



## Daily Devotionals – April 3 to April 9, 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 3 - John 19:38-42** **by Dr. Charles Qualls** ***Jesus' Body is Buried***

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.

#### **Devotion:**

All four canonical (biblical) gospels have some allusion to this story. Jesus has succumbed to death on a cross. What happens next is the gateway for all that leads to Easter's victory.

Isn't this the kind of moment that we instinctively believe should have involved Jesus' disciples? Of course, they were a little scarce at the moment. I can't blame them. They were a hunted bunch, those twelve. So, they are laying a little low. None of them should have been in a hurry to walk right in and identify themselves as a disciple just to claim his body.

Which is part of the Easter story of hope. Because who DID claim, prepare and bury Jesus' body? These two are such unlikely characters.

First, we have Joseph of Arimathea. We don't know too much about him, except that John tells us he was a "secret disciple" of Jesus. That is, he was very quietly following along with Jesus, believing but not occupying a visible seat like the twelve insiders. Luke explains one good reason for that: Joseph was a member of the "council," otherwise known as The Sanhedrin. This is the elite council of seventy-one rulers or judges who had great power in local matters. Even in matters far outside the Church. So, he was in a position to request Jesus' body. He gave up his unused tomb for our Lord. Remarkable.

Meanwhile, we do know Nicodemus. Only recently did we reflect on his late-night meeting with Jesus also in secret. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Despite that, he was becoming persuaded of Jesus' teachings. So his time with Jesus appears to have been as a sincere seeker.

That's why this passage gives me hope. It suggests that I, too, have a place as an imperfect and unlikely vessel through which God's work might happen. God is still in the business of redeeming and using whomever God may wish. They give me hope, these two who were slowly coming around.

**Prayer:**

Lord, continue your patience with me. May I be of use to you before my days are finished, that your purposes in Creation may be accomplished. Amen.

**April 4 - Mark 10:32-34**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection***

32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; 34 they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

**Devotional:**

As Easter's unfolding drama approaches, Jesus is on a collision course with those who would do him harm. Over in Luke's gospel, we even get a narrative tip that helps us understand the general time frame that today's scripture from Mark speaks of. *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.* (Luke 9: 51) In Mark 10, just before today's reading, the Rich Young Ruler had asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus' answer hit him hard, and perplexed those around them. Then, Jesus began to explain what God was doing and where the world was headed. It wasn't what the rich young man wanted to hear, for he had many possessions.

With that, we understand this third prediction of Jesus' death that our Lord makes in Mark 10: 32-34. Before this scene, and afterwards, Jesus' own disciples will make evident that they still don't understand what is ahead, nor why it must happen. As we read these verses, may we consider what Jesus did for us. And, why Jesus did this.

We live in days of physical isolation out of a concern for our own safety and for the safety of others. We don't like what we have heard. We must stay home. Our economy will suffer for a time. We are sacrificing. Some are losing loved ones in these days of illness. May Jesus' sacrifice inspire us. May his teachings to love others fuel our selflessness and our loving actions.

**Prayer:**

Lord, in these days of fear may you hear our honest voices. Surround us with your loving, giving and inspiring presence. Hear our cries, and may we hear your guidance. Amen.

**April 5 - Matthew 21: 1-11****by Dr. Charles Qualls*****Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem***

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" 10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

**Devotional:**

This is a busy Jesus we are following toward Easter's victorious tomb. We like this Palm Sunday Jesus. He is playing to a big crowd, everyone is jubilant and all is well! He is simply, humbly riding in on a donkey. His power has been demonstrated today, even as he instructed the disciples of what they should do ahead of them, and then it was so. Just as he had said. We like the busy, active and wise Jesus.

Can't we be fickle sometimes though? Some of the same people who are waving palm branches at Jesus and shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David!" may well have been the very same crowd who would turn on him mere days later. They would soon be some of the ones calling for Jesus to be crucified. We don't like the heavy Jesus as much. The one who steps over into our business and challenges us in places we don't want to be challenged. We want Jesus to stay in his lane. To receive the adoration of the crowds and be the Grand Marshall of our Easter Parade. Maybe clear a bunny or a sheep out of his lap so that a small child may be allowed to come and sit on his knee. That's the Jesus we like.

Instead, this busy Jesus still has work to do. Heavy work. Right after this triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he will overturn the money-changers' tables in the Temple and then curse a poor fig tree. Whenever I suggest to someone that Jesus' anger here was instructive, they resist. They'll prefer to play semantic games, because an angry and frustrated Jesus in his very season of Passion is not what we want to

see. They'll insist he was instead "righteously indignant." They'll observe that a divine Jesus would never have been angry. They'll philosophize that to be angry is to lose control.

Try this instead. Let Jesus be who he was at all stations of the Passion. Don't rob him of his strength of conviction, and don't water down his energy. How can we take seriously a Jesus who did those things that came next, and confine him to having done so with a smile on his face?

**Prayer:**

Lord, today may we permit you to be who you were. May we not place you in spiritual shackles one minute ahead of the authorities in Jerusalem. Instead, may we heed your example and take courage that our God would live among us and intervene in all the ways we so badly needed. Amen.

**April 6 - John 12: 1-11**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Mary Anoints Jesus***

12 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

***The Plot to Kill Lazarus***

9 When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11 since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

**Devotional:**

Isn't there a lot going on in this story?! Bethany was about a 45 minute walk from Jerusalem. Around 2 miles. Jesus felt safe there, and loved to go spend time in Mary, Martha and Lazarus' home. These siblings welcomed him freely, and let him just be -- well, they let him be him. He could relax there because he trusted them. Ever since the home crowd in Galilee tried to throw him off a cliff, Jesus seems to have gone to his own hometown less and less. Instead, he went to Bethany more and more.

Here now, in this loving environment, Jesus is the guest of honor it seems. On this night, they wanted to say "thank you." Lazarus had been raised from the dead by Jesus, what the biblically literate among us might pick up on as a foreshadowing of that which was just ahead. Yes? Lazarus is at the table.

Two important things to notice. First, Mary anoints Jesus with oil. Costly perfume, actually, likely imported since it was pure nard. Judas is there also, and he objects to her lavish demonstration. Ostensibly, he does so because he is trying to sound like a responsible treasurer. But, John is having nothing of that. He'll look us right in the eye and narrate that Judas really was greedy and cared nothing about being generous toward the poor. We'll snarl at Judas, because we know who he is and what he's up to.

Second, Mary's gesture could appear as a mere thank you. And if it were, that would be enough. She is grateful and so should we be. But we sense that there is more to this story. That's because there is. Her anointing of him also foreshadows. For mere days later, Jesus will embark on a new chapter of his life and ministry on the Cross. Anointing in the Bible almost always marked a significant new beginning. Jesus' death and resurrection will change everything. Oh...that. This same Mary will take oil and head out for the Tomb one morning very soon. She'll go to embalm a crucified Jesus this time. May we have ears to hear, eyes to read carefully, and spirits open to the teaching of God's sacred story!

**Prayer:**

Lord, we give thanks for the example of one who even had room at the table for a crooked follower who would soon betray him. And who was gracious enough to receive the anointing that marked the beginning of his own end. With Lenten hearts, with fearful and uncertain hearts, we move ever forward, following you even unto the healing made possible on the Cross. Amen.

**April 7 - John 12: 20-36**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus***

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

***Jesus Speaks about His Death***

27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say -- 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to

indicate the kind of death he was to die. 34 The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" 35 Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."

### **Devotional:**

You know what today is? Okay, this is actually a trick question. Some of you insisted that I ought to write this series of devotionals during our troubled time with the novel CoronaVirus. So, I claim writer's privilege today. Into this time of uncertainty, loss and fear, I celebrate today. This is Elizabeth's birthday! Today also marks 3 years ago that we moved to Franklin and into our new home.

In November of 2002, I sat on a platform chair readying myself to preach inside the Biserica Crestina Baptista Providenta. That is Romanian for "Providence Baptist Church." We were in Bucharest, Romania for the better part of two weeks. Elizabeth was working with scores of school age children in English speaking and in basic hygiene instruction. Meanwhile, I was teaching a two week course on the life of Jesus. I was nervous enough about preaching with a translator. Then, I glanced underneath the pulpit. There on a plaque -- where only the one who was about to preach could see -- were words from today's devotional text in John 12. "**Sir, we would have them to see Jesus.**" That was convicting. Suddenly, language was not my primary concern. Would they see Jesus in what I had to say?

Something shifted inside our Lord in this episode. Jesus was at a festival. Some "Greeks" came looking for him. We get no notion that these people wanted to cause Jesus any harm. They seem to have heard about him, these Gentiles. Jesus' own disciples aided them in trying to have contact with him. They went to Philip. Philip went to Andrew. Andrew and Philip went to Jesus and told him there were some Greeks there to see him. Gentiles, in other words. Suddenly, he declared that the hour for him to be glorified had come. This after insisting throughout his ministry that in fact his hour had not yet come.

Then, Jesus began to riff with a metaphoric discussion of what was next. A piece of wheat does no one any good unless it is first ready to be harvested. Then, the grain can be multiplied. The light shines into darkness, but it will not shine forever. So, like any worker knows, we do well to work while there is still light with us. Jesus was signaling that his days were ending. His perspective was obvious. What was about to be upon him was not pleasant. Everything would be different after this.

We live in uncertain days with an illness that we struggle to understand and to slow down. We hear statistics that both give us perspective and darken the soul. We medicate the anxiety that is attendant, while trying our best to use the time we have productively. As you are working to stay safe and healthy (as you should!), give thanks to the Savior who understood what had come to him -- and did anything but play things healthfully and safe.

**Prayer:**

Lord of our uncertainty, hear our prayers. In our need, hear our prayers. In our hope, hear our prayers. In our anxiety and grief, Lord, hear our prayers. We give thanks that you walked right into the center of human need, sacrificed your very essence, and made possible a new day. Amen.

**April 8 - Isaiah 50: 4-9a**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***The Servant's Humiliation and Vindication***

4 The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens -- wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. 5 The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. 6 I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. 7 The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; 8 he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 9 It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

**Devotional:**

I have never been drawn to the gratuitously violent depictions of Jesus' crucifixion and death on the Cross. Some of the more popular movie versions of this, I find revolting and unnecessary.

Nor, though, do I feel we ought to minimize what Jesus allowed to happen. Since my older childhood, maybe I began to get it a little better. I knew that his sacrifice could not have been pretty. His pain was real, his death was uncomfortable unto torture. The older I get, though -- maybe the more mature I become in my faith -- I ponder that some of the other dimensions of Jesus' death might even have been worse in some ways.

In Isaiah 50, we hear the prophecy of the Sacrificial Servant. Christians hear Jesus' life and passion foretold in these. Read back through today's scripture text above. Notice what is being described. He has been a teacher, a model of life itself. A willing Lord who has lived and now hands himself over to humanity. His followers will abandon him. We will assail him. We will strike his back, for he has made himself vulnerable to whatever fate we should deal out. We will even insult Jesus. We will!

Who will sustain him? Who will see him through? Who will sustain and see us through? It is God. God who continues to this very moment, working in and among Creation. That very God.

**Prayer:**

Oh God of my days and God of my Christ. Hold me up just now. Sustain me even as I seek to give life and sustenance to others. Help me to be inspired by the loving Christ who has given all He had. Amen.

**April 9 - John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet***

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."

11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord -- and you are right, for that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

16 Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. 31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

**Devotional:**

If you can't love Peter, you probably can't love my people. I don't think Peter was as...how shall we say...socially "finished" as many who were higher in society. Peter was just Peter. He was out there, ready to go with any job Jesus might throw his way.

I picture an impulsive man. A physical man who had been used to working with his hands, and who spoke from his heart. Maybe he even spoke a little from his hip. What you saw was what you were going to get.

Contrast him with, say, Judas and we are reminded that Jesus truly was surrounded by all types. Judas was entrusted with keeping what meager finances Jesus' ministry might have had. He had some book learnin' about him, or at least the organization to be entrusted with the money.

Big mistake. Probably neither Judas nor Peter should have had the money truth be told. John has already hinted to us that Judas was stealing the money, and we know he is about to betray Jesus for a sum of 30 pieces of silver. So he can't be trusted. Peter? He's so impulsive and gung-ho, with a huge heart. He would give it all away with no practical plans for other or later needs they might have come about.

On this night, however, it doesn't matter. The money doesn't matter. Jesus was giving them (and we who read these words) a gift that would continue to give right up until now. He got up during supper to wash their feet. Peter insisted that he wasn't worthy, and that he instead ought to be the one washing Jesus' feet. You have to love Peter!

Jesus protested that if he couldn't wash Peter's feet, then Peter could have no share of him. Predictably, Peter got ready to offer him his hands and head, to let Jesus give him a proper bath!

Jesus went on to use this foot-washing as a lasting metaphor for the kingdom of God. That in God's kingdom, we would take care of one another. That we would love each other not just in heart but in deed. That we would think as much of each other as we do ourselves. In fact, as this ends Jesus gives us a new commandment: that we love each other as he has already loved us! He goes on to say that people will know that we are his disciples if we love one another.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again -- some of the loudest talking Christians I have known, who carp on and on about saving souls...have also been some of the meanest-spirited Christians I have known. Jesus says, right here as he was leaving humanity, that this simply wouldn't do. Love is the only hallmark by which genuine faith will be known. Everything else is idle chatter and only so much window-dressing. The Easter victory compels us to give our whole selves over to Jesus.

**Prayer:**

Lord, help us to take our faith in you as seriously as you did! Help us to understand that our love for you has less to do with fire-insurance (against Hell) and more to do with being transformed by you into people who resemble you. Amen.