

"God has a great outpouring for us and our community. This is a time for us to lead and join others in prayer to seek more of His Presence. To receive the outpouring like the book of Acts we should pray like those in the book of Acts."

### Pastor Shawn

#### The Vision

At least two people praying in the sanctuary every day until Easter. "They all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14) We will continue praying through the book of Acts.

### **How It Works**

You choose the day or night and time. Sign up at Cornerstone.ag/ more

We post the results below under "Scheduled Prayer Times" Now others can look at the website and choose to join with you.

# What is the story and heart behind this time?

The Lord has clearly said that 2022 is a year of an outpouring of His Spirit for our church family and others who will seek His Presence. This is why we have been following the book of Acts and letting God work the same truths in us as He did the first believers. So far the result has been refreshing and powerful. As we have seen physical miracles, mental health healings and a new love for the Lord, we know *there is so much more!* 

# **Daily Ways to Pray**

Lent, March 2, Genesis 3.19 (Ash Wednesday) Image of God, March 3, Genesis 1.27 A Father's Compassion, March 4, Psalm 103.13-14 Discipleship, March 5, Luke 14.27

#### Week One

Toward the Cross, March 6, 1 Jn 2.2 Prayer Rhythm, March 7, Acts 3.1 Placement, March 8, Acts 3.2 Engagement, March 9, Acts 3.3-5 Divine Provision, March 10, Acts 3.6 Faith Action, March 11, Acts 3.7-8 Living Testimony, March 12, Acts 3.9-10

#### Week Two

Witness Awareness, March 13, Acts 3.11-12 Worldly Reversals, March 14, Acts 3.13-15 The Name, March 15, Acts 3.16 Unknown Made Known, March 16, Acts 3.17-18 Repentance, March 17, Acts 3. 19-21 The Promise, March 18, Acts 3.22-23 Restoring Blessing, March 19, Acts 3.24-26

## Week Three

Trials, March 20, Acts 4.1-4
Battle for Power, March 21, Acts 4.5-7
The Upside Down Kingdom, March 22, Acts 4.8-11
Salvation, March 23, Acts 4.12
Systems of Silence, March 24, Acts 4.13-17
Righteous Stand, March 25, Acts 4.18-20
Release, March 26, Acts 4.21-22

### Week Four

United Community, March 27, Acts 4.23 United Prayer, March 28, Acts 4.24a United Faith, March 29, Acts 4.24b United in the Spirit, March 30, Acts 4.25-27 United in Recognition, March 31, Acts 4.27-28 United in Boldness, April 1, Acts 4.29-30 United in Pentecostal Experience, April 2, Acts 4.31

#### Week Five

Unity, April 3, Acts 4.32
Resurrection Power, April 4, Acts 4.33a
Gracious Power, April 5, Acts 4.33b
Generosity Empowered, April 6, Acts 4.34a
Grace of Detachment, April 7, Acts 4.34b-35a
Grace of Mercy, April 8, Acts 4.35b
Life of Encouragement, April 9, Acts 4.36-37

## Week Six

Conflicted Aspirations, April 10, Acts 5.1-2
Deceptive Motivations, April 11, Acts 5.3-4
Weight of Guilt, April 12, Acts 5.5
Ripples of Consequence, April 13, Acts 5.6
Corrupted Nature, April 14, Acts 5.7-8 (Maundy Thursday)
Testing the Spirit, April 15, Acts 5.9 (Good Friday)
Toward Wholeness, April 16, Acts 5.10-11

## Wednesday, March 2

#### Lent

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return. (Genesis 3.19)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

There are days and times we establish to root our lives, to fix or recenter our focus on the realities of life. We set days of celebration and remembrance on our calendars. The disciples of Jesus would have been well versed in the Genesis story of creation and the consequence of sin that broken the image of God within humanity. How does one reconcile the promise of God and the failure of humanity?

#### **Toward the Cross**

As the disciples journeyed with Jesus toward Jerusalem and the cross, the weight and stress of their mortality became heavier. It was one thing to see and hear Jesus performing miracles and proclaiming the Kingdom of God, but another to witness the condemnation and recognize death on the horizon. It was a sobering time to take stock of their witness and commitment.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today begins our journey toward the cross, a time often referred to as Lent.

- Pray that as a church family we would individually and corporately take stock of our lives and the time we've been given to steward God's call.
- Pray for the Spirit to lead us toward a deeper reconciliation within our fellowship.
- Pray that the Spirit would use our obedience as a model for the world in need of hope between ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

### Thursday, March 3

## Image of God

So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1.27)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Reading the words of the Creation story it is little wonder that so many men and women responded to the words of Jesus. He called them to repentance and restoration. In His call they rediscovered that they were more than just flesh and bone, but image bearers of God like Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Zipporah. In Christ, the disciples found the fulfillment of the old stories passed from generation to generation.

#### **Toward the Cross**

But, just as is too often the case in our world today, others were invested in the devaluing of others' lives. The religious leaders had established a self-serving system of faith that benefitted them most with power, prestige and position, only possible by demeaning the image of God in others. When Jesus spoke, the people heard God's call to hope and the religious fought back to preserve their status and way of life.

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray with us as we journey to the cross that we would strip away the trappings of affluence and self-importance.

- · Celebrate that we have been made in the image of God.
- Rejoice that all peoples around the world and in our own community have also been made in the image of God.
- Pray that we would have a renewed zeal to share this good news with all people, including the marginalized and hurting, the wealthy and the poor, the isolated and alone.

### Friday, March 4

## A Father's Compassion

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103.13-14)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Many people in the times of Jesus' ministry were in dismay and distress, a people oppressed by a foreign power along with the difficulties of normal life. In a way they were living Psalm 102 which recounts the disquiet and discomfort of the psalmist. But in Jesus they were being invited to a Psalm 103 existence, one that is anchored in the compassion of God as Father and the many blessings He is ready to pour over them and their families.

#### **Toward the Cross**

Toward the cross, God the Father saw the pain in the life of Jesus and His disciples. He was not absent from their struggles or indifferent to their strained emotions. He knew the weight of the cross just as He knew the numbers of the hairs on their heads. In the face of our finite and limitedness, God our Father offers us His permanence and faithfulness as we walk in obedience.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, whether in good times or bad, anchor your faith in the faithfulness of God.

- Pray as a church family we would walk with one another through the struggles of life just as God our Father walks with us.
- Pray for those who have been hurt and abused by this corrupted world that they would receive mercy from Jesus through our ministry.
- Pray for those who have been hurt and abused within the walls of the church, who are struggling to rebuild a fragile faith after experiencing pain among God's people.

### Saturday, March 5

## Discipleship

And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14.27)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Luke tells us while having dinner with a prominent Pharisee, Jesus watched as the guests moved and maneuvered themselves for the places of greatest honor around the tables. Jesus spoke to them about the way God viewed their power brokering and prestige management through a parable. From there Jesus went back out to the large crowds of men, women and families that followed after Him and shared with them the true cost of discipleship.

#### **Toward the Cross**

"Discipleship requires radical obedience," Justo González warns us, and nothing should stand before our obedient discipleship to Jesus. It is no small thing, like a golden pendant or wall hanging, when the disciples heard Him mention the cross. The cross was reserved for criminals and the civilly disobedient, not for the good, family focused law-abiders.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray the words of martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death."

- Pray that we would find in Jesus' words a calling to new life through a recognition of His death and die to ourselves with Him as we carry the cross.
- Pray our church would draw near to Christ through this journey with the early church to the cross during Lent.
- Pray for a fellowship of believers in every church across Chesterfield County defined by radical obedience.

"Lent is a time for discipline, for confession, for honesty, not because God is mean or fault- finding or finger-pointing but because he wants us to know the joy of being cleaned out, ready for all the good things he now has in store."

- N.T. Wright

### Sunday, March 6

#### Toward the Cross

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2.2)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Imagine being a Christian in Ephesus hearing these words from the lips of the Apostle John. Yes, we find these words in His letter to the Church, but these words were rooted deeply in his theology, his personal experience with Jesus. John was there at the foot of the cross and witnessed his death firsthand.

#### **Toward the Cross**

As we journey toward the cross we have the miracle of salvation raised high before us. In our sin we are dead and without hope, lost; but in Jesus' sacrifice we find the sin that bears death in our life removed. And this miracle reverberates from that cross outside Jerusalem across space and time to all people. In the atoning sacrifice of Jesus all people are invited to new life!

### **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would rejoice in the restoration and redemption freely given to us and all people made in the image of God.

- Pray we would have a renewed passion to share the passion of Christ with those who have not heard.
- Pray that we would live a cross-shaped life, carrying in our witness the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the joy of new life in His resurrection.

## Monday, March 7

## Prayer Rhythm

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. (Acts 3.1)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

A distinguishing characteristic of the Jerusalem church was prayer. Brought to life on the day of Pentecost after ten days of prayer, the Church—the gathered followers of Jesus—was continuously seasoned by this repeated call to prayer. The disciples, now commissioned by Christ as Apostles, set for themselves times of prayer in the Temple courts.

### **Toward the Cross**

It is in the daily routines of our lives that we meet with Jesus and others. The disciples and apostles sought to set their lives to the rhythm of the Holy Spirit's leading. This meant praying together in the Temple courts at the time of day many others were gathering to seek after God.

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray for our church as we seek to dedicate special time each day to praying and prayer together in the church.

- Pray for the many men, women and families that are needing to hear from God.
- Pray they would be led to the right places where we see them and share the good news of Jesus and His Church with them.

### Tuesday, March 8

#### **Placement**

Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. (Acts 3.2)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

In the time of the early church it was not uncommon to see crippled and lame people being carried from one place to another, often to a strategic location in the city where they could beg. Today, around the world we still see this. Often crippled men and women will place themselves outside places of worship hoping those going in or out will have mercy and give them a coin or two.

#### **Toward the Cross**

Luke tells us this man had been lame since birth and had daily been brought by others to this particular gate to beg as people entered the Temple. Surely, many men and women gave a coin to him and the others around him, as they sought to ingratiate themselves to God before entering the Temple. For them a coin appeased their sense of doing good deeds and it helped the lame beggar eat for another day, but underneath the root of his broken body was unaddressed.

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would be in the right places and at the right times, but also we would respond in the right ways. There are times to give alms but there are also times to believe for miracles.

- Pray we would sense what the Lord is saying about our church being a healing place in a new way.
- Pray for an attitude toward the hurting and broken that goes deeper than meeting visible needs and addresses root causes.
- Pray that we would see those God places on our path toward the cross.

### Wednesday, March 9

## Engagement

When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. (Acts 3.3-5)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

How many times had this beggar asked Peter and John for money? Everyday he sat on the steps of the Temple. Every day the disciples went in to pray. How many times had Jesus passed by this man and heard him call for a few coins? Most people never even looked down at his call for cash but walked on, even if they flipped a coin his way. When Peter and John looked at him he knew he was about to receive something. That moment was filled with attention and expectation.

#### **Toward the Cross**

There is something for us to learn from this lame man beside the gate of the Temple. His days had melted into a daily routine of mindless calling and listless begging. When someone came along and seeing him called back to him, something electric took place: he gave them expectant attention. Perhaps he was hoping for an offering large enough to take the rest of the day and relax. Regardless, what the apostles had to offer was beyond what he could have hoped for himself.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, ask the Lord to give us eyes to see those around us and seek His leadership in how we should call their attention to Jesus.

- Pray for every man, woman and family in our church to be engaged in the Spirit-led ministry of the church.
- Pray over places of our community that make our needs most visible (like the beggars on the steps of the Temple) our local school system, our police and local governance, the street corners where people beg.

## Thursday, March 10

#### Divine Provision

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." (Acts 3.6)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Somewhere in our mental wiring we've come to think that money can solve all the world's problems. Our giving is often driven by philanthropy, a love of one's fellow man. Other times it is driven by an underlying guilt or discomfort because we don't know how to address the concerns of others. We see sickness and poverty from afar and, unable to think of a solution in our strength, we give hoping it will fade from view.

What a freedom the high estate of an empty pocket can be! Peter and John didn't have a man-made solution to the lame man's cry. Led by the Spirit they went beyond the surface issue the beggar was asking them to help with and address the brokenness of his very soul.

#### **Toward the Cross**

Moving toward the cross, closer to that holy and painful place of sacrifice, shows us how hollow our earthly, monetary solutions truly are. With an empty pocket we are pressed to trust God's divine provision for the lives of men, women and children in our community and around the world.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray with empty hands. You may have a wallet filled and a bank account packed with zeros, but today seek to hear the Lord leading you toward a deeper reliance on His Spirit.

- Pray God would lead our church to address root causes of the ills and troubles in our community, not just be economically engaged in surface solutions.
- Pray that our first response would be not "What means do I have to meet this need?" but "How should I believe the power of Jesus' name over the root cause of this challenge?"

### Friday, March 11

### Faith Action

Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. (Acts 3.7-8)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

In the time of the disciples they had witnessed the healing of countless sick and lame people. One by one, they'd been healed and directed to show themselves to the priests. The sick and the lame were not allowed access to the courts of the Temple. They could position themselves of the exterior stairs but could not come in because they were unclean.

#### **Toward the Cross**

Can you imagine spending every day of your life at the gate of God's presence but unable to enter? When Peter spoke the name of Jesus over his life and took him by the hand the greater miracle is that he was granted immediate access into the Temple because His body was made whole! If it hadn't he would have reenacted the scene from Rocky on the Temple steps and run out into the streets of Jerusalem. Instead he takes his strength feet walking and leaping into the house of the Lord praising God!

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, all kinds of people are sitting lost on the outside steps. Some are broken and hurt, others numb or jaded. Still others searching anxiously for a bandaid for today's problems. Jesus offers more.

- Pray Jesus would show us how to see the people on the stairs outside of His presence.
- Pray the Holy Spirit would guide our words and lives to speak healing and direction into a life that walks and leaps and praises God.

### Saturday, March 12

## Living Testimony

When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3.9-10)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

Of all the words Luke could have chosen to describe the crowd he chose wonder and amazement. When Jesus drove out the impure spirt on the Sabbath they were overwhelmed with the same stunned wonder (Luke 4.36). When the four friends lowered their paralyzed friend to Jesus the people were seized with the same ecstatic astonishment (Luke 5.26). It would be one thing if someone claimed to be healed they'd never seen before, but they knew this man! They'd seen him day after day, broken and begging, now praising the glory of God in the Temple, healed and whole!

#### **Toward the Cross**

The journey to the cross for many that day didn't begin with Peter's sermon but with the recognition of the lame man healed. The illustration of Jesus' power was the living testimony of that man's face and voice.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, would you offer your life as a living testimony to those around you? Are you willing to ask God how He would use the healing He is working in your brokenness for the spiritual benefit of others?

- Pray that people would be stunned by the greatness of God as they encounter God's presence in the people of our church.
- Pray that people would find themselves shaken from the trance of everyday life because they see the transformation possible in the Spirit.

"I imagine Lent for you and for me as a great departure from the greedy, anxious antineighborliness of our economy, a great departure from our exclusionary politics that fears the other, a great departure from self-indulgent consumerism that devours creation. And then an arrival in a new neighborhood, because it is a gift to be simple, it is a gift to be free; it is a gift to come down where we ought to be."

Walter Brueggemann

### Sunday, March 13

#### Witness Awareness

While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? (Acts 3.11-12)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Theologian Babu Immanuel Venkataraman shows that popular thinking at the time of Jesus' ministry "was that miracle workers were so pious that God was obliged to do what they wanted. Peter understood this type of thinking, and so he immediately insisted that this miracle had nothing to do with the apostles' own power or godliness." Through the disciple's eyes the people were ready to respond to the power of Jesus' name, like fields white and ready for harvest.

### **Toward the Cross**

In that moment it would have been easy to feel seen and affirmed by the people, as if Peter and John had performed this miracle in their own strength and piety, to build their own kingdom in the Temple courts. Instead, they corrected the crowd and gave them the answer they needed most: Jesus Christ. It is one thing to be a witness or be aware of people's true needs, it is something wholly other—only found in the direction of the Holy Spirit—to be a witness for Christ with genuine awareness.

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray our church would be a place of true witness awareness, sharing the good news of Jesus in tangible and relevant ways to those in our community.

- Pray we would not become puffed up by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit through us, but humbled and more submitted to Christ.
- Pray we would have clear cultural insight to know how best to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

## Monday, March 14

## Worldly Reversals

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. (Acts 3.13-15)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

The disciples watched Jesus being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter watched as he was led before the Sanhedrin and judged. John heard Jesus speaking to him from the cross. They experienced the injustice of this world's self-centered systems. The very people who claimed spiritual pedigree in their ancestors were the very ones who cried for Christ to be crucified. They killed the author of life.

#### **Toward the Cross**

And they watched as Jesus responded in the opposite spirit. In the face of their brutality Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing," (Luke 23.34). But instead of rejecting the world as we rejected Him here is the resurrected and ascended, Jesus healing the lame man in the very courts overrun by the Pharisees and Sadducees.

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray we take Jesus posture toward the Father and the world around us.

- Repent for our role in the crucifixion of Jesus, those areas in our lives that we have denied Him like Peter before others.
- Ask the Lord to show us where our worldviews and systems have reversed us away from truly carrying our cross.
- Rejoice that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead and offers us resurrected and restored life in Him.

### Tuesday, March 15

#### The Name

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. (Acts 3.16)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Don't miss that this verse says the same thing twice. Twice Jesus and His name are mentioned, twice we read faith and twice we celebrate the healing of the lame man. The name of Jesus is not some magic word to be used but the root of true faith that leads to complete healing.

#### **Toward the Cross**

On our journey to the cross remember Jesus. Remember the basis of our faith is Jesus Himself. Recount the countless ways He has proved Himself faithful, gracious and merciful. Recall that once we were not a people, lost and alone, but in Jesus we've been brought near to the Father, restored and redeemed. In the name of Jesus, which means God saves, we find salvation and complete healing.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, remember it is in the name of Jesus and the faith that comes through Him that we have been saved, redeemed and restored.

- Rejoice that we serve a God who saves.
- Intercede for those around you, family, friends and people in our community that have not met with Jesus or experienced faith in His name.

### Wednesday, March 16

#### Unknown Made Known

"Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. (Acts 3.17-18)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Listen to the grace and conviction in the disciple's voice. Peter, who struggled to live out the significance of His own testimony that Jesus was the Messiah, gives this same generous tone with the crowd. Their actions against Jesus were not done with full knowledge. They, like the religious leaders in Jerusalem, were spiritually blind and ignorant to Jesus' true identity.

#### **Toward the Cross**

The ignorance of the crowd, the religious leaders and the Roman authority led them to fulfill the prophetic words of the Old Testament unaware. Their lack of understanding when reading the prophets regarding the suffering of the Messiah or the true purpose of His reign led them to kill the author of life. If they had understood the revealed Word of God they would have discovered this was always part of God's plan.

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, let us seek to yield ourselves to the unknown plans of God for our lives, our community and our church.

- Pray we would not be found fighting against God's plan for Cornerstone.
- Pray we would not miss the crowds gathered around us waiting to hear the unknown made known in their lives.
- Pray we would read the Word of God inspired by the Spirit that directed its composition in men and women just like us.

### Thursday, March 17

### Repentance

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. (Acts 3.19-21)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

For the disciples, once the crowd was made aware of their unknowing role in the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah, the only appropriate response was to repent—to turn around from the direction they were on, which was away from God—and make their way back toward God. Peter and John had done this very thing when the women disciples shared with them that Jesus' tomb was empty; they ran to the place His body had been only to find that Jesus was indeed risen from the grave.

#### **Toward the Cross**

In these verses according to Darrell Bock, on our journey with Jesus and His disciples to the cross, we find three promises: "the forgiveness of sins, the promise of times of refreshing, and the opportunity to participate in the return of the Messiah."

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, come to the Lord with a heart full of repentance.

- Pray that the Spirit of the Lord would show each of us where we have traded His generous salvation for the idols of our own making.
- Intercede for our church family that in repentance we would experience a new, fresh revival in Jesus' Spirit.
- Seek the leading of the Lord to engage our whole church family in the opportunity to participate in the return of the Messiah through lives of discipleship and sincere witness.

### Friday, March 18

#### The Promise

For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.' (Acts 3.22-23)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

The disciples were actively seeing the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets in Jesus. As young men and women they would have learned the stories of the Torah, sung the songs of the Psalms and memorized the Kings of Judah and Israel. Now standing on the other side of Christ's resurrection the history of God's people was brought into a whole new light! They were seeing Jesus everywhere, especially in the great stories of their people like Moses.

### **Toward the Cross**

Moving toward the cross, people often speculated that Jesus was one of the prophets returned to Israel, but after the cross the disciples recognized Jesus was the prophet God promised to send that was greater than Moses (Deuteronomy 18.15).

The cross of Christ is a line in the sand, those who choose to remain on the far side will have no claim as the people of God. Moses, the great liberator of the people, stands with Jesus and calls the people to listen to Him.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray for those have not seen the line drawn across history which calls all men and women to response.

- Pray they would listen to the good news of Jesus and His promise of salvation and transformation.
- Pray for favor with others and wisdom in how to share what Jesus has done in our lives with them.

### Saturday, March 19

## Restoring Blessing

"Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." (Acts 3.24-26)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Samuel was the first prophet to follow the ministry of Moses and was the servant of God who anoint King David to the throne over Israel. Across the millennia the people of Israel were the heirs of the prophets and the chosen people of God's covenant with Abraham. The eleven disciples saw themselves as the sons of Israel, chosen to carry God's promise of blessing for all peoples.

#### **Toward the Cross**

The revered theologian Stanley Horton once wrote Jesus coming first to the people of Israel was not favoritism but "was their opportunity to receive the Abrahamic blessing by repenting and by letting Him turn them away from their "wicked ways" (their evil or malicious acts). They needed salvation—and salvation includes forgiveness, blessing, and righteousness... Receiving the blessing is also an opportunity for service." This is the call to the cross Jesus provides for us all, the people of Israel and children of the nations.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray we would find deep delight that we have been brought near through Jesus, bearing the blessings He promised to Abraham.

- Pray we would remember that we have been blessed to bless others.
- Seek the leading of the Holy Spirit over the men, women and families of our church to sense how they should bless others today.
- Pray for a revival in our church to serve others in humility, seeing others' value and the love we owe them as image bearers of our Lord (Philippians 2.3).

"Nothing, how little so ever it be, if it is suffered for God's sake, can pass without merit in the sight of God."

Thomas a Kempis

#### Trials

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand. (Acts 4.1-4)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Heed the words of Willie James Jennings: "Speaking holy words has serious consequences...The holy words that bring consequences are words tied to the concrete liberating actions of God for broken people. Such holy words bring the speakers into direct confrontation with those in power. Jesus not only spoke such words but he was such a word."

The response of the religious power-people was not surprising to the Apostles. They were highly disturbed to see Peter and John still preaching, and even proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus (which they'd paid the guards at the empty tomb to keep quiet). Literally the word translated disturbed was like experiencing a piercing fatigue; as if to say, "I thought we'd finally finished with this annoyance!"

### **Toward the Cross**

Carrying our cross with Christ will include jail time, as it does for many men and women across the world today. Speaking the truth of Christ and His promise of freedom from sin and eternal life is liberating to the powerless and marginalized but infuriating to those who gain from their position and prestige.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, reflect on the two extreme reactions in these short verses. For thousands of people they found joyous freedom in Christ and healing in His name. For a select few priests and wealthy religious leaders, they were deeply frustrated.

- Pray we would persevere when power people are fatigued by new people coming to know Christ in our community.
- Pray we would not be surprised when the revival of the Lord elicits a contrary response from the enemy and those who gain from the cultural status quo.
- Pray all the more for revival!

### Monday, March 21

#### Battle for Power

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" (Acts 4.5-7)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Not long before the death of Jesus on the cross, John's mother went to Him requesting he place John and His brother James beside Jesus on His royal throne over Israel (Matthew 20.21). They, like us, long for the comfort we believe is hidden within power. What we might find instead is the insecurity of those men and women who possess a semblance of power in this world, just as the rulers who stood in judgement over Peter and John.

#### **Toward the Cross**

This recalls the stirring words of Karl Barth who said, "It is our basic sin to take the place of the judge, to try and judge ourselves and others... [Jesus] took our place as judge [and] He took our place as the judged." John in this moment began to personally taste the cup he'd longed for, not from a position of worldly power, but from a place of stewardship before Jesus (Colossians 1.24).

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we, as a church family in Chesterfield County, would not battle for power as the world does, but find ourselves with the disciples and the apostles filling up the suffering of Christ for his body, the Church.

- · Pray we would identify ourselves more fully with Jesus Christ.
- Pray we would more fully submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ, filled with joy in our invitation to steward His calling on our lives.

### Tuesday, March 22

# The Upside Down Kingdom

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' (Acts 4.8-11)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

This moment reveals one of the sincerity of Jesus' promise to His disciples that the Holy Spirit would speak through them when they were tried and accused (Mark 13.11; Luke 21.15). Standing before the powerful rulers in the Sanhedrin, men who feel the ground beneath them giving way to uneducated Galilean fisherman. Peter and John need the Spirit to guide their words. Why? Because they are on trial for the name of Jesus healing a disabled man.

#### **Toward the Cross**

The world cannot understand the journey toward the cross. They have built hedges of protection and systems of security to mitigate against the events of life, but the cross does not lead us to self-preservation or self-interest. The journey to the cross is a call to die to ourselves, not even rising to our own defense in our own words, but trusting the Spirit to speak for and through us.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, recognize the world is upside down, and the Kingdom of God is foreign and counterintuitive to our societies.

- Pray that we would embrace the "upside down" kingdom of God.
- Pray we would humble ourselves, not rising to our own "Christian" defense, but wholly trust on the Holy Spirit to speak through us into the lives of others.
- Pray for the men, women and families persecuted for their faith in Jesus around the world that they would sense the comfort of Jesus' Spirit.

### Wednesday, March 23

#### Salvation

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4.12)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

If we need proof that the disciples were speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we need look no further than Acts 4.12. Standing before the religious leaders, the cultural gatekeepers of the Temple and access to God, the disciples proclaim, Jesus is the only way to salvation. Jesus, whose name means God's saves is the means by which we find redemption and restoration with God. The great men seated in judgement are not the saviors of their people and could never administer divine justice. That is Jesus' absolute domain and it extends beyond Jerusalem to all peoples.

#### **Toward the Cross**

These words were surely an invitation to fury and reaction. Peter and John were not arrogantly speaking true to power but responded to the demand of the Sanhedrin, "By what power or what name did you do this [healing of the lame man]?" (Acts 4.7). In Jesus there is healing, but on the journey to the cross there is so much more! Freedom, restoration, transformation and salvation!

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, let us rejoice in our salvation found in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord through the words of King David (Psalm 51.10-12).

- Pray that, in Jesus, God would create in us pure hearts and steadfast spirits.
- Pray that we would find in Jesus a place to draw near to God through His offer of salvation in renewed ways.
- Pray that the Father would restore the joy of our salvation if we have been weighed down by trials or consequence.

## Thursday, March 24

## Systems of Silence

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name." (Acts 4.13-17)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

The Sanhedrin had everything to lose. In a single act of miraculous healing at the Temple Gates they saw the danger of losing their control over the religious system in Israel. If God had appointed them to their positions surely they should use all means necessary to preserve themselves and their authority. This subtle lie is still present today that leads to spiritual abuse.

According to Wade Mullens, "the abuser plays a major role in keeping you from exposing your experience [for the disciples it was the lame man's healing in Jesus' name]. Through intimidation the abuser misuses their physical, verbal, spiritual or emotional power in order to create a deep sense of danger...the goal of intimidation is to silence you."

#### **Toward the Cross**

Jesus' disciples throughout the history of the Church have felt the intimidating force of these systems of silence, both inside and outside of the Church. The old adage rings ever true that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Made in the image of God, but not God ourselves, makes us weak vessels for handling power.

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray for the Church facing trials and intimidation, both from hostile governments and extremist religion as well as from corrupted leaders within the fellowship of believers (Philippians 1.15-17).

- Pray for those recovering and rebuilding their faith after experiences of spiritual abuse that sought to silence them.
- Pray for those misguided who are using intimidation within the church to maintain control over what was never theirs to own.

### Friday, March 25

## Righteous Stand

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4.18-20)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Luke carefully shows how the disciples are repeating the same pattern Jesus walked with the religious leaders in Israel. The book of Acts parallels his gospel step by step as they testify to "what they have seen and heard" as disciples of Jesus. They had tried to silence Jesus, now they are trying to silence His disciples.

### **Toward the Cross**

Facing the cross we must choose the two paths set before us in these verses: do we 1) ascent to the judges' demand for silence in one aspect of our witness (in a way saying, keep doing everything you are doing in the community—good works, faithful care of the poor, etc.—just don't do it in the name of Jesus; or 2) risk everything because Jesus' name is the foundation for everything we do and is the means of salvation itself!

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray for those who are isolated in their witness to Jesus Christ.

- Pray the Spirit would lead them into personal relationship with other followers of Jesus that can stand with them in the face of trials and challenges (like Peter and John standing together in the Spirit).
- Pray for a boldness to carry the cross of Jesus and not abandon His authority over the rule and reign of men.
- Pray the American church would do what "is right in God's eyes" and not what seems right but leads to death (Proverbs 14.12).

### Saturday, March 26

#### Release

After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old. (Acts 4.21-22)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

On this day, the Sanhedrin could only make threats, implying through intimidation the consequences of their noncompliance with their demands. The great goodwill and favor of the public because they healed the lame man the day before made it impossible for them to act right away. But, like they did with Jesus, the seeds for persecution were planted in their hearts that day as they sent the disciples away.

### **Toward the Cross**

The journey toward the cross will call us to challenge the world's systems at work in us, not just in society. As we've seen throughout this entire episode, Church historian Justo González shows that "what is taking place must be seen as a struggle over control and authority." Not only does the cross of Christ challenge how the world's powers grapple for dominance and power, so do we as men and women.

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, most of us are not on trial for our confession of faith in Jesus or the healing of the crippled, but we do have a contest of wills taking place in our own souls.

- Pray that we would find freedom in Jesus, releasing ourselves from the sinful longing for control and authority.
- Pray we would see the grace of submission to the Lordship of Jesus and the joy of stewardship in His kingdom.
- Pray that those who find God's mercy and grace through our ministry would praise God and testify to His truth.

"Lent stimulates us to let the Word of God penetrate our life and in this way to know the fundamental truth: who we are, where we come from, where we must go, and what path we must take in life..."

—Joseph A. Ratzinger

### Sunday, March 27

## **United Community**

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. (Acts 4.23)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

The following verses are a beautiful reminder of the disciples' humanity. In the moment they had experienced the movement of the Holy Spirit, giving them words and speaking through them in boldness; but now that they are back home with their family and friends in the church, their adrenaline is pumping. They came back and shared all the things said them, the threats and intimidation, all the insinuations and warnings. Even the apostles needed the unity of the Church, their brothers and sisters in Christ to walk alongside them and pray with them.

#### **Toward the Cross**

Our journey to the cross is not an isolationist walk, it is a pilgrimage with other people. We do not walk alone because God has not made us to be alone, but in community with others, united around Jesus. Community is where much of our friction comes from but also is the place God speaks comfort and support into our lives.

## **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would seek the unity of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual community (Ephesians 4.3).

- Pray that we would allow community to be the place where all can honestly present their pain, struggles, concerns and challenges to one another.
- Pray we would drawn near to Christ and to one another in new and deeper ways.

### Monday, March 28

## United Prayer

When they heard this, they raised their voice together in prayer to God. (Acts 4.24a)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

The disciples of the early church model for us how to pray in unity with a simple use of a singular noun. It is grammatically difficult to explain in our language how a plural group of people could raise up a single voice. The disciples prayed with one purpose and one accord. To be in one accord was to be of one mind, driven by the same passion to see the current situation placed in the right context: at the feet of the Father.

### **Toward the Cross**

On our journey to the cross and the tribulations we face through the difficult valleys of life it is too easy to become isolated, by pain or by fear. But our life of carrying the cross should be marked by united prayer, gathering with our brothers and sisters in Christ, lifting up our concerns and placing them before God.

### **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we might be united in prayer.

- Share the concerns that you are facing today with the brothers and sisters God has placed around you.
- Lift one another's burdens before the Lord together, with one voice founded on one faith.

### Tuesday 29, March

#### United Faith

"Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. (Acts 4.24b)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

How beautiful are the words of their united prayer. In the face of an oppressive enemy the disciples cried out to the God recognizing His complete Lordship. God is the Lord who wields unrestricted power. There is no limit to His authority and dominion.

Luke parallels this title for God in the praise and prayer of dedication as Simeon held the baby Jesus (Luke 2.29). Simeon had waited his whole life in expectancy because of God's promise that he would see the Messiah before he died. Without a doubt for Simeon and the disciples gathered in Acts 4, nothing is impossible for God.

#### Toward the Cross

In this way the disciples united their faith around the character of God who is far greater than any earthly, human power. The same Sovereign Lord who made all creation is the same Gracious King receiving their prayer.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we as a church family would unite our faith around the unchanging character of God.

- Intercede for those who are stumbling in their faith because of life events and challenging times.
- If you are facing deep difficulties pray the prayer of the martyrs in Revelation 6.10: "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Trust the Lord with your vindication.

### Wednesday, March 30

# United in the Spirit

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.' (Acts 4.25-27)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

The disciples seeking to understand their lives through the revealed word of God turned to the Psalms, those ancient hymns of the faith. In Psalm 2 they found not only the words of their ancestor David but the inspired word from the Spirit through his mouth. The challenges they were facing were not new, they are as old as sin has existed in the world.

The nations still rage and the powers of this world still seek to gain their prominence and control over others. But the Spirit shows us through David's song that He is far greater and unshaken by humanity's plans and schemes (Psalm 2.1-4).

#### **Toward the Cross**

Be encouraged if you find yourself confused and questioning when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, God is still in control. Be inspired when you reach the end of yourself and your solutions because God is still enthroned in heaven, sovereign over all. Our journey to the cross will be difficult but blessed as we lean on His Word and are united in His Spirit.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would place our questions and concerns in their proper context: beneath the Lordship of Jesus.

- Intercede for the church that we would be united in the Spirit, praying the revealed truth of Scripture inspired by the Spirit.
- Pray that the Spirit would show us how we are united with a vast cloud of witnesses who have walked this same pilgrim's path.

## Thursday, March 31

# United in Recognition

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4.27-28)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

As the disciples' prayed together, they came to a new recognition of what it means to be united with God and His purpose. David was anointed to be king over his people and passed through times of great suffering as he sought to shepherd the people. Jesus was anointed as the Messiah and was mocked, derided as the "King of the Jews" and killed. Just as David and Jesus were anointed and chosen, the disciples were recognizing what it truly meant to carry their cross.

#### **Toward the Cross**

Jesus had told them hours before He would carry the cross that they would have troubles and walk through deep seasons of grief (John 16.16-33). The great difference is that where Jesus made His to the cross alone we walk in the companion of our brothers and sisters.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would be united in the recognition that God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and that in this world we will have troubles.

- Pray that in that recognition we might find deeper solidarity with others.
- Pray that we would find deeper union with Jesus and His people as we carry the cross.

# Friday, April 1

#### United in Boldness

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." (Acts 4.29-30)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

Put yourself in the disciples' sandals. The governing bodies of the land had proven their capacity for violence only months before. The Spirit of God was moving in a new and powerful way, even healing crippled people at the doors of the Temple. How would you pray as you held these two opposing feelings. Paul Mumo Kisau gives us a glimpse of their mindset: "Instead of praying for their enemies to be punished, they prayed about accomplishing their mission of proclaiming Jesus to all."

#### Toward the Cross

The way of the cross will always hold this tension: the profound love and presence of Jesus and the intense hatred and rage of the lost. This tension did not keep Jesus from Jerusalem, or going to the cross. This tension did not hold the disciples back from striving toward a united boldness, not to preserve their own lives but to proclaim the name of Jesus to all!

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would hold this tension well.

- Pray that if we are not sharing the good news of Jesus with others we would be moved with a new zeal.
- Intercede for those who are experiencing the persecution for their faith in Jesus around the world.
- Pray our church family would be united in a boldness to love our county and community well.

## Saturday, April 2

# United in Pentecostal Experience

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4.31)

### Through a Disciple's Eyes

The disciples have gathered to share their concerns with each other, to walk with one another in prayer, seeking a new perspective and boldness to press forward. Seeing their unity in His Spirit, God shook the building they were in. Like the day of Pentecost where He used wind and fire to symbolize the outpouring of His Spirit, this day He shook the ground beneath their feet to remind them of His power and demonstrate His pleasure.

#### **Toward the Cross**

Along the way of the cross we will face troubles, challenges and difficulties. Disciples across the ages have met with God, like on the day of Pentecost and then—only a short time later—needed a fresh visitation of His presence. Rejoice, for the God who poured His Spirit out on Pentecost was not done walking closely with His people when trials came. What was true in Acts is true today. Lean on His presence and seek to bring your Christian walk into balance with you calling in Jesus (Ephesians 4.1).

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray we would not turn inward or insulate in the face of trials and tribulations, but we would set our eyes toward Jesus and seek a new boldness in His Spirit.

- Pray as we draw closer to God and one another we would see the move of the Spirit among us.
- Pray we would be united in the Spirit for the glory of the Father.

"Lent comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy."

Jorge Bergoglio

### Unity

All the believers were one in heart and soul. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. (Acts 4.32)

### Through a Disciple's Eyes

If you were pressed to define the word unity could you think of a better definition than "being one in heart and soul"? The disciples chose to seek the Lordship of Christ in their personal and collective lives which produced a unity of will and want.

When we consider the original words we translate as heart and soul, we find them to be highly individualistic. The heart is the seat of the one's emotions, the figurative center of a person's emotional life. The soul is the distinct identity of the individual, the special personhood of one who bears the unique finger print of God's image.

#### **Toward the Cross**

This is the where Jesus calls us to take up our cross. To set our lives in rhythm with His Spirit and to bring our individual heart and soul into the community of faith (words much easier read than done).

What an opposite response to that of the Sanhedrin who sought to hold onto their power and authority. "These followers of Jesus," in the words of Willie James Jennings, "released themselves to one another, making themselves responsible for and accountable to one another." That is unity!

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray for unity, sincere heart and soul level unity in our church.

- Pray we would set our eyes on Jesus and place our arms around one another.
- Pray we would not be known as proud and selfish men and women, but as a community who generously gives of ourselves and our blessings to one another.

### Monday, April 4

#### Resurrection Power

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 4.33a)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

The disciples of Jesus had prayed for boldness to keep proclaiming the good news of Jesus in the face of threats and trials. In this verse we see them standing on the truth of their testimony. What better way to respond to the threats of murders than to testify to the resurrection of Jesus, the author of life!

#### **Toward the Cross**

There will always be those who threaten the people of Jesus to be still and silent, to cease their testimony of Jesus' healing work and transforming power. They spit venom and speak threats because the Kingdom of God is in direct opposition to their authority and power.

When persecution comes, true persecution, once we've carried our concerns before Jesus and cast our cares before His throne, let us stand again and shout the resurrection of Jesus to the nations (1 Peter 5.7)! O death, where is your sting? God has already given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 15.55-57)!

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we as a church family would testify with a renewed energy to the resurrection of Jesus.

- Pray we would cast our cares and concerns before Jesus and trust His sovereignty.
- Pray that we would be known as Jesus' people because we have rooted ourselves in His life, death and resurrection.

### Tuesday, April 5

#### Gracious Power

And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all... (Acts 4.33b)

### Through a Disciple's Eyes

Just as the disciples sensed the move of the Spirit when God shook the building they were in, so God was powerfully at work among them through His grace. The Greek word for great appears twice in this verse, once speaking of the great power of the apostles' testimony and here recognizing God's great grace at work in the fellowship of disciples.

#### **Toward the Cross**

As the early church grew, surely the adage rang true: "more people, more problems." The disciples were from all kinds of languages, cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. Just as they needed God's power to keep preaching with boldness so they needed God's grace to build a community centered on Jesus.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that as our church grows and expands with new generations, languages, cultures and diverse levels of wealth, we would love one another in God's grace.

- Pray for eyes to see others unlike ourselves through Jesus' eyes.
- Ask the Father how we could show His grace to others today in ways that would be meaningful to them.

## Wednesday, April 6

# Generosity Empowered

...that there were no needy persons among them. (Acts 4.34a)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

When it was time to build the Tabernacle while the people of Israel were in the wilderness Moses invited them to participate as their hearts felt prompted to give (Exodus 25.1-8). The Tabernacle would be God's dwelling place among His people. The people gave so generously that it was more than Moses and their artisans needed for the construction. The people had to be restrained from giving more (Exodus 36.6-7)! The disciples of Jesus would have known this story well, as part of their history.

#### **Toward the Cross**

The disciples in Acts were building a new Tabernacle; not one made of cloth and gold but of living stones (1 Peter 2.5). Moved by the Spirit of God like the ancient people of Israel, they gave generously to one another, for the good of the other and the glory of God. They took up the cross the rich young ruler was unable to and were blessed immeasurably in their obedience (Mark 10.21-22).

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would know our spiritual history in a fresh way, asking the Lord how He would have us build a Tabernacle for His glory in this place, just as the disciples did in Jerusalem.

- Pray that God would illumine our eyes to see the needs of others with our church.
- Intercede for those who are confined by their wealth to sense the prompting of the Spirit.
- Pray that our church would be empowered by the Spirit to give so freely we would need to be restrained!

## Thursday, April 7

#### Grace of Detachment

For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet... (Acts 4.34b-35a)

### Through a Disciple's Eyes

The Apostles did not demand the disciples to sell their possessions as a means of entrance into the community or guilt people toward social action. They were not establishing a cult built on control and rigid submission, but of one focused on Christ-centered obedience and cheerful giving (2 Corinthians 9.7). In this, according to Yon Gyong Kwon, the "richer members voluntarily sold their possessions and offered the money for the needy in the Church. They did not do so all at once but as need arose. This is not a case of 'communism' but a Spirit-guided community of love."

#### **Toward the Cross**

The journey toward the cross creates moments we discover the grace of detachment, where Jesus invites us to disentangle ourselves from self-centeredness and the blinding binds of self-sufficiency. The closer to the cross and the selfless sacrifice of our Lord invites us to live in greater freedom.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, invite the Spirit of Jesus to speak truth into your life.

- Pray we would not be lost in the lie of self-sufficiency that denies the Lordship of Christ in the most sensitive areas of our lives.
- Pray we would carry our cross into those difficult places we've created our own comfort, blind to the needs of others.

## Friday, April 8

## Grace of Mercy

..and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 35b)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

These early disciples were seeking to live out the difficult truth of Deuteronomy 15, where God called His people to cancel all debts and free all peoples. God spoke through Moses that "there will be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God," (Deuteronomy 15.4-5a).

#### **Toward the Cross**

The disciples did not determine the merit of each case, choosing who was "worthy" of their care but distributed care to all those in need. This is the grace of mercy that we find on the journey to the cross. If we understand, like Jesus' disciples, that mercy is the withholding punishment or consequence and grace is giving unmerited favor, we find ourselves searching for ways to give mercifully to others just as Jesus did (Matthew 17.15).

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would live as God called His people to live, keeping short records of wrong and forgiving debts that destroy lives.

- Pray we would better understand the rhythms of sabbath, where we experience God's grace of mercy weekly.
- Pray the Spirit would guide to establish personally just systems that direct us to give generously and forgive debts just as He does (Matthew 18.21-35).

### Saturday, April 9

# Life of Encouragement

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4.36-37)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

Luke introduces us to a young Levite named Joseph, but this young Levite was not your average Joseph, born and raised in Israel. He was a third culture kid, a child of immigration, a Hellenistic Jew. He was born on the mediterranean island of Cyprus off the elbowed coasts of Turkey and Syria. His generosity before the others in the church led the Apostles to give this young man a nickname: Bar Nabas—which in Hebrew literally means son of prophecy, but through interpretation and translation into Greek became "son of encouragement."

#### Toward the Cross

Jesus promised His disciples that God the Father would send them a helper, an encourager, one who would help them and be with them. This is the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit poured out on Pentecost. The same Spirit who led Peter and John to heal the lame man. The same Spirit who prompted a rich young immigrant to love His people in Jerusalem. Remember Jesus' promise as we carry the cross.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray we would be people of the Spirit, people who encourage one another, help one another and advocate for each other.

- Pray the men, women and children of our church would be generous to one another in kindness and encouragement.
- Pray we would be a place in the community known for our godly character, like Barnabas.

"The Lord measures out perfection neither by the multitude nor the magnitude of our deeds, but by the manner in which we perform them."

St. John of the Cross

### Sunday, April 10

# **Conflicted Aspirations**

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 5.1-2)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

The Jewish disciples would have remembered the story of those early days when Israel came into the Promised Land. God blessed His people with a miraculous victory over Jericho but made it clear how people were to approach the spoils of war. One man named Achan, however, kept back part of what he found and hid it beneath His tent (Joshua 7.1-26). That sin affected the whole people as they went into battle Ai. Our sin has consequences.

#### **Toward the Cross**

Here Ananias and Sapphira chose to follow in the disobedience of Achan, not in the keeping back of something that was their rightful possession, but attempting to hide from God. Achan did not come forward in repentance to confess His sin, and this couple sought to acquire status through worldly means for recognition.

This attitude is the opposite of Jesus journeying toward the cross. They would have come into the city triumphant, puffed up with pride and riding a white warhorse as heralds ran ahead announcing their worth. Jesus, however, came into the city humbly on the foal of a donkey (Luke 19.28–44, Zechariah 9.9).

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that Jesus' Spirit would speak directly to our conflicted aspirations.

- Pray that He would show us those pride-filled areas of our lives that seek vain recognition and hollow hype at the expense of our humility and honesty.
- Pray the Lord would show us how to be people of genuine character, shaped by the gentle hand of the Master as we carry the cross.

## Monday, April 11

## **Deceptive Motivations**

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God." (Acts 5.3-4)

## Through a Disciple's Eyes

Is it little wonder the sensitivity the apostles had to the danger of financial falsehood when only months before Ananias and Sapphira sought to deceive the fellowship, Judas was busy doing the same thing (John 12.6)! They knew the painful consequence of such deception in the life of the Church. This unaddressed greed was one of the very things that drove Jesus to cleanse the Temple (Luke 19.45-47). In this moment, Peter sensed the same demonic, manipulating force at work in this couple that he'd witnessed in the twisting life of Judas.

#### **Toward the Cross**

We would be wise to heed the warning sign of Judas, Ananias and Sapphira on our journey to the cross. One could easily be misled into thinking it is okay to take liberties with honesty or present a more appealing picture of themselves to others, on the way to the cross. In doing this we not only lie to ourselves and others, but we attempt to deceive God, the very God who drove out those who used His Temple courts as a commercial enterprise.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, invite the Holy Spirit a new, as we make our way to the cross to search us, revealing our deceptive motivations, and guide us toward truth (Psalm 139.23-24).

- Pray He shows us our anxieties (those places we would fraudulently cover up) and show them gently to us.
- Pray He would see the idols we've constructed that need to be removed and give us His divine strength to uproot them, replacing them with righteous worship (Judges 6.25-26).

## Tuesday, April 12

### Weight of Guilt

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. (Acts 5.5)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

Considering the early church was in its first months of existence, these days for the people were defining and important. They were like the early days of the Tabernacle in the midst of the tribes of Israel as they journeyed toward the Promised Land. On one event, the sons of Aaron the high priest, Nadab and Abihu, did not bring fire from the bronze altar into the Holy Place as they'd been commanded by God (Leviticus 10.1-2). In response God dealt with them in the same way He would with Ananias and Sapphira.

### **Toward the Cross**

When Luke tells us the Church was seized with great fear two power truths are revealed. One, this word seized is often used to describe something coming into being, like in giving birth or a changing condition. We could say the early church was pregnant with fear. This situation produced a growth moment in the way they carried the cross of Christ.

The second truth is the kind of fear the disciples experienced. In the words of Youngmo Cho and Hyung Dae Park, it was a "fear of God's holiness. By witnessing God's judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, people recognized God's holiness and therefore were filled with the fear of God." The weight of guilt and shame took Ananias to his grave, but it produced in those who heard a real sense of God's holiness that should be feared.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would not miss the great holiness of God as we journey toward the cross.

- Pray that as we draw near to God we would not bring false or partial offerings that would dishonor His glory (Malachi 1.8).
- Pray that His Spirit would stir within us the grandeur of His holiness so that we might confess our need for purification rather than attempting to fool God with a pretend piety (Isaiah 6.5).
- Bring a new offering before the Lord, one that is without blemish: a sincere heart of worship (Jeremiah 4.4).

### Wednesday, April 13

# Ripple of Consequence

Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. (Acts 5.6)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

The disciples of Jesus knew their national symbols as well as we do ours. An American sees an eagle or that star-spangled banner and know they are in America. So, when they saw a fig tree on their way into Jerusalem with Jesus, they knew they were in Israel (Mark 11.12-25). The fig tree had become a symbol of Israel finally at peace (Micah 4.4; Zechariah 3.10). When Jesus found the tree barren of fruit He cursed it, much to the disciples surprise.

Our decisions, our guilt often comes to rest on the shoulders of others, the consequences passed on to the next person. The spiritual barrenness of the religious leaders in Jerusalem cut off God's people from His revealed Word and promise.

### **Toward the Cross**

Just as Jesus withered the barren tree on the way to the cross, so the Spirit of God struck down the spiritual deformity in Ananias that would have infected the Church. It was left to the young men of the church to carry His body, prepare it for burial and lay his lifeless frame in a grave. As they carried their cross through life surely they carried this memory too.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would come face to face with Jesus as we carry the cross.

- Pray we would have the same spiritual hunger to see the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven.
- Pray that we would invite the Spirit in to uproot the barren places of our faith that are not producing fruit.
- Pray we would give up idols in our lives that ripple consequence through the lives of those around us.

## Thursday, April 14

## Corrupted Nature

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." (Acts 5.7-8)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

How reminiscent this story is to that of Adam and Eve in the garden. Adam and Eve sought to hide their sin from God, but their conspiracy falls apart quickly as they begin to cast blame on one another (Genesis 3.8-13). In their willful actions they brought sin and death into the world. Ananias and Sapphira are their spiritual heirs, attempting to hide their nakedness before God, holding back parts of themselves.

Our corrupted nature seeks to hide, it seeks to store up a secret stash of comfort while appearing fully obedient and pious.

#### **Toward the Cross**

How different Ananias and Sapphira's story could have been had they humbled themselves before the Lord. Just as God placed clothes on Adam and Eve to cover over their shame, so Jesus scrubbed away the dirt of the disciples' feet hours before He would die on the cross (John 13.1-17).

Jesus came to break the cycle of sin and death but we must accept His free gift of redemption and trust the transforming work of His Spirit.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that we would remove our shoes before Jesus, exposing the dirt and grime of our lives to His healing hands.

- Invite the Holy Spirit to show us where we are holding back pain, pride and corrupt motivations.
- Silence the noise in your life, find a quiet space and prayerfully read Luke 22.39-46. Listen to the Spirit.

### Testing the Spirit

Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." (Acts 5.9)

#### Through a Disciple's Eyes

On the night He was betrayed Jesus was taken before the Sanhedrin, the same collective of wealthy and influential men who would later try to silence the Apostles. In their rage and rancor they sought to trap Jesus, "If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us," (Luke 22.67).

Jesus' response to their test exposes their corrupted hearts and preconceived plans: "Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You say that I am." Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips," (Luke 22.68-71).

#### **Toward the Cross**

Jesus knew, on His way to the cross, they were not seeking the truth but testing the Spirit (Matthew 12.22-32). And yet, Jesus went to the cross, not just by their command in their petty tyranny, but for them as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29)! Jesus went to the cross not just for Peter and James or any of the Apostles, but for Ananias and Sapphira and those who would test His Spirit.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, this Good Friday, the day we prayerfully remember Jesus died on the cross for our sins, let us hear the words of an eyewitness to His crucifixion, the apostle John. He writes:

"Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5.10-12).

- Pray that we would accept God our Father's testimony to the Sonship of Jesus.
- Ask the Lord to show you the heights and depths of Jesus love in a new way as we stand before the cross (Ephesians 3.14-20).
- Intercede for the lost who have yet to know Jesus or have tried to use the Church as a means to gain power and position, like Ananias and Sapphira.

### Saturday, April 16

#### **Toward Wholeness**

At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. (Acts 5.10-11)

# Through a Disciple's Eyes

The fear that gripped the disciples after the death of Ananias and Sapphira was nothing compared to the intense fear they felt the day after Jesus' crucifixion. They barricaded themselves behind locked doors as they grieved the death of the One they believed was the Messiah, the promised One of Israel (John 20.19).

The fear the disciples felt in Jerusalem stirred within the people toward a whole faith. No longer could a facade of righteous faith do. They needed true wholeness.

#### **Toward the Cross**

Death has a sobering effect. It calls us to account how we are living. For the disciples' closest to Jesus it produced a deep fear they would be the next ones nailed to crosses. It drove them into hiding. For others, it spurred them to bold action.

After Jesus' death, a member of the Sanhedrin named Joseph (who not agreed or voted in agreement with their Roman sanctioned assassination of Jesus) went to Pilate and requested his body for burial (Luke 23.50-56). He took Jesus' lifeless body, wrapped it in linen and placed it in a tomb. Imagine the hours of life Joseph spent with the body of Jesus, racked with grief and left wondering how he could honor Jesus.

# **Prompt to Prayer**

Today, pray that the Spirit of God would lead us toward wholeness in Jesus.

- Pray we would not grieve as the world grieves, or fear as the world fears, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds by the Spirit of God (1 Thessalonians, 4.13; Romans 12.2).
- Pray we would understand, as we stand before the laden cross or the filled tomb, how to fear the Lord God in righteousness (Proverbs 9.10; Psalm 22.3).

# **Scriptures**

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