



Come Back to Jesus

A Lenten Devotional by the
Readers and Authors of
The Pietist Option

Edited by Christopher Gehrz

2018

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In my part of the world, Lent starts in the end of winter and concludes in the beginning of spring. In Minnesota, that's a messy transition. Gray tundra doesn't just burst into green grass and yellow daffodils. The thaw is sloppy: mucky ground, slushy roads. The thaw is frustrating: no sooner have we traded parkas for jackets than we get a sudden reminder that March is one of our snowiest months; just as we dare to plot our gardens, a cold front swoops down from Canada.

If we're not careful, that's how we'll start to think of our Lenten journey: two dismaying steps back for every tentative step forward through the messiness of our mortality.

But in the midst of it all, there is new life. Brush away late March snow in our yard, push back the leaves I forgot to rake in October, and you'll find hints of hosta just starting to shoot up from the earth.

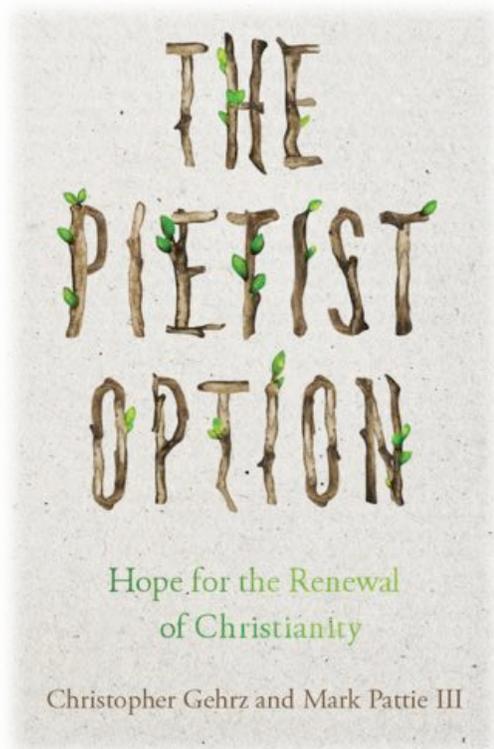


All that came to mind when I first saw the cover of *The Pietist Option*, the book I wrote last year with Mark Pattie. Someone at InterVarsity Press had the brilliant idea of rendering the title as branches in spring: a bud or two, here and there, just starting to turn into green leaves.

It's a subtly powerful image of the renewal we sought to inspire in the Church, through a fresh encounter with Pietism's "distinctively hopeful way of coming back to Jesus: growing to be more and more like him, living at peace as part of his body, and fulfilling his mission in service to others."

When better to "come back to Jesus" than during the Christian season of repentance, when we turn from our sin toward our Savior? In Lent we walk with Jesus to the foot of the cross, a journey that teaches us more clearly how our iniquities have brought him to that trial.

Then, having been reminded that dust we are and to dust we shall return, we are ready to believe the gospel's most astonishing claim: even in death, there is yet life. For Lent is followed by Easter, and the resurrection dawn that brings light and warmth to an earth made new.



So I'm delighted to offer this free Lenten devotional as a continuing reflection on *The Pietist Option*, revisiting that book's themes via spiritual disciplines that help Christians turn from the sin that clings so closely and run towards the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Whether or not you've read the original book, may this booklet enrich your study of Scripture and your practice of prayer — as such devotional literature has done for generations of Pietists before.

If you like what you read, all we ask is that you consider sharing it with others.



This devotional also gave us the chance to extend the conversation that we described in the book's introduction. Before Mark and I wrote a single word, we thought out loud via a series of podcasts. The feedback we received from listeners helped reshape the structure and content of our manuscript. Now that the book is published, we wanted to reopen the conversation — rather than writing all of these reflections ourselves, we invited readers of *The Pietist Option* to contribute most of what you're about to read.

To our delight, it took only a few days for the sign-up sheet to fill up. Not surprisingly, several contributors are fellow members of the Evangelical Covenant Church, but you'll find Baptists, Brethren, Lutherans, Methodists, and others in these pages. Coming from many parts of North America, they are women and men, clergy and laypeople, millennials and retirees, Republicans and Democrats.

The only guidelines I gave those volunteers were that they should start from a text in the daily version of the Revised Common Lectionary, connect to some theme from our book, and keep it brief. Except on that third count, I resolved to keep my editorial touch as light as possible and let our readers' voices be heard.

Thanks to all of them for volunteering their time and sharing their reflections. Thanks to Mark for his continuing friendship and partnership (plus some last-minute copyediting). And thanks to Katie Gehrz, Dorothea Hanson, Jon Boyd, and Jeff Gissing, among the others who have made helpful suggestions during the development of this booklet.

Chris Gehrz

February



Amanda Vivan, "Meu Coração/My Heart" (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.*

Psalm 51:10

Ash Wednesday ☞ February 14, 2018

The Lenten Discipline We Need

*Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.*

Joel 2:12-13a

It was Ash Wednesday. Imposing ashes in the sign of the cross on my infant son's forehead, I struggled to hold back the tears. "From dust you have come, to dust you shall return," I said. "Repent and believe the Good News."

Why include my son in this odd tradition of the Church? Why speak to him at this tender age — to anyone at any age — about ashes and death, repentance and Good News?

Because at the core, this is the issue, one I hope my son catches on to more quickly than I have: we are not God. We are not in control: all-powerful, invulnerable, independent, all-knowing, immortal.

Our hope is not in ourselves. Our hope is in God.

This is the Lenten discipline we need: to daily practice turning away from the false gods and hopes that so seductively prey on our allegiances, and to turn to God. To practice trusting, listening, and stepping forward with confident hope in God, the One whose love for us and for all is sure.

Gracious God, help me this Lent to learn to believe
in the Good News of your love —
and to live like I believe in it. Amen.

Mark Pattie
Lino Lakes, Minnesota

Thursday ☞ February 15, 2018

The Joy of Fellowship

...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:3-7 (ESV)

In the beginning of this Lenten season, we remember Jesus emerging from his testing in the desert, where he fasted and prayed. This was crucial before he *did* anything. He had just been baptized, when he rose from the waters to hear the voice from heaven tell him who he was: “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy” (Mk 1:11, NLT). Immediately after that he is led to the desert where each temptation begins with “If you are the Son...” Maybe even *if* you are dearly loved and *if* you bring Him great joy?

Jesus had to go through this time because his ministry and life would flow out of his identity: he is the Son and he’s dearly loved by his Father. Just being who he is gives him great joy.

So it is with us. By knowing who we are as people whose “fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ,” we walk in the light. We can’t help it.

Especially in a time of deep division — like the one out of which Pietism was born — we proclaim what we see and hear from our fellowship with Jesus that actually impacts our fellowship with one another.

God, you are light, and in you there is no darkness at all.
And yet you call me, a sinner, what you called your Son: beloved, child.
Help me to confess my sins, receive the gift of your forgiveness, and walk in the light.
In the name of Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

Bret M. Widman
Chicago, Illinois

Friday ☞ February 16, 2018

All Who Bear Christ's Name

"We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name!"

Daniel 9:18b–19

The Protestant reformer Martin Luther insisted that we are not saved by our own righteousness but by *Christ's*. By clinging to Christ in faith, we receive all that is his — his life, righteousness, and holiness — and so may boast confidently, "If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine and all mine is his." Because sin and death are swallowed up by Christ's righteousness, all fear is eliminated. "Who would have the power to harm or frighten such a heart?", Luther asked.

Likewise, the 19th century Swedish preacher and editor C. O. Rosenius taught that one becomes a true Pietist in arriving at "the certainty that he can claim Christ and all of his benefits." In a time of great division, Rosenius emphasized additionally that union with Christ entails unity with *all* who bear Christ's name. He believed that unity in Christ should relativize internal division and free Christian energy for unified service.

As we seek Christ during this season of Lent, may we also seek unity with all who bear Christ's name. "If all Christians seek to come closer to their center point – Christ," said Rosenius, "the inevitable result will be that they will also come closer to one another in mutual love, which is the true sign whereby to recognize a disciple (Jn 13:35)."

Thank you, God, for sisters, brothers keeping faith with us and you,
joining heart to heart with others, as your call to us comes true.
One our Christ and one our Gospel—make us one we now implore:
"Glory, glory, yours the glory, through the ages evermore."
(Roger K. Powell, adapted by Jean C. Lambert)

Hauna Ondrey
Chicago, Illinois

Saturday ☞ February 17, 2018

The Joy of Forgiveness

*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*

*Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

Psalm 32:1-2

The heading associated with Psalm 32 is “Of David. A Maskil.” The Hebrew word ‘Maskil’ appears to mean “an instructional piece.” (It recurs in verbal form in verse 8: “I will *instruct* you and teach you the way you should go.”)

What is the key instruction provided in this psalm?

First, the pain of holding on to sin quickly becomes clear: “While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up like the heat of summer” (vv 3-4).

But when the hiding and silence is broken, transformation happens: “Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgression to the Lord’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin” (vv 5-6).

When we lay our sins on the Lord — when the entire community of “all who are faithful” comes back to the Lord — and, in trust, receive the good news that the Lord forgives, we experience refreshment and joy.

Your Holy Spirit is calling us to “Come back to Jesus.”

As we ponder Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, move us to heed your teaching,
“Come onto me all you who are burdened and heavy-laden and I will give you peace.”

Transform us so that, with faithful generations before us, we can witness,
“Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

Amen.

Dennis Hanson
Cedar Falls, Iowa

1st Sunday in Lent ☞ February 18, 2018

The Entire Life of Believers

*...Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying,
“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;
repent, and believe in the good news.”*

Mark 1:14b-15

Last year marked the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, which began with this first of 95 theses: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

This turn from sin, argued Martin Luther, was more than the outward act of confession. But also more than mere “inner repentance,” which he thought “worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.” For Luther (who died this day in 1546), repentance affected the whole lives of whole persons who had failed to love God with their hearts, souls, minds, and strengths — and their neighbors as themselves. Without such repenting, no individual — let alone a whole church — can be reformed, or renewed.

The bad news is that we will fail to repent as we should. Even saints remain sinners, as Luther knew full well. He “found it incredible,” explains British theologian and historian Alec Ryrie, that God, “his beloved should love him unworthy as he was.”

But the good news — the Good News — is that God’s forgiveness is available to all who believe in Jesus Christ. This is the “incomprehensible, terrible, beautiful” love that Ryrie says Luther discovered: that “God loved him wildly, irresponsibly, and beyond all reason.” Throughout this season of repentance, may you experience *this* love, then share it with others.

O Lord, help me... I am poor; you are rich and came to be merciful to the poor.
I am a sinner; you are upright. With me there is an abundance of sin;
in you is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore, I will remain with you
of whom I can receive, but to whom I may not give. Amen.
(Martin Luther)

Chris Gehrz
Roseville, Minnesota

Monday ∞ February 19, 2018

“She Is Set Free!”

*For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God —
not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*
Ephesians 2:8-9

The power of grace became real to me as I experienced Ash Wednesday through the eyes of my three-year-old daughter, Emily.

During that worship service the congregation was invited to confess a sin on paper and bring it to the foot of the cross. Emily grabbed my hand tightly as she helped me take my paper to the cross, while the worship team played the song “I Am Set Free.”

Upon returning to our seats, Emily bounced into the aisle and began dancing, twirling, and leaping to the music. Not wanting to distract others, I attempted to coax her back to our seat.

But a gentleman approached me and asked me to let her freely dance. With tears streaming down his face, he said, “We are truly set free by the grace of Jesus and your daughter has helped me remember this. She is set free!”

As I watched Emily dance with no hindrance or burdens, I took in the powerful gift of God’s transforming grace. I was reminded that grace “is not your own doing” — it comes from receiving the gift of what Jesus has done for us.

In grateful response, may we dance in the freedom of his glory!



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Kristie Kolsrud

Our God, you are rich in mercy, loving us even when we were dead in our trespasses.
By your immeasurable grace, you have set us free and made us alive together with Christ.
(from Eph 2:4-5, 7)

Kristie Kolsrud
Altoona, Iowa

Tuesday ∞ February 20, 2018

Twists, Turns, and Potholes

*Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary,
repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—
that you might inherit a blessing.*

1 Peter 3:9

So many images of the future we find in film and popular culture (to say nothing of our social media feeds!) are *dystopian*. The images that bombard our hearts and minds can cause us to despair: *things will only get worse from here!* However, as citizens of God's kingdom, are we not called to hope for better?

If love of God and love of neighbor are the twin commandments on which all the law and prophets hang (Matt 22:36-40), then surely keeping these commandments is the way forward in our hope for better times. Today's epistle reminds us, however, that this way is paved with disciplined living, love for others, and the willingness to suffer. Love of God and love of neighbor may cost us.

Peter not only exhorts us toward unity and love for one another, but that we should repay evil with *blessing* (vv 8-9). Inside and outside the community of faith, living rightly *matters*. Loving one another and our neighbors, repaying evil with blessing, and suffering for doing good — these are the twists, turns, and potholes on the road toward our hope for better times. In this we model our lives after Jesus, who was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (v 18).

May it be so in our lives and communities, this Lenten season and beyond!

Lord, give us that we truly change and from now on receive a truly new heart and new mind. Help us by your grace, you who are love itself, that we may all experience in our hearts your divine mind, to love our neighbor as ourself, as you have given us a commandment through our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us unto death.

Amen.

(August Hermann Francke)

Stacey Littlefield
Lafayette, Indiana

Wednesday ☞ February 21, 2018

Refuge in the Word of God

Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Prov. 30:5 (ESV)

A crucial characteristic of the Pietist Option is its reliance on Scripture. Indeed, the Pietist theologian Philipp Spener said, “If there is to be any good in us, it must be brought about by God. To this end the Word of God is the powerful means.” If we would have God work in our lives through these means, it follows that we should regularly spend time reading and meditating upon the Word.

In today’s reading from Matthew, Jesus demonstrates reliance on God through Scripture when he responds to temptation in the wilderness with the words, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (4:4, ESV). Christ’s example reminds us that our spiritual sustenance comes from God through the Scriptures.

As we reflect on Christ and the example he left for us, let us commit to renew our study of the Bible, that we might be thoroughly equipped and sustained in Him by His Word.

Father of light, by your Spirit prepare our hearts for the knowledge of truth.
As you opened Lydia’s heart to Paul’s teaching [Acts 16:14], open to us the Scriptures.
Purify us in reading from all forwardness, fleshly wisdom, and improper intention,
so that we might handle this holiness with holy hands.
(adapted from Philipp Spener)

Elizabeth Fritz
Watertown, Wisconsin

Thursday ☞ February 22, 2018

“Gathering Around a Campfire”

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
Genesis 15:6 (NIV)

I am struck with the great contrasts found in today’s readings from Genesis and Psalms. There is a vast distance between “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1, NIV) and “From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly” (Ps 22:25, NIV), between “You have given me no children” (Gen 15:3, NIV) and “Look up at the sky and count the stars... so shall your offspring be” (Gen 15:5, NIV).

How do you hold in your heart a Word from God that says such disparate things? It is deeply painful to feel forsaken by God, or to be childless. How can a soul move so quickly from such pain to praise and to belief in God? How was Abraham able to hear and believe a Word that promised uncountable descendants, and then spoke of 400 years of slavery for them? How was Jesus able to recall all of Psalm 22 on the cross?

August Hermann Franke wrote, “Do not seek to measure and arrange scripture according to your mind and understanding, but rather determine your understanding according to Scripture.” Like the Swedish Pietists described by Eric Hawkinson, we gather “around the Word as if to encircle it, like gathering around a campfire on a cold day or dark night.”

And yet we must admit the fire of the Word often jumps the circles of our campfires and races like a Western wildfire, too large to encircle or control. Psalm 22 is no campfire, nor is the faith of Abraham.

Yet we dare stand before the Word, and listen. What does it say? What does it mean?

Speak, O Lord, for your servant is listening. May your Word warm my cold heart, like a campfire on a dark night; may your Word like wildfire consume the chaff of my life, that I might draw close to you in faith this Lenten season. Amen.

Dwight Nelson
Mount Vernon, Washington

Friday ☞ February 23, 2018

Remember, Return, Reverence

*All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.*

Psalm 22:27

Lent calls us to remember, intentionally sacrificing time and attention so that, in some small way, we mirror the One who willingly set aside heaven's glories to minister in the dust to people made of dust: the poor and the oppressed, the widow and the orphan, the hopeless and the forgotten. As Christ did, so we do, remembering the Hagers and Ishmaels of our time and place. Rather than casting them out, we call them to join us in returning to Christ.

Return to Christ. The call goes out to all regardless of wealth or status or fame or gender or philosophy or politics. Return to Christ. Our works – our sacrifice, our keeping of the Law – cannot save. We possess no advantage, no good thing. Return to Christ, in faith believing as Abraham also believed by faith, and it was counted to him for righteousness.

Remember and return. Only then can we wholly reverence the Lord as he is worthy to be worshipped. Lifting up our voices individually as fathers and mothers and daughters and sons, as a community of believers from every tongue and tribe and nation, we give praise to Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us, and in whom we live and move and have our being.

Remember.

Return.

Reverence.

Remind me of those I would forget. Return me to the Savior I would neglect.
With reverence, Lord, may I worship you as you deserve.

Jay Eldred
New Bern, North Carolina

Saturday ☞ February 24, 2018

“Who Do You Say That I Am?”

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”

Mark 8:27-29

A Pietist instinct is to know Jesus through prepositions, not propositions. Jesus is Emmanuel: God *with* us, and we have a living faith *through* him. We are not so concerned with impersonal doctrinal statements about Jesus as we are with knowing and experiencing him personally.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus asks his disciples who the people say he is. They report that opinion is varied: he could be John or Elijah or some other prophet. But then he asks them the question he still asks each of us: “Who do *you* say I am?”

The disciples knew Jesus better than anyone. Their proximity to Jesus let Peter answer, “You are the Messiah.” They didn’t have to guess or speculate about Jesus; they knew him personally and intimately. They had come to see him as he was: their promised King.

The Pietist call to “come back to Jesus” is to know Jesus better and to better define our lives in light of his. Many are tempted to reduce Jesus to a great teacher or philosopher, but the closer we come to him — the more time we spend in his presence — the more we see him as he is: our promised King.

O Jesus, who came to be with us as Emmanuel and reigns over us as King, thank you for your continuing presence in my life. When I am asked who you are, may I respond, by word and action, “You are the Messiah.”

Stephen Hoffman
Beresford, South Dakota

A God for Abraham and For Us

In hope [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Romans 4:18-21 (ESV)

We are often reminded during the Lenten season of the far-reaching effects of sin in this world. Life is cut short instead of flourishing to its fullest potential. Systemic injustice threatens the basic rights of the underprivileged. Our relationships are broken. In time, even our physical bodies reveal their frailty. Scripture confirms our temporary state: "...for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19b, ESV).

But this is not our final resting place. The God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom 4:17, ESV) has not abandoned us to despair, overcome by the perils and realities of this life. He offers us His good grace and another life to come.

So the patriarch Abraham "...did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old)" (Rom 4:19, ESV). Abraham believed in God's promises despite extraordinary circumstances.

As we reflect as Abraham's example, what will we believe in the midst of our pain? How will we step forward in faith to receive the good grace of God?

Father, in hope may we believe against hope, fully convinced that you are able to do for us as you did for Abraham. For the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, count our faith as righteousness. Amen.

Eric Magnuson
Austin, Texas

Monday ☞ February 26, 2018

Laughter and Learning in Lent

Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him... Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." And she said, "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Genesis 21:2-3, 6-7

Here in our second week of Lent, laughter hangs in the air like a butterfly. This laughter is colored in the brilliant hues of surprise, awe-struck wonder, and healing.

Sarah has never laughed like this before. She has born the shame of childlessness, which in her culture meant she was cursed by God. She has heard the promise of God and has laughed the jaded laughter of those who know better than to believe that God can keep his promises. Then that wormy laughter crawled into the cocoon of God's immense power and plan. It emerged transformed into a baby whose very name meant laughter.

It took a year — from caterpillar stage to the butterfly stage — for Sarah to be able to laugh this laugh.

The Pietist tradition reminds us that this kind of transformation is the invitation of all education. We are invited to not just learn information, but to experience transformation as we learn. Sarah has not just learned about the power of God; she has become a new person who has encountered that power herself, and her laugh will never be the same.

During this season of Lent, what are you learning? I wonder what metamorphosis awaits you as God transforms knowing into being in your life.

How great are you, O God! From death bring forth my soul,
like a lovely butterfly from its cocoon. How good are you, O God!
All is done for us by you, who but asks us to give our wills to you
that we may be as wax in your hands.

(adapted from Teresa of Avila)

Jonna Fantz
St. Paul, Minnesota

Tuesday ☞ February 27, 2018

My Wonderful Lord

*Give first priority to Jesus Christ and the values of His Kingdom,
and everything else will turn out all right.*

Matthew 6:33 (as paraphrased by Carl H. Lundquist)

Today marks the date my father, Carl H. Lundquist, died in 1991. Most people knew him as a pastor, scholar, college and seminary president, leader in the Baptist World Alliance, founder of the Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents, and founder of the Burning Heart retreat ministries. He was a Pietist, through and through.

Long before all that, however, he was simply a teenager with a gift for speech and debate planning to go to law school. One summer at camp he and some friends skipped the evening service to go into town instead. Upon returning, he learned the campers had experienced a powerful revival that evening. Sorely disappointed, my dad took his flashlight and Bible to the chapel and asked the Lord to do for him what he had done for the others. He reported that the Lord did meet with him that night in a special way that deepened his own sense of commitment to Jesus as Lord and that stayed with him for the rest of his life.

His goals changed. He began preparing for seminary and a lifetime of ministry and Christian leadership. A favorite song of his, *My Wonderful Lord*, became an expression of his heartfelt commitment. One verse says, *All the talents I have I have laid at thy feet, Thy approval shall be my reward; Be my store great or small, I am yielding it all to my wonderful, wonderful Lord.* This was a commitment he happily kept throughout his life.

Jesus, help me today to give first priority to you,
my wonderful Lord!

Carole Spickelmier
Little Canada, Minnesota

Wednesday ☞ February 28, 2018

Loving Jesus More

Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

John 12:42-43

How do we know if we love human glory more than the glory that comes from God? Sometimes the two become incredibly intertwined, especially if we've grown up going to church, and we come from Christian families. For many of us, following Jesus is the very thing that makes your family proud, or that brings praise from your community. As a result, over time we find ourselves embedded in Christian culture and are no longer able to discern if we're listening to the voice of Jesus, or the voice of our particular culture.

Today's Christian culture is deeply divided. Everywhere I turn, those who follow Jesus seem to be at one another's throats. Daily, the infighting and divisions worsen: on the news, on social media, even in our families.

At some point in every Christian life, the loyalty of the heart will be tested. This is a season in our Christian culture when we must cull down our affections, and ask God to test our hearts, ask God to help us see from His perspective, and choose to love God more than we love our culture, our communities, or even our churches. Right worship orders our allegiance.

Jesus, in this season of sifting, show me where I have loved human glory more than that of God. Strengthen my heart with the courage to love you more.

Tina Osterhouse
Carnation, Washington

March



Matthew Matheson, "Meltwater" (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

*"Blessed be the name of God from age to age,
for wisdom and power are his.*

*He changes times and seasons,
deposes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding.*

*He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and light dwells with him."*

Daniel 2:20b-22

Thursday ∞ March 1, 2018

Holy and Common

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 Peter 2:4-5, 9

Today's epistle reading reminds us that through Christ we are a "holy priesthood... a chosen race... a holy nation..." Lutheran theology emphasized this point as the "common priesthood" (or "priesthood of all believers"), which Chris Gehrz recasts in *The Pietist Option* as "the common priesthood for the common good."

It's striking that such a central theological concept can be expressed using two terms — "holy" and "common" — that seem to pull in different directions.

Rather than debating differences of definition, I — in true Pietist fashion — will instead invite you to explore the tension and ambiguity of these words. Consider how "holy" and "common" are blurred in our daily life before praying the prayer of confession.

In Creation, by the Incarnation, and through the active and ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, the common world is infused with your holy presence. Forgive us when we forget this. Forgive us when we fail to care for creation.

Forgive us when we fail to see the divine image in all of humanity — especially those suffering and those at the margins.

Forgive us when we fail to work for the common good.

God, you have called us into a holy and common priesthood to work for a holy and common good. Remind us of this call, forgive our failings, and give us strength for the journey. Amen.

Andy Meyer
Chicago, Illinois

Friday ☞ March 2, 2018

God Who Touches the Earth

Then the Lord told Moses, "Go down and prepare the people for my arrival. Consecrate them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their clothing. Be sure they are ready on the third day, for on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai as all the people watch."

Exodus 19:10-11 (NLT)

Imagine something with me: imagine the Infinite, the Vast, the Unknowable, a swirling blur of glory and power, suddenly bending into time, pushing some gentle tendril of that inexpressible Godliness into a little world lost in trackless space. "Take off your shoes," that Unknowable said to Moses. "Do not touch the mountain," the Infinite said to people huddled at its foot. The people prepared themselves for worship because just there, at the base of Mount Sinai, they glimpsed the glory of God beyond comprehension. Moses turned his eyes away; the people bowed in reverence.

During the season of Lent, we encounter the Holy One at the intersection of the vastness of God and the speck-of-dust-ness of humanity. The Word becomes flesh. The very idea astonishes us and causes us to avert our gaze and bow our spirits. *Who are we*, we ask with David, *that God should come to us? How can we possibly respond?*

For Pietists, Emmanuel is glorified in service. Our worship is expressed in compassion for all who share this tiny, beautiful world. God bends into it with holy love, and out of wonder at this marvelous truth, so shall we.

Emmanuel, in you the vastness of God meets the limits of us.
Grant us grace to worship you in tender care of those around us,
for none of us is too small, too distant, too damaged to be loved by you.

Janet Hanks
Pulaski, Virginia

Saturday ☞ March 3, 2018

Glimpses of Glory

*Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice,
“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked
around they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.*

Mark 9:7-8

It was a beautiful but warm day in the mountains. I was on a camping trip with the youth group from Trinity Covenant Church in Salem, Oregon. We decided to climb a scree (a long slope of fallen rock) on the flank of Mt. Jefferson.

It was tough going. The slope was steep and long. By the time we reached the top we were tired, sweaty, and ready for a rest. It was only then that we turned and saw the magnificent view that stretched before us. We had climbed above the tree line. We could now see the valley below us, and miles beyond we could see the peaks of Three Finger Jack and The Three Sisters.

In chapter 5 of *The Pietist Option* Mark Pattie speaks of spiritual, devotional practices: exercises that can seem like work to make us “busier and prouder.” Such is the climb up the side of the mountain.

But then comes the moment when we turn, when we open ourselves to the awesome view. Then comes the moment when the “spiritual practices become means by which we welcome the very presence and grace of God.”

On a mountain top the disciples glimpsed the glory of God in the beloved Son, Jesus.

I want Jesus to walk with me,
All along my pilgrim journey;
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.
(African American spiritual)

Jim Anderson
Shoreview, Minnesota

The Pursuit of Justice

In the temple [Jesus] found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

John 2:14-15

The pursuit of justice is not easy. In fact, in the face of societal expectations, calls for countercultural, biblical justice may appear, as the Apostle Paul would put it, like “foolishness” (1 Cor 1:18-25). Yet justice is an integral expectation of the Mosaic Covenant, articulated through the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Through these commandments, Yahweh establishes not only the legal expectations for the Israelites, but also the parameters by which justice can best be realized between community members both as they journey to and after they settle in the Promised Land. The terms of God’s justice-based community are clear: the Israelites are to uphold and embrace the Ten Commandments “so that your days may be long in the land” (Ex 20:12). The consequences of disobeying the code are disruption of the community when acts of injustice are perpetrated and disruption of the community’s relationship with Yahweh.

Jesus encounters the brokenness of the Mosaic Covenant as he finds the temple infested with examples of societal injustice. Jesus does not walk away from the situation, but actively engages it, acting as an agent of justice and societal restoration.

We are faced daily with examples of injustice in our immediate contexts. In this Lenten season, may we seek God’s guidance in ways that we can be agents of justice and reconciliation in our broken communities.

Give us grace, O God, to dare to do the deed which we well know cries to be done.
Let us not hesitate because of ease, or the words of men’s mouths, or our own lives.

Mighty causes are calling us — the freeing of women, the training of children,
the putting down of hate and murder and poverty — all these and more.

But they call with voices that mean work and sacrifices and death.

Mercifully grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say:

I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish.

(W.E.B. DuBois)

Monday ☞ March 5, 2018

“My Heart and My Flesh Sing for Joy”

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
Psalm 84:1-2*

As followers of Jesus Christ, we often do “things that are good” because we truly feel called by Christ to do them. Other times, we do them because, well, that’s just what you do. Going through the motions. A liturgy without much thought or a prayer without much passion.

For me it hit as we were preparing our annual cantata. I love singing and I love our choir, but for some reason God’s message thru the music was not reaching me. Finally, in the last rehearsal it all came together for me. The lyrics. The scripture. The music being played by the orchestra. I got it; *this* is why we sing our cantata — to shout our praises to our Lord on high!

We sang at three worship services that weekend, but one stood out where the Spirit was really moving. When the congregation joined in singing our anthem I noticed a young woman near the front. With a hand raised high and her eyes closed tight she was praising the Lord with her whole being. At that point I was so moved that my voice stopped, though my lips still formed the words. The connection I saw was truly awesome. Through the praise of those all around me, my heart and flesh *truly* sang for joy to the living God.

O Lord, thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit.
Help us to stay on fire for you, to resist simply going through the motions!
In your holy name we pray.
Amen.

Paul Kolsrud
Altoona, Iowa

Tuesday ☞ March 6, 2018

Time to Carry Out the Filth

[Hezekiah] said to them, “Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and carry out the filth from the holy place. For our ancestors have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God... Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger may turn away from us... The priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and they brought out all the unclean things that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 29: 5-6, 10, 16

Just as Hezekiah commanded the Levites once again to purify the house of the Lord, so Lent is a time to “carry out the filth” from our own hearts. It’s a time to be honest with ourselves. How are we living into God’s mission in this world? How are we impeding it? What habits, distractions, fears, and insecurities need to be carried out of our lives to make room for the Lord?

This cleansing takes time. The Levites did not purify the house of the Lord in a day — it was a process (2 Chron 29:17). So it is with our hearts. We must be diligent in carrying out the unclean vessels cluttering up the space that should be filled with nothing but God’s presence. However, we must also be patient with ourselves. Some change comes quickly, yes. But if we expect all change to be that easy, it will only result in frustration and shame — emotions that stand in the doorway, cutting off the light of redemption and blocking our path to renewal.

While this cleansing process is humbling — even terrifying — it is also exciting! What new thing will God do in our lives? What adventure awaits as the stone is rolled away and we leave the grave of self-centered living, stepping forward in faith?

As we empty ourselves, recommitting our hearts to God, we pray that the powerful work of the Holy Spirit will be done in our lives. We pray for encouragement as we wait. We stand before God in confidence “that the one who began a good work among [us] will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” Amen.

Lauren Pattie
Seattle, Washington

Wednesday ☞ March 7, 2018

Friendship with Jesus

*“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.”*

Psalm 84:10

Over twenty years ago, living overseas on the mission field, I hoped to do great things for God: to serve God in ways that might make me someone important, and give me significance. I yearned for greatness.

One morning, in my daily devotions, I stumbled upon Psalm 84. The psalmist’s words stunned me. As I meditated on the verse above, I realized I had been getting it all wrong. I wanted to do significant things for God, but God was inviting me into a significant relationship with Him. A relationship that had less to do with our performance, and much more to do with friendship.

I wrestled in prayer for weeks. Would I prefer to be famous in the courts of kings, or was I content to be friends with the Servant King?

While it certainly takes years to learn how to cultivate that relationship with Jesus, something did get settled in me that day: I wanted Jesus more than I wanted greatness or fame.

As you lean into Lent this season, in preparation for Good Friday, is there something Jesus is asking you to let go of in order to draw closer to him? You will not regret it.

May the Lord bless you today.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.
O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!
(Psalm 84:1, 4, 8)

Tina Osterhouse
Carnation, Washington

Thursday ☽ March 8, 2018

Being Made Whole and Holy

*...he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world
to be holy and blameless before him in love.*

Ephesians 1:4

Even in a passage dripping with God's grace, "holy and blameless" can be read as a difficult task. Paul's portrait of one chosen by Christ sometimes leaves me feeling left out, not taken to a "high place of blessing in him." Yet in Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this passage, I hear the incarnational pathway to resurrection life: God "had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love" (Eph 1:4, MSG).

That sounds more like a process, a movement, a transformation than an expectation. That sounds like something God is doing, not something we do. That sounds more like an adventure I want to join than an untrue descriptor placed upon me.

In the words of the Evangelical Covenant Church's paper "On Being a Healthy Pastor," the passage places us at Christ's incarnation where we "ground our understanding in the idea that God loves human beings and desires humans to be whole and holy. The Incarnation is the pathway that God uses to make us fully alive as the people we were created and in Christ, redeemed to be."

Here we can see the God-driven, nurturing development of a whole person experiencing whole life formation.

How blessed are you, O God! By the same love that adopted me into your family through Jesus Christ, continue to make me whole and holy, fully alive. Amen.
(from Eph 1:3-6, MSG)

Andy Sebanc
Surrey, British Columbia

Friday ☞ March 9, 2018

Theology as Doxology

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.
Ephesians 1:11-14

When I read the rich and beautiful language of Ephesians, two thoughts often come to mind, both given to me by mentors long ago. First: “The best theology is doxology.” Second: “Truth is often accompanied by beauty.” In drawing this letter together Paul draws on the hymnody, the prayers, and the benedictions of Israel and the early church. The language is grand and sweeping, powerful and poetic. Written for the church, written for the ages, but written for us.

Notice the preposition “in.” It delivers to us a profound sense of location and identity. Because of the gospel, because of the cross where are we? We are in Christ! And Paul invites us to plumb the depths of this. This identity, this location was set for us before the foundations of the world. The first response, the last response must be praise. Where are we? In a time and season when the church, its people are seeking for their identity, we are to be in the praise of his glory.

Who are we to be? What are we to become? It seems like meditation on Ephesians 1 must be essential. Called, predestined (as doxology), sealed with an unshakable inheritance. Our pietistic heritage leads us to song; praise grants meaning, so even if our songs during this season of Lent are pensive and brooding, let them be sung to the praise of his glory.

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress;
'midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head.
(Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, trans. John Wesley)

Dave Kersten
Chicago, Illinois

Saturday ☞ March 10, 2018

Born from Above

“Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’”
John 3:7

“Pietists,” writes Chris Gehrz in *The Pietist Option*, “fully expect the encounter with Jesus to be transformative” (p. 8). But is that really possible? After all, consider the New Year’s resolutions you made a few months ago to exercise more and finally complete that reading of *Moby Dick* you began back in high school. Have they fallen by the wayside? Or think back to the resolutions you made at the beginning of Lent to pray more, complain less, and attend church more regularly. Honestly, how’s that going?

Most Christians ascribe to Jesus the power to heal illness, move mountains, and change the cosmos. But after so many failed self-improvement projects, we have few expectations that Jesus can or will heal our own brokenness, move us from selfishness to generosity, or change our hearts.

The problem, of course, isn’t Jesus. Rather, it’s our insistence that we can accomplish everything on our own.

True spiritual transformation begins when we stop trying to be our own savior and humbly trust in and submit to Jesus. Transformation does not come from *within*, but from *above*, as a gift from Jesus. In the warm light of that gift, the ice that surrounds our hearts can finally melt. And in the warm light of that gift, even we can become walking, breathing miracles of merciful love.

Jesus, help me to let go of the illusion that I can do it all on my own,
and bless me to cling only to you, confident that in your light,
I can be born from above. I can be transformed. Amen.

Scott Schul
State College, Pennsylvania

4th Sunday in Lent ∞ March 11, 2018

Fools Rescued from Their Pit

*Some of the redeemed were fools because of their sinful ways.
They had suffered because of their wickedness...
So they cried out to the Lord in their distress,
and God saved them from their desperate circumstances.
God gave the order and healed them;
he rescued them from their pit.
Psalm 107:17, 19-20 (CEB)*

There is a long tradition of no “Hallelu, Yah!” during the season of Lent, no automatic “Praise the Lord!” from the amen corner. Lent is a pensive time, calling us to look inward and to tell the truth about our lives. Psalm 107 provides four story frameworks from which everyone can build a truthful witness.

In verses 17-20 this psalm calls us to tell about being fools in the pit. The psalmist reminds us that even we who are redeemed are often fools who sin and fall into the pit of consequences. But while we suffer, God hears our cries and saves us from the pit.

Freed from foolish choices, we are called to close our witness with grateful hearts, voicing our thanks to the God who loves us so faithfully. Thank You, O thank You, Lord!

Thank you, Lord, for your steadfast love, for your wonderful works to humankind.
Give me the joyous words to tell of your deeds to all who would listen!
(from Ps 107:21-22)

Judy Swanberg
Plymouth, Minnesota

Monday ☞ March 12, 2018

Holy Partners

Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also “was faithful in all God’s house.”

Hebrews 3:1-2

Imagine you asked a congregation shuffling out of a Sunday morning service about their willingness to sign up for a lifetime in the priesthood. I imagine many would say they are afraid to speak in public, hesitant to work for a pastor’s salary, lack leadership skills, or don’t have answers to all the difficult theological questions. This may be a fair assessment if they are considering entering the clergy for a vocation, but many fail to recognize that all followers of Christ are called into the priesthood.

This aspect of Pietism, recognizing that we are all part of a common priesthood for the common good, asks each of us to take a dynamic role serving, sharing, and leading our local church and community with an active faith as we pursue Jesus Christ. If we can shed the intimidation at the prospect of priesthood, it should create an army of followers, seeking God’s kingdom and witnessing to the world about a life transformed by Christ as “holy partners in a heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1).

Heavenly Father, thank you for calling me into your priesthood.
Please reveal to me how this calling should manifest itself in my life,
my words, and my actions.

Dale Gentry
Shoreview, Minnesota

Tuesday ☞ March 13, 2018

“Let the Redeemed of the Lord Tell Their Story...”

*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so...*
Psalm 107:1-2a (NIV)

How do you tell your story? Open up Psalm 107 to see a model of storytelling. Where do you fit among “those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south” (Ps 107:2b-3, NIV)?

In Psalm 107, the psalm-writer places the details of ancient Israel into a frame that lets us all recognize ourselves in the story of the redeemed. Who are you among the “some”?

Some wandered in desert wastelands... (v 4)

Some sat in darkness and gloom... (v 10)

Some were fools and became sick because of sinful choices... (v 17)

Some went out to sea, trading goods and traveling the waves... (v23)

Can you also recognize yourselves among the “all” of Psalm 107?

All had moments when “they cried out to the Lord in their trouble”

All experienced his rescue: “...he saved them from their distress...”

All are called to “thank the Lord for his steadfast love...”

Wherever you find recognize yourselves in the some’s and all’s of that story, may you remember to “give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind” (v 8).

Lord, you satisfy the thirsty and fill the hungry. You shatter prison doors and still storms.
You rescue, heal, and deliver. We thank you for your goodness,
for your love that endures forever.
(from Ps 107:1, 9, 15, 20, 29)

Virginia & Neil Lettinga
Prince George, British Columbia

Wednesday ☞ March 14, 2018

More Than Halfway There, with a Good Slog Ahead

*The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night;
but the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.*

Isaiah 60:19

Some time ago, I started seminary with a ministry calling and a timeline. The three-year program would take three years. I was called to pastor. I pictured it precisely, and knew how to get there. But life has its way, and I was still studying four years later. I was more than halfway there, but I still had a good slog ahead.

We've spent almost four weeks now on the journey from the dust of Ash Wednesday to the dawn of Easter. We're more than halfway there, but with a good slog ahead.

Our scripture today speaks of blessings unimaginable: stones become precious metals; violent destruction is replaced by peace, and God is the everlasting light of life.

Wow, our troubles are over... but not. Isaiah's passage ends "*in its time*, I will do this swiftly" (60:22b, NIV), and clearly that time has not fully come.

The time finally came when I graduated seminary. I was ordained, and planted a church. What I dreamed became reality. And, as it happens, I found myself on a *new* journey from ashes to resurrection.

This Lenten path brings home a crucial truth: life is lived in the time between times, "more than halfway there, but with a good slog ahead." The Pietist Option is to hope for better times, and join God on the journey there. Living this journey through Lent, we are wise to attune ourselves to God's voice in Isaiah: "I am the Lord; in its time I will do this swiftly."

Lord, as a pilgrim through life I go; each day your loving presence I know.
Travel beside me, strengthen and guide me, Shepherd divine!
You are my refuge; grant me, I pray, strength for each burden, light for each day.
Comfort in sorrow, grace for tomorrow, Savior divine!
(Wilhelmi Malmivaara, trans. Gilbert E. Doan)

John Bangs
Carnation, Washington

Thursday ☞ March 15, 2018

Returning and Rest

*For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel:
In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.
Isaiah 30:15*

My pastor likes to sum up the story of the Gospel thusly: “Oneness created. Oneness destroyed. Oneness restored.” I love that! The passage from Isaiah in today’s lectionary is an encapsulated version of that story — one that resonates powerfully with me in this season of Lent.

God, talking to the Israelites through Isaiah, both hearkens back to oneness created and promises oneness restored. He reminds them that their hope and salvation is found by turning back toward a loving God and resting and waiting and trusting in all the good that He created in the beginning. But the Israelites didn’t listen. They didn’t turn back toward oneness with God, but furthered its destruction by plowing ahead under their own perceived strength. And yet. God, in his mercy, even after their destructive choices, still promises oneness restored. “Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him” (Isa 30:18). What a promise!

During this season of Lent, as we retell and reflect on the ultimate story of oneness restored, may we remember that it is through returning and rest, quietness and trust that we come to it.

Lord God, help us to remember that you are determined to do us good all the days of our life — to advantage us and restore oneness with you.

Help us to remember that it is not out of our own strength, but by turning back to you and waiting on you, that you restore that oneness. And help us to live lives that point people toward you, so that they may experience that restored oneness, too.

Kyle Peterson
Alexandria, Virginia

Friday ☞ March 16, 2018

What's a Priest to Do?

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:14-15 (ESV)

The idea of priesthood doesn't come into our thinking very often. The great Reformation rediscovery of Peter's words describing believers as a royal priesthood doesn't mean much in our busy society today. But it was a defining motivation for our Pietist ancestors to serve their communities. They stood before God and actively interceded for their hurting neighbors: not in prayer alone, but with gifts of service to relieve poverty and suffering in their world.

The great paradox of today's passage is that Christ, the object of sacrifice and the author of the call for sacrifice, became that perfect sacrifice so that we might become effective priests. Just as his sacrifice in his death wasn't for himself, for he was sinless, His sacrifice for us wasn't just for us as individuals. We are baptized into a community of priests so that we may intercede together for our hurting world, by our acts of worship and service. Our greatest resource is the same risen Christ who is both the object and the means of the sure fulfillment of our priestly calling.

So what's a priest to do? We're to read Scripture together to embody its transformative power, and then go out together to pray for and sacrificially act to be Christ's presence in our fallen world. To be the priests we're called to be.

Thanks be to a Risen Christ, our High Priest!

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Book of Common Prayer)

Dave Johnson
Mendota Heights, Minnesota

Saturday ☞ March 17, 2018

The Move Outward

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him.

Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

John 12:1-3

She couldn't have been more grateful. Lazarus was alive. Her thankfulness had grown each day she was able to build a few more precious memories with her beloved brother. So when Jesus arrives for dinner, Mary's gratitude bursts from the invisible world of her heart into the real world of a dinner party. In a sacrificial act of devotion, she pours out what was probably her savings account on Jesus' feet and vulnerably uses her hair to wipe his feet dry.

It is an act of such humility and extravagance that her story is told in all four gospels. Jesus receives her gift as part of the way God will strengthen him through the ordeal of the cross coming for him just days away. Her movement from the inward life to outward action leaves a sweet perfume for all to smell.

The invitation for us is to join Mary in this move outward. Her inner gratitude led her to kneel at Jesus' feet and serve him at great expense. In *The Pietist Option* Mark Pattie reminds us that it is among the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and imprisoned that we will now find Jesus. Our inward gratefulness and commitment to Jesus makes us want to burst into actions of sacrifice for those with whom Jesus identifies.

Who are you encountering this Lent that might be blessed by the sweet aroma of sacrificial love given in the name of Jesus?

Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

(Frances Ridley Havergal)

Jonna Fantz
St. Paul, Minnesota

5th Sunday in Lent ☞ March 18, 2018

Belonging

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 31:31, 33

“The days are surely coming,” says the Lord through the mouthpiece of the prophet Jeremiah. The narrative arc of blockbuster disaster movies accustoms us to hear words such as these as words of warning. But the days spoken of here are not ones of doom and destruction. No, the days surely coming are instead those in which God and his people will belong to each other.

Truly belong. God will be our God, and we—the least of us, and the greatest—will be God’s people.

This assurance is not from a best-selling author who tempts us with bright and polished language to believe that we, too, can be filled with God, but from the actual God who will indeed fill, will indeed forgive, will indeed be known.

“How goes your walk with Christ?” ask the Pietists. Sometimes I think how nice it would be have a cloud in the sky by day or a pillar of fire by night to follow so there would be nothing to miss or figure out or guess wrong about. But then I remember to whom I belong and with whom I walk. I remember the filling and forgiving and knowing that already are possible through Jesus Christ.

The days are surely coming; the days have already begun.

Dear Lord, may I walk closely with you today,
in both mission and companionship, and always,
in hope for what is yet to come.

Nancy Nordenson
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Monday ∞ March 19, 2018

Love for the Law

*With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.
I treasure your word in my heart,
so that I may not sin against you.*

Psalm 119:10-11

In *The Pietist Option*, Mark Pattie writes that “Pietists understood the Bible to be ‘an altar where one meets the living God.’” Psalm 119 is a magnificent portion of that altar. Like an architect, the writer has designed a grand structure in which the finest details work together so that they cause us to awe.

The structure of the longest chapter in scripture is an acrostic divided into 22 stanzas, each corresponding to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Every stanza contains eight verses that begin with that letter. For example, each of the verses in the psalm’s second stanza begin with the second letter in the alphabet, *beth*.

In studying the details, we see the words for law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, and obedience occur nearly 130 times. But we also see throughout the psalm the psalmist’s love for the law, which is received as a life-giving gift. In just the eight verses of today’s text, the writer treasures, delights, and seeks for deeper relational understanding beyond the words.

Acrostics are often employed as memorization tools. But though the psalmist concludes the stanza by saying, “I will not forget your word,” it is clear that the memory is lived in wonder.

I delight in the ways of your decrees, Lord, as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways.
I delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.
(Ps 119:14-16)

Stan Friedman
Chicago, Illinois

Tuesday ☞ March 20, 2018

Proclaiming the Good News

*“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.”*
Acts 2:17 (NIV — from Joel 2:28)

God poured out his Spirit on Pentecost. Everyone could suddenly hear the Good News of Jesus Christ in his or her own language. The Holy Spirit obliterated the linguistic barriers that separated the Jewish pilgrims visiting Jerusalem. There were only 120 followers of Jesus on the morning of Pentecost. By the end of the day, about 3,000 new believers had been baptized into the Christian Church.

All those new Christians brought the Good News back home to Iraq, Turkey, Italy, and Egypt. The Holy Spirit inspired these pilgrims to share the Gospel with their friends at the local synagogue. The Holy Spirit also inspired the religious tourists to share the Good News *beyond the synagogue*, with their neighbors who didn't have a Jewish background. The Christian message spread throughout the ancient world. Soon, every race, every culture, and every language was welcome into the Christian Church. The Holy Spirit knocked down all the barriers that keep us apart.

“Evangelism is the spontaneous expression of abundant life in Christ,” according to Covenant pastor Wesley Nelson. “The power of the Holy Spirit convinces other people to believe also.” May we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to help others take a step closer to Jesus Christ.

O God, who freed us from death by the resurrection of your Son,
free us from any hesitation to share the good news of life in Christ.

Ryan Eikenbary-Barber
Mount Vernon, Washington

Wednesday ☞ March 21, 2018

Even “Plan B”

...take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear.

Haggai 2:4b-5

Comparison kills contentment. And with the completion of the second temple in 515 BC, Israel was plagued by comparison to Solomon’s beautiful temple and inevitable discontentment with what they considered a second-rate work of God.

Haggai’s timeless message is that God was every bit as present in “Plan B” as he was in “Plan A.” God’s presence and faithfulness is as active in the second temple under a Persian ruler as he was in the opulent temple under King Solomon. Haggai reminds Israel that their very lives are expressions of God’s work among them, and they honor God through the temple (even Plan B) because they have experienced God’s promises in history through events like the exodus and the restoration to the land.

Most of us experience our share of exile and defeat. For those of us who join the Pietists in “hoping for better times,” God meets us where we are, not where we wish we could be — even and especially in “Plan B” circumstances like a rebuilt temple in a devastated Jerusalem. God’s Spirit moves in the dust and dirt of our lives and says, “From this day on I will bless you” (Hag 2:19b).

As the sun rises today — on a world new with possibility —
please give us eyes of faith to seek out your faithfulness in this new day.

And steadfast hearts to believe it when we don’t see it yet.

And courage to put steps to that faith today — even Plan B.

Amen.

Matt Runion
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Thursday ☞ March 22, 2018

Imitation: Flattery or Worship?

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love,
any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,
make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love,
being in full accord and of one mind.*

Philippians 2:1-2

They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but whoever “they” are, they’re wrong. For the Christian, called to be like Christ, imitation is the sincerest form of worship.

During Lent, we imitate Christ’s human suffering in our fasting and abstaining. And yet, we are called to do more, to be more: to dwell together in humility, in love, in service.

How often we fail! We allow private, petty differences to disrupt the work of the Church and bitterness to root in our hearts. Personal is not the same as important. Christlikeness is important. To be like Christ is to portray enduring, steadfast love. To be like Christ is to humble ourselves before Him, and in his name serve others. To be like Christ is to be of one mind and love and purpose with our fellow believers.

I am reminded of the words of the German Pietist leader August Hermann Francke, born this day in 1663:

We also ought to be so many shining lights before others, by our hearty denial of all the honors, pleasures, and riches of this world; and by employing our lives entirely for the service and assistance of our neighbor. But if, on the contrary, we seek ourselves, being influenced, in what we do, by temporal concerns; then, as far as I understand, we depart from that glorious pattern Christ our Lord and Master hath set before us: neither is there any thing, to my apprehension, that doth more effectually deprive us of God's blessing in our calling, than this doth.

Christ Jesus, let the same mind that was in you be in me: humbled and obedient.
May God be at work in me, enabling me to will and work for his good pleasure.
(from Phil 2:8,13)

Jay Eldred
New Bern, North Carolina

Friday ☞ March 23, 2018

“Through the Desert”

*It is a good, every good transcending,
That Christ has died for you and me!
It is a gladness that has no ending
There in God's wondrous love to see!
Praise be to Him the spotless Lamb,
Who through the desert my soul is leading
To that fair city of joy exceeding,
For which you bought me as I am!*

Peter Jonsson Aschan (d. 1813; trans. Karl A. Olsson)

“Why do you call me good?”, Jesus asks a wealthy man. “No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18). The recipient of this declaration wanted to have God’s favor and find eternal life. But if I turn my focus from an introspective Christianity that misunderstands myself and God, and instead walk in the Way, seeking the ultimate good that is found in Jesus, I begin to have joy and understanding.

How does that walk? Sometimes it takes my soul through the desert of the old Swedish hymn. But my ability to make that journey does not depend on my goodness or resolve, nor any creed, but on Jesus, God’s entire message to humanity.

Walking through the desert is hard. But I can walk with confidence, hope, and love, knowing that I carry a water bottle that is miraculously refilled every time I give it to a thirsty person.

O God, bring me through the desert to your fair city of joy. Open to me there the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give you thanks.
(from Ps 118:19)

Dale Berry
Cambridge, Minnesota

Saturday ☞ March 24, 2018

“Get Up, He’s Calling You”

When we heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, [Bartimaeus] began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’... Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’”

Mark 10:47, 49

Jesus had just told his disciples of the mocking, pain, and death that would precede his rise from the dead. This was the “big picture” for his future. But there was still ministry to be done in the present.

In Mark 10, it comes as the Savior encounters blind Bartimaeus, who shouted for all to hear, “Son of David, have mercy on me” (v 48). In the midst of all he had on his mind, Jesus stopped, told his disciples to call the man, then asked a simple question: “What do you want me to do for you?” (v 51)

When the beggar asked for sight in faith, Jesus gave it to him and the man followed.

Choosing the Pietist Option means doing ministry, says theologian John Weborg, with “a heart ready to do the divine will.” It may include being uncomfortable as we shine our lights to a dark world. But it’s a joyous journey too.

Giving mercy, being flexible enough to let people tell you what they need, brings healing. And it comes from the mindset that faith, in Martin Luther’s words, “is a divine work within us.” Like Bartimaeus, we’re encouraged to do so with these words: “Get up, he’s calling you.”

Dear Jesus, thanks for allowing us to be part of your ministry.
Help us be open to whomever you bring before us,
for God’s glory and our neighbor’s good. Amen.

Craig Pinley
Hamilton, Ohio

On a Horse with No Name

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'"

Mark 11:1-3 (ESV)

As we come to Jesus' Passion, we see again and again the values of earthly kingdoms juxtaposed with those of the heavenly kingdom becoming a reality here on Earth. "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them," he tells the ambitious James and John. "But whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-44, ESV). Then as he leaves Jericho and begins the last leg of his climactic journey, Jesus reveals his power not by lording it over others, but rather by serving Bartimaeus in healing his sight.

Finally, Jesus approaches Jerusalem — on a young mule, exemplifying that his kingship is one where power should not be sought as an end itself, but rather should be used to participate in activities of humble service bearing his name.

Most interesting to me in this passage is the mule. I like to think that it has not been reared, that a colt "on which no one has ever sat" has not been led by bit and bridle to teach it where and when to go. Instead, I like to think that the young colt that Jesus rides is unharnessed and relies on his voice to lead it well into the city.

Lord, I pray for the same qualities as the mule: to be a humble servant who is attentive to Jesus' voice, as I engage in active expectation of your kingdom.

Steve Pavlicek
Plymouth, Minnesota

Holy Monday ☞ March 26, 2018

Compassion, Mercy, and Justice

He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth...

Isaiah 42:4a

It's the day after Jesus got off the donkey and the days that would change us forever loom ahead. The Old Testament reading is from Isaiah. The compelling and challenging passage is one of four "Servant Songs" found in Isaiah. I commend this first servant song to you: Isaiah 42:1-9.

Jesus is our model of servanthood: the Savior who washed his disciples' filthy feet. We are called to follow his example in real and significant ways. How? By doing the difficult work of looking for root causes of injustice in our culture. As is noted in *The Pietist Option*, we are often more comfortable being people of compassion and mercy, asking "Who is broken?" and "Who is in need?" rather than "Why does this brokenness exist?" or "How do we address the causes?"

In our lives of private devotion and our lives of public action, may we realize that the two are linked together.

God of love and justice,
let me know and live that they are not separate.
Loving people will do justice,
and just people will do their work with love and respect.

Amen.

(Richard Rohr)

Jane Hutchins-Peterson
Champlin, Minnesota

Holy Tuesday ☞ March 27, 2018

The Foolishness and the Power

*The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...*

*Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,
but we proclaim Christ crucified...*

*For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.*

1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-23a, 25

Tuesday marks a sobering pause in Holy Week. Headed toward the unmitigated glory of Easter, there is anticipation in the air. For those of us in ministry, it is a busy week rehearsing songs of enthusiastic celebration. Choirs and orchestras swell so we can sing praises that rightly accompany resurrection. But another day lies between now and the springtime celebration this Sunday: that day is Good Friday.

I have heard pastors say that the church should treat every day as Easter — and that people ought to live a glory-filled life every day. This attitude, though, misses an important truth: the difference between triumph and triumphalism — perhaps the defining facet of genuinely Christian living.

Here is that truth: The only way to Easter is *via* Good Friday. Resurrection cannot happen without death. The way to the Father is the *Via Dolorosa*.

Jesus lived his life, from baptism to Good Friday, with his eye on the cross. All that he did happened on that downward path. This is the foolishness of the gospel — and it is the power of the gospel. The route to resurrection is the way of the cross. And the normal Christian life is to join Jesus there.

So if you are feeling less than triumphant, and have a cross to bear, know that Jesus has invited you to that place, and that he bears it with you and for you. Let the anticipation of Easter bring hope and joy into your normal Christian life: the way of the cross.

O God, who shamed the wise and strong with what seems foolish and weak,
thank you for the grace that has been given us in Jesus Christ.

(from 1 Cor 1:4, 27)

John Bangs
Carnation, Washington

Reclaiming Hope

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1-3

On this day, Judas Iscariot makes the decision to betray his Lord, a decision that will lead to Jesus hanging on a wooden cross at Golgotha, the place of the skull. How can we be hopeful this week as the skies darken? We stumble through the darkness of our own lives: darkness defined by crippling anxiety, deep sorrow, regrettable mistakes, and an ironclad guarantee that we will die and so will those we love.

Where is our joy? Where is our hope?

The Pietists recognized our human condition, but they also remind us that in spite of these dark days, in spite of guilt and regret, we are to endure. We are called to hope by recalling Christ's great sacrifice in the name of love. Full stop. Even if I had a thousand years to try to grasp that, I could not. But I can, in my small way, reclaim hope by deciding to trust God, to read Scripture, and to pray frequently.

We err. We fail. We falter. And yet, the Pietists whisper, God is faithful; Christ rises.

May you remember that your strength comes from God, your hope from Christ, and your joy from persevering.

Praised be the love of our heavenly Father, who has carried me in his arms as his child.
Praised be Jesus Christ, my Savior, who has led me by the hand, so that no accident could overthrow me. Praised be God, the Holy Spirit, who has not departed from me.
O thou Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, remain with me this day and night.
(from Johann Friedrich Stark)

Maundy Thursday ∞ March 29, 2018

Stooping Before Each Other

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34-35

Followers of Jesus live under and by the cross. Our lives are characterized by the giving of ourselves to others in Jesus' name. It is not an easy way of life. Too often we are inclined towards selfishness, winning, competition, and self-promotion. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer described sin as "the heart turned inward on itself." Jesus calls us to a different way.

On the final Thursday of his earthly life, Jesus gathers his disciples and recasts the Passover meal pointing towards his cross — this bread is my body, for you; this wine is my blood, for you. During that meal, Jesus stoops before his disciples and, with a towel and a basin, washes their feet. Then Jesus says: This is the example I have set for you! This is how you are to live with each other. You are to stoop before each other.

According to Chris Gehrz, a pietistic instinct calls us back "to the motivations and actions of the Servant who stooped" (*The Pietist Option*, p. 64). We let go of our self-centered ways. We put others first. As we stoop, our lives, our families, our churches are transformed. As we stoop, we become witnesses of the Good News. For God's glory and our neighbor's good.

Father, forgive us for our selfish ways. We live in this place too often.
We see the actions of your Son and desire to live this cross-shaped life as well.
Empower us to stoop before others. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Kurt N. Frederickson
Simi Valley, California

Good Friday ☞ March 30, 2018

Entering Into Darkness: A Spiritual Discipline

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. Then they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

John 19:16b-18

A few years ago, my wife and I were involved in prison ministry at the Federal Medical Center in Rochester, Minnesota. Medical Center is a misnomer; it is a prison... a prison designed for inmates with physical or psychiatric illnesses that are beyond the capabilities of most correctional facilities' medical services. It is also the place where old inmates go to die, as it provides palliative and hospice care.

One weekend, along with inmates, we led a Tenebrae service in the prison chapel, found in the inner bowels of a centrally located building in the facility. The building is as far as you can get from the "outside world"; even the perimeter fences are blocked from view. Furthermore, both the building and certainly the basement chapel were windowless.

It is bleak and dismal and depressing, as I suppose prisons are meant to be. It seemed fitting for a Tenebrae service. The candles were extinguished until there was only one left. At this point, the inmate sitting next to me whispered, "It's going to get real dark because there ain't no light in here."

And it did. And we sat there for a long time.

Your task — your spiritual discipline — on this Good Friday is to enter into the darkness of the Crucifixion. It's going to get real dark because there ain't no light in here.

*Like the Tenebrae service itself, we end today's reflection in silence.
Instead of trying to find the right words — are there any? —
simply meditate on the image of Jesus dying on the cross,
and enter into the darkness of the Crucifixion.*

Stephen E. Pitts
Minnetonka, Minnesota

Harrowing

*For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead,
so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body,
but live according to God in regard to the spirit.*

1 Peter 4:6 (NIV)

We often gloss over this significant day that sits between Good Friday and the triumph of Sunday's resurrection. But what if something profound was occurring on Saturday that made the next day coherent? What if, like an ordinary week, you cannot get to Sunday except by going through Saturday?

This ordinary day has extraordinary implications, for it is also known as the Harrowing of Hell. It's a great story with astounding implications. Too bad it is nearly unknown to Protestants, apart from one phrase of the Apostles' Creed: "Jesus descended to the dead." From Matthew 27:52-53, Ephesians 4:9-10, and 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6 we learn that Jesus went to the dead to bring them into life.

Who was the first to be retrieved? The Bible doesn't say, but the Eastern Orthodox icon of the Resurrection shows Jesus standing at the gates of Hell, lifting two people out of their graves: Adam and Eve. The second Adam, Jesus, liberates the first Adam. The Story is being retold by one who, unlike the first Adam, is found faithful (1 Cor 15:48-49).

So may this ordinary Saturday pave the way for an extraordinary Sunday. May the descent of grief as we look back on Good Friday remind us that our God is always moving to tell a better story amid the brokenness that is our world. The Pietist heart is one with hope for better times. This Holy Saturday, may we start to become a Resurrection Sunday people in a Good Friday world.

Shepherd of all, in death you remained hidden from the world;
teach us to love our hidden spiritual life with you and the Father.
In your role as the new Adam, you went down among the dead to release the captives;
grant that all who are dead in sin may hear your voice and rise to new life. Amen.

Jason Barnhart
Ashland, Ohio

April



Claudio Barrientos, "Amanecer Río Gallegos" (CC BY-ND 2.0)

*"Come, let us return to the Lord;
for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;
he has struck down, and he will bind us up.*

*After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.*

*Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord;
his appearing is as sure as the dawn;
he will come to us like the showers,
like the spring rains that water the earth."*

Hosea 6:1-3

Easter Sunday ☞ April 1, 2018

A New Day

*Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been
removed from the tomb.*

John 20:1

He is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Only Mary didn't know it. It was still so early, so dark. There was so much she couldn't see, didn't know, couldn't understand. The open tomb was no glorious sign of victory to her. We sing songs of joy about the stone that had been rolled away, but to her it only served as yet another example of a world gone completely out of control.

She didn't know God was up to something good, something great. She couldn't imagine in her grief and confusion that God was accomplishing something far greater than she had ever dreamed. The long night of death's dark rule was broken. A new Day was dawning. As Jesus had promised, the kingdom of God was coming near. God's kingdom had definitively broken into our world.

This is the Good News we are called to believe in, to stake our lives on. Our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Even the worst things in life — those that seem to be the proverbial last nail in the coffin — are used by God for good. We live and love and serve looking to the future with confident, expectant hope.

Alleluia! He is risen! He is risen, indeed!

God of the Resurrection, we praise you!
Open our eyes to the new Day that is dawning and enable us
to live and love and serve with confident, expectant hope.
Amen.

Mark Pattie
Lino Lakes, Minnesota

Easter Monday ∞ April 2, 2018

Living in Jesus Christ's Future

*So it is with the resurrection of the dead.
What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.
It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.
It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.
1 Corinthians 15:42-43*

Easter Monday is that forgettable day of the church calendar seemingly dedicated to, well, getting on with our lives. It's remarkable how quickly the unexpected, inexplicable joy of yesterday dissolves into the predictable, prosaic routine of today and tomorrow.

But we actually spend much of our lives in something like Easter Monday. We're not unaware that the Resurrection has happened. But today we're already feeling ourselves pulled away from that reality by the need to be realistic. We're already tempted to surrender to the insistent demands of a world that seems unchanged by the miracle we celebrated yesterday.

So let me send you forth into the extended Easter Monday of your life with the words of the 19th century German Pietist Christoph Blumhardt, who urged his flock to "expect the overcoming of all the powers of evils, of all the sin that still prevails." Live in "active expectation" that the Resurrection has left nothing unchanged: the perishable has become imperishable; the dishonored, glorified; the weak, powerful.

"In this expectation," Blumhardt preached, "we will not become weary. In all our activities, we must live in Jesus Christ's future."

May you live in this future, to God's glory and our neighbors' good!

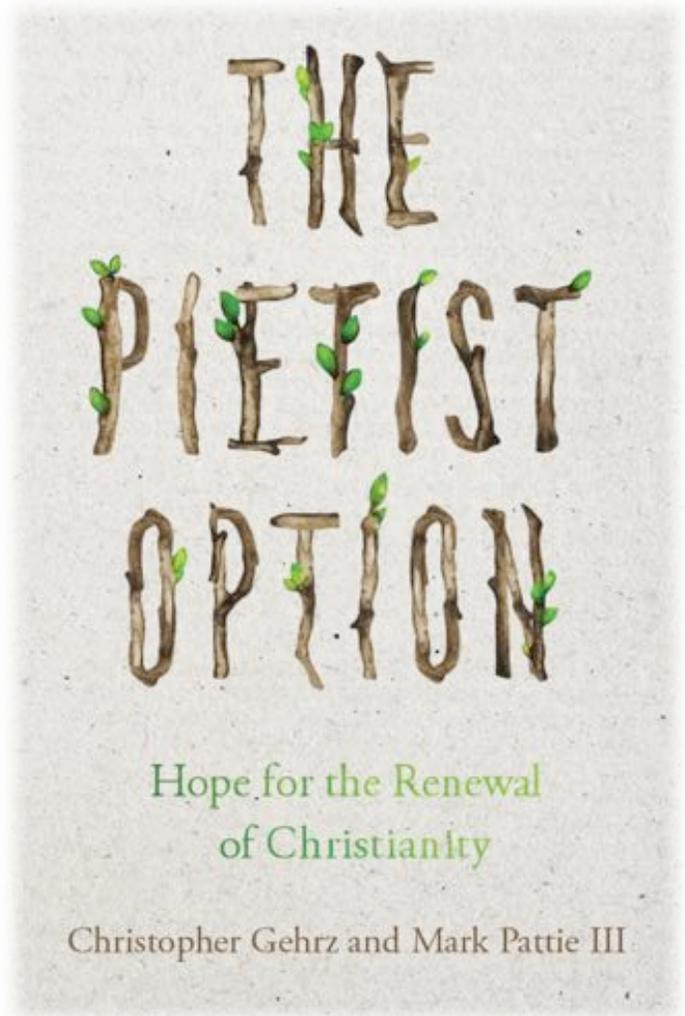
Jesus, I believe in your resurrection.
Help me now to live as if I believe. Amen.

Chris Gehrz
Roseville, Minnesota

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from Amazon
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