



GROW. PRAY. STUDY

Maple Grove United Methodist Church – Weekly Devotional Guide

March 24, 2019 – *With All Your Heart: “Repenting”*

Scripture References:

[Isaiah 55:1-9](#); [Psalm 63:1-8](#); [1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#); [Luke 13:1-9](#)

Notes from today’s sermon:

40 DAYS OF LENT

Before Jesus ventures out to preach in the synagogues of Judea, he departs to a desolated place. Jesus retreats in order to advance his ministry. These 40 days offer us the opportunity to do likewise. As we seek to discern how and where God is calling us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, we are invited to find a place without distraction, where we can notice our thoughts, name our fears and listen for a holy word of guidance that is no doubt very near.

MONDAY 03.25.19 [Luke 9:37-62](#) (focused on 9:57-62)

Sooner or later, most of us who know in our heart of hearts we want to follow Jesus find ourselves coming up with excuses as to why his particularly sharp demands don't really apply to us. God knows we're human and need a rhythm of rest and refreshment. But God also knows, and Jesus obviously knew, that once we start down that road it's easy to make exceptions to all the rules when it comes to our own case. So Jesus says, 'Look! This is God's kingdom we're talking about, not a comfortable way of being religious that will let you settle down and take life at your own pace!' Are you up for that? Jesus never said, 'Come with me and all your happiest dreams will be fulfilled.' He said, 'Take up your cross and follow me.'

- Talk to God about the excuses you make to him. Ask him to help you to follow him wherever he leads, and to give you the strength not to look back.

TUESDAY 03.26.19 [Luke 10](#) (focused on 10:25-37)

The danger is that we think we know this story by heart. Today, read it slowly, again and again, and allow yourself to stand by the side of the road and watch what's happening. Or, imagine *you* were the one going down from Jerusalem to Jericho... All of a sudden, I have to think again about who God's kingdom is really for. Is Jesus saying that God's kingdom has all sorts of people in it I never expected? That, certainly, is what the first Christians discovered very soon. The question, now as then, is whether we will use all that Jesus is telling us here about love and grace as a call to extend that love and grace to the whole world. No church, no Christian can remain content with living life in a way that allows us to watch most of the world lying half-dead in the road and pass by.

- Ask Jesus to help you to see the people you are passing by on the other side.

WEDNESDAY 03.27.19 [Luke 11:1-28](#) (focused on 11:1-8)

I have no idea why God answers on the 1000th time a prayer he seems to have ignored for the previous 999 times. One might imagine that it would work more steadily and gradually. But no: from our point of view at least, prayer is like chopping at a tree. For 99 strokes of the axe, the main trunk seems to stand firm. Then, on the 100th stroke, suddenly it keels over. However you pray it, the Lord's Prayer starts precisely with the note that says, 'God's way and God's time is best.' To say the Lord's Prayer demands that you pay primary attention to God himself. It is his name and his kingdom that we care about above all, not our particular problems. But, having said that, the three requests that follow – for bread, forgiveness, and safety from being tested to destruction – all place our concerns within that name and kingdom. That's the clue. To pray the Lord's Prayer, then, requires an odd combination: complete humility and complete boldness. Once we get the first right, the second can follow cheerfully. Once God's name and kingdom are the framework of all we do and think, we are free to knock on his door as late at night as we want.

- Try to find some occasions to pray the Lord's Prayer very slowly, as if you were praying it for the first time. Think particularly about the words, 'Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done.' Imagine what it will be like when God's kingdom is here on earth as it is in heaven. Does that help you to see Jesus' prayer in a new way?

Lenten Challenge

What am I being challenged to give up or stop doing in order to grow in my relationship with God?

What am I being challenged to start doing or practicing in order to grow in my relationship with God?

Who will I ask to hold me accountable for these 40 days?

Prayer Concerns

THURSDAY 03.28.19 [Luke 11:29-53](#) (focused on 11:33-36)

When you think about the things you've gazed at today, or in the last few days, how have they affected the person you are? Have you allowed your eye to rest on, and feast on, genuine beauty? The eye is one of our principal means of finding our way within God's beautiful creation; are you allowing your eyes to draw in the light of that beauty to make your whole personality beautiful as a result? Have you allowed your eye to rest on, to concern itself with, the injustices of the world, the places where people cry out to God for hope and help because they are being trampled underfoot by careless and arrogant people and systems? Or are you allowing yourself to be a mere spectator, looking on as though with a bird's-eye view but without any real engagement with what's happening? Gazing on the beauty of God's world on the one hand, and on its need for justice on the other, will illuminate the body, the whole person, so that it celebrates the glory of God and works for his kingdom. Lent leads us to the foot of the cross. Two millennia of Christians have found gazing at the cross of Jesus, however it is depicted, to be both one of the most beautiful sights they can imagine and one of the most impassioned pleas for justice.

- What have you gazed on in the last couple of days? What would you like to gaze on today?

FRIDAY 03.29.19 [Luke 12:1-34](#) (focused on 12:22-32)

Jesus relished the goodness and beauty of the natural world, and so should we. It's strange, considering just how much beauty is all around us, that the modern world has trained itself to ignore it for much of the time. But not only is it a delight to the eyes and the mind; it is a great school of prayer. Stand beside a field full of wheat, or barley, or some other great crop. Watch the sun bringing out the color. Watch the wind rippling through and making patterns, and the grain, supple but strong, springing back into shape. Then think of the way we humans are meant to flourish, with the love of God looking down on us and the fresh wind of the Spirit bringing out patterns and meanings in our lives – corporate as well as individual. Reflect on the strange interconnectedness of it all. And, in thanking God for the mystery of our life, learn to trust him in new ways and at new levels.

- Try to spend some time looking at something around you more slowly and with greater attention than you normally do. Is there something you don't normally notice that makes you want to give thanks to God?

SATURDAY 03.30.19 [Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32](#)

'We just *had* to have a party!' That's the main point of this story. Jesus had been challenged about the parties he was having, and the company he was keeping at them, and he responded with this spectacular story. All right, you want to know why there's a party? You want to know how it is with fathers and sons? And out it comes: a masterpiece, one of the greatest stories ever told, echoing the ancient stories of those other ill-starred brothers, Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, and particularly Esau and Jacob. The son who runs away in trouble and comes back to find resentment. But all with a new twist. Something new is going on, right here, right now, and a party is the only possible response. 'Resurrection' is happening right under your noses, and you can't see it. 'This my son – this your brother – was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.'

- Imagine you are at a party; it's happening at the local pub. One of the regulars has just had a very good win on the horses. He's invited all his friends, and all the other regulars, for a really good evening. There is Jesus, right in the middle of it all. He turns and looks at you, standing by the door. 'Yes,' his eyes seem to say, 'and what about you? Come on in and join the fun.' Talk to God about how that makes you feel, and what it makes you think.