARCH 31

JOHN 11:45-57 | WE SHARE A MISSION

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 38: APRIL 1

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 39: APRIL 2

GOOD FRIDAY | MATTHEW 27:11-61 | A CROSS! ME?

“After this, when Jesus knew that all now was finished, he said...‘I am thirsty.’”

—John 18:28

In his Gospel, John tells us that hearing Jesus’ cry, “I am thirsty!” a soldier reached out, got a stick with a sponge on top of it, and gave Jesus some sour wine to drink. He drank the wine and said, “It is finished,” and bowing his head he died.

Jesus died on the cross to “cross out” our sins and all suffering, especially the suffering of hopelessness. He tasted its bitterness. He descended to its very roots to overcome it. That is why he could tell the murderer next to him, “I tell you today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Hanging on the cross, Jesus at the same time pleads with us, “See me, feel for me, feel my pain. I am here because I saw your pain and your need and had it crucified with me here on the cross. Join me in overcoming the pain of others.”

Let’s be honest, we don’t want a cross. Early in his ministry Jesus said to those who wanted to be his disciples: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). He didn’t say: “Make a cross” or “Look for a cross.” He said “deny yourself and take up your cross daily and follow me.” Can we do that?

Not on our own. That is where the Holy Spirit helps us and the community of faith encourages us and supports us. That is where the devotional life and worship and service help us. But we are able to embrace the cross-life because of the promise and presence of God. The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote about Jesus and the cross: “for the sake of the joy that was set before him, [Jesus] endured the cross, disregarding the shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus’ invitation to share his cross, is also an invitation to share his joy and the promise and presence of God. Can we believe that? Can we live out that truth?

Lord, to be honest, we don't like all this talk about a cross. We don't like sacrifice and self-denial and we certainly don't like suffering. But we know that you call us to the cross-life and because we love you and trust you, we take up our cross and follow you. Fill us with your joy and your grace. Amen.

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

DAY 40: APRIL 3

1 JOHN 3:11- 21 | STRONGER THAN DEATH

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

SUNDAY, APRIL 4

EASTER SUNDAY | LUKE 24:13-35 | THEIR EYES WERE OPENED

Dean Simon Farisami, a Lutheran pastor in South Africa, spoke of his experience of death and resurrection, of having his eyes opened. He was arrested by the security police during the period of apartheid oppression in South Africa. He describes vividly his experience of torture. The physical and mental pain was so severe that at one point he prayed to God that he might die and, when death did not come, he began to doubt the power and mercy of God.

In his agony, he says that the Risen Christ appeared to him. Although he was under intense psychological stress, Farisami insists that the encounter was real. Jesus didn't speak. He only showed him the wounds in his hands and side.

Farisami accepted this as a revelation of God. He understood in his heart that through suffering, he was sharing in the suffering of Christ. As Jesus endured the cross to bring the rule of God's love, so he shares in that suffering grace.

With his eyes opened to the presence of the Risen Christ, Farisami was able to bear his own cross. What is even more significant, he was able to love and even smile at his tormentors. He saw differently. He saw them, not simply their evil deeds. With the eyes of Christ who gave his life to make them friends, he saw them as human beings.

Men and women seeing through the eyes of the Risen Christ become risen Christians. Their eyes are opened. Like the two discouraged and confused disciples in today's passage, their eyes have been graced. They see the power of caring, sacrificial love. They see that God brings life out of death. They see.

Lord, open my eyes to the greatness of your love for me. Open my eyes to see, amid all the changes and chaos of the world, your constant love and grace. Open my eyes to see the opportunities you give me each and every day to love those around me, even my enemies. Open my eyes to see my life as you see my life and to live in the promise of the future that you are calling me to. Amen.

What God said to me today through His Word:

a promise, reminder, rebuke, challenge, and/or mission

What is my response to God:

What I saw God do yesterday:

My prayer for today:

