



SETTING OUR FACES TOWARD JERUSALEM

A National Presbyterian Church Holy Week Devotional

When the days drew near for (Jesus) to be taken up (to heaven) he set his face to go to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51

Our focus is on *Setting our Faces toward Jerusalem*, as we prepare our hearts and minds for the most important week of the Christian calendar. Join us in this time of reflection and contemplation as we delve deeper into the events that led to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through these daily devotions, meditation questions and prayer, we hope to draw closer to God and renew our commitment to follow in His footsteps.

Palm Sunday: Matthew 21:1-11 Triumph

As we enter into Holy Week, let us reflect on Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Can you imagine the excitement and joy that filled the air as Jesus rode in on a donkey while the crowds waved palm branches before him? It was a moment of victory and triumph! But let's not miss the deeper meaning behind this event. The people of Jerusalem thought that Jesus would be the king who would banish the Romans and restore their people to glory. However, God had a bigger plan in mind. Jesus came to save the world and reign as Lord of all.

Questions: How do you celebrate a success? What did Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem mean to his disciples? To the crowd? What does it mean for your walk with him? In what ways do you miss the mark on how you understand God's plan for your life?

Next step: Ask God to show you what it is He wants you to learn, grasp, or experience as you set your face towards Jerusalem. Ask God for your heart to be open to what it is God wants for you this week. Can you decide now to set aside some time daily to listen and write down what you hear God saying to you this week? Challenge: Journal your experience with this devotion this week.

Prayer: *God Most High, just as the crowd praised you on Palm Sunday, we offer our praise to you. Help us to enter into this Holy Week in ways that allow us to understand you more fully and to grow more faithful. May your vision for our lives come to pass. Amen.*

Monday: Matthew 21:12-17 Idolatry

Passover is the holiest day of the year for the Jewish people. Families would travel long distances to Jerusalem to celebrate, worship, and sacrifice animals in offering to God. Merchants capitalized on this by exchanging foreign currency and selling animals in the temple. They often took advantage of those who had traveled far to worship God. This angered Jesus because they perverted the purpose of the temple. Jesus came to reorient our hearts to worship God alone.

Questions: Are we very different from the moneychangers in the temple? What desires have we put before our worship of God? How do we substitute outward signs of worship for real worship? How are we spending our time, energy, and money, and how does that show what we love? How can we reorient our worship to put God first in our hearts?

Next step: God wants your whole heart, mind and spirit. What is one thing you place above God that you want to address today? What positive step can you take today to reorder your priorities so Jesus is in the place of honor?

Prayer: *Holy God, we often don't get it right. We worship the wrong things, sometimes, anything but you. Please orient our hearts to align with yours. Fill us with a desire to seek you first always. And may the Holy Spirit fan the flames of our heart so our worship of you is full, rich, and alive. Amen.*

Tuesday: Matthew 21:18-22 Bearing Good Fruit

Typically, fig trees bear leaves and fruit at the same time. However, in this particular instance, the fig tree had plenty of leaves, but no fruit. This lack of fruit made the tree barren, and it serves as a powerful symbol for the nation of Israel. You see, the Israelites might have appeared to be doing all the right things on the surface, but in reality, their hearts were spiritually barren. They were going through the motions of worship, but their hearts were far from God. May we remember that it is not just our actions that matter, but the condition of our hearts as well.

Questions: Jesus surprises and shocks the disciples by cursing the barren fig tree. What kind of fruit do you bear? Do you show God's love, mercy, grace and joy? Or do you bear fruit that shows your pride, selfishness or greed? What attitudes, behavior, characteristics or sin get in the way of your ability to bear good fruit?

Next step: Is there a habit or behavior that you feel led to change? Try writing it down. Ask God for wisdom on how to make that a lasting change. Is there a friend you can ask for help or a resource you can turn to?

Prayer: *Gracious God, sometimes we think we are bearing good fruit, but in reality, we are dry and barren. Prune what needs to be cut back so we can bear good fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness and self-control. May we radiate your goodness to others through our faithful walk with you. Amen.*

Wednesday: Matthew 26:1-16 Discipleship

Mary, the sister of Martha, makes an extravagant display of her love and devotion to Jesus by anointing him with costly perfume. Despite the beauty of this gesture, the disciples were critical, believing the perfume should have been used differently. Sadly, one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, became disillusioned with Jesus and looked for ways to enrich himself at Jesus' expense. We may never fully understand his motivations, but we can learn from his example the dangers of allowing greed and our own expectations to overcome our love and devotion to God. Let us strive to follow Jesus' example of selfless love and sacrifice, and never allow greed or selfishness to cloud our judgment.

Questions: What do these examples tell us about what is important in being a follower of Jesus? How are you like the woman, lavishing God with praise? How are you like the disciples in the way you judge others? How are you like Judas Iscariot in the way you seek to change or control the outcome to meet your expectations?

Next step: Gratitude is a powerful way to reorient our hearts towards God. Today, look around and thank God for the beauty, blessings and good things you see. Name 5-10 things that you are grateful for right now. Be lavish and generous in your praise! Challenge: See how many people you can genuinely thank or appreciate today.

Prayer: Blessed God, we want to be lavish with our praise for you, but most often, we allow our vision of how things should be get in our way. Empower us to follow you with love, joy and devotion. Amen.

Maunder Thursday: Matthew 26:17-56 Betrayal and Denial

Jesus and his twelve closest followers gathered in the Upper Room for a meal and a time of fellowship. It was a moment of deep significance, where Jesus revealed to them the true meaning of his mission on earth at this Last Supper. Jesus foretells Peter's denial and later, after a time of prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas betrays Jesus to the Jewish authorities and Jesus is arrested. As we reflect on this story, let us be mindful of the challenges that come with following him, including the painful moments of betrayal and denial.

Questions: Have you been betrayed by a friend? What did that do to your friendship? How did you recover? Have you betrayed another? Why? How did things turn out? Have you denied a friend? Why do other people's opinions matter so much? How do we deny or betray our relationship with God? Why?

Next step: Do you have some unfinished business to address? Do you need to ask forgiveness or forgive someone? Bring this to God in prayer today. Ask Him for wisdom for a possible next step.

Prayer: Lord God, too often we allow the opinions of others to dictate our walk with you. We hide our faith, we deny our relationship with you, or we betray you because of our own fear and weakness. Fill us with courage to proclaim you boldly. May we glorify you this day. Amen.

Good Friday: John 18:1-19:37 Death of a Dream

Jesus has been arrested and appears before the High Priest, King Herod, and the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. In the midst of those appearances, Peter denies knowing Jesus three times. Jesus is tried, convicted of blasphemy (for claiming to be the king of the Jews), flogged, stripped, and hung on the cross to die. The disciples scatter, and a few of the women, including Jesus' mother, Mary, stand at the foot of the cross to watch his painful death.

Questions: Have you had to deal with the death of a dream - the vision you had for your future? Looking back, how was that necessary to allow God to show you the bigger dream he intended for your future? Are you still waiting for God to show up in that way?

Next step: Sometimes our unmet expectations turn into irritation with God. And that irritation and disappointment can grow into anger and bitterness. Today, bring your disappointment and discouragement to God. Let God know how you feel! The lament psalms are a good source for how to do that: see Psalm 13, Psalm 70, Psalm 73:21-26 or Psalm 102:1-2 for inspiration. Challenge: Select a verse or two from the Psalms above. Write it down and place it in a place where you'll see it frequently. Bonus challenge: memorize it!

Prayer: Merciful God, Jesus went to great lengths to show us how much you love us. Jesus was obedient to the point of death to save us from our sins, and to give us eternal life with you. May we fully appreciate the depth of your love for us, and may we honor you by walking faithfully as your beloved children. Amen.

Saturday: Matthew 27:57-66 Quiet Waiting

Today we reflect on the somber moment when Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body so he could lay him to rest in a tomb. The stone was rolled in front of the tomb, and for many, it felt like the end. The future they had envisioned was dead, and their hearts were heavy with grief.

As we remember this part of the story, let us be reminded of the power of God's love and the hope that we have in Jesus. May we hold on to this hope, even in the darkest moments of our lives, knowing that God is with us and that nothing is impossible with Him.

Questions: How do you move on when your vision of the future is not coming true? What do you do in your waiting? How do you approach God in this liminal time?

Next step: Take a moment to reflect on something you are waiting for: a job offer, a relationship, a diagnosis, an answer to prayer. This week, whenever you feel impatience rising, take a deep breath and turn to God for strength and guidance. Reflect on how that practice of refocus helps you as you wait for results.

Prayer: *Loving God, sometimes we don't fully understand your ways and your plans and we give ourselves up to despair. We think it's over rather than trusting your love and goodness. In our times of waiting, help us to have patience and be still to allow you full reign to work everything out for your glory. Amen.*

Easter Sunday: Matthew 28:1-10 He is Risen!

Early in the morning, a few women gathered in front of the tomb because they wanted to prepare Jesus' body for burial. But an angel appeared before them, declaring that Jesus was alive! The angel even invited the women into the tomb to see for themselves - the burial clothes were neatly folded, and Jesus' body was nowhere to be found. It was true - Jesus had risen from the dead!

Filled with excitement and joy, the women ran to tell the disciples the good news. Jesus was not dead, but alive and well. The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate victory over sin and death, and it gives us hope for our future, eternal life with God.

May we be filled with the same joy and wonder that the women felt that day. And may we be reminded that the resurrection of Jesus is not just a historical event - it is a powerful reality that can transform our lives today.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Questions: What do you feel when you read this story? What does it tell you about God's plans and actions? What does it mean for you that God has a future and a hope for you? ("For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11) What does Jesus' resurrection mean for your walk with God?

Next step: As you enter into worship today, praise God with a full heart. Be engaged with the music, the prayers and the emotions of the morning. Reflect back to God the joy of being one of God's own people.

Prayer: *Almighty God, we praise you! You have broken the power of sin and death over our lives. Thank you for your incredible grace and mercy. May we always reflect your grace and glory! Amen.*

The Great Commission

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:16-20