

Today

July/August 2012

refresh, refocus, renew



“Enjoying the Son”
Reginald Smith



“Receiving the Inheritance”
Arie Leder

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reFRAME MEDIA

this issue

Enjoying the Son—July 2012

Reginald Smith

In July we aim simply to enjoy Jesus. So far this year we have studied Jesus in the Bible, and we have seen his work in our world today. That's great! As the Westminster Shorter Catechism reminds us, our purpose for living is to enjoy the Lord and serve him forever! In summer we enjoy warm weather, beaches, parks, and more. How about enjoying the Son, who gives us our true rest? The Gospel books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are helpful guides in this exercise.

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Receiving the Inheritance—August 2012

Arie Leder

Day by day in August we will reflect on texts in the book of Joshua, focusing on the God who brought his people into Canaan, their promised inheritance, and who shaped them to live by his law, given through Moses. Through these texts we will hear how God engages the nations of the world to make himself known, to call his people to discipleship, and to choose wisely in dealing with those who oppose God's way. May the Lord strengthen us along the way to serve faithfully in all the opportunities he sets before us.

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WELCOME BACK

"Come and have breakfast."

—John 21:12

British Petroleum leader Tony Heyward watched oil wash up on the once-clean Gulf of Mexico beaches. The sticky sheen destroyed the livelihood of many people and tainted wildlife for years to come. Heyward knew he had blown it when he blurted out in a TV interview that he wanted his life back, rather than making things right for the people affected by the spill. The cameras found him later doing the one thing he loved: sailing.

No one had to tell Peter he had blown it with Jesus. Just a few days earlier he had claimed that he would even die with him (John 13:31-38). But when Jesus was arrested and people pointed Peter out as one of Jesus' disciples, he quickly denied having any connection with Jesus (John 18:15-27).

While waiting for Jesus to meet them in Galilee (Matthew

28:10), Peter and some other disciples went back to the one thing they knew best: fishing. But they came up empty.

Then someone on the shore offered advice and another chance to get it right. They could have picked up their nets and called it a day. But they listened and got a miraculous catch of fish, and Jesus welcomed these disciples back to himself. (See Luke 5:1-11.)

Have you ever blown it with Jesus? Do you think he won't welcome you back? Jesus will never give up on you—or any of us. Let's join with him again!

Dear Jesus, my guilt over broken promises has often kept me from receiving your forgiveness. Help me return to you, Lord. Amen.

TRUE SAFETY

He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

—John 20:22

One day when I was in third grade, a bully named Michael waited for me after school. He stood at the school door and demanded that every kid give up their leftover lunch money. Those who resisted were greeted with a bloody nose. I lived across the street from school, so I decided to make a run for home—with Michael on my heels. I knew if I could make it home, I had a chance to keep the small change I had. With only seconds to spare, I made it to the door and locked it shut. Michael was not happy with me. I did not want to go to school the next day for fear he would get me. A locked door was my friend! My safety rested in staying behind secure doors.

In a similar way, the disciples wanted the doors locked because their lives were on the line. The religious leaders were out to

get them because of their connection with Jesus. The life they imagined with Jesus was clipped at the cross and buried in a tomb. Their vision of a new kingdom of righteousness and peace had turned into a nightmare.

But the resurrected Lord found a way to slip past their fears and anxiety. He had a special delivery to make to a frightened bunch of disciples: the peace of his presence. Jesus quietly said, "Peace be with you," and he revived their joy.

Jesus promises today also to send the best help we can ever have: the Holy Spirit, who will never leave us or forsake us.

Holy Spirit, breathe on us the peace that drives away our fears and worries. May we put our trust in our only Savior. Amen.

SHOW AND TELL

"Father, the hour has come."

—John 17:1

The apostle John could have been a good kindergarten teacher. He was a "show and tell" kind of writer in the way he drew pictures of Jesus, showing that our Savior is fully human while also being fully God.

John tells us that Jesus looked up to heaven. He shows an obedient servant, "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2:6-7). Jesus was sent to do the Father's work. His mission was to please the Father and complete his assignment of bringing us to God the Father.

How could that happen? John wonderfully relays the words of Jesus by saying, "This is eternal life: that they know you, the

only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." When we accept Jesus as the one whom God sent to save us from our sins, we experience the wonder of salvation. Jesus was the best thing that ever happened to this world.

How about you? The Light of the world has come, and the timing was perfect for all of us. He came to save us from ourselves. He shows us a life that brings us into the family of God. He promises to shine his light into our lives. Shine Jesus! Shine on us!

Dear Lord, thank you for coming to display God's work and bring us into the blessing of eternal life. Help us all to glorify the Son in our lives. Amen.

SPIRIT OF TRUTH

*"When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth."
—John 16:13*

Can you handle the truth? Your doctor tells you, after an MRI scan, that there are spots on your liver. Your company files for bankruptcy after you have given them 45 years of loyal service. Your young-adult children must live with you because the job market has flat-lined. Let's be honest, the truth can sometimes hit us in the gut and send our lives reeling into places we never imagined.

We have to admit that the truth is hard to handle without help. But Jesus helps by providing a helper, the Spirit of truth.

Jesus was preparing to leave his disciples and return to his Father, and his disciples were afraid. They imagined themselves spending much time with Jesus, learning about his kingdom and finding their places in it. The truth they could not handle was that Jesus had to leave them. Their lives

had to transition from the God they could see to the God who would be in them.

But Jesus gave them truth they could handle. The Spirit of God would remind them of the truth of Jesus as the only Savior whom they—and we—will ever need. The Spirit takes us by the hand and helps us to live into the words and actions of the Father and the Son. We can handle that truth!

Has the Spirit been speaking to you this week? Are you taking his counsel to heart? Let the Spirit lead you and guide you every step of the way!

Holy Spirit, I need your guidance to take in the truth of God's Word. Help me as I receive the truth of Jesus as the very words of life. Amen.

TRUST ME!

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

—John 14:1

For many years, I lived across the street from an elementary school. I've noticed that the first day of class for kindergarteners can be a day of terror. They cling to their parents like Velcro. I recall the cries of young boys and girls who wanted nothing to do with math, reading, and graham crackers. They were simply troubled about leaving their parents.

Peter and the other disciples were not thrilled to learn that Jesus was talking about going away (John 13:31-33). He knew he would soon be arrested and crucified, but would rise again on the third day. Jesus also knew the disciples were troubled and distressed. So he spoke directly to their fears and uncertainty to give them the confidence they needed to stand. Jesus said, in effect, “Don't be upset that I'm leaving you for a little while. Put

your trust in my promise to prepare a permanent place for you in my Father's kingdom.”

When life pulls us into situations that make us doubt, Jesus reassures us that we can let go of uncertainties and live with the amazing promise that Jesus has prepared a home for us.

Have the hard knocks of life taken the wind out of your sails? Jesus has a good word for you: trust in the Father, who loves you, and in Jesus, who has prepared a place just for you—for eternity.

Jesus, we are often tossed on the restless seas of worry and doubt. Give us your blessed assurance that we have a place in your kingdom now and forever. Amen.

THE SMELL OF ACCEPTANCE

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

—John 12:3

One of my favorite childhood memories is of my mother's cooking. She would take whole chickens from the refrigerator and prepare them with her secret ingredients of herbs and spices. Then she would gently place each piece into hot, bubbling oil. The fragrance of the chicken traveled through our apartment. She did not have to call us to the dinner table; the mouthwatering smells drew us in. To me, the aroma of the chicken my mother made displayed the depths of her love and care for us.

Jesus had dinner in the home of Lazarus. Mary wanted to show her love for Jesus, who gave her his unconditional love and acceptance. She broke open a flask of expensive perfume, and, without words, lavished the oil on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair.

Mary's devotion to Jesus was caught by everyone except Judas. He was more worried about the cost of the perfume than noticing the sweet smell of love in the room. He missed the chance to enjoy his only Savior.

But others in the room probably never forgot the smell! Mary chose to enjoy the Son as the one who fully accepted her as God's child and who appreciated her act of love. The room probably never smelled ordinary again.

Are you ready to break open your best for the Lord?

Lord, I want to leave a scent of love and devotion to you alone. Help me to freely spread acts of mercy, grace, and peace to others in your precious name. Amen!

TOO LATE?

"Whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
—John 11:26

We value time! We say things like "Time is money" and "The early bird catches the worm." We believe everything is urgent.

In our verses for today, Jesus visits Martha and Mary, whose brother Lazarus has died. They had sent word when Lazarus was sick, but Jesus didn't come right away (John 11:1-7). Didn't he care that his friend was dying? Yes, but he also knew God had other plans for Lazarus (see John 11:11-15, 38-44).

Still, we can sympathize with Martha. She had placed her full trust in Jesus to cure her brother. How many times had she looked out and stared down the road for a glimpse of him? When Jesus finally did arrive, she met him with tears and perhaps a bit of scolding: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." But then she said, "I know that even now

God will give you whatever you ask."

We have all felt frustrated when Jesus shows up later than we have wanted. Our dreams are dashed, and our confidence in him withers. But Jesus knows how we feel—and he often uses time differently than we do. Though we may not understand, he also knows what's most important. Maybe he held Martha by the shoulders and looked her in the eyes as he said, "Whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Jesus came to infuse our faltering faith with amazement and wonder. Do you believe this?

Jesus, forgive me for placing too much emphasis on time and much less on building my faith and trust in you. Amen.

SHEPHERD US, DEAR LORD

"I am the good shepherd."

—John 10:14

I watched a mother duck lead her ducklings across a busy highway. When she approached the middle line, she looked back and quacked to her children to keep following her. Those little ducks trusted her voice and believed she would get them to the other side. She knew them, and they knew her.

There are all kinds of people competing for our followership. Businesses drown each other out with their commercials, promising more than they can deliver. Politicians try to convince us that they can make the government bend to their will. A radio pastor claimed the end was near and said everyone should follow his lead.

Whom can we trust? There is one who can back up his claims: the good shepherd, Jesus. John catches the honest and tender words of the Savior who knows

and loves us. Jesus accepts us as the sheep of his flock, always nurturing us with his firm voice and gentle hand. But ultimately he is willing to lay down his life for us. Instead of trying to get something from us, Jesus gives himself away to bring us to God. He chooses to give up his authority and his rights to make us right with God. That's a voice I can listen to and follow anywhere.

How about you? Will you follow the good shepherd, who knows and loves you? He can get you safely to the other side. Listen; he's calling you!

Good Shepherd, I trust you are good and have my good in mind. Help me to follow you into safe and abundant pastures of love and grace. Amen.

WATER OF LIFE

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink."

—John 7:37

Last summer much of the central United States was caught in a once-in-a-decade heat wave. The media showed bone-dry lands, unable to produce crops or provide food for cattle. People from Texas to the Great Plain states were offering prayers for rain. The heat wave reminded people that weather is unpredictable and rain is a precious gift from God.

The great festival of today's verses was designed to help God's people remember when their ancestors wandered in the wilderness. Water was not in abundance. Only after they came out of the desert were they blessed with regular rainfall and flourishing crops. On this "last and greatest day" of the feast, John says, Jesus took the opportunity to let thirsty people find true living water for their parched souls.

Grab your pitchers and barrels and come to the fountain named Jesus! Today's power drinks are limited in their ability to give the relief we are really after. Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me . . . rivers of living water will flow from within them." His Spirit promises spiritual refreshment to strengthen us for the journey through the dry times of our lives.

Ice water, sweet tea, and power drinks can quench our temporary thirst. But if you want the real thirst quencher, Jesus will hand you his Spirit, which replenishes all dry and weary souls—always. Drink up!

Jesus, thank you for your Spirit, who quenches my thirsty soul. I need to drink deeply from the well of the Spirit and be satisfied in you alone. Amen.

DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION?

They saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water.

—John 6:19

Good teachers come up with amazing ways to get students' attention. Kindergarten teachers quiet their voices to get children to settle down. Coaches have a knack for using the right words and tactics to motivate their players to win.

When Jesus walked on the Sea of Galilee, that got his disciples to pay attention to who he was and what he was about! At the time, though, they might not have realized he was the best teacher they could ever have.

They had probably figured it would be an uneventful evening. The disciples were on their way to the other side of the lake while Jesus stayed back on shore to spend some time alone (John 6:15). The wind and waves, however, started getting rough, and the disciples were probably growing concerned for their safety. Then

somewhere in the middle of the lake, Jesus came right out to them, walking on the water!

Now they were frightened! How do you think you would have reacted to that?

Why did Jesus do that? He wanted his disciples—and us—to pay attention to him as their chief focus even when the storms of life seem to take over. His voice breaks through the rumble of water and wind and says, "It is I; don't be afraid."

Jesus wants your undivided attention today. Are you keeping your eyes on him?

Dear Jesus, forgive me for allowing the storms of life to distract me. I believe you are Lord over all things. Help me to trust you. Amen.

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

He lifted up his hands and blessed them.

—Luke 24:50

What is central in your life today? For some people, it's a spouse, child, or other loved one. For others, it's power, money, fame, or all of these. Maybe for still others, it's world peace, feeding the hungry, or dismantling racism. For Christians, the central thing in our lives is Jesus. When it really comes down to what makes us get up each day, it's that Jesus is central; he's the heart of our worship.

In today's verses we encounter Jesus at the end of his earthly journey, ready to return to the Father. He reminds his disciples of what their mission will be when he is no longer with them. His message is simple: they are to be his witnesses. Then Jesus lifts up his hands and blesses them.

What an affirmation! Jesus entrusts his disciples to live and teach the gospel in spite of their faults and failures. The disciples,

as they watch Jesus taken into heaven, are near bursting with joy and an unforgettable experience with the Master.

Luke writes, "Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." They knew the heart of worship was the ascended Christ as the center of their joy.

What is the center of your life? Is it Jesus, the one who gives you joy in all circumstances? Come to the heart of worship, where it's all about Jesus.

Master, many things compete for my worship. Center my heart on you, Jesus, for you are the only one who can bring me the joy that really lasts. Amen.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Jesus himself came up and walked along with them.

—Luke 24:15

Have you ever wondered how long Jesus was following the two disciples along the road before he came up and walked with them? How much of their conversation did he overhear? Could he have heard them discuss his death, and their disappointment? Jesus followed them on the road, and those disciples would never be the same after this encounter.

When our disappointments become our central focus, we miss lots of details around us. We might not notice other people. We might not realize that the Lord is there with us.

These two disciples had their hearts set on a new earthly kingdom for Israel, and that idea died when Jesus was crucified. But disappointment with Jesus can be the entryway into meeting the Lord for the very first time. Jesus walked these disciples through God's prom-

ises in the past and led them to the reason he had to die—so that sinners everywhere could have new life!

Once these disciples understood the truth, they could not get enough of Jesus. They later asked, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Do you feel as if you are on the road alone? Have your dreams been shattered? The Lord has been walking with you and listening, and he wants to share with you the truth about life. Can you believe it?!

Risen Lord, often I drown myself in my troubles and heartaches. I miss catching your presence with me. Thank you for never giving up on me. Amen.

HERE'S YOUR SIGN

"When you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near."
—Luke 21:31

When stores advertise children's clothing sales, we know a new school year will soon begin. When the sun sets early and it's dark by late afternoon, we know winter is approaching. These are signs pointing to a change of seasons for us.

Jesus wanted people to be fully aware of the signs of God's approaching kingdom. Our senses must be alert to catch how he wants us to live with confidence and peace in him.

Jesus said, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap." Jesus isn't trying to scare or trick us. His sharp words are meant to keep us on top of our game.

The signs we have are the life-affirming words he speaks into our lives. His words are the very

truth we can rely on as the solid ground beneath our feet.

He said, "The kingdom of God is near. . . . Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

He also reminded his followers to "be always on the watch, and pray."

Peace and wholeness are under way. Let's keep our eyes open for signs of the coming kingdom as we not only listen to Jesus' words but also do what he says (James 1:22; 2:20). And what does he teach? "Love one another" (John 13:34).

Lord Jesus, as we serve you each day, keep us alert and watchful for signs of your kingdom coming. May your word keep us grounded in doing your will. Amen.

THE NO-NAME WOMAN

A poor widow put in two very small copper coins.

—Luke 21:2

Often, financially blessed people will give money to build wonderful buildings for worthy causes. Often, those buildings display the names of the contributors, letting everyone know who gave the generous gift. I call it “philanthropic graffiti.”

Jesus noticed something going on at the temple treasury. He saw the true spirit of giving in the eyes of the Lord—and its opposite. Some people who brought their offerings to the temple were using it show off their wealth. They wanted everyone to think their spirituality was tied to their wealth. They gave to bring honor to themselves, not to the God who made their wealth possible in the first place. They knew the words of Moses but failed to let them take root in their lives. Moses had said, “When you have eaten and are satisfied,

praise the LORD your God for the [blessings] he has given you. . . . Otherwise . . . your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 8:10-14).

Jesus pointed out the quiet giving of a woman who offered all that she had to live on. Though we don’t know her name, we know that she gave because she was devoted to God.

It’s not about the amount of money we give for the Lord to use in his kingdom; it’s about our total dependence on God and recognizing that it’s all his. He knows our hearts and our names.

Dear Lord, I can’t fool you about anything, especially my resources. May I give with a heart that depends on you alone. Amen.

KNOWING YOUR PLACE

“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

—Luke 18:13

While I was waiting to catch a plane, a businessman ran up to the airline attendant, demanding immediate entry on the plane. The attendant asked him to go to the end of the line and wait his turn. The man shouted, “Do you know who I am!?” He said he was a senior executive who flew often, and he could have her fired. She said, “Well, I guess I’ll wait for that call, but you’ll still have to go to the end of the line.”

Similarly, one day, Jesus was talking with “some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else.” So he told a story about a Pharisee who approached the temple with a superior attitude. He was thankful he wasn’t “like other people.” His virtues were impeccable. He tithed faithfully. He knew he measured up to

the standards of a good religious man.

Then Jesus described the tax collector. He knew he could never measure up to God’s perfection. He cried from a distance, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” He had no sense of entitlement. He made no excuses to justify himself.

Can you feel the painful silence in the room as Jesus exalted a repentant tax collector over a Pharisee? Jesus exalted the man who knew his place in the game of grace. How about you?

Gracious Father, thank you for showing me the dangers of seeking spiritual entitlement. Humble me to know my place in the kingdom—that I’m a sinner saved by grace. In your name, Amen.

LOST AND FOUND

"There was a man who had two sons."

—Luke 15:11

When someone wants to simplify their life, they get rid of things that get in their way—even people, in some cases.

The young man in today's story was not interested in his father, but he *was* interested in the things he could get from his father. He thought his life would be more exciting if his father was dead. In the culture of that day, it was an insult to ask for your inheritance before your father passed away. But the young man didn't care about that.

The story then takes a surprising turn as the father gives the young man his inheritance. Most fathers would not react in a way like that. They'd probably consider the most reasonable options for such an unreasonable child. But Jesus is making a point that parallels our Father in heaven's lavish love for us. The father knows his son is lost, and he watches and prays

for his return. As a result, the focus of the story isn't really on the son but on the outrageously generous father who waits for his son to come home.

Jesus told this story to tell us about his Father. His Father gave up everything, even his own Son, so that we might be returned to him. Our Father is overjoyed to the point of being utterly undignified because we belong to him again. He loves us that much. As we come to our senses, we too find our Father running toward us, undignified but overjoyed.

Father, thank you for patiently waiting for us to come home to you. As you run toward us, we run toward your arms ready to embrace us. Amen.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

“Rejoice with me: I have found my lost coin.”

—Luke 15:9

On June 19, 1991, Jaycee Dugard walked to her bus stop in South Lake Tahoe, California. Her father saw a car speed toward her and someone pull her inside the vehicle. It was the last time Dugard was seen for 18 years. Her parents never gave up hope that their daughter would be found alive. Jaycee was precious and important to them because she was their child. When she was found, her mother flew quickly to southern California to embrace the daughter she had not held in a long time. And there was great rejoicing in their home, because their daughter had been found.

Jesus does not tell us how long the woman in his story searched for her lost coin. Was it a few hours, a week, a month? Maybe the length of time isn't as important as the concern she had for a coin that was important to

her. Scholars explain that Jesus' listeners probably would have understood this coin as part of an important collection, or perhaps a special heirloom. And once the woman's eyes caught a glimpse of the small coin in a corner of a room, her face would have shone with joy and relief. And in her joy, she asked others to rejoice with her.

A person who has been lost is worth every effort to find for the sake of receiving full life in the kingdom of God—and that prompts a celebration in heaven. “I tell you,” said Jesus, “there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Jesus, I am amazed that you search till you find me and celebrate with joy. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

GETTING INTO GOD'S CLUB

"Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"
—Luke 15:4

American Express has marketed its credit card with a bold statement: "Membership has its privileges." The card is promoted as the key to getting the life you deserve, with its benefits for "members only."

The Pharisees grumbled that Jesus was spending too much time with unsavory people. To them, Jesus was giving the impression that sinners could gain entrance into an exclusive club: the family of God.

Jesus detected the disease of self-righteousness at work in the Pharisees. In *Tell It Slant*, author Eugene Peterson describes it well: "Only men and women who become Christians are capable of and have the opportunity for some sins, with self-righteousness at the top of the list."

Jesus' first listeners to his parable of the lost sheep were

probably enraged. Why would a shepherd leave the 99 "club member" sheep in the open country to find one who had walked away from his membership privileges? Jesus wanted to drive home the unsettling point that lost sheep can enter God's family through Jesus Christ. He willingly seeks lost sheep for his club of grace and mercy. Once found, Jesus brings the new member to his friends and neighbors to celebrate.

Our membership privileges are earned not on our own righteousness, but on Christ's alone. Welcome to the club!

Jesus, help me fight the disease of self-righteousness with your medicine of grace alone. May I never suppress my joy when you bring others into your kingdom. Amen.

JESUS IS AVAILABLE ON THE SABBATH

"Woman, you are set free from your infirmity."

—Luke 13:12

There is a saying that goes, "Some people are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good." The Pharisees were so Sabbath-minded that they were no earthly good. They worried about their righteous standing before God and did not notice the obvious: a woman "crippled by a spirit for eighteen years."

While teaching on the Sabbath, Jesus made clear that God was available for doing good on the Sabbath too, even if the Pharisees weren't. Our Lord was interested in bringing hope in God's kingdom, in which all will have full life forever.

In a calm and gentle voice, he called the woman to him and said, "You are set free from your infirmity." Jesus placed his rough hands on her crooked body and filled her with God's healing power. At once, she was healed, and she praised God.

Joy came to her on the day that was meant for freedom and worship.

But not everyone was thrilled with Jesus' intervention. The Pharisees were unhappy because Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath, a day meant for no work. Jesus, however, knew the Sabbath was for doing good and showing grace in the name of the Father. He restored the Sabbath to its original intent: that all good things come from God, who is always available to help us. Thank God that he never takes a day off from caring for you and me!

Dear Jesus, you are Lord of the Sabbath. Help me see that you are always available for your children who cry out to you. Hear my cry, I pray. Amen.

TRUST ME

"I tell you, do not worry about your life."

—Luke 12:22

We all have reason to worry. The world's economic engines have not been cranking out enough jobs. Many family homes are near the point of foreclosure. Prices are rising for our basic needs: food, clothing, and transportation. Sadly, most of the evening news is often just more bad news.

Where can we turn for a hopeful word? There's nothing better than Jesus, who knows the future and every detail of our lives.

Jesus' disciples were concerned about the same things that worry us today. So he addressed the one thing that was running their lives: worry.

They worried about where their next meal would come from. They worried about having decent clothing to wear. They worried about their future.

But worry doesn't gain us anything, says Jesus. Instead, it distracts us from the One who knows what we need and when we need it. We are called to trust in him, knowing that our Lord will meet our needs in his good time.

Do you believe the God of heaven and earth will take care of you today? Practice living a life that is not based on possessions, wealth, or money. Challenge yourself to live as one whose treasure is the Savior who knows your needs even before you ask him (see Matthew 6:8).

Master, I believe you will take care of my needs according to your perfect plan and will. I will practice a life of generosity to those around me. Amen.

NO OTHER OPTION

"I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not."

—Luke 9:40

This father was out of options. Maybe he had taken his son to other teachers and they had tried to bring relief. But the refrain he kept hearing was "There is nothing more I can do." The demonic spirit in this boy's body caused chaos in the life of his family.

Hearing that Jesus was in the area, the man brought his son and begged Jesus' disciples to help. Surely they would know how to deal with the partners of Satan, right? But they too came up empty. So the desperate father went straight to Jesus, the only option he had left.

We aren't told why the disciples couldn't help. But it does sound like Jesus was frustrated by this situation. Another account of this story in Mark 9 reveals that Jesus later told his disciples, "This kind [of demon] can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29).

Thankfully Jesus knew what to do. He "rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father."

In this and so many other episodes, Jesus drove home the point to everyone, including his disciples, that he is the only Savior.

How about you? Is Jesus your only option in times of trouble? How about in times of comfort and peace?

Are you looking for other solutions? Turn to the Savior; he's the only option.

Dear Jesus, help me to resist the options that cannot really help or heal my situation. I come to you and believe you can truly heal my soul. Amen.

DON'T BE QUIET!

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more
—Mark 10:48

People had gotten used to hearing Bartimaeus asking for money. Day after day on the road near Jericho, he probably used the same annoying requests for help from friends and strangers. His begging, after many years, was probably just part of the background noise to most of the people passing by.

But when he heard Jesus was coming, Bartimaeus called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” People tried to quiet him down, but Bartimaeus “shouted all the more.” He was betting that God’s mercy might shine on him that day.

A mother makes a similar prayer request for a daughter who has run away: “Please, God, show her the way home.” A father, quietly and consistently, prays at the foot of his bed, asking Jesus to forgive him for harsh words spoken to his son in anger.

Bartimaeus believed Jesus would show him mercy. The blind man who was ignored by others knew that only the Son could meet his need.

And when Jesus called him over, Bartimaeus got more than money. He received a miracle from the Master, who saw the man’s faith and gave him sight.

Don’t be quiet if people tell you to stop asking the Lord for help. He always hears us, and he wants what’s best for us. His answer may be different from what we expect, but in faith we know it will be for good.

Dear Lord, I thank you for hearing my persistent pleas. I trust you to answer according to your will. Amen.

ON THE SAME TEAM

"Whoever is not against us is for us."

—Mark 9:40

When someone is serving effectively in the name of Jesus but we don't know them or know much about their church, does that mean we're on the same team? Of course it does, says Jesus. After all, he's the one in charge. He can give authority to whoever wants to do his will.

The disciples had begun to make distinctions about who was allowed to bring help and hope to persons who were possessed by demons. Jesus had to straighten out his followers on how he wanted to expand the reach of his good news in this world.

The disciples wanted to corner the market as Jesus' officially appointed dispensers of God's power. They believed that Jesus' authority rested within their circle alone. When they saw a stranger setting people free in Jesus' name from the debilitat-

ing power of evil, they wanted him to stop. They wanted Jesus to tell him he was not on their team. Sadly, the disciples cared more about that than about serving others.

Jesus will not allow us to try to control his power for our own purposes. He wants to delegate his power and authority to whomever he wishes. Why? It's about bringing freedom to captive lives.

Are you partnering with other brothers and sisters in Christ's name? Jesus has a clear motto: "Whoever is not against us is for us."

Jesus, I need your help to see that all who believe in you are on your team. May we all work together to serve you. Amen.

3D JESUS

There appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.
—Mark 9:4

A few years back, I saw my first three-dimensional movie. I had to wear 3D glasses to get the full effect of the technology. I saw hands reaching out toward me. I noticed the richness of the background with fiery colors. The movie made everything and everyone appear as close as the person sitting next to me. It was weird and exciting at the same time.

Similarly, Peter, James, and John experienced a 3D Jesus. They experienced the Son like no one else ever had. They witnessed a conversation between Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Jesus invited the three disciples to hear and see that God had confirmed and affirmed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise of grace and mercy shown through these Old Testament representatives. The voice of God, who has the last word, de-

clared, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

Jesus wanted his disciples to remember from this event that God had come down to us in the person of Jesus to suffer and die and then rise again. His death and resurrection changed everything!

Jesus is closer to us today than we might think. He has given us the Holy Spirit. He lives in us, knows us, and reminds us that we are in a vital relationship with him. And we don't need special glasses to see and know the only Savior we will ever need.

Master, help us to see you through the lens of your love. Keep us in conversation with you through the discipline of prayer and worship. Amen.

A GROSS MIRACLE

“He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

—Mark 7:37

If you are a germ freak, this healing story might gross you out. Jesus doesn't use any soap or hand sanitizer. He uses his own spit like a sort of miracle gel. He sticks his fingers into the man's ears. Then he touches the man's tongue with his own saliva on his fingers!

Why would Jesus do that? Well, Jesus will use whatever method suits him.

If we look beyond our modern context, we notice that Jesus was not appealing to our sense of cleanliness but wanted to help this man enjoy the Son.

This man was cared for and loved enough by a group of people who wanted their friend to be healed. They did not care about the method of healing—only the result. They believed Jesus was different from any other rabbi.

Jesus was visiting a region where most Jews would not go. The people were not worshipers of God, but of course they still needed God. The man's friends took a risk that Jesus could heal him.

By the fingers of Jesus, the man could hear the voices of his friends. A few drops of Jesus' saliva on his tongue made him able to speak.

The miracle comes when we trust the Master's methods even when we don't understand them. He knows what he's doing. So let's trust him.

Jesus, I do not understand your ways, but I know they are best. Help me to trust in you. In your name, Amen.

SEE THE FUTURE

“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

—Matthew 28:20

People are nervous about the future these days—especially with the global economy teetering this way and that. They are not confident that the job market will improve, or that inflation can be reined in, or that greedy power brokers can ever be held in check.

But Christians are promised a future that depends on something far better than economics or politics. The Lord over the universe, Jesus Christ, promises that he is always with us!

As the disciples were getting their last glimpses of Jesus, they were not sure what life would be like after he left them. Matthew tells us that “some doubted” even when they saw him face to face.

Jesus put their doubts about him and the future to rest by assuring his followers that through

faith in him, their future would be secure. He said, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” In other words, their worries and concerns would not necessarily go away, but his followers needed to base their trust in the promises of the Savior alone.

As for us today, this means . . .

Go and make friends for Jesus, because our life belongs to him. Witness and celebrate as new believers move from darkness to light. Teach future disciples of Jesus to work for the future as the Lord goes with us.

Dear Lord, help me not to worry about circumstances I cannot control. May I trust my future to you alone as the firm foundation of my life. Amen.

STEALING FROM GOD

"I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground."

—Matthew 25:25

Living as a follower of Jesus can be frustrating. We want to give to the poor, but we worry about putting food on our own table. We desire to forgive people, but those same people keep punching us in the face. We want to use our God-given skills to better the world, but the world keeps asking for more.

The man with the one bag of gold decided to play it safe and bury his gift while his master went on a journey. He wanted to be safe rather than sorry. How can we blame him for that? Life is fragile, and it keeps slipping away from us. If we bury our gifts and talents, we won't get hurt. Jesus would not get angry about that, right?

Jesus used strong language in assessing the servants in this story. He called them "good and faithful servant" or "wicked, lazy servant." There is no third option.

Either we use our gifts to expand God's kingdom for his glory, or we hide our gifts, not really wishing to serve our Lord. The servant with one bag of gold was given plenty of time to use his gift. Unfortunately, he saw the master only as mean rather than generous. He chose what he saw as the "safe way" rather than trying to do something, anything, to bring God glory.

How about you? Are you burying your talent and "playing it safe" or using it to honor God's extravagant generosity to you? It's your choice.

Dear God, thank you for not giving us wiggle room in this teaching. Help us to please only you with our gifts, time, and talents, to bring glory to you alone. Amen.

THE QUESTION IS . . .

*"All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."
—Matthew 22:40*

None of us likes to be upstaged by anyone. It makes us feel dumb, especially if others are watching. No one wants to be embarrassed. The Pharisees were not going to be stomped on by some "fly by night" rabbi named Jesus. They were the real scholars; they had been to the best schools, studied under the best professors, and graduated at the top of their class. The Pharisees had the question they believed would stop Jesus in his tracks: "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" They thought, "This will trick him, and then people will know that he isn't as smart as he thinks he is."

The Pharisees based their lives on acquiring knowledge to boost their egos and reputations. Jesus used his knowledge to bring sinners to the Father's love. The most important answer to the question is quite simple: love God and love

others. The Pharisees were not loving God for God's sake, but for their sake. They loved God with their minds but refused to love people God's way.

How would you answer the question if you were asked? Are you loving God with all of your passion, intelligence, and strength? It requires a childlike faith in the One who first loved us. Are you loving your neighbors on your block and at work Jesus' way? It requires experiencing the abundant love that Jesus has lavished on us. It's a question worth answering!

Master, I struggle to love you with all my heart, soul, and mind. I'm challenged to love my neighbors the way you do. Help me to love you and others your way today. Amen.

REST AREA

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
—Matthew 11:28

One of the nicknames for New York City is “the city that never sleeps.” Some other cities have claimed that title too—and of course many big cities around the world can be described that way.

In many countries today, cell phones and Blackberries are considered essential. These devices are always on as we complain about how tired we are. Our laptop computers and tablets are now electronic friends we can’t live without. Sometimes it’s hard to admit that you are bone weary. Is there a place to go without always having to be productive or “plugged in”? Can we ever get away from the busyness?

If you feel that way, a quiet voice has been calling to you. It’s the voice of Jesus, who knows you are tired and need a break from the world.

Jesus invites us all to come to him and find the rest our souls long for. If we accept his invitation, we make a startling decision: life isn’t about becoming more connected or networked; it’s about being known by our only Savior. Matthew 11:28 in *The Message* puts it this way: “Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest.”

Do you want real rest? It comes with realizing you are totally dependent on Jesus as your Master and Lord. Do you need a rest area for your tired soul? The Master has been calling you to come to him. He will be your rest anytime, always.

Dear Jesus, I admit I’m tired and weary. I come to you as my true resting place. Amen.

THE MISSION

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority”
—Matthew 10:1

In the 1981 movie *The Blues Brothers*, small-time criminals Jake and Elwood Blues receive a vision in church to reunite their band in order to save their former orphanage. To convince some of the band members to join them, they have only one thing to say: “We’re on a mission from God.”

In a sense, Jesus was doing the same with his disciples. He gathered them together and told them they were on a mission from God. What was the mission? They were invited to change lives in the name of Jesus.

Jesus empowered those twelve disciples to do amazing things in his name. They were authorized to drive demons away and heal people from all kinds of sicknesses. Jesus was not interested in making a name for himself, or building up his poll numbers. He was announc-

ing that the kingdom of God was on the move. It was time for God’s agenda to be known in the life and actions of the Savior. He gave his followers a mission from God, and the world will never be the same because of it. That includes you and me too.

We have been sent into our neighborhoods to share the story of forgiveness in the name of Jesus. We have been sent into the places of trouble and despair to model the life-affirming witness of the Savior. We are on a mission from God!

Jesus, I accept the mission of sharing the news of grace, healing, and freedom in your name. Thank you for empowering me to be your witness. Amen.

JUST A TOUCH

"If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

—Matthew 9:21

When Pope John Paul II went visiting cities around the world, he often walked among the people. He understood the power of a touch. Women fought their way to him and handed their babies to him. He held and kissed the children. The mothers believed their children received God's special blessing.

The woman in our Bible story today wanted to be touched by God. When we are desperate, we will find a way to get close to the Master.

The woman had not been able to stop her bleeding for twelve years. She may have sought the help of many doctors, but nothing had worked. Her medical condition made her spiritually unclean, according to Jewish customs. No one wanted to be near her. When Jesus was on his way to see about a sick

little girl, the woman managed to get near him, thinking, "If only I touch his cloak, I will be healed." She believed that Jesus could heal her with just a touch. She took a risk, believing that Jesus was the Anointed One sent by God. She wanted to receive God's touch. And she was never the same again.

The love of Jesus is only a touch away in fellow Christians who minister in his name. His touch can be felt through the prayers of saints near and far away. His healing can be known in friends who are only a phone call away. Do you need God's touch today?

Lord, I want your touch today. Show me the people who can be Jesus to me, and help me to share your love with others. Amen.

GOD'S WORD WILL NOT PASS AWAY

"Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you."

—Joshua 1:7

Moses had led Israel for forty long and sometimes difficult years (Joshua 5:6). The people had known no other leader. Now they would be going into their new land without Moses to guide them. What would the new leadership do?

As God appoints Joshua, he does not say, "It's time for fresh ideas; it's time to do things differently than Moses did. Be creative." Rather, God says that the words of Moses are still relevant. They were right for Israel's life with God in the desert, and they will be right for the people's life with God in the promised land.

It was not that Moses had such good ideas, but Moses had spoken the words God had given him to lead and teach Israel. To listen to Moses in the desert was to hear the Word of God. And now, though Moses had

died, the Word of God would not pass away.

So God said to Joshua: "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you. . . . Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

Today the Lord still promises to be with us—always. Jesus, the Son of God, came and fulfilled the law of Moses, and now we know God through the Holy Spirit, who comes to live in our hearts. The Spirit helps us understand the words of Moses and all the rest of the Bible, which gives us the trustworthy Word of God.

Lord, help us by your Spirit to hear your voice as we read the Bible today. In Jesus, Amen.

REST FROM THE ENEMY

"The LORD your God will give you rest"

—Joshua 1:13

It often troubles people that God waged violent warfare in Canaan at the time of Joshua. But the land and its people already belonged to God, and they had been in rebellion against him for more than 400 years. In the meantime, God had been patient and longsuffering, providing for them, but they never turned back to him. So this part of Israel's history illustrates that eventually God brings punishment. (For background, see Genesis 15:13-19; Exodus 1-15; 23:20-33; Leviticus 18:24-30.)

Sadly, there is violence in the world, and that is a result of human sin. And it must be said that we are all sinners and enemies of God (Romans 3:23). Wherever our sin brings conflict into God's world, violence often erupts. God wants full life and peace for his people, but the powers of evil tear away at that and bring death.

The Lord, though, is far more powerful, and his goodness will prevail. He turns his enemies into his children. He promises rest from violence, and his Son, Jesus, has begun providing that for all who believe in him. He died to redeem us from sin and give us new life with God.

And one day, just as God promised Israel, when all his enemies are defeated, he will give his people complete rest, and they will live with him forever in a new heaven and new earth. That's what the promised land of Canaan pointed to. (See also Matthew 11:28-30; 26:28; Revelation 21:1-7.)

Help me, Lord, to find rest in you alone. Help me to trust in you and to live faithfully for you. Amen.

BIBLE TIMES

"Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go."
—Joshua 1:16

Maybe you've heard someone say, "If I lived in Bible times, I would believe!" Maybe you have even said that yourself. We might think Bible times are in the past. They are about miracles in the desert and in the promised land given to Israel, right?

It's true that such events are part of Bible times. But we also live in Bible times today, because Jesus Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to lead us into the truth, especially when we read and reflect on Scripture. Neither Joshua nor the other people of the Old Testament enjoyed the presence of God through the Holy Spirit in the way we can today. Nor did they live to hear about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

After Joshua communicated God's instructions to the people, they shouted, in effect, "We

hear you, Joshua!" and, "We will obey and follow you, whatever you say!" In Bible times God's people follow the leader that God gives them. Once it was Moses, and then Joshua. Now it is Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, "Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). We servants are not greater than our Master. And if the Master gave his life in order to do the will of God, what will we do to follow Jesus today?

O Lord, help us all to follow you faithfully all the way, no matter the cost, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

RAHAB'S HOUSE

They . . . entered the house of a prostitute name Rahab and stayed there.
—Joshua 2:1

Rahab's house was the kind of place the Bible warns young men to stay away from. Proverbs 7:27 puts it this way: "Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death." Nevertheless, after swearing to go wherever Joshua sent them (see 1:16), the Israelite spies entered the house of a wayward woman. We aren't told why, but we do learn later that she had become a believer in God (2:9-11).

The gods of Canaanite Jericho had been getting credit for the rains on the land that fed Rahab and her fellow citizens. But the Canaanites mistook the source of the fields' fertility because they lived in a land that did not honor the true God. As Rahab the prostitute had wasted her body, so the people of Canaan failed to honor the true God when they worked the land.

Their whole culture had become corrupt. But still there was hope. It's good to know that Rahab gave up the false beliefs and empty idols of Canaan and surrendered everything to God.

Today we have the benefit of more of the Bible's story than Israel had in Joshua's day. We know that Jesus came to save us from sin and has given us the Holy Spirit. But we also still sin. So it's good to be reminded, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you . . . ?" (1 Corinthians 6:19). May we always seek to glorify the one true God.

Thank you, Lord, for the blessings and beginnings of new life with you, through Jesus and the Spirit. Amen.

WHAT RAHAB KNEW

"I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us"
—Joshua 2:9

Everybody lies, even prostitutes. To the king's messengers Rahab said, in effect, "I don't know where those guys came from, and I don't know where they went."

Then Rahab went to the spies' hiding place and confessed what she did know: "It's over for Canaan. Our gods are incapable of dealing with the LORD your God, who rules over heaven and earth. I know we are as defeated as the kings your God defeated in the desert on the other side of the Jordan."

Rahab's words underscore her actions. Not only does she confess that Canaan's future lies in God's hands, but also, by making this confession, she's become a traitor to her own people's vision of the good life.

Being a traitor is the right thing to do if it means turning from

your sinful way of life and acknowledging the true God's power to save and to bless. By her confession and actions, Rahab showed she knew that.

It's all about what and who you trust. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, to bring them to new birth by the power of the Spirit. Worship today gives us an opportunity to confess our sinful past and to entrust our future to the God who made the heavens and the earth.

For new life received through Jesus Christ, I thank you, Lord. Help me to keep my eyes on him as I entrust my future to you. Amen.

HELP FROM AN OUTSIDER?

She tied the scarlet cord in the window.

—Joshua 2:21

In this story it can look as if Rahab and the spies are just helping each other, scratching each other's backs. But why wouldn't they? Isn't that how you survive in this world?

Actually, this story is about the new knowledge Rahab had. "Now then . . ." Rahab says to the spies, after acknowledging the true God. Her new knowledge leads to a new loyalty and new commitments for Rahab and her family.

In her new faith, Rahab promises to hang a red cord from the window of her house on Jericho's wall. It will let Israel know she has kept faith with the spies. Frightened Jericho will remain behind its tightly closed gates, doomed by its rebellious faith in false gods. Rahab's dangerous new loyalty, however, will bring life to her and her family.

After the spies escape, they return to Israel's camp and inform Joshua of Rahab's commitment. Through an outsider, the Lord helped Israel see that God would surely give them the promised land!

This was an example of the important help that Israel sometimes received from people from other nations. It was a sign that God wants people from all nations in his family. In fact, we learn later that Rahab became one of Jesus' ancestors (see Matthew 1:1, 5). She was an outsider who came into God's family by grace, and through faith. Is that true of you too?

Lord, thank you for the gift of faith. Grant me the strength to declare my loyalty to you, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

CONFIDENCE

As soon as . . . their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing.
—Joshua 3:15-16

“Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God,” Joshua said to Israel. Our verses today reveal how “the LORD of all the earth” would show that he is the one true God.

The gods of other kings had been worthless in defense of their people (Joshua 2:10). How would Baal compare as the Canaanites’ storm god, believed to bring rain and fertility?

It was harvest time, and the Jordan River was filled to overflowing. To the Canaanites it would appear that Baal had blessed them and was defending them. Surely no army could cross the great barrier of the swollen river. Still, everyone had heard of the Israelites’ crossing at the Red Sea (see Exodus 14-15; Joshua 2:10).

It’s foolish to put confidence in worthless gods. When the feet

of the servants of the Lord, who created heaven and earth, touched the flooded Jordan, the waters receded. In his presence God’s people passed through on dry ground.

The waters of the Jordan provided bountiful harvests. But it was not Baal who sent the rains to fill Canaan’s rivers. Only the Lord God of Israel sent the rains to bless the land. Earth’s vast resources are God’s gifts for good living, but those resources themselves do not deserve our trust.

Trust in God and in his Son, Jesus, who stills stormy waters, and feeds thousands, to this very day. (See Mark 4:35-41; 6:30-51.)

Help me to trust only in your power, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

STONES OF MEMORY

"Tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan."
—Joshua 4:3

The stones at the bottom of the Jordan River probably hadn't seen a dry day till the people of Israel crossed that barrier on dry land. But when taken from the exposed riverbed, twelve of those stones became a monument to God's mighty works. Standing in a pile beside the river, the stones were to remind all who passed by that the Lord had dried up the Jordan so that his people Israel could cross over into the promised land.

As time went on, Israel had trouble remembering all that God had done for them. Perhaps they were too busy enjoying the milk and honey of the promised land. But the stones at Gilgal were a reminder. Memory was their ministry: to remind everyone of God's power and of his faithfulness to his promises.

You and I may also have trouble remembering who God is and

what he has done for us. Perhaps we're so busy enjoying the gifts God has given that we overlook his sacrifice of love and care for us through Jesus Christ.

But struggles will come—they always do in this world—and the stones of memory will be there to remind us of the source of all goodness and joy. To this very day God's Word reminds us of all God has done, especially through Jesus Christ. It's a great collection of memory stones pointing us to the Savior as our chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

Thank you, Lord, for your Word. Strengthen me to read it often, that I may remember all your good gifts and faithfulness, through Jesus Christ, the Savior. Amen.

THE SWORD OF THE LORD

Joshua . . . saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand.
—Joshua 5:13

The instruction to circumcise all the Israelite soldiers made no military sense. Blood loss from surgery would weaken the army; it would take extra time for the men to regain strength. But the surgery God required would show God's strength through Israel's weakness.

Before wielding his sword against the peoples of Canaan, God used it, in a sense, on his own people, to remind them of their identity. Since the time of Abraham (Genesis 17) circumcision had been a sign of total commitment to God. Before engaging in battle against Jericho, God called Israel to affirm their commitment, to show they belonged to him, body and soul. In addition, Joshua learned from the Lord's army commander that he had to change his thinking to prepare for doing battle God's way.

Today we engage in bringing the gospel of the Lord to people who do not believe in him. What conditions must we meet before doing so? Must we make sure we get a proper education? Gain the backing of a church? Be willing to be scorned? Have enough time to visit people? All of these are important, but they are not enough.

The condition we must meet is to die to our own ways and yield to the Lord's way. Circumcision pointed to this. Unless we are buried with Christ through baptism, we do not have new life (Romans 6:4). Unless we belong to God, body and soul, we cannot speak sincerely in Jesus' name and help with advancing his kingdom.

"Have thine own way, Lord," guiding us to serve you faithfully. Amen.

ALL FOR WORSHIP

"Have seven priests carry trumpets of ram's horns in front of the ark."
—Joshua 6:4

As we observe Israel marching around Jericho, following the Lord's orders and bearing the ark of God's covenant, we are witnessing what could be called a worship procession. The Israelites are declaring they are loyal to God and will worship him alone. And any who rebel and refuse to worship the true God will be lost.

In worship today we gather around God's Word. In worship we invite this Word, sharper than any two-edged sword, to cut to the marrow of our existence, to lay bare our sin and grief. (See Hebrews 4:12-13.) Worship reminds us that we have been conquered by the sword of the Spirit, that resisting God with all our heart and strength has no effect. As Christian worshipers, we want and need to be reminded that God has conquered us.

Similarly, Israel, marching around Jericho, showed that the Lord had conquered them and had made them his own. And on the seventh day of their marching, the Lord would claim Jericho as his own.

In worship we gather in the presence of the same God who rescued his people from Egypt, marched around Jericho's walls, and defeated the power of death on the cross. In worship God renews us; our praise and prayer enthrone the God who is on his way in our world to reclaim people gone astray. And at the last trumpet, when Christ returns, every knee in every city of the world will bow, to the glory of God.

By your power, Lord,
break down all walls of
resistance, that you alone
may be worshiped. Amen.

THE LORD'S TREASURY

"All the silver and the gold . . . are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury."
—Joshua 6:19

Being good followers did not make Israel wealthy. After they shouted, the walls came down, but all the wealth of Jericho went into the Lord's treasury.

The cities and nations of the world and their people enjoy the good things of the earth. But this goodness, and the people themselves, belong to the Lord. He expects to receive the firstfruits of the land and of the family, of the mind and of the body (see Exodus 23:19). So when Israel wields the sword of the Lord in Jericho, Israel is there to gather into the God's treasury what belongs to the Lord: silver and gold, bronze and iron. But the people and their animals are slain by the sword of the Lord. Thus God dedicated Jericho completely to himself, body and soul, in life and in death.

Jesus Christ brings his disciples into the Lord's treasure house

through his complete dedication to God, by the death wrought in his body and spirit on a cross (John 19:28-30). As Christians, we don't just give the Lord the firstfruits of what we have and are, but everything—our thoughts, our loves, our wealth, our youth, our old age, and much more—belongs in the Lord's treasury. We belong to him totally.

Being good followers of Jesus may not make you wealthy, but it brings you into the Lord's treasury. That makes you more precious to the Lord than the finest gold.

"We give you but your own, whatever that gift may be. All that we have is yours alone," to do with as you please. Amen.

RAHAB'S PROMISED REST

Rahab . . . lives among the Israelites to this day.

—Joshua 6:25

We might wonder how a prostitute from a nation outside of Israel could receive what God had promised Abraham and his descendants. The Bible tells us Rahab was spared “because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho.” But a lot of questions are left unanswered.

How long would it be before she could feel at home in her new neighborhood? How long before the Israelites would accept her? We are not told. We do read, though, that she lived and remained “among the Israelites.” She received rest for her soul as she found a place among God’s people.

If “that kind of woman” can join God’s people, what will prevent other disreputable types—the proud, greedy, selfish, drug or sex addicts, miserable sinners of all kinds—from becoming part of the community of God? Nothing,

if they and God’s people love God above all and their neighbor as themselves. Rahab did both.

What’s more, God blessed her beyond what anyone would have imagined by providing her a husband and giving her a child in the family tree of Jesus, born many years later as the Son of David who was also the Son of God (Matthew 1:1-6).

As we worship God today, let us remember that Jesus welcomes all kinds of sinners (Matthew 21:31-32; Luke 15:1-2). Praise God—he welcomes us too! We are all sinners, but we can be saved by grace!

Help me, a miserable sinner, to love you, Lord, and to embrace my neighbor with the compassion you have shown me. Amen.

AN OATH TO DIE FOR

“Cursed before the LORD is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city.”
—Joshua 6:26

Why would it be a problem to rebuild Jericho? Why put it under a curse? Is urban renewal not a good thing?

But what would we think about flying the flag of a corrupt, vanquished enemy? Or rebuilding the statue of a dictator who pilaged the country for decades? Flying that enemy flag or rededicating a statue to that terrible dictator would suggest that the old, corrupt regime is coming back.

The city of Jericho was the symbol of all that was wrong with sinful humanity in rebellion against God. It was filled with people dedicated to turning away from God. No one in Jericho (except Rahab) believed and belonged to the God who created the heavens and the earth; they thought that all good things came from the hands of the false gods of Canaan. Some

of Canaan’s Baal worship even involved child sacrifice.

Joshua placed a curse on rebuilding Jericho because a resurrected Jericho would mean returning to that old way of life and rejecting the renewal that God brought to the land. Many years later, when wicked King Ahab allowed Jericho to be rebuilt (1 Kings 16:29-34), he helped Israel burden itself again with the sin of idolatry.

If Jesus is our Lord and Savior, we must not become burdened again with the slavery of sin (Galatians 5:1) but serve Christ alone.

Grant me the strength, Lord, to stand firm in the freedom of Jesus Christ, that I may not return to the slavery of sin. Amen.

WAITING FOR GOD'S GIFTS

But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things.

—Joshua 7:1

Heaven and earth are intimately connected. Because one man had stolen from the Lord's treasury, heaven refused to lead Israel's earthly battle against Ai. God abandoned Israel to its own strategy and strength, and some of God's people died in the battle that day. And no one knew why, except Achan.

We who read the Bible today also know why Israel failed: the Bible tells us that Achan stole from God. Earth is inescapably connected to heaven.

When God's people depend on their own strength to arrange kingdom matters in God's name, it forfeits heaven's blessing. That happens when, like Achan, we embezzle from heaven's treasury because we don't want to wait for God to share the good things of his kingdom (Joshua 8:2). Soldiers in the Lord's army learn to deny themselves, to act

only on the Lord's instructions, to wait for his gifts.

Sometime after Christ sent the Holy Spirit to the church, Ananias and Sapphira lied about their contributions for the church (Acts 5:1-10). They died for their deceit, and the church learned again to fear the power of God. Their story, like that of Achan, was written so that Christ's followers may grow in self-denial and wait for the Lord's blessing.

May we listen to all that the Spirit says to us.

Help your people on earth, Lord, to do your heavenly will, so that you may be glorified and your people may grow in grace. Amen.

MISPLACED CONFIDENCE

The king of Ai . . . hurried out . . . to meet Israel in battle.

—Joshua 8:14

When Israel returned to Ai, the people of Ai were confident that they could rout Israel, as they had done before.

What was different this time? This time Israel began its battle with the Lord's permission, and they followed his instructions. When God's people comply with heaven, God's will is done on the earth (see Matthew 6:10). And because Jericho was the firstfruits that went into the Lord's treasury, Israel would receive the riches of Ai.

Unable to resist the divinely planned ruse, Ai's soldiers hurried out to swat the pesky flies of Israel. But the Lord's strategy—hiding and catching the enemy by surprise—brought Ai to its knees.

In time, God will build his own city, Jerusalem, and into it will flow the treasures and peoples

of the nations (Revelation 21:24).

Following the Lord in this world can be dangerous and messy, for body and soul. But not following him leads to far greater danger.

The destruction of Jericho and Ai are a sign, to this day, of the nations' fear of God. The death and resurrection of Christ are also a sign, to this day, not of fear but of God's victory over sin, over misplaced confidence, and over those who gather together against the Lord and his anointed (Psalm 2:1-6).

Lord, may all who oppose you die to themselves by the sword of your Spirit so that they may rise to newness of life, as citizens of the city you are building. Amen.

DANGER AHEAD

When the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done . . . they resorted to a ruse
—Joshua 9:3-4

The people from Gibeon came to Joshua looking worn out from a long journey. They knew about the victories over Jericho and Ai, and they had heard what the Lord had done in Egypt and to the Amorites (Joshua 9:9-10). So they pretended to be from a distant land and pleaded with Joshua to make a treaty with them.

Israel was suspicious, but their visitors' moldy bread and worn clothing looked convincing. Without consulting God, the Israelites made a treaty with the Gibeonites. But a few days later the truth came out: the Gibeonites actually lived nearby.

God has two kinds of enemies: those like Achan, from within his own people, who steal from the Lord and get in the way of God's will; and those like the Gibeonites, who will do anything to avoid a sincere relationship with God and, of course,

possible destruction. Some steal; others deceive.

That day the Gibeonites escaped death, but they and their descendants became Israel's servants. "The LORD works out everything to its proper end" (Proverbs 16:4).

As Christ's disciples who seek to do God's will, we need to be as cunning as people who try to use God for their own ends. Jesus said to his disciples: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). In other words, be as wise and faultless as Jesus, by the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Give us wisdom, Lord, to do your will, and may that also help others come to know you. Amen.

PANIC

Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!

—Joshua 10:14

When heaven fights, there is no escape, only terrible confusion and inescapable ice missiles (hail). “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD. . . . Victory rests with the LORD” (Proverbs 21:30-31). Joshua and Israel had only to mop up and finish the victory God had given them. And they had plenty of daylight to work in as “the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.”

The sun and moon were worshiped as gods by many ancient nations. But the Lord showed his power over these lights he had made (see Genesis 1:14-18). And his enemies, who followed the ways of darkness (evil), fell headlong before him.

Of course, this passage is not meant to teach that the sun revolved around the earth; that’s just the way things looked un-

til we learned more about the solar system. Instead, this passage shows that God controls the whole universe—and somehow, at the request of a human being, God gave Israel an extra “full day” of light as they battled his enemies who sided with the powers of darkness.

As we seek to serve God in our world today, we can often face challenges that come from the powers of darkness. But we know that Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12), and his brightness never fades. He calls us to be light for his sake (Matthew 5:14-16) so that others can see him and be saved from destruction.

Lord, help us to see and to shine with your light, that others may come to know you today. Amen.

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

The Israelites . . . took them all in battle . . . exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

—Joshua 11:19-20

We want our God to be loving and merciful. And he is. But some Bible stories can make us wonder about that.

As we noted (see Aug. 2), the Lord had been patient with the peoples of Canaan for generations, but they had never turned back to God. He knew they would not stop rebelling, and the time had come to bring justice. As God had described it to Abraham, their sin had now “reached its full measure” (Genesis 15:16). As God had said to Moses, their sins were so detestable that even the land was defiled and was ready to vomit them out (Leviticus 18:25). They were not innocent. They were like the king of Egypt, who hardened his heart in defying God even as God hardened the king’s heart (see Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:12, 34). Sadly, they had all gone too far,

and God knew they would not turn back, so he gave them up to go the way of destruction (see Romans 1:18-32). And we can be sure that this grieved him deeply (see Ezek. 33:11).

The Bible does not avoid the difficult matters of life, or the reasons why people die. Death came into the world because of sin; death is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). As a result, all of us will die.

But God is merciful, and there is hope: God sent his Son, truly innocent, to die in our place so that if we believe in him, we won’t perish but will have eternal life (John 3:16). Do you believe it?

Father, may we experience your love in life and in death. In Christ, Amen.

UNFINISHED WORK

"There are still very large areas of land to be taken over."

—Joshua 13:1

Your work is never done. You may relax a few hours after your workday, but soon the next day comes, and the factory, office, school, yard, field, and more summon you again. Even if your car or house is paid for, it requires maintenance and updating now and then. And if a wealthy relative dies and leaves you her property, there's more work to do.

That's how it is in God's world. All his gifts—life, health, a good job, and especially forgiveness—come with fine print: they need regular attention, and batteries are not included.

In Joshua's day, much remained to be done in the land; everything was not yet in submission to the Lord. The work of reclaiming the land for the Lord would keep Israel busy for years. In the meantime, God gave the tribes a place to call their own, to settle

into as they continued to do the work God had called them to. And God would be their ever-present aid in this work of proclaiming his rule.

That's how it is in God's world. None of us is finished with God's work. Christ's disciples work every day to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1), to pursue holiness "out of reverence for God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). They also make sure that the Word goes out to people who have not yet come to know the Lord. In the meantime, they have a place to call their own: the church, the body of Christ.

Thank you, Lord, for the time in worship to be reminded of our work for you. Give us strength for each day. Amen.

WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

Joshua blessed Caleb . . . because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.
—Joshua 14:13-14

Forty-five years earlier Caleb and Joshua had encouraged Israel to enter the land of promise to receive their inheritance. But God's people were afraid, so they refused. As a result, God made the people wander in the desert for forty years. Only their children would enter the land. (See Numbers 13-14.)

It takes courage to serve God in the world—sometimes more so among God's own people. Caleb's generation feared the people of the land more than they feared God. In effect, they said, "It would be better to die in the desert or to have stayed in Egypt than to follow God and have to face those giants. It's not worth the milk and honey." (See Numbers 14:1-9.) So God let their whole generation die in the desert.

Discipleship has a price: it may cost no less than what our

Master paid. Jesus Christ bought us for a price; we are asked to be worth the cost (1 Corinthians 6:20)—and that includes the patience to wait for God's blessing, whether we wait a day, a year, or forty-five years, as Caleb did.

Good things do happen to people who pay the price of discipleship and patiently wait for the fullness of the blessing. Through Jesus Christ we have the down payment on God's rich blessings of life and joy (Ephesians 1:14)—and the rest will come in God's good time, when Jesus returns.

When the waiting gets troublesome, Lord, and I am tempted to complain about bad people who get good things, open my eyes to see what you have done for me. Amen.

LIVING WITH THE ENEMY

Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem.
—Joshua 15:63

Israel had managed to clear enough land to gain territorial control, but a lot of unfinished business remained. Lines had been drawn, but the war was far from over. The Canaanites were not weak or easy prey, and some of them held on fiercely to their local territory. In many cases, they had a military advantage and had better technology for doing battle.

So Israel lived with the enemy.

Living with the enemy of the Lord raises all kinds of questions for believers:

- Is the Lord not strong to save?
- Are *they* actually right and we wrong?
- Why do *they* still enjoy all kinds of good things?

Spiritual warfare takes its toll on everyone.

Thankfully, by God's Spirit, unbelieving enemies sometimes cross over to the Lord's side, as with Rahab and the apostle Paul (Acts 9). And, sadly, sometimes believers commit treason, as did Achan and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

The apostle Paul encourages us to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:10-11) until the Lord returns and every knee will bow (Philippians 2:10; Revelation 21).

Strengthen me, Lord, to carry the armor of your mighty power and to wield its weapons till the day of your return. Amen.

THE LANDOWNER

In the presence of the LORD . . . they finished dividing the land.

—Joshua 19:51

In Joshua's time, the Lord's dwelling among his people was in a tent, because the people moved from place to place (see Exodus 25-31). From this earthly throne God proclaimed decisions. For example, God decided how the inheritance of land would be divided.

Since the time Israel had left Sinai, God had accompanied his people in a tent. For more than forty years this "tent of meeting" was the place where God revealed his will, usually by speaking to Moses. Without this arrangement, Israel would have been just another nomadic people moving about, fighting for land and water rights, soaking the earth with the blood of those who got in harm's way. The Lord's tent, now in Canaan, let everyone know that the Landowner had returned. (Then later, after

many years, God had Solomon build his temple (1 Kings 6).

Today the Holy Spirit of God accompanies God's people wherever they are, because he lives in their hearts. For nearly 2,000 years now the temple of the Holy Spirit has been the church, the body of believers in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). Without this Spirit, the church would be just one of many groups that have a vision for the future of the world. But with the Spirit, the church is God's temple in the world, and it's a sign to all peoples that the Landowner has returned to reclaim wasted lives and empty souls.

Dwell in us, blessed Spirit, so that, through us, people may know Christ as the Redeemer of their bodies and souls. Amen.

CITIES OF SAFETY

[Anyone] who killed someone accidentally could flee to these designated cities and not be killed
—Joshua 20:9

Let's say you were involved in a head-on car crash in which someone's daughter died. You feel terrible, but it wasn't your fault; the driver of the other car ran a red light. Sometimes horrible things happen to people; unintentional mistakes are made.

Life in the promised land provided a way of justice in dealing with accidents that resulted in death. During Israel's constant warfare against enemies, or on the farm at home, things could easily go wrong. Even if an accidental death wasn't your fault, a grieving family member might bear a grudge and try to get even with you. Not everyone is understanding or forgiving.

An unjustly accused murderer—an Israelite or a foreigner who lived among them—could find safety in any of six cities in the promised land. The rulers and other residents of those cities

had the responsibility of giving shelter and securing justice. They would provide a fair trial and give the unjustly accused person a place to live, until the death of the high priest. Only then could the falsely accused person go home. That could take a long time!

Today we can be thankful that our sins—intentional or not—are covered. God's just anger at our sin was turned away through Jesus Christ.

Let us live peaceably with all our neighbors while we wait to enter the heavenly city, where sin and anger are no more.

Because you have forgiven all my sins, Lord, help me to understand and forgive the sins of others. In Christ, Amen.

SHARING THE INHERITANCE

The Israelites gave the Levites . . . towns and pasturelands out of their own inheritance.
—Joshua 21:3

After nearly all the tribes had received their inheritance from the Lord, it was necessary for the Levites to receive their allotment. They received towns and pasturelands from all the other tribes, as God had commanded (see Numbers 35:1-5).

The Lord required this because the tribe of Levi was to serve God as priests and as caretakers of the Lord's house, the "tent of meeting" or tabernacle, in which God came to live among his people. As mediators between God and his people, the Levites would help with the daily sacrifices and take care of God's dwelling place (Numbers 1:47-53; 3:5-13).

The grant of "towns and pasturelands" throughout Israel to the tribe of Levi made it possible for priests and Levites to serve as a constant reminder that all Israel lived in the Lord's

presence, no matter how far they lived from the tabernacle (or, later, from the temple in Jerusalem). That was good, for it prevented those who lived close to the tabernacle from thinking they were special.

God's only Son, our ultimate High Priest, Jesus Christ, brings us into God's presence. In that way Christians, no matter where they live, share the inheritance Jesus gained on the cross on which he died for our sin. He stands before God on our behalf, and we are credited with his righteousness (Romans 3:22; Hebrews 10:1-14). We all live in God's presence!

Thank you for the marvelous gift of your presence, Lord. Keep us close to you, through Jesus Christ, our heavenly High Priest. Amen.

REST ON EVERY SIDE

The LORD gave them rest on every side. . . . Not one of their enemies withstood them.
—Joshua 21:44

Israel had won many battles, but it was the Lord who gave them rest from their enemies. After years on the battlefield Israel could serve God without interruption from the enemy. The freedom to serve God that Moses had demanded of Pharaoh before they left Egypt (Exodus 5:1; 7:16) was finally achieved in the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Still, the conquest remained incomplete. Non-Israelites remained in the land, and they worshiped other gods. But their kings had no power to enslave Israel. Israel was now free to serve the Lord, who had rescued them. This was good news for all.

The freedom Christ has won for his disciples is also good news. No longer enslaved to the power of sin, we are em-

powered by the Holy Spirit to resist our passions and addictions. Still, the power of sin remains; it beckons and tempts us all to rebel and walk away from God. But God has given us the victory.

We may be buffeted on all sides by the old enemies of pride, or lust, or greed, but, having been clothed with the righteousness of Christ and the armor of God, we can resist and deflect the darts of the evil one. No enemy can withstand the righteousness of God through Christ our Lord.

Thank you, Lord, for rest from the persecution of sin and its seductions. Clothe me this day with the righteousness of Christ so that no enemy can overwhelm me. In Christ, Amen.

A PERCEIVED THREAT

"How could you break faith with the God of Israel . . . ?"

—Joshua 22:16

It's true what a cartoon character—Pogo—once said: "We have met the enemy, and he is us." It's not so much what others do to us but what we do to ourselves that gets us into trouble.

Having received rest from war on every side, the Israelite tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh headed back to the land of their inheritance east of the Jordan. But as they reached the Jordan, they set up an imposing altar, and that made the other tribes think they were violating the Lord's instructions for worship of the one true God alone.

But that turned out to be a misunderstanding. The eastern tribes had not built the altar for worship, but to stand as a witness for their descendants, reminding them "that the LORD is God" (see Joshua 22:21-34).

Though this matter was easily resolved, God's people need to be watchful, that sin may not enter in and cause division and trouble, as the Israelites experienced when Achan sinned (see Joshua 7). The apostle Peter writes that the enemy of God prowls constantly, "looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

At the same time, we need to realize that jumping to conclusions can lead to trouble as well. People can sometimes be their own worst enemies. As we gather for worship today, may we do so with integrity, our eyes opened and our hearts ready for God's Spirit.

Open our eyes, Lord, that we may see ourselves as you see us. May we all serve you faithfully in Christ's name. Amen.

COMMITTED TO UNITY

"Let us get ready and build an altar . . . to be a witness"

—Joshua 22:26-27

When people think of others as living "on the wrong side of the tracks," they can get themselves into big trouble. For one reason or another, they might think some people don't belong, even though they really do belong.

"Don't think of us like that," said the tribes from the other side of the Jordan. "Our inheritance from God is on the east side of the Jordan. We are committed to worship God at the place he has chosen in the west. The altar is only a witness to our commitment." Thus the tribes from the east saved their brother tribes from going to war with their own people.

That was good.

But we must be careful not to make foolish judgments even if our intentions are good. Why should God's people divide what God has put together?

It's sad, and it grieves God that Christians have "gone to war" with each other over the kinds of clothing they wear to church, or the kinds of songs they sing in worship. Some think of fellow Christians as second class because of their political leanings or their ethnic background.

Let us be united in God's will for our lives and the lives of our neighbors, wherever we live or worship. The rest will take care of itself (see Matthew 6:33-34).

Lord Christ, help me to receive your gifts of grace alongside your people everywhere. May we all see your cross as the sign of our unity in you. Amen.

HOLD ON

“Hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.”

—Joshua 23:8

You went to school, trained hard, and now you’re a nurse, teacher, computer programmer, accountant, or other professional worker. You’re on your own without anyone to guide you. All that responsibility is a little scary: What will happen? Will you help people or get in the way? Will you be successful? The answers are up to you.

Joshua had led God’s people across the Jordan, against Jericho and many other cities, and had supervised the distribution of their inheritance. Now that Israel was facing the future on its own, Joshua reminded them to keep the law of the Lord, the instructions that Joshua himself had followed all those years.

If there was anything special about Joshua, it was that he sought to do God’s will as proclaimed by Moses. Doing so, he successfully brought Israel into

the land, to the rest that God had promised them.

This would also be the key to Israel’s future: “Hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.” Joshua was telling God’s people to imitate him, to submit to God’s instructions in their future, as he had done in their past.

When Christ gave his disciples the Word of the Father (John 17:14), he was teaching them to imitate him: to submit their lives to the Word of God, knowing that their future depended on it. And by the power of his Spirit, God’s Word is with us to the end of the age.

Help us to hold fast to your Word, Lord, that we may face the future secure in your presence. Amen.

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

“Now . . .”

—Joshua 24:14

Your grandmother is telling you a story about a prank she played on someone many years ago. After relating all the exciting details, she says, “Now, then . . .” and you know the moral of the story is next. Why can’t grandma just leave it at the story? Why does she *always* end with a lesson? For one very good reason: stories from the past help us understand how to live in the present. That’s also how the Bible tells its story.

As Joshua recounts God’s wonderful deeds—beginning with Abraham and on to the time when Israel received the land of Canaan—he is preparing Israel for their task in the present. Because Joshua is telling the story in the first person singular, as if God himself were speaking, we hear God reminding us of his gracious deeds, of his faithfulness to his promises. And when we hear the word

“Now . . .,” we know we’re at the teaching moment.

Joshua’s rehearsal of God’s mighty deeds serves to motivate the people to be loyal to God, to praise him for his grace and mercy, and to acknowledge his faithfulness.

The book of Acts includes a couple of similar history lessons. And in both cases the audience has a “now” moment: God has already acted mightily; now, how will you respond? Some reject Christ (Acts 7:54), and others submit to him (Acts 13:48).

What is your response to Christ?

Lord, we praise you for your faithfulness, especially Christ, our Lord. Help us obey you. Amen.

OLD AND NEW

“Choose . . . this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” —Joshua 24:15

Joshua seems to offer Israel a choice between two bad things: to serve the old gods of their ancestors in Mesopotamia and Egypt or the new gods of the local peoples in Canaan.

But Joshua is not really offering a choice between old and new—both groups are false gods. Having reminded Israel of God’s mighty deeds, he now challenges the people to acknowledge and serve the Lord in the land God has given them.

In effect, Joshua says, “You may choose to live like your ancestors or neighbors did, but here in God’s promised land, I won’t!”

Joshua’s presentation here reveals a sad truth: God’s people have great difficulty giving up their old ways of life and resisting the temptations of their new surroundings. The “old” gods

are comfortable. The “new” gods that are still worshiped by their neighbors are distracting and alluring. Yet they are all empty.

The God of Abraham, the Father of Jesus Christ, is the only true God. He has shown himself to us again and again, especially in his Son. His Spirit blesses us even now. Trust in the Lord to truly bless your family, your work, your mind, and your eternal future. Don’t depend on empty promises. The choice is clear!

“For health and strength and daily bread, I thank you, Lord.” Keep me faithful, for you chose me before I could see you clearly. In Christ’s name, Amen.

BURIED IN YOUR INHERITANCE

They buried [Joshua] in the land of his inheritance . . .

—Joshua 24:30

Everybody dies. But not everyone is buried in a grave. War, fire, hurricanes, and tsunamis may leave little or no remains for loved ones to bury.

When Joshua and Eleazar died, their burial in the promised land signaled the end of their earthly pilgrimage with God. The burial of Joseph's bones signaled that Israel's journey to Canaan was complete. Like their ancestors, they were buried in ground consecrated by God's promises. Burial in a grave took their bodies away from their families, but death would not remove them from fellowship with God.

We will all die, but we will not all be buried in the same place. Some will be buried in a cemetery—and others in a variety of other places. But all who begin their pilgrimage with God on this earth and then die—they will be remembered by God,

no matter what happens to their present bodies.

When their earthly journey comes to an end, no matter when or how that happens, all who have followed Christ on this earth will be buried in him. Their baptism says so (Romans 6:3-4). Christ's grave, consecrated by his resurrection power, is our inheritance. When we are buried in that inheritance, we will remain with Christ until the day when death will reign no more, and we will rise to a new life.

Are you one who claims that inheritance?

Thank you, Lord, for preparing a place for me to remain with you when my earthly journey has ended. In Christ, Amen.