



Daily Devotionals – April 10 to April 16, 2021

By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church

With the April 3 devotion, we concluded our weekly exercise of writing a daily reflection for a year. I hope you'll consider this good news, though. We plan to loop around and continue sending these to you weekly until they are published in book form. We'll keep you posted as we know more about that.

Let me say, I think for both Steve and me this has been an enjoyable task. The discipline of it has been helpful. I hope you have found these to be uplifting or challenging as a part of your daily faith practice. When the Pandemic started, and so much of life temporarily shut down, we pledged to send you these. It was a way we could minister to you on a daily basis. I hope it has been meaningful.

A word about how this will work. Now they will come simply by date with no mention of the day of the week. Remember, these devotions were written for a specific year in time. This means occasionally you may find mention of it being "Easter" even though at a given time the calendar that year may see Easter, Christmas, etc. fall on a different day. If that is the case, then be flexible and just enjoy that special day as it falls within the Devotional. We hope you'll enjoy these as they continue to speak to the year ahead.

Faithfully,

Dr. Charles Qualls, Pastor

April 10 - John 18:1- 19:42

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

18 After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. 2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. 3 So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. 4 Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" 5 They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he."

Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. 6 When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. 7 Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." 8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he.] So if you are looking for me, let these men go." 9 This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." 10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. 11 Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Jesus before the High Priest

12 So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. 13 First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. 14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Peter Denies Jesus

15 Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, 16 but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. 17 The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." 18 Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

The High Priest Questions Jesus

19 Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. 20 Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. 21 Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." 22 When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" 23 Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" 24 Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Peter Denies Jesus Again

25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." 26 One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" 27 Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Jesus before Pilate

28 Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. 29 So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" 30 They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." 31 Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." 32 (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 35 Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to

the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” 37 Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” 38 Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

Jesus Sentenced to Death

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him. 39 But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” 40 They shouted in reply, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a bandit.

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. 2 And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. 3 They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face. 4 Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” 5 So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” 6 When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” 7 The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”

8 Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. 9 He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” 11 Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” 12 From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”

13 When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” 15 They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.” 16 Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

So they took Jesus; 17 and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. 19 Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece

from the top. 24 So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." 25 And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." 29 A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Jesus' Side Is Pierced

31 Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. 32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. 35 (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) 36 These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." 37 And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

The Burial of Jesus

38 After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. 39 Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. 40 They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. 41 Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. 42 And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Devotional:

Testing, testing...1-2-3. Are you still with us? Still reading and made it all the way here? You are to be commended. Pessimistic as it may sound, experts probably are right. Clicking on TV remote controls, skipping through commercials on the DVR and especially a few generations who have become accustomed to the brevity of Internet posts on social media and tiny little phone texts have all worked to shorten our attention spans.

So, you may have taken one glance at the printed scripture just above and decided to skip it. If so, that was the Crucifixion of our Lord. You know what else folks like to skip? The Good Friday worship service I like to refer to as “Poor Tenebrae.” Tenebrae is a darkened service that features the reading of sacred texts like the one above. You know the one where Jesus dies for you? All along the way, we gradually extinguish candles until at its end, the room is nearly dark. You know, just like it was as Jesus died?

People say they don't like Tenebrae. They say it isn't uplifting enough. Which is, of course, rather ironic since it commemorates the very moments when Jesus was lifted up. Onto a Cross. For you and for me.

No, we don't like to do the spiritual heavy-lifting. I'll bet it wasn't a real party for Jesus either. But he did it. So, too, must we cooperate in the spiritual disciplines. If you want a resurrected Jesus to celebrate on a bright, sunny and music-filled Easter...then you have to put Jesus up onto the Cross in the first place. Then, and only then, can you once again appreciate what he did.

If you skipped the story, loop back now. Read it slowly. Concentrate and marvel at what happened! It made possible the grace that saves you, the coming of the spirit that transforms you and the fellowship with God that nourishes you!

Prayer:

Lord, with grateful and relieved hearts we give thanks on this day. That's it. Simple thanks. Because you did what you didn't have to do. Which made possible what we couldn't do. Lord, you must love us. Help us to love you by being alive in you! Amen.

April 11 - Matthew 27: 57-66

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Burial of Jesus

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The Guard at the Tomb

62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64 Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” 65 Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” 66 So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Devotion:

Joseph of Arimathea. I wish we had known you. We had been told to expect you. No less than the prophet Isaiah told us you'd be along. That is, if we believe that Isaiah's prophecy of a "Suffering Servant" was indeed fulfilled in Jesus himself. He said (Isaiah 53: 9) that the suffering servant's burial would be with a rich man. Now, the time had come.

Joseph. A man from the council, but who disagreed with the council's action that ultimately freed Jesus to be killed. Joseph had begun following Jesus, even closely enough that he was numbered the "disciples." It is here that we are reminded that Jesus had far more than just twelve. Truth is, we don't know how many followers or disciples Jesus had. It's just that he chose twelve of them to function especially closely with him.

Joseph would become the centerpiece of some legends that eventually developed. Some of them came from apocryphal literature, which reads like scripture but was not deemed sacred and reliable enough to be voted into the biblical canon. By the twelfth century, there was even one legend which suggested Joseph had become the keeper of a "Holy Grail." Legend. We'll stick with the canonized scriptures instead. Three of the four gospels give us additional and different details about Joseph.

Joseph reminds us that we can't fix everything, but sometimes we can do our part. We can do what is within our resources and our conviction. Then, we have to leave the rest to God. Joseph was just enough of an insider that he could ask Pilate for the body of our Lord. This was granted. Joseph was wealthy enough that he had a brand new tomb that he had not, as yet, used. He said Jesus could be buried there.

A simple gesture, born of love and care for our now dead Lord. A conviction that the Son of Man's body needed a respectable place of rest. He didn't stop there. Although the word "gentle" is not used, Matthew somehow gives us this pensive image of Joseph...gently...slowly and thoughtfully...wrapping Jesus' body in a "clean" linen cloth and then laying it in the tomb.

That is why we have a Tomb to focus on at Easter. That is why the Marys had a place to head out to in the coolest, earliest light on that first Easter. Joseph's care is the reason that when John (the beloved) outran Peter and then waited for his elder to catch up, they had a tomb to peer into.

We need more Josephs. The church needs more Josephs. The world needs more Josephs. Why -- because they're rich and generous? Well, that's nothing to criticize. If everyone only takes, and no one gives, things don't work. But no. That's not the reason. It's because Joseph cared and did something about what he cared about. That's why we need more Josephs.

Prayer:

Lord of our Easter faith, we thank you for the loving, generous sacrifice made by Jesus. Our faith is not possible without him. We place our hope in his risen, victorious story! But give us the active faith to be a *Joseph* in a world with far too many Judases. Amen.

April 12 - Matthew 28: 1-10

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Resurrection of Jesus

28 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Devotion:

An earthquake. You ever felt one? I recall waking up one morning during our North Carolina years and wondering, "When did we get a water-bed?" It felt as though the room were moving. But it also felt like I was rolling. Soon, the morning weather person on TV confirmed that we were about two hours distance from the epicenter of what (in the earthquake world) was a pretty minor quake. Just some tectonic shifting of the earth's plates, I suppose. A fault-line letting off a little tension. Nothing that would do damage. Big enough that you could feel it, though. Don't really care if I never experience another.

The palpable and unmistakable presence of God is described in that manner, in Matthew 28. A messenger of God comes to the Tomb. The Marys have just arrived. They think they will faithfully embalm Jesus' body, since three days have now passed. Nothing more. The Sabbath has passed as well. No work like that could have been allowed on the Sabbath.

Their expectations were low, the two Marys. They were not on any special alert. If anything, I suppose they were a little numb. Probably just moving through the motions of their duty, only now beginning to awaken to their grief. You can get a little done and still be absolutely checked out to what is happening around you. One of God's gifts that is wired into us is the numbness that can often accompany our sadness in tragedy.

Jesus has lived among them. They have loved him so. He has been the figurehead of their very hope. Even more, those around him sensed that this was God come to live among us. Now he is dead. They had work to do, and they have now come to perform that gentle, loving act and head back home.

Another sign we get here is what happened with the guards. A sentry had been posted there by the Tomb. Actually, a few guards. This would have been brave, proven soldiers. They froze. They passed out. We don't know.

The messenger assuages the women's fear. "Do not be afraid." Grief can often feel an awful lot like fear. Grief that awakens into earthquake and the scene these women saw could be terrifying.

"He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

I love the things that happen next. Faithfully, they do leave to go and tell the disciples, just as they have been instructed. That should challenge us, their willingness to do as God has instructed. They also reported mixed feelings that were described here as "...fear and great joy." A genuine encounter up close with the palpable presence and power of God should leave each of us feeling nothing less.

It is Easter! The women have been entrusted with the greatest news the world has ever heard. Women were the first proclaimers of the gospel! Women were the ones who were there in the first place. Thanks be to God that women preached the good news to the disciples on that first Easter. The Church has been deeply indebted to women ever since.

It is Easter! Arise and go with joy! Go forward emboldened, even in uncertain days. Follow your faith. They surely did, and changed the world forever!

Prayer:

Lord of our lives, and Lord of our Salvation. You are victorious. You have risen. We thank you that you had compassion upon Creation and came to live among us. May you have not died in vain, but rather have lived and reigned as God among us. Give us Easter hearts that are open to your calling upon our lives. "Christ the Lord has risen!" He has risen indeed! Amen.

April 13 - Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Give Thanks to the Lord

¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! ² Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever." ¹⁴ The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. ¹⁵ There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; ¹⁶ the right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly." ¹⁷ I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. ¹⁸ The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death. ¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. ²¹ I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. ²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. ²³ This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴ This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Devotion:

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Into an expectant world -- where one is only as "good" as their latest achievement -- comes this word. Into a world where you are only good until you are no longer new or young, comes this word. Into a world where "good" sounds like you just got a 'C' grade on a scale of A-to-F, the Lord is good. Into a world where there seems to be exactly nothing that we have confidence will last forever, "...his love endures forever."

Among a book of great psalms, this psalm may indeed be one of the greatest ones. The words of the 118th psalm roll off of our tongues because they are first written in our hearts. Yet, when we read them with Easter hearts we seem to weigh them a little differently. In the physically distanced days in which we live, they are almost baffling to some.

In fact, when we read these words and truly take them in with 21st century ears, they sound foreign. We strain to wrap our heads around the claims that the writer makes about God.

As the novel Coronavirus rages on, and we endure the uncertainty of the days, each of us brings our own little twist to the notions that begin in v14ff. Some take the Lord as their defense to mean they can be as risky and cavalier as they wish during these days. "God will protect me," they say. Others, though, await the Lord and wonder when God will make good on this kind of faith. They wait for the Lord's mighty right hand to do mighty things right now. What is easy to miss is how God is moving in our midst. In fairness, some of that is so much easier seen in the wisdom of retrospect. We'll have to get a little bit down the road to gaze backward and see where all God was during this time.

The Lord is still our salvation. The stone the builders rejected is still able to be the cornerstone in our lives. These very days, God is just as able and just as active. Will we have eyes that can see and hearts that give God a true chance to be Lord?

Prayer:

God of these days, and God of my uncertainty, hear my heart. Accompany me just as surely as you have those who wrote words like this psalm so long ago. Lead me to search these words, that they would speak into my own days. Amen.

April 14 - Colossians 3: 12-17
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Put on Love

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Devotion:

If ever there were a word written for these times, this might be as good as it gets. First, though, we are handed this gem through the filter of a huge assumption. Did you catch it?

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved..." That's how this section of Colossians 3 begins. A wise person I interned with shared a lesson he had learned as a debate competitor in his college years. He said, "They told me that a person's argument or case is only as strong as its weakest assumption. So, if you can pinpoint their assumptions you start there."

Christians have debated for centuries what the apostle Paul meant by "chosen." There are some who make a compelling case that the Bible suggests that Christians are the new "chosen" people of God as its pages close. That could sound pretty good for those of us who claim this faith.

Ahhh...but these words hinge on a couple of assumptions. One of them is that we ourselves are God's people at all. I could argue either side of the "chosen" issue. Today, I am more concerned with the "God's people" part. You see, that is something that I have to choose for myself and don't get to for you. Nor you for me.

We Baptists tend to have an unwritten "once saved always saved" doctrine about us. But on some days, I do a better job of choosing than I do on others. I don't know about you. Why does any of this matter?

Think it over first. Think it over good. Then read v12b-17 again in light of what you have heard v12a saying. Believe me, it matters. It does. I believe the Christ of Holy Week and of Eastertide would support me on that.

Prayer:

Lord, guide me to know my heart afresh in these days. Help me see if there is any way about me that keeps me from being truly yours. Help me to search myself to know what it could mean to instead give myself over to you. Lead me to be the person I have just read about in your word! Amen.

April 15 - Matthew 28:1-10
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Resurrection of Jesus

28 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'

This is my message for you." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Devotion:

We come to a passage that is easily glossed over by today's society. I believe that we have the opportunity to learn a new lesson in this resurrection story.

The scene reminds us of a great action movie with the characters Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. They arrive at their appointed place, the tomb, with raw emotions, but with a sense of duty and obligation to their Lord. As they approached, a powerful earthquake startled them and they saw an angel of the Lord, who had rolled the stone away. They were afraid at this scene, none of which was expected! Can you imagine their reaction when the angel spoke to them these words, "Do not be afraid."

The entire Gospel of our Lord is framed with these words, "Do not be afraid." Remember in Luke when Mary received the news of her pregnancy, she received the same greeting, "Do not be afraid."

When the shepherds were in the field tending their sheep, the first words from the angels were, "Do not be afraid." And so it is with today's passage, the angel firmly announces, "Do not be afraid."

It is instructive to me that the words were uttered to different people, in different times and in different places. What does the Spirit have for us in today's uncertainty in the midst of a global pandemic?

Martin B. Copenhaver shares that the phrase to "fear not", does not imply that nothing can go wrong, because we all know that it often does. Rather, the angel's words speak hope to us as they remind us that whatever happens, God is with us. Whatever today may hold, the phrase, "Do not be afraid", reminds us that God has the power to strengthen and uphold us; this phrase reminds us that whatever we face, we do not face it alone because God is with us. We are reminded that nothing that we encounter is stronger than God's love. We are reminded that God gets the last word, and that God's love is triumphant. Thanks be to God for the assurance of his presence with us.

Prayer:

Holy Father, we give you thanks for your love that never ends and is always with us. Give to us the ability to project that assurance and calm, even in this time of need. Strengthen us, so that we may be your servants, both today and forever. Amen.

April 16 - Psalm 16

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Song of Trust and Security in God

1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. 2 I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." 3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight. 4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. 5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. 7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. 8 I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. 10 For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. 11 You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Devotion:

Having traveled through Holy Week filled with drama and intrigue, I am more than ready for the security that we have in God. J. Clinton McCann states that this Psalm proclaims the confident state of the righteous ones who dwell with God. Michael Dahood describes this Psalm as a Psalm of conversion, because in it the Psalmist welcomes and rejoices in "a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:6) with hopes for the future.

The Psalm begins in a mood of repentance and forgiveness, a plea for refuge and protection. "Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge" (Psalm 16:1) Rhodora E. Beaton suggests that God will protect those who cry out to God, especially when they cry out in repentance for the evil they have done.

It is with the forgiveness that follows repentance that verse 9 proclaims, "Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure." These are the words of a confident faith, not the words of doubt. But, if we are honest, all of us have a mixture of faith and doubt. Paul Tillich once wrote, "Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith."

Friends, I believe that we have similar doubts, similar struggles. When will the economy return? When will we be able to lift the stay at home order? How will our town respond? How will our church do ministry in the near term? In the long term? All of these are valid questions and the best advice that I can share is to trust them to God. Trust them to the God who created you, who made your redemption possible, and who has prepared a place for you in God's house.

H. Ernest Nichol wrote both text and tune to the following hymn, "We've a Story to Tell" and I quote the refrain for our benefit: For the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright, and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth, the kingdom of love and light.

Prayer:

God of love and light, we are eternally thankful for the assurances found in Psalm 16. Help us to take its words to heart, to meditate upon them day and night, and to place all our hopes and doubts into your strong arms, we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.