

Daily Devotionals

Week 7 (March 30 - April 4)

Monday, March 30

Nicodemus and Jesus

We are most familiar with Nicodemus as the Pharisee who comes to Jesus by night. We remember that in that heart-to-heart conversation Jesus told him, "You must be born over," and that "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." Jesus also said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son and that the Son did not come to condemn, but to save." However, we are left to wonder, at the end of that spiritually world-shaking conversation, if Nicodemus became a believer.

A few chapters later in John, Nicodemus defends Jesus before the leadership: "Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before and who was one of them, asked, 'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?'" (John 7:50-51) He apparently believed in Jesus enough to risk defending him before the Sanhedrin.

Nicodemus also helps to take care of Jesus' body and prepare it for burial at his own expense: "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. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds." (John 19:38-39)

Nicodemus was a smart man, but he didn't always understand what Jesus was saying or doing. Yet he still believed. He even believed enough to risk his own reputation and life to stand up for Jesus and honor him in death. We don't always understand either, but God does not require understanding. All God asks is that we trust. As we approach the remembrance of Jesus' trial and death during holy week may we not only seek to understand, but first and foremost to trust.

Prayer: Open my heart, as you opened Nicomeus' heart, so I can know Jesus more deeply, trust him more sincerely, and follow him more closely. Amen

by Alex Stevenson

Tuesday, March 31

Reading through Luke

Over the past 15 months, the youth group at St. Mark (Ignite!) has been reading through the Gospel of Luke together. We started just after Advent 2024 with the stories of Zachariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, and Jesus and the nativity in Luke 1-2. And we will soon complete our reading of the book, which lines up with Easter 2026; in the last couple of weeks, we have been reading about the Last Supper, and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus in Luke 22-24.

Throughout this reading experience, there have been many additional times when what we have read on a Sunday or Wednesday evening has aligned with the church calendar as we've (re)experienced it as an entire St. Mark community. There were several instances when the passages we read were either a week or two removed from the lectionary texts on which Pastor Alex's sermons were based, especially during the Spring of 2025. This Providential orchestration helped the youth with recall and retention, integration and formation.

As we read Luke, we paid attention to the gospel writer's thesis: that Jesus is Savior, Christ, and Lord (Luke 2:11). And how Jesus' self-proclaimed mission supports his identity/roles: to proclaim [1] good news to the poor, [2] liberty to the captive, [3] favor to the oppressed, and [4] to grant sight to the blind (Luke 4:18-19)—and to do so not only to/for Jews but Gentiles as well (Luke 4:23-30), which he does (Luke 7:18-23). We also paid close attention to Jesus' way of discipleship (Luke 10) and the way of God in Jesus' personal interactions, teachings, and actions.

Not only was every word of the Gospel of Luke read, we also, after every passage or two, watched a cinematic representation of the biblical text. The movie we watched was a word-for-word narration of the Gospel of Luke, with Mediterranean actors who were speaking in Semitic languages. This feature was beneficial to the youth too; for, it restated what we read and discussed. Sometimes a new thought occurred to someone when viewing the story of Jesus versus reading it (visual culture that we are); and sometimes something would be caught for the first time rather than it being review. Regardless, this practice also helped the youth with recall and retention, integration and formation.

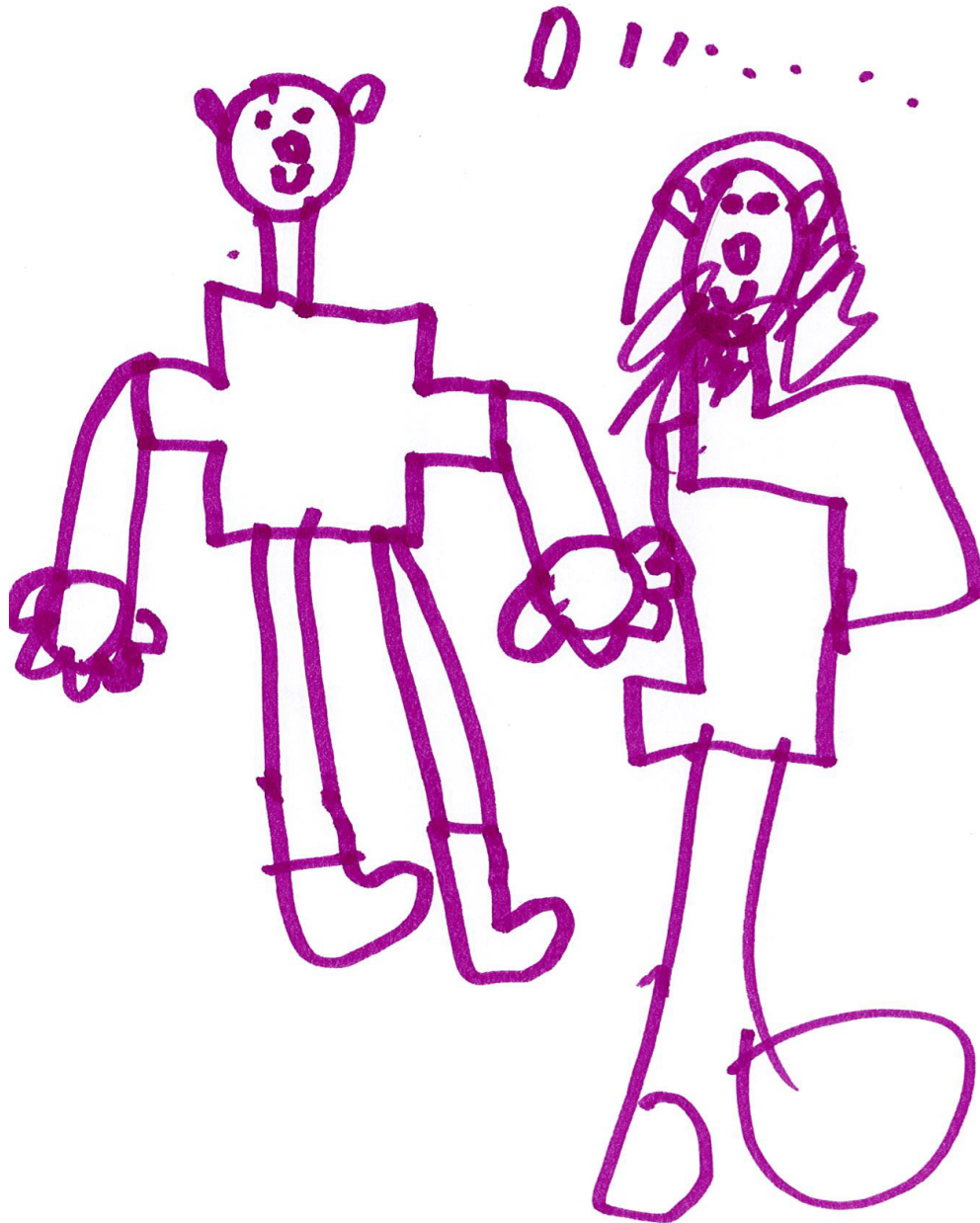
We tried to understand Jesus and the world that he lived in, so that we could know how to live in our world in relationship—personal and communal—with Jesus. We read to learn how to be disciples of Jesus, and to be guided in our life in Christ. When you see us around, please ask us about our experience reading through the Gospel of Luke; and ask us who we are becoming in Christ Jesus.

by Josh Spoelstra on behalf of Ignite! Youth

Wednesday, April 1 This picture was drawn by a child in St. Mark's Spark program.

Mason

The biggest proof of God's faithfulness is Jesus. God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to save us so we can live with him forever. That's pretty amazing! Knowing that God will never leave us brings us comfort every day.



Thursday, April 2

A New Exodus

Maundy Thursday commemorates Jesus' Last Supper; and this fateful meal occurred during the Festival of Passover, which commemorated the original Passover that took place in Egypt. There, the Israelites had been enslaved by the Egyptians for four centuries, and God was about to liberate them. Nine plagues had passed, and the tenth and final plague was about to transpire during the night; the tenth plague brought the death of the firstborn to every household who did not have the shed blood of a lamb painted on the doorframes to their dwellings.

Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples during the annual Passover celebration is reminiscent of the original Passover in Egypt that the Israelites observed. The Passover meal followed a set menu with a didactic purpose; it contained unleavened bread, bitter herbs, lamb (the same one whose blood was on the doorframes so that the angel of death would *pass over* the house), and water or wine (Exod 12:11-17 // Mark 14:12). However, Jesus reinterpreted the elements of bread and wine (Exod 12:7-8) as his own body and blood given for a new liberation, a new salvation (Luke 22:19-20). This, though, is only where the parallels between the exodus and the new exodus begin.

- Each family was to sacrifice a lamb for Passover (Exod 12:3); Jesus "Christ, [is] our Passover lamb, [who] has been sacrificed" for us (1 Cor 5:7b)—indeed, Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).
- The sacrificial lamb had to be perfect, without blemish (Exod 12:5a); and the Apostle Peter asserts: "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways [you] inherited... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:18-19).
- The Passover lamb was to be slaughtered specifically at twilight (Exod 12:6b); and Jesus breathed his last and died on the cross "as evening approached" (Mark 15:37, 42, 43, 46).
- The blood of the lamb was to be smeared upon the (vertical) doorposts and (horizontal) mantles to save its inhabitants (Exod 12:7); Jesus's blood—which purifies us from sin (1 John 1:7) and frees us (Rev 1:5)—was smeared on the vertical and horizontal beams of the cross to make peace and reconciliation amongst humanity toward God (Col 1:19-20).

As the Israelites were liberated from the bondage of slavery under the tyranny of Pharaoh, so Jesus-disciples are liberated from the bondage of sin that enslaves them to the tyrant Satan. While Pharaoh and his army were drowned in the Red Sea, after God had split it and cause the Israelites to pass through unharmed, and Israel thus experienced salvation, so by the resurrection of Jesus, which delivered the fatal deathblow to Satan by emerging victoriously from death, do Jesus-disciples experience their salvation. As the liberated Israelites on the far shore thence journeyed to Mt. Sinai to enter into covenant-relationship with God, even so Jesus

enters into a new covenant with his disciples which governs their relationship with their Savior and all others (John 13:34).

So, the original Passover is like Jesus' Last Supper; the first exodus like the second exodus; the tenth plague akin to Jesus' crucifixion. The lamb died to save the firstborn; Jesus the only begotten Son of God, the Lamb of God died to save others. The doorposts and mantles are like the wooden beams of the cross of Christ. Jesus said: "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, [s/]he will be saved..." (John 10:9 NASB).

by Josh Spoelstra

Friday, April 3

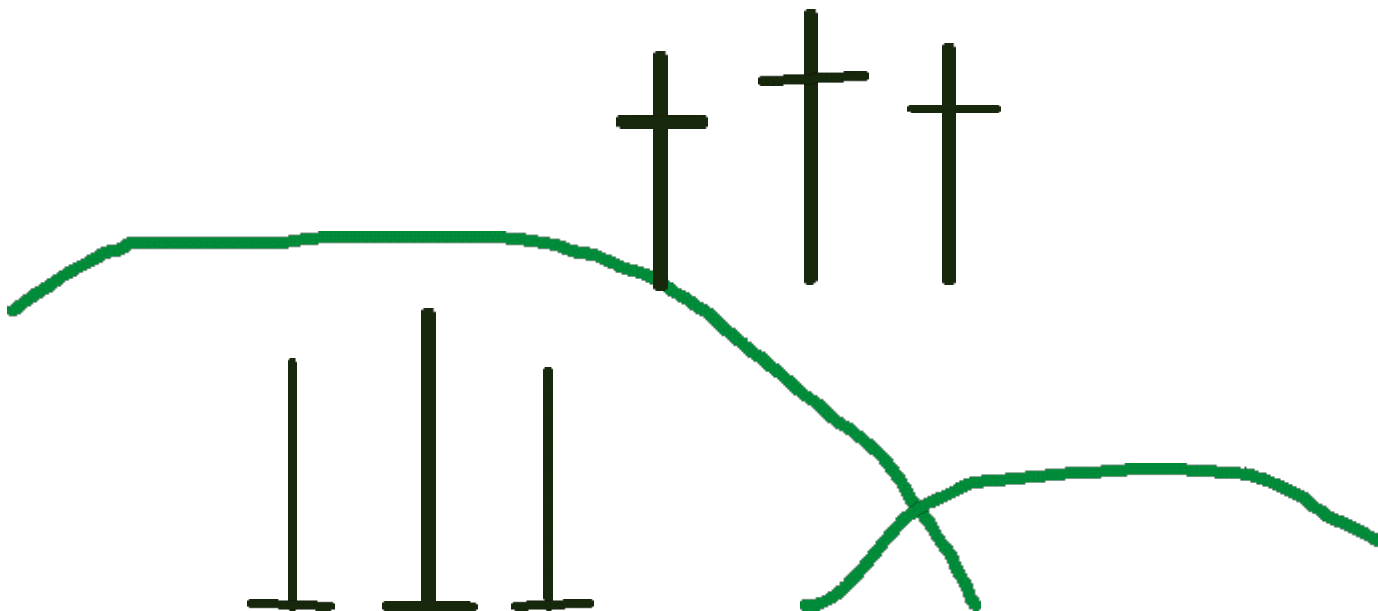
When Alex graduated from Duke, we were given our first assignment in the United Methodist Church. It was to a two-point charge in Abbeville county. We went for our introductory visit with the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) and district superintendent. Abbeville county is a rural county, but the people are so very good and the landscape is beautiful. We spent four years there living in “God’s country” as many people call it. I have enough good memories to write a book.

One memory stands out especially during the Lenten season. On the way to town, we always passed three crosses on the side of the road. Those crosses always reminded me of God’s grace because of what Jesus told the thief on the cross beside him: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43

No matter what you and I have been through or done in the past, Jesus is there for us with open arms. He will stand beside us and meet us just where we are.

Prayer: Lord, guide us to you, help us to reach out to you no matter what we have been through in our lives.

by Melissa Stevenson (this devotion was inspired by the one Frank Axson wrote last week)



Saturday April 4

This last Lenten devotional is reprinted from the 2024 St. Mark Lenten devotionals. I felt it was very fitting here. Christ is risen!! Thank you to all who wrote devotionals during this 2026 Lenten season including the children and youth for participating. And thanks to the readers! Have a wonderful Easter! - Melissa Stevenson

In the spring of 1966, I was working on a pier project on the Song Han River in Da Nang, Vietnam. I was serving with the Navy Seabee battalion MCB 8. The work was very hard and miserable including the heat, working in mud up near our knees, and the never ending mosquitoes. At this particular time, I was on the night crew. Suddenly, one night, the generators died. We were all told to report to the Conex box, this was the place our supplies were stored, and it was the office of the Chief who was on duty. The 16 of us scrambled from our various jobs and gathered to find out what was going on. The Chief informed us that there was some kind of trouble going on in the city that surrounded us, and our orders were to stop all construction and to defend the pier at all cost. Posts were assigned, and we all took our positions. The remainder of the night was filled with gun fire and the explosions of grenades. The next day all seemed quiet, and we were all called to report to the Conex box again. The Chief explained that we had only a couple of cases of C rations and a little less than 10 gallons of water. He also explained that the fighting was a religious conflict and not the Vietcong. A plan was laid out of rationing what we had, and our orders had not changed. The heat and boredom was tough and the skirmishes continued. On the 4th day we were out of food and we were getting very low on water. Then a Duck came up the river with a few Marines on board. Our Chief flagged it down. The Marines told him that they were the last Americans leaving Da Nang, and they could give us a ride to our camp. This info was radioed to our command, but the reply was no, and our mission had not changed. On day 6, the Chief sent word to us that choppers with Marines would relieve us and take us back to our base camp in the morning. The morning finally came, and we waited. Finally, we heard the choppers coming, and soon they were on the ground. As soon as the Marines got off the chopper to relieve us, we all scrambled on. As the chopper made its way up the river, we were soon making our way over our camp of nearly 1,000 men below us. At the center of the camp was a large open area we called the "Grinder". There, we saw about 300 or 400 men sitting in rows on the ground. I thought, "what in the world could they be doing?" I had no idea. The chopper landed in its assigned spot. Someone met us there and told us that a shower was being opened and that the mess hall would be open for much needed food.

I made my way to the tent I was sharing with 7 other guys and no one was there. I shed my clothes, grabbed my towel and shower gear and headed for a shower. When I returned to the tent I

was all clean, but there was a terrible smell. I soon realized that it was my filthy clothes. We had a flat shovel for a dust pan, and I used it to scoop up my clothes and put them in a trash can outside. I got myself dressed and followed the path that would take me to the mess hall. "Hey, Boggs" I heard a familiar voice call out, "you guys had it pretty rough out there, huh". "Oh it

was just peachy”, I replied. “By the way what’s going on at the grinder? I just saw a bunch of guys out there”, I asked. “Oh, that’s Easter Mass”, he said nonchalantly. “You know, it’s Easter!” I stopped. I had to catch my breath, my knees got weak, and my head swirled. Suddenly in my mind’s eye, I could see my mom ushering my little brothers along, all decked out in their new Sunday duds. There was dad in his Sunday best and my mom as beautiful as ever. I could see them making their way to Saint Mark. I could see and hear the pageantry of flowers and music. And then, I thought of those filthy cloths and how the warm water had made me clean, and the family that I loved so much was worshipping Jesus, who gave us a way to clean our souls and start a new life.

Every Lenten season brings back memories of the pier, seeing the camp from above and those hundreds of young men worshipping our Lord and Savior.

by Billy Boggs