



SWEET SURRENDER:
Our Sins, the Psalms and the Blues
2009 LENT DEVOTIONAL BOOK

LENT WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

ASH WEDNESDAY

Services at 12 noon and 6:30 p.m.

Sunday, March 1, 2009

Symbol: Sign

Scripture: Psalm 25

Sermon Title: "The Sins of My Youth"

Sunday, March 8, 2009

DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME STARTS

Symbol: Crown of thorns

Scripture: Psalm 16

Sermon Title: "My Chosen Portion"

All-Church Dinner (after morning worship service)

Sunday, March 15, 2009

Symbol: Coins

Scripture: Psalm 19

Sermon Title: "Hidden Faults"

Sunday, March 22, 2009

Symbol: Whip

Scripture: Psalm 122

Sermon Title: "Pray for Peace"

Sunday, March 29, 2009

Symbol: Nails

Scripture: Psalm 51

Sermon Title: "Have Mercy"

Celebration Service, 6 pm

(includes baptisms and dinner before with Luz y Vida)

(Passion Week schedule on back cover)

HOPE AND HELP FOR THE WOULD-BE REVOLUTIONARY

Have you been looking forward to the Lenten season?

Does anyone really look forward to Lent?

Lent is a season of introspection, brutal honesty, penance, self-denial and sacrifice. It's a time to come face to face with my own human-ness, my own brokenness, my own sinfulness.

Looking forward to that?

Especially for us at OKC First who, as we have followed the Lectionary texts through Epiphany, have been called and then pressed and prodded to change the world, to perpetrate REVOLUTION- the Lenten season hits us like an unwelcome splash of ice cold water.

During Lent, Revolutions are quieted and Revolutionaries laid low as they are forced to look in the mirror and consider their own failures and diseases. Change seems to stop altogether.

It seems to stop, but it doesn't.

If the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness are any indication, Lent is a season of preparation and renewal, hope and help for the would-be Revolutionary.

It was in the desert, faced with His own humanity and all the temptations packaged therein that Jesus continued to cultivate an "inner ear" that would allow Him to latch on to the whispering voice of God, even when other voices were screaming for his attention.

Jesus' capacity to perpetrate Revolution seems to have been found or at least solidified in the wilderness, during a 40 day pilgrimage marked by prayer, fasting, self-denial and sacrifice. In the wilderness, Jesus faced down the competing voices and desires that would have derailed the Revolution. To His Glory, Jesus was in fact able to overcome his own hunger and human passions to be our Messiah and Savior.

You and I? We've not been so faithful. We seem to be chronically human, desperately normal, strikingly UN-Christlike.

Somehow, when faced with our own bad habits and fragile nature, we understand the Blues and the songs and the singers. Blues singers sing about shame, disappointment, frustration, helplessness, hopelessness.

This Lenten season, we will explore our own chronic hopelessness with the help of Blues songs and singers. Perhaps we will hear something of our own struggle in the lyrics and the stories behind the music.

During the next forty days, guilty or not, faithful or not, make good use of the wilderness. Re-focus, renew, re-kindle. In your fasting and self-denial, cultivate an ear for the voice of God who is still shaping us for His glory and for the Revolution.

Re-focus. Rehabilitate.

I can get into that.

Pastor Jon Middendorf

MAYBE WE NEED TO LEARN TO SING THE BLUES

*“Nobody knows you when you're down and out
In your pocket, not one penny
And your friends, you haven't any
And as soon as you get on your feet again
Everybody is your long lost friend
It's mighty strange, without a doubt, but
Nobody wants you when you're down and out” – B.B.King*

*“Done anybody wrong,
I done anybody wrong,
Have mercy on me,
If I did anybody wrong, oh,
Have mercy on me.” – Junior Kimbrough*

The themes of these two verses drawn from a couple of old blues songs ring true across a broad range of ethnic and cultural divides. Yet, in spite of the commonality of the “blues experience,” somehow I didn’t discover Blues music until I was an adult. I was drawn to the honesty expressed in the lyrics and the sometimes gritty, earthy musical style. I was also drawn to the “preaching” style used by a lot of blues performers, where the vocals would “call” a response from the guitar. An emotive back and forth that reminded me of sermons I heard preached in small churches in Missouri and Arkansas where I grew up...

But more than the lyrical or musical style, the subject matter of blues music was something that I found myself drawn to - the honest expressions of despair, estrangement, and loss. There just seem to be times in life when one needs to live in the painful moment – to immerse one’s self in the seeming awfulness of life, in order to eventually move past them. However, in the midst of a prevailing culture that places such a high value on personal happiness, we find it difficult to

embrace the times in life where we experience loss, pain, and deep grief. The Blues provide an outlet for the expression of these darker emotions.

I've found similar solace in some passages in the Psalms, those labeled lament Psalms, where the Psalmist finds outlet to express similar dark emotions. I think that too often we want to look to scripture for positive affirmations for our faith, and we end up not allowing these "Blues Psalms" to speak to us in our time of despair, grief, and pain. It's important that we validate the form of these Psalms, instead of trying to re-interpret them in a positive light. To embrace the message of these words is to embrace very valid expressions of what it means to be human.

Consider this excerpt from Psalm 25:

19 Consider how many are my foes,
 and with what violent hatred they hate me.
20 O guard my life, and deliver me;
 do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
 for I wait for you.

These are not quite the words of comfort and solace that we expect to hear in the Psalms. However, I'm encouraged to know that even in the midst of dark times, the Psalmist chooses not to simply wallow in self pity, but cries out to God for deliverance.

To deny that the Blues happen is to deny a part of who we are. God wishes for us to share those times so that God can walk with us through them. Maybe we need to learn to sing the Blues...

Chris Yates

AMAZING GRACE AND THE BLUES

King David in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament had something in common – they both apparently liked to write a lot. Paul wrote letters, David wrote songs. Paul spent a great deal of time in prison; David spent a lot of time hiding in caves. I think they both would have liked Blues music.

I'm not in prison nor am I subjected to hide for my own personal safety, but yet I can thoroughly understand their need to pen words that poured from their souls. There is something about captivity that makes one search underneath those foundational rocks labeled "grace," "surrender," "freedom" or even "mercy." When I struggle, I write from my heart.

Paul shows what surrender means when he writes, "For I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live." In Psalms 139, David struggles with God's intense knowledge of him, and he writes a prayer of surrender to God's searching, probing and caring.

Captivity. Struggle with surrender. Freedom. The progression that is evident in the Bible continues today.

I have to admit that sometimes I've been in captivity without knowing it. Other times, the oppression is obvious and almost palpable. My cry to God is for immediate rescue. And, if God doesn't answer right away, I want to blame Him for my miserable state.

At a recent women's retreat, the speaker asked us to move into groups of 3-4 women. We were given the assignment to address each woman, noting their good qualities and how they have been a blessing. We were supposed to actually

write the words on an adhesive label and then physically apply it to them! It was exactly the kind of group assignment I didn't care to do. I would have bolted from the room but the speaker wisely mentioned that she would be watching the exit doors for anyone that left!

I didn't want to receive compliments; I wanted to complain to God about my prison. I wanted to stay in the cave. It was easy to see the strengths in the other ladies but I wanted to cry out "not me!" when it was my turn to be singled out. And I definitely didn't want them to pin words on me in the form of an adhesive label.

But words of affirmation and encouragement were freely offered. God gave me amazing little pieces of grace that day. And as I accepted gifts of words from those three women, my hands opened in sweet surrender.

These lyrics of Amazing Grace are especially poignant to me right now:

*Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
and Grace will lead me home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me.
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.*

Now, I know Amazing Grace isn't a blues song, but maybe it should be included. I know I'll quietly sing it as my personal blues song during Lent. And I will focus on the process - Captivity. Struggle. Surrender. Freedom. Amazing Grace.

Paula Meder

LINT OR LENT

We recently bought a new dryer and to prepare for its arrival I moved out the old dryer and removed the lint hose. Well guess what was in the exhaust hose going outside. That's correct a clogged hose, clogged with lint. See preparing to receive the new dryer required me to pull out the old one making sure the electric outlet was not clogged, buy a new lint hose, clean out the exhaust hose, and clean around where the old dryer sat. This new dryer has a 7.0 capacity drum, the latest in wrinkle free drying, and more knobs and settings than anyone could possibly use so, based on its cost, we want it to work properly. Doing this preparatory work ahead of time meant when the new dryer arrived we were ready to start using it. When I say we I don't mean me, I really mean Patty.

Preparing me for Easter, I think, is what the Season of Lent is all about. What is clogging me up – fear – relationships, worry, my current economic situation, family, job, church, or my health? The word Lent comes from the Teutonic (Germanic) word for springtime and springtime, as we all know, is a time of cleaning. So how do I clean out my clogs?

First, I have to acknowledge those things which will keep me from a personal relationship with the Risen Christ. How do I do this? By coming to church and having an ashen cross placed on my forehead (which I have done) or giving up *Sweet-N-Low* in my iced tea (which I have not done)? I do not want to get caught up in the “doing” – 40 days of giving up something – but rather in preparing for HIM.

Second, His resurrection requires me to be prepared to receive something new. I want to focus not on the 40 days, but rather on what is revealed about me by my preparing through Bible reading, prayer, and fasting. Clogs, dirt, grime and items that need to be removed are all identified and I

say, “Now unto Him who is able....” Easter brings into clear focus what has been revealed during the 40 days.

Just like our old dryer space could not prepare itself to receive the new dyer, neither can I, by myself, clean out the lint in my life. But I can through these 40 days begin to see the approaching Easter and what it can mean for my life. My lint can be removed and something new put in its place – His presence, His love, His grace, and His mercy being lived out in and through me.

There will be sermons, readings, songs, and even this booklet to help us journey through this time. I, for one, want those areas that do not reflect the Risen Christ to be exposed to the light of Easter so I can say, “He is Risen; He is Risen Indeed!”

-Stan Martin



SHARING IN CHRIST'S SUFFERING

In Luke 9:51 Jesus “sets his face” towards Jerusalem. This may seem like just an ordinary story of one man’s journey. It is not. Jesus knows when he reaches Jerusalem he will face suffering and death. By “setting his face” he accepts the role he must play. He will be the Suffering Servant of God who will obey the Father no matter what the cost.

The Son of God will die? Maybe he just didn’t have enough faith.

We can’t say that about Jesus can we?

The New Testament writers leave us a legacy concerning Jesus Christ, Messiah, Son of God. This legacy tells us that even the most perfect man who ever walked the earth experienced pain and suffering. How can we be so arrogant as to say we will not face it?



When my second daughter, Skyler, was three months old, I found myself on the floor in a fetal position, unable to function. My doctor diagnosed me with post partum depression. Thus began the most difficult period of my entire life. Not only was I a mother of a three-year-old and an infant, but I was also a senior pastor.

My struggle became a spiritual one. How could God let this happen to me? The dark clouds of depression clouded my reasoning. I could not make decisions. I could not deal with any sort of crisis. My church lovingly gave me all the time I needed to recover. After six weeks, I pushed the pain deeper into my soul, hiding it even from my husband, and went back to work.

Six months after the initial breakdown, I once again became desperately depressed. I drove to a mental health facility and asked to be evaluated. The Psych Nurse questioned me, and finally handed me a paper that said I needed to see a counselor. I managed to drive home, look in a phone book, and found a counselor's number. God led me to the counselor I needed. I saw Dell every week for the next year. She convinced me to see a psychiatrist and start antidepressants.

I wish I could say that once I gave my depression to God it all went away. But it did not. It has been 8 years. I still have "down days," but I know what I need to do to stay sane and healthy. I see a counselor, not every week, but she is there when I need her. I still take antidepressants. I express myself through sewing and other forms of art when I get stressed.

My counselor convinced me I need to leave the church where I was the pastor, in order to heal. God led Chris and I to OKC First where we have both experienced a community of faith and healing.

We have entered the Christian season of Lent. Lent follows a forty day journey of the cross through Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Easter where the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem is celebrated), Good Friday (the observance of the crucifixion of Christ), and finally Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Lent is an ancient Christian practice dating to the fourth century. During this time

Christians focus on prayer, fasting, and sometimes self-denial in order to share in the suffering of the Savior.

St. Francis of Assisi, a 13th century saint, once prayed that he would share in the suffering of Christ with amazing fervor. Legend tells us St. Francis came to bear on his body the marks of the Crucifixion. He desired to share Christ's suffering and was granted that privilege.

The ancient saints have taught me that everyone suffers in some way. It is a horrible misinterpretation of Scripture that God will keep us all from pain if we have enough faith. By looking at my own suffering as sharing in the pain of Christ, I have felt him giving his own strength to me. "By his stripes we are healed."

Kelly Yates

(Kelly also provided the charcoal drawings on the cover and within this article)

THE JOURNEY UPWARD

Lent means "lengthen of days". In the Christian church Lent is the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter. It is a time for reflective hope and to prepare ones self for the challenges of living as Christ's in the world.

As I think about my personal journey of faith I am reminded more of the Rocky Mountains than the gentle rolling plains of western Kansas! Yes, there have been great moments of victories that seemed to touch the heavens. But for the most part the mountain peaks have been surrounded by dangerous cliffs and difficult climbs upward.

In the February 2, 2009 issue of Fortune magazine, management guru Jim Collins talked about "How Great



Companies Turn Crisis into Opportunity". He wrote, "When I did my El Capitan climb for my 50th birthday, on Yosemite's 3,300 foot rock face, my partner was Tommy Cadwell, who happens to be the greatest climber in the world." He

continued, "My hedge against the scariness of this climb was Tommy."

Like Collins, I would want the world's best if I were to attempt such a feat. But then, there are the mountains in daily life, with all of their challenges and dangers! For these we need a capable partner. And, we can have the one who has climbed life's most difficult mountain - Golgotha.

Lent is a time for us to establish our base camp, to check our climbing gear, and to listen to the instructions of our guide. It is our opportunity to dump unnecessary weight and rid ourselves of anything that might compromise our ascent to the top. It is also a time to make sure our communication system works because we know that there will be critical moments when we need to talk with the one who goes ahead of us!

As we start our climb up the challenging mountains of life, we can rest assured on the taut ropes of our master partner as he calls out to us, "Follow me". We keep our eyes focused upward and our hearts set on the view from the top.

In life we can never be sure when the challenge of the mountain will summon us, so we must prepare. Our Christian forefathers knew this and set aside this time called Lent. So we pray, "Come Lord, we wait for you. Prepare us for what lies ahead. Renew your Spirit within us and strength us. Search us and remove any thing that would encumber our journey. We yield ourselves to your leadership. You alone are our guide."

Monte Nabors

AN OKLAHOMAN'S PSALM 16

Help, Lord, help! My sirens are all wailing.
Be my storm shelter!
 I have nowhere else to run.
I am utterly needy, completely helpless without You.

The faithful witness of Your disciples all around me
 keeps me hanging on.
But some take cover in other things besides You
 —in stuff, or status, or comfort.
I will not hide in their “safety.”
I will not honor them, or even secretly envy them.

Lord, You are my inheritance,
 my family estate, my homestead.
What a beautiful spread You are!
How blessed I am, that You should be such a home to me!

Thank You for Your regard, Your attentiveness to me;
 even in the stormy hours before dawn
 I know Your love holding me.
I rest my soul in the sureness of Your very self,
when nothing else is sure.
 There I rest, unshaken.
All of who I am finds rest in You—not just heart and soul,
but mind and body too.
 You hold me whole and entire.

You have me.
You won't let me go, in spiritual death or in physical death.
You bring me into Life overflowing, joyous life in You,
 now and forever!
THANK YOU!!!!

Judy Cox

TUNE IN – TO GOD

There has been men throughout the ages that have received much acclaim because of their high degree of intelligence. There have also been men of great intelligence that have lived as unknowns in their quiet world until after their death, when imprints of the magnitude of their mental capability became evident.

In God's great plan and purpose for us, He did not choose for all people to have the same degree of intellectual abilities. There are many areas of intelligence. One person



pursues knowledge in philosophy, another in theory, others in construction, electronics, archeology, meteorology, science and various fields of learning. Many people are highly capable of leadership skills and stand out in a crowd and speak with authority. Others are happy to perform in popular positions. Some do not really care to be seen or given applause, but they desire to be useful and work most diligently behind the scene, accomplishing many necessary

tasks of service. God gives to each person the intelligence and grace needed to accomplish the duties of their lives.

Let us consider a special servant that was prepared by God Himself, to follow King David to the throng of Israel. One of David's sons, Adonijah, stepped up to take the throne as David approached death. Adonijah prepared chariots, horsemen and men to run before him, and he sacrificed sheep, oxen and fat cattle while calling in his brethren. This was not God's plan. Bathsheba, Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest and Benaiah intervened before David and the king declared that Solomon was to be king over Israel and Judah.

As King Solomon took over the throne, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon asked God for an understanding heart to judge the people, that he may discern between good and bad, knowing that no man could judge so many people. God was pleased at his request and told Solomon that he was given a wise and understanding heart; that there was none like him before and none would be like him in the future. He would also give him riches and honor and, if he kept the statutes and commandments and walked as David walked, that He would lengthen his days.

This is a beautiful story with a guideline for us today. Is there enough knowledge in man to know and live on the human side of daily life, and yet can move in the path God has chosen? Does man humble himself enough before God so God can honor him with His wisdom, His words to speak and His actions to carry out? Man has a tendency to think he is wise and can handle any situation – and it often gets him in a tangle of undesirable circumstances! By calling on God to speak, act and show compassion through him, man can become more of a true servant of God.

Solomon humbled himself before God and was rewarded with great wisdom. What has God given you and is this gift

the result of complete openness and surrender to His divine plan for your life?

Finally, are you allowing your gift to be used to magnify the name of our great and wonderful Savior?

Naomi Tidwell

GOD IN THE WILDERNESS

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
(from Psalm 19)*

That God speaks through His creation is a truth we are quickly losing—between headphones and behind television and computer screens, kept away by suburban sprawl and thrown further to the heights from urban high-rises. Have you heard, as Isaiah did (55:12), the mountains and hills burst into song before God, have you seen trees clap their hands?

The creation the Bible describes is different than the one we've seen on television. Yes it's incredible, miraculous, but it is also *speaking*, and not just through some overdubbed description of its functions. One serious challenge that the Church faces, and has always faced, is that she will stop defining the culture and will instead be defined by it. This is

one of the reasons that some of the spiritual giants of our Christian ancestry spent their lives in the desert. We need to remember that it was the *Spirit* that drove our Lord to the wilderness, to *prepare* Jesus for the enemy's attacks (Matthew 4:1). It is in this Spirit that we can properly understand the preciousness of creation and become its caretakers instead of merely exploiting its abundance.

Why was our lord always climbing mountains and going sailing, why was he baptized by John in the River Jordan and not at synagogue? When did you last spend an evening without the companionship of some kind of electronic screen? When did you last travel by foot, at a speed from which the sky speaks and the trees clap? We are always hearing; it is in the quiet glory of creation that we can listen.

Scott Allen

O, LORD!

O Jesus! meek and humble of heart,
Hear me.

From the desire of being esteemed,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being loved,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being extolled,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being honored,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being praised,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being preferred to others,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being consulted,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being approved,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of being humiliated,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of being despised,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of suffering rebukes,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of being calumniated,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of being forgotten,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of being ridiculed,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of being wronged,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of being suspected,
Deliver me, Jesus.

That others may be loved more than I,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be esteemed more than I,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That, in the opinion of the world,
others may increase and I may decrease,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be chosen and I set aside,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be praised and I unnoticed,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be preferred to me in everything,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may become holier than I,
provided that I may become as holy as I should,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

--Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val (1865-1930).
Submitted by Cathy Sturgis

MY CHOSEN PORTION

*Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.
I said to the Lord, "you are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing."
As for the saints who are in the land,
they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.
The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods.
I will not pour out their libations of blood or
take up their names on my lips.
Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup,
you have made my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.*

*I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I have set the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to
the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*

*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy
in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Psalms 16

Has something bad ever happened to you? Have you ever felt, "why was I so lucky to be chosen for this? Aren't we supposed to be protected from this? Where is the safety net? There must be some mistake.

We think we are exempt. We think our "chosen portion" provides for only the kindest, simplest and safest if we follow in His steps. He doesn't abandon us to the grave. He allows us to conquer it with Him. Does that mean that we do not experience the grave? Think again. Jesus experienced it. We are not exempt, if he was not. So what does it mean to have a delightful inheritance, our "lot secure? This is not for this world.

Eleven years ago, as I walked the very dark road of grief, I became so very stubborn that I refused to blame God for my loss. I refused to believe that God didn't love me and that God had closed His eyes to where I was. With my whole heart I embraced the idea that he knew exactly where I was. He knew exactly how I felt. I said to him, "You are my God." I recognized that perhaps I was chosen for this path. Perhaps I was chosen to persevere and to endure and to keep looking up.

That first Easter after my husband's tragic van accident, I began to consider the path Jesus was chosen for. In prayer I asked to understand God's heart. I began to realize that God weeps, too. Had He closed His eyes to His Son on the cross? Had He closed His eyes to the bloody beating His Son endured? Did He refuse to acknowledge His love for Him while He was on the cross? Where was the love then?

Our Lord took on our sins and became the sacrifice for us. But do we really get it? God the Father made Himself vulnerable that day. He hadn't closed His eyes at all. He

watched it happen. He didn't jump to intervene or stop anything. His silence was heard while those who witnessed it watched in disbelief. His profound grief was felt in the darkness that followed as the earth trembled and shook to the point of opening graves and ripping the curtain in the temple.

God didn't stop my husband's van from rolling. He could have allowed some miraculous intervention to happen and testimonies of wonder and amazement. That didn't happen. God didn't allow himself to be exempt from sacrifice and loss. He didn't allow me to be exempt either.

I prayed and cried tears with the Lord and tried to understand His heart. I saw His heart on Good Friday. I understood the darkness over the land and the earthquake not as God's anger against our sins but for the sacrifice Jesus had to make for us. I saw it as Him grieving over the loss of His Son. His heart was broken and the grief was so profound that the world knew it—to the point of admission that “truly He must have been the Son of God.”

My stubbornness had understood that God hadn't left me when I now had to walk alone without my life's partner. He had been with me the entire time grieving with me. He understood the injustice of it all. He had experienced separation. He too was declaring it isn't fair. He didn't stop Jesus from walking the path He took. He didn't stop the tragedy of all time. He didn't stop the one that rocked my family either. He watched it and He allowed it to happen. God knew pain. He knew and understood mine. He had been there before and many times over.

That Good Friday, I understood it. I cried tears with my God and told Him that I understood His heart. I told Him that whatever I was supposed to learn or do I was open. I certainly didn't want either of these sacrifices to be in vain. My portion and my cup...My portion is to walk the journey together with my Lord. My lot is secure with his presence in

this life and the family circle complete in the next one. “I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.” How true it is. I refuse to be shaken. I choose to believe that my God loves me and truly does understand my heart. I choose to believe that I have caught a glimpse of understanding His. I rejoice in His love. I will praise him and rest secure.

Mary Johnson

CONFESSONAL PRAYER

Psalm 130: 3 – 4

*O Lord, if you O Lord, kept a record of sins,
O Lord, who could stand? But with you is forgiveness.*

Lord, I confess I have kept an account of wrongdoings, of failures of my own and of my brothers' and sisters'. How sharp is my memory as I return to those accounts to wallow in my own defeats or to revel in the failures of others. O Lord, You could hold everything against us and yet You choose to hold nothing. Forgive my unwillingness to accept your gift of forgiveness. Forgive my petty list of grievances against others which keeps them in boxes of my own making.

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry of mercy.

Psalm 130: 5

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchmen wait for morning, more than the watchmen wait for morning.*

Lord, I confess I am not good at waiting. I am impatient, and in my impatience I childishly want what I want and want it now. I am resistant to quiet sitting, to resting, to waiting on You. I confess that I often rely upon what I can produce or what I think I can control. I confess that I have clung to the foolish notion that my hope lies in my work and even in the actions that come from my worry. Forgive me of my false understanding of my abilities and my persistent belief in my own self-sufficiency. Forgive me that I leaped when I should have waited; that I ran, when I should have stopped; that I spoke, when I should have remained silent. Forgive me that I have failed to remember that You are my only hope.

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry of mercy.

Psalm 7 – 8

O, Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

O Lord, who loves me more than You?

No one.

O Lord, who cares for me more than You?

No one.

O Lord, who can I trust more than You?

No one.

O Lord, who but You can wipe my slate clean?

No one.

O Lord, I place my wants, my dreads, my dreams, and my worries into your Hands. As I place these in your Hands, I release them from own. Then, in holy quiet, I wait. Amen.

Sue Anne Lively

HELLO, MY NAME IS PETER

My name is Peter. My brother Andrew and I were at our daily task of fishing in the sea of Galilee when this man came along the shore and shouted to us, “follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Normally we wouldn't just leave our nets and follow such a cry, but there was something compelling about this man that drew us to him – something that made us want to do what he said. We quickly left what we were doing and followed. We walked down the way and spotted John and his brother James (the sons of Zebedee) busy mending their nets. They, too, were invited to follow. Likewise, these brothers left their nets and their father's business to follow.

We learned that this man who called us was named Jesus, the one who had been preaching and teaching in this area. We followed as if He had a rope around us, but yet there was no rope. It was an attraction that came from deep within us – we felt joyous and happy and most of all, we genuinely loved to be with Him.

This man Jesus went all about Galilee, teaching in synagogues and preaching and healing all kinds of sickness and disease. Lots of people from Galilee and nearby towns came to hear Him; others came to be healed by Him. He continued to invite followers until there were twelve of us who followed Him closely. He taught us many truths about God and we bowed in reverence to Him, realizing that truly He was special.

One day Jesus went on a boat and we followed Him. Soon there was a great storm and the boat was covered with waves. Jesus was asleep. We quickly awoke Him and asked that He would save us – or we would perish! He said, “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” He then stood up, rebuked

the winds and sea, and there was a great calm. I was amazed at this, wondering “what manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

The twelve of us followed Jesus daily, learning things from Him, and then sent out to do preaching on our own. We were happy to tell the wonderful truths we learned, and to pray for those that desired to be a follower of Jesus. His popularity spread throughout the region and many were converted.

The religious leaders were concerned about Jesus' popularity and tried to find a way to get rid of Him. We found out too late that Judas betrayed Him for a sum of money. Jesus was bound and eventually taken to trial where many accusations were hurled against Him. People demanded that He be crucified! I was afraid to come too close for fear that I too would be accused. I'm ashamed to admit that, when asked three times about my relationship with Jesus, I denied that I even knew Him! Although Jesus was innocent of any crime, the raging crowd demanded he be crucified. The ruler finally gave in to the crowd and gave consent for Jesus to be crucified.



(Artwork provided by Riley Rowland)

When I was Jesus hanging on the cross, and when I heard the words He said, I was overcome with my own guilt. On the third day after His crucifixion, He appeared to us. That was so hard for me to understand! But He let us know, without doubt, that He was the Messiah! I fell humbly at His feet and asked forgiveness for my denial. By His great love, I knew I was forgiven. After that, I did all I could to spread the Word, persuading men that following Jesus was the only way true joy and happiness can be known.

Naomi Tidwell

PSALM 18

If I didn't know it before, I have decided that my life is complex! The challenges of my life have exceeded any likely prediction from my youth, based on any indicators at that time. Across the years, complexities surfaced for many reasons too lengthy to enumerate here. A few trusted individuals who know me best would even verify that most of these trials are not of my own making. They just happened. Difficult life events just come our way. Rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. Living in a fallen world can sure wreak havoc in our otherwise potentially peaceful lives, and sometimes even the activity of God in our lives seems like a confusing chaos. I don't know. Maybe some people still grow up in Beaver Cleaver-type families and then go on to live glib, untroubled lives in adulthood, but that number is rare and shrinking, it seems to me. For the rest of us whose troubles remind us we live in the real world, the Scripture of the Psalms can be extremely comforting, especially when we realize we are enduring life's toughest times.

It was exactly such a time for me in a motel room near Manhattan, Kansas a dozen or more years ago. My all-to

frequent visitors of self-doubt, grief and pain bordering on clinical depression had confronted me once again. I was on a business trip, and while the many activities of the day kept me busy and completely occupied, the remnant of an evening spent alone seemed to leave me no other choice than to face the hopelessness of my situation. Alone and feeling blue I recalled that I had once heard my evangelist friend, Nathan Covington, preach a sermon from a portion of Psalm 18. Specifically, he liked the imagery of 18:33.

*He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;
he enables me to stand on the heights.*

The image of being sure footed and steady, even on the extremely narrow path of the very highest mountain trail way lifted my spirits momentarily. I could imagine a deer stepping ever so gently at every point along a narrow mountain path, with nothing below but an expanse of nothingness for miles below. From heights such as this, a careless mis-step could bring certain disaster, yet never losing secure footing because of the presence of God seems to be the promise, not only for the deer but also for the Psalmist. I felt hope from that thought, but I had yet to connect with the rest of Psalm 18. As I read them that night, they became words I desperately needed to hear. I clung to words and images such as these:

*The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold....
The cords of death entangled me;
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.
The cords of the grave coiled around me;
the snares of death confronted me....
He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep waters.
He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes,
who were too strong for me.
They confronted me in the day of my disaster,
but the Lord was my support.*

*He brought me out into a spacious place;
he rescued me because he delighted in me....
You save the humble but bring low
those whose eyes are haughty....
It is God who arms me with strength
and makes my way perfect....
He trains my hands for battle;
my arms can bend a bow of bronze....
You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn.
The Lord lives!
Praise be to my rock! Exalted be God my Savior! ...
Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O Lord;
I will sing praises to your name.
(18:2,4-5,16-19,27,32,34,36,46,49).*

That night, in the darkness of my angst, the words of this Psalm began to speak volumes of comfort, hope, peace and wisdom to my soul. I began to feel fresh and new encouragement pouring back in, and I wept warm tears of hope. Though spiritually and emotionally exhausted before, now I felt I was arriving at a new and better place. During this season of Lent where we deny ourselves certain privileges and conduct spiritual inventory, I hope you will find the words of this Psalm thought-provoking yet uplifting. Though years have passed since my first real encounter with Psalm 18, I can see that I need to perceive and believe these truths now, as much as ever before. The Lord is still my rock, my fortress and my deliverer.

John Martin



(Artwork by Carynne White)

PASSION WEEK

AT OKC FIRST CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

Sunday, April 5, 2009

PALM SUNDAY

Symbol: Palms

Scripture: Psalm 118:19-29

Sermon Title: "Save Us Lord!"

Thursday, April 9, 2009

MAUNDY THURSDAY, 7 pm

Scripture: Psalm 78:14-20, 23-25

Sermon title: "Served by God Himself"

Friday, April 10, 2009

GOOD FRIDAY

Tenebrae Service, 8 pm

Sunday, April 12, 2009

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunrise Service, 7 am (at 182nd & May)

Breakfast, 9:30-10:15 am (at OKC First)

Worship Service, 10:30 am

Kaleo in the Green Center, 6 pm



Oklahoma City First Church of the Nazarene

4400 Northwest Expressway

OKC, OK

Office: 405.843.9588