

The great Lutheran theologian Helmut Theileke said, “Those who possess the last hour need not worry about the next moment.” How can you live differently today knowing that life and death are in God’s hands? What does it mean to you that Jesus is resurrection and life? Where do you find hope in this story, and how is that hope made manifest in your daily life?

Prayer: Eternal God, help me to remember that the last word will always belong to you.

Saturday: Read Psalm 40:1-3

When the old song doesn’t fit anymore, can you sing a new song? Change will come — it is not a matter of *if*, it is a matter of *when*. What will you do when everything changes? The psalmist has some suggestions. **Wait.** Don’t rush things. Don’t be impatient. If your life is turned upside down one day, don’t expect everything to be normal the next. **Listen.** Listen to what God is up to. One of God’s great gifts is an open ear, an open heart. Listen to what God is saying and doing in your life, and pay attention. **Trust.** Trust that, even when things seem hopeless, God will deliver. This is the constant story of God and God’s people: God delivers us from slavery, God delivers us from exile, God delivers us from sin. The story of God-with-us is the story of deliverance. When you remember what God has done, you can find hope and assurance for what God will do. If we can wait, listen, and trust, God will see us through.

Prayer: God of the ages, help me to trust in you, so that with the great communion of saints, we can sing a new song of praise to you.



Sermon: A Change is Gonna Come

Habakkuk 3:16-19

“I hear, and I tremble within; my lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones, and my steps tremble beneath me. I wait quietly for the day of calamity to come upon the people who attack us. Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights.”

Monday: Read Luke 1:46-55

What is most striking to many about Mary’s song is that she sings in past tense. God has scattered the proud and brought down the powerful, she sings. God has lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry, sent the rich empty away. God *has done* all these things, she sings. It’s a little odd, isn’t it, to give thanks for gifts that haven’t been given, to remember that which has yet to happen, to offer praise for the fulfillment of promises that remain unfulfilled? It’s a little odd for Mary to give God thanks for what God has done in Jesus when Jesus hasn’t even been born yet. And Jesus’ birth only makes sense in light of Jesus’ life and Jesus’ death. It is only in looking back that the nativity has meaning for us. But before the cross, before the empty tomb, before Jesus is even born, Mary sings. She bursts into song, remembering what God has not even done yet. She sings because she believes what God has promised: in her womb is the anointed of God, and in him, God’s kingdom will come in the fullness of time. Mary’s song attests to the faith we hope to have. She sings ahead of time, trusting that her song will ring true when the time is right. But can we sing with her? Do we really believe the ludicrous claims of the gospel? Can we live in the hope that God’s promises will be fulfilled? Can we sing today about what we trust God will do tomorrow?

Prayer: Gracious God, help me to sing ahead of time, trusting in your promise of wholeness and peace.

Tuesday: Read Matthew 21:1-11

For generations, the Jews had waited on a Messiah —God’s anointed — to come. The Messiah was to overturn the powers that oppress, and set the world aright again. He was to be a king, like his ancestor David, mighty and powerful. The crowds had heard of Jesus, heard that he had healed the sick, that he was a powerful teacher, that maybe, just maybe, he might be the Messiah. They gather to greet him as he comes into Jerusalem. They expected to find this would-be king coming as a king would come: mighty steed, red carpet, the king’s guard. Instead, Jesus comes as a peasant on a donkey. A servant. A nobody. What does it mean that this carpenter from Nazareth is the one we’ve been waiting for? Many asked, “Who is this?” Who is this Christ? Who is this one who comes in the name of the Lord? We all have expectations of Jesus: Maybe we’re looking for the healer who will take away our pain and suffering, and the pain and suffering of those we love. Maybe we’re looking for the friend who will stand by us when no one else will. Maybe we’re looking for the peacemaker who will save a world in conflict. Maybe we’re looking for a miracle-worker to turn our lives around. Maybe we’re looking for the righteous judge who will pronounce a final verdict. The truth is, the one who comes in the name of the Lord may meet some of our expectations, but he will confound them as well. He will touch every nerve, step over every boundary, enter in to all those places we would just assume he would not go. The same Jesus who heals and comforts also challenges and confronts, and we don’t get to choose what parts of ourselves we’ll open to Jesus; we don’t get to choose where we let Jesus in. When Jesus comes, Jesus comes all the way, and he always goes just a little farther perhaps than we would like: We love when Jesus turns over the moneychangers’ tables, unless we’re the ones sitting there. We love when Jesus confronts the Pharisees, until we look in the mirror and see ourselves in them. We love when Jesus says the first shall be last, thinking surely he must be talking about somebody else. The crowds know this all too well. Today they cry “Hosanna!” But come Friday, they will shout, “Crucify him!” How does Jesus confound your expectations? What are some of the hard truths Jesus is trying to tell you? How is Jesus calling you to live more faithfully today?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to receive you as you are, and to follow your way instead of my own.

Wednesday: Read Mark 6:14-44

We hear the story of John’s death and we tremble at the cost of discipleship, the consequence of following Jesus. We know the world is full of evil and violence and death, and that it is into this world that Christ sends us. John’s call was to prepare the way for Jesus, and he did, even unto death. But the tomb could not contain Jesus, and in his dying and being raised, death — and life — are changed forever. Nothing’s the same. The past is changed because Jesus is raised, our present is changed because Jesus will return. Tomorrow shapes today. This isn’t it. There *is* more. John’s beheading is a difficult text to hear and a heart-wrenching story to follow. But if you read ahead just a few verses, the disciples return to witness the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. The world says it’s the powers and principalities running the show, that speaking the truth has terrible consequences, that evil is lurking round every corner. It’s a convincing argument, and it could keep you down. But when Jesus hears this, he finds some hungry people, and with a few loaves of bread and a couple fish,

he gives them something to eat. How is God calling you to respond to the injustice in the world? What can you do when faced with evil? How can you help to prepare Christ’s way?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to stand up to evil with love and grace.

Thursday: Read Mark 1:40-45

We are not powerless, you and I. There is so much brokenness in the world, but we can do something about it, if we choose to. The priests didn’t do a thing. That’s why Jesus was so angry. The priests had all the power in the world to wipe out those lines that keep some people in and some people out. They had all the power in the world to say to that leper: you are healed, you are cleansed, you are home. But instead of flinging open the doors, they flipped the deadlock shut, set the alarm code, and held the world at bay. “If you choose, you can make me clean.” The leper knows Jesus has the power, and he risks it all in hopes Jesus will use it. As followers of Jesus, we have that same power, if we choose to use it. Maybe it’s the single mother on food stamps, or the homeless man living in the abandoned barn, or the convict or the addict or the mentally ill. Maybe it’s the family member waiting for forgiveness and an invitation to return for Sunday dinner. The power is ours, and so is the choice. The leper cries out to Jesus, and the world cries out to us: “If you choose, you can make me clean.” Who do you know that needs to feel loved and included? What can you do today to extend acceptance and community to someone on the margins?

Prayer: Gracious God, help me to choose love today.

Friday: Read John 11:1-44

“If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” That’s how Martha greets Jesus. Not thanks for coming, but where were you? Mary, who will anoint Jesus before his own death, throws herself at his feet and cries out the same accusation. These were Jesus’ friends, this family — Mary and Martha and Lazarus. They sent word that Lazarus was ill, but Jesus stayed two days longer before traveling to Bethany. When he arrives, Lazarus has been dead four days. Martha goes out to meet Jesus before he gets to the house full of mourners. “If you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now, God will give you what you ask.” We don’t know in what tone Martha spoke those words, but there has to be some anger — her response implies faith in Jesus’ power to heal, and rebuke for not using it on her brother, his friend. Then, in the midst of this grief and pain, Jesus says: “I am the resurrection, and I am life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” This is **eschatology**, which comes from the Greek *eschaton*, meaning “last things.” Eschatology is Christian hope: trust that the fullness of time belongs to God. It is a reminder that today is different because of what God will do tomorrow. And so, if we look more deeply at the story, where Jesus is deeply moved and troubled; the tomb is near Jerusalem; the tomb is a cave with a large stone covering it; the stone is rolled away; Jesus cries with a loud voice; and at the beginning we are told the end of this story will be the glorifying of the Son. Sound familiar? This is less a story about Lazarus and more a story about Jesus, for when Lazarus comes out of the tomb, Jesus must enter it, and in the end, both life and death are different than we ever imagined.