

Holy Saturday, March 30

Hebrew 4:1-16 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* (v.12).

If you have ever undergone surgery, then you will know what it means to trust a steady hand. Isn't it true that the one unsaid comment that goes through your mind before anesthesia is, "I sure hope this surgeon knows what he is doing"?

God is like a surgeon and He is worthy of our trust because of His great love for us. He gave His word to help cut away, separate, untangle, build up, and preserve our spiritual health. When he sets His word to work with us, it is powerful, penetrating the inner workings of our heart. Our part is to have the courage to go to Him and read His word daily. No, it may not always "feel" good to undergo His "knife," but reading the word is critical to our health. God's hand is steady and sure. We must let the Great Surgeon have his way.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

Lamentations 3:37-58; Psalm 88

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Palm Sunday, March 24

1 Timothy 6:12-16 *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.* (vv.6-7 NIV)

My daughter worked with disabled adults in an outdoor program in Colorado. One man, paralyzed from the neck down from a car accident in his early teens, made a particular impression on her as he shared about his struggle with contentment. His deepest pain was that he could no longer serve others the way he wanted to; he couldn't even touch others on his own. He couldn't put his arm around a hurting friend, he couldn't stroke the fur of a passing dog. But this man talked about God teaching him the true secret of contentment.

Contentment is a gift from God. It is not given through circumstance; it is not obtained from what we have or don't have. Rather it is given through knowing God in a personal way. God's blessings are what ultimately fill the voids in our life. Contentment with God is great gain and that is something that we can take out of this world to heaven, even though God is not face-to-face with us at present. God uses His inspired words to touch us. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace" (John 16:33).

Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalms 24, 29; Luke 19:41-48

Monday, March 25

Psalm 51 *Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.* (v.6).

One day God and I had a Pow Wow. I am not ashamed to tell this personal story. In fact, I tell it often when it is told in the right place with my fellow Christians. Years ago my husband and I found ourselves in a difficult situation, one which caused us to stand almost alone for our faith. I was very angry with God in that circumstance. My anger was bottled up inside with all the injustices of the situation. One day in my time with God, I began pouring it out to Him. It was as if this voice inside of me said, "I am big dear one, I already know what's inside of you. Be honest, so just tell me." I sat there laying it out, fussing, and pouring my anger out to Him. What followed was a sweet communion with Him. It was an amazing time as He poured His loving presence on me like no other time before.

I will always point back to that time when I was completely honest with God. It feels good to be completely honest. When we are open, He can teach us His truth, comfort us, and bring insight and wisdom into our most puzzling circumstances.

Tuesday, March 26

2 Corinthians 1:8-22 *He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit on our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.* (vv.21b-22).

I cannot think of a better example of people who can understand God's desire to embrace us as His children than adoptive parents. I am thinking of dear friends who adopted their first child. With much heartache they were not able to fill their deep longing to have children on their own. They hunted, they spent countless hours poring over paperwork, waiting to bring their new daughter home. I cannot exaggerate the joy felt the day these parents received their child. Through adoption they had chosen (anointed) their child, bestowed their family name (seal) on their child, and promised to care for their child.

God's plan doesn't end with forgiveness. He takes ownership and responsibility for us as His children. He gives us His name, anoints us, sets His heart within our heart. We can then "know" him. It is good to think about the price paid by our Lord for our adoption. After all, He found you, paid for you, and brought you home. What a great price He gave for us, His adopted children. One day He will come and take us to live with Him forever.

Lamentations 1:17-22; Psalms 6, 12; Mark 11:27-33

Wednesday, March 27

2 Corinthians 1:23—2:11 *I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.* (vv.10c-11).

As a child I remember going to the local fruit stand. My mother would pull out a small paper bag from the stack and allow me to pick out my very own apples. I would study each apple from stem to bottom, carefully looking for those disgusting little wormholes. Only perfect apples were allowed in my bag. But a determined worm has his way! When biting into my delicious apple how irritating it was to find that one had schemed his way through, ruining the whole thing.

Satan is the most seasoned schemer of all. His great intention is to bore his way into our relationships wreaking conflict. This conflict often tempts us to take our eyes off God's commandments to love others. Satan's greatest desire is to catch us off guard, to stir us, anger us, depress us and, most importantly, to ruin God's plans for us.

Ahh...God will have his day with you, Master Schemer. Make no mistake. Satan has a plan, always. Let us keep our eyes open for his "little wormholes" and, with determination, repeat this bold proclamation from the Apostle Paul: "We are not unaware of your schemes!"

Maundy Thursday, March 28

Mark 14:12-25 *"Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guestroom, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready, Make preparations for us there."* (vv.14-15).

The Lord is in his last hours. I can almost see him as the director of a play at this point carrying out the divine script in this moment. Everything he says and does in the next few hours will be one of the last things that his disciples remember in his time on earth. So, Jesus takes one last time to be intimate with those who have walked with him day by day. In this one meal he sums up all he came to be and do. He is the King, the one in charge; he is the Servant, who came to serve; he is the Promise, who came to fulfill. He is the Christ, who came to die.

When I come to the Lord's table, I am reminded that there is only one thing that is required of me. Just as it was for the disciples in the upper room that night, I am only required to come and "receive." That is the way the script was written. Christ breaks the bread, his body broken for us. Christ offers wine, his blood poured out for us. As you "receive" all that he has done for you in this Holy Communion, remember the disciples, the saints throughout the ages, and all the company of heaven join with us in this sacred moment.

Lamentations 2:10-18; Psalm 102; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32

Good Friday, March 29

John 13:36-38 *Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times!"* (v.38).

I still remember the words, of my once ten-year-old, as he asked to go to a rather, seemingly, dangerous place alone. "Just trust me," he would say. You want nothing more than to believe your children but, with all you have inside yourself, as a parent you know the temptations, and the pitfalls. And you know your children better than they know themselves. Out of love, as parents, we must help them face the truth about themselves.

During Holy Week, today's reading, Peter's denial, strikes a chord in me. Maybe it's because I am well aware there are times when I have been false in my relationship with the Lord. When my pride puffs up, Jesus has a way with me. When I am heading down the wrong path basking in my own sufficiency, with one word, one Scripture, he can bring the truth back to me. Jesus knows us well when he asks, "Will you really lay down your life for me?"

O Lord Jesus, grant us strength to never be ashamed of you and deny you the place in our hearts that is rightfully yours.