

God, the Living Water

26 March • Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent

Jeremiah 2:4-13

⁴ Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel. ⁵ Thus says the LORD: "What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless? ⁶ They did not say, 'Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells?' ⁷ And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination. ⁸ The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit. ⁹ "Therefore I still contend with you, declares the LORD, and with your children's children I will contend. ¹⁰ For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has been such a thing. ¹¹ Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. ¹² Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, ¹³ for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Meditation

God's people sinned when they put their trust in broken cisterns they dug for themselves instead of in God, the living water (Jer 2:13). Rejecting grace, they chose to trust in their own works. When the created is trusted above the Creator, idolatry has taken over and God ceases to be supreme in their lives.

God's people, charged Jeremiah, "went after worthlessness and became worthless"(Jer 2:5). We are what we pursue. We become godly when we pursue after God, we become worthless when we pursue worthless things of the world.

This is a sad story of a people who had taken God for granted. Rank and file alike, they had forgotten the source of their salvation in their effort to save themselves. They have turned from the deep well of God's goodness, and have tried to quench their deepest thirst with their broken cisterns leaking with human wisdom.

What are some of the broken cisterns today? They are the things we trust in and depend on. They are often the good things that keep us from the best because they keep us from trusting and depending on God.

We all have our own broken cisterns and love them with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our minds. They include materialistic acquisitions, compulsive consumerism, obsessive dependence on technology, and the drive to succeed at all cost.

Meanwhile God's offer of living water is ignored because we have taken Him for granted. We have stopped enquiring after Him. Then we wonder why our spiritual life is dry. We wonder why we are losing our sense of purpose.

If only we can see the futility of depending on broken cisterns, we will repent and return to God, the living water.

Prayer

Forgive us, Lord, for we have not loved You more than these. We have trusted in broken cisterns instead of You, our living water. Turn our hearts, souls and minds to You, Lord, and show us how to live by faith and not by sight.

Action

Reexamine our priorities. Recommit our time, treasures and talents to God's service in the church and in the world, so that we can trust and depend on Him alone to make a difference in this world.

*Rev Dr William Wan
Chairman
Prison Fellowship Singapore*

Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow Me

27 March • Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Meditation

When I was a young Christian, Psalm 23 became a prayer that was close to my heart. In those days when I first came to this new faith, I faced many challenges, rejections in the family and even spiritual attacks. Just like the Lord's Prayer, new believers are often taught Psalm 23 at the beginning of their journey with Jesus Christ, the Shepherd of their lives.

Contrary to presumptions that the Psalm was written against a serene and idyllic backdrop, a close study of Psalm 23 will reveal otherwise. The distresses highlighted were "the valley of the shadow of death", "evil" and "presence of enemies". Sufferings were not absent but evident in the psalmist's experience!

Unsettling events riddled the world in the past year, and many of us might have been shaken by the one-too-many

natural calamities or unfortunate episodes of troubled civilisations. Just like the psalmist, our world may seem like one plagued with troubles and tribulations where futile denials offer little solace.

Yet the peace that surpasses understanding comes, not from troubles' absence in our lives, but triumph's presence won for us by the Shepherd. Prayerfully tarrying in the Lord's presence brought the psalmist assurance that the Shepherd's guidance will lead him into pastures of betterment, and restoration beside still waters.

It is not accidental that Psalm 23 follows Psalm 22, a prophetic depiction of all that the Messiah and Good Shepherd went through on Calvary's tree 2,000 years ago. Forsaken, persecuted, cursed and tortured for the sake of the flock of humanity, the Saviour nonetheless went on to scorn the shame of the cross and the grave!

Because of Jesus Christ's passion and divine atonement in Psalm 22, Psalm 23's victorious feasts "in the presence of enemies" are ours to claim! The victorious Messiah who overcame Psalm 22's death shadow valley, is also the same loving Shepherd who will lead us, as described in Psalm 23, to "dwell in the house of the LORD forever" with the eternal presence of His "goodness and mercy".

Prayer

Father, in the face of life's uncertainties and challenges, help me not to dwell in the shadow of fear and hopelessness, but look up towards the light of favour and victory in my Good Shepherd. Amen.

Action

Find rest in the loving Shepherd, and trust Him to do the rest.

*Ps Ezekiel Tan
General Secretary, The Bible Society of Singapore
Associate General Secretary, Evangelical Fellowship of Singapore*

Christ Loved Us and Gave Himself Up for Us

28 March • Friday of the Third Week in Lent

Ephesians 5:1-9

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷Therefore do not associate with them; ⁸for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),

Meditation

“Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us.” Many have heard this phrase many times before, but what does it really mean? How many of us are really able to give our lives up for others simply because we love them so much? Well, to be more personal, how many of us will love someone so much that we are willing to give our life up for that person?

I suspect that it is more theoretical or philosophical when we make claims that we are able. For when it comes to the crunch, it may be another matter altogether.

The key in this passage is not in the claim. The key in this passage is the phrase that says, “and walk in love...” To be able to do so means it is not just philosophical or theoretical. It points to the fact that you have actions to show what you believe in. It is shown in the way you walk or the way you live your life. That is the crux of the matter.

Returning to the beginning of the passage in verse 1, it says, “be imitators of God.” To imitate is to mimic, to copy, or to follow. In this case, to imitate God’s holiness in all conduct. It begins with the change inside and radiates outward to affect the conduct outside.

As God’s beloved children, we obey by mimicking God’s holiness, we love by imitating God’s sacrificial love, and present ourselves by following Christ’s example. To this end, we become like Him and are able to give ourselves for others.

Prayer

Lord, help me to reflect on Your love and be transformed by Your power to love from inside out. Empower us to live out Your love in our actions and words, instead of just making claims of love. In Christ’s name, amen.

Action

Beginning with one area of your life one day at a time, seek to allow God's love to be reflected in that area throughout the day.

*Rev Dr Peter Poon
Pastor, Christian Education Director
Orchard Road Presbyterian Church*

The Light Shines in the Darkness

29 March • Saturday of the Third Week in Lent

John 1:1-9

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

Meditation

According to Scofield NIV Study Bible, the Greek word Logos (Jn 1:1, 14) is more than just a thought or concept, but the expression or utterance of the collective thought of God in the incarnate person of Jesus Christ. Bible translators have translated logos as the Word in English Bibles, 道 *dao* in Chinese Bibles, and *firman* in the Alkitab. Together, they encapsulate the full meaning of the word, just as Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). That is why John has come to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him (Jn 1:7).

An experiment we did in school many years ago seemed to underline this great truth. We placed seeds on a wet cotton pad and put them inside a dark cupboard, but nothing happened. However, when a small hole was made in the cupboard, shoots soon burst forth into life

toward the light. "In Him was life and the life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4). "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:5). There was a childhood fable about the sun coming to visit the cave. As the host was ushering the visitor into the cave, he excitedly exclaimed, "Sun, since you came in, there was no more darkness."

True indeed! When Jesus Christ comes into our lives, we do not have to live in darkness anymore. This is especially relevant and true for many individuals and families in Malaysia. Despite suffering and struggling in the darkness of sins perpetuated by runaway injustice, immorality, and insanity of the society and state, Jesus Christ has empowered countless citizens to come out of the darkness into the light of life. Jesus has set many people free from the bondages of addiction, adultery, and arrogance, giving them much hope, freedom and vibrancy in living. He can do the same for you if you allow the light of Jesus to shine in your heart.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for coming into the world to give me light. I invite You to come into my heart and shine Your light in my life. Like John, I want to tell others about the light so that they too can receive the light of life in You. Let Your light continue to shine in the darkness! Amen!

Action

Every time you switch on the light in your room, thank God for the gift of light. Each time you see your fellow Christian brother or sister, say to him or her, “Let your light shine so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

*Rev Dr Simon CH Wong
General Secretary
Bible Society of Malaysia*

God's Peace for a Troubled World

30 March • Fourth Sunday in Lent

1 Samuel 16:1-13

¹ The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ² And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" ³ And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you." ⁴ Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him." ⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰ And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." ¹¹ Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here." ¹² And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had

beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

Meditation

We live in a world where we can easily find ourselves in situations beyond our control. A downturn of the economy, an unexpected illness, an unkind word or a betrayal by a close friend... Our fragile calm can suddenly turn into a sea of turmoil. Like the prophet Samuel grieving over the failure of the king he helped to install, we feel paralyzed by disappointment, fear and distrust, and cannot see any path forward through the gloom.

It is at such times that God reminds us He is still on His throne. He is bigger than our problems. The weakness, failure and sin of man cannot thwart His eternal purposes. God specialises in turning bad situations into spectacularly good outcomes.

God wants us, like Samuel, to move past our grief, and arise from our disappointments. Open your heart to God as He comes to us in peace. He calls us to worship, for He is worthy. He invites us for cleansing and consecration – set apart for His glory, for He is holy.

Through the gentle act of pouring oil on a boy whose heart was after His own heart, new hope was born. God fulfilled the act by placing His Holy Spirit powerfully upon the boy David, to prepare him to lead Israel in the fullness of time.

In our own lives, let us have faith that God is working out His purposes for good, in His own perfect timing. Let us take heart in the words of Christ, the Prince of Peace:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (Jn 14:27, ESV)

Prayer

Lord of peace, come into the turmoil of my troubled world. By Your redeeming blood, cleanse and renew me in Christ. By the freshness of Your presence, enable new life and new hope to flow through me. By the anointing of Your Holy Spirit, let my heart glimpse and fulfil Your divine purpose for the glory of Your name. Amen!

Action

Beginning with one area of your life one day at a time, seek to allow God’s love to be reflected in that area throughout the day.

*Venerable Wong Tak Meng
Archdeacon for Community Services, The Diocese of Singapore
Vicar, St Hilda’s Church, Singapore
Dean of Cambodia*

(Written on behalf of Rt Revd Rennis Ponniah)

Trust in the Lord

31 March • Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Psalms 146

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! ² I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. ³ Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. ⁴ When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish. ⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, ⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; ⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; ⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. ⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. ¹⁰ The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!

Meditation

Psalm 146 is an urgent call to a lifestyle of praise. To praise God is to live, and to live is to praise God. The psalmist clarifies the central thrust of the Psalm as exclusive loyalty to and trust in God rather than human rulers.

Praise is the lifelong vocation of the human creature in response to God's cosmic sovereignty, and God's comprehensive claim on human life and the life of the world. Praise, therefore is mandatory.

The antithesis of praising God is trusting oneself, human

agencies or institutions in place of God. It is precisely this that the psalmist warns against. In the book of Psalms and the Bible as a whole, wickedness is essentially a matter of trust. It involves the decision to trust someone or something other than God, and the results are empty and destructive.

Happiness is a matter of whom one trusts. Happiness is not the absence of pain and trouble, but the presence of God who cares about human hurt, and who acts on behalf of the afflicted and the oppressed. Verse 6 cites two basic traditions which are inseparable - God is creator and God is redeemer. The main claim of God is that God is one who executes justice in the context of injustice. Verses 7b-9a offer concrete illustrations involving those whom God helps. God helps the needy and opposes the way of the wicked. The sovereign God stands for the works of justice. As an embodied reality - provision for basic human needs, liberation from oppression, and empowerment for the disenfranchised and the dispossessed.

Psalm 146 reflects Jesus' preaching of the reign of God (Lk 4:16-21). The reign of God becomes a reality when justice becomes the order of the day. Let us be messengers of peace in this troubled world.

Prayer

O God, we thank You and praise You for Your constant assurance that You are with us in our journey of life, in our varied experiences of joys and sorrows. We also thank You for calling us to partner with You in making the world a peaceful and just place to live in. Give us a willing spirit to discover You and Your purposes in working towards peace in this troubled world. Amen.

Action

Please think of the world in turmoil where peace is a distant reality. Think of the ways in which we can act as agents of peace so that the reign of God will become a reality for many people.

*Rev Dr M Mani Chacko
General Secretary
The Bible Society of India*

Darkness Into Light

1 April • Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Isaiah 42:14-21

¹⁴ For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labour; I will gasp and pant. ¹⁵ I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. ¹⁶ And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. ¹⁷ They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols, who say to metal images, "You are our gods."

¹⁸ Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! ¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD? ²⁰ He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. ²¹ The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious.

Meditation

The cry of the soul of man today in the midst of all the confusion of the world is "Where are you Lord? Will you not answer our prayers?"

As we read this passage in Isaiah, we find that God was answering the cry of the people of Israel while they were in exile. They had been taken captive by Babylon, and so their distress was great. In the midst of all the trials and tribulations, they cried out to God. But God was silent. It was as if they were living in darkness.

In Isaiah 42:14 God answered, "For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out".

What a glorious sound it must have been to the people of Israel that God stepped out and answered their cry for help. It was the light they had been waiting for in their dark world.

But God warned them in verse 17, "They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols..." This is so true with us Christians. In the midst of all God's blessings, we often forget Him and succumb to the pull of the world!

This passage for our meditation today speaks of the servant of God. But in the following verses 18-21, we see that God called the children of Israel His servant, which they were. But He also called them blind and deaf - lack of belief in God's plan. I want to remind us today that God is talking about us!

We are God's servants. He has called us, just as He called the nation of Israel. But sometimes I think we are blind. We have the sight that God gives us through the Holy Spirit. But many times we choose not to listen to Him. We forget what the resurrected Lord has promised in Matthew 28:20, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

If you are going through a dark period in your life, then this passage gives us hope - surely God will answer. He promised in Isaiah 42:16 "I will turn the darkness before them into light."

Prayer

Lord teach us to patiently wait upon You as we journey on life's highway with all its ups and downs. May we never waver in our trust in You Lord. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Action

Take time to visit those whom you know are going through a lot of suffering in their lives and help them to lean on our Saviour.

*Rev Dr Rieweh Robert Cunville
President, United Bible Societies
Associate Evangelist, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association*