



## **Daily Devotionals – April 17 to April 23, 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.

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 17 - 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11** **by Rev. Steven R. Gibson** ***The Resurrection of Christ***

15 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you -- unless you have come to believe in vain. 3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them -- though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

#### **Devotion:**

Have you ever felt inadequate? Have you ever felt that you had to justify your ministry? This is where we find ourselves today.

Perhaps Paul had similar feelings and experiences. Remember that before Paul was Paul, he was Saul, the persecutor of Christians. It was after his encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus that he was given the name Paul. Paul had a history and a very sordid one at that. Before he was Paul, he persecuted and even put Christians to death. (Remember the stoning of Stephen in Acts 6: 8- 7:59; especially Acts 7: 58)?

Paul is sharing how difficult it was to turn his life around -- from persecutor to defender of the faith. In the sharing of his story, Paul gives us a new reason to hope. It is easy to believe in the Resurrection, even without concrete facts. Of course we remember the Biblical Narrative and the numerous times that the Risen Christ

appeared before his Ascension into heaven. In addition to the accounts, we have the eyewitness accounts of numbers of people who saw Jesus.

Paul did not allow people's questions hinder his ministry. He made a proper defense or maybe an introduction to his ministry, and then continued in his ministry.

Does God look at us differently because of our questions? Does God love any of us less because of our skepticism? Can our doubts hinder God's ability to work in and through us?

Scripture is filled with people whose faith was questioned. Scripture is filled with people who wanted to believe, but doubted.

In John's Gospel, chapter 20: 24-29, we have the story of Jesus appearing to his disciples two times, a week apart. It is noted that the first appearance that Thomas was not there. (John 20:24 because he had not seen the Risen Christ with his own eyes, he doubted.) The good news is that the story does not end there, it ends with Thomas proclaiming "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28) Jesus then answers Thomas with these words, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (John 20:29)

Friends, many are fearful of what life may look like once the pandemic has passed. Many have doubts, concerns and outright worry. We are concerned about our families, our church families, our homebound members, our employment, and the list goes on and on. It is my desire that our faith may increase so that we incorporate the lessons from Scripture.

Thanks be to God, that when I feel inadequate, I recall Christ's victory over death. Halleluiah, what a Savior!

**Prayer:**

Remind us, dear Lord that there is nothing that can limit you. Increase our faith that we may cast our cares upon you and leave them in your arms of love. Thank you for your love! Amen.

**April 18 - John 20:11-20**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene***

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

***Jesus Appears to the Disciples***

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

**Devotion:**

I don't want to traffic in the excesses or unfairness of stereotyping. So, let me stick with basic sociology. Men in our culture generally tend to have been socialized to be more like "strong, silent types." You know, *never let 'em see you sweat. Or, big boys don't cry*, and the like. Which is why sometimes a woman can occasionally find a significant man in her life to be a little unavailable emotionally. Women in western societies seem to be a little freer in expressing themselves than men.

Mary is suffering no such moment here. She is crying it out, as our story opens. That would have been so understandable in this situation. You may be noticing by now that John's details in chapter 20 are not just different from Matthew's. They are downright disagreeing at some points in our Easter story. Makes for a fascinating study. I'll try to stay focused, though.

Tears are an inner-driven signal that something important has happened. In our adult hurry to suppress them, we often miss an opportunity. The opportunity is to explore where the tears might be originating inside us. Distracted by how we might appear to others, most of us never take that journey unless we are alone.

Here is where I want to be there at the Tomb. To simply put an arm around Mary and reassure her. To whisper to her that it's okay to let things out. Even better, to simply stand next to her silently and let it happen. Of course, if I were that close relationally with Mary, then I probably would be crying too. This is no casual cry, after all. Notice that Mary is "weeping." The word is used twice here.

So, what was the source of Mary's tears? What was so strong within her that it came out at this very moment as tears? She takes a peek into the Tomb. There are two messengers there (Greek word often translated "angel"). Then, we get some insight. "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

She has lost Jesus in execution and death. She is grieving him profoundly, now compounded by what appears to be the theft of his body. That's all she can take. Mary's numbness is overcome by her sorrow. Here is where your story may join in with Mary's. For in our time of need, Jesus is there. Have you found that to be true? Maybe not until after things have looked so bleak. Maybe not until we've expended a good cry, a dark night of the soul or an anxious period of living. But Jesus seems to show up and speak into our lives right on time.

What is your deepest need? What looks so broken or desperate that you don't see a solution? What seems to be missing, with no way in sight to fill the void? Our faith in the grace and presence of God imparts a word for you. Eastertide's victorious message for us is that Jesus is not finished. He still cares, still shows up and still speaks exactly the right word for our days.

**Prayer:**

Into the dark places of our lives, Lord, we thank you that you accompany us. Like Mary, may we notice you nearby. May we hear your instructive voice of perspective, and may our faith be large enough to follow what you say. Amen.

**April 19 - John 20:19-31**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Jesus Appears to the Disciples***

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

## **Jesus and Thomas**

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

## **The Purpose of This Book**

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

## **Devotion:**

Willoughby was a poor hound dog, light on intellect but long on stubborn pursuit of his quest. He was a cartoon character, introduced in a 1940 animated feature. His catch line was, "Which way did he go? Which way did he go?" The poor hound would follow his nose and his curiosity anywhere. So popular did the phrase become that Warner Bros. made sure that he continued to pop up in a total of eleven of their stories. These are cartoons that generations have laughed at. Always late on the chase, poor Willoughby doesn't know which way to go.

When I read this story, I feel like Willoughby. I don't know which way to go, so many possible lessons and storylines are featured in today's text. Jesus' sheer power is on display, as well as his instructive words.

- Twice he says to them, "Peace be with you." Those are timely words for our day.
- We think of the Holy Spirit as arriving later in Acts 2. However, the Disciples were given an early dose of it as Jesus breathed upon them the gift of life in God's spirit.
- Then, we are reminded why we refer to one of his followers as "Doubting" Thomas. This exchange is rich in meaning for us all, as well.
- Related, there is also the challenge issued by Jesus that those who believe without having seen all they'd like to see are most blessed.
- Finally, there is the small epilogue as John's account ends. A statement of purpose for John having written a Gospel in the first place. This closing note makes us glance skyward, lost in thought as to what all we have never even heard about our Lord.

Which way did he go? Suffice for today that we go back to dear Thomas. That cynic and unbridled questioner of even his Lord. Thomas has said that he would not believe until he had seen the nail holes in Jesus' hand and the executioner's slits in his sides. Now, presented with the chance to see those very things, Thomas' confession bursts forth. Can you hear his voice as he responds so viscerally? "My Lord and my God!"

Our substance-addicted friends are called upon in 12-step groups to remember something that we Christians can often forget. That is, their recovery hinges among other things on their ability to admit that there is a higher power. That is also within the statement of faith that Thomas makes. "My Lord and my God!" demonstrates that Thomas has been reminded that God is God...and therefore he is not. Nor, does Thomas have to be.

I find that simple confession powerful. I also find it instructive. In these days of the Covid-19 illness, you are not God. Nor do you have to be. I hope that brings you relief, perspective and hope. Just as the disciples needed to see him most, Jesus showed up. That's what a legitimate God will do. God will show up, although maybe not at the very first moment we want. But always when we need.

**Prayer:**

Lord, into the locked-down spaces of my life may you also walk. I invite you to have access to who I truly am. May I recognize and receive you when you do. I pray that you will stand with me in the hiding places of my soul. My fear may accompany me at times, but you are my Lord and my God. Amen.

**April 20 - 1 Corinthians 15:12-20**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***The Resurrection of the Dead***

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ -- whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. 17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

**Devotion:**

What an understandable question the people must have been asking by now. They were curious about a detail as the apostle Paul and others went about spreading the good news (or "Gospel") of eternal life in a resurrected Jesus Christ. They wanted to know a few things, actually. For instance, how credible could the accounts of a risen Christ be? After all, none of them at Corinth (way over in mainland Greece) had actually seen Christ after his time in the tomb. They had only heard, probably second or third-hand at best. No one else they knew in their city had ever risen up after being declared dead.

Let me make a confession that some of you have heard me at least allude to before. I don't do well with rebels. It's why I can struggle with our biblical friend, "Doubting" Thomas. Curiosity is a natural feature of a well-developed mind. Pursuit of knowledge, data or facts is a trait of the trained intellect. Any of those pursuits that come from an organic, understandable path get my complete respect. We have questions. We should ask them.

What I don't respect is a rebellious spirit. Questions or challenges that come from someone simply used to being disagreeable. One who has self-invented a counter-voice to the mainstream, just for the fun of being disagreeable, doesn't register with me as honorable. Someone asking questions just to push someone, or to get their jollies causing trouble, doesn't strike me as amusing at all.

While we don't have the full opportunity to know what Paul was speaking to here at Corinth, their questions appear to be in-bounds. One of the most frequent sources of curiosity in Paul's time came from those who had known martyred Christians. People who had died because they had sided with the cause of Christ and had paid the ultimate price. What would happen to them?

But there's more. In letters he wrote to other churches, the apostle will address another texture of all this. What if you had lost loved ones in previous generations, and now you were hearing that the path to eternity was through belief in Jesus Christ? Your parents, your grand-parents and extended family would not even have heard of Jesus. How could these be left out?

Again, the even more practical issue here likely was that none of them (nor us as well?) personally knew anyone who seemed to have been declared dead for a period of 3 days and had then risen. They may even have wanted to believe. The reach was simply too much for them.

Paul couldn't prove in a scientific way Christ's resurrection. No more so than you or I can. What he did want them to consider was that these testimonies were credible. He could offer testimony from those he knew personally who had seen Christ post-resurrection. Paul knew some of Jesus' own disciples. Paul also attributed the mysterious voice he heard on the Damascus Road to Christ himself.

Here is our reality, as stated by Paul. Christ's resurrection is at the center of the matter of faith. That is, at some point without proof, we all have to make the decision whether or not we will believe. That is faith. If Christ wasn't resurrected, then all this is for naught. But let me ask you a question: would a God who could not resurrect the Christ be very much of a God at all?

**Prayer:**

God of the heavens, we confess that we have doubts at times. Even as people of faith, we have questions we cannot satisfy. We have yearnings to understand more. Hear our hearts of faith, O Lord, even as you work within our unbelief. May the resurrected Christ continue to minister to our lives in ways we cannot deny. Amen.

**April 21 - Jonah 1: 1-17**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Jonah Tries to Run Away from God***

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." 3 But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. 6 The captain came and said to him, "What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish."

7 The sailors said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Tell us why this calamity has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" 9 "I am a Hebrew," he replied. "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." 10 Then the men were even more afraid, and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them so.

11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. 12 He said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you." 13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them. 14 Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, O Lord, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you." 15 So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

17 But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

**Devotion:**

There is so much about the book of Jonah that fascinates me. Here's a sneak preview in one sentence -- very little of it has to do with his days spent in the belly of the large fish. But why in the world would a text from Jonah come up during Eastertide?

That's part of the journey that we'll have to consider. I hope you will reach your own conclusions. However, there are dimensions of the human story that are timeless and that speak to why God so badly needed to intervene in the form and person of Jesus Christ.

What are some of those themes? Briefly, here are just a few:

- The **human tendency to stray from God** and to make poor moral and ethical decisions while operating apart from that very God. In fact, to fall into patterned behavior that is unhealthy at best, and immoral or unjust at worst.
- Along with the prophets, Jonah acknowledges that **sin is not just an individual issue**. A city, state or nation can collectively stray from God and come under judgment for that.
- God's calling can (and always does) fall upon **a life that is not perfect**. Jonah's shortcomings will be on full display here. That is no excuse for humans choosing and following dramatically flawed individuals. However, God works with what God has.
- A "loving" act **does not always mean "liking"** the person whom you may have been called to love. Jonah clearly does not like the Ninevites. Still, he delivers the news of God's impending judgment and their sliver of an opportunity to be saved!
- **Biblical stories are not always gift-wrapped** and tied with a neat bow by their end. Unresolved at this biblical book's end will be that Jonah is upset with God for sparing the Ninevites. He is not happy with God. (They didn't teach me that in Vacation Bible School!)

Here we see a reluctant Jonah trying to flee his assignment from God. He simply does not, and will not, like the Ninevites! Also featured here is how pagan superstition can suddenly call upon and intermingle with the Judeo (-Christian) faith for a moment of "chaplaincy" when in a terrible tight! Still does today. "There are no atheists in foxholes" some may say.

The sailors call upon Jonah to prevail upon "his" god for help as soon as they all fear for their lives. Eventually, they decide to make a spiritual discernment by casting lots. This was actually a fairly common practice in the ancient world. Superstitious, nonetheless. Suddenly.... conveniently even...they are believers enough to attempt prayer to Yahweh. Unresolved for us is whether their newfound dose of faith "took" for the long haul. We simply don't get to know.

The loser is poor Jonah. He will be tossed overboard. Sometimes, we are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes, though, in honesty we might need to admit that through our own choices we have put ourselves at the wrong place and at the wrong time. Jonah is running from God; he should have been in Nineveh by now. So many talk about Hell's judgment after life. Oh, how we might all do even better to consider how much living judgment we can bring ourselves under with the choices we fail to acknowledge were even...choices.

**Prayer:**

Lord, open our eyes that we might live more intently. Help us to wake up. Help us daily to connect our faith with our living, that our days might be no harder than they are. Amen.

**April 22 - Song of Solomon 8:6-7**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Love is Stronger than Death***

6 Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. 7 Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned.

**Devotion:**

Many people continue to crave and look for love, especially in today's context of social distancing. It is unnerving to have the ability to visit our families and friends taken away, for the greater good of the community. Regardless of social distancing, love continues to flow from person to person. That form of love comes from the God who created, the God who redeemed, the God who sustains, and the God that has prepared a place for you and me. This is the God whose mercy knows no end, the God who forgives all our transgressions, and the God who is always with us.

This type of love turns society on its head, because this love is the exact opposite of the world's definition of love. The world looks at love as the opportunity to acquire all that I think I need, often at the expense of others. The world looks at love as the ability to hoard all that I think I might need, to the exclusion of others. The world looks at love as selfish love -- the love that looks after self's interests, but not the interest of others.

The passage begins with the idea of a "seal" that the maiden wishes to be placed upon her lover's heart. This "seal" would identify her desire to be inseparably united with her lover by a sacred oath. This sacred oath requires a symbol or a "seal ring", a token of the love that new lovers tend to make. As the lovers pledge themselves to each other in love, they acknowledge their belief in the power of love -- in essence the only force known to humankind that has the ability to circumvent even death and the grave.

The lovers understand both the blessing and curse of pledging love to another. The blessing of pledging love is immediately understandable, but the curse needs a little unpacking. The curse that can come from pledging love to another is often called jealousy. Jealousy is often described as the dark, dangerous side of love. Indeed jealousy can be as unrelenting as even death itself.

Human love can be as intense as divine love, likewise divine jealousy can be as intense as human jealousy. This type of intense love cannot be squashed or put out by any other force of nature -- many waters cannot quench love. (Verse 7)

The point of this is to teach us that wise souls are prepared to reckon with all the implications of love. My personal observation is that our intense love for spouse and family pales in contrast to the pure love that God has for us. If God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31b)

**Prayer:**

Holy and loving God, we praise you for loving us, despite our faults. Remind us that the intensity of divine love is stronger than any force known to mankind, and that your love never fails. Amen.

**April 23 - Song of Solomon 2:8-15**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Springtime Rhapsody***

8 The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. 9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. 10 My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; 11 for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of

singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. 14 O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. 15 Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards -- for our vineyards are in blossom.”

**Devotion:**

Springtime is such a beautiful time -- the earth awakens from its wintery sleep with plants, flowers and all nature sings! It is a ritual that we are acquainted with, this yearly rite of passage. I love the image of God resurrecting plants from the dead earth in the spring.

This passage reminds us that human relationships, like a divine relationship takes time. Both relationships require cultivation and nutrition. They are to be safeguarded and cherished. Intimacy (both human and divine) requires both time and energy, as well as a willingness to be present, to remain accountable and to see things through to their ending place.

Many people shy away from passages like this because they cannot move beyond the language of romance. Permit me, for a brief time to consider another possibility...

What if that imagery was pointed toward the relationship between God and God's people? Suppose that my beloved was literally speaking about God? Can we dare speak to God as "my love?"

I remember my parents and others in my home church talk about God "wooing" a person before they made a decision to follow Jesus. Although I did not completely understand the concept of "wooing", I respected my parents and church elders, and experienced God's "wooing" of me. It is a difficult concept to understand that God "woos" God's people.

The imagery of this passage speaks to our senses -- "The voice of my beloved"; "like a gazelle or a young stag". "My beloved speaks and says to me: Arise my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time for singing has come."

We rejoice in the provisions of God, in that while we were sinners, God sent Christ to the earth to provide a way out of our sinfulness -- a way that allows us to return to God!

No one knows what the next day may bring, but this is certain -- God, whose essence is love, desires to have a relationship with us. The Good News in this is that God has completed all the work for the relationship, the acceptance is simply up to us.

**Prayer:**

God of infinite love, thank you for loving us, even when we are not worthy of your love. Remove our doubts and replace them with an uninhibited love for you. Amen.