

FIFTH WEEK IN LENT

Shalom: The Way to Repairing

Written by Christian Brooks



Reflect: In Lent, as we journey to the cross with Jesus, we are reminded that along the way the Lamb of God repaired what was broken — healing bodies and spirits. As we get closer to Holy Week — and to the cross of Good Friday — how can we see the broken world with compassion? How can we stop long enough on the roads we travel to reach out and bring shalom into our communities?

Add to your peace prayer “tree”

This past week, the daily devotionals talked about a hope that is unseen, which can bring peace. Add to your prayer “tree” all that you are hoping for in this world. Hope for hunger to ease. Hope for poverty to banish. Hope for healthcare for all. Give it to God in prayer.

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 21

Enough for All

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. — Amos 5:24

When I think of a world where justice will “roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,” I think of a world where there is no suffering or oppression. I think of a world where the oppressed are vindicated. Where the wrongs from the past have been acknowledged and made right.

I think of a world where everyone has all of the resources that they need. Everyone has food. Everyone has clean water. Everyone has shelter. Everyone has access to education.

I think of a world where there are no more “isms” such as racism and sexism. There will be no more patriarchy, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, discrimination or bigotry. We will all be viewed as worthy and of value.

We have the tools at our disposal to create a world like this. We can stand up for the one knocked down. We can speak up for the one who has been silenced. We can advocate for better policies to ensure everyone has enough of what they need. This year, we can emerge from our Lenten wilderness wandering and begin repairing the world. What’s stopping us?

Lord, help us to understand that a society without suffering and oppression is possible. Teach us how to get there. In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

Monday, March 22

Repairers always face opposition

When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers. — Proverbs 21:15

This passage in Proverbs gives us a startling and sobering reminder that when seeking to repair the world, not everyone welcomes progress. Jesus saw this as he made his way to the cross, encountering opposition along the way from those in power who wanted the status quo to remain as such. This is a concept that is important to understand as we continue to move forward in our fight for justice and equality for all people.

Our country was built on an ideology of power which created a dichotomy of “those who have” and “those who have not.” This dichotomy says in order for “those who have” to have power and resources, they must take from “those who have not.” This unhealthy understanding led to the oppression of many groups of people through stealing

land and enslavement.

Though these atrocities occurred long ago, the ideology from our founding is still deeply embedded in the fabric of our country. Some Americans still hold to that ideology. Because of this, though, some will rejoice for progress; others will fear progress and perceive it as a threat to their way of life. But regardless of the resistance, we must continue in our call to seek justice for those who are oppressed.

Lord, as we continue to fight for justice, let us hold those who resist with love and compassion, but continue to fight for what is right and set at liberty those who are oppressed. In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, March 23

Finding faith to stand up for justice

When Esther’s maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king’s treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people. Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come into the king for thirty days.” When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.” Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is

against the law; and if I perish, I perish.” — Esther 4:4–16

I love the book of Esther, especially this chapter as it tells us a story of a young woman whom God calls to do something extraordinary, but she is struggling with fears and doubts. Ultimately, she overcomes her apprehensions, puts her faith in God and starts living into what God has called her to do — to stand up for what is right and save her people.

Many of us can identify with Esther. Many of us fear stepping out of our comfort zone to stand up for what is right. But like Esther, we must overcome our fears and step out of our comfort zone because the world needs us.

Every day we watch in horror as another Black person is gunned down by the police. Children are locked in cages like animals in detention centers. Just recently, too, we had to witness in our country voter suppression tactics to keep people from exercising their right to vote as citizens of the United States. This isn't right. We have to do something about it.

This Lent, as we explore the ways to shalom, we must remember Esther's example and live into our calling to be liberators. Why? It's because our people need us.

Lord, like Esther many of us are scared to speak up. We have families to care for and households to maintain. But just as Esther overcame her fears, we must too. Lord, help us to step out in faith and move forward in our call to seek justice. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Wednesday, March 24

Jesus the liberator and protestor

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. — Luke 4:18

Who is this Jesus that we follow to the cross? He was a healer to the sick. He was a friend to the friendless. He was also a liberator and a protestor, speaking out against oppression and corruption.

Not everyone, however, embraces Jesus the liberator and protestor. In Luke 4, as Jesus continued to teach about healing and liberation, people became furious. A mob formed in an attempt to drive him out of town.

As followers of Christ, Jesus entrusts us to continue his mission. We are called to be truth-tellers who not only proclaim the gospel, but also live out the gospel in our daily lives. We are called to speak out against oppressive systems that were built to abuse, oppress and marginalize.

As we continue to speak up, there will be people who are

not pleased. Just as they did with Jesus, people will raise up against us. However, just as Jesus continued to speak out, so shall we.

The Lenten path we trod is not an easy one. It leads to the cross of crucifixion where the world thought it finally silenced Jesus. But like Jesus, we put our faith in God, knowing that hope reigns beyond the cross. The work of liberation will not stop.

Lord, guide me in your way and help me to speak up for what is right, even when there are people who are against me. In Christ's name, I pray. Amen.

Thursday, March 25

Be the change you want to see

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? — Micah 6:8

Jesus knew the teachings of the prophets and turned to those lessons often as he modeled for others what a life filled with shalom could look like. On our Lenten journey, we turn to this oft-recited Scripture passage from the prophet Micah and discover two little words that can make all the difference in our broken world: “to do.” We are not only to hear about the work of justice, but we are also to do that work. And we are not only called to seek justice from others, but we must also behave justly ourselves.

Micah calls us to look within ourselves, our organizations and our communities to make sure we are behaving justly. If we discover injustice within our lives and communities, we must have enough humility to acknowledge our missteps and correct our mistakes. We must also have the kindness to apologize and ask forgiveness for our mistakes. We cannot only expect others to change. We must also be the change we want to see.

Lord, please give me the strength and humility to look for injustices within myself. Give me the courage to acknowledge my mistakes and give me the strength to change. In Christ's name, I pray. Amen.

Friday, March 26

A new reality

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. — 2 Peter 3:11–13

In the Second Epistle of Peter, we are given the hope of a new reality. This hope is much needed as we are still reeling from and dealing with a year — 2020 — that brought us a global pandemic that claimed the lives of millions around the world. The pandemic also triggered an economic crisis that rendered millions of people unemployed, homeless and food insecure.

The legacy of deep-seated systemic racism and oppression was also unveiled in 2020. The Scripture addresses the need to tear down the old to create a new existence where there is no oppression, suffering or inequality, but one filled with love and righteousness. This hope for a new existence is important now more than ever.

As people of faith, we must take heed of Peter's words. Lent is a time to repent, to acknowledge past mistakes and repair the wrongs of the past. When we do this, we will begin reimagining an equitable society for all.

Lord, help us prepare for the shift that is necessary in our society. Help us to accept what needs to change with grace and love. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Saturday, March 27

Unity

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. — 1 Corinthians 1:10

The divide in our nation has been very apparent in recent years. This division has led to fear, hatred and destruction. We are in dire need of unity and healing.

However, before we can even begin the work of repairing and move toward reconciliation, we must acknowledge our wrongs. There are past and present atrocities that have not fully been acknowledged. The colonization of the Americas and the enslavement of African Americans are two horrific events in America's history that still need to be addressed. These events breached trust; they stripped the dignity from and took the lives of many.

Though these events took place long ago, the descendants of Indigenous peoples and enslaved African Americans are still suffering. People lost their languages, their native religions and their cultural identities. Families were separated. Land and income were stolen.

As we look forward to unifying our nation, let us not forget the pain and suffering that are part of our history. This Lent, as people of faith, let us take on the role of repairers — restoring the dignity of those who have been harmed.

Loving God, guide us as we journey to become a more unified nation. Give us the humility, grace and courage to make right our wrongs. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.