

# THE SOLE BALM II

*Musings from the Pulpit*

By  
Elmon Krupnik Ph.D.

aBM

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# Dedication

Without the support of my family, I would not be where I am today (nor would I have many of the everyday experiences to draw from that form the basis of this book). I would like to dedicate this book to my wife Lynn, my children, Jennifer, Elmon Jr., Timothy, and James, and their spouses, David, Brittany, Ashley, and Katy, and my grandchildren, Jonathan, Joshua, Eli, Noah, Addison, Elmon Graham, Emery, Jadon, Lilly, Matthew, Elizabeth, Riley, Lucy, and Benjamin.



# Foreword

Life is difficult. Oftentimes, the challenges of our daily lives are further complicated because we lose focus of our priorities. I am the first to admit that I am in no position to suggest how you should prioritize your life. I believe that everyone must determine for himself or herself how they will prioritize the things most important to them. I will suggest, however, that self-reflection, guided by the wisdom found in the Holy Scriptures, is an excellent way to help a person discern whether they have their priorities right or not.

Elmon Krupnik serves as the Command Chaplain for the New Mexico National Guard. His formal education and his life experiences have helped shape how he serves others. One of the ways he has chosen to serve others is through authoring books. This book, *The Sole Balm II, Musings from the Pulpit*, provides a wonderful means to perform the self-reflection I have suggested. The beauty and simplicity of this approach is that, through prayerful reading of the material and then musing about its meaning, a person can gain incredible insight. I pray that this book provides this opportunity for you.

Sincerely,  
Kenneth A. Nava  
Major General (NM), New Mexico National Guard





# Preface

Life without Liberty is like a Body without Spirit.

–Kahlil Gibran

Free Will is the amazing gift we hold that sets us apart from other creatures. The freedom to exercise that free will is the special gift we hold as Liberty. The American Experience is the condition in which we exercise our Liberty while respecting that of others. In fact, we grow so accustomed to it, we cannot comprehend our lives without our freedom. With such great gifts come equally great responsibility and demands. We look to those who exercise leadership to provide us the examples of how to enjoy the fruits of our Liberty and its limitations.

As you reflect on Chaplain Krupnik's musings, be challenged in your views of Life, the concept of Liberty and the demands of Leadership. Gain a deeper appreciation of the delicate balance and interdependence of these aspects of our human condition.

Then consider your purpose and how your actions can achieve the greater good for you and others. Whether you are a leader or one who is led, your Life, and how you live it with Liberty, should enhance the lives and freedom of others.

Blessings to you and those whose lives you touch!

Semper Fi,  
Mark A. Costa,  
Colonel of Marines (Retired)



# Introduction

While serving as a hospital or military chaplain for over 30 years, I have had the opportunity to minister to veterans and their families from many eras, starting with the Spanish American War (I prayed with the last surviving veteran from the Spanish American War era) through present day. One of my favorite parts of my ministry is having the opportunity to provide sermon messages on Sunday, to be able to share in the hurts, fears, pain, and joy of others. The following is a prayer that I wrote to remember those who sacrificed during the Bataan death march of World War II. Here is my prayer:

Lord God of all creation, through this remembrance ceremony, we want to see clearly the tears in the darkness that began at Bataan in the Philippines on April 9th, 1942.

It is through the tears in the darkness that we remember the service and sacrifice of all those who were a part of this horrific event.

It is in those tears that we see the love of freedom that was preserved by those who honored themselves and this nation through their sacrifice. That love of freedom inspires us today.

It is in the darkness that we see the light of freedom shining for us through the courage and commitment of all those who served.

It is through the overall tears in the darkness that we see the life of freedom by remembering those who gave their lives to preserve that freedom. Help us not to forget but to remember and to be inspired by what they have done for today and tomorrows to come. Lest we forget.

Amen

It is my hope and prayer, as you read these “Musings from the Pulpit”, that they will shine light through the tears in the darkness of your life.

Blessings to all,  
Chaplain Krupnik



# Life

## Scripture Reading: 1 John 5:1-12

- 1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent also loves his child.
- 2 This is how we know that we love God's children when we love God and obey His commands.
- 3 For this is what love for God is: to keep His commands. Now His commands are not a burden,
- 4 because whatever has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith.
- 5 And who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?
- 6 Jesus Christ-He is the One who came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and by blood. And the Spirit is the One who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.
- 7 For there are three that testify:
- 8 the Spirit, the water, and the blood-and these three are in agreement.
- 9 If we accept the testimony of men, God's testimony is greater, because it is God's testimony that He has given about His Son.
- 10 (The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. The one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given about His Son.)
- 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.
- 12 The one who has the Son has life. The one who doesn't have the Son of God does not have life.

AMEN

## Musing: Class Project

Recently I was teaching a class where the final exam was a project that required groups of students to work together. As I was talking about the guidelines for this class project, one of the students said, “I didn’t know about that. We never discussed it in class. The next time you teach this class, why don’t you tell the students about the project first and then we’ll understand what we need to know and cover, so we can be prepared for it?” I said, “Okay,” and then I thought to myself, A - It was in the class syllabus; B - It was outlined in your lessons; and C - We did talk about it in class but evidently you missed that class.

I then thought, we all have one “no excuses allowed” final exam for which we must be ready! Actually, the Word of God presents to us the entire course work and final exam requirements, lesson by lesson and, truly, It is our class syllabus. The main difference, although the group class project prepares us for the final, each of us has to take their individual and unique final exam alone.

In keeping with this, I am starting at the end of the passage of Scripture that fully prepares us for that final because we never know when the Teacher will call our name. “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” In that truth alone, you and I should have confidence in what we believe as followers of Jesus Christ. In this we know the beginning, understand each lesson, and the passing requirements for the final exam.

Now, I don’t know about you, but I had to study very hard and was never very good at taking tests or exams. I am thankful that this final exam, although individual, is an open book take home exam that I can pass because of what Christ has done for me on the cross. He has completed that exam for you and me and all we need to do is have the trust, confidence and faith to believe that He is the final answer to all of the questions in life, temporal and eternal. Yet, we struggle and don’t have the confidence that we need to have each day as we journey with God.

When you were in school, whether junior high, high school, college or even your time in the military, there was always some type of test or exam that you had to take to measure your progress. But you see, God's grace provided to you through His Son Jesus Christ has taken care of all of that because God loves you for who you are today. He has forgiven your sins of the past, present and future and, because of what Christ has done for you on the cross, you have passed all the exams that you are required to take.

Christ bore the burden of our sin when He went to the cross, but yet our doubts and fears continue to plague us. We are not exempt from the struggles and the difficulties of life. It would be nice if we were exempt but that is not realistic, and, if we really think about it, we have actually grown, become stronger and matured in the Lord as we have journeyed with God through those struggles and difficulties.

It is true that I don't necessarily want to go through those same things again, but I know it is because of those struggles and challenges that God has taught me to have confidence in the present moment as well as the future. In the same way that Christ has been with me, He is with me today and will be in the future because I know what the end is going to be. I know the end of the story, so I live with confidence over what challenges I might face.

I often sang solos when I was younger. One of my favorite songs was written by Andrae Crouch. I loved to sing his song, "I've Got Confidence!" In fact, I still sing it in the shower or when I'm in the car by myself. The lyrics go like this:

“When trouble is in my way  
I can't tell my night from day  
That I'm tossed from side to side  
Like a ship out on a ragin' tide  
I don't worry, I don't fret  
My God has never failed me yet  
Troubles come from time to time  
But that's alright I'm not the worryin' kind

Because, I've got confidence  
God is gonna see me through  
No matter what the case may be



I know He's gonna fix it for me  
I've got confidence  
God is gonna see me through  
No matter what the case may be  
I know He's gonna fix it for me

Job was sick so long  
Till the flesh fell from his bones  
His wife, cattle and children  
Everything he had was gone  
But Job with his despair  
He knew that God still cared  
Sleepless days and sleepless nights  
But Job said that's alright

Because, I've got confidence  
God is gonna see me through  
No matter what the case may be  
I know He's gonna fix it for me  
I've got confidence  
God is gonna see me through  
No matter what the case may be  
I know He's gonna fix it for me

Mmmm, some people wonder how I smile  
Even when I'm goin' through trials  
They say, Andrae, how can you have a song  
When everything is goin' wrong?  
But I don't worry, I don't fret  
My God never failed me yet  
Troubles come from time to time  
But that's alright, I'm not the worryin' kind

Cause, I've got confidence  
God is gonna see me through  
No matter what the case may be

I know He's gonna fix it for me  
I've got confidence  
God is gonna see me through  
No matter what the case may be  
I know He's gonna fix it for me"

(<https://genius.com/Andrae-crouch-ive-got-confidence-lyrics>, May 19, 2018)

That's the confidence that God wants us to have, to know that you and I are in Christ and, because we live in Christ, Christ lives in us. God is not seen by human eyes, but God is seen when you and I express our love, faith and confidence to one another. God's love is seen and exhibited by us as followers of Jesus Christ through how we respond to struggles, trials and difficulties. We also experience that confidence when we are reminded that others have walked with God through difficulties and challenges. It may not have been the exact same challenge or difficulty, but it's similar in terms of how it feels.

I could not walk in anyone else's shoes and you cannot walk in mine, but yet, our journeys have been very similar. At some point we came to the realization that God was calling us to Himself through Jesus Christ and we responded and came to know Christ. Some of us have gone through very difficult challenges emotionally, physically and financially and successfully come out on the other end because God was with us and brought people into our lives who helped us. This is what I mean as our class project. In Christ, our journey together is the focus, not the final exam. Because God loves us, we love Him. Because we have accepted Christ as our personal Savior, He provides a Comforter for us in the presence of the Holy Spirit and comfort through each other as a body of believers in Jesus Christ.

Now I'm not referring to clichés but the empathy that God wants us to show when we make eye contact with one another, when we reach out, touch and embrace one another. That is when we can sense the honesty and truthfulness of that person's love. It's in the truth of that moment that we exhibit who we are in Christ. It is in the truth of that moment that you and I best exhibit the Son of God in our lives. It is in that moment; the way we interact with one another, love one another, exhibit faith and trust in each other, that we understand the eternal life that God has given us through His Son Jesus Christ. God wants us to exhibit that confidence.

Now you might say, “Well, you have a pretty good idyllic world there, Chaplain. You’re talking about all these ideals but yet reality says the church is not that way. My brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ are a bunch of hypocrites.” If that is your criticism, your criticism is correct. In our walk with God, we pass the final exam but continually fail each other in our class project. But, even though we all are hypocritical, we are still endeavoring to grow and mature in the Lord as we journey with God. But always remember, there’s room for one more and you’re welcome to join us.

Our confidence is not in our own ability but in understanding that God loves us and that we have eternal life with Christ. So, our class project is to A - take care of the responsibilities that God has given us, B - respond to God’s calling in our lives wherever that is, and C - be confident in our obedience to what God wants us to do. It’s in that confidence that God gives us freedom, the freedom to love in Christ, the freedom to know, understand and believe in the testimony of Jesus Christ. Consequently, we have a desire to share that testimony with others because we want others to come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

As we walk with confidence, we will face challenges. We will have our doubts and fears about ourselves, our relationship with God and each other. It is in those times, as we call out to God, He does hear and respond to our cry. Our responsibility is to develop a spirit of awareness to that response because God might provide it in a way that we least expect, but God does respond! The only way that we can have that awareness is to be open with each other to the truth that God has given us about ourselves. We sense and express the Spirit of God’s love as we come before Him and share with each other in all openness, truthfulness and honesty.

We truly do see the love of God in our lives and can walk with confidence because we know the end of the story; we will be reunited in the physical presence of Christ and that this life will pass away and seem as nothing. It is because of that, you and I can have the strength to go forward today, tomorrow and into the future, knowing that God is always with us.

AMEN



## Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:10-13

- 10** I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you have renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me, but lacked the opportunity [to show it].
- 11** I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.
- 12** I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret [of being content]-whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need.
- 13** I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.

AMEN

# Musings: Contending for Contentment

When it comes to contentment, there are things in my life that I would have changed or done differently. Maybe not a whole lot, but I am not content about everything that has gone and is going on in my life. All of us want to have contentment and search for it daily. We look to find that satisfaction, but we just can't seem to make it happen in all circumstances.

Do you remember the song, "I Can't Get No Satisfaction?" I think all of us struggle with that frustration, because we all earnestly desire that contentment that is mentioned in the Scriptures. We want the satisfaction of knowing who we are as individuals in our walk with God. It is a struggle.

Contending for contentment begins when we admit to ourselves that there are times when we want more. We want to have a satisfaction that the world cannot provide to us. Even though we have a lot of positive things going on in our lives, we continue searching for that other thing - that one more thing that we think will give us satisfaction and contentment, yet we can't seem to find it. It appears to be elusive, but the Scriptures tell us that we can find that elusive contentment. It is an understanding that, regardless of our circumstances, regardless of whether we are in need or have a lot, there is only one person in our lives that can give us that contentment and that satisfaction. That person is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Even as I say that, as I previously admitted to you, I am not satisfied with the circumstances in my life. It is a struggle for me because I never seem to be quite satisfied. I want that next step. I want that next thing.

Earlier I shared about patience and what it means to be patient. I believe patience is a part of contentment and it is right to place it in the paradigm of faith. When we understand that principle, we will see that our lack of satisfaction is linked to personal impatience in appreciating all that God has given us.

If we are truly seeking contentment, if we truly desire and want to have that satisfaction, we need to acknowledge the many blessings that God has given us. We need to say, thank you. Thank you for the things that you have

provided for us today. We need to be thankful for the relationships that He has provided for us, along with the subsequent circumstances in which He places us. When we do so, we have a sense of contentment and satisfaction that the world cannot give, because it is spiritual and reaches beyond to who we are in Christ. Contentment comes from going beyond the relationships that we have with each other and is transcendent in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

What is your desire? Is your true desire to have the best fellowship with God? Is it to really want to commune with God, spiritually, to see God reveal things in your life that you have never seen before, even though it might require you to change something that you are doing? Is that your true desire?

When we look at our desires, we will see that the whole idea of being satisfied and content can happen to us, as we focus on what are we thinking. If we are only thinking about the life that God desires us to have, the life that God has waiting for each and every one of us in eternity, then we have the correct perspective and will comprehend contentment and satisfaction.

Contending for contentment is not based on our environment, the situation that we are in or our human nature. The Scriptures tell us that, once we come to know Christ as our personal Savior, the old nature is put away and we take on that new nature that is in Christ. Our new nature in Christ should be the foundation of our contentment. Yet, we struggle with contentment because we live in a competitive environment.

I come from a competitive family. In fact, we joke about different achievements in our own family, in terms of who has the higher score doing this, and who's the first to do this, and who graduated first, etc. We have that sense of competitiveness within our own families. We brag about the things that we are good at, even playing Go Fish, right? When I play Go Fish with my grandchildren, I have to be careful that one of them is not looking at my cards, or one of the other kids is not looking at their sibling's cards. Those innocent things that happen have that sense of competitiveness where we want to win. We think that the only way that we can find that contentment and satisfaction is by winning.

The Scriptures tell us that is not the case. The satisfaction happens when we win in our relationship with God. We are on a winning team. We've already had the victory. God is just allowing us to play a part in that victory that has already been won. In that sense, we can be content in pursuing the things of

God when we realize that we are on the winning team. That should be my goal. I suggest that should be your goal as well.

Realize there are going to be circumstances when we're going to want more, but we need to understand wanting does not come from God. That wanting comes from the old nature of our lives that has been put to death and is no longer there. It gives us that proper perspective that God wants us to have.

Contentment is not measured by the amount of wealth we have accumulated or our position. We measure each other based on that type of scale, but God says, "No!" We should never measure each other on the accumulation of wealth, position or power because that is not the scale that God uses to measure us. God measures us based on how much we reach out to Him in prayer and are willing to serve Him.

How often are we willing to say, "Yes, God I am so thankful for the circumstances that You've given me. Lord, I know that You've blessed me so much. Lord, I just want to do Your will more each day. I want to serve You more each day. I want to put my selfish desires aside and live for You. I want to show love and compassion to other people. I want to be able to give in such a way that I've never been able to give before." That's the scale and measurement that God wants us to have. That is not based on the things in this temporal life; it's based on those internal things that are measured by the external things that we believe, in terms of our faith in God through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There is something more here that we need to consider. When we do that, the satisfaction that we will experience will surprise other people. People are going to say to you, "How are you satisfied with your life?" Compared to other people, in their eyes you have accounted for next to nothing. Maybe it is in that circumstance where they see your contentment and become a little envious, because you have found the peace that passes all understanding. Then they too can see that the things they've been able to acquire just don't measure up, just as they don't measure up in our lives. Yet you have found that peace.

You have been able to overcome things because of the power of God, the Holy Spirit and your relationship with Christ. You've been able to pick up those things in your life, and move forward. You've been able to achieve things that nobody thought that you could ever achieve. They thought that you were a loser. But, when you have a winning relationship in Jesus Christ, you find the victory.



Those people that look at you now, they're like, "Wow, who is this person? I don't even recognize them anymore. They seem to have a whole different attitude about life." That is reflective in the contentment that you have; the contentment that God has given you. There is a process in terms of understanding how we can be content and learn to be satisfied in our circumstances.

The first thing that we need to realize is we are going to have desires and longings. But the Scriptures remind us that we are to be content in all of those challenges. Whether we have a little or a lot, we learn how to balance desires through humbling ourselves and giving thanks for everything that God has given us, big and small.

"Thank you, God, for the food that I ate this morning. Thank you for the place that I was able to sleep this morning. Thank you for the relationships that I have with the people this morning. Thank you, God, for allowing me to wake up this morning and for the most part, be pretty healthy, in mind, body, and spirit. Thank you, God, for that."

When we are thanking God for all things, it gives us the proper perspective. When I woke up this morning, I didn't have that attitude. I was kind of like, "Oh God, another Sunday morning. God, can't something exciting happen to me today? How am I going to preach this morning? Because, Lord, I just don't have that feeling of excitement." God reminded me that something has happened in a fantastic way, and something fantastic will happen to you too.

What we need to say when we get out of bed with those "blahs" is, "Oh God, okay, another day. How am I going to treat this day, God? What am I going to experience? I want something fantastic to happen. Forgive me for desiring something that I know will never satisfy, except in my relationship with your Son, Jesus Christ."

I found myself being humbled in those circumstances, understanding that the contentment that God has given me comes only from Him and my relationship with Christ. Then, I found myself being inspired. I found myself saying, "Thank You, God, for the opportunity that I have to come, and just to share what's on my heart with others. Thank You, God, for the responsibilities that You've given me, even though there are times, God, that I just don't want that responsibility. Thank You for the people that You've put in my life, that confirm the relationship that I have with You. Thank You for the mistakes that I've made, because, when I truly embrace those mistakes, I see the learning that

can take place in my life, so that I can draw closer to You. Thank You for the imperfections that I see around me, because, in those imperfections, I find the love as You comfort me through the spirit of Your presence. Thank You, God, for the way that You challenge me and the way that Your Holy Spirit pricks at me - the way that You get my attention by saying, “No, I don’t want you to live this way, I want you to live that way.” You challenge me, God, to live better; not because You’re trying to punish me, but because You want me to have more peace. You want me to have more enjoyment from my life.”

That’s really what it’s all about. When it’s all said and done, the contentment that God wants us to have and the satisfaction that you and I long for each day, comes from the fact that God wants to be in control of our lives in all circumstances.

The other day, somebody texted me about some changes that have happened in our world. They asked how this is going to influence and change our situation. I responded back, “God is in control, right?” That person responded, “Yes, God is in control.”

When we are not feeling content and examine our emotions, God wants us to look up to Him when we are unsatisfied with life. He wants us to ask ourselves the question, is God in control?

Will you take that step in faith, understanding that God is in control of your life? If we answer that question, however we answer it, we will have the key to whether or we are content or satisfied, just by asking that one basic question.

That Sunday, I had to ask God to forgive me, because my initial response was, “God, I know that you’re in control, but there are times that I just don’t believe it, and I want to see it.”

God responded, “I am in control, and I will give you the vision and the insight to see that I am in control of all of those circumstances.” In that moment, there was a spirit of contentment and a spirit of satisfaction that I could not explain. Other than the fact, that unless you’ve been there, unless you’ve experienced the power of God working in your life, you would not be able to understand.

When God gave you the vision to see that He is in control of all of your circumstances, He gave you that spirit of contentment and satisfaction that no one else can explain. It just happens when we are totally honest before God with all the things that are taking place in our lives. He gives us His purpose,

His faith, and His strength to do all those things that God wants us to accomplish. Not for our own will or desires but for those things that accomplish the will of God in us and the lives of others.

God wants us to have that contentment. He wants us to have that contentment every moment of every day. That should be our goal, understanding that God is in control. Will you contend for contentment?

Amen.





## Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 6:1-8

- 1 All who are under the yoke as slaves must regard their own masters to be worthy of all respect, so that God's name and His teaching will not be blasphemed.
- 2 And those who have believing masters should not be disrespectful to them because they are brothers, but should serve them better, since those who benefit from their service are believers and dearly loved. Teach and encourage these things.
- 3 If anyone teaches other doctrine and does not agree with the sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the teaching that promotes godliness,
- 4 he is conceited, understanding nothing, but having a sick interest in disputes and arguments over words. From these come envy, quarreling, slanders, evil suspicions,
- 5 and constant disagreement among men whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth, who imagine that godliness is a way to material gain.
- 6 But godliness with contentment is a great gain.
- 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out.
- 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

AMEN

## Musing: Peace Begins with a Smile

I was reading a quote attributed to Mother Teresa saying, “Peace begins with a smile,” so I’m going to ask you to smile. At least try to smile. Can you smile? Peace begins with a smile, and, as silly as that sounds, I have actually been trying to do that. In fact, my wife made a comment to me the other day that, “When I see you smiling, I’ll know that you’re trying to find peace!”

I want us to think about that for a moment because I can only testify about what’s happening in my life. There are times that I just get frustrated and can’t seem to find peace in my circumstances. I feel overwhelmed by people, places, things, and wish I could take a break from life and do the things that I want to do. Does anybody else feel that way?

As I was reading about “peace beginning with a smile,” I thought a little bit differently about my circumstances; the things that I have been and will be facing and looking for a way to somehow try to get out of them. Then I thought about peace beginning with a smile and it truly does. I suggest that you try it for a few days. When you’re feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, things are not working out the way that you planned, people seem to be not listening or hearing you and not accepting you for who you are, try that smile.

As stupid as you may look smiling at yourself in the mirror, give yourself that smile because I think all of us are looking for peace. All of us are looking for that contentment regardless of our circumstances. Whether we have plenty or not, we all want that peace. We all want to have that satisfaction in whatever we are doing. We want to feel that sense of peace and contentment because we know what it’s like not to be satisfied. We know how frustrating it is to be impatient about our circumstances when we want to have something right now and we can’t have it.

Peace and contentment does begin with a smile. It is the peace in our hearts that truly identifies who we are, and, when all is said and done, the final analysis of our lives is not between you and me, but God. God is what truly matters and, if we think on that thought, we can accurately measure our suc-

cess. We will never be content by the standard that the world gives, because the world will never be able to satisfy our desires. It takes something different. It takes a personal relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The final analysis is between us and God is because God is the ultimate judge, not me, not someone else. Nobody knows your past and future experiences. Nobody understands what you have been or will go through, other than God.

Woe to those people that have aloofness and self-righteous judgment! But for those of us who know we are unworthy of God's love, know that, within our own everyday lives, we can't do it without God, I would say that we are on the right track. We are looking for that peace that begins with the smile that surpasses all of our understanding about what life is and can give us, which is something that is greater than ourselves.

Do we want to have that gratification that we are doing the things that God wants us to do and have the satisfaction that our desires are in tune with what God wants us to be? Are you looking for those things that just totally gratify yourself so people can look and say how great and wonderful you are, how much money you have, or what a great leader you are? We know that those things will never satisfy. The satisfaction that we are looking for comes from those things that come from inside of us, in our personal relationship with God, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

For those of us who have that relationship through Jesus Christ, what are we doing with it? Do we understand that it is there for us to use for our betterment in our relationships with each other? If only we could set ourselves aside and allow God to truly work through and in us and understand that the contentment that God wants us to have comes only through our personal relationship with Him; not our position, power, education, or wealth. None of those things will last. If we truly believe in an eternal God, if we truly believe in an eternal life, those things that the world says we should have, such as power, wealth, or title, are truly meaningless because, in the final analysis, it is between you and God. It is between God and me. In that analysis, God wants us to be satisfied and content every day because, if we are not, perhaps God is trying to point out something we need to work on.

I was thinking about the song, "Blessing," by Laura Story. I don't know all the lyrics but the summation is, all of those sleepless nights that we have, all those times that we cry out to God, all those things that go wrong into our lives, perhaps they truly are a blessing in disguise because, if our circum-

stances bring us closer to God, isn't that the true blessing? If the things that we are struggling with cause us to cry out to God in frustration, "God, help me because I don't know what else to do. I've tried everything else," then God reminds us that He is always there with us. He is always by our side. He has never left us. He has never forsaken us.

When we cry out to God and want to weep, cry ourselves to sleep or perhaps we get angry, those represent the same emotions portrayed in different ways. Crying is just the same as being angry because it reveals that you are feeling a personal rejection, that you are hurting deep down inside about circumstances that you are in, and that things are not working out the way that you want them to work out. Whether you cry or get angry, you are hurting inside and that's the time that God can come in because you've acknowledged your hurt. You've acknowledged the frustration and you're exhibiting it by those two extreme emotions. If we are honest with ourselves, what are we crying about? What are we angry about? "God, why is it just not working out the way that I want it to? Look how old I am, God. I'm still struggling with the same things I struggled with as a teenager. Aren't things going to get better, God?"

The answer to that question is yes, they are going to get better. It may not be on the timeline that I want, but things are going to get better. God wants us to have that trust. Whether we are crying or exhibiting our anger, God speaks to us in that still small voice. It is in trials, tribulations, and rejections from the world or the people that are the closest to us, that hurt us and drive us down when we cry out to God, "God, I thought I was doing the right thing, but Lord, I'm not being blessed. I'm being hurt."

God says you are being blessed because it is in your weakness that He is made strong. It is in my weakness when God comes into my life, when I say, "God, please come in, I can no longer do it on my own." He gives us that strength that could only come from Him, something that is greater than ourselves. It is in that faith that we will see God's strength exercised. Then, all of a sudden, we seem to be a little better. It's not perfect and we're still struggling with things, but then we begin to see those circumstances in a different way. We see that those circumstances are truly a blessing because we are learning from them.

We begin to realize that we are maturing and growing in Christ as a result of those painful situations. Then we will experience the satisfaction and



contentment that God promises, the contentment that God wants us to have. We start learning to be satisfied in our walk with God, in all circumstances. Whether it is when we have plenty or when we have nothing, we can do all things through Christ who gives us the strength to have that peace that begins with a smile. Because of the reassurance that we have in Christ, we know that, no matter what men can do, if we know Jesus Christ as our own individual Savior, no one can ever take away our peace.

Christ paid the price to remove our separation from God. Once we accept, understand and believe that, no one can ever take that away from us. This salvation we will have into eternity. That is the hope and faith that we all have that gives us that satisfaction and peace. It's what we all want.

It's not about the money, it's not about the position, power, education, or title. When it's all said and done, you and I are looking for the same thing. We're looking for that satisfaction that we want to have in life, which can only be found as we look to God through his Son, Jesus Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives and ministering to our hearts, we can serve each other and minister to others, so people will see the legitimate smile that God wants us to have - that peace which is the result of our relationship with Him.

AMEN





## Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37

- 25** Just then an expert in the law stood up to test Him, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
- 26** “What is written in the law?” He asked him. “How do you read it?”
- 27** He answered: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.
- 28** “You’ve answered correctly,” He told him. “Do this and you will live.”
- 29** But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”
- 30** Jesus took up [the question] and said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead.
- 31** A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
- 32** In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.
- 33** But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw [the man], he had compassion.
- 34** He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
- 35** The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him. When I come back I’ll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.’
- 36** “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”
- 37** “The one who showed mercy to him,” he said. Then Jesus told him, “Go and do the same.”

AMEN

## Musing: “Mr. Roger’s Syndrome” – Won’t you be my neighbor?

Many of us have thought about this parable in terms of what this story represents when the lawyer finally asked that Jesus identify and give a legal definition for “neighbor”. The lawyer asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Instead of giving him a definition, Jesus gives him a story, a parable, so that the lawyer could see the different interactions that take place in terms of what it means to be a neighbor. For you and me, I need to ask you as I need to ask myself, what is the definition of a neighbor? Is it a friend? Is it someone close to you? Is it physically your actual next-door neighbor where you live?

Jesus gives the parable to define a neighbor in a very unique way. He gives the opportunity for the attorney to consider the options of those who saw the suffering and did nothing, someone who was totally indifferent because of their own religious belief system, and an outcast of society, a Samaritan, who showed mercy. For us, as we define neighbor, it should be all of our fellow human beings. It should not be defined based on color of the skin, religious beliefs or political affiliation but on the fact that God sees all of us equally and that we are responsible for each other. I think it’s important for all of us to understand the whole idea of who is our neighbor along with the importance of each other. Our neighbor is everyone that is around us, regardless of whether they agree or disagree with us or perhaps they represent something that we don’t want to be associated with; they still all are our neighbors.

In this parable, Jesus rebukes the religious leaders of the day by inferring that they’re not showing and demonstrating the mercy that God wants them to show to their neighbors. He does this by using two people of a religious faith that understand the law, understand all the ins and outs of the definitions of the words in which they follow and what they believe in, but do not apply what they believe. They did not show mercy. They did not demonstrate the need to help, to take care of someone that obviously was suffering and needed intense ministry. Jesus gives the example of a Samaritan, someone that totally believes

differently, worships differently than the Jews of the time, but yet did what God has commanded all of us to do, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

God has created you and me for His purpose and will, and many times we struggle to try to find out what is that purpose, and what is His will. However, I think God shows us those things one step at a time. I don't know about you, but I'd like to see it kind of all unfold before me, so I can see the direction that I am going. I want to see the end of the road. I want to see the end of the line. I want to see how far I have to go, what I have to do, and what it takes for me to get there, but God does not do it that way. God gives us one moment in time and tells us to take one step at a time, live in the moment, show and demonstrate mercy to each other, and help each other out and do those things that show that we truly love God. When we truly do love God, then we are going to love our neighbor, which is all of us.

All of us should be loved by each other in the same way. That love should not be based on some type of definition that we have conjured up in our own mind. I know that I do that. I have a definition I think in my own mind, defined for myself in terms of who I'm going to and not going to help. I believe that's part of our own value system, the values that we grow up with, the events that have affected us, the interaction that we've had with other people, and how it taints and corrupts us, and changes our definition of "neighbor." However, contrary to our made-up definition of "neighbor", Jesus says our neighbor is everyone, even those people that we cannot stand to be around. It is those people with whom we think we can no longer have any fellowship. It is those people where, as we think about them, we despise them for who they are, and what they believe in, because their values are contrary to our own, but Jesus said those people are our neighbors, too.

Something else interesting about this parable is, when you show and demonstrate mercy to others, it may cost you something. Are you willing to do that? It may cost you something to show and to demonstrate God's love to a perfect stranger, but to God, they are not a stranger. God knows everything about that person, so it may cost you to show and demonstrate that mercy that God wants you to give, and there may not be any kind of payback.

The other day I was reading quotes from Mother Teresa. In one of her quotes she said, "If you can't feed the hundred, feed the one." I thought about that this past week, specifically what it means to "feed the one." It is interesting to me, because all of us can identify with the fact, sometimes we just feel

that we have to do this humongous and wonderful project to reach thousands of people, but God said, “No. That’s not your responsibility. You need to focus on the one.”

We need to remember that what prompted this parable was the question, “What do I do to inherit eternal life?” I believe all of us, deep down inside, ask that question of ourselves. I was watching a documentary, and they were talking about the fact that most people believe in some type of afterlife. Because we have that belief, innate in us as part of our character and who we are, we ask that question. Maybe not in these exact words, but we do it in such a way that we ask the question, what’s going to happen to me after I die? I believe it is a valid question as it is a question that mankind has always tried to answer. From the beginning of mankind’s history, when we look at the discoveries by archeologists about the preparation of the dead, it reveals what mankind truly believed about the hereafter - the eternal life that takes place after you and I die.

I think we all ask that same question as the lawyer, “What do I need to do to inherit eternal life?” The real question is, “How can I show and demonstrate to God that I truly love Him and desire to have communion and fellowship with Him?” I want to have fellowship with God and experience His forgiveness of my sins. God has given us His Son Jesus Christ to fulfill that desire, to make things as right as they can be, to understand that we will inherit eternal life if we accept Jesus Christ as our own individual personal savior, not because of something that we have done but because of God’s grace and the unmerited favor that He shows to each and every one of us.

I am thankful God has given us His Spirit to show us the way, to give us the truth that we need to have, and to help give us confidence in the future, both on this earth and beyond. There are times that it can be very scary when we think about those things. I know there are times when I begin to question myself and my relationship with God; whether God truly does love me just for who I am.

Now, we know that God knows everything, sees everything and has an awareness of everything, so we can cry out, “Lord, I am so unworthy. I don’t want to think about these things anymore.” I think, in those times, God speaks to us in His still voice, reminds us how much He does love us. We look to the example that we find in the Scriptures and what God has given us in the past as we have been journeying with God, that God has never left us. He’s never

forsaken us, even when we make mistakes and realize that a lot of the circumstances that we have in our own individual lives falls on our responsibility. We have to own it to make our way through it and don't play the blame game about our circumstances. As we accept our responsibility and are accountable before God, then we see that God truly does love us for who we are.

He accepts us for who we are, in all things, and gives us the opportunity to show mercy to others, truly defining for ourselves what we believe in by a practical application, helping our "neighbors", others that we don't even know. When we are able to follow Christ's example in this practice way, we can understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and have that inheritance of eternal life, because that inheritance of eternal life also touches the present. It reminds us that as we live with each other, as imperfect as we are, God wants us to make the attempt to show and demonstrate the love that He has for us, to others, and then those questions that we have and definitions that we're looking for, get answered. When we seek the presence of God, we are empowered to carry out God's purpose for our lives, put our own selfishness aside, effectively interact with each other and follow God the way He wants us to follow in His Spirit and truth.

We see, and we are able to identify the importance that we have with each other, and what it means to be a follower of God through His Son Jesus Christ when we sincerely request, "Won't you be, please won't you be, my neighbor?"

AMEN







## Scripture Reading: Hebrews 6:1-12

- 1 Therefore, leaving the elementary message about the Messiah, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God,
- 2 teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.
- 3 And we will do this if God permits.
- 4 For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, became companions with the Holy Spirit,
- 5 tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age,
- 6 and who have fallen away, because, to their own harm, they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding Him up to contempt.
- 7 For ground that has drunk the rain that has often fallen on it, and that produces vegetation useful to those it is cultivated for, receives a blessing from God.
- 8 But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and will be burned at the end.
- 9 Even though we are speaking this way, dear friends, in your case we are confident of the better things connected with salvation.
- 10 For God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you showed for His name when you served the saints-and you continue to serve them.
- 11 Now we want each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the final realization of your hope,
- 12 so that you won't become lazy, but imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance.

AMEN

## Musing: The 3-D Life

A few weeks ago, we had our little family vacation and one of the things that we did was tour the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff. One of the exhibits was in 3-D, so we were given a pair of 3-D glasses when we first went into the exhibit room. I don't know if you have ever used a pair of these specialized spectacles but, when you put them on, you have the ability to view images specifically developed for the purpose to be seen in a three-dimensional construction. The images we were gazing at were the landscape of Mars, which gave new insight and perspective to the depth of its caverns. When you take the glasses off, you see 2-dimensional pictures but, with 3-D, you get that additional dimension that enhances your senses and understanding. We already have a limited natural perspective but, looking at art, photography, or film, you lose even more perspective unless you use 3-D glasses.

I think a lot of times within our own Christian lives and walk with God, we fail to see the depth and perspective that God wants us to have because we don't put on His 3-D glasses, or what I call, 3(in 1)-Divinity glasses. This gives us supernatural ability to clearly see yourself, others and circumstances the way that God sees. We need to look through different glasses in order to live the 3-D Life.

The Scriptures remind us that there is more to being a Christian than just calling ourselves one, and we need to gain the 3-D perspective. This perspective grants us the ability to see and understand the depth of wisdom that only the Holy Spirit can give. God wants us to have His understanding in how we participate and are active in this Christian life in all areas, including sacraments and ordinances that we practice as the Church of Jesus Christ. There is something more important here than our religious conduct and actions. We do not have the divine perspective that God wants us to have as followers of Jesus Christ if we just do surface conduct or go through the motions. Religious behavior (rather than Christlike behavior) not only brings disgrace upon ourselves but on all followers of Jesus Christ. We have God's perspective and will be fruitful in our relationships with one another when we enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ and are able to see and perceive through the presence of

the Holy Spirit. We will be that land that soaks up the spiritual water of Christ. That water in the dry land of our soul will produce those crops which brings others to know Jesus Christ.

Do you remember the movie classic, *Ben Hur*? Recently, I watched it, as I have many times. I am reminded that when Judah Ben Hur is taken as a prisoner and on his way to serve in the prison galleys, he is walking with all of the prisoners along with the Roman guards. It is portrayed very well in how they are shown as being thirsty because they are walking through dry and desolate land on their way to serve their sentence according to the condemnation from the government of Rome. Then they enter a village with a well. Although not stated, there is a man we assume to be Jesus Christ that walks out of a carpenter shop and draws water for all the prisoners. We see this person that we believe is Jesus Christ give water to Ben Hur. If you recall, the audience never sees the face of Christ in that movie. Ben Hur has been denied water by the Roman Centurion, who probably was under orders that he not provide any provisions to Ben Hur on his journey to the prison galleys. So, as we see this person representing Jesus Christ giving water to the prisoners, Ben Hur looks into the face of this mystery man and sees something that represents peace. He sees something in the face that transfers encouragement and strength. When the Roman Centurion comes down the line of prisoners, he tells this person, "I said no water for this man." This same man then looks at the face of the Centurion. We don't know what the Centurion sees, but he becomes silent. He doesn't become scared, but he becomes quiet. As I recall that moment, he looked into that face and sees strong compassion. He sees something that is greater than himself, which causes him to forget about his abusive orders and to change his behavior.

When we look at the face of Jesus Christ, what do we see? What do you see? Do you see a Christ that gives us encouragement and peace? Do we see in the face of our Christ the person in which we know there's something here that is greater than ourselves and gives us a moment to pause for introspection? We all need to take time to think about who we are in the presence of Christ and realize that we are truly nothing as we become overwhelmed with His strength of love and compassion. His strength of mercy. His strength of forgiveness.

The Scriptures remind us that we have a responsibility as followers of Jesus Christ to reveal Christ to others in the same way that Christ has been revealed to us. In Him we have that strength of forgiveness, compassion, and

mercy that God wants us to share as we interact with each other. The Scriptures also remind us that God will not forget the things that we have done in the work that we do for God. God will not forget the love that we have shown other people. God will not forget the fact that we have helped other people throughout our lives. Many times we help people in a private or quiet way where other people will never know, but God sees and knows.

God understands that, as we walk with Him, we achieve a level of maturity that He has provided for us. We have heard of the fruit that God wants us to have, but sometimes we produce thorns and thistles. Sometimes we have done things that bring us shame. Instead of helping people, we have chosen to look the other way. Instead of helping people, we have even hurt them at times.

The good news is that, when those things happen, God gives us the opportunity to come back to him in repentance. Our salvation is accompanied with all of the good things God wants us to have. The good things that reminds us of the presence of Christ in all things. The goodness that comes as we look into the face of Christ and see a smile of confidence that everything is the way that it should be. We hear Him say, "It's all good because you have put your trust, confidence, and faith in Me." It is then that we understand that we imitate the face of Christ by our attitudes and our actions. We imitate and understand that it is through faith and patience that you and I have an opportunity to inherit what has been promised to all of us. The promise of salvation and eternal life. The promise of the presence of God to help us overcome the challenges we face, to overcome the stressful difficulties that each day brings. Each day is a challenge, but God is always with us in His presence.

Many times, we see our lives only as a two-dimensional life. We look at our lives but do not see God's perspective. We do not see the dimension of maturity that God has for us on a regular basis, or the perspective that God wants us to maintain through the difficulties, problems, and suffering. He wants us to maintain that perspective of having a right attitude, of being the right person, of exhibiting the right results to have that God kind of faith and patience.

Toward the end of the movie, *Ben Hur*, Christ is going to the cross. Again, we see this man we know for sure is Jesus Christ and now Ben Hur has an opportunity to give Him water as He's going to the cross. Ben Hur looks into the face of this person that is going to be crucified and recognizes that it is the same person that gave him water at the well. At the end of the movie as Christ is on the cross, His blood flows down the hill into the brook to Ben Hur's

mother and sister. The blood is mingled with the water and we see a magnificent miracle take place; the healing and physical restoration of Ben Hur's mother and sister who had leprosy. In the same way, the blood of Jesus Christ mingles with the heavenly waters of the Spirit that God has given each of us. We too have been healed. We too have been healed from the soulish leprosy of sin. Once again, we have been made whole in the presence of God. He wants us to take that wholeness and share it, distribute it, and pass it on to each and every person. We do so in His strength, with His faith and patience, showing a 3-D Life.

AMEN





## Scripture Reading John 12:42-50

- 42 Nevertheless, many did believe in Him even among the rulers, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, so they would not be banned from the synagogue.
- 43 For they loved praise from men more than praise from God.
- 44 Then Jesus cried out, “The one who believes in Me believes not in Me, but in Him who sent Me.
- 45 And the one who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.
- 46 I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me would not remain in darkness.
- 47 If anyone hears My words and doesn’t keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.
- 48 The one who rejects Me and doesn’t accept My sayings has this as his judge: the word I have spoken will judge him on the last day.
- 49 For I have not spoken on My own, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a command as to what I should say and what I should speak.
- 50 I know that His command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.”

AMEN

## Musing: Follow or Wallow

I find it interesting that I receive so many texts on Christmas and other holidays from people who normally don't contact me. I think that's really nice that they want to wish me a Merry Christmas. I know I really appreciate those sentiments and, of course, I exchange sentiments with those same people as well.

But one of the most interesting things I have received over the holidays is a Christmas yearly newsletter. Do any of you send those out? We always deliver ours late because we don't get our family Christmas picture taken until either right before Christmas or right after Christmas. One of the most interesting Christmas letters that I have received was where at the end of the newsletter, "JOY" was used as an acronym meaning "Journeying Outside Yourself." Think about that for a minute.

As I have stated many times, happiness depends on your circumstances but joy does not. So we've already established that, but I want to establish one more thing about joy. Joy truly is journeying outside yourself.

The Scriptures read, "We saw the glory of God," and then we see Jesus telling those that are listening to Him that He has come to be that light. During the morning service on Christmas, I enjoy using the story of the three wise men those who "journeyed outside yourselves" to celebrate the birth of Jesus. In the same way, people have journeyed outside themselves when they worship in a chapel service on Christmas Day. It takes that step of faith because they want to remember Jesus Christ and the light of His life that has been shown in their lives. Jesus told us that He has come as a light; to illuminate, to light up the things in our lives that have separated us from the love of the Father God through his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus makes it very clear in the scriptures that He has not come to judge the world but to save the world. Jesus did not come to judge you and me but to save you and me.

As Christians, we embrace the light of our Savior. We embrace the light in terms of what it means for us. For us to truly have joy, we have to journey outside ourselves to embrace the love of God through the grace that He has given to each and every one of us. The light is there for us every day, even



when we face circumstances and challenges that make it difficult for us to see our way clearly.

The light of God is there for us to see our way through. Perhaps that light will only be one step at a time and yet that light is still there and I am so thankful that light. God wants us to keep that light shining every day. He wants us to be like the wise men that journeyed from afar because they followed the star, they followed the light that was illuminating Christ's birth. They journeyed outside of themselves. They did not stay at home. They took the chance and the challenge as they embraced and followed what they saw in the sky. They followed it to Christ's birth, which we celebrate as a true supernatural event. But, within that we also need to realize that, as the light shines in our lives, the opposite of journeying outside ourselves also applies.

The opposite is when we journey inside ourselves because when we do that, we focus internally and lose sight of God's light. We need to move forward believing that God's will is for us to make our lives better. To have the joy, peace and purpose that God wants us to have in all things. We should remember that light, not just on Christmas morning but every day. Spiritually, God wants to make us complete, and the only way we can experience that sense of completion is by following the light of God, following His will for our lives. We all must "journey outside yourself"- ourselves.

We need to take that step of faith because that's the only way we are going to see the light. That's the only way that we're truly going to believe in what we believe. We do the opposite when we "journey inside yourself." We fall upon doubt, fear, disbelief and distrust instead of having trust in God, where the light is. We begin to distrust God. We begin to distrust ourselves. We begin to distrust those around us because we are no longer walking in the light. We start wallowing in our circumstances, our selfish ways, self-pity, and our guilt and shame. We are no longer "journeying outside yourself."

God wants us to follow Him in the light. Just as the three wise men followed the light; made that long journey, provided those gifts to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, in the same way, God wants us to follow in faith, believing.

I need to be reminded, as do all of us, that there is no judgment in the message of the light of Jesus. He makes that very clear that judgment is going to come from the one who sent Him, which is God. Jesus said, I have not come to judge. I have only come to save. I have only come to love you. I have only

come to give you that grace to follow that light. I no longer want you to wallow in your shame, guilt and the wrongs that you have done. I have come to take that all away from you. I have come to take all of that burden from you because God wants you to journey outside yourself.

Our reaction should be that we believe just as the wise men followed the light, journeyed outside of themselves to believe. That is where we find the joy, when we come before God in all honesty. Many times, we don't want to go to God because we're afraid He's going to turn the light on and show the darkness in our lives and how we have messed up, pointing out the things we have done wrong that bring shame and that guilty feeling. We feel undeserving. We feel that we don't need or want to have God's love. But yet God says, my Son Jesus Christ has come to be that light unto this entire world, which means each and every one of us can believe in that light and allow it to shine into our darkness as we confess to God the things that we have done wrong, the things that have separated us from the true joy that God wants us to have.

God wants us to continually "journey outside yourself" because then we can see the light that is shining in our lives through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Then with JOY, not happiness, we show that light to others because we are unashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are unashamed of the truth that is in our lives and we don't hide it. We show it to others, more so in deed than words. Then we see that God is truly glorified in our lives.

I want each and every one of us to consider the truth that God wants for each of us: to always walk in faith; to always walk in that light; to "journey outside yourself" as the wise men did because, then too, you will be that wise man and wise woman that God wants you to be.

God wants us to have that joy but the choice is yours, to follow or wallow.

AMEN







# Liberty

## Scripture Reading: Colossians 2:6-10

- 6** Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him,  
**7** rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.
- 8** Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elemental forces of the world, and not based on Christ.
- 9** For in Him the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily,  
**10** and you have been filled by Him, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

AMEN

## Musing: Oh, the Pain of it All

I remember going to a “drive-in” theater as a young man with my family, because we usually didn’t go to movies. If you grew up in that religious tradition, you didn’t do the movie thing, but it was okay to go to the drive-in to watch a Christian movie or a “picture film” about faith. Recently, I was reflecting on one of those times when I was seven or eight years old and watching the movie, “The Ten Commandments.” As I reflected on the story of the exodus and Moses, along with quotes from that movie such as, “so shall it be written, so shall it be done,” one of the thoughts that came to mind was the fact that Moses endured a lot of suffering and pain as he journeyed through the desert to get to where he needed to be to begin his mission. In fact, earlier that day I had put the following quote on my daily devotional: “When we have doubts about God, it is because of our own personal pain.” Think about that for a minute. When I consider the times in my life when I had doubts about God, they were tied to events that caused me great personal pain.

Many times, our doubts are an attempt to deal with and figure out the pain we are experiencing. During those times, we need to be reminded that the pain Christ experienced on the cross is no different than our pain. His life was no different than our lives in terms of dealing with the everyday challenges that we face, dealing with people and relationships while struggling with circumstances and situations. In fact, as we think about Christ’s journey, what was He praying about in the Garden of Gethsemane? He asked God to help Him because Christ knew He was going to have to endure pain and suffering, and He would rather not! “If it would be possible, take this cup from Me,” were His words that I too have found myself saying over the last couple of years, because I don’t want to deal with the pain or hurt that makes me doubt the whole existence and relationship that I have with God. Rather than fearing the pain, I should embrace the challenge with the confidence in my relationship with Christ, even as He did with the Father.

When we understand that, in the nature of God, we process everything through faith, and that means our pain as well, then we can partake in the relationship that God has provided for us to enjoy. It does not mean that we are

going to have a pain-free day, but it does mean that we have a way in which we can deal with that pain. The physical, emotional and spiritual pains that we have, the aching and longing in the depths of our soul that you and I have and don't share with anyone else, God knows what they are.

Sometimes those longings are too painful for me to confront. Yet God says, "In the same way that Jesus Christ conquered death, I can transform those longings and give you victory over death." It does not mean that the memories or the thoughts of those events will disappear, but what God does tell us as we walk with Him in faith, as we allow the transformation process to continue with us every day and allow it to continue to work as we take that one step at a time, those memories and hurts that we try to forget will fade away. We need to make that attempt in faith to believe in what Christ has done for us to find relief from our pain, because we're not going to find it in human philosophy or in different types of traditions. That transformation will only take place in a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ.

It is the mystery of faith. I will have doubts about it at times. Why? Because I will be dealing with my own personal pain and suffering as I walk with God. If you have the same struggle, we just need to remind ourselves that, within that suffering, you and I can have the victory that God wants us to have because of what Christ has done for us. Just as God has victory over the suffering of His Son Jesus Christ, so you and I can have victory in the suffering that we have had to endure in this life. It doesn't mean it's not going to hurt, but I want to tell you that the pain should help us remember what Christ did for us on the cross. Our hurts should make us reflect on what Christ has suffered for us, so He can begin that healing process in us, which leads to our victory.

You must understand that you and I are one with God in all things in that victory. God wants you to be complete in that process, but it is something that you need to be aware of on a daily basis, to keep on working toward that goal. You are going to continue to have doubts, but it's just a reminder that God wants to work and begin that healing process in your life of the various things that you might be struggling with, the pains and memories of the past that you would like to have healed once and for all. It is a process, and we know that when you come to know Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior and have the forgiveness of sin, that is the beginning point. Your life with God through Jesus Christ does not end there, it is only the beginning. It's more than just having a "fire insurance policy" of not going to go to hell, so you can live the



way that you want to live; it doesn't happen that way. If you choose to try to live that way, you will continue to walk in your own personal pain, and not fully experience the healing power that God wants you to have, including the freedom from the weight of sins.

There's nothing the world can offer that gives us such a completeness as when we go before God in all honesty as to who we really are. When we look at God's creation, we see and begin to understand the fullness of God's love for us. We embrace that in spirit and in truth, and as, we read in an earlier musing, grace is the trophy that everybody gets from God through His Son Jesus Christ. We don't even have to participate; we just have to be willing to allow Christ to come into our lives, and then we see the fullness of God's love for us and begin to implement the power of God working in our lives in very special ways.

God wants you to experience life to the fullest as you partake not only of eternal life to come, but of the eternal life that God wants you to have right now in the present as you embrace the teachings of Christ and comprehend what the atonement for your sin means. You understand the relationship that God wants you to have will not be one of perfection. You and I will make mistakes today, but as we walk in that imperfection, we believe in the One who was perfect, who did not deserve the death of the cross for you or for me. The perfection that you and I partake of is through Jesus Christ our Lord, and it is in that perfection that you and I, with Christ, rise from the grave of our old nature of sin, pain and suffering.

We take on that new nature that God wants us to have every day. Today, He wants you to have that new nature. Today, He wants you to begin that process to deal with that pain. If you are doubting God, then I would suggest that there's some personal pain that perhaps you need to confess before God so you can begin that healing process with Him. That is something between you and God and a call that you have to make without judgment, for there's no judgment from Christ either, only His love. Continuing to live in the pain of it all is more than enough judgment.

AMEN



## Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:23-25

- 23** when reviled, He did not revile in return; when suffering, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to the One who judges justly.
- 24** He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness; by His wounding you have been healed.
- 25** For you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

AMEN

## Musing: Heeled or Healed

Do you need to be healed in some way, shape, or form? I know that there are things in our lives that need healing, but where do we go for that healing? It could be physical, emotional, spiritual or even financial healing. As we think about healing and what that represents to us, it should represent that we no longer want to feel the pain about certain things that have happened or may be taking place in our lives right now. We don't want the wounds that have been healed to reopen, because we don't want to experience that hurt and that pain again as we have before. So, I think all of us, universally, desire to be healed in some form or fashion.

The two-part question is, do we believe in the healing that God can give us through His presence and what does that healing represent? The Scriptures tell us that it is through Christ's suffering that you and I have been healed. Through His wounds, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and I would even say financially, His suffering was so that He could understand our suffering. If that is the case, that Christ endured the same types of suffering that you and I have endured, then there can be healing resulting from that suffering. If we put the two together and take that step in faith, then healing can take place, whatever type of healing you might need.

But, that healing may not meet our expectations of the way we would like to see it happen and God does not necessarily heal everything based on our expectations. So, what do we do then? What if that wound that we want to be completely healed somehow continues hurting? Do we then say that God does not exist, or that our faith is not strong enough?

The Scriptures remind us that the healing offered through Jesus Christ is to forgive us for the wrongs that we have done and the sins that we have committed. That healing is guaranteed. Within that healing process of our sins being forgiven, Christ also commands us to live a righteous life, following His example, because we have been healed from our sin, through the wounding that Christ suffered for us on the cross.

The healing through the forgiveness of our sins is guaranteed, that, as far as the East is from the West, our sins are no more in the eyes of God. So,

spiritual healing is complete. But, do we understand that the Spirit of God is also there to be the Guardian of our souls? The Scriptures remind us again and again that the one relationship that we need to be the most concerned about is our relationship with God, because He controls the destiny of our souls as its guardian.

How do we live our lives each day? Do we just go through the motions, or do we try to do the best that we can with our lives each day, one day at a time? As I have mentioned in previous musings, we are not looking for perfection. You and I are imperfect people and will make mistakes on a daily basis, but God does not want us to give up on the fact that perfection should be our goal. It helps to understand that it will require taking one step at a time, but eventually we will get there by the fact that we are attempting to live a righteous life in faith, representing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. The big first step is made as we look back at our lives and we see our different decisions that we made, different choices that other people make, and then see them as God's will for our lives.

The big question then becomes, "How can God's will involve any kind of hurt or pain or suffering for anybody, not only just for me, but anybody else?" As I look back, I know that the things that have happened in my life, even the dumb stupid mistakes that I have made in my own life, even the mean and hateful things that other people have done to me, spiteful things, things that hurt me emotionally and physically, I still need to be able to say somehow, even though I don't understand it completely, that those hurts were a part of God's will for my life. It is something that is beyond my own comprehension. It is something that I just cannot fathom how can pain and suffering go together and produce God's goodness in my life. I tend to dig in my heels when something is beyond my capacity to comprehend and it becomes difficult for me to trust, believe and receive from God.

How can the bad things that I've done to other people, and the bad things that have been done to me, work out to somehow be His will and plan for my life? But, God says they are and I have to accept that in faith, not completely understanding or having the complete healing that I would like to have from things that have been done to me. I know, somehow, I will find comfort, knowing that God was in control of those circumstances, as terrible as they might be. We can't find the healing that we want unless we come before God in all mercy and all truthfulness, in faith, believing in what Christ has done for us

on the cross. We all have imperfections, yet God says there is healing if we believe in Him, that our wounds can be healed.

Once again, we start with the premise that the healing of the spiritual wounds can be guaranteed because of the forgiveness of sin, and, whether we want to admit it or not, other people that have wronged us can also be healed if they ask God for forgiveness. That's a difficult concept for me to understand and accept, because I'm the type of person that likes to get even and wants God to use me to be the instrument of revenge. Do you feel that way? When I do, the following is a typical conversation that I have with God.

Me: "Lord, if it be Your will, let me be the instrument of Your revenge on that other person!"

God: "No, that is not how you should live. Allow Me to be in control of the circumstance and I will even the score in My perfect timing, according to My will for that other person's life."

Me: "But yet, somehow, God, I just feel that I just need to have more. I deserve to have more."

God: "No. I want you to live your life the way that I have asked you to live it. Live it in such a way that it is reflective of the fact that you have been forgiven of the wrongs that you have done. Let's focus on you. Let's focus on Me. Don't worry about the other person. Let's talk about you because you are the one that is in control and responsible for living your own life, not anyone else."

This spiritual dialogue represents the whole idea of having accountability in faith, that God truly wants us to live the life that He wants us to live in righteousness and truth. He wants us to not carry those burdens and wounds anymore. Through His Spirit, He gives us the ability to be healed from those wounds, because, if we take that step in faith and live the life that God wants us to live, we are no longer under the law of God but under His grace. If we take that step in faith and live the way that God wants us to live, we are no longer under our own personal desires, that old nature that has been put to death on the cross. Instead, the life that God wants us to live is that new nature, and you and I are no longer controlled by the environment in which we live.

You and I truly control our environment when we step out in faith every day, desiring to live for God with a commitment to Christ that reflects the fact that God loves us and wants to be with us, going through all of these difficulties and challenges and helping us understand His purpose and will. This is the life that He wants us to live, which is expressed in love to each other. If we

believe that, then we will be no longer be serving ourselves, serving the hurts and our revenge. As long as we're serving those things, we stubbornly dig in our heels and will not be able to be healed and live the life that God wants us to live. Then, we often find ourselves in our self-made corner, heels dug in, resisting the healing that God has provided for us to enjoy.

When we are in that corner and feel we are being attacked, we instinctively want to attack in response because we find that we can't run anymore. God again and again gives us opportunities to step out in faith, to be healed. But yet, we seem to find ourselves again in that corner. Don't we? It's kind of like painting yourself in a corner and we can't get out.

God says, there is a practical way that we can get out and begin that healing process, by accepting the fact of what Christ has done for us on the cross by taking all of our burdens, asking God to forgive us of our sins, and allowing the healing to begin. How we live our lives depends on how consistent we allow God to be a part of our lives, not turning it off and on, which I know I do every day. Some days it is, "Okay God, I got the Spirit on and I'm walking with you. Oh Lord, I just turned the switch off because I'm gonna kind of do my own thing right now. Okay God, I'm through with that and did what I wanted to do. Now, I'm gonna turn the Spirit back on like a light switch. God says, "No. It needs to be on all the time, not just when you wanna flip the switch on and off. I'm always there for you." The light is always there. The Spirit of God is always there. You make that decision whether you want to activate that switch or not.

In that sense, we see within our own lives that God wants us to be completely restored. He wants us to live with that light on, and then we find ourselves in a very unique place because, as that light is on, we truly want to love each other the way that God wants us to love each other. We see this in whether we are willing to bear each other's burdens. We see it in whether we want to help each other in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and those of us who have served in the military, we know what it's like to be on a rough patch on a hump.

As a Navy Chaplain, I took many humps with the Marines that I served and there were times when someone just had to drop their pack because they couldn't go on, but there was somebody there to help them pick up their pack and share the burden with them until they could get themselves back together and carry their pack again. That's what God wants us to do with each other,

to bear each other's burdens, because in so doing we are exhibiting the life that God wants us to live. I encourage you, do not wait for tomorrow. Begin today, because today is the day that you have. Don't waste today waiting for tomorrow. I'd like to tell you that I got that saying from some wonderful book of wisdom but I got it from watching a Charlie Chan movie.

Don't waste today waiting for tomorrow, respond now to the way that God wants you to live, the way He wants you to love. Then we will see that, as we are bearing each other's burdens, we don't have the time to make comparisons of each other, because we're working together to accomplish the greater good. If we are making those comparisons about the things that are going on in the world around us, then we have way too much time on our hands and are not bearing each other's burdens. When we make those comparisons, what are we doing? I know that when I am doing that, I am thinking only of myself, and that the only burden I want to bear is what I want to accomplish for me and not anyone else.

God wants us to see that, as we live by faith and embrace God in all things, walking through life showing kindness to each other because we are willing to bear each other's burdens, we will not make those unfair comparisons about what others have and what we want to have. We see that, as we look at the life that God wants us to have, we do so in such a joyful manner, we do so generously, because we know that God is in control of our lives. Maybe the understanding is not as complete as we want, but it is enough to know that we have trust and confidence that God is working out His will for our lives. In doing that, we see the opportunities that God gives us, the opportunities to do good, to live the life of faith that God wants us to live, because we know that we have been healed spiritually through the forgiveness of our sins. We know that the Good Shepherd is for us as the Guardian of our souls, which gives us the confidence to take that step of faith each day, and to live by faith.

So, it is my hope and prayer that, for each and every one of us, we live the life of faith that God wants us to have, the way that God has always intended it to be, by and in His spirit. If you believe in faith and with confidence in terms of who you are, being followers of Jesus Christ, being His disciples and wanting to pursue those things of God that represent that righteous life that you are to follow because of what Christ has done for you, then you will stop being "heeled" by yourself and be the healed of the Lord.

AMEN





## Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:18-28

- 18 For you have not come to what could be touched, to a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm,
- 19 to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words. (Those who heard it begged that not another word be spoken to them,
- 20 for they could not bear what was commanded: And if even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned!
- 21 And the appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, I am terrified and trembling. )
- 22 Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels in festive gathering,
- 23 to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to God who is the judge of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect,
- 24 to Jesus (mediator of a new covenant), and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the [blood] of Abel.
- 25 See that you do not reject the One who speaks; for if they did not escape when they rejected Him who warned them on earth, even less will we if we turn away from Him who warns us from heaven.
- 26 His voice shook the earth at that time, but now He has promised, Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also heaven.
- 27 Now this expression, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what is not shaken might remain.
- 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us hold on to grace. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe;

AMEN

## Musing: Puzzling Picture

No matter what happens, we always need to be looking forward to the hope that God has given us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Like you, sometimes my week goes okay and other times not as great with some ups, but mostly downs. The downs usually come with different responsibilities that come my way, which prompt me to ask, “Lord, may this extra burden that I’ve been given pass from me. Lord, I don’t want any more responsibility. Thank you!” But after a little while longer I pray, “Lord, thank you for trusting me. Thank you, Lord, for loving me, but I need to know, do you really trust me with this extra responsibility, God?” So, I struggle with that conundrum of wanting them to go away and embracing them as God’s will for my life.

As we journey through each day of our individual lives, we have times when we celebrate our different successes and accomplishments, and other times we undertake challenges that fill us with fear and trembling. When we, individually or collectively, go before God in prayer, we focus on those same feelings and emotions - joy or fear. I believe when we go before God in fear, we don’t approach God the way we should. We know we can’t hide anything from God, but yet we seem to make an attempt to hide. Even when the Holy Spirit says, “Hey, what are you talking about, here? I know the truth about who you are as a person. I know that you are seeking the results that you want for your own selfish motives.” If we are trying to hide from God those things that He already knows, we will not receive the full joy that God wants us to have from our relationship with Him.

But then there are times when we go before the Lord in all joy, open and honest, prostrating ourselves before God in all humbleness and humility, knowing that He already knows everything about us. That is when there is nothing for us to hide from God so we lay it all out to Him, our frustrations, anger and disappointments, asking God to expose the truth about our everyday lives so we can experience the joy that He wants us to have.

The question is, do we go before God in fear and trembling, or in all joy? To reiterate, the only reason we’re experiencing that fear is because we know we are holding something back from God, and God knows it. But, when we

approach the Lord in all joy, we are unabashedly clean. We know in all honesty that God accepts us and loves us for who we are, so we willingly lay exposed before God in the truth of who we are. Yet, there is a joy in that honesty. There is a joy in that truth and the revelation that God loves us and accepts us just for who we are. God knows our imperfections and frustrations. God knows the things that we struggle with every day, but still prefers for us to go before Him in joy, understanding what He has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Yes, understanding who God is causes us to cast off all fear and worship in all joy.

If we are worshiping and going before God in all joy, then we truly are part of that joyful assembly wanting to be with God in such a way that compels us to praise Him for those challenges. We praise Him for those circumstances and frustrations because then we see our faith as it is before God. Faith is something that we need to express before God all of the time and make the effort to express that faith in the things that we do for Him. Part of that expression is when we are able to live at peace, first and foremost within ourselves, and then with all people. As followers of Christ, everything begins with understanding where we need to place ourselves in our relationship with God and needing to be at peace with all people.

The greatest challenge for me is the baggage about people I have acquired through my journey of life that causes me to not trust the way that I should because of the things that have happened to me and fear of being hurt. Now, I don't want to be associated with people that have wronged or hurt me, but yet God tells me if I am to have the faith that He wants me to have, I need to be at peace with all people. I am sure that you can relate with me. Somehow, we need to come to terms with the people who make us feel uncomfortable, remind us of the wrongs that have been done to us or have even hurt us. Somehow, we need to be at peace.

Looking only to God is the way that we can find that peace and joy, as we do our best to be holy, daily walking with God and asking God to give us the strength and understanding that we need to have so that we can live in peace and joy. It is very reassuring to consider, when we are focused on God and our relationship with Him, what can people do to us? People can do absolutely nothing to us because, if we are focused on the things of God, no one can hurt us, either past, present, or future, because the Scriptures tell us that nothing

can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Those people cannot separate you and me from the love of God.

We see that within our own lives, as we have faith given to us by God that goes beyond our own understanding. You and I tell God, “I don’t know why or how You love me, but I just know that You do, and I am so thankful for what your Son, Jesus Christ, did for me on the cross. It is to my wonder and amazement that You constantly want me to be a part of a relationship with You.”

That faith expressed in wonder, even though you do not understand all of the things but truly desire to know the living and loving God, reveals that the Father God wants you to participate in a relationship with Him because you are part of His creation. You are one of His created beings. I am one of His created beings and it is in that wonder that we see the life that God has created all around us, even in the lives of others. Our willingness to apply and express this wonderful faith that God wants us to have in all circumstances, and with the people who might think of us as a failure, begins the process of putting this puzzling picture into the hands of our “Puzzle Maker,” who never considers you and me a failure.

Keep in mind that the Creator of the universe, the Creator of all of us does not see you as a failure. That is why He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for your sins and to die for my sins. When you know and understand that, it is with joy that you express your willingness to serve God wherever you are, wherever God has called you to be.

In this way, we can strengthen our faith by utilizing it, by expressing it in the wonder of God, willing to serve God wherever that might be. More times than not, it is the small things that we do for each other that express the willingness that God wants us to have in the application of our faith. Then, as we do that, we see that our faith is expressed in how we worship God, how our faith is used by God, and how faith gives us the opportunity to see the truth in our lives and to trust God; to trust God with our puzzle pieces.

We see within our worship of God the entire picture of why God wants us to be thankful for those difficulties and challenging circumstances. As much as we would like to see them removed from our lives, God is building something stronger inside of us because of those challenges. As long as God is wanting us to work through the different things in life to make us stronger and more mature in our walk with Him, life will always be a challenge.

Remember that, as long as you are making the attempt to thrive in your relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, you are living a life that God wants you to live. If you stop thriving in your relationship with God, then you truly are dying as a person. You will mature and gain strength as you embrace those challenges, the things that God wants you to work at and to work through. Will there be times when you have anxiety? Will there be times when you fear whether you can measure up to the challenges and responsibilities that you have been given, when you've told God, "Please no more! I don't know if I am smart enough. I don't know if I can take care of this new challenge that You have given me." Yes, but it is then when you hear God speaking in that still small voice through hymns, scripture and prayer, "I will give you the strength that you need to take on that new responsibility and to grow through it to become stronger."

It is in corporate worship where you see that God is at work in your life because you see how God is working in other people's lives. You are not alone in the challenges that you are facing. You are not alone in not wanting the responsibilities that you have, but yet God is telling you, "I want you to go through this responsibility and I will see you through this, so you will learn and grow. I want you to mature and thrive every day in your life and that's why I'm giving you these challenges." Worship then becomes, "Okay God. I can't do it. Not my will, but Your will be done in this circumstance." It's similar to a puzzle with all these different pieces taken apart, and you start working on it, trying to figure out how it all fits together.

Initially, when I'm doing a puzzle, even with my grandkids, it kind of stresses me out. I think, "How do we bring this puzzle to a successful completion?" Thankfully, the completed picture is on the front of the box so we know how to put the pieces together. Be assured, God has the completed picture of our lives. Many times, when we look at the different pieces of the puzzle that we have in our lives, we want to see a completed picture. God knows what that is for you and for me, and it is with faith that we pick up those pieces of the puzzle that God has given us, even though we cannot see the completed picture. We're trusting Him as He guides our hand to put that one piece of puzzle next to the other, and we say, "Ah, those two things seem to fit. Okay, God, what is the next piece of puzzle that you want me to put into this picture?"

That is what faith is, trusting in God that, even though we don't see the complete picture of the puzzle of our life, God does. He gives us one piece at

a time to connect that picture because, if we ever saw the completed picture that God has for us, we would probably say, “God, there is no way that could be me.” God is saying, “Yes. Yes, that completed picture is perfection, not for anything that you’ve done, but it’s what you have believed when you walk by faith believing in my Son, Jesus Christ, to do those things in your daily lives.” That is when we joyfully say, “Yes God. Thank you, God.”

We begin to better understand when we see the different puzzle pieces of the picture begin to take shape and see things the way that God wants us to see them. We begin to have that attitude of thankfulness before God and see that God has given us the circumstances. Praising and rejoicing with Him in the circumstances is how we worship. Then, we see with reverence the awe of God, the life of God working to change us to make our lives better, so we put forth the effort that God wants us to have every day to acknowledge Him.

You acknowledge God by saying, “I don’t know what this day is going to be like for me, God, but I am beginning with prayer. It is with faith believing, and I will make the effort to do the things that you want me to do, but I need Your strength. I need for You to give me the insight, ability and courage to make the decision to do the right things, to walk holy with You, and to accept in faith believing that Your final picture and my puzzle pieces will work out.” His promise to you is that your life will work out in the perfection of what God has done for you through His Son, Jesus Christ because His image is on the front of the box.

AMEN







## Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

- 16 Therefore we do not give up; even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day.
- 17 For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory.
- 18 So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

AMEN

## Musing: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

I recently read a post talking about Christians and how we live our daily lives, and how we don't allow God to work in our lives because we feel that God cannot use us due to our imperfection and sin. He concluded, "We need to get over ourselves." This begs the question: how do we do that?

A lot of times we find ourselves between a rock and hard place. I think we understand what that terminology means. Many times, we find ourselves stuck in the middle between two things that are very hard and seem to be immovable. We can't seem to change them, and so we're between a rock and a hard place, trying to find a way to get out of our situation.

This situation often arises in our relationships. We find ourselves wanting to give up on the relationship that God wants us to work on with Him, but also with family members and friends, because we can't seem to find a way to work through it. We become frustrated, we become angry when people don't see the needs that we have in our lives or we don't see the needs of others, and it can cause division, but not with God.

Our Scripture reading tells us not to give up when we find ourselves in that situation, when we are dissatisfied and disappointed with our relationships. We need to be reminded that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are not to give up, even though we want to give in to the circumstances.

Isn't it a wonderful feeling when you're in a relationship with someone and you know for a fact that they need you and want you to be in their lives? What a sense of satisfaction there is in the feeling of being wanted, needed and that the relationship is indivisible, that it cannot be divided. Can you see that? You may be able to see some of the actions involved in the relationship. You may be able to hear some of the words that are involved in that relationship, but you cannot actually see it because it is something that is felt. It is something in which you understand that there's a sense of want and of a need for you in that relationship. Think how much greater that relationship can be with

God! Regardless of what is happening on the outside of you, the part of you that at times seems to be destroyed, gnawed at, whittled or chipped away, God is renewing His relationship with your inner person day-by-day.

Do you want God to be in your life? Do you need God in your life? In the same way that we respond to God, God responds to us. God, through the presence of His Holy Spirit in our lives, gives us that sense of being wanted, gives us that sense of being needed, but yet it is something that we cannot see. God doesn't only appreciate you, God wants and needs you. That's why He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for your sins. God's presence in our lives is something that is unseen but gives us the power and understanding to face each day, no matter the struggles we are facing.

A revolution took place when Jesus allowed Himself to die on the cross for you and me. That revolution continues in us each day. I think we can comprehend what revolution means because of our history of the American Revolution, but this is something far greater; this is the spiritual revolution taking place in each one of us daily through the renewing of God's Spirit in our lives. When you think about the renewal taking place, what guidance do you need to have to see that renewal? You need to ask yourself these questions: Who are you in Christ? What are you in Christ? Why are you in Christ?

If you can answer these questions, I think you will find a definition for yourself and see that your spirit is being renewed daily and that what's going on around you physically is only momentary. You will understand that the affliction that is taking place in your life, the struggle that you are going through, the wrestling between the old nature and new nature, is producing something eternal within you, an incomparable eternal weight of glory. This revolution started when you first came to know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, when you first sensed the love of God for you through Christ. However, that was only the beginning point. The revolution inside of you has been continuing since that day.

Now, it is true that we all come to know Christ in different ways. Sometimes it's just that altar call experience when the pastor or the chaplain calls you to come to know Christ and you come forward, kneel, and accept Christ as your personal Savior. For some people, it's a gradual process where they have to come to an intellectual understanding of God and who God is, and through that process all of a sudden one day they're walking down the street and a light comes on and they say, "Okay, I know how much God loves me because

of what His Son, Jesus Christ, did for me on the cross.” Either way, there is a moment for you when you knew that you had established a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, because God wanted and needed you and gave you the Holy Spirit to guide you, to give you the light and love of His life.

You should never forget the fact that God wanted and needed you, and God still wants and needs you right now in the present day. Regardless of what you have done in the past, the Word of God tells us that, as far as from the East is to the West, our sins have been forgiven. You can’t say anything greater than that truth.

When I think about the wrongs and the sins that I’ve committed in my life, I need to remind myself that my sins have been forgiven as far as the East is from the West and that they are no more. I need get over myself and remind myself that God wants and needs me, and ask, “God, I am unworthy. How can you use me? I’m not going to be able to do anything for you on my own.” Then God responds to me through His Holy Spirit, who reminds me, “I need you and want you, and I want you to be a part of My work and will, not just for yourself, but for others as well.”

When we sense God’s presence and direction, we no longer find ourselves between a rock and a hard place. We see our lives being indivisible, not being separated from God in any way, shape, or form, but as being fulfilled, not because of what we have done, but because of what God’s love has done for us. The affliction that we’re going through right now, as difficult as it is, whether it’s a physical, emotional or spiritual affliction, is only temporary. God is working through that affliction to renew your spirit in Him, to renew the fact that, as you ask those questions about the need for Christ in your life, that you can answer them; the who, the what, and the why. It all comes down to the fact that God loves you and that He needs you.

Can you sense that in your life? Can you sense the fact that God just doesn’t only appreciate you? We have God’s undivided attention when we go to Him anytime in prayer. We have God’s undivided attention anytime we want to have fellowship with God, whether it’s walking, sitting, driving, standing, or just looking out the window and thinking about the things of God and your own personal relationship. God gives you that individual time because God is God, and He is everywhere and knows all things.

As we spend time with God, we are reminded that what truly matters is that relationship with Him, which is unseen. It has nothing to do with your fi-

nances. It has nothing to do with who you were in the past. It has nothing to do with the reputation that you think you might have with others. It's just between you and God, which is unseen. That is what truly matters.

God sees what we do in secret and rewards us when we do those things that give Him the honor and the glory that He so richly deserves, because He sees the unseen things that we do. He sees the unseen times when we are praying to Him, when we are praying for others, when we are filled with love and compassion, even though we don't exhibit it or use the God-talk. God sees our love and compassion for others that maybe we don't show, maybe others can't see it, but God sees. God sees when you're moved by something with compassion over a particular circumstance, a family member, a friend. You feel that love and compassion, and maybe you don't show it, but God knows that you're demonstrating it in your heart and mind, and He sees those things that are unseen.

Then we need to understand that this life is temporary, but it's hard for us to understand because this is all we have. This is our reality. I am who I am. I can't see anything beyond this, but God reminds us that there is something beyond this, and that the situation we're in is only temporary. We need to focus on a regular basis on that which is eternal, not based on our physical, emotional, or financial circumstances, but based on our relationship with God. It's based on those things that are unseen, because those things that are unseen is what really matters.

You and I are never divided from God. God never lets us go once we have committed to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, regardless of how many years ago it was or just today. That separation will never be there because God wants us in that permanent relationship. Because of that, we see the other relationships that we have that maybe we haven't always done right, maybe we've made mistakes or said or done the wrong things, but God reminds us that, because our relationship with Him is indivisible, our relationship with others can be as well. It's going to be based on those things that are unseen, not on the things that you can see. It's going to be on the presence of two people being and wanting to be together, and many times it's not the words that are being said, it's just the presence of being together. You can sense that there's a very close relationship there, even though you cannot see it.

When I'm preaching, you can see my wife sitting behind me. In a few days, we're going to be celebrating our 37th wedding anniversary. We dated

for three years prior to that, so my wife has known me for 40 years. She still sits behind me, looking out for me, praying for me, and I joke with her about grading my sermons, whether I get an A or a B or a C plus. We joke about that, but it's the relationships that we have in our lives that are unseen that you know there is love, there is that affection and compassion.

The relationship that we have with God is something that we all can have, that we can share in that will last forever. When we focus on our relationship with God, we can see the things that God wants us to work on in our temporal life that will make it better, because we have a different perspective about our circumstances. This empowers us to incorporate God's forgiveness and grace in our personal lives and see things with a different point of view. We see our circumstances not as punishment but as opportunities for us to be renewed more and more by God. We see the things that we are learning. We see the things that we are experiencing in a different way because, all of a sudden, we have the vision and the understanding of God. We see that we do have an indivisible relationship with God, one that cannot be divided, one that can only be sustained by the power of His Spirit in our lives.

God wants us to be renewed each day. He wants that spiritual revolution that began when we came to know Jesus Christ to continue today, with a continual understanding that God wants and needs us because He loves us. In the same way, when we see those things that are unseen because we need and want God, then our circumstances do not dictate whether we are between a rock and a hard place. Our circumstances are only temporary, and they only dictate to us the opportunity that we have to want and to need God more in our lives.

AMEN





## Scripture Reading: Romans 12:9-21

- 9 Love must be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good.
- 10 Show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honor.
- 11 Do not lack diligence; be fervent in spirit; serve the Lord.
- 12 Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer.
- 13 Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.
- 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
- 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.
- 16 Be in agreement with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.
- 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Try to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes.
- 18 If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone.
- 19 Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath. For it is written: Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says the Lord.
- 20 But If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.
- 21 Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

AMEN



## Musing: To Be or Not to Be?

Do you believe that God exists? I think that's a question that it's very relative to our own daily lives, because if we do believe that God exists, then our light should reflect that belief. If we do not believe that God exists, then we should live however we want to live, get as much as we can out of life, serve ourselves only with pleasure and don't worry about the rest.

However, the Scriptures tell us that we are to live a life that reflects the fact that God does exist. We should live a life that reflects the reality that we have a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, and it is something that we accept by faith. Although there are those who study apologetics (arguments to develop that God exists), I think most of us are concerned about the practical application to our lives each day. The Scriptures are correct when they tell us not to worry about the future, as they say each day has enough worry of its own. The guidelines we've been given this morning tell us how we should live in terms of being a follower of Jesus Christ, representing our relationship with God.

In fact, when I first read this portion of Scripture while planning this sermon, I think for me personally, this is one of the hardest portions of Scripture for me to exercise, because I have one of those personality types that remembers. I want to get even against those who have wronged me in the past. Anybody else have those kinds of issues? You remember the things that were done to you, the wrongs, the things that were said? I'm not talking recently. I'm talking way back in my own personal history, and there's a lot of years back there now in my personal history, and I remember those things. I'd like to be able to forget them, but it's just who I am as a person. I remember the wrongs that have been done to me, but the other flip side of that personality is I remember the wrongs that I have done to other people. Does that make sense? If you remember the wrongs that have been done to you, your personality also remembers the wrongs that you have done to other people.

For me, when I think about the wrongs that I have done to other people in the past, it hurts. Even though I have asked for forgiveness, even though I

know that God has forgiven me of the things that I have done in the past, the wrongs that I have committed, I still remember them. That is a struggle for me.

As we consider this Scripture, what does God want from us? He wants us to be genuine. He wants us to be sincere in the love that we show and demonstrate to each other. It takes courage. It takes strength. It's not easy for us to do. In fact, it's much easier for us to be living a life in which we seek to get even with the people that have wronged us. It's easier for me to obsess on certain things, to try to even the score, or in fact, even get a little ahead in terms of the wrongs that have been done to me.

The Scriptures remind us that we are not to live that way. We are not to repay bad with bad. We are not to repay evil with evil. We are to repay bad with good. We are to repay evil with good, because that's really the only way that we can truly live as a follower of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures remind us that, if you do these things, not only will God bless you, but you're also saying to God, "Lord, I'm going to leave the revenge business in Your hands. I am not going to take revenge on my own. I am not going to seek to get even. I am not going to try to take action in terms of inflicting the same pain that the person gave to me, and give them that same pain and even more in time." We leave that up to God. If we believe that God exists, if we have that relationship through His Son Jesus Christ, then we are saying, "God, that situation is in Your hands, because You know all of the circumstances involved. You know all of the people involved."

God knows why they reacted the way that they did. God knows their heart. God also knows how we received it, and how it hurt us. The Scriptures tell us to let it go and let God take control. We are to cling to what is good, and when we have those thoughts that come into our minds about the wrongs that have been done to us, about the wrongs that we have done to others, God tells us, let it go. He has forgiven us of the wrongs that we have done, because of the relationship that we have with His Son, Jesus Christ. In the same way, we need to forgive those who have wronged us and let it go. It is up to God to balance the scales of judgment.

God also wants us to pray for those who have wronged us. As hard as that is to do, I have found that, when I do that, it frees me emotionally. I'm not so hung up on trying to take that wrong that has been done to me and reap revenge.

If you look at some of the history in the United States, those people that had the most outstanding movement to change society and culture did not repay evil for evil. They repaid evil with good. They lived at peace with all men. They let God take care of the scorekeeping.

If you are repaying evil with evil, if you are repaying bad with bad, that is not how God wants you to live, because you are trapping yourself in a vicious cycle. Unfortunately, we often like to hold onto that vicious cycle, because it gives us predictability. Even though we know it's wrong, we know it's not going to help us, we can predict the outcome, so we are comfortable with it and we feel we have control.

We don't have to be caught in that cycle of evil for evil, bad for bad. We can break out of that cycle. We can have a different kind of life that God wants us to enjoy. We don't have to have that predictability that gives us so much pain, so much problems, so much anger, because, in that predictability cycle, we will never sense the love that God wants us to have. We'll never sense the life that God truly wants to give us, and that's why He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins, so we have a predictability that is based on the premise of understanding that God exists in the universe, and that He sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins. That's the predictability that we should be in, the predictability that God has promised each and every one of us eternal life.

Not only the eternal life that is yet to come, but the eternal life that God wants to give us right now in the present, in terms of how we live with one another, how we love one another. God wants us to understand that, as we embark on our daily lives, as we look at the past, the past has been taken care of. It has been forgiven. God will even the score in God's timing, in terms of God's judgment. As we live today, we see the wonderful opportunities God gives us, and the different relationships that we have with each other, to truly love each other, and to be sincere in that love. Not perfection. My love will never be perfect until I am with the Lord, but until that time, I am going to love the people in my life as sincerely as I possibly can. That's how God wants us to reflect the life that He has given us. That's how we bless one another because, in that sincerity of love, we find the harmony and the peace that we're all looking for.

Every day, we are looking for that harmony, we are looking for that peace, we are looking for that purpose, and the way that we can find it is truly allowing ourselves to be sincere in what we are trying to accomplish. We are going to make mistakes. We are going to fail. We are going to fall short of what we

are trying to do, but God tells us to keep on trying. That's where being sincere is so desirable in our lives. We are not responsible for the reaction of others. We are not responsible for how other people respond to what we are trying to do. We are only responsible for what God has asked us to do, what God has demonstrated for us to do, to show His love, and to walk in fellowship with each other, to embrace each other, to accept each other's challenges, to rejoice with those that are rejoicing, to mourn with those that are in mourning. In doing so, we find ourselves being made complete, because, as we are complete with God, and complete with His Son Jesus Christ, then we find ourselves being complete with one another. When we live the way God wants us to live, we have the peace that God wants us to have. We are not searching for something else. We are not desiring something else to give us peace or satisfaction. We are not living only for ourselves. We find ourselves living for others, and when we are living for others, we truly find and exhibit the truth in our lives that God wants to have.

Once again, God is taking care of the situation. We believe in the existence of God. We believe in the Son Jesus Christ, and as we do that, we let God have those circumstances, those things that we are struggling with. Then God reminds us with the presence of His Holy Spirit, as we worship God, as we pray with God, as we have fellowship with each other about God, we see the good that God has allowed us to have, because of His love for each and every one of us.

AMEN







# Leadership

## Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-16

- 1 When He saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.
- 2 Then He began to teach them, saying:
- 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
- 4 Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted.
- 5 Blessed are the gentle, because they will inherit the earth.
- 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled.
- 7 Blessed are the merciful, because they will be shown mercy.
- 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God.
- 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God.
- 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
- 11 “Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me.
- 12 Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- 13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men.
- 14 “You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden.
- 15 No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house.
- 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

AMEN



## Musing: Dream On

What a wonderful world it would be if all of us did our best to follow these teachings from the Sermon on the Mount. What a different world it would be, a dream come true! I think of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I believe he had a dream which reflected the essence of the Sermon on the Mount, that all of us could walk together as one. I am also thinking about when my grandchildren come over to my home. One of the movies they like to watch is *Tangled*. In it there is a song in the movie about a dream to have different things and aspiring to become a different type of person.

I would like to ask you as well as I ask myself, what is your dream? What is the dream that you have for yourself? What is the dream that you would like to see realized?" If we are honest with ourselves, we all have certain individual dreams to do certain things or to be in a certain place. It is only natural to desire certain types of circumstances around us where we see what we want to see, be with the people we want to be with that make us comfortable, and familiar and at rest with ourselves. This is all good, but I believe God calls us to have a higher dream, not just what we would like to have in terms of our personal gratification, but to have a higher dream for ourselves, to have a higher dream for our families, to have a higher dream for the society in which we live. A dream in which we live in peace with everyone. Christ reminds us in His teachings that our attitude needs to be one that is open to His Spirit.

*Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God.* What about your spirit? Is your spirit open to the lordship of Jesus Christ? Is it poor in spirit from the standpoint that you realize your spirit is not what it takes to fulfil your dream but it is God's spirit? It is only the presence of God in your life that fulfills. If we are a follower of Jesus Christ, God wants us to live a life that reflects His kingdom, a kingdom that is reflective of the light that shines before men so when people see us, they see the glow and the love of Jesus Christ. They see us living in such a way that our spirit is humble. It is a reflection of our life in Christ which points to the Kingdom of Heaven.

I was reading an article by C.S. Lewis where he states that a lot of times we fail as a Christian Church because we think first about and focus on the things of this earth. We think about our needs or maybe a political situation. He suggests that the times in which the Church has been and is the most successful in changing the culture is when we first think about heaven and then afterwards the earth. I thought, what a profound statement; we are not successful as the Church when we only think about the things of this earth and not the things of heaven.

Christ tells us here in His teachings on the Sermon on the Mount to think about the Kingdom of Heaven and to have an attitude that reflects its nature. He did not really say to have a poor spirit that inherits the earth. No, He tells us that, in order to have the peace that we want, we must have a spirit that is reflective of Christ in our lives, one that reflects the Kingdom of Heaven.

*Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.* In those times when we are hurting, Christ reminds us that that comfort only comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit in our daily living. Sometimes God allows us to be a part of that process by comforting each other when we are wounded in life's battles. Many times, people feel that they must go through that mourning process alone. Christ reminds us that this is not the case for "you will be comforted" by your relationship with Him because the Holy Spirit is with you. This again focuses on the kingdom of Heaven, not of this Earth.

*Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.* That seems to be contrary to what we are trained to believe about ourselves. *Blessed are the meek.* What does that mean? Does it mean for us to be weak? No. It is a reminder for us that our daily attitudes and actions need to reflect the humbleness of our relationship with Jesus Christ. We will inherit the earth through our relationship with Jesus Christ and focusing on the Kingdom of Heaven, not seeing Christ as a possession or something we control. If we focus on the things of God and the kingdom of Heaven, then the things we are working with and at on this earth will be claimed for His glory and purpose, that God's will be done.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.* What is your desire today? Do you desire to hunger and thirst for the righteousness that God wants you to possess, a righteousness that reflects your walk with God? C.S. Lewis also said that, "when we resist temptation we

know righteousness; His perfection, how He resisted all temptation without sin and it is in His righteousness that He went to the Cross.” It is in His hunger and thirst, that we too hunger and thirst for righteousness. If you give in to temptation easily, then you do not know what it takes to resist temptation. If you resist temptation, then you know what it is to have righteousness in your life. All of us should desire to have that righteousness lived out loud - the desire to do the right thing. Christ tells us that, if we desire those things, then we will be filled. We will receive a personal benefit from being filled with the presence of Christ. What happens when we are living a righteous life? Even though we are aware of things that may be wrong, our whole world seems to be good and right when our attitude is reflective of that righteousness we have in Christ. We are filled with that peace that passes all understanding. What a wonderful world it would be if we could all desire to live in that righteousness. Let’s dream a little more.

*Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.* I think that is simple and straight forward. Have you shown mercy to someone else? Have you exercised that forgiveness? If you have, then you also will be shown mercy? You too will be shown forgiveness.

*Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.* How do we get there? How do we have that desire to be pure in heart? It’s when we lift our spirits and daily desire the presence of Christ that reflects that pure in heart because we are trying to live a righteous life. We are trying to show mercy to others. We are trying to hunger and thirst for those things that God wants us to have. When we are hurting, we know we can turn to Christ and be comforted with the presence of His spirit. Our desire is to be pure in heart. Our desire should be to see God in a very positive light and that the only way we can understand and do the things of God is to have that pureness in our hearts and minds.

*Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the Sons of God.* Are you a peacemaker? Are you a peacemaker in the lives of your family, in the lives of your co-workers? Do you see the best and desire the best for those that are around you? Do you desire to have a win-win situation? Do you seek the best in others? If you do, you are a peacemaker! *Blessed are those that are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.* Do

people make fun of you because you try to do the right thing? Do people make fun of you because you are trying to live a righteous life in Christ? Do people say bad things about you because you try to live that righteous life? Often people seek to tear you down because they know there is something different in you. They try to bring you down to their level because you make them feel uncomfortable just because you are trying to do the right thing. You are trying to be good and point out the truth in people - not to be better than them but to say, hey look, there is a better way! There's a better life where we can get along with each other even with all our differences. Do you point out the truth that the Father has taught you in terms of your relationship with Him through his Son, Jesus Christ? Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ. It is interesting how people are so quick to point out when we make a mistake, when we do something that is not righteous or make the wrong decision. Yes, people quickly point that out, but we are reminded that we are to rejoice and be glad because "great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Do we look for the truth in our lives? Do we look for the truth within our own families? Do we look for the truth within society? Do we desire to show others the truth that we have found through Jesus Christ? Christ tells us that we are to be that light that needs to shine in such a way in all of our relationships that it reveals and reflects the Kingdom of Heaven not this earth; that we reflect the Kingdom of Heaven and what we believe. If we believe in what we say we believe, our attitudes and actions will reflect the Kingdom of Heaven not the Kingdom of Earth. God wants us to respond to be that light, to be the presence of Christ in our world today. An example in my life is what happened this week in several of the meetings I attended. It was rewarding when casual conversations turned to the need to pray, which turned to prayer for the lives of officials that govern over us, personal needs and also seeking God's will in all things. Often prayer is the practice of trusting God with our dreams.

If we must have a dream or a vision for our lives, and I think all of us should, it is to reveal the Kingdom of Heaven to all people; to go into all the world and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to reveal that light; to show forth the Kingdom of Heaven because, when we reveal the Kingdom of Heaven,

all the little problems that we have on this earth will work themselves out, because we are being that light. We are being that example and, even though we say, “Man, things are just not the way I think they should be,” if we turn to heaven, if we turn to our relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, and focus on things above, then we will have our perspective come into focus that is essential in resolving those problems and situations. We are given the assurance, peace and discernment that God wants us to have because our attitude mirrors the things of God. It is as we walk with God that we have and remain at peace. We can be that light for ourselves and for others. Dream on!

AMEN





## Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 3:3-13

- 3 First, be aware of this: scoffers will come in the last days to scoff, following their own lusts,
- 4 saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have been since the beginning of creation.”
- 5 They willfully ignore this: long ago the heavens and the earth existed out of water and through water by the word of God.
- 6 Through these the world of that time perished when it was flooded by water.
- 7 But by the same word the present heavens and earth are held in store for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.
- 8 Dear friends, don’t let this one thing escape you: with the Lord one day is like 1,000 years, and 1,000 years like one day.
- 9 The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.
- 10 But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that [day] the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed.
- 11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, [it is clear] what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness
- 12 as you wait for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be on fire and be dissolved, and the elements will melt with the heat.
- 13 But based on His promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell.

AMEN

## Musing: Forward Thinking

Are you looking forward to that new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells, or do you have something more immediate that captivates your future interests? I know that on holidays we usually plan several events when our family comes together and celebrates. This also involves a time of worship for all of us on holy days.

I think all of us look forward to something. Within our own everyday lives, as we pause and think about what our life is like, I believe all of us should have something to look forward to. God always wants us to have something to look forward to, especially in anticipation of His return. We do not know when that is going to be, but we do know that someday it will happen because of what has been fulfilled in us.

God is consistently fulfilling the promises that He has made with all of us and with the prophets of old. He fulfilled those promises to them. He has fulfilled and is fulfilling those promises to us. God is committed to us, and that is something we can always look forward to. Perhaps we're looking for something else that gives us something to look forward to. It may be something that happened that we consider supernatural. It might be we are looking forward to applying and benefiting from an investment, idea, or concept.

In my realm, I find some people looking forward to the science of medicine and hoping that it will take care of physical and mental needs of patients. Others are looking forward to ministry and helping to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of others. It all takes faith. In that, we must understand that humility is a basic requirement. I know that I struggle with maintaining humility in some circumstances.

Humility means having the ability, power and authority to carry out action but making an active choice not to do so, because, to do so would not be in the best interest of others. That is humility. I think many times we think of humility as being meek and mild and not being strong or not having courage. But the correct definition plays out when we have the power and ability to show our strength and unleash our aggressiveness but make a conscious decision not to do so because we love the people that are around us. We choose to exhibit the



righteousness that God wants us to have and make that choice not to “swing our sword!” That is showing and demonstrating humility.

Humility is a spiritual principle that goes with our faith. We hold on to our faith in believing what God has done for us through his Son, Jesus Christ. It’s something that we look forward to because, as God gave the promises to the prophets in the past, and know that He has provided purpose through Jesus Christ, we believe that God will continue to keep His promises until His plan and will are complete.

The other day, I was thinking about the song from Garth Brooks, “Unanswered Prayers,” and reflecting on things that have occurred in my life. There were many circumstances that did not work out the way that I had planned and prayed. We pray for things and want God to answer them a certain way and He either says “yes”, “no” or “maybe”. Then we say, “God, you’re not answering our prayers!” The reality is that God does answer our prayers but many times we feel the prayers are unanswered because God knows what is best for us. That is one way He keeps His promise.

As we look at our relationships, we should always be looking forward, rather than backward. The other day I was reading an article that stated that one of the things you need to do if you are feeling unhappy is smile because, if you are smiling more, then you’ll be happier. Does that make sense? I think it does. I know that, when I struggle, I walk around with a frown. I have this solemn look on my face and sometimes my grandchildren think that Grandpa is so serious.

It’s a reminder to me that I need to smile more, that I need to reflect God in my life through his Son, Jesus Christ, because He has kept His promise to me - a promise that means something more, that goes beyond what we believe in and what we see. It is the faith that God has given to us.

The next question we should ask is, are we keeping our promises to God? That’s a question that I asked myself while looking in the mirror the other day. Am I keeping the promises that God wants me to keep with Him? My truthful and honest answer was, “No, I’m not keeping all of them the way that I should be.” If I am not keeping the promises that I should have with God, how do I expect God to keep His promises to me? But yet God does keep His promises, regardless of what my conduct would, could or should be. Sure, He wants us to be better because, the more righteous I live in my everyday life, the better my life truly is. When I’m living for God, things are going okay. They’re not necessarily perfect and I have my challenges every day, but yet I know that, as

I reflect God's righteousness in my life, I'm able to overcome those challenges and those difficulties that I face.

God remains in control and is keeping His promises to and through you and me. We just have to be able to see them. We have to be able to understand them and we can't do that unless we are making the sincere effort to live a righteous life that reflects the promises that God has made to us.

When we look in the depths of the universe and science, there has to be some type of creator keeping His Word. Then and most importantly as we look within our own lives, there must be that Creator keeping His promises. This mindset generates the faith that God wants us to have and empowers us to walk in humility. As we humble ourselves before God by acknowledging that He is keeping His promises, we see the light of God, which illuminates the different things that we need to work on to make our lives better. Many times, God uses other people to pose the question to us about how we're doing.

Each year, whether I'm in the military or working at a medical center, I have a job performance evaluation. I don't know about you, but I hate evaluations of any kind. As I'm getting older, I hate evaluations even more. Don't tell me how to do my job. Don't tell me what I need to do. I am doing all the correct things. I am doing all the things that I'm supposed to be doing. How dare you evaluate me for what I do. You don't even have a clue of what I do. Does anybody feel that way when they get evaluated? There you go, yeah!

But sometimes in those evaluations, when I'm honest and open and not defensive, not angry, not wanting to have that confrontation, I look at the evaluation and of course, in a spirit that comes from God, not from me, I say, "You know what? I need to make things better. I can improve upon certain things that I'm doing right now." That is the challenge that motivates forward thinking.

God uses those external things to challenge us. Maybe there are things that we can do better and improve upon, because we should never stop growing. Whatever the case, whatever spiritual principle we are learning, whatever we are learning in terms of our faith, whatever we're learning emotionally, whatever we're learning just in terms of knowledge of our understanding of the world around us, we should never stop growing. If we stop growing, then we will begin to die.

God always wants us to keep growing, always to look forward to something greater and better than ourselves; to keep looking forward because God is keeping His promises and those fulfilled promises control of our circum-

stances and world. God is in control of this universe. God is in control of this world. God is in control of my life whether I like or want to admit it. In all of this, God also gives me a range of influence in the decision-making process about my own life. God still gives us the ability to make choices. We are not robots. Rather, God wants us to exercise our free will in the perfect liberty that God has given us through His son, Jesus Christ.

I think what's wonderful about this is, as we think about the promises kept, the most important is God is committed to His grace for you and me. He is firmly committed to His grace that He wants us and everybody to have and use. The Scriptures tell us on several occasions that God is postponing perhaps the day of the Lord, His second coming, because He wants more people to come to know Him.

For those of us that believe in Jesus Christ and have accepted Him as Lord and Savior of our lives, we show that we are not looking forward when we start murmuring by saying, "How long, oh, Lord? When are you going to come back? I'm sick and tired of this life!" When I say those things, I know it comes from a selfish heart. I'm not thinking about the person that does not know the Lord. I'm not thinking about the person that has not received the same grace that I have received, that you have received. I am moving backward, not forward.

God wants us to live looking and moving forward. God wants to fulfill His promise through us, by us sharing the Word with others, by sharing our own personal testimony of how we made mistakes, have done things wrong, committed sin, but yet God still loves us. God still forgives us. God still gives us that grace and it's nothing that we have done to earn it. It is His free gift to us, a gift that we embrace, a gift that we hold on to that propels us forward. It is then we see the light within and understand in our own lives that His promise is kept and fulfilled because of His grace. We just have to believe in it, turn it on so we can see the things that God wants us to see, so that we can accept the evaluations of others as just concerns to make us better.

Here is a challenge to each of us. Are we willing to listen to others and put our egos aside? Are we willing to say, "You are right, and I have no excuses"? "You are right and I am the one responsible"? When we are willing to own our actions, that's where our true beliefs come into play of who we are, what we believe in. Do we say to God, "Lord, I just messed up. I made mistakes. I was lazy. I was selfish. I knew what I was doing, my pride, my arrogance. But God, I own it"?

It's very humbling when we claim responsibility for our actions. However, when we own what we have done, we can own what God has done through His grace. That is why God wants us to be in that place where we do that willingly every day. When we own it, we see that He owns us. We live in that place where we can see the promises kept that God has put in our lives, we see and benefit from the relationship of others. We know that God is in control because He has created all things from the beginning of time. We acknowledge that God is Holy and desires us to live holy and godly lives.

Once again, it's not going to be perfect, but God wants us to live holy lives because that is truly the best way for us to live, to make the attempt every day, to make the attempt to say, "Lord, I just want the light to shine in my life. I want to live in that light. I want to live in your promise kept through Your grace. God, I know I'm not going to always get it right but yet, God, I'm going to own it. I'm going to take responsibility for it. I'm not going to have any excuses. I'm going to be committed to what I believe in, in You." I promise you that a transformation will take place every day. Your way will be lit with His light to see and move forward!

As we begin to the light of His grace and look forward to the next day, we won't be afraid of the future. Are you like me at times, afraid of the future and what's going to happen? "God, am I going to make it into heaven? Do You still love me? How could You still love me, somebody like me, because You know I'm a sinner?" But God says, "Yes, I still love you." God still loves me. You don't have anything to fear in the future. You don't have anything to fear about tomorrow.

We're going to have challenges. We're going to have obstacles. We're going to have things that we have to work through, but once again, it's an opportunity for us to grow. It's an opportunity for us to get closer to God. It's an opportunity for us to mature in God, because in doing so, we truly do exhibit and show the promises kept by God in our lives and the promises kept that we make together. Through God's grace, through God's love, we find God's purpose for each and every one of us every day. Remember, light is always in front of you and a shadow is always in back. Forward, march!

AMEN



## Scripture Reading: Matthew 14:13-21

- 13** When Jesus heard about it, He withdrew from there by boat to a remote place to be alone. When the crowds heard this, they followed Him on foot from the towns.
- 14** As He stepped ashore, He saw a huge crowd, felt compassion for them, and healed their sick.
- 15** When evening came, the disciples approached Him and said, “This place is a wilderness, and it is already late. Send the crowds away so they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”
- 16** “They don’t need to go away,” Jesus told them. “You give them something to eat.”
- 17** “But we only have five loaves and two fish here,” they said to Him.
- 18** “Bring them here to Me,” He said.
- 19** Then He commanded the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples [gave them] to the crowds.
- 20** Everyone ate and was filled. Then they picked up 12 baskets full of left-over pieces!
- 21** Now those who ate were about 5,000 men, besides women and children.

AMEN

## Musing: Give Me A Break

You will notice something when you attend chapel where I am Chaplain: it is very quiet. What is interesting to me is that I hear the noise of quiet. You may not notice it, but I will sit up on the platform and listen to the quiet. As I am praying or singing, it is quiet up at the front of the Chapel. This speaks to me of a principle in our Christian walk - to be still in my soul and listen to the quietness of God in my life. Maybe it is an opportunity to step back and to consider the different things I am doing, the noise, routine, challenges and my scheduled appointments. It is an opportunity for me to receive peace by listening to the quietness of God.

One year, my wife and I had a wonderful time vacationing in Hawaii with my former commanding officer who was a colonel in the marine corps and is now retired. He decided several years ago that I was still his chaplain and wanted to vacation with me, so my wife and I took him up on his generous offer and joined him and his wife in Hawaii. I became aware during that trip of the further need for situational awareness; anyone who has served in the military knows what that means. This realization came as I had to focus on the principle of checks and balances, that even in new surroundings we still have responsibilities that need our care. While on this vacation, I received several calls and texts about the variety of issues and my wife also received several calls, emails, and texts because of her work responsibilities. We found ourselves using checks and balances trying to blend work and pleasure because we were in Hawaii with our friends and wanted to enjoy the opportunity for fun and relaxation but also needed to exercise the responsibilities that we have in our everyday lives. I think in the same way as we go about our lives this week, we need to have checks and balances about what is important to us.

We see this exemplified here in Scripture when Jesus was actually tired, needed some rest and to get away from the crowd because He just needed to have a break from the people. Yet, as He went by boat to another place, people from other towns found out where He was and came out to meet him, to have discussions, hear him speak and see Him heal the sick. Instead of saying, "No, no, no I'm not going to do this. I'm here taking a break, I'm on a vacation,

I've been preaching for the last couple days, please go back home, I'm not going to have anything to do with you, give me a break," Jesus was moved with compassion and ministered to them. Even though perhaps He was dealing with personal pain and sorrow and was emotionally and spiritually exhausted, He understood that the greater responsibility that He had in His life was maintaining His personal mission. I believe that Jesus understood the commitment that He had made, not only to the Father but the people, and so He served the people with compassion.

In the same way, as we measure the checks and balances in our lives, regardless of how tired, fatigued and hungry we might be, we have a responsibility to be compassionate toward one another, and sometimes that is very difficult. I know that there are certain times of the day when I am snappy and I say things, not out of anger, but a quick retort when I'm annoyed by what's being asked of me, so I respond in a certain way. Afterwards I feel badly that I just did that, I didn't mean to say it that way, I was just tired and fatigued, or maybe needed another cup of coffee; we use all those little excuses to justify our actions. Yet the Lord reminds us that, regardless of where we're at, we have the responsibility to be compassionate to one another, and that is a standard for us that we need to uphold because it reflects who we are deep down inside as Christians and followers of Jesus Christ. Who we are as disciples really comes down to how compassionate we are with people and how we love each other.

I believe this requires us to have checks and balances in how we minister to others because there are times that compassion kind of dries up and we experience compassion fatigue; yet we still need to act in love. Jesus tells us in the scriptures again and again that our life is not about ourselves, so we need to implement those checks and balances to show and demonstrate the compassion with responsibility that God wants us to have. I know that at times in my life I've received ministry called "tough love," where people told me "no" because they knew "no" was the best answer for me. I'm thankful that there were times when God practiced tough love, when He told me, "No!" There were times when I tried every way I possibly could to get what I wanted; I tried a window, digging underneath the proverbial fence, and each way was barred or blocked, which prevented me from going further, because God was telling me "no".

God still practices tough love on me on a regular basis because I am so stubborn and pigheaded that my pride really gets in the way until God reminds



me that I need to have those checks and balances, the responsibility to be compassionate. One particular outing in Hawaii required us to travel this road that is very difficult to travel because of all the tourists not being prepared where the road becomes one lane and is unsafe. The locals don't like the fact that most tourists drive like tourists, and the locals like getting from point A to B as quickly as possible. As I was driving on the way back, I was doing everything I was supposed to be doing. I was driving carefully, managing my speed when a local came up behind me and started beeping his horn, flashing his lights and started to use certain offensive language. So, I signaled for him to pass, but he continued on with certain inappropriate expressions as he went down the road. At this point, my wife could immediately tell that I was getting upset, and as my car started to speed up a little bit, she reached over and grabbed my arm. She didn't need to say anything. It was her way of reminding me that I did not need to stoop to this person's level.

To me, my wife exemplified the checks and balances we have when the Holy Spirit offers that reassuring hand that reaches out to us when we want to ratchet up the situation, allowing our anger to take control. Our pride tells us, "Hey, I need stand up to the situation and defend myself, there's an injustice here and I need to do something about it, this is just not fair." That is when we can count on the Holy Spirit reminding us through those checks and balances that His hand is there for us because God is always walking by our side, in all of the circumstances and challenges we are facing. We just need to be able to feel that hand of His Spirit, to feel the direction that it provides to us, to discern the checks and balances that we need to have and the resources that God available to each and every one of us.

The responsibility that we have in terms of compassion to each other is all of ours, not just my job or yours, it's everyone's opportunity. In this story, I can envision the disciples coming to Jesus, as I think all of us, would saying, "Hey, these people need to go eat, we don't have anything. Lord it's not our problem that they didn't bring any food. It's not our problem that you're out here in the middle of nowhere, in the wilderness, so they have to go back to their towns and the villages to get something to eat. So, send them away because we have nothing for them to eat!" I use that excuse sometimes against other people by saying, "Your poor planning does not make it my crisis!" But, Jesus said to His disciples, "No, this is not the case, it's our responsibility to be compassionate; therefore, we need to feed them. We need to provide the resources for them.

It is striking to me that Jesus did not question anyone's judgment, He just asked, "What do you have here to eat? Let's take a look at our resources, whatever they might be." Then during this process, all of a sudden, we see in this story how Jesus was empowered to bless the resources He'd been given, and it began to multiply and exceed its original value. I believe that, as Christians, we have these checks and balances available to us, but do we have the vision in the same way that Christ had of compassion and of His power? I believe we often put our limitations on that supernatural power and, sometimes, limit God and what He can do, but we still have access to His power.

God wants us to be compassionate with each other on a daily basis, to share that responsibility with each other and unleash His power into the situations. I also know that it is not easy and, as I am driving on the highway or the street, something will happen that will challenge my compassion for my fellow drivers, but God will utilize His checks and balances to help remember His compassion and power. I would like for it to be that like that all of the time, but I know myself and I cannot guarantee that I will always act appropriately, but I should, because it is my responsibility to show compassion to whomever comes my way, in the same way Jesus showed compassion to whomever came His way. That is the vision that God wants us to have and embrace, the principles and power by which God wants us to live.

There is such a blessing that we can give to other people as we do that and, many times, that blessing bounces back to us. As I have shared in other musings, the first thing we need to do is to love ourselves as God's creation by identifying who we are in Him, which is further realized by checks and balances. I need to recognize those situations that make me feel uncomfortable, and I have many of them, as God's tools of compassion.

There are times in certain situations, types of groups and circumstances when I have panic attacks. So, consequently, in those checks and balances I need to comprehend my spiritual situational awareness and be able to identify those things I need to work through or around. This again was evident when I was talking to somebody a few weeks ago about the various circumstances and he offered a suggestion that I should better prepare myself. I asked him, "What happens when panic happens and you're not prepared?" He said, "Well..." and then he proceeded through a rather lengthy series of recommendations that boils down to the compassion that God wants me to have for all circumstances.

The key for me which applies to everyone is to begin every day committed in my heart and life to be responsible for showing compassion to other people. God wants us all to have courage and not be afraid to go out in the world, aware of our own checks and balances, boundaries and emotional limitations, relying on Him to take us beyond those challenges. We must look to God to take the resources and relationships that He has given us and allow the compassion and love that God wants us to have to increase and multiply.

Ask yourself on a daily basis, how committed am I to God? Does my commitment to Him represent an ongoing relationship which allows me to be vulnerable when I face those challenges? This means that we allow ourselves to be open to each other even when there is a risk and the potential for hurt, knowing that we can't find out who we truly are unless we allow ourselves to be vulnerable with each other. Now, I don't particularly want to go through those circumstances again or feel that emotional pain and hurt, but I learned that going through those circumstances made me stronger and becomes a reflection of my commitment that I made to God through his Son Jesus Christ. When I go before God in worship, singing hymns in the Chapel or reading scripture and praying together, I am allowing myself to be vulnerable to God and others.

You are taking a risk when you go to chapel because, as we worship and believe the Holy Spirit is directing our lives, God might speak to us corporately or to you as an individual in a very interesting way. It may be through the hymns we sing, prayers that are offered, or through something said during the sermon that speaks to you and causes you to become vulnerable by revealing to you the truth that God is still working in your life. That's when you understand the checks and balances that God wants you to trust - His grace, that perfect love, liberty and freedom that God gives to you on a regular basis. This reveals the compassion that God has for each and every one of us through his Son Jesus Christ.

AMEN



## Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

- 1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or like some, do we need letters of recommendation to you or from you?
- 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, recognized and read by everyone,
- 3 since it is plain that you are Christ's letter, produced by us, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tablets but on tablets that are hearts of flesh.
- 4 We have this kind of confidence toward God through Christ:
- 5 not that we are competent in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our competence is from God.
- 6 He has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit produces life.

AMEN

## Musing: Imperfect Competence

A few weeks ago, I attended some training that I coordinated to present leadership in a specific way. The training was with a group of chaplains, chaplain assistants, and chaplain candidates. I had asked my former commanding officer, who is a retired Marine Corps colonel, to come and provide some training on leadership. I asked him specifically to present the training in such a way that it had nothing to do with theology or philosophy; rather, to provide an academic assessment and practical application of what truly is servant leadership. He said, “That’s a tough request that you’ve given me.” I said, “Well, sir, I know that you can handle tough requests.” In response, he put together a small training module, in which he stressed three things.

One, as a leader, you must have competence in what you know and what you believe in. Two, you must have confidence, and that you get your confidence from the competence that you have been able to obtain. Three, because you have competence that leads to confidence, you are able as a leader to make decisive decisions for yourself and also for those that you are leading. The essence of these three key elements is competence, confidence and decisiveness. He stressed the fact that this cycle is an ongoing process. The learning process never stops because, if your competence stops, if your learning stops, then your confidence begins to wane. It becomes less and less. If your confidence begins to wane, then the decisiveness of your decision-making process becomes less and less, and you find yourself in a situation where you either are unable to, or you can’t, make the right decision in a timely manner.

The Scriptures that we have read this morning are about the competence that we must have in our relationship with Jesus Christ. That’s where we need to begin. I ask you and I ask me that question. What is the competence that we have in Christ? Are you competent? Am I competent in my relationship with Jesus Christ? If we are competent in what we believe in as followers of Jesus Christ, then you and I will be confident in our daily walk with God, in our following of Jesus Christ. Then, when we are in situations where we need to

make important and crucial decisions in a timely manner, we will make them decisively because of the competence that we have in Christ that gives us the confidence that we need to make the decisions decisively, because we know that we are following the will of God for our lives. How is your competence today? Your competence in Christ?

Our competence in Christ comes from the experience of knowing Christ, so I need to ask, do you know Christ, do I know Christ, in a way that gives us that reassurance and knowledge to be competent as a follower of Jesus Christ? If you have that knowledge, if you are growing in that competence in Christ, then you and I should exhibit, and we should be able to validate, our relationship with God through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

As we validate the presence of God, as our competence grows in what we do and how we follow Jesus Christ, then we see and we understand the truth that Christ represents to us, and it becomes relevant. The competence that we have in Christ is valid, but not only that, it is also relevant to our lives. Everything we do, everything that we say, because if it does not reflect the relevance of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ, then we truly do not have a competence and truly understanding in what it is to be a Christian, because it has to be relevant. It has to be valid. It has to be experienced, because if it is not any of those things, then we truly don't have the competence that God wants us to have through his Son, Jesus Christ.

As we have read the Scriptures here, the letter is to the Corinthians, specifically asking them whether they exhibit the competence that has been shown to them by the instruction and by the training that they have received, by the lives that they have seen led in their presence? It doesn't come from a letter of recommendation or introduction. On the contrary, it comes by the exhibit of their lives.

The other day I had to write a letter of recommendation for someone, and I wrote those things that I knew about them, truthfully and honestly. In my recommendation letter, I talked about the qualifications, I talked about who they were as a person, but it was those things that I experienced personally. It wasn't something far off, something beyond, if you will, just their credentials, but just who they were as a person.

In the same way, the recommendation here is not from a letter of recommendation, not something that is written, but something that comes from the heart, something that is exhibited in how they present themselves to others.

Their presentation reveals the competence that they have in Christ, because, in that competence, we see the knowledge that God wants us to have. When we enter into that knowledge, we come to a deeper understanding of Christ, and when we are performing the daily tasks of our lives, not only do we validate that relationship, but we also demonstrate the relevance of Christ in our lives. We do that by introducing others to Christ through our own lives.

Now one thing I need to stress here. You and I will never be perfect in this process. Does God ask of us to be perfect? Yes, but God knows that we will never be perfect. It is in our imperfection that God reminds us, again and again and again, to never give up in our relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ. If we keep trying, keep going on, keep going forward, we truly are exhibiting the competence that God wants us to have through his Son. Because of our own imperfections, and people see that we're working on those imperfections, we introduce others to Jesus Christ. It's not the perfections that people see in us that bring people to Christ. It is people seeing the imperfections of our lives that we are working on, with the help of God, through the presence of his Holy Spirit in our lives, that presents others with that personal introduction to Christ.

Think about that for a minute. It is your imperfections that God uses. It is in my weaknesses that God uses so others can be introduced to Jesus Christ. I think it's important for us to know that because, as we are pursuing our desire to have a competence in Jesus Christ, we find ourselves in situations where we know that we have to surrender our will to God. As we talked about before, the whole idea of competence, confidence and decisiveness only truly comes when we surrender ourselves to what we believe in, when we understand that, as we surrender our will to God's will, it is to make us better.

The only thing that gets in the way between you and God is you. The only thing that gets in my way between me and God is me. When we personally surrender, once again, we are doing the thing that we need to do to increase our competence. We are experiencing Christ when we surrender, we are validating our relationship with Christ when we surrender, and we are demonstrating the relevance of Christ in our lives when we surrender, because we are showing in our lives that, as we increase in competence, we become intimate with God. We know God more and more, through his Son, Jesus Christ, and we achieve, not for our own design, or not through our own strength, an excellence of knowing God in Christ.



As our competence increases, we will have a sense of courage in what we believe in, a sense of understanding that, as we introduce others to Jesus Christ, we will be able to do so in such a way that we will not be afraid of our message, because we will tell them through the story of our lives.

The Corinthians were showing and demonstrating what they believed in Christ by the story of their lives. In fact, the title for the sermon today is simply this, “Chapel service story today.” We are sharing in a story today, and in that story, we are trying to pursue and increase our competence in Jesus Christ. We are trying to pursue that excellence in knowing Christ, and we do that because as an act of worship, we come together, we praise God, we sing hymns, we pray to God, we listen to his Word, and this is our story today in this chapel. Our story today is for us to increase in our competence in knowing Christ, because we know that is the beginning point. If we want to make our lives better, we do so by increasing our competence in Christ, because, as we increase that competence, we have access to deeper depths of understanding the presence of God in our lives.

As we get deeper in knowing God, we just see again and again the validation, the relevance, the knowledge that we have, the acceptance that we need to have, and we actually begin to surrender more things in our lives, because we begin to hunger and thirst for the knowledge of knowing Christ closer, intimately. In doing so, we achieve an excellence in our lives, not in a sense of excellence that the world measures, but the excellence that you and I can achieve in being followers of Jesus Christ. Following our true course, following our true path, not in the things that we do, but who we are in our own individual personal identity in our relationship to God. It is not those things that are on the outside, but it is the personal identity of who we are on the inside, in which we should seek the excellence that God wants us to have.

Consider these things today and this week. Consider your competence in Christ. How is that competence doing? How is that competence growing? What are you doing with the competence that you have in Christ? A key indication of your competence in Christ is your confidence in Christ. If you cannot be confident in your relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ, then you need to grow and increase your competence. It is something that I am doing every day, to increase my competence, because I know that, in my own individual life, there are times when I lack confidence in Christ in certain situ-

ations. That tells me that I can be more competent in knowing Christ, so I, too, am working on my competence.

When we are faced with situations in our lives, our competence needs to be increased if we don't feel that we have the confidence that God wants us to display in those relationships, so it is my hope and prayer this morning, as we have told this story today in this chapel, that it will be exhibited in your own personal lives, because, in so doing, you are demonstrating in your hearts and in your actions the competence that you have in Christ through your own personal story.

AMEN





## Scripture Reading: Matthew 20:20-28

- 20** Then the mother of Zebedee's sons approached Him with her sons. She knelt down to ask Him for something.
- 21** "What do you want?" He asked her. "Promise," she said to Him, "that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and the other on Your left, in Your kingdom."
- 22** But Jesus answered, "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" "We are able," they said to Him.
- 23** He told them, "You will indeed drink My cup. But to sit at My right and left is not Mine to give; instead, it belongs to those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."
- 24** When the 10 [disciples] heard this, they became indignant with the two brothers.
- 25** But Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles dominate them, and the men of high position exercise power over them.
- 26** It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,
- 27** and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave;
- 28** just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life-a ransom for many."

AMEN

## Musing: “You Call Yourself a Christian?”

This past week, I attended a secular management training which was about servant leadership. I was seated at a table with a lady from a Medical Center who also happened to be a Christian. She said, “Wow, we know who the best servant leader is, don’t we?” Of course, she was referring to Jesus Christ.

There were a couple of articles from this training that we were required to read. I want to highlight a few quotes from them so you will get an understanding that people are desiring servant leadership, even in secular models. One of the articles states, “Who is a servant leader? A servant leader is any leader who is focused on identifying and meeting the needs of others rather than trying to acquire power, wealth, and fame for one’s self. Servant leaders love people and enjoy helping others, which brings meaning and satisfaction in their lives and work.” Wow, that’s pretty powerful stuff! That’s almost scriptural and, in one sense, it is. When we think about the idea of being a servant, as Christ is telling his disciples, it does require sacrifice on our part.

This whole idea of who is going to be sitting at the left hand and right hand of Christ is not a new issue. This power play by the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John) is something we all do within our families and workplace – some of us just do it more subtly. There is an old saying, that wherever you have more than two people, you have politics. The disciples were no different. Notice what Christ does in this situation - He brings them together and tells them their purpose is to serve, not to be served. Jesus declares that their purpose is to be servants and, if they want to be first, they must be last. Just as the disciples, you must be that servant.

In every branch of the military that I have served, there is a tradition that the senior officer always eats last. I remember one time I was with a battalion when our new commander stepped into the chow line first. I tell you, you could hear the rumble! It was like a wave went through that line because everybody knew the tradition. Even though he was new, he should have been around long enough to understand and know the tradition. Maybe he forgot or was too

busy, but it immediately was noticed when he stepped into that chow line first. The Sergeant Majors of the different units that was there immediately took note and the Battalion Sergeant Major couldn't believe what he was seeing. The significance of the senior officer eating last is a good tradition that shows the example of service. It may be a small one, but it is an important one, because if you are a senior officer, you should always first make time to take care of your Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen. That's the tradition and just the way it is in the military.

Christ is challenging his disciples and us to be that example of service and sacrifice. All of us at times have our own self-interest, but is your prevailing attitude throughout your life one of self-interest or of service - an attitude in which you let others go first? I think a lot of time we get so busy with our self-interest, just as this Battalion Commander, that we overlook what we should be. We disregard this truth that we should be a servant to all.

As a follower of Jesus Christ; student, instructor, pupil, or apprentice, all should follow the teachings of Christ as his disciples. This is one teaching that He makes clear to all of us in terms of His desire for us first to serve others instead of ourselves. I think a lot of it is just an attitude adjustment. Do you feel more important than the next person? Are you more important than the person you just casually meet on the street, in a restaurant, grocery store, or waiting to get gas? I know there are times we get in a hurry and so focused that we kind of zone out other things and people. We think about only our self-interest. That happens to all of us, but is it a pattern about who you are as a person? Is it that you only think about#1? Perhaps it is like the old adages we hear all the time - "you only go around once in life" or "you owe it to yourself," "stay ahead of the competition," and "look out for numero uno!"

We don't have to look very hard to see examples of self-interest. Any time you turn on the television or look on the internet, there's always something trying to attract you and your self-interest in terms of what you need, usually over other people. If we think about it, our self-interest usually costs us something, not just the monetary aspects but something far more important. Our self-interest cheapens the relationships that we have with other people, which are far more important than any type of monetary wealth we could obtain. We lose the relationships that God has placed in our lives when we have such an attitude that totally dominates our lives. Just think about that for ourselves. Do we truly want to be around a selfish person? I don't know about you, but I am

attracted to people that think of others rather than themselves. I think about people in my life that are concerned about what is going on in my life and in the lives of others because they have a servant heart. They have an attitude of service. What powerful relationships you could have if you put others first instead of yourself!

Christ actually is giving us an example of service and sacrifice which benefits personal relationships. Simply, divisive walls come down when we think of serving others. When I'm having a bad time with somebody and they do something nice for me, or exhibit some type of service, wow! First, the little warning light goes on. Why are they doing this? Are they trying to get something from me? I see you laughing and smiling out there, but we have the tendency to be skeptical at times. You can see the relationship change when there is a continuing pattern of service, not because they want anything in return but because they are sincere. However, sometimes an attitude of service requires us to not always say yes, but to tell people no.

The other day I had someone come and ask me for something. I told them no and they actually said to me, "You sold out...you sold your soul to the Devil!" That was their response to me because I told them no. I must admit I took a step back and went, Wow! That was an interesting response from this person in terms of what they were asking. I explained to them why the answer was no. It was not out of harshness. I shared the bigger picture with them as to why the answer was no. It was not the answer that they wanted because it was asked out of their own self-interest.

I've had, "You call yourself a Christian!" thrown at me so many times, and you know what, thank you. I Am. I appreciate the compliment. When this person told me I had sold my soul to the Devil, I took a step back and realized, that's a compliment. Thank you. They said that to the same person I'm trying to follow in my life, Jesus Christ.

They called Jesus the Son of Beelzebub, the Son of Satan. Christ responded, "How can that be? A divided house cannot stand." Christ is our example of service and sacrifice to each other. We should try to emulate and follow the teachings of Christ, which at times is difficult, but we need to try. Try every day to have that attitude of service and if you fail today, tomorrow you have another opportunity to do something to show service. You have another opportunity to show that it is more than just your own personal self-interest. You

have another opportunity to influence someone you may never see again. This portrays the entirety of sacrifice.

Have you seen those commercials where somebody is always doing a kind act by paying it forward? It is opening the door or preventing someone from walking into the street when a car is coming. That is showing self-sacrifice. You may never see those people again, but you have exhibited the Christ-like example of being a servant. Christ, of course, has given us the greatest example of self-denial.

Now, there are somethings that are easier for me to give up. The example here of self-denial represents the reality of the willingness to surrender yourself in whatever circumstance you might have for the service of others. It is contrary to the way our society tells us to be, striving to acquire power, wealth, and fame. All of us know people that are out there purely for that purpose and only for that purpose. They are called narcissists. It's all about them. It's all about who they are and what they want. Christ is telling all of us not to be that way but to have a heart and mind that works to put others first. To have a heart and mind that reveals humility and which desires to serve and not to be served. Christ furthers the example by likening it to being a slave. That's a pretty drastic example! What Christ is saying here is that your service needs to be in a state of mind that says you are not doing it for profit or gaining something in return. You are doing it because it is your desire to serve others because that is the desire Christ has for you.

If we have come to know Christ as our personal savior, been set free from the bondages of sin, given that freedom through grace, then we need to show that freedom to others by how we interact with each other. We have been set free because of the ransom of Christ's death on the cross, burial, and resurrection. He has paid that ransom for each one of us. We have been set free and, because we have been set free, we need to be able to serve each other, to bring others to Christ so they too can be set free to serve. We should daily examine our behavior and thoughts in light of the truth of service versus our self-interests. We must develop a habit of serving each other by exercising Christ's teaching concerning putting others first over ourselves. When it becomes a habit, your relationships will be much more positive. The people that are negative toward you will turn positive because of your desire to serve. Your desire will be to show them sacrifice because of Christ's sacrifice for you.



Do you want to be that servant leader? Regardless of where you are at in your journey in life, you always have opportunities to be that servant leader, whether it is with your friends, family, co-workers, people where you work, or interacting with strangers that you will never see again. Being a servant leader by following our greatest example, Jesus Christ, can show others the way to Jesus Christ, where he gave the ultimate sacrifice, of giving His life for all. Consider the idea of serving others and not being served because that is what Christ wants us to be in all things.

AMEN





## Scripture Reading: John 13: 34

- 34** “I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another.

AMEN

## Musing: Oops, I Did it Again

In one of my occupations, I got into a little trouble. Yes, I am capable of getting in trouble and, yes, from time to time I get in trouble with the leadership. But, when you lead from the front, you're going to get into trouble. What was interesting about the trouble that I got into was, I did something without fully getting the permission that I was required to have because I thought it was the right thing to do. Then, all of a sudden, I realized I had made a mistake and had to deal with a series of emotions like, I should have known better, I'm mad at myself, that was stupid, etc. My emotions endured a roller coaster of ups and downs, peace and depression, and I ended up feeling angry about the circumstances.

As I've been thinking about my response to the circumstances that I created, I want to make it very clear that I own it, and, as we say in the military, no excuses! Even though I have no excuses, that doesn't mean I don't wrestle with those challenges about my decision-making process, and how others have responded to me. In fact, when I read the portion of scripture where it specifically talks about anger, "...and to not let your anger go down with the sun," God tells us very specifically that, if you are angry, you cannot exhibit the righteousness that God wants you to have in your life. This spoke to my heart, not only regarding the anger directed toward others, but also toward myself.

Do you ever get mad and angry at yourself? Do you ever get frustrated with yourself because you do something really stupid? If you do, then that portion of Scripture that applies to me applies to you as well. But, many times we go to bed angry at ourselves because of the circumstances, even when God tells us very specifically that we should never, never, never let the sun set on our anger. When we are angry, we cannot truly experience the righteousness that God has for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. If we are not making the attempt to exhibit the righteousness that God wants us to have, in no way will we ever truly follow the commandment that has been given to us about loving each other. If you're angry with yourself, your circumstances, or with people, how can you ever exhibit love to anyone, including the people that you truly love? When you are living through your anger, you're going to be holding

back the unconditional or complete love that God wants you to show. When we are angry, we are trying to figure out our own issues and not capable of loving unconditionally, the way that God wants us to love, because there will always be that emotional incompleteness.

Anger steals our motivation to love and causes us to hold something in reserve. If we really want the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to be exhibited in our lives, we need to be able to present that love to one another unconditionally, in such a way that we are honest about ourselves. When we do that, we are honest with those that are around us. That doesn't mean that we have perfection, for we will always be incomplete and never reach that goal of perfection that God has set for us, nor does it mean that we give up on ourselves or others. We have our best day when we love one another, which always begins the night before, when we put our thoughts to rest for the day. It's when we put our heads on that pillow, and ask ourselves, "Are you still angry with yourself, the circumstances, or others?" If you cannot settle those issues, then you will not be able to experience the love that God wants you to have, because your life will still be exhibiting some form of unrighteousness. The Scriptures tell us again and again that, when we face difficult encounters for which we may or may not be responsible, there's an over-arching and very specific directive that God provides for us, which is that we are to exercise love for one another.

I think all of us want and have the potential to be leaders. One of the best ways that I can tell you to exhibit that leadership is to exhibit the love of God. I also can think of no greater leader that I would ever follow than someone who truly had compassion and love for the people that they were leading. That doesn't mean that they were not strict or there wasn't discipline. I know the great respect that I have for the leaders whom I have served with in the military who exhibited compassion in their role as being a leader.

The other day I was watching a TED Talk when this executive was talking about how important it is to lead without your own personal ego. He went on to say how he was able to lead in various circumstances by participating with his employees, willing to work with them and hear and implement some of their ideas. He concluded his talk by sharing that creating this paradigm gave him the ability to lead in such a way that there was tremendous improvement in every area within the corporation that he was leading. When we look at Scripture, we see another example of leadership in how Christ led without ego. Have you

ever thought about how Jesus Christ is revealed to us through the Scriptures as a leader without ego and, because of that, was able to transform His followers?

If you and I claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, then the model that we are to follow is one of love. I'd like to give that to you in a sugar-coated fashion, that love would be easy and you would not have any problems and immediately your life would be transformed; that's nice but that's not reality. Love is something very difficult for us to do, because we always get in the way of the love that God wants us to have. It is impossible to totally, objectively look at our lives and say, "You know what, I just love everybody." I would say to you, "No, you don't. You don't love everybody. I know I could put you in situations with certain types of people, and see your buttons being pushed." What is more accurate in your life as a follower of Christ is, "Oops, I did it again! I did not respond in love."

As followers of Jesus Christ, God wants us to emulate the love that Christ showed for others. We look at Christ's love, the love that He gave His disciples who were people just like you and me. I don't think we realize and understand that they were just normal people living normal lives that God called to be His followers. In the same way, you and I are leading normal lives doing the things that we normally do, but the Spirit of God calls each and every one of us to be His followers.

The Spirit of God says to each and every one of us, "I want you to be part of who I am. I have led you to come to know the truth and you have accepted Christ as your personal Savior, and your life has been transformed. I now want you to love one another as best as you can, the way I have loved you." It is in that model of leadership where we see the humility that we need to exhibit as leaders.

As I have stated, humility means we have the power to do and say something, but we make the conscious decision not to do what we want but what God wants. Humility does not mean that we are powerless. On the contrary, humility means that we have the strength to do something, to respond and react, but choose to do what is in the best interest of whom we represent, Jesus Christ. Consequently, we choose to show humility. Christ was an example of that humility. He could have gotten himself off that cross as He had the angels at His beck and call to punish and decimate everyone that was mistreating Him, but He chose not to do so.

In addition, when we look to the Gospel for leadership, we not only see the humility we are to exhibit but also the patience. One of my Chaplains that I supervise asked me, “What’s the most profound thing that I’ve learned in my ministry and life?” I told him one word, “patience.” I then put a caveat on it and said, “I am just now beginning to learn and understand what patience is.” I didn’t tell him I have patience because I still don’t have it, but I am beginning to know what patience means. God wants us to strive for patience so we can move on and exercise forgiveness; that’s a big one.

Forgiveness is something we find very difficult to do because we have wrong misconceptions of what is forgiveness. Forgiveness is when we are in a situation or relationship, whether past or ongoing, where we do three things. One, remember that forgiveness is a canceled debt. Two, we do not exercise the right to get even. Three, we give up the attitude that you owe me. Can you do those three things in terms of exercising forgiveness? If we focus on what forgiveness is, exercising those three concepts, you and I, with the power of the Spirit of God, can exercise forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean that you are pretending that it is acceptable when somebody has wronged you; wrong will always be wrong and unacceptable. It doesn’t mean that you are not hurting from what took place and somehow, you’re going to be able to forget everything that has happened. No, on the contrary, you’re going to remember.

I am the type of person who remembers things that I have done wrong a long time ago. I still remember those things and I have to cut myself some slack, and I want to encourage you to do the same in terms of the whole process that you need to be able to forgive yourself as well. When we do that, we’re exactly modeling those three things Christ has done for us on the cross. It is in that model of Christ on the cross where we see the power that is in forgiveness within our own lives. As we experience all of these things and desire to serve and to follow God through these steps, that is when we achieve a level of understanding and insight that we never thought was possible. It’s like all of a sudden, the lights go on and we have a clearer vision of how God’s will is truly working in our lives.

Many times, we don’t feel God, wondering if He is truly working in our lives because it doesn’t appear or seem to be that way. I submit to you that God is working in your life as He is working in mine. We just need to be able to ask God to give us that spiritual understanding to see that He truly is working to

make us better, even with our occasional “oops” in relationships. Then, as we follow this Christ-like model of humility, patience, and forgiveness, we find ourselves exhibiting compassion, exhibiting the love that God truly wants us to show to each other. The reason why we are able to do that, as I mentioned before, we now have sufficient emotional energy because we are not hung up on anger, our ego and pride. When those negative emotions are no longer holding us back, we are able to exhibit and show the compassion that God wants us to freely give to one another, to exhibit His true love.

As a follower of Jesus Christ, we do those things because we are motivated by the example of Christ’s love. If you think about your own personal relationship with Jesus Christ, what did Christ do for you in the power of the Spirit? He introduced you to the Father God and, in that introduction, you saw that He was inviting you to be a part of His family. You and I are part of God’s family. There is an old saying, “You can pick your friends, but you’re stuck with your relatives!” You and I are stuck with one another as the family of God, and as one of my daughter’s-in-law says, “We get along relatively well.”

When you first came to know Christ as your personal Savior, all the bells were ringing, and you felt a burden was lifted from your shoulders and everything was finally right with the world. That’s exactly how God wants you to live every day, as the day you first met Jesus Christ. That’s what our motivation must be in order to carry out the mission that God wants us to do, to love each other. Those are the things that make us distinctive as followers of Jesus Christ and set us apart from the world. Those also are the things that make us attractive to others to want to follow Jesus Christ, as we have followed Him. That is our true calling.

As followers of Jesus Christ, following Christ’s leading in these areas gives us an opportunity to have the best possible life that we could have in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but also to attract others, so they too would come to know Christ as their personal Savior.

It’s my hope and prayer that we apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives, that we exhibit the leadership that God wants us to show for ourselves and others, a true expression and model of Himself.

AMEN





## Scripture Reading: Matthew 10:37-42

- 37 The person who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; the person who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.
- 38 And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.
- 39 Anyone finding his life will lose it, and anyone losing his life because of Me will find it.
- 40 "The one who welcomes you welcomes Me, and the one who welcomes Me welcomes Him who sent Me.
- 41 Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. And anyone who welcomes a righteous person because he's righteous will receive a righteous person's reward.
- 42 And whoever gives just a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple -I assure you: He will never lose his reward!"

AMEN

## Musing: The Parade Route

Have you ever had an “interesting” week where you are totally unprepared for those unexpected events? Those days, or even weeks when you think everything is going fine, in the right direction and the way it should be, and all of a sudden, boom! life happens, and you find yourself unprepared and not knowing how to respond to the situation?

To tell you the truth, sometimes I do not respond in a way that is compassionate or loving. I get frustrated and angry when I feel those “all of a sudden” situations that either I thought were resolved or about which I was not concerned. The most frustrating is when I suddenly have to fulfill the responsibilities and duties of others, because they failed to do their jobs. Either through their actions, inaction, or whatever the situation, I am left to clean up the mess!

Yes, I get frustrated and feel it even more when I am preparing for my Sunday morning message, because I always try to address and intertwine in my messages what’s currently happening in me. I find that there is a connection that people can make with me when they understand my feelings, because it reveals my personal struggles and insight into who I am. In doing so, I violate one of the principles that I learned in seminary, that, as the pastor, preacher or Chaplain, you never talk about yourself in front of the congregation because they will form judgments against you, which will limit the effectiveness of your ministry. You don’t want people to think, “Did you hear what he just said about himself? What a terrible person he must be. I wonder what else he does?” Now, being in the ministry for almost 30 years, I have found that I don’t need to have that pretense. I can simply share what’s on my heart, try to incorporate in my messages the Scriptures that God is applying to my life, and, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, hope to establish a connection.

On Palm Sunday, we traditionally pass out some palm leaves representing the celebration of Jesus entering into Jerusalem, when people laid down palm leaves and their cloaks as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowd that was there for the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem proclaimed Him to be the Messiah, the one for whom they were looking to save all of mankind.

In some traditions, the palm branches also represent a remembrance of eternal life and peace. The fact that Jesus rode on a donkey, instead of a horse, shows that He is a person of peace, because, if He was a person of war, He would have ridden into Jerusalem on a horse and proclaimed himself as a king. That would not be a person of peace!

As the Scripture states, Jesus was telling the disciples and those who were listening to Him that we must understand and make a choice about what we love and whom we serve. Now, I love my mother and father, my children and grandchildren, but Jesus stated, "If you love these things more than me, you cannot be my disciple." In this we see a conflict, and I would argue, a contradiction to what Jesus represents. If Jesus does represent eternal life and peace, it appears to me that the Scriptures create a conflict because they also tell me to honor my father and mother and love all people. Not only am I to love those who love and exercise compassion to me, but also for those who do not. So how do we resolve this conflict? How do we resolve the prioritization that Jesus is asking His disciples and those listening?

It is important that we understand that you and I do prioritize our love. If we actually wrote down the people that we love the most and the people that we love the least, we could all make that kind of list. To paraphrase what Jesus is saying, when you make your list, make me the One whom you first love. If you are a follower of Me, of what I represent, the truth that I have showed you and that I am going to show you by sacrificing My life for each and every one of you, then you truly will love Me first. If you do that, then all the other types of love and compassion that you need to show and demonstrate will take place in your life.

I believe what Jesus is saying here is that, if we love and make Jesus Christ the number one priority, then all of our thoughts and actions will follow the truth of what Jesus Christ represents, which is the eternal love and peace that He gives each and every one of us in terms of not just who He was, but in the future as well. In that realization, we become truly honest as we stand before God, just as we are with all of our failures and successes.

I recently received an email from someone that's in authority over me with the directive to investigate and resolve a situation. The email also stated, "Chaplain, I do not want you to be too aggressive about this..." Later that day I was discussing it with my wife, and I said, "Well, what does he mean, not be too aggressive?" She laughed and then reminded me that, at times, I can be

very, very aggressive. She was correct, that I do have an aggressive personality and want to get things done. When things don't happen quickly enough, I become frustrated and "go over the top" to try to finish what I think needs to be accomplished. She also shared with me, "You know it works, we've been together for 40 years!" In the midst of me berating myself for being too aggressive, I realized that, if I wasn't aggressive, I wouldn't be where I am today. I wouldn't have taken the initiative to go to school, seminary, and further my education. I wouldn't be with my wife because I had to be very aggressive to win her heart.

Our personality and who we are can cut both ways to either help or hurt us and it can put us at a disadvantage until we find that balance. So, where do we go to try to find the balance in terms of too much of one thing or too little of something else? I believe that, as we look at the example in Scripture, we see that if, we place Christ first and foremost, the balance of who we are as a person will fall into the proper perspective. Jesus is challenging us to look to Him for those answers, to understand our own personal condition when we feel helpless, harassed, lost and in need some kind of guidance and direction to take that first step.

Now every day is a new day and we can make an active choice as to what we want to do with that new day, but we have to be willing to take that first step of faith. The first step is considering how we want today to be better than yesterday, to have more peace in our lives. It is my hope that you step out in faith every day, including when you attend Chapel. Maybe I will give a morsel of truth because, "even a blind pig finds an acorn every once in awhile."

You have to take that step of faith followed by the next step, confidence. This is the confidence and courage that God wants you to have, through His Son, Jesus Christ. You want to be able to interact in such a way with people that they understand why you love Christ. If you want to change your world and affect change in the lives of others, you do so by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which first has to be incorporated in your life. The Gospel must mean something to you, the priority has to be in Jesus.

I've worked with a variety of Chaplains that helped out in a variety of different programs, and I too have participated in those programs, but we sometimes wonder whether we are having any impact. When I begin to doubt whether I am having any impact, I am reminded of the words shared with me by a fellow Chaplain. He stated, "As people are working their various programs here, they

need to incorporate what they're learning. They need to incorporate the things that can be a revolutionary change in their lives as they work through that program. Then after they've successfully completed that program, they need to look to have a faith established in Jesus Christ." Does that make sense to you? First you work your program and, after you've successfully worked into that program, then faith needs to be added.

Another Chaplain whom I worked with for many years said, "You know, there's a danger when you go from one program to the other program without it being incorporated to the other." Basically, what he said was, you don't want to go from one addiction issue to another addiction issue, because then there's no healing that takes place. He said, "You've got to let the program work for you. You've got to incorporate it into your life and then you find faith in Christ."

I believe faith in Christ should be the number one priority but I also think people need to understand that it's not just going from one thing to another without working through those issues in making that transition. It's working through the program, then finding your position that you need to have in Christ. When you realize that your faith is as it should be and have that confidence in Christ, it is then that healing will truly begin to take place and you find your mission in life.

In Christ, your life changes, the focus and priorities change as well. In many cases, your friends change, not that you don't love your previous friends or relationships, but because you have a different approach to how meaningful and life changing every day can be. You simply see things differently and understand that you have chosen a new priority, which gives you the help that you need.

As you apply the words of Christ to your life, they just begin to make more and more sense. Unless they are applied to your life, the entry of Jesus as the Messiah of eternal life and peace is only empty and foolish tradition commemorating an event that happened several thousand years ago. But in the application of truth, you understand that you and I are part of this celebration and parade in which we enter into God as His followers and find the faith and fulfillment that God wants us to have in Him. We find the parade route that God wants us to be on by taking one step at a time. Each new day is walking in that parade following Jesus Christ into Jerusalem to partake of that eternal

life and peace that passes all of our understanding, to partake in His sacrifice, death, and new life in His resurrection.

When it's all said and done, when all the philosophical arguments and theology is shared, it comes down to one question, and one question only: Do you believe that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of the world; yours and mine? With all of our imperfections and the things that we get wrong, that's the truth that we are to represent as followers of Jesus Christ. With all of our emotions, different personality types, how we view the world and all of the things that "cut both ways," it is in that truth where we find our identities. So on Palm Sunday when we take and share the palm leaves, I would encourage you to give it to somebody that you don't like, because you're actually representing to them, "Here's eternal life. Here is peace that God has provided through His Son, Jesus Christ."

It is in the remembrance of what Christ has done for us that we begin each day as a new day by taking a step of faith without any fear. Then we take the next step with confidence, believing in what Christ has done for us so that we can have the strength and courage we need to lead the fulfilled life, to find the purpose that God has for each and every one of us, and to continue on the route He has created for us.

AMEN







## Scripture Reading: Psalm 119:105-112

- 105** Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.
- 106** I have solemnly sworn to keep Your righteous judgments.
- 107** I am severely afflicted; Lord, give me life through Your word.
- 108** Lord, please accept my willing offerings of praise, and teach me Your judgments.
- 109** My life is constantly in danger, yet I do not forget Your instruction.
- 110** The wicked have set a trap for me, but I have not wandered from Your precepts.
- 111** I have Your decrees as a heritage forever; indeed, they are the joy of my heart.
- 112** I am resolved to obey Your statutes to the very end.

AMEN

## Musing: Trophy of Grace

A friend of mine and I were having a casual conversation when he actually said to me, “Do you call yourself a Christian?” I gave him an honest answer, “Sometimes.” I had to admit with my friend that I don’t always meet the standard. I went on to say, “I fail as a Christian if I am pursuing perfection. I’m not always going to measure up. Even though I call myself a Christian, many times my behavior is not to the perfection standard by which I measure myself.”

I think a lot of us can identify with my statement. We pursue perfection because of what Christ has done for our individual lives and what the Holy Spirit has presented to us as we make the effort and to do our best to follow God’s will. But we do not always measure up to the title, “Christian” and that’s okay. As long as we are aware and continue to strive after that perfect example that has been set before us, that perfection will be the lamp for our feet and light on our path.

The psalmist here specifically talks about the law and what those laws mean to him. Because Christ came to fulfill the law, we are able to follow Christ’s example of perfection, but we are not bound by it. That is what the Scriptures tell us, you and I are no longer under the law but under the grace of God because He fulfilled the law.

We have all heard the expression, “everybody gets a trophy.” I know I’ve heard comments, “Well, that’s not the reality of life because everybody doesn’t win a trophy.” When I hear those conversations, I am reminded about something that applies to me.

When it comes to God’s grace in our lives, every single one of us gets a trophy. There is no reason why we get that trophy of grace. We don’t even have to participate; yet God gives us that trophy of grace. I was taught at a very early age that “grace” is God’s unmerited favor to each and every one of us, and that is correct. Now, in terms of our modern-day inferences and expressions, God’s grace means that all of us get a trophy. I have even pondered the idea to have little trophies made for new believers with the inscription, “Receiver of God’s Grace.” You don’t even have to participate; that’s what God’s love truly is for you and me.

We are given the gift of God's unmerited favor every day as we follow Jesus Christ, to walk with Him, because of what He did on the cross for each and every one of us. Everything that we say and do should reflect what we believe in Jesus Christ. The question is, if we are following the perfection of Jesus Christ, what path are we on now?

The path that we are on this morning reflects where we are in our relationship with God which reflects who we are in our relationship with God. I don't know what path you are on, you do not know what path I am on, but both of those paths reflect who we are as a follower of Jesus Christ. God wants us to follow who He is, who He was, and who He will become by taking one step at a time every day. God wants us to get on the right path for our lives but first we need to find it.

I try to make the effort to follow the path that Christ wants me to follow, but I do deviate from that path. I do step off that path, but God reminds me through the presence of His Holy Spirit to get back on that path. Sometimes I'm a willing participant and other times I'm unwilling. Then, He drags me back onto the path by using circumstances to correct me and points me in the right direction. Using the circumstances in my life, He gives me the guidance that I need so I can get back on the path that God wants me to follow. Perhaps it is the same way with you.

Within the path that God wants us to follow through His Son Jesus Christ, understanding that we will never measure up to this path of perfection, we are to continue to follow and pursue it every day. We are reminded that we are not alone in this process, but God is always there with us, walking by our side as we journey on that path. We are journeying together on that path with God. He has never left us, He will never forsake us, even though there are times we wonder "Why?", when we find ourselves in certain circumstances.

I think God is big enough to handle that question. God is big enough to handle our anger and frustrations because God is God. Many times, as we are on that path talking with God, we have different needs and we want those needs to be met. We not only want our physical needs to be met but also the need to have compassion. As human beings, we desire to be loved, appreciated and to somehow live a life that is based on peace and less conflict. Even though we are surrounded by conflict, all of us are looking to find the truth that represents the path God wants us to follow.

We're seeking to find God's will for our lives and, as we are looking at our needs, we are also trying to figure out and know ourselves better. We do what I call the shotgun effect. That is when you blast it all up against the wall and see what sticks. But God tells us, as we are journeying down the path with Him, to come to Him with all of our needs. Everything that we want, no matter how small or big, God wants us to come to Him and receive that spiritual light of what Christ has done for us on the cross. You and I have received God's grace. We have received the trophy that was won for us because of what Christ did for us. Yet, as we journey through the circumstances of life and try to walk on the correct path with God as much as possibly we can, we find ourselves crying out because we are getting tired.

I used to work with a chaplain, and I can't tell you how many times during the week he would just say in conversation, "How long, oh Lord, how long?" Doesn't it sometimes seem to be that way when we just get tired of the things and challenges that we deal with every day? Maybe we don't verbalize it, but in our hearts and minds, we are expressing those words and feelings, "How long Lord?" How long do I have to continue on this path where you have placed me? How long do I have to work with the anxieties that I have in my life? How long do I have to work with the emotional issues that I have, the depression that I have? How long do I have to work with the sorrows and sufferings that I'm experiencing and trying to deal with in any way that I possibly can? We become tired, want to give up and lose the courage to continue on the path.

God tells us that, as we grow tired on that path following Christ, that is the time when we reach out to God to help us take that next step, to pick us back up when we have fallen from the exhaustion of just living life. When we have been so overwhelmed by worry and feel so inadequate, that is the time when we rely on Him.

I recently had a long conversation with someone who was seeking advice for a specific situation. The next day he texted me and was very appreciative of our conversation and how I reminded him as I remind myself, "God wants you! Regardless of who or what circumstances you are in today, how inadequate you feel, and when you feel everybody seems to be against you. All of those things might be true; your anxieties, fears and concerns. God has this word for you as He has it for me: God wants you and it is in that wanting that you truly see the path God has laid out for you. You may not see the path all

the way to the end, but just enough to take that one more step that will give you the confidence and courage that you need to take another step.” That is empowering grace!

It is in that journey, as we understand and follow the path of God, that we can give praise in those circumstances and identify with the truth that you and I have a heritage that is based on faith that will last into eternity. There is no way in our finite thinking, the boundaries that we have in terms of our existence in time, that we can truly understand what eternity really means. However, the Scriptures remind us again and again of the eternal life that is there for each and every one of us who have acknowledged Jesus Christ, confessed their sins before God and invited Christ to come and to be in their life.

As we desire to follow the path God has set before us through His Son, Jesus Christ, the best way for us to get out of challenging circumstances is to say one word, and that is “No!” No, I am not going to do that because I am aware of the boundaries that God has given me. We need to realize that “no” reveals the control that God has made available to us to make choices, the control that God has given us through His grace.

By our actions, we say “no” to those things which create more problems for us than they should. I know that we need to say “no” to the things that take us off God’s path and away from the light when we find ourselves in darkness and do not know what to do. We need to say “no” to the things that challenge the boundaries that keep us on the path that God has given us because God wants you! We say “yes” to those things that keep us on God’s path because God loves you! We say “yes” to those things that keep us in the light so we can take that next step. We say “yes” to those things that can give us an understanding and a vision about our future, that it’s more than just the daily existence in which you and I survive.

Our existence as a follower of Jesus Christ is more than just the daily grind that we have to endure. His vision about our future gives us that hope in terms of what we look forward to and provides understanding that, as we take the next step, we do so without any fear or anxiety. We take our next step understanding that God wants us to go forward. He does not want us to look back, He wants us to look forward and see that peace that passes all of our understanding and comprehension, to give us the revelation of His purpose that He has for each and every one of us. God wants us to follow His will.

Your will for your life is different than my will for my life even when we are walking with God. But the provision and principles are the same; to delight in the things that God wants us to pursue, to say yes to those things that give us the understanding and the comprehension that we need to have to create in us the compassion and love that God wants us to have and to create in us that smile, not frown, that God wants us to have.

Did you smile this morning when you got up and looked in the mirror? God wants us to live in such a way that each day we begin with that smile that reflects the truth that God empowers us every moment of every day, with the understanding that you and I have of His grace as we walk with Him. You and I have that trophy of God's unmerited favor and, because of that, each day we can do the things that we need to do: to say "no" when we need to say "no" and "yes" when we need to say "yes," and to allow God to do the rest.

It is my hope and prayer that all of us desire to stay on the path, as best as we can, allowing God to work in our lives so that each step is one we take with faith, trust, confidence and courage.

AMEN





## Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:8-12

- 8** This grace was given to me-the least of all the saints!-to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of the Messiah,
- 9** and to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.
- 10** This is so that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens.
- 11** This is according to the purpose of the ages, which He made in the Messiah, Jesus our Lord,
- 12** in whom we have boldness, access, and confidence through faith in Him.

AMEN



## Musing: Who's Your Daddy

Today we say Happy Father's Day to the fathers of the past, present, and future. Earlier this week I posted a remembrance of my father on social media. My father went to be with the Lord on Father's Day, June the 15th, 1975. My post read, "To you, dad, I give you a toast," and I said to him in Polish, "Cheers, happy days." I got some interesting responses back from people. My brother, who saw the post on social media, responded back in Polish, "I miss him too," and then, of course, I responded back in Polish, "Yes, I do as well."

As we honor our fathers of the past, I think all of us would share a toast in remembrance of our fathers. I know that my father was imperfect, but he was still my dad and, regardless of those imperfections, I still love him. In the same way, as a father and as a grandfather, I know that I am imperfect and am sure my children and grandchildren know that as well. I can only hope that they too see through my imperfections and realize I love them very much and do my best to express that love. I think all of us share the same sentiments and feelings about those relationships.

Being a father and grandfather, I want to lead my family in a way that pleases God. However, at times it is difficult to know the right decisions to make. If we want to lead in a way that pleases God, we need to have confidence in Christ. If we do not, we will not be decisive in making those decisions. Such a lack of decisiveness can lead to error in following God's will. It all comes back once again to having confidence in what we believe in, in Christ.

Do you have that confidence? Are you walking in confidence in Christ? Remember, our confidence goes back to the understanding and the knowledge that we have in Christ, the guidance that God gives us through the presence of His spirit in our lives. Do we have that confidence in being a follower of Jesus Christ? If we don't, then we are not exemplifying the truth that by which God wants us to live.

I was thinking about the whole idea of truth and what it means for you and me to have to have that confidence in our relationship with God. We must have an understanding of what that truth represents, and, for something to be truth, it has to stand by itself. It has to stand alone. There can be only one ultimate

truth in the universe. We can't have many truths that mean the same thing because it would not be truth. Truth means that there is only one answer. Let me say that again. Truth means that you have the one and only answer. You cannot have multiple answers to the same question because it is not truth.

We need to have and understand the ultimate answer of truth in our lives. For us, as followers of Jesus Christ, that ultimate answer is in the truth that is represented in what Christ did for us in His life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension. That is the ultimate truth that we need to believe in and hold on to.

Now, are there other systems of belief that might parallel some of the good news of the representation of Jesus Christ in the ultimate truth in which we believe? I would say yes, but there is only one ultimate truth. You and I should have our confidence resting on that ultimate truth because then we can go forward in our lives understanding the confidence that we have in Christ and the truth that it represents, and we can make the decisive decisions that we need to make as a follower of Jesus Christ with a desire to follow God's will. Regardless of where we are in life, regardless of the different things that we have gone through, that ultimate truth exists.

We show and demonstrate that truth to one another by the love we show to each other. "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) The ultimate love is seen in that ultimate truth. When we have confidence in Christ, we can demonstrate that love to each other.

Now, sometimes, that love is demonstrated in what is called "tough love." I know, every once in a while, I find myself in situations where it is easier for me to say yes but I know that it is not the right decision. I have said "no" sometimes because I love that person and giving in to what a person desires is not always the answer. It's not the love that they need to have at that particular time. Love is saying "no" as well as sometimes "yes" because, if you're doing it with the understanding that you love that person, you do so because you have that ultimate truth of what is represented in your life and in my life. We make the best decision possible and trust it is the right one.

Through the confidence that comes from the ultimate truth in Christ, we can lead others. We can exhibit leadership everywhere. It's not just in leadership positions. You and I can lead people wherever we go in the interactions that we have with them on a daily basis. We can lead through our confidence in Christ and through our encouragement.

We can also provide a sense of acceptance by the way we interact with each other and handle problems together as followers of Jesus Christ. We show the leadership of God by leading with confidence and acceptance of those around us. In doing so, we demonstrate the ultimate truth and the ultimate love that the Father God has given us. That is how people can understand our relationship with Him, and by which they can answer the question, “Who’s your Daddy?”

What the world calls love and what God says is love are entirely different. If you have never come to know Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior, what I am saying will not make any sense to you because you don’t have the beginnings of having that confidence in Christ. If you do not have the beginnings, if you have not experienced that ultimate love, you cannot have the confidence in Christ’s life or His teachings. Consequently, your decision-making process will fail, and you will make some pretty poor decisions and end up living with those poor decisions. Therefore, the choices that you’re making will do more harm to you than good because they do not come from the foundation of the confidence that we have in Jesus Christ.

Rather, it is only if you start in the confidence of Christ. It is in that confidence that you and I have a freedom, a freedom that is unimaginable with potential; the freedom to do the right thing and make the right decisions as best as we possibly can with the help of God. We can only express that freedom when we truly have the confidence that rests in understanding and knowing the ultimate truth as we acknowledge our relationship with God, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and it is in that freedom that we see the transforming work of love. Once again, that ultimate truth and love that transforms is an ongoing process because it is a work of love.

When you and I see that the transformation process of the relationship we have in Jesus Christ is a work of love, then, when we interact with other people that might frustrate or annoy us, we remember that the love of God is working in their lives in the same way. Our relationship with God is not perfect; it is a work in progress. The people we contact, they too are a work in progress of growing in God’s love. You and I have an opportunity and a responsibility to continue that work of love in others as God continues the work of love in our own personal lives.

Someone asked me the other day about how I provide pastoral care and counseling as a chaplain, and whether I exercised judgment or compassion

in that role. Without hesitation, I said to them, “I still have judgment, but my compassion meter has increased.” I still have judgment in my decision-making process. However, I find that my compassion level has increased as I have helped others deal with their circumstances. In our confidence, we become a visual expression of what God means to us because our lives will reveal the condition of our hearts.

I’m just repeating the Bible in a paraphrased form, that our lives will reflect what is in our hearts. When my heart is not in the right connection with God, it will reflect in my actions. It happens, I do it on a regular basis. I’d like to say that my heart is always perfect and that everything comes out of my mouth and all of my thoughts are always the right thing and are always pure, but that is not true. My heart struggles every day to deal with the ultimate truth of love that God has for me.

In the same way, when our hearts do not reflect God’s love, our actions will reflect that we are not in the right place with God. However, God does not give up on us. He reminds us again and again, always bringing us back to the place where He wants us to be, representing that ultimate truth, the visible expression of God’s love for each one of us. In doing so, we truly express the power of God in our lives and go forward with that confidence, understanding and integrating that freedom by expressing that love towards each other. We also continue to walk in a direction that represents that ultimate truth as we see it happen every day.

As we walk in the confidence of Christ, we can deal with the challenges and struggles that we face each day. It’s not that we want to have those struggles, but we know that they are going to happen, so how do we deal with them? How do we prepare? How do we follow through making those right decisions when those things happen? We do so by exhibiting the confidence in what and who we believe; the Father. As we see the ultimate truth of God’s love, we understand that the Spirit of God will guide us and provide that understanding so when our hearts are not in the right place, reflecting a heart that is opposed to that ultimate truth, the Spirit of God reveals to us the condition of our hearts, to make us better.

The Spirit of God is there in our lives not to put us on some kind of guilt trip but to remind us of the condition of our hearts and correct our actions. Is our heart in the right place? Are we exhibiting those things that truly reflect what we believe as followers of Jesus Christ? It is that Spirit that gives us the

ultimate truth where we make those decisions based on what we feel is the will of God and it comes when we worship Him. It comes when we study His Word. It comes when we pray to Him. It is in those times when we seek the power of God to make the best decision that we possibly can so we have to have the confidence that God wants us to have. It is in that confidence that we have a pathway of freedom, the freedom to make the decisions that God wants us to make that are the best for us. What a wonderful way to live! What a wonderful way to be a representative and follower of Jesus Christ by showing others the pathway of freedom that God has for each one of us.

As we make decisions under God's guidance, we see that the life that God has for us is something very special and unique. We see that we are created by God. We truly begin to understand that we reflect the image of God. We have that peace in our lives that only comes from God, and we can go forward each day having nothing to fear. We have nothing to fear because our future has already been taken care of. Our future is one in which we will be with God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the presence of the Father for eternity. I believe that when we get to heaven, our presence with God will also be an ongoing experience. God will keep us continuing to learn more and more about what it is to truly represent Him as a follower of His Son, Jesus Christ.

It is my hope and prayer that, as we finish this day, as we begin this week, that we have the confidence and decision-making process that God wants us to have so we can follow the will of our Father and be on His path more and more each day as we take each step through Him.

AMEN





## Scripture Reading: Romans 10:9-10

- 9 If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.
- 10 One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.

AMEN

## Prayer to receive Jesus Christ as Savior:

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and there is nothing that I can do to save myself. I confess my complete helplessness to forgive my own sin or to work my way to heaven. At this moment I trust Christ alone as the One who bore my sin when He died on the cross. I believe that He did all that will ever be necessary for me to stand in your holy presence. I thank you that Christ was raised from the dead as a guarantee of my own resurrection. As best as I can, I now transfer my trust to Him. I am grateful that He has promised to receive me despite my many sins and failures. Father, I take you at your word. I thank you that I can face death now that you are my Savior. Thank you for the assurance that you will walk with me through the deep valley. Thank you for hearing this prayer. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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