

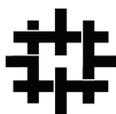


the **attentive** life
Lent 2016

WEEKS ONE- THREE:
February 7-27

Each week during Lent, we will
distribute the upcoming week's
devotional in print at Connect Central.

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the attentive life

Our lives are filled with trivial distractions masquerading as urgent necessities.

Did you really need to check Facebook this morning when you woke up? Or text a friend while driving to work? What is it that makes you compulsively check your phone in the midst of a conversation?

When was the last time you spent an hour entirely focused on one thought, one task, one book, one person?

Because of the obvious and immense benefits the internet brings us, it has quickly become the context of our lives - not always to our advantage.

Addiction is the relentless pull to a substance or an activity that becomes so compulsive it ultimately interferes with everyday life. By that definition, nearly everyone I know is addicted in some measure to the Internet. It has arguably replaced work itself as our most socially sanctioned addiction.

And it is the motherlode of all distraction:

"The net is designed to be an interruption system, a machine geared to dividing attention," Nicholas Carr explains in his book "The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains." "We willingly accept the loss of concentration and focus, the division of our attention and the fragmentation of our thoughts, in return for the wealth of compelling or at least diverting information we receive."

What is it that ought to be our focus? What is it that actually deserves our undivided attention?

For when we lose touch with that for which we were created, we'll find ourselves spiraling into a frantic confusion, distracting ourselves with one stimulus after another from the disturbing hollowness of life.

If you've ever found yourself in such a place, Lent comes as an unexpected gift.

These seven weeks leading up to Good Friday and Easter – when we remember and focus on the Cross and the Resurrection, when we are together reflecting on what Jesus has done for us – these seven weeks are an invitation to slow down, to stop, to be attentive to what is actually essential.

Lent invites us to be attentive to reality.

There is a great and marvelous story going on right now, around us, in which we are full and necessary participants.

The story begins in the love of God overflowing into beauty and creativity a long, long time ago, and it continues right here and now in us, around us.

It's your story, it's my story.

It's our story.

But most of all, it's the story of our good Creator God who is Three-in-One, whose astonishing love overflowed into speaking us into existence. He created us to be in community with himself - Father, Son & Holy Spirit, and with each other. And then he made his home with us in an amazing world filled with wonder.

It's the story of how goodness and beauty and truth collapsed into unfathomably dark evil when we chose to trust ourselves instead of our Creator.

And then it is the story of what our gracious Redeemer chose to do about the deep darkness into which we fell.

And finally it is the story of our glorious King rescuing us - his rebellious, distrustful, sinful, arrogant and corrupt creation - from evil, and making all things unimaginably new and marvelous and good.

Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of this great story is that our King - having redeemed us - then turns around and trusts us with the mission-critical task of reconciliation, of restoration, of making all things new.

We are loved by him, redeemed by him, filled by him, trusted by him.

We are commanded by him to set aside the infinitely seductive distractions of the present age that entice us into forgetting our true story.

And we are invited by him to focus all of who we are toward following him into his mission of reconciling the world to himself in Jesus.

We begin by loving each other as he loves us. And as we do, we find astonishing power in that love to bring the glorious gospel of the Redeemer King to all creation.

It's a wonderful story!

It's the one true epic from which every great myth and legend and fairy-tale and film draws its themes.

But we have forgotten it.

We have directed our attention instead to ten thousand trivial fantasies that distract us with the seductive promise of selfish pleasure, idolatrous fame and private profit.

It's time to remember.

During this season of Lent, we will immerse ourselves in select passages from God's own Word that guide us into his story. We're going to read large parts of the Bible together, and remember again who our God is, who we are, and what we are to be about.

We're entering into the attentive life.

We're seeking to be attentive to God, in his story.

We're seeking to be attentive to each other, discovering who we truly are, learning to love one another as God loves us.

We're seeking to be attentive to the world around us as we engage with the mission God has called us into.

Let the words that have shaped the people of God for millennia enter into you, and form you.

May the Creator, Redeemer and King, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit grace you.

May he open the eyes of your heart to see his love for you and for the world around you.

May he strengthen you to follow him faithfully into his redeeming mission with heart and mind and soul and strength.

The story in seven parts

Week 1: February 7-13

God creates us from the overflow of the love that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit experience in each other. He then places us in a stunningly beautiful world that he created for us, and trusts us with it. Much to the astonishment of the known universe, we quickly decide we can't trust him to care for us, and turn inward, choosing to trust only in ourselves. Evil ensues.

Week 2: February 14-20

God sets out to overcome our evil with his goodness. He invites us to partner with him: trust me, he says. Follow me. And some people do. There are wonderful moments of trust and we get to see how evil can be overcome by goodness. But it all falls apart eventually, because we simply aren't able to stay faithful. God then covenants with us that he will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He himself will come to us in the Messiah - the chosen one, the Anointed one. He himself will be the faithful one, through whom God's mission of overcoming evil with good will be accomplished.

Week 3: February 21-27

The Messiah shows up, about 2000 years ago, in Israel. He turns out, quite unexpectedly, to be a construction worker from Nazareth named Jesus. Nothing about him fits our expectations, even though everything about him rings true to the prophecies made about the Messiah. He invites us to trust him, to trust God... to follow him into death, if that is the cost of faithfulness, trusting God to raise us up. Jesus remains faithful to the end in the power of the Holy Spirit, and is put to a brutal death by crucifixion. God the Father, faithful to his Son, raises him up from the dead. The resurrected Messiah, Jesus, has overcome evil by taking it all upon himself and returning goodness instead - and invites us to trust him, and follow him, and take this good news of forgiveness to all the world.

Week 4: February 28 - March 5

We who do trust him - even if hesitantly and with many doubts along the way - turn out to be the beginning of a whole new creation empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome evil with love. We who trust him are now no longer defined by the evil we have done, but rather by what God has done for us in Jesus, and is doing in and through us through the Spirit of Jesus.

In Jesus, there are astonishing things now true about us as we trust and follow him, and we are invited to accept, internalize and live from our new identity. The old is done away with, the new has come.

Week 5: March 6-12

Because we are now the people of God, formed by what God has done for us in Jesus, we are invited to lay aside the patterns of life that characterized our old identity - distrust, unfaithfulness, self-centeredness, anger, hatred, violence, pride, jealousy, deception... all those things that flow from a heart that is unable to trust God, that is unwilling to trust anyone else. We are invited to live as those who have trusted God and have found him comprehensively trustworthy in Jesus. God's own Holy Spirit is given to us to give us the capacity to live as true Jesus-people. We are invited to lay down our self-protective defenses, and deepen in our trust in God, our love for him and our love for each other.

Week 6: March 13-19

We are then invited into a life of mission: of partnering with our Messiah Jesus in fulfilling the task that God began in Abraham. In Jesus, we have been astonishingly graced with unconditional love, forgiveness, and healing, in order that we may turn around and grace the world around us with love, and forgiveness, and healing. We are sent to take the message - and the reality - of God's great salvation accomplished for us in his Messiah Jesus to every child, woman and man on the earth, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Week 7: March 20-26

This mission, this mandate, this invitation to be the Jesus-people bringing the Jesus-life to all creation must flow from a community that actually lives the Jesus-life. We are invited to enter with Jesus into the places of great evil and pain and grief and brokenness around us, and bring love, and hope, and healing, and forgiveness, and grace... partnering with God to fulfill his mission of redeeming the world, overcoming evil with goodness, and restoring all creation. And so we follow along as joyful pilgrims waiting for, working toward, and hastening the day that will surely come, when the goodness and the glory of our amazing God will comprehensively cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

How to use this book

This book is designed to draw you into the great story within which we discover who God is, who we are, and how we are to be in proper relationship with God, with each other, and with the world around us.

You'll find three sections to each day: a reading from the Bible, a reflection or two, and then space to remember.

In the morning, **receive.**

Each day of Lent, you will find a passage or more from the Bible which guides you into the next part of the great story. The sequence of texts chosen in this book isn't the only way to tell the story, nor is it the best way – but it is a useful way to engage with the complete story.

So read the set passage each day. Read it when you wake up in the morning. Read it slowly and reflectively. Receive the word of God into your mind, into your heart, into your soul.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

Throughout the day, **reflect.**

Read the reflections and questions for the section. These are designed to move you along the story line and offer you starting points to guide your meditations through your day.

Is there anything from the reading for the day that you'd like to investigate further? Was there something that connected dots for you? Anything that puzzled you?

At night, remember.

Before you go to sleep each night, spend a few minutes thinking over the day that's now coming to an end. Invite Jesus to walk with you through the day, and bring to mind those things that would be helpful to sort out with him in the safety of his love for you.

What were the thoughts and feelings within you when you woke up? How did you spend the first hour of your day?

What was the highlight of your day?

What occupied your attention the most?

Where did you most sense God's presence during your day? What was going on?

Did you sense God's prompting to do something? Or say something? Did you sense him move you to engage with a particular situation you noticed? How did it go?

What were your primary emotions? Was there a fear or anxiety that was constantly present? Was there a hunger or a longing that was a constant itch?

Was there peace? Joy? Gratitude?

Who were the people you interacted with today? How do you think your interactions went? Was there a conversation you wish you could redo? Is there someone you need to make peace with tomorrow?

Is there someone whose forgiveness you need? Is there someone you need to forgive?

End your day in the **Lord's Prayer**.

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:5–13

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

This, then, is how you should pray:

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

Give us today our daily bread.

**And forgive us our sins,
as we also have forgiven those who sin against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.**

***For yours is the kingdom,
the power
and the glory...***

From this time forth and forever.

Amen.

Sunday, February 7

Receive

Genesis 1:1-31

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness...

God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let the land produce vegetation..." And it was so... And God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night..." And God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky..." And God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let the land produce living creatures..." And God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness..."

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Reflect

Our story begins with incredible goodness flowing out in astonishing creativity.

God, out of sheer love and marvelous grace, creates the world and everything in it.

This is where it all begins. So the Bible tells us.

And yet, when we look around us, things don't seem to match up. We must be honest about it: we live in darkening times, when violence and terrorism, greed and deception dominate. There are moments of goodness, there is love, there is kindness around us... but the spreading darkness threatens to overcome the light.

Where did that good world go?

Remember

Monday, February 8

Receive

Genesis 2:18-24

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

...

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Reflect

We were not meant to be alone. We were made for relationship, for companionship, for community. And so we are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, grandfathers and grandmothers, family and friends. We are born into community.

There's nothing quite like that first moment of falling in love, is there?

And there is nothing quite like a true friend who really does know you – the good, the bad and the ugly – and still loves you...

And yet, in a world filled with relational potential, we often find ourselves lonely.

Why is that?

Remember

Receive

Genesis 2:8–17; 3:1–6

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

...

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

...

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Reflect

Why would God warn Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What is it about this knowledge that is dangerous to us?

Reflect on the difference between

- knowing something at a distance,
- knowing something because you trust someone else who knows, and
- knowing something by direct experience.

The serpent's strategy was to cause distrust between God and Eve. How did he do it?

Why did Eve choose to distrust God and trust the serpent?

Remember

Receive

Genesis 4:1–10

Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.”

Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground...”

Reflect

Our story is rapidly descending into complete and utter darkness. As is usual in Genesis, there is much more going on than the spare narrative makes explicit. We are invited to immerse ourselves in it and sense the connections and implications.

What difference do you see between Abel's offering and Cain's offering? Why do you think God favored Abel, but not Cain?

Why did Cain kill Abel? What is the underlying desire behind murder?

In these stories, God asks questions to which you would think he already knows the answer. Why do you think he might be taking such an approach?

Remember

Thursday, February 11

Receive

Genesis 6:5–7; 6:11–12

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.”

...

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.

Reflect

Evil spreads rapidly and morphs into terrible new forms.

What is to be done about it? Can evil be stopped? Can it be destroyed without creating even more evil in the process?

What possibilities come to mind?

Remember

Receive

Genesis 6:8–14; 7:11–23

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord... Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood..."

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights...

For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

Reflect

What do you think of this approach to ending evil?

Remember

Saturday, February 13

Receive

Habakkuk 1:2-4, 13

How long, Lord, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not save?
Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.
Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.

...

You who are of purer eyes than to see evil
and cannot look at wrong,
why do you idly look at traitors
and remain silent when the wicked swallows up
the man more righteous than he?

Reflect

The prophet Habakkuk lived in Jerusalem around the 6th century BC, and found himself struggling with the extent of evil all around him. In this passage he is quite frustrated with God's apparent inaction in the face of violence, injustice, and wickedness all around him.

The problem with evil is that it has taken us all over. It isn't simply out there, where we can destroy it - it has entered into our own hearts.

You will remember Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's words: "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

That is the true complexity of the problem of evil.

And God's redemptive response shapes the rest of our story.

Remember

Sunday, February 14

Receive

Genesis 12:1-4, 15:16

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out.

...

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Reflect

It is with Abraham (Abram in this passage, later renamed by God to Abraham) that we see the first traces of God's response to the evil that we have brought upon ourselves. This passage in Genesis 12 is crucial to the story, because it is there that we see how God is going to accomplish the task. He has chosen one ordinary man, and will grace and bless that man - in order that through him all the world might receive grace and blessing.

This storyline becomes the framework for the rest of the Bible. The people of God are blessed to be a blessing.

What God promises Abraham is so out of the normal that it isn't easy to accept. But Abraham does: he believes God, and that trust becomes the foundation of his relationship with God.

And so we discover that simply trusting God is the basis of the solution to the problem of evil. When we act out of a distrust of God, we create evil. When we act out of trust, we create blessing.

Remember

Receive

Deuteronomy 4:1–13

[Moses said] “Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

...

“See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

“Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, “Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.” You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets.”

Reflect

Abraham's descendants become the people of Israel, who end up in slavery in the land of Egypt. God then delivers them from Egypt through Moses, and takes them on a long journey through the desert to the Promised Land. Along the way, God gives them his Law - the Ten Commandments expanded and explained into hundreds of practical situations.

The Law is given to Israel as a gift - to give them wisdom and understanding into the ways of God. Trusting God and obeying his Law will keep them safe until the fullness of God's plan of redemption is revealed and accomplished. The trusting and obedient people of God are to be a light to the world in the midst of the darkness, and the Law is given to them for that reason.

As Israel trusts God and obeys his Law, all the world will know that God is among his people, and will therefore be drawn to him.

Remember

Receive

Ruth 1:1–17

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”

Reflect

This is a beautiful vignette from early in Israel’s history. Naomi the Israelite lives her life before her daughter-in-law Ruth in an attractively God-centered way in the midst of very difficult circumstances. And so, in time, Ruth - the foreigner - decides that Naomi’s God will be her God, and Naomi’s people will be Ruth’s people.

This is how it was supposed to work. The people of God follow God faithfully, and through their lives, attract those around them to God himself.

Ruth, returns with Naomi to Israel, to a small village called Bethlehem. And in time, she marries again, has children, grandchildren, and then a great-grandson, David, who becomes the greatest of the kings of Israel. And in the fullness of time, Ruth has a descendant, Jesus, born in Bethlehem, who is the final and complete fulfillment of the promise that God made to Naomi’s ancestor Abraham - to bless all the nations through him.

Remember

Receive

1 Samuel 17:8-16, 40-50

Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

...

For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.

...

Then [David] took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!"

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

Reflect

Few stories in the Bible are better known to us than this one. Phil Vischer, of course, epic'd it for countless toddlers and their parents in "David and the Giant Pickle" - you may have seen it a time or two.

There's a deep and powerful theme below the familiar lines of the story: David trusted God, and God came through for him.

This is the steady drumbeat of the solution to the problem of evil: trust God, and follow him, and see what happens.

"The battle is the Lord's..." So trust him.

Remember

Receive

2 Chronicles 36:11-20

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the Lord... He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the Lord, the God of Israel. Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm. God gave them all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant...

Reflect

Israel's story doesn't end as we'd hoped. The descendants of Abraham completely abandon the simplicity of trust with which their ancestor followed God. The story of the serpent and Eve, the story of Adam and Eve, the story of Cain and Abel repeat over and over again throughout the story of Israel. God warns them over and over again through his prophets, but to no avail.

Finally God acts in judgment. The people of Israel are sent out of the Promised Land into exile, just as Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden of Eden.

Is the story over? Is this how it is to end?

Remember

Receive

Isaiah 9:1–7; 52:7

In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

The people walking in darkness
 have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
 a light has dawned.
You have enlarged the nation
 and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
 as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
 when dividing the plunder.
For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
 you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
 the bar across their shoulders,
 the rod of their oppressor.
Every warrior's boot used in battle
 and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
 will be fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given,
 and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
 there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
 and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
 with justice and righteousness
 from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
 will accomplish this.

...

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
"Your God reigns!"

Reflect

Woven into the tapestry of our story – alongside the dark and shadowy threads of unfaithfulness, sin and exile – are the golden threads of the promise of the Messiah. In the midst of the darkness - seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem - there comes a prophecy of One who will come, and reign on David's throne and over his kingdom with justice and righteousness. "And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Who could this possibly be? And what will be the sign of his coming? What will this Messiah be like? How will we recognize him? How will he accomplish this task that everyone so far - including David - has completely failed at?

Remember

Receive

Isaiah 53:1–12 NIV11

Who has believed our message

and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?

For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,

he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.
After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Reflect

This is an absolutely astonishing passage. It is a vivid description of the Messiah and his mission given to us through Isaiah, hundreds of years before Jesus. This is the way the Messiah will accomplish the task of redemption: he will be despised, and rejected... a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. He will take up our pain and bear our suffering, yet we will consider him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he will be pierced for our transgressions, he will be crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that will bring us peace will be on him, and by his wounds will we be healed. He will pour out his life unto death, and will be numbered with the transgressors.

He will completely and utterly trust God, take all our evil upon himself, and give us back the unimaginable blessing of love, and forgiveness, and life.

And so the Messiah will overcome evil.

Remember

Receive

Mark 1:14–28 NIV11

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Reflect

There's an utter simplicity to Jesus: his entire heart and soul and mind and strength are focused on a simple trust of his Father and a total engagement with his mission of redeeming the world from evil.

Put yourself in Simon's shoes. Along comes Jesus, and says, Follow me. Enough with fishing - let's go rescue people.

What might Simon be thinking? What questions, concerns, doubts, and fears might he be facing? What do you think compelled him to leave his nets and follow Jesus into what was obviously an unclear mission at best?

Remember

Receive

Mark 1:29-34, Matthew 11:2-6

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

...

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Reflect

John's question to Jesus is simple: are you the One?

What does Jesus' answer tell you about his mission?

Remember

Receive

Matthew 5:21-24, 27-30, 38-48

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

...

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

...

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Reflect

There's a simple clarity in these words of Jesus. What's the underlying theme?

How would your life change if you took him seriously?

Remember

Receive

Mark 8:27-36

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”

Reflect

Peter has been following Jesus for a while now, and no longer has any doubt that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

However: the way Jesus intends to go about his mission of redeeming the world makes absolutely no sense to him. You don't overcome evil by taking it on upon yourself – that makes absolutely no sense. No, you use all the power available to you to destroy it.

Right?

Remember

Receive

Luke 22:1–7,14–20, 39–47

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

...

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

...

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them.

Reflect

What temptation do you think Jesus is warning his disciples about?

Remember

Receive

Luke 23:32-46

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!”

There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Reflect

If trust is the foundation of God's way to redeem the world from evil, forgiveness is the means.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus died for us so we might receive forgiveness. He died for us so we might become a forgiving people.

Is there anyone you need to forgive?

Is there anyone whose forgiveness you need?

Remember

Receive

Luke 24:1–32

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” Then they remembered his words.

...

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

“What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he

explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Reflect

The cross was a brutal and tragic end to the hopes of so many, who had trusted Jesus and followed him. The story didn't end like they'd hoped... and so these two are trudging home, desolate.

But of course, the story isn't over. Jesus shows up in the midst of their despair.

It is the resurrection of Jesus that makes sense of the entire story. Just as it will be our own resurrection that will finally make sense of our story.

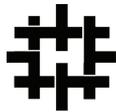
Death - which entered into our world through our distrust of God - no longer has final power over us. Death has been overcome through the trust of the Messiah in his Father.

Remember

Easter service times:

Sat, March 26, 5:30pm

Sun, March 27, 9am, 10:30am, & 12pm



HERITAGE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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