**Readings and Devotions for Eastertide 2014**

**Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches**

  
James Jacques Joseph Tissot - The Ascension - c. 1884-96

Ephesians 1:18-23

*… that you may know… the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

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**The Forty Days of Easter**

by Steve Wilkins

N.T. Wright in his book *Surprised by Hope*, refers to how the Church largely disregards Easter. Christmas is celebrated with a vengeance, but Easter? Nah, Easter gets a day, a morning. Some candy in a basket, maybe a new dress and shoes. And this is as true in so-called “liturgical” churches as it is in straight-down-the-center, Puritan-Reformed congregations. We hear about the Christmas “season” (the “twelve days”) but how much attention is given to the Easter “season” (40 days, from Easter to Ascension, or 50 days if we go to Pentecost). There are numerous Christmas hymns (plenty to fill up the two Sundays of the season) but I’ve about used up all the Easter hymns in our hymnal (the Trinity) after this Sunday. Yet, as Bishop Wright points out, without Easter, everything is lost:

*“This is our greatest festival…. Take Easter away, and you don’t have a New Testament; you don’t have a Christianity; as Paul says, you are still in your sins. We shouldn’t allow the secular world, with its schedules and habits and parareligious events, its cute Easter bunnies, to blow us off course. This is our greatest day. We should put the flags out.”*

Bishop Wright suggests that we not only need more hymns but more energy given to celebrating the season of Easter and offers that we should *at least* celebrate it with an eight day festival:

*“But Easter week itself ought not to be the time when all the clergy sigh with relief and go on holiday. It ought to be an eight-day festival, with champagne served after morning prayer or even before, with lots of alleluias and extra hymns and spectacular anthems. Is it any wonder people find it hard to believe in the resurrection of Jesus if we don’t throw our hats in the air? Is it any wonder we find it hard to live the resurrection if we don’t do it exuberantly in our liturgies? Is it any wonder the world doesn’t take much notice if Easter is celebrated as simply the one-day happy ending tacked on to forty days of fasting and gloom? It’s long overdue that we took a hard look at how we keep Easter in church, at home, in our personal lives, right through the system.”*

One reason so many feel uncomfortable with the 40 days of Lent is just here: We ignore the 40 days of Easter. Thus, as Wright points out, “if Lent is a time to give things up, Easter ought to be a time to take things up. . . . The forty days of the Easter season, until the ascension, ought to be a time to balance out Lent by taking something up, some new task or venture, something wholesome and fruitful and outgoing and self-giving.”

To which I says, “Amen and I like it.” And, there’s no time like the present to begin. Today is the first day of the Easter season. Time to celebrate. Rejoice, be glad, break out a little champagne for breakfast, shoot off a cannon (or two), and engage in all manner of jollification over the reality that Christ is risen and has conquered sin, death, and all the powers of hell.

**Easter in the Church Calendar**

by Randy Booth

The Christian Year or Calendar finds its origin in the early Church. By as early as the first and second century, the Early Church had already arrived at some degree of local agreement regarding the importance of certain aspects of the Gospel narrative as regards the Church's worship and remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ. The pre-Nicene calendar consisted of two annual feasts, Pascha (i.e., Easter) and Pentecost. These special feasts were celebrated in addition to a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. Both of the feasts had been derived from the Jewish feasts of Passover and Pentecost, with the exception that their observance was moved to the nearest Sunday.

Pascha was a time in which the redemptive nature of Christ's works and death was remembered. This corresponded to the original Jewish observance of Passover as a time in which the Lord had redeemed the Israelite nation from the Egyptian peoples. Pentecost became in the early Church the time to celebrate the Holy Spirit's outpouring upon the church. This also became a feast through which the Church reinforced her identity as the people of the New Covenant. This observance likewise corresponded to the Jewish Pentecost tradition remembering the implementation of the Mosaic Covenant, as embodied in the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. The early Church calendar, therefore, consisted of two major observances (Pascha and Pentecost) in addition to a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Constantine I, Roman emperor, convoked the Council of Nicaea in 325. The council unanimously ruled that the Easter festival should be celebrated throughout the Christian world on the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox; and that if the full moon should occur on a Sunday and thereby coincide with the Passover festival, Easter should be commemorated on the Sunday following. Coincidence of the feast of Easter and Passover was thus avoided.

The calendar which emerged from the fourth century has been the basis of all contemporary observations of the Christian year. The calendar has traditionally consisted of two "cycles" or groups of commemorations: One pertaining to the Lord's Birth (Advent-Christmas-Epiphany), and the other pertaining to the Lord's death (Lent-Easter-Pentecost). These are also referred to as the Christmas and Easter Cycles respectively. The entire year concludes, therefore, with the two original feasts of the pre-Nicene calendar, Pascha (Easter and Ascension) and Pentecost.

Editor’s note:

This devotional booklet encompasses Easter through Pentecost, considering church history from the resurrection of Christ to the giving of His Spirit at Pentecost and looking ahead to the consummation of His Kingdom. These readings are designed for family devotions, ending with an application and/or prayer, **which is often on the following page, after the name of the author.** Most of the texts are synchronized with the Revised Common Lectionary. Scriptures are in the NKJV, unless noted otherwise. Steve Hemmeke

**Resurrection Day**

Read John 20:1-18

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it!

When a man comes back from the dead, everything in all history must eventually center on that man. When a man is executed by the most powerful authority in the world at the time, and they do the worst that mortals can do—which is to execute—and then that man comes back from the grave, the old story is all over. The new story has begun, and the new story is obviously inexorable. The gospel is established, and the cornerstone is laid. He is risen — He is risen indeed.

This was not done in a corner; it was out in public. It was not done in anyone’s heart with a subsequent effect on the public square. It is the other way around. The only reason our hearts can be transformed is because the exact place where Jesus rose can be marked by latitude and longitude, and there is probably some tourist standing on that place right now. The only reason our hearts can be transformed is because Jesus rose on a particular day in history, in fulfillment of all that the prophets had spoken.

The resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of the Regeneration of all things. Put another way, the world was born again before we were, and the only reason we can be born again is because Jesus thrust the principle of new life into the middle of all our public affairs. He put it there in such a way that it cannot be extracted, and it cannot be ignored. More wonderful than this, it cannot be stopped from spreading. It cannot be defeated.

That life has now reached us, and because it has, we have gathered on this Lord’s Day to celebrate that life, and the impact it has had. We do this every seven days, and we do it annually. But think for a moment. What kind of event deserves to have its anniversary marked and celebrated every seven days? We frequently forget how odd this is. But whether we take it for granted or not, the principle of life continues to grow. The resurrection life of Jesus continues to spread around the world.

Men who have not yet been touched by this life have sought out many devices, trying to keep what they see as a superstitious contagion from spreading any further. But despite all this, despite their lies and counterarguments, the spread of life continues. He is risen. He is risen indeed.

*- Pastor Douglas Wilson, Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

**Devotional Thought**:

The Apostle Paul is not afraid of tough questions: “What if Christ didn't really rise from the dead? What if Christianity is all about a good way to live here on earth instead of this stuff about having your sins forgiven, getting new bodies after death, and eternal life with God?” Wouldn't Christianity would be a much easier religion to accept if it were about keeping rules and living a good life instead of believing in strange stories like a man coming back from the dead?” Questions like these give Paul a chance to make the gospel easy to believe. Just get rid of this story about the resurrection, and Christianity would be a very good life to live!

Instead, Paul raises the stakes: “If Christ didn't rise,” he answers, “then the Christian life is the *worst* life to live.” Following Jesus means laying down your life for others, and being raised up by God. If Jesus isn't alive, then Christianity is a terrible religion, all death and no life. But in fact, Jesus *is* alive, and that changes everything.

Paul is showing us that you can't get rid of the gospel story and replace it with instructions on how to be a good person. God is finishing a story that started with one man, Adam, leading all men into death. Here's part one: *Adam dies, we all die*. At the heart of the story comes Jesus, who overcomes death and returns to life. Jesus' resurrection is the most important moment in the story, and makes good news possible: even after death, there is life! Part two of God's story says this: *Jesus lives, we all live*. The Christian life calls us all to die to ourselves, so that God can raise us up to new life. Without the resurrection, there is only death. But since Jesus really did rise from the dead, then the Christian life, even though it leads us to die daily, ultimately leads to life!

*- Pastor CJ Bowen, Christ Reformed Evangelical Church, Annapolis, Maryland*

**Application**:

The resurrection of Jesus frees us to embrace a life of dying to ourselves, and spending our lives for others. Right now, it means that you should think of one small way that you can serve the person sitting to your right before you go to bed, whether by doing the dishes, taking out the trash, playing their favorite game with them, spending time doing what they want, or anything else that enables you to give up a small part of your life for them. Remember, it's okay to spend this life dying: you'll get another life!

**Prayer**:

Father of life, we thank you for raising Jesus from the dead, so that life becomes the end of your story instead of death. We thank you that we belong to Christ, and that because we belong to Him, you promise to raise us from the dead, as well. Give us the strength to take up our cross daily, so that we can happily die to ourselves, knowing that you will raise us up to new life, just like you raised up Jesus. In the mighty name of the Resurrected Lord we pray, *Amen*.

Week of April 28-May 4, first reading of three

**Read John 20:19-31**

**Devotional thought**

Incredible. The word describes something you can’t believe. My family enjoyed watching The Incredibles, about a family of superheroes who did *unbelievable* stunts to stop the bad guys. It’s great onscreen entertainment, but could you believe it if you actually saw it in real life? Nope. It’s incredible.

That’s how Thomas felt. “There’s no way Jesus is alive, I saw Him die. What’s wrong with you guys?” When I saw Mr. Incredible get banged around by the droid I thought, “There’s no way he could survive that.” When Thomas heard that Jesus was alive he thought, “There’s no way He could survive that.” That would be supernatural. And it was.

But there were reasons to believe the disciples’ words. First, the same power of God that made life from no life at the beginning could now restore life. If we believe He made all things and gave life in the first place, why is it incredible that He would restore life to one already dead, especially His beloved and anointed Son? Nothing is impossible with God. Second, Thomas had already seen some earthly resurrections. Jairus’ daughter. Lazarus. Although Jesus’ resurrection was different in that He would never die again, still Thomas had seen Jesus bring others back to life from death.

Yet Jesus does not berate Thomas. He gives Thomas what he says he needs to believe. He points out that many will believe without ever seeing Him first (like you and me). Christ’s patience is great and His provision is tender. He gives to each of us what we need to believe in Him: the Word of God, the Holy Spirit at work in us, parents and pastors to point us to the way, the truth and the life.

Call out with Thomas. Be amazed again. Jesus is alive! He is your Lord and God.

*- Pastor Steve Hemmeke, Covenant Heritage Reformed Church, Newport News, Virginia*

**Discussion questions**

How do you think you would have responded to the disciples if you were Thomas?

What do you do with your doubts about the truth of the resurrection?

How can we recover the wonder of the resurrection, so that we remain alive to the joyous news of Christ’s resurrection?

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for showing us Thomas’ doubt. We believe. Help our unbelief. Direct us by Your Spirit to see in Your Word, Your Son risen to everlasting life. Take nagging doubts away from us and replace them with the wonderful news that Jesus lives, with the assurance that we too will live forever with You.

Week of April 28-May 4, second reading of three

**Psalm 27:13–14**

*13 I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. 14 Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!*

During Eastertide the Church has historically remembered and celebrated the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead. Death is not the final word. As horrible as death is, as devastating as it is, death is a conquered foe. Jesus rose from the dead; Jesus dealt death a death blow. We now live in sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead; because Christ has risen we too shall rise.

So what does this mean? It means that we can have immense confidence in the face of death itself and in the face of all death’s minions – whether sickness, pain, torture, persecution, hardship, or trial. None of these things have the last word – the last word belongs to Jesus and to life. And it is this hope that even David anticipated in Psalm 27: *I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!*

It is absolutely necessary for us to possess such courage, confidence, and patience. After all, consider the twofold task that has been entrusted to the Church. First, we are to lead lives of godly sincerity and purity no matter what others may think or say. Second, while living this way we are not to retreat into a little hovel but to engage all the nations of the earth with the message of the Gospel. This is not a recipe for popularity. So what enables us to accomplish our twofold calling? The early church historian Eusebius explains:

*“[To do so] the strongest conviction of a future life was necessary, that [we] might be able with fearless and unshrinking zeal to maintain the conflict with Gentile and polytheistic error: a conflict the dangers of which [we] would never have been prepared to meet, except as habituated to the contempt of death.”*

How can we accomplish this task? By recalling that our Lord Jesus has conquered sin and death – the mightiest weapons of the enemy have been rendered dull and useless so that we can, through the hope of the resurrection, treat them with contempt. Even as Christ rose from the dead, we too shall rise. This mortal shall put on immortality. So what should characterize our lives? Fearless and unshrinking zeal to maintain the truth of God against all opposition – whether from our own flesh or from the world or from the devil himself.

*- Pastor Stuart W. Bryan, Trinity Church, Coeur d’Alene, Idaho*

**Easter Application**

Discuss ways in which our twofold calling as Christians can present us with opportunities to be afraid. How does the resurrection help us overcome these fears?

**Prayer**

Our Father, we pray that you would grant us courage and boldness and patience. Empower us by your Spirit to keep the resurrection of your Son ever before us – and in keeping his resurrection before us, may we be filled with the passion to live lives of holiness and purity while at the same time engaging our neighbors and endeavoring to lead them from death to life. Amen.

Week of April 28-May 4, third reading of three

Read Acts 9:1-20, The Conversion of Saul

The world was out of order and Saul wanted to do something about it. He sought to restore the proper worship of God. He wanted purity of doctrine and devotion amongst God's people. He longed for singleness of mind in discipleship. He requested official sanction for his work. Saul's goal was to set the world right.

Ultimately, Saul's story is one of God giving him all that he desired. Through a series of missionary trips he laid the foundation for the conquering of the known world. His letters for the synagogues in Damascus were replaced with letters to the churches in Corinth, Philippi, and Ephesus. God used him to turn the world right by turning it upside down (Acts 17:6).

First, though, Saul had to be set right. All that he desired was given him but only after he was turned upside down. The great light shining on him in the passage is the light of Jesus promised to Israel and all those who sat in darkness. He takes no food or drink for he is being reminded that man's life is found in the Word of God. After three days of death he is not just restored but resurrected.

In this way, Saul's conversion is the story of Israel's conversion. She had long been blind to her sin. From the beginning she complained about the bread gave her. Some continued in their blindness, but many repented and through Jesus' death and resurrection were given new sight. Through their witness resurrection is brought to the world. All who hungered for righteousness were fed. What happened on the Damascus Road happened to Saul, Israel, and all the World.

We are not to wait for a personal “Damascus Road” experience. It is ours already. Flowing from Jesus' resurrection we are the result of God's answering of Paul's desire. As Easter People, the Church, in Christ we are the world turned upside down. Let us then keep and continue the feast, celebrating, praying, and serving until every knee shall bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

*- Todd Davis, Christ Church, Searcy, Arkansas*

**Application:** Discuss how God's use of Paul continues today as we read the Epistles. Give God thanks for the long reaching influence of Paul and others. Note that Paul compels us in 1 Corinthians 11:1 to imitate him as he imitates Jesus. Ask for examples of how Paul imitated Christ and ways that we may follow him in proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God.

**Prayer**: O God, who used the preaching of Paul to shine the light of the Gospel throughout the world: Grant us faith to follow that which he taught and grace to imitate him as he imitated Jesus. Turn the world upside down and cause every knee to bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to your glory, Almighty Father. Amen.

Week of May 5-11, first reading of three

**Read ACTS 9:36-43**

Jesus’ death and resurrection affect us in amazing in ways. Romans 6:4 says, *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* The story of Tabitha (or Dorcas) shows us an example of a person who was buried with Christ and was given new life in at least two ways.

Even before Tabitha’s physical death, she had - as a disciple - been buried with Christ in baptism. In a spiritual sense she had died to herself and to selfishness. And Jesus had raised Tabitha up from that death to a new life, which overflowed with blessing for others. Not only was Tabitha dead to sin; she was alive to righteousness and to ministry and the love and life of Christ within her could not be constrained. They caused her to join the widows of the church to make clothing for others.

Tabitha’s new life in Christ was so abundant that it could not be missed by those around her. It was so much of her identity, that when Tabitha died, the widows were moved to remember her by her kindness and by the wonderful gifts that she had made.

The Apostle Peter reminds us of Christ in the way that he came to Tabitha while she was in the helpless state of death. Peter prayed for Tabitha as Jesus did for his followers (John 17). Peter reached out his hand to Tabitha much as Jesus had reached out his hand to Peter on the sea (Matt. 14). Peter presented Tabitha as alive and resurrected in body, as Jesus will do with us someday, except that He will resurrect us in glorified bodies.

Finally, Peter continued by taking his resurrection work to others. He went to share the abundant life with Simon, who worked in the “unclean” business of processing the hides of animals. In the midst of animal death, Peter would continue to bring life even to gentiles.

*- Pastor David Givler, Christ Covenant Church, San Antonio, Texas*

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, we confess that we underestimate the importance of the death and resurrection of your son and we forget that these bring blessings to us now and that they enable us to be like your son. Help us to die to sin and to our selfishness. Help us to live like Christ in our new life that He gives us. Help us to share that new life with others in the way that we speak and share love and kindness. Help us through the power of your Holy Spirit to be like Tabitha, like the Apostle Peter, and even like Jesus. In Jesus’ name, AMEN.

Week of May 5-11, second reading of three

**Read Acts 13:15-39**

In this section of Acts, Paul has visited a synagogue on the Sabbath to hear reading of the Law and the Prophets and by doing so is given an incredible opportunity. The rulers of the synagogue ask Paul, “Do you have anything to say about this? Any exhortation to give us?”

“Why yes,” Paul replies, “as a matter of fact I do.” What follows in the text is the first lengthy sermon we have recorded from Paul where he takes these men through history that they should know very well. But it is history with a twist, because now he is helping them see their own history through the lens of the story of Jesus.

The thrust of his sermon is that the story of Israel, with Jesus at the center of that story, is the history of God’s mighty acts in the world. All of human history and all of Israel’s history specifically has brought them to this point. As he tells this story, Paul floods the account with references to God’s mighty arm, driving home the point the Lord God is the both the author and central actor in human history.

Paul covers over a dozen historical events that reveal what God has done for Israel and through Israel. He sets His favor on Israel. He delivers them from Egypt. He shepherded them through the wilderness and destroyed the Canaanite nations. God distributed the lands among the tribes and gave them divinely appointed Judges. God gave them Saul. God removed Saul. God gave them David.

Later He sends Jesus and John the Baptist. And at the apex of the sermon, Paul details how God planned and sovereignly directed all of human history to bring Jesus to the cross, down into the tomb and out the other side of it in resurrection.

What Paul is demonstrating here is that all of human history is God’s story. God is moving men and nations and events whether or not those men acknowledge it. They are part of his design even when they ignore him and disobey him. In telling Israel’s story, Paul says, “God did this, then God did that, and then God did this other thing over here.”

Is this the way that we tell stories about our own lives and history?  Do we say God did this and God did that and then God gave me this and then God took away that and God gave me this illness and then God healed me? Or do we tell the story of our lives in purely materialistic fashion? I did this, and then this happened to me, and then I went over there.

It is evident that in this sermon Paul is making a conscious choice to communicate history a particularly God-centered fashion, and by doing so, he was making a statement to this synagogue, saying, “Hey, those of us who follow Jesus are not a bunch of trouble makers trying to lead Israel astray. Our story is part of a long history of the mighty acts of God, a story that you are a part of, whether you acknowledge it or not.”

Paul was telling the people in that synagogue on that day that there is a great, majestic, glorious, God who keeps his promises and continues to works his purposes out in history. He invites them to come to know what he has done through Jesus and come see what he is doing in the world now.

This God and His acts on behalf of His people are ultimately the explanation and the meaning of everything that has ever happened in human history. You want to know why something happened? You want to know why things are going the way that they are going today? Somewhere in this lies the answer: God is doing something with or on behalf of his people. God is really working, right now in time and creation.

You want to know why something is the way it is in the world, you want to know the answers to all the mysteries of this creation? Why is the sky blue? Why do the planets move around in the sky? Why do squirrels never walk, but hop everywhere they go? *Why do things work as they do? God has so decreed it.*

*-  Pastor Duane Garner, Christ Church, Cary, North Carolina*

**For discussion:**

Work on always viewing our stories through the perspective of God’s sovereign direction of our lives and considering what stories he might be telling through us and our families. Remember a few of the major events of the past couple of years, and talk about all the ways it is evident that God was working in and through those circumstances. Discuss what big things are on the horizon for you in coming months and years, what temptations you might be facing with those changes, and what opportunities for service and faithfulness that God is possibly giving you with those developments.

Week of May 5-11, third reading of three

**Read Revelation 7:9-17**

When John beholds a great multitude which no one could number, he is seeing the promise that God had given Abraham, “*count the stars, if you are able – so shall your descendants be*” (Gen 15). The sons of Abraham, those who would have the faith of Abraham, those who would follow Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, would be an innumerable throng. And they would come from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues. God is keeping His word; the world is going to be saved.

This might be a way to measure the *quantity* of the salvation Jesus purchased. But this passage also talks about the *quality* of that salvation. “They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore….And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” – read all of verses 16-17 again. This is a great comfort to any who are going through or watching others in the faith go through difficult trials. Not only will we be witnesses to the salvation of an innumerable host, but we will find that not a single trial, not a single wrongdoing, not a single tragedy, has not been fully made right by Christ and used by Him to work in us an even greater glory. No hunger. No thirst. No tears. Just a perfect throne, a perfect Lamb, a perfect Shepherd, and living fountains of water.

God’s salvation will quantitatively envelop the whole world –so much so that it will be said that the glory of the Lord will have covered the earth as the waters cover the sea. God’s salvation will qualitatively envelop every evil and difficulty with grace and glory beyond measure. Standing upon this by faith, and seeing ourselves in union with Christ and His ultimate victory, we are emboldened to stand firm for the truth and tell the world of this great Lord and Savior.

*- Pastor Dave Hatcher, Trinity Church, Kirkland, WA*

**Application** – Name three countries in the world that have been recently in the news. Discuss how the manifestation of the Lordship and salvation of Jesus is not yet occurring, what would change when the nation is converted and discipled, and then pray to the LORD that the gospel would be freshly and effectively declared in that land.

**Prayer** – Father in heaven, because of the great work of Your Son, we are able to come before Your throne in faith and join with those who in this passage sang, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *Be* to our God forever and ever. Amen.” Nothing and no one in all of creation stands against your perfect and final work of making all things new in Christ and making all things right in Christ. We give you thanks and praise in Jesus’ name – Amen.

Week of May 12-18, first reading of two

**Romans 8:11**

*11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*

There once was a boy named Jack whose family was very poor. His father had died and he and his mother lived alone on their small farm. But the crops had failed and Jack and his mom had only one choice left: to sell their cow so they could buy food and seed for the next season.

So Jack’s mom sent him to market and Jack, like a good boy, made his way to town. But along the way he met an old man by the side of the road. *“Beans, beans, magic beans!”* the man cried. Jack was curious. *“What do these beans do?”* he asked. *“Ah, plant these beans,”* the man replied, *“and they will grow into a huge vine that will rise to a massive height and take you to the giant’s castle where he holds the goose that lays the golden eggs.”* Golden eggs! Well that was just the thing for Jack. If he could get those golden eggs then he and his mom would be free of their troubles.

So Jack made the trade – his cow for the old man’s beans. Whistling happily Jack returned home and proudly showed his mom the beans he had obtained in exchange for the cow. But Jack’s mom – as you may recall – was none too pleased with her son. *“You foolish boy,”* she declared. *“Those aren’t magic beans – that old man has fooled you and now we have nothing left either to eat or to plant in the spring!”*

Jack was grieved that his mom was unhappy with him – for he was a good boy. So what did Jack do? He determined to put those beans to the test. Late that night, when the full moon was shining on their farm, Jack went out and planted the beans, watered them, and then returned to bed. *“Perhaps now my mom will see that these beans really are magic.”*

Early the next morning, before his mom was awake, Jack got up, put on his clothes, and ran outside to check on his beans. And there before Jack’s eyes, reaching high up into the sky, was the biggest beanstalk Jack, or anyone else, had ever seen. It soared up into the clouds, far out of Jack’s sight. Jack had been right – they were magic beans. How did he know? The proof was right there in front of his eyes.

During Eastertide we continue to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. So why was Jesus raised from the dead? Listen as the great historian Eusebius explains the reason to the emperor Constantine upon the 30th anniversary of Constantine’s reign:

*“Suppose one desired to show us that a vessel could resist the force of fire; how could he better prove the fact than by casting it into the furnace and thence withdrawing it entire and unconsumed? Even so the Word of God, who is the source of life to all, desiring to prove the triumph over death of that body which he had assumed for man’s salvation… pursued a course consistent with this object. …delivering [his body] up to death in proof of its mortal nature, he soon redeemed it from death, to demonstrate the immortality of the body accomplished by His Divine power and the powerlessness of death.”*

Even as Jack proved his beans were magic by planting them, Jesus demonstrated the immortality of the body by dying and rising from the dead. With this difference: Jack and his beans are a mere fairy tale but Jesus’ death and resurrection really happened – they are the fairy tale come true.

*- Pastor Stuart W. Bryan, Trinity Church, Coeur d’Alene, Idaho*

**Eastertide Application**

How did Jack prove the beans were magic? How did Jesus prove that there shall be a resurrection of the dead in the future? Read Romans 8:11 again, how is our resurrection related to Jesus’ resurrection?

**Prayer**

Almighty Father, we thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ and that he, in his mercy, gave himself over to death for us – and, what’s more, has risen again from the dead. We thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit who raised up our Lord Jesus from the dead, so that we might have the assurance that we too shall rise from our graves. Death no more has the final word. All praise and glory and honor to you, our Father, together with your Son and Spirit, one God now and forever, Amen.

Week of May 12-18, second reading of two

**Revelation 19:1,4-9**

*After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants." Once more they cried out, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."*

**Devotional Thought**

Easter is almost a month old now. Summer is just around the corner. School will be ending in a few weeks. Vacations are being planned. Easter is now in our rearview mirror, getting smaller every day. As we move away from the day, time can erode our excitement about Easter. Like a toy gun once loved, but now stuck in the corner, Easter is forgotten. But, as Christians we never get past Easter. Easter does not go away. Easter does not come once a year. Every Lord’s Day we celebrate Easter. It comes 52 times a year. What would life look like if we never forgot Easter? What would life look like if time did not cause the resurrection to shrink in our minds?

Revelation 19 gives us two images of what an Easter shaped people would look like. First, praise would be the dominant note in our lives. The word Hallelujah means, “Praise the Lord.” It is a Hebrew word used at the beginning of numerous psalms (106, 111, 146, 148, 149, 150). The New Testament uses the word four times. All four times are in Revelation 19:1-6. If you add the “Praise our God” from verse 5 and the “Let us rejoice” from verse 7 to the four Hallelujahs there are six praises to God in these few short verses. A people who are redeemed, who know that God has glory and power and salvation (vs. 1), that he has cast down our enemies (vs. 2-3), and that he reigns (vs. 6) are a people who have not forgotten the resurrection. When Easter is remembered songs of praise will echo throughout our homes and churches.

The second image is feasting. Our passage speaks of the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Bride, which is the Church, is made ready for her Groom, Jesus. A great multitude rejoices at this feast. The resurrection of Jesus brought us everlasting life, a life that includes this feast. By faith we are already at this feast. A people shaped daily by Easter would feast. It may be Saturday night. It may be after church on Sunday, but we should feast. Our feasts should be at a full table with lots of wine and lots of singing.

Christ has the Lord has risen. Therefore let us sing and feast.

*- Pastor Peter Jones, Christ Church, Morgantown, West Virginia*

**Prayer**

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give you thanks and praise for raising Christ from the dead. We ask that you would forgive us for not remembering the great blessings of Easter. Help our churches and homes to be filled with songs of praise and feasting as we celebrate weekly the resurrection of our Lord. Give us eyes to see in our weekly worship and weekly communion what it means to be raised up the Christ. Help us daily to look back to Christ the first fruits of our resurrection and to look forward to that great resurrection day. We pray this for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom, Amen!

**Eastertide Application**

Discuss how the Lord’s Supper is like a marriage feast. Are there ways you can incorporate more singing into your family life? What about feasting? Is this a regular part of your family culture? If not, how can you start doing it? If you do it already, how can you improve your feasting?

Week of May 19-25, first reading of three

**Joel 2:21-27**

*“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things! Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their strength. Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you—the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. “So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame. Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.”*

**DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT**

Go ahead and tell the children. Call them together and tell the stories. Tell thosestories…tell *our* story. Open the whole Bible and read and hear and—this is more than just “story time”—be shaped. Tell them about failures and faithfulness. Point out foolishness and wisdom. Learn from sin and about the pursuit of holiness. Speak to them about sadness and joy, barrenness and fruitfulness, of forgetting the Lord and of being remembered by the Lord. Tell of tragedies and triumphs, rebellion and repentance, exodus and entrance, leaving and cleaving, cutting and shaping, evening and morning, exile and return, bread broken and bread given…go on, go ahead and tell. Hannah was the one who sang, “The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap…” (1 Samuel 1:6-9). While you are doing this, go ahead and speak about death and resurrection.

Just like Psalm 78, Joel wants the children to be told (Joel 1:3). Even when the first part of the message is about devastation, misery, and even death, Joel doesn’t hesitate. The children should not be left out. They are included. They are meant to hear, and they are expected to tell others. Although not included above, Joel started his message by referring to a great deal of devastation. The people and the land were being shredded and devoured, and this was happening because of sin, and sin is always devastating. Sin devastates each of us, as well as others and other things around us. Sin, when running rampant, will destroy a nation no matter what uniform they wear or flag they serve under. This is the dark and necessary backdrop to the scene. Joel spoke of the present miseries before getting to the promised hope and restoration. Repentance and renewal are needed…but how can that be accomplished by a sinful people?

Thankfully, Joel tells us the good news. The Lord Himself must intervene, and Joel tells us that this is precisely what *will* happen. Joel points us to the One who brings life from the dead. Because of this, that story of devastation is not over; there is more to come. We know this because we know His story, we have heard of His ways, and this is the message that has been told throughout the generations: “For the Lord *has done* marvelous things” (Joel 2:21). Still, there is more. It’s not only that the Lord *has* done marvelous things; He *will* do marvelous things again. Joel is careful to point to some of what *will* be: the pastures *will* open up; the trees and the vines *will* bear fruit and grow strong; the Lord *will* give the rains; bread and wine and oil *shall* be given in abundance. The Lord *will* restore, He *will* give plenty, and He *will* remove the shame. All of this, most wondrously, *will* be done through the Lord’s own presence with His people: “Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God and there is no other” (2:27).

Jesus is the presence of God and the provision of God. He is Emmanuel (“God with us”), the One who brings life from the dead. He is *Life* from the dead. Jesus is the Resurrection and the life, and here we are between Easter and Pentecost, and we see the ancient story once again. What was and what shall be; death and resurrection, and the resurrection leads to so much more. Jesus is both the presence of God and the provision of God. He is both Sacrifice and Sacrificer; Offering and the One who offers; Gift and Giver; and He is the One who said,

“Most assuredly I say to you,

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies,

It remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain”

John 12:24

Much grain? A harvest of plenty? An abundance through death? Yes and amen.

This is because Pentecost is right around the corner and our Lord’s ministry continues.

*--Pastor Jeff Niell, All Saints Presbyterian Church, Fort Worth, Texas*

**EASTER APPLICATION**

Have you ever seen a seed that has been split apart? Maybe you have been out in the yard and have uprooted an acorn that had split and was sending a tender shoot up through the grass? Perhaps, if you pulled on that little shoot, and if the ground was moist enough, up would pop a split acorn. Jesus spoke of a grain of wheat falling to the ground and dying. It was split. It was broken, and this resulted in even more wheat. Jesus’ resurrection is considered the beginning of a harvest. How does this explain anything about Pentecost?

That’s not all. Every time we join together at the Lord’s Table we are declaring the realities of death and resurrection. Consider the bread and the wine. What was done to the grains of wheat that went into the loaf of bread? What about grapes from which the wine was made? Among other things, they were once “alive” and they died. The grains and the grapes needed to be changed; they were ground or crushed, and they were then made into (transformed into) something else. It is no wonder that the Apostle Paul said that each time we partake of the Lord’s Table we are proclaiming Christ’s death until He comes.

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, we come to You through Jesus who is the Resurrection and the Life. We give You thanks for placing Your love upon us and for placing us in Your Son by adoption. We praise You for the conviction and comfort of Your presence by Your Holy Spirit. We also praise You for all that is written in Scripture, so that as we hear and see and learn, we may obtain perseverance and comfort and hope as we are more and more conformed to the image of Your Son, through whom we pray. Amen.

Week of May 19-25, second reading of three

**Revelation 21:22-22:5**

*1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Rev 22:1, 2 ESV)*

**DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT**

There are various threads you can trace in God’s rich tapestry of his saving purposes throughout Scripture. Trees are one such thread. God prepared a garden for his image bearers, in the midst of which were two trees of particular note, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:8 *f.*). Adam and Eve had free access to the tree of life (“You may surely eat of *every* tree of the garden,” Gen 2:17), but when our first parents fell into the estate of sin and misery (WLC 23), man was barred from it. “Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever – *therefore* the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden” (Gen 3:22 *f.*). God would not have men live forever in the estate of sin and misery; to live forever in a state of sin would be a curse, not a blessing. He had something far better in mind and *therefore* barred the way to the tree of life.

At the other end of God’s Word we again come to the tree of life. (We can find it in other passages, too, such as Ezek. 47:7, 12.) Now we see many trees “on either side of the river” (Rev 22:2), collectively called one tree. And what a tree, but bearing not just one kind of fruit, but a twelvefold variety, bearing fruit twelve months of the year. Access to this tree(s) isn’t simply for the by-and-by of life in the new heavens and earth, but is even now “for the healing of the nations.”

How does man have access again to the tree of life? Between the tree of life in the Garden of Eden and the tree of life now (and into eternity) is our Savior. Between paradise lost and paradise (re)gained is Christ, who is sometimes spoken of in tree-like terms: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit” (Isa 11:1). Or again, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’ ” (Jer 23:5 *f.*)

Christ became our righteousness by spreading himself upon another tree, the dead tree of shame and cursing, the tree of his cross (*cf*. Gal 3:13). Between the tree of life *lost* and the tree of life *regained* is the Christ who spread his arms upon the tree of his cross. There our sins were dealt with and God freely offers to men healing in Christ. He who is Life – who died and was raised and now lives forevermore – gives us life as we are engrafted into him (*cf.* Rom 11:17; John 15:1 *ff.*). We partake of his life and live.

But it doesn’t stop there! We in turn are transformed, becoming Christ’s fruit in the world. We are members of his resurrected body, the church (awaiting our own resurrection in due season). We are members of Israel (recall the emphasis on twelve – twelvefold fruit, all twelve months) and as such we, too, are for “the healing of the nations,” a great variety of fruit, growing and maturing continuously as we partake of and become channels of the life-sap of Jesus Christ in and to the world.

Listen to how we are described in Psalm 1: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither” (Ps 1:3). We are trees, offshoots of Christ, producing fruit to the glory of God: “The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.” (Ps 92:12-15) Palms and cedar trees are evergreen; we partake of Christ’s eternal life, and are “ever full of sap and green.”

As the tree of Christ has brought us life, bear fruit to God’s glory and participate in the healing of the nations.

*—Pastor Mike Pasarilla, Christ Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, Tennessee*

**Eastertide APPLICATION**

It isn’t just the tree of life we see in both Genesis and Revelation. In both passages (and Ezek. 47:1 *ff.* as well) we also hear the flow of water. Discuss with your family parallels between these various rivers and what they may represent (*e.g.*, think of the “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14); and think of how Eastertide ends with the outpouring of the Spirit flowing out to water the earth, just as the river in Genesis 2 flowed out and watered the earth, as did the water that begins in God’s temple of Ezek. 47). How are you and your family part of that flow? Thinking of trees again, how can your leafiness bring the healing life of Jesus to touch others in your immediate sphere of relatives and contacts?

**PRAYER**

O God, by your grace alone we are engrafted into Christ. Cause us to ever partake of his life-giving sap that we might be evergreen within your courts, always bearing fruit to your glory. Use us to spread the life of Christ through the world, and heal the nations through him, who with you and the Holy Spirit are one God, now and forevermore, Amen.

Week of May 19-25, third reading of three

**Read John 5:1-9**

I hate waiting in lines. You probably do too. But what is even worse is when others cut in front of you. Lines are a drag, but at least your turn comes eventually. But when there's a mob instead of a line, your turn may never come. It certainly looked that way for the lame man by the pool. He'd been in line for 38 years, and every time the angel would come to stir the healing waters, everyone else would cut in front of him. The name of this wonderful pool, "Bethesda", means "house of mercy". But you had to be quick on your feet to find mercy there...and he wasn't. What a picture of misery and helplessness!

Incidentally, archaeologists have found this pool, and it was more like a small lake...as big as a football field and 20 feet deep. Imagine this place by the Sheep Gate swarming with hundreds of the weak and sick, a true picture of Israel at that time, and of all humanity today; lost and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

One marvelous day, a Sabbath day, Jesus came to the house of mercy. He saw this paralyzed man lying there in his weakness and frustration, stretched out on his mat, but finding no rest. But Jesus already knew him, already knew his infirmity, as He knows each one of us. *"Do you want to be made well"?* And then He healed this sick man; or rather, commanded him to be healed.

In His compassion and His power, Jesus has done this for each of us. He has rescued you from a life of futility, from one failed attempt at saving yourself after another, in order to give you salvation and eternal rest in Him. Some may wonder why, with so many hundreds at the pool, Jesus heals only one. But this is only the beginning of Jesus' work. Through His cross and resurrection, He has made for Himself a people who are to carry on His work of Sabbath healing. We are to imitate His kindness and mercy to us, extending it to all those around us who are like sheep without a shepherd, who are wandering in their sin and misery, in need of healing grace.

*- Pastor Eric Sauder, Christ the King Church, Springfield, Missouri*

**Application**

Where are the "Pools of Bethesda" in your community, where the weak and helpless congregate? What can you do to bring rest to them?

**Prayer**

Father, thank you for the salvation you have freely bestowed on us, when we were as helpless and hopeless as this lame man, through the suffering and victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to be your faithful ministers as you bring salvation and rest to a suffering world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Week of May 26-June 1, first reading of four

**Read John 14.23-29**

These verses are in response to Judas’ question of verse 22, “Lord, how will you manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answers with a three-fold answer. First, Jesus says “love me, and my word, and the Father will love you, too, and we will both make our home in you…for the word that I speak is the Father’s” (23-24). Second, Jesus tells them that “the Father will send the Helper, the Holy Spirit, in my name, and he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (25-26). Third, he says to them, “My peace I give to you, because I go to the Father, who is greater than I” (27-29).

These three answers are very encouraging to us. If we love Jesus, and his word, then the Father and Jesus will make their home and live within us, and, they together, will send the Holy Spirit as a Helper to remind us all that Jesus taught. This is so that we might continue to love Jesus and his word, repeating the cycle and becoming more and more the home of the Father and Jesus. We, as Christians, become the home of the Trinity.

Additionally, in loving Jesus and the Father, we have the peace of Jesus, who dwells in peace with his Father. We also share in the Father’s protection. Knowing that Jesus is Lord at the Father’s right hand, we have no anxiety, only peace, even while Jesus is absent from us bodily (until the final return).

Key to all this, in Jesus’ absence, is remembering that the Holy Spirit only teaches us what Jesus taught and did, and only brings to remembrance all what Jesus taught. So if you hear or think or believe something that is in contradiction to what Jesus taught or did, it is NOT of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not have his own, separate agenda from Jesus; instead, He is sent to serve Jesus and the Father, glorifying both.

*- Pastor Burke Shade, Cornerstone Reformed Church, Carbondale, IL*

**Resurrection Application**

Discuss with your family how we as God’s people are the new tabernacle, the new temple, a temple of living stones indwelled by all the members of the Godhead. Also discuss how many Christians are led astray by others who proclaim teachings and practices that are not in the scriptures, yet they say are approved by the Holy Spirit. Reinforce how and why the Holy Spirit only comes to remind us of what Jesus taught and did.

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank You that You, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all in agreement, and do not confuse us, but work together to advance your will on earth and make us into your image, through the teaching of Your Son and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Bring us into your eternal fellowship, that we may enjoy that fellowship and radiate its peace to all the world.

Week of May 26-June 1, second reading of four

**Read Psalm 47**

“Sing, Sing, Sing”

Psalm 47 describes Christ’s ascension to the right hand of God, the Father. This great and awesome coronation is replete with music: clapping, shouting, trumpets, singing. With the directness of a trumpet, the psalmist makes his theme clear:

*1 Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!*

*5 God has gone up with a shout, The Lord with the sound of a trumpet.  
6 Sing praises to God, sing Praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!  
7 For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding.*

While the psalm was given to the Chief Musician, the call is to all peoples. The music is not merely an inconsequential overture or background music to the story; it is a sacred concerto in which the triune God, His creation, and His creatures all perform polyphonically – communicating with and delighting in one another. This motif is seen, or rather heard, throughout the entire Bible from Creation to the Eschaton; the musical connection between heaven and earth is inescapable.

When God created the heavens and the earth through Christ, the Word, the angels sang (Job 38).  
When Isaiah was given a vision of Christ enthroned on high, the angels sang continually (Isaiah 6).  
When Christ left heaven and was born on earth, the angels sang (Luke 2).  
When Christ arose from the earth and ascended to heaven, the angels sang (Psalm 47).  
When John was given a vision of Christ sitting on His heavenly throne the angels were singing continually (Revelation 4-5).  
When Christ comes again from heaven to earth, the angels will sing (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Perhaps musicals and opera are more like ultimate reality than we care to think. As we celebrate Christ’s glorious ascension, may we respond to the call and invitation of Psalm 47 and offer our music as a sacrifice of praise to Him who alone is worthy. As He delights over us with singing, may we likewise resound sympathetically in song with glad hearts and voices strong.

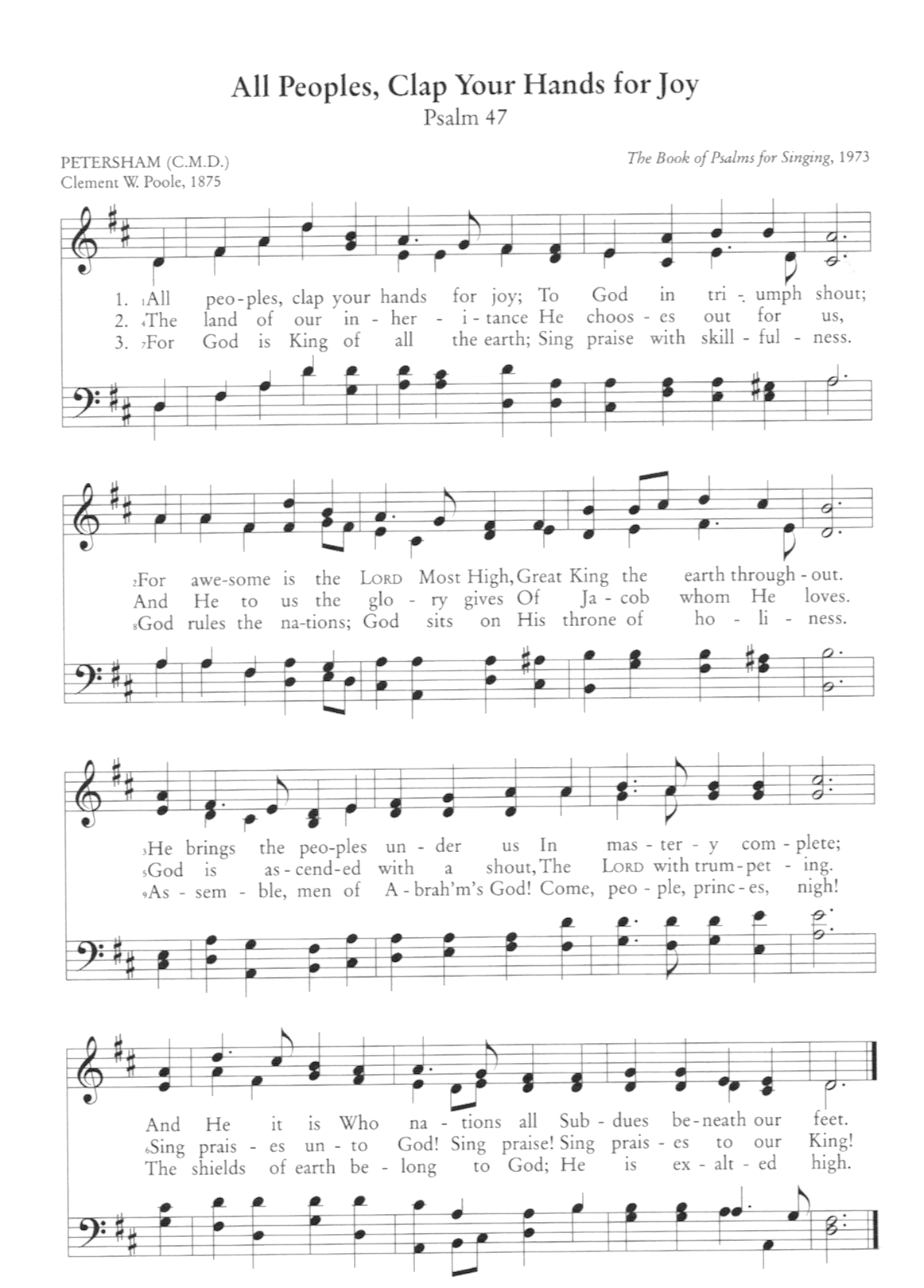
*- David Erb, Director of Music, Christ Church - Moscow, ID*

**Prayer**

Lord, you are our strength and our song and have become our salvation. We praise You and exalt you for your great victory over sin, death, and Satan through Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who ascended to heaven where He sits at Your right hand judging the people righteously and governing the nations on earth. Therefore, let us be glad and sing for joy! Amen.

**Suggested songs:** *Psalm 24, 47, 110, 118; All Peoples, Clap Your Hands for Joy (next page)*;   
*See, the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph*; *Rejoice, the Lord is King*

**Suggested listening:** *O Clap Your Hands* (Orlando Gibbons); *God is Gone Up* (Gerald Finzi);   
*O Clap Your Hands* (Vaughan Williams); *Coelos Ascendit Hodie* (Stanford)



Week of May 26-June 1, third reading of four - **Ascension Day**

**Acts 1:6-11**

*Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

*9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

**Devotional thought:**

Of all our Christian holidays, today’s is the most overlooked. If Christmas is over-blown for two months leading up to it, Ascension Day gets no press at all. And that’s too bad.

After Jesus died on the cross, rose to everlasting life, and appeared to the disciples for forty days teaching them about the kingdom, His Father took Him up to heaven. He will be there until He comes again to judge all men. This means three things:

**Inauguration** – after Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death, God exalted Him above every name (Philippians 2:8-11). He also gave Him an everlasting kingdom to rule (Daniel 7:13-14), which will grow until every enemy is defeated. Then Christ will return the kingdom to His Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The ascension is the result of Psalm 110:1: “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” So Jesus was formally given His kingdom upon His ascension to heaven. He was enthroned – inaugurated - and now sits as King.

**Mediation** – the Heidelberg Catechism helps remind us of the benefits to us of this Ascension, in question 49. *“First, He pleads our cause in heaven in the presence of His Father. Second, we have our own flesh in heaven – a guarantee that Christ our head will take us, His members, to Himself in heaven.”* As we saw on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, our King uses His power not to take things from His people, but to give to them. He took up a towel and a cross to cleanse His subjects. So now, Jesus sits on the throne interceding for us with the Father. He died for you. He won’t abandon you or keep your plight out of His Father’s eye. Every time we pray in Jesus’ name we should remember that He sits on the throne of David at the right hand of God the Father – the most privileged position in the universe!

**Provision** – from there Jesus not only looks to the Father for us, He also pours out upon us the Holy Spirit from the Father. Heidelberg, again, says, *“Third, He sends His Spirit to us on earth as a further guarantee. By the Spirit’s power we make the goal of our lives, not earthly things, but the things above where Christ is, sitting at God’s right hand.”* Jesus tells the disciples in the Upper Room: “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7).

The ascension of Christ shows us His majesty and His ability to continue helping His people.

*- Pastor Steve Hemmeke, Covenant Heritage Reformed Church, Newport News, Virginia*

**Activity**

Look up the depictions of the Ascension by artists Jean Francois de Troy (1721) and Salvador Dali (1958). Discuss the experience of the ascension from the disciples’ view as you contrast the two paintings.

**Prayer**

Thank You, heavenly Father, for exalting and crowning Your Son as our King. We praise You for providing us with an atoning sacrifice, everlasting life, faith, spiritual gifts and more, all through Christ and by the working of Your Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Week of May 26-June 1, fourth reading of four

**Scripture Reading:** Acts 16:16-34

*“Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." 18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. 19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. 20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." 29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.*

**Devotional thoughts: Those troubling Christians**

There is a way of looking at those who live faithful Christian lives as troublers. We can be those who stir up trouble as we bring light to a sin-filled world. These citizens of Philippi were content and peaceful in their outward lives before the arrival of Paul and Silas: The demon-filled slave girl was a real money-maker, her owners prospered, the market square was quiet, the civil magistrates could pat themselves on the back for keeping the peace in this Roman colony and the jail-keeper had everything in order at his prison.

Paul’s godly annoyance with this demon begins a series of events that turns everything upside down.   
The young girl is set free, but these men lose their source of income and comfort. They begin a public outcry against these ‘trouble-makers’ and now the civil magistrate has to get involved and provides some new prisoners for the jailer to care for. He makes sure that they are securely bound and goes off for a good night sleep. The prayers and hymns of Paul and Silas are heard in heaven and an earthquake removes their chains. Now the jailer’s life is in turmoil and as he is about to take his own life, Paul reaches out to him with words of comfort. He and Silas do not bring real trouble, but good news that brings the life, the abundant life that Jesus promised. The jailer cries out, ‘what must I do to be saved’ and is soon baptized and sharing a meal with his new brothers in Christ. Sometimes we need to cause a bit of trouble to bring real salvation.

*- Pastor John Stoos, Church of the King, Sacramento, CA*

**Applications:** Discuss as a family those times where standing for the truth has seemed to cause trouble and what the result was in the lives of those involved. Discuss how being a sinful “trouble-maker” can be very different from your faithful lives being troubling to someone who you interact with.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father we thank you for the great salvation that we have in your Son Jesus and the power you have bestowed upon us through your Holy Spirit: May He be able to rightly use us as those who trouble people enslaved by sin that they might truly cry out with the Philippian jailer: “What must I do to be saved?”

Week of June 2-8, first reading of three

**Psalm 104:24-35**

*O LORD, how manifold are your works!*

*In wisdom have you made them all;*

*the earth is full of your creatures.*

*Here is the sea, great and wide,*

*which teems with creatures innumerable,*

*living things both small and great.*

*here go the ships,*

*and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it. (vv.24-26)*

*These all look to you, to give them their food in due season.*

*When you give it to them, they gather it up;*

*when you open your hand,*

*they are filled with good things.*

*When you hide your face,*

*they are dismayed;*

*when you take away their breath,*

*they die and return to their dust.*

*When you send forth your Spirit,*

*they are created,*

*and you renew the face of the ground. (vv. 27-30)*

*May the glory of the LORD endure forever;*

*may the LORD rejoice in his works,*

*who looks on the earth and it trembles,*

*who touches the mountains and they smoke!*

*I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;*

*I will sing praise to my God while I have being.*

*May my meditation be pleasing to him,*

*for I rejoice in the LORD.*

*Let sinners be consumed from the earth,*

*and let the wicked be no more!*

*Bless the LORD, O my soul!*

*Praise the LORD! (vv. 31-35)*

**Devotional thought:**

Psalm 104 is patterned after the creation week, and in the verses above we hear echoes of Days 5, 6, and 7. This psalm is also about Jesus, and He is the fulfillment of it (Luke 24:44). Let’s briefly examine these verses.

Day 5 (vv. 24-26): The earth and sea, and all that they contain have been made in wisdom. In the Bible’s use of symbolism, the earth/land represents Israel, and the seas represent the Gentile nations (cf. Ps. 65:7). Leviathan, likely an aquatic dinosaur/dragon, can be a symbol of rebellious nations or leaders of nations (cf. Is. 27:1). Carefully note the perspective, though: In comparison to the God who made him, Leviathan is nothing more than a frolicking creature. Imagine a dog eager to chase a ball or stick. Imagine a dolphin you may have seen at Sea World or on TV that is ready to play. That’s how Jesus views kings, presidents, and prime ministers. Paul says of Jesus in Colossians 1:15-17: *15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Day 6 (vv. 27-30) is reflected in Paul’s words as well. The psalmist declares that all have been created from dust, and are reliant upon God to provide their food. God is actively involved in feeding men and beasts (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4; 6:26). The creative work of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in v. 30, and just as the Spirit was present at the creation of the world, so He is vitally present for its re-creation. The Holy Spirit is the chief gift of our Ascended King (Acts 2:33), and by the power of the Holy Spirit the world is being renewed.

Day 7 (vv. 31-35) naturally leads into Sabbath worship. Notice the parallels that emerge, and the themes of praise and judgment. The psalmist calls for God’s glory to endure forever, and the psalmist will sing praises for as long as he’s alive, as long as he has being. The psalmist calls for the LORD to rejoice in His works, and, and he will rejoice in the LORD. The trembling of the earth and smoking mountains in v. 32 rightly reminds us of Sinai (Ex. 16:20; Heb. 12:18-21). When the LORD descends, when the LORD visits, it is time for evaluation, for judgment, and for making or renewing covenants (cf. Gen. 3:8, the first Sabbath day). The Lord “visits” His people each week in worship, but there is a time to come when Jesus our King will return, will finally descend to judge the living and the dead. Then, at last, sinners will be consumed from the earth and the wicked will be no more (cf. Rev. 22), and that is cause for rejoicing and blessing.

*- Pastor Joe Thacker, St. Mark Reformed Church, Nashville, TN*

**Application**: In v. 34, the psalmist says, “May my meditation be pleasing to him.” Consider and discuss how meditating on this psalm, and how it points to Christ, is pleasing to Him. The psalm begins and ends with “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” What further encouragement and comfort is there for your faith when you consider the greatness of God and the power of Jesus as portrayed throughout this psalm?

**Prayer**: Almighty God, whose blessed Son our Savior Jesus Christ ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things: Mercifully give us faith to perceive that according to His promise He abides with His Church on earth, even to the end of the world; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– *Book of Common Worship*

Week of June 2-8, second reading of three

**John 7:37-39**

*“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

This coming Sunday the Church celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. At Pentecost all that Jesus accomplished on the cross and by His resurrection and ascension is delivered to us by the Spirit which He poured out on us. By the Spirit, we become partakers of the blessings of life in communion with the Triune God.

John points to the significance of Pentecost in our passage by making the comment, “the Holy Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified.” For John, Pentecost is an epochal event – it marks the beginning of a new age of history – when God dwells with man in a new and more glorious way than at any time in the past. Now we are united to the exalted body of Christ (Eph. 2:4-7) by virtue of sharing the same Spirit that unites Him with the Father.

The Holy Spirit has been called “the life of God.” The Hebrew word for “Spirit” is “ruach” (breath, wind). This word carries the idea of overwhelming energy, life, and power. To have the Spirit of God is to share in the life and power of God (Isaiah 31:3). The Holy Spirit manifests the life and power of God in the world. As the Nicene Creed states, the Spirit is the “Lord and Giver of life.” All life (temporal and eternal) is the gift of the Spirit.

This helps us to understand the term “spiritual.” Spirituality doesn’t refer to *invisible*things. Rather, it means to be made a partaker of the Spirit. To be a “spiritual” man means that you are being filled with the ways and works of the Holy Spirit. To be “spiritual” is to live like God Himself lives, following the example that Jesus has given us.

So, at Pentecost, Jesus pours out the Spirit upon the Church, uniting His people to Himself.  But He doesn’t pour out the Spirit so that we can become reservoirs of the Spirit. As He says here in John 7, He pours out the Spirit so that the Spirit will flow from us to others around us. We must become fountains of life for the world.

The one who believes in Him becomes a spring of living water – a fountain of life. By the gift of the Spirit, by His presence and power working in us, we become fountains of living water for the world.

There is an allusion here to vision of the Temple given to Ezekiel. Remember that in that vision Ezekiel saw the water flowing out from the temple, healing the world (Eze 47:1ff). Jesus is the new temple incarnate. As the exalted Son, He gives forth the water of life, pouring out His Spirit upon His people and making us dwelling places for the Spirit. Thus, the body of Christ as a whole (the Church) as well as the individual members of that body become the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20).

And that means that the water of life (the Spirit) flows from us as well. And as a consequence of our union with Jesus, we are filled with His Spirit and become fountains of life to the world. So, by our union with Jesus through the Spirit, we not only become lights in the world, but fountains of the Spirit of life because we are united to the One who is the Fountain of all Life.

*- Pastor Steve Wilkins, Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, Monroe, LA*

**Application:**Paul warns us about “grieving” the Spirit (Eph. 4:30). This warning comes in the midst of a passage (4:25-32) in which he lists a number of ways in which we “grieve” the Spirit by our sins – quenching His work in us and through us. The passage actually continues all the way through chapter 6:20. This might be a good time to go through this passage as a family and see how you might become a greater blessing to those around you.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, the king of glory, who hast exalted Thine own Son Jesus Christ, with great triumph to Thy right hand, we beseech thee graciously to supply all our needs through Thine own blessed Spirit, that we may be equipped for every good word and work, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.

Week of June 2-8, third reading of three

**Read John 14:8-17**

Have you ever walked into a room and right into the middle of someone else’s conversation?

Well, this is exactly where we find ourselves after reading our text for today.

Since their last Passover meal together, Jesus has been talking to all the disciples about His betrayal, His death, His love for them and the fact that He is leaving so as to ‘prepare’ a place for them to dwell eternally with Himself and the Father.

Our text picks up where Philip asks Jesus to reveal the Father—so that their faith might be made sure. The answer that Jesus gives is more than Philip could imagine.

Jesus assures Philip that the Triune God is all about assuring the faithful through revelation and that this revelation is deeply relational. Earlier, Jesus had told Philip and the rest of the disciples that the Father had sent Him out of love for them. Jesus now says that He is going away very soon and that He is making preparations for all of God’s people to live together with the Trinity forever. Then Jesus says that as He leaves, another member of the Trinity will be coming to guide, help, and comfort them—the Holy Spirit.

The message here for Philip (as well as for all of us) is that God never leaves us alone, a member of the Trinity is always present in a way that we can see, hear, sense or believe. Tomorrow we celebrate Pentecost; the coming of the Holy Spirit. His coming was based of Jesus going. But here is the Grand Mystery, the Big Secret that most people do not know. Are you ready?

Jesus never ‘left’ and the Father and the Holy Spirit have always been here. You see, the Trinity is never separated. The Trinity is all-present, everywhere, all the time. The comings and goings of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are manifestations of the persons of the Godhead playing out the Story of Redemption. These ‘arrivals’ and ‘departures’ serve the Story of Redemption to give us assurance that redemption restores and maintains our relationship with God. God wants us to know Him, that is why the Father sent Jesus, that is why Jesus came—and left—and then Holy Spirit came.

I’m glad that Philip asked that question for Jesus’ answer shows me how much God cares for me.

*- Pastor Laurence Windham, St. Peter Presbyterian Church, Bristol, VA*

**Prayer:**

Lord, thank you for Your great love for us. Thank you for never leaving us alone. Help us to see that this comfort and assurance should cause us to keep your commandments out of love and gratitude for all that You have done, are doing and will do for us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

**June 8, 2013, Pentecost**

**Read all of Acts 2**

In Acts, chapter two, Passover had been observed, as it had been for centuries, and now the Feast of Weeks [Pentecost] followed. Jews from all over the world were gathered in Jerusalem for these events. They came to assemble expecting one thing, but they wound up experiencing something quite different and dramatic. Some big changes had begun, but it would take some time for those changes to become apparent. They were earth-shattering―kingdom-shattering changes. Everything in the past had led up to this moment. And from this point forward the world would never be the same. Pentecost marks the beginning of the *international gospel reach*.

With the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, there was now a new and superior offering presented by Christ that ushered in a new world order. Long ago God had *promised* Abraham that He would bless him, his children, his children’s children, and ultimately *the whole world*. This is the gospel *promise* that would be fulfilled in the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). The whole world, including the gentile world, would now be blessed by this ancient *promise*. The difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament was that in the person and work of Christ, the covenant is no longer administered in a central location on earth. It was no longer limited to the nation of Israel. It was no longer tied into all the rituals of the Tabernacle or Temple. Rather, it was now tied to heaven where Jesus Christ had entered into the very presence of God as our great high priest on our behalf, in the true sanctuary. That means that anyone on earth now has equal to access through Jesus Christ. The *internationalization of the gospel* is what the New Testament is all about―the gospel reach expanding to the whole world. And so, on the day of Pentecost this big change gets going.

As the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Jesus, all those who had gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world hear the gospel in their own language (Acts 2:8) This was a reversal of what happened at the Tower of Babble, when the nations were divided. Now the nations would be reunited in the gospel of Christ. After the apostle Peter preaches to the gathered crowd they cry out: “What shall we do?” Peter then points them back to God’s ancient *promise* that He made to their father Abraham (a promise these Jews would have been familiar with), and tells them: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the *promise* is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39). This was not a brand new thing. It was what God had *promised* all along, a Savior for the entire world. That’s Pentecost! The day god fulfilled His *promise* to Abraham. The day the Church went global!

*- Pastor Randy Booth, Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, Nacogdoches, TX*

**Prayer**

Father, thank you for opening our eyes to see the broad scope of the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To see the universal gospel reach. Indeed, You loved the world and gave Your only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Help us to live in this light and to be witnesses to this truth; here and there and everywhere―to all men, in all times and in all places. Bless Your Church as the Body of Christ ministers to the world and calls all men everywhere to repent and believe Your *promise* that they might be saved. AMEN

Reading after Pentecost

**Revelation 22:12-20**

*“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city…”*

**Devotional Thought**

Do you know what an “alpha” is? How about an “omega”? Those are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. John, the author of Revelation, heard Jesus tell him that He is the first letter and the last letter. What do you think that means?

As it turns out, this is the very end of the entire Bible. Do you remember how the Bible began? In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters, getting ready to create the universe (Gen. 1:2). Here at the end of the story, the Spirit is calling thirsty men to drink from His waters (Rev. 22:17). Before the second chapter of the Bible is over, God planted a garden in the land of Eden with a river running through it, and at the center of the garden, He planted the tree of life (Gen. 2:9). And here at the end, there is another river of life and a tree of life in the midst of the new garden city of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1, 17). At the beginning, God gave specific commands to Adam, and when the Bible ends, God is again concerned about obedience (Rev. 22:14).

Why do you think the Bible ends where it began? First of all, we should say that this is because the Holy Spirit wrote the whole story of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Secondly, I think it ends where it began because Jesus came in order to begin a new creation, a new world. The first creation was broken and mangled through sin and death, but the Spirit hovered over Mary’s womb, and Jesus came as the new son of David, the Bright Morning Star, the new King to bring new light to the dark world. He did this by planting another tree in the middle of the story, the tree of the cross where our sin and guilt was condemned, and living water flows out of His side: forgiveness for all our sins and the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

There were evil men in John’s time just like there are evil men in our day, and there are many beginnings and ends, many chapters in the story that the Spirit is telling. But if Jesus is the beginning and the end, we know for sure that the whole story is about Him. The Spirit raised Jesus from the dead and now He is Alive and He is King (Rom. 1:3-4). This means He always comes for His people. He judges the wicked and delivers the righteous. Pentecost means that the world has begun to be made new. By trusting in Jesus and receiving His Spirit, we are invited into His story. We become words in His sentence, letters in His alphabet as we obey Him, serve the hurting, love our enemies, and tell the truth about sin.

*- Pastor Toby Sumpter, Trinity Reformed Church, Moscow, Idaho*

**Activity:**

Look up or retell the story of a famous missionary or saint or apostle. Talk about how the Holy Spirit gave them courage to obey Jesus and be faithful to Him. Notice how the Spirit makes our lives look like the life of Jesus, how our words come to sound like His.

**Prayer:**

Holy Spirit, Comforter and Advocate, we ask you to fill us with your presence, the life of Jesus, so that we may be trees of life, water of life, books of life for the dead and dying around us. Help us to see Jesus in the Bible and in the story of history, and in our lives, so that we might love Him and walk with Him all our days. For the glory and honor of Jesus, Amen.