



April 2022

**Real Faith
Real Life
1 Corinthians, Part 4**

**Readings,
Reflections,
Prayers**

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Monday, April 4: 1 Corinthians 14:20-25

A person recently told me that one third of the Bible is end-times prophecy. Really? I wondered if they'd really read much of the Bible recently. As we noted yesterday, in the Bible "prophecy" does NOT normally mean "**FORE-telling the FUTURE**" as we tend to think of it. Instead, most biblical prophecy is about "**FORTH-telling God's truth in the PRESENT.**" If you read through the Old Testament prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, etc. – they say relatively little about the future. They do speak a LOT about the sins and problems of people at that **present** moment and what God thinks about their **present** lives. This is why we may struggle to read the prophets today – so much of their writing seems to be directed to their own time and place. Only a few passages talk about end-times.

Prophets in the church today help us hear what God is saying to us in **our present** time and place. Prophets help us see issues in **our** culture and society. They call us to remain faithful to God in **our** crazy times. They show us how we should live as God's people in Lethbridge (or wherever) on April 4, 2022.

Sometimes, people with a prophetic gift can speak directly into our own personal circumstances. A few times in my life I have had a dream about someone in which I really felt God saying to me, "*You need to tell this person this message ...*" NOTE: In every case it has been a message of **encouragement**. In every case it was exactly what the person needed to hear. FYI – God has NEVER told me to give a message of criticism or discouragement. I suspect if I thought such a nasty message was from God, I'd be wrong.

These study guides continually ask a prophetic question: **How is God speaking into your life, today?**

God is always speaking to us – through Scripture, trusted godly friends, our prayers, our consciences – are we listening? Do we do what we hear God telling us to do? Do we obey?

"Many times I have been driven to my knees in prayer by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day." (Abraham Lincoln)

*Our heavenly Father,
we pray your blessing may rest on each one of us who profess to be Christians.
Lord, help us to love Christ more than we love ourselves.
Help us to be more like him in our way of life.
Help us, Lord, to walk humbly, prayerfully,
consistently on, in the dust of our pilgrimage.
May others never stumble over us and say,
"They profess only, but they never do anything."
God, help us to live up to what we profess,
through your Spirit, in Christ Jesus.
May your love be shown in each one of us.
Amen*

D.L. Moody (1837-1899)

Tuesday, April 5: 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

How can we worship well? Through 1 Corinthians 11 (communion), 12 (gifts), 13 (love), and 14:1-25 (tongues/prophecy), Paul has been talking about public-worship issues. These verses summarize his points:

- Everyone has something to contribute to the church (not necessarily just in a worship service, but in many ways, using our skills, talents, experiences, gifts, and resources).
- Everything is done for the glory of God and to build up the church and one another.
- Worship is orderly, not chaotic.

It would be great if Paul's discussion of worship ended with 14:26-33 and 36-40 (just omitting 34-35). This

passage, without vs. 34-35 is a fitting conclusion to Paul's discussion of worship. We'll look at those two verses in a moment. First:

- How has Paul's discussion (from the Lord's Supper [Chapter 11], through gifts [12 and 14] and love [13]) enriched your appreciation of worship?
- What have you learned?
- How can you worship God more fully?

Verses 34-35 ... note these verses are sandwiched between "*God is not a God of disorder but of peace*" (14:33) and "*everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way*" (33:40). Paul's point is **order**.

In other passages, it is clear women were welcome to be involved in leadership and worship (See 11:2-16 and chapters 12-14:25, where gifts are never described as distributed (or not distributed) based on gender). For whatever reason, in this particular church at this particular time, women were causing disorder (remember this is a letter to a specific church about specific problems they were having). In Corinth, the women would do well to remain "silent" – the same word used for those who wished to speak in tongues who do not have an interpreter (that person gifted with tongues was NOT to always remain silent – just when their speaking in tongues could not be interpreted).

- Perhaps it was **women** who were over-zealous about speaking in tongues without interpreters?
- Women, in the Jewish tradition, had never had the opportunity to learn about their faith in synagogue schools as men had. Perhaps these women had questions and would interrupt the service, causing disorder? Women in Greek/Roman/ancient Jewish culture were dreadfully suppressed: now the Christian church gave them freedom to be equals, learn, participate and lead in unprecedented ways. Perhaps they needed to learn in other contexts rather than interrupting services? Then, over time, they could use their God-given freedom in orderly and appropriate ways.

We simply don't know all the details about the specific problem with women in Corinth. What Paul is teaching in these verses, as in all of 1 Corinthians 11-14, is that order and unity is important in churches. He's not really teaching definitively about the role of all women, for all time, in all churches, in all places (like First Baptist, Lethbridge in 2022). If he were doing so, we would expect more explanation of why this is so. We would also expect to find similar teaching by Peter, James, John – and Jesus. Neither Jesus nor these other writers make gender an issue at all.

Our application to today is to think about who or what might be causing disorder or disunity in our church. If there are problems, how do we correct them?

It's not about gender. It's about keeping our focus in worship on Jesus. It is about building up the body of Christ – the church. How can we worship God more fully?

"The fact that I am a woman does not make me a different kind of Christian, but the fact that I am a Christian does make me a different kind of woman. For I have accepted God's idea of me, and my whole life is an offering back to Him of all that I am and all that He wants me to be." (Elisabeth Elliot)

*Lord, because you have made me, I owe you all of my love.
Because you have redeemed me, I owe you all of myself.
Because you have promised so much, I owe you all of my being.
Lord, please make me taste by love what I taste by knowledge.
Let me know by love what I know by understanding.
I owe you more than my whole self, but all I can give you is all that I am.
Draw me to you, Lord, in the fullness of love.
I am wholly yours by creation. Make me all yours, too, in love.
Amen.*

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

Wednesday, April 6: Psalm 96

Paul has been teaching us about worship. Psalm 96 is a wonderful expression of worship from the Jewish tradition. As you read the Psalm, ask yourself, *"Who is being worshipped? Who is worship for?"*

Sometimes people say, *"I liked (or did not like) the worship service"* or *"The service did (or did not) do something for me."* How do those comments fit with who worship is really all about – God?

"When we worship," writes Marva Dawn, *"we sing to the **Lord** because of who **God** is – and God is so astounding that He deserves our worship whether we feel like offering it or not. This raises a critical question: How has it come about that so many Christians have forgotten that worship is for **God**?"* Basically, Dawn says, we're influenced by our culture to be very self-centered and narcissistic: we are tempted to think worship is about **us** – our preferences, likes and dislikes. It's not.

She goes on, *"Unless we are perpetually vigilant, we find ourselves asking about everything, 'What's in it for me?' When that point of view invades our worship attitudes, we complain, 'I didn't get much out of that worship service.' **So what? It wasn't you we were worshipping, was it?** How we FEEL about worship is not the point. Worship is for God, because creatures owe their creator praise."*

Worship is our offering to God. As you prepare for Sunday, reflect on the truth that all worship – whether privately or publicly – is our gift to God. How can you worship Him, in spirit and in truth, more fully?

"The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express that same delight in God which made David dance." (C.S. Lewis)

*God, give me patience through tough times.
How impatient and angry I am when I think myself unjustly slandered, maligned, or hurt.
Christ suffers the indignity of the cross, the innocent for the guilty,
yet I will not stand up under one negative word for His sake.
Lard, grant me character and patience, power and strength,
that I may take all adversity with a Christ-like character,
and with faith in Him overcome it.
And if necessity and your honour require me to speak,
grant that I may do so with gentleness and patience, confidence and inspiration,
that the truth and your glory may be seen by all.
For yours is the power and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen*

Adapted from Miles Coverdale (1488-1568)

Thursday, April 7: Luke 19:1-10

As we approach Good Friday (when we remember Jesus' crucifixion) and Easter (when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection), it is good for us to focus on worship. It is good for us to remember that worship is about God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – not about us.

Biblical scholar, Christopher Wright, notes, *"The Greek word for 'saviour' (sōtēr) is applied to God eight times in the New Testament and to Jesus sixteen times, **but to nobody else ever.** And yet the term 'sōtēr' was a fairly common term in the classical world. It was applied both to human kings and military deliverers, and also to the great gods and heroes of mythology. Lots of people in the ancient world of Greece and Rome could easily be described as saviours. But not in the New Testament. 'Salvation belongs to our **God** ... and to the **Lamb.**' Nobody else deserves even the **vocabulary** of salvation (and worship) let alone the reality of it."* We worship God – Father, Son, and Spirit – in all His glory.

In this wonderful story, Jesus shows us what His salvation is all about. He invites Himself into our lives. He

welcomes us, as we are, into His Kingdom. Therefore, we worship Him. It's our only logical response.

Perhaps it's when we lose sight of the wonder of our salvation that we lose sight of what worship is really all about – and we get caught up in our own peevs and preferences.

*"We are not saved because we are Christians and do all the Christian religious things. We are saved because **God has acted, in Christ**, to accomplish salvation for us, and then simply calls on us to trust him. Nothing religious that we do is the means or cause of our salvation. Our Christianity is the response we make, in faith and life, to the saving acts of God. **Salvation belongs to God.**"* (Christopher Wright)

Reflect on the difference God's salvation makes in Zacchaeus' life: how does Jesus change his life? What difference does His salvation make in your life? Worship Him.

"A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, 'darkness' on the walls of his cell." (C.S. Lewis)

*God of love, we pray that you give us love:
love in our thinking,
love in our speaking,
love in our doing,
and love in the hidden places of our souls;
love of our neighbours, near and far;
love of our friends, old and new;
love of those who we find it hard to bear,
and love of those who find it hard to bear with us;
love of those with whom we work,
and love of those with whom we take our ease;
love in joy,
love in sorrow;
love in life
and love in death.*

*In the end, may we be worthy to dwell with you, who are eternal love –
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – forever and ever.*

Amen.

William Temple (1881-1944)

Friday, April 8: Luke 19:11-26

How does this parable dovetail with Paul's talk about spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12 and 14)? (Luke uses the unit of "mina" in his version of the parable; Matthew uses the word "talent" (Matthew 25:14-30). Both the mina and the talent were Ancient units of money. It was from the Matthew parable, when it was translated into the King James Version, that the English use of the word "talent" took on the meaning of a gift or skill. In Jesus' parables he was simply referring to money).

- We all have gifts, talents, abilities, resources, experiences, education, skills that He has given us.
- The church, to be healthy, needs us to be active, sharing His gifts.
- Our spiritual health depends on being connected with the body and functioning within it?

Jesus does hint at this death and resurrection in this passage. Soon He will leave. In fact, He tells this story near Jerusalem, where He will be soon killed. In the story, the nobleman gives what he has to the servants. His work is to be done now by others. Jesus is preparing us for the task of building His kingdom.

This parable is for us today. **All** we have is really a gift from Him. It's given to us in trust, that we will use it for His glory. We are the ones entrusted with the mission and the life of Jesus. In prayer, mull over what

gifts and talents, resources and treasures, experiences and education, time and energy you can bring to the service of God here and now – today. How can you live for Jesus, today?

"Every Christian is a priest, not offering a sacrifice for sins - since that has been done once and for all – but offering his person, praise and possessions." (Vance Havner)

*God of our life,
there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and weigh us down,
when the road seems dreary and endless,
when the skies are grey and threatening,
when our lives have no music in them,
when our hearts are lonely and our souls have lost their courage.
Flood the path with light.
Run our eyes to where the skies are full of promise.
Tune our hearts to brave music.
Give us a sense of comradeship with heroes and saints of every age.
Quicken our spirits so that we may be able to encourage the souls of all
who journey with us on the road of life ...
Lord, who though you were rich yet for our sakes you became poor,
and you promise in your holy Gospel
that whatever is done for the least of your brothers you will receive as done to you:
Give us grace, we humbly ask you, to be always ready and willing to minister,
as you enable us, to the needs of others,
and to extend the blessings of your kingdom over all the world.
Amen*

Augustine (354-430)

Saturday, April 9: Luke 19:28-48

Tomorrow is Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday we remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem the week before His arrest and crucifixion. It's an interesting story of worship:

- A livestock owner is willing to let his colt be borrowed by strangers.
- People lay their (often one and only) coat on the ground before Jesus as if he were royalty.
- People are publicly praise Jesus, in spite of disapproval from their family, friends, neighbours, and threats from the powers-that-be.
- People take time out of their earn-a-living day to worship Him.
- They risk retribution and persecution for identifying with Jesus.

This was a costly act – in terms of personal security, earnings, property, and time.

What does my worship cost me? What am I willing to give Jesus? Do I recognize my indebtedness to God at all that I should give Him anything? My time? My possessions? My reputation or public 'image'?

Jesus challenges those who are so comfortable with their lives they have lost their genuine passion for God. He invites them to genuine worship. He upsets the "apple carts" (so-to-speak) of their lives. He challenges them to rethink their priorities. And to act on what's most important: their love for God.

What are the most important things in my life? **My** money? **My** career? **My** 'image'? Is it all about you? What if Jesus were to overturn the tables of your life?

"In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds" (Richard Foster).
What is Jesus saying to you?

*Holy Jesus, you came down from heaven
and were pleased to pay the ransom on the cross for us,
so that you might redeem us from all sin,
and purify to yourself a precious people, zealous for good works.
We ask that you write your law on our hearts that we may understand it,
that we may know you, and the power of your resurrection,
and express it in turning from our sinful ways,
that you may rule our hearts by faith,
and that we, being dead to sin and living rightly,
we may bear fruit leading to holiness,
we may grow in grace,
and we may grow in the practical knowledge of you.
Amen*

Henry Hammond (1605-1660)

Palm Sunday, April 10: Psalm 118

Psalm 118:26 is the background for the crowd's cheers in the passage we read yesterday.

Psalm 118 was traditionally sung at one of the great Jewish pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles), when people would come from all over Israel (and beyond) to worship in Jerusalem. The Psalm recalls God's great deliverances from Egypt and from other enemies over the centuries.

118:25-27 is a beautiful foreshadowing of the triumphal entry story we read in Luke 19:28-48.

Overall, what is the theme of this psalm?

It begins and ends with the same words: "*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever*" (118:1 and 29). That's great advice for today.

"Some people come to worship in order to be entertained or to be made to feel good, to be comfortable, rather than to engage actively in worshipping God (which should sometimes make us experience anything but comfort!)" (Marva Dawn).

*Lord, holy Father,
show us what kind of man it is, who is hanging for our sakes on the cross,
whose suffering causes the rocks themselves to crack and crumble with compassion,
whose death brings the dead back to life.
Let my heart crack and crumble at the sight of Him.
Let my soul break apart with compassion for His suffering.
Let it be shattered with grief at my sins for which He dies.
And finally, let it be softened with devoted love for Him and His world.
Amen*

Bonaventure (1221-1274)

Monday, April 11: Luke 20:1-26

Luke 20:17 reads, "*The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*" This comes directly from Psalm 118:22, which we read yesterday (notice how Psalm 118 is interwoven in Luke 19:38 and 20:17).

A cornerstone is the key to every foundation. It's the starting point, the basis upon which a building – or a life – is built. It's the foundation upon which everything else is built. And it's the plumbline, with which every other stone is aligned. If you get the cornerstone correct, your building will be solid, square, with walls that are straight up and down. If you get the cornerstone wrong, your building will be a mess.

What is the cornerstone of your life? What is the basic foundation upon which you have built your life? What guiding principles shape your decisions? What values determine your direction in life? Does God? Or something/someone else? Do you even know? Spend some time reflecting on it ...

How seriously do we take Jesus? Do we really love Him? Are we indifferent to Him? Are we hostile?

A cornerstone establishes the straight lines of a building – horizontally and vertically. Whatever you base your life on determines how you relate to other people (horizontal relationships) and with God (vertical relationship).

- If Jesus is your cornerstone, you can live by His morals, values, ethics and guidelines with other people – they just work well. If Jesus is not guiding you, what values are? How are they working?
- If your life is built on Him, you can have a rich and wonderful relationship with God. If not ... well ... spiritually we'll be pretty dry. We won't know God in a personal, meaningful way.

Jesus' comment, "*Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's*" (20:25) challenges us to think on this. Roman coins had an image of the emperor and an inscription naming the emperor as a living god. The Jewish authorities were trying to trap Jesus: should a good Jew pay taxes to a pagan Roman overlord, especially one who claimed to be a god? Should he touch this blasphemous money at all? But if Jesus refused to pay, the penalty from the Romans could be brutal. They wanted to trap Him.

- What is God's? Your body. Your life. Your health. Your education. Your family. Your friends. These are all God's good gifts to you. We are called to offer them all back to God.
- What is Caesar's? Thanks to our government we do have security, services, and other blessings. It is good to pay the taxes we owe. We benefit from them. (if we don't like the government's use of our monies, an election is coming – thank God we have the opportunity to vote)

While the government can make us pay our taxes, the government cannot make us change our consciences, compromise our convictions. Just make sure your convictions are actually biblical! Our hearts, minds, and souls always belong to God, first and foremost. He is the cornerstone of our lives.

"Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion – it is a daily process whereby you grow to be more and more like Christ." (Billy Graham)

*Father Almighty, Creator of everything
and the Source of all that is good and satisfying,
help us to be more devoted to you
with all that we are and with all that we have.
Forgive my wandering, lustful heart
that is always looking for something else to quench its insatiable thirst.
What I really desire is the grace to be more devoted to you and your Word.
I have a "God-shaped" hole that can only be filled
as I consecrate myself to your service.
Let me be wholly set apart from all that distracts and desecrates,
and consecrate both my inner and outer life,
my possessions, relationships, and career,
to the cause of Christ and his Kingdom.
I pray that the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, meditation,
fasting, good works, solitude, and corporate worship
will be pleasing in your sight as I go deeper in your love.
Amen.*

James Bell Jr.

Tuesday, April 12: Luke 20:27-21:4

Luke 20:27-40: "The teachers of the law and chief priests" are out to get Jesus (read 20:1, 19, 20, 26, 27). They question His authority (20:1-8). They try to catch Him being heretical by acknowledging Caesar as a god (20:20-26). Now the Sadducees, one of the Jewish factions, are trying to trip Him up on the topic of resurrection. Sadducees did not believe in resurrection – you died and that was that (the Pharisees, the major group Jesus interacts with, DID believe in the resurrection). Sadducees believed the first five books of our Old Testament (written by Moses) were the real basis of Jewish faith: the later biblical books were less important. They didn't see evidence of resurrection in those five books. Therefore, they argued, resurrection was a later invention (by prophets like Daniel). They believed the prophets were wrong. They crafted this hypothetical situation as a mind game to trap Jesus on the impracticalities and impossibility of resurrection.

This is not really a passage focused on the NATURE of resurrection (what our bodies will be like, what our relationships will be like). This is a passage intended to emphasize the FACT of resurrection. Jesus does go back to the first five books of Moses and emphasizes that there, too, the doctrine of resurrection is evident. Jesus emphasizes that God's faithful people are very much "living" in Him, they are "alive in God."

There is a lot of mystery about death, what it means to be "in God" or "in Christ" before the Day of Judgment, and full resurrection. The Bible does not give us all the answers. Jesus does assure us that:

- resurrection is REAL – His own life, death, and resurrection will prove that.
- resurrection is GOOD – whatever our life in God will be like, it will be wonderful.
- REAL life is something we look forward to, when we're fully with God, in the future.
- God is in control. Nothing and no-one can ever take us out of His hands.

We may have questions about resurrection. We would like more complete answers. We have to live with the mystery of not understanding it all. Perhaps we just could not comprehend what life with God, in all His glory, could possibly be like, so Jesus is deliberately vague? We just couldn't grasp it?

Luke 20:41-21:4: Consider the contrast between the teachers of the law (20:46-47, 21:1) and the poor widow (20:47, 21:2-4). These sayings follow on Jesus' teaching about the true cornerstone of our lives – our need to build our lives on Christ, and Him alone. How do these verses re-emphasize that truth? How does this complement what Jesus has says about the truth and goodness of resurrection life with God? What is Jesus challenging us to consider? How do we live wisely in this life? What is He saying to you?

"The idea is to live all of our lives in the presence of God, under the authority of God, and for the honor and glory of God. That is what the Christian life is all about." (R.C. Sproul)

*Lord, may your peace and power rule in our hearts.
May your Spirit be our strength and our song, this day.
Let your grace be mighty in us,
and sufficient for us, and let it work in us.
Grant us strength for all the duties of the day.
Keep us from sin.
May your Spirit rule over our own spirits,
and keep us from speaking unadvisedly with our words.
May we live together in peace and holy love.
Prepare us for all the events of the day,
for we do not know what a day may bring forth.
Give us grace to deny ourselves;
to take up our cross daily, to walk boldly,
and to follow in the steps of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Wednesday, April 13: Luke 21:5-38

The temple was the centerpiece of Jewish culture, identity, and religion – it represented their history, faith, and hope for the future. It was the Westminster Abbey/Statue of Liberty/Vatican of its day – no one could conceive of it being destroyed. It represented so much. (We Canadians don't really have an iconic building that represents our national identity – Scotiabank Arena? Bell Centre? Pundits suggest hockey is Canada's national religion. We are more devoted to hockey, more conversations happen about hockey, more decisions are based around hockey schedules, more people get excited about hockey than anything else. If Jesus said, "The time will come when hockey will be no more ..." how would we react?)

Jesus is warning his disciples the temple, and the legalistic Judaism it represents, is doomed. We may read this passage and try to read present day events into it. Remember Jesus is saying this to his own disciples in the shadow of the real temple, preparing them for what is about to happen *in their lifetimes*. This is not really a prophecy aimed at Canada in 2022. It is a word for Jesus' soon-to-without-their-Lord followers in 30 AD. He is preparing them for the next few years of their lives, without Him.

Notice the context in Luke 21:5-7. Jesus is talking specifically about the destruction of the physical temple in Jerusalem (21:6). The disciples are asking about that specific event (21:7). Other passages in Scripture talk clearly about Jesus' end-times return and judgment. This is not one of them.

Jesus' key message is courage and patience (21:9):

- Wars and revolutions happened throughout the first century – between Antony and Augustus; after Augustus died, the entire Roman empire never really reestablished peace and security again.
- After Nero's suicide in 68 AD, the entire Roman world descended into chaos. Unprecedented anarchy and fear swept through the empire, aptly described – metaphorically – in 21:25 (69 AD is "they year of the four emperors" – four claimants, each backed by their own army, after murder and bloody battles, succeeded each other as emperors of Rome).
- Earthquakes and other natural disasters happened, too (for instance, Ephesus, a city of 500,000+, was flattened by earthquakes in 26 and 163 AD). The region of the Roman Empire is prime earthquake/volcano country (think of Vesuvius and Pompeii, recent earthquakes in Turkey).
- Christians were brutally persecuted by Nero and other emperors – thrown to lions, burned alive as human torches, etc. They were blamed for everything from the fire in Rome to crop failures. Many, like Paul and Peter, had the opportunity to share their faith in the midst of the persecution.
- Jerusalem was besieged, razed, and the temple leveled by the Romans in 70 AD, during the First Jewish-Roman War. Smart people got out. This all occurred by the end of 70 AD.

Before we try to apply these to our times, we need to know they all fit perfectly in the context of the apocalyptic events the people Jesus actually spoke these words to – His disciples – would experience *in their lifetimes*. The specifics in this passage were first for the people of Jesus' time, not for us in Canada in 2022. Jesus is preparing His followers for what the next few years would bring in *their* lives.

Yes, there are dreadful things that have happened recently. Many of these challenges are still relevant today. Do these verses have meaning for us? Absolutely.

- Wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions, betrayals and other dreadful things still happen. We should not be surprised. Does God cause them all now? Did God cause them all then? No ...
- When those dreadful things happen, what attitudes, qualities of character, spiritual disciplines does Jesus encourage us to cultivate in those times? Patience. Courage. Prayer. Compassion. Love.
- Jesus has recently talked about the truth of resurrection. How does hope – hope of a future with Jesus – help us when these things happen?
- When dreadful things happen, how can we bring the love, comfort, peace, and hope of God?
- How can we encourage Christians in other places who do face persecution?

- When we are challenged about our faith, God will help us express our faith.

Lord, help me to be patient in hardship, to be courageous in my witness, compassionate in my generous love to those suffering, and persevering in prayer.

"The greatest thing is to be found at one's post as a child of God, living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though our world might last a thousand years." (C.S. Lewis)

*Lord, I make you a present of myself.
I do not know what to do with myself.
So let me make this exchange:
I will place myself entirely in your hands,
if you will cover my ugliness with your beauty,
tame my unruliness with your love,
and forgive all my sins by your grace.
Lord, I make you a present of myself.
Put out the flames of false passion in my heart,
since these flames destroy all that is true within me.
Make me always busy in your service.
Lord, I make you a present of myself.
Let my love for you be pure, complete, and without reserve.
All I am, I give to you.
Amen.*

Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)

Thursday, April 14: Luke 22:1-65

This is a long reading, recording the events of the Thursday before Jesus crucifixion (on Friday). Simply read the story. Ask the Spirit to speak to you. What is He telling you ... about God ... about Jesus ... about yourself ... about those you love ... about ...???

- **Read these verses several times** "with the ear of your heart" – listen deeply to what God is saying to you. Listen for God's still small voice speaking to you. What phrase speaks to you the most? What themes resonate with your soul? Read slowly, attentively, listening to God ...
- **Ponder this in your heart.** Reflect on God's Word. Turn it over in your mind. Ruminates on it. Mull it over. What does it mean to you, today?
- **Pray.** As God has spoken to you, personally, offer your life – with all of the changes that need to happen – to God. "Lord, make this part of my life ..."
- **Rest.** Take a moment or two to thank God for transforming you through His word. If a special phrase or thought continues to resonate in your soul, celebrate it before God. Praise Him.

"I choose goodness ... I will go without a dollar before I take a dishonest one. I will be overlooked before I will boast. I will confess before I will accuse. I choose goodness." (Max Lucado)

*Lord, I am an empty vessel needing to be filled; my Lord, fill it.
At times I doubt and am unable to trust You; give me hope.
I am weak in faith; strengthen me.
I am cold in love; warm me and make me passionate,
so my love may go out to my neighbour.
Amen.*

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Good Friday, April 15: Luke 22:66-23:56

We have a Good Friday Service at First Baptist today, 10:30 a.m. (in-person and livestream)

This is another long reading, recording the events of that fateful Friday.

Tom Wright, Professor at Oxford University, writes: *"At the heart of Luke's picture of the cross is the mocking of Jesus as king of the Jews, which draws into a single stark sketch the meaning expressed by the various characters and the small incidents elsewhere in the narrative. Jesus has stood on its head the meaning of kingship, the meaning of the kingdom itself. He has celebrated with the wrong people, offered peace and hope to the wrong people, and warned the wrong people of God's coming judgment.*

"Now he is hailed as king at last, but in mockery. Here comes the royal cupbearer, only it's a Roman soldier offering him the sour wine that poor people drank. Here is his royal placard, announcing his kingship to the world, but it is in fact the criminal charge which explains his cruel death.

"His true royalty, though, shines out in his prayer and his promise, both recorded only in Luke. Unlike traditional martyrs, who died with a curse against their torturers, Jesus prays for their forgiveness. Like a king on his way to enthronement, Jesus promises a place of honour and bliss to one who requests it ('Paradise' in Jewish thought wasn't necessarily the final resting place, but the place of rest and refreshment before the gift of new life in the resurrection.) The prayer shows that the promise is not to be taken as meaning that the only hope is in a life after death, vital though that of course is. Forgiveness brings the life of heaven to earth, God's future into the present."

Jesus died. The Roman centurion saw that and commented upon it. The crowds saw it; they went home shocked and saddened. Jesus' friends and family saw it. Then the burial. Witnesses see what happened. They know which tomb it is. His is the only body in it. Luke is clear to help us appreciate that there is no doubt about any of these events. Jesus died. He is buried. Lots of witnesses. No doubts.

This is important for what will follow, of course. Did Jesus just swoon; will He revive in the tomb? Impossible. Will they mistake his body for another one in the tomb? Impossible. Will they go to the wrong tomb? Not possible. Too many witnesses. Too much evidence. Too much at stake.

The centurion – not a Jew, but a Roman – sums up Good Friday well. He praises God, saying, *"Surely this was a righteous man."* Jesus is innocent. He really is God. He really is the King. What will happen next? How can this dreadful wrong be made right? Somehow God's future has come into the present, but Luke leaves us in suspense ...

"The Christian faith is meant to be lived moment by moment. It isn't some broad, general outline – it's a long walk with a real Person. Details count: passing thoughts, small sacrifices, a few encouraging words, little acts of kindness, brief victories over nagging sins. It all matters." (Joni Eareckson Tada)

*Christ Jesus, when all is darkness
and I feel my weakness and helplessness,
Give me the sense of your presence,
your love,
and your strength.
Help me to have perfect trust in your protecting love.
Help me to experience your strengthening power,
so that nothing may frighten or worry me,
For, living close to You, I shall see your hand,
your purpose, and your will through all things –
even your cross, even my cross.
Amen.*

Irenaeus (130-200)

Saturday, April 16: Psalm 13

Imagine the emotions of the friends who buried Jesus. They had hoped He was the Messiah, the long-awaited Saviour. Now He is dead. Buried. They do not – cannot – understand His teaching about resurrection – yet. Nothing like that has happened before. Why would they expect it to happen now?

They buried the body hurriedly before the Sabbath, which began Friday at sundown. They knew they could return after the Sabbath, at sunrise on Sunday. On the Sabbath (Friday sunset to Sunday sunrise) people had to rest. They certainly could not touch a dead body. Therefore, Jesus had to be interred quickly, before sundown. Otherwise, His body would have had to hang on the cross until Sunday morning. Horrible.

Jewish burials were often in caves or tombs that were used over and over as people died (tombs were family or community vaults). A body would be wrapped, with spices and ointments to cover the smell as the flesh rotted. When the flesh had all decayed, the bones would be reverently and ceremonially placed in a small ossuary (or box). Jesus was placed in a new tomb – no other bodies were there yet. But the disciples had not had time on Friday, before sundown, to anoint the body with spices to cover the smell. They were planning to do that on Sunday after sunrise, when the Sabbath was over.

Perhaps Psalm 13 captures some of their feelings as they wait, grieve, share, and mourn Friday night, Saturday, and Saturday night. All they have to look forward to is anointing a battered, dead body.

There are times in our lives when we may resonate with David's emotions in Psalm 13, too. Bad things happen. We hurt. We find no answers. Isn't it good to know we can share these feelings with God? We can be honest – even when we're in pain. We can express all of our deepest emotions to God.

Pray honestly to God. How are you feeling? Tell Him. What are your concerns? Talk about them. He knows anyway. He can handle whatever you want to talk about.

"Blessed are those who mourn' is, paradoxically, a more necessary message than 'Rejoice in the Lord always,' because there can be no true rejoicing until we have stopped running away from mourning."
(Simon Tugwell).

*My God, I don't ask You to take me out of this life,
but to prove Your power within it.
I don't ask for tasks more suited to my strength,
but for strength more suited to my tasks.
I pray for a vision that moves me,
strength that endures,
and the grace of Jesus Christ,
Who walked our earthly life with love and mercy,
with compassion and forgiveness
In your strength, I pray, O God.
Amen.*

William Edwin Orchard (1877-1955)

Easter Sunday, April 17: Luke 24:1-12

Surprise! Jesus is risen! He had spoken of his own resurrection several times (for the first time in Luke 9:22). Two of his greatest stories concluded with reference to rising from the dead (Luke 15:24 and 32, 16:31). But nobody got it. It wasn't that they didn't have faith in God. They just didn't understand that God could work in this way. Resurrection was outside the "realm of the possible" in their minds. Nothing like this had ever happened before. It was all new.

It's all a big surprise. The women obviously were not expecting it. They were going to finish the anointing

process cut short by the Sabbath. They went to perform a brutally painful, final-saying-good-bye task. They weren't planning to meet a resurrected Jesus.

The empty tomb was a complete surprise.

In Luke's gospel, the men didn't believe the women – partly because they were women (in that culture women were not considered credible witnesses), but mostly because it was too unbelievable. It was not possible. When Peter did go, he, too, was completely surprised, "*wondering what had happened.*"

"Easter is always a surprise," writes Tom Wright, *"whether we meet it in celebrating in the Easter service itself, or in the sudden surges of God's grace overturning tragedy in our own lives or in the world."* Have you experienced God's surprises in your life? In the life of a friend or relative? So often we take God's surprising grace – miracles of healing (through doctors/medicine or through an unassisted miracle), encouragement, provision (through other people or directly from the Lord) – for granted. Often God does work through other people. He IS always at work. Thank Him for His works of grace in your life.

Easter reminds us God works in ways we do not expect, through things we cannot believe, and in ways we cannot understand. God is so far beyond us ... He is far more amazing and gracious than we imagine. Easter reminds us to be faithful, to wait, and to be open to surprises we cannot possibly comprehend.

"Take with you the joy of Easter to the home, and make that home bright with more unselfish love, more hearty service; take it into your work, and do all in the name of the Lord Jesus; take it to your heart, and let that heart rise anew on Easter wings to a higher, a gladder, a fuller life; take it to the dear grave-side and say there the two words 'Jesus lives!' and find in them the secret of calm expectation, the hope of eternal reunion." (John Ellerton)

*God, whose I am, have mercy on me.
Have mercy on me so that, in love and faith,
in righteousness and humility,
I may believe in you.
Help me to follow You with self-denial,
steadfastness, and courage.
May I meet with You in the silence.
Please give me a pure heart that I may see You,
a humble heart that I may hear You,
A heart of love so I may serve You,
and a heart of faith so I may live in You.
Amen.*

Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961)

Monday, April 18: Luke 24:13-35

Two people are walking home. One is named Cleopas (24:18). The other is unnamed ... put yourself in his/her shoes. Nothing that has happened over the past few days makes any sense to you. It's all still so confusing. You and Cleopas are trying to make sense of it all. The empty tomb is a complete surprise. A mystery (notice, in Luke's gospel, no one has yet seen Jesus – they have just seen the empty tomb). There is a glimmer of hope ... but also a LOT of unanswered questions ... and fear ... and "What next?" ...

Another person joins you. You tell Him about your week. Your hopes – dashed by the crucifixion. Your fears – have the Romans or Jewish authorities stolen the body? What was going to happen now?

And the new fellow says, "Haven't you read your Bibles?" That's a bit much, don't you think?

The stranger leads you in a Bible study – looking at the big picture of Scripture: it's a story of God allowing

His people, through their own choices, to get into real messes – slavery, defeat, despair, and exile. It's a story of God rescuing them again and again. God rescues them from Egypt; he rescues them from Babylon. In passage after passage, God promises rescue from more than just slavery: He'll save His people from sin, even from death itself. They will have to go through the dark valley of suffering to come out the other side.

Keeping with that pattern, what if (once and for all) God Himself, the Messiah, would go through the darkest valley (death itself) and victoriously come out the other side? What if God could go through it all Himself, and rise again, as the conqueror of sin and death? What if evil could be completely defeated?

This was something no one had really considered. Yet.

You invite the stranger in for a meal. Somehow, He becomes the host – breaking the bread for you as He did at the last Passover supper. You get it. You recognize Jesus. He is alive. Jesus has risen.

Jesus is risen. He is alive. Bring your questions, confusion, suffering to Him. Allow Him to warm your heart. Read Scripture. Open your eyes and see Him. He is with you in your daily life. You may not understand it all now – or ever – but know that He is always with You. That's what really matters.

"The power of God is now and has always been the power to raise us from the dead. Period. It is not about us. It is about God. Our only role is to stick our feet straight up in the air and admit that without God we might as well be put to bed with a shovel. Now that is a message that can empty a church out fast."
(Barbara Brown Taylor).

*Who can tell what today may bring forth?
So, by the power of your Spirit of grace, help me
to live every day as if it were going to be my last,
because for all I know it might be.
Cause me to live now as I will wish I had lived when it is time for me to die.
Grant that I may not die with any guilt on my conscience
or any known sin I haven't repented of.
Enlighten me, good Jesus, with the brightness of your light
and cast out all darkness from my heart.
Grant me, Lord, to know what is worth knowing,
to love what is worth loving,
to praise what is worth praising,
to hate what is unworthy in your sight,
to prize what to you is precious,
and, above all, to search out and do your holy will.
Write your blessed name, Lord, upon my heart,
there to remain so indelibly engraved,
that no prosperity or adversity shall ever move me from your love.
Holy Spirit, be to me a strong tower of defense,
a comforter in tribulation,
a deliverer in distress,
a very present help in trouble,
and a guide to heaven through the many temptations and dangers in this life.
Amen.*

Thomas a Kempis (1480-1471)

Tuesday, April 19: Luke 24:36-49

Several years ago, I heard a radio interview with Dr. Reg Bibby, sociologist at the University of Lethbridge. He was talking about and taking calls on the state of religion in Canada. Most of the callers were respectful, typically describing how they were still spiritual people, but struggling with what they perceived to be

"institutional" organized religion. One caller, however, went on a rant about how he did not believe in "*the boogie man, fairies, and other kooky things*" – we just need science/facts. The implication was anything spiritual was also ephemeral, fantastic (in the sense of being fantasy), incredible (meaning not credible), unprovable, and unbelievable. Only stupid people could be spiritual.

(Science is a wonderful gift from God. As we study His creation through science, we learn about God, the Creator. My experience, as a geographer, is science and my Christian faith complement each other beautifully. I have yet to find a conflict. The scientific method – looking at what is observable and testable – is essential to understand the natural world. But science is limited. It cannot teach us EVERYTHING. There are things – like love, beauty, ethics, goodness, etc. – that are very real, but are not scientifically verifiable. Just because science cannot describe them doesn't mean they're not real. God's Word and science both help us learn about God and creation in their own ways. We need both types of knowledge)

Luke, a medical doctor, began his book with these words: "*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*" (Luke 1:1-4)

This is not fantasy. Luke is recording real, credible, believable people meeting the risen Jesus. This is the risen Jesus – check out His hands and feet. This is no ghost. Check Him out, eating fish. This is no dream. This is not some make believe story – who could dream this up? This is reality. It's verifiable. Testable.

The implication of this reality is that God's Kingdom has really come, too. We are in a new reality in which Jesus is alive **in us**, and **in our world**. We have a mission, to spread His good news of repentance and forgiveness to everyone – to individuals and to entire nations. God's message of love and reconciliation is for ALL people (we take that for granted – this was radical to first century Jews, certain they were God's (only) chosen people). Jesus is with you today. How can we live the Kingdom of God today? How can His love shine through my words? My actions? My choices? My relationships?

"Ever Present Christ. Christ is in the midst of us. He was in the midst of us. He is in the midst of us. And ever shall He be in the midst of us. Ever Present Christ." (Russian Orthodox Acclamation)

*My soul's desire is to see the face of God,
and to rest in his house.
My soul's desire is to study the Scriptures,
and to learn the ways of God.
My soul's desire is to be freed from all fear and sadness,
and to share Christ's risen life.
My soul's desire is to imitate my king,
and to sing his praise always.
My soul's desire is to enter the gates of heaven,
and to gaze upon the light that shines forever.
Dear Lord, you alone know what my soul truly desires;
and you alone can satisfy those desires.
Amen.*

Celtic prayer

Wednesday, April 20: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Back to 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians has dealt with issues the Christians in Corinth were struggling with, including divisions in the church (chapters 1-3), lawsuits (chapter 6), marriage and sexuality (chapters 6 and 7), speaking in tongues and order in worship (chapter 12 and 14), etc. Paul is now tackling another issue: some were saying there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12). After our past week's

readings, what do you think Luke would say to that?

Sometimes Christianity is presented as ONLY about resurrection from the dead: you become a Christian so you can go to heaven when you die. This is a dreadfully impoverished description of what the good news is. In fact, on the few occasions Jesus directly spoke about His purpose and His death and resurrection – when He actually said, *"I have come to do _____"* – He used words like:

- *"I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."* (Mark 2:17)
- *"I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full."* (John 10:10)
- *"I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark."* (John 12:46)
- *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."* (Luke 4:18-19)

The good news certainly includes a future hope of resurrection and the assurance of being with Jesus one day someday. But Jesus also wants us to have a full life, a forgiven life, a light-filled life, a good-news life, here and now. Eternal life – life in the presence of Jesus – has already begun. His Spirit is in us.

An opposite pitfall is to live only for this present age and forget all about the future. This was what some Corinthians were doing. The problem with this is you just, *"eat, drink, and be merry, because tomorrow you die"* (see 11:21-22) – not a very fulfilling, purposeful existence.

What we are called to do is to live passionately with and for God ***in the present***, while at the same time remembering ***this is not all there is***. Then we can live fully, generously, sacrificially, completely, purposefully ***right now*** knowing that ***our future*** – our real, eternal future – is safe in God's hands.

Paul responds to those who were saying that there is no resurrection for believers in three parts:

1. by reaffirming that Jesus has risen from the dead (15:1-11) – today.
2. by pointing out inconsistencies and contradictions in their theology (15:12-34) – Thursday.
3. by discussing how – in what form – we are raised from the dead (15:35-58) – Friday.

The Corinthians apparently did agree that Jesus rose from the dead. Paul is *not trying to prove* Jesus' resurrection. He is *reminding everyone that it is a fact*. There are many historical events that may be questioned (who were the first Europeans to reach North America? Irish monks? Vikings?). The resurrection of Jesus, however, is beyond doubt. There is much good research on this (I recommend the writings/videos of N.T. [Tom] Wright, Josh MacDowell, William Lane Craig, Lee Strobel).

Of course, not everyone will believe the reality of the resurrection (but then some people still don't believe all sorts of things – the holocaust, moon landings, death of Elvis ...). Our task is simply to keep on telling the story. We keep on inviting people to meet Jesus for themselves. We keep on encouraging people to discover new life through Jesus. We keep on living the Kingdom of God by loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and by loving our neighbours as ourselves. We keep on living God's Word and His ways in our lives. We keep on loving as He loved. We keep on exploring more deeply what the gospel really means in our lives, in the community of the church, and in the world ...

As I reflect more and more on the death and resurrection of Jesus, I am more and more overwhelmed by the wonder of God's love. And I am more and more aware of how little I deserve His love. It is His grace – His gift of love – that transforms my life. I do not deserve it. I did not earn it. God simply gives me – and all of us – life. *"We are bought at a price"* (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23). Like Paul, we can only respond: *"I am the least of the followers of Jesus and do not even deserve to be called His follower ... But by the grace of God I am what I am"* (15:9-10). By the grace of God, you are what you are. Praise Him.

"The resurrection is the revelation to chosen witnesses of the fact that Jesus who died on the cross is indeed King – conqueror of death and sin, Lord and Savior of all. The resurrection is not the reversal of the defeat but the proclamation of the victory. The king reigns from the tree. The reign of God has indeed come upon us, and its sign is not a golden throne but a wooden cross." (Lesslie Newbigin)

*Lord our God, teach us, we pray,
to ask you in the right way for the right blessings.
Please steer the ship of our lives towards yourself,
the tranquil haven of all storm-tossed souls.
Show us the course in which we should go.
Renew a willing spirit within us.
Let your Spirit curb our wayward senses.
Guide us toward that which is our true good:
to keep your laws,
and in all we do to rejoice always in your glorious and gladdening presence.
For yours is the glory and praise from all your saints, forever and ever.
Amen.*

Basil of Caesarea (330-379)

Thursday, April 21: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Paul reaffirmed Jesus has risen from the dead. The Corinthians apparently believed that, but did not believe anyone else would rise from the dead.

Outspoken atheist, Richard Dawkins, says, *"Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."* Paul would say just the opposite. Faith is belief based on the convincing evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

Alister McGrath, professor of theology at Oxford University, was an atheist when he went to university: *"Growing up as a Protestant in Northern Ireland, I had come to believe religion was the cause of the Province's problems. While I loved studying the sciences at school, they were important for another reason: science disproved God. Believing in God was only for sad, mad and bad people who had yet to be enlightened by science."*

"I went up to Oxford to study the sciences, expecting my atheism to be consolidated. In the event, my world was turned upside down. I gave up one belief, atheism, and embraced another, Christianity. Why? There were many factors. For a start, I was alarmed by some atheist writings, which seemed more preoccupied with rubbishing religion than seeking the truth."

"Above all, I encountered something at Oxford that I had failed to meet in Northern Ireland - articulate Christians who were able to challenge my atheism. I soon discovered two life-changing things. First, Christianity made a lot of sense. It gave me a new way of seeing and understanding the world, above all, the natural sciences. Second, I discovered Christianity actually worked: it brought purpose and dignity to life." (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-433628/Do-stop-behaving-God-Professor-Dawkins.html>)

In 15:12-19, Paul argues that **if** the Corinthians who contend that we will not rise from the dead are correct, **then** logically Jesus could not have risen from the dead either. And if Jesus is not risen ... well, Paul considers some of the logical consequences of taking this position:

- Paul and his buddies are wasting their time. In fact they are actually spreading lies and promoting a horrendous deception. They are horrible liars.
- "Faith in Jesus" is pointless. Indeed, those of us who have sacrificed anything (time, money, morality, safety) for God are pitiful. It's all been a waste.

- Sins are not forgiven. We are guilty of them all forever. We are doomed.
- Death is the end, for you and anyone who has died before you. There is no hope.

What Paul is describing is atheism at its most stark. No hope. No purpose. No point. No values. Anyone teaching hope is an evil charlatan. Life is an empty, meaningless existence ending in oblivion. Ouch.

The good news is that this is **NOT** true! This is NOT the world in which we actually live. We DO live in a world which is radically different because Jesus has risen from the dead. We have hope, meaning, and purpose for our lives now, and confidence in a life hereafter as well. You matter. What you do matters. Jesus is with you, this moment and for all eternity. How does that change how you live ... today?

"You could speak of Jesus' rising as the most hopeful (hope-full) thing that has ever happened – and you would be right." (J. I. Packer)

*Father, I don't understand why you choose to trust me to share your love with my neighbours.
 Too often I mess it up. I make stupid choices.
 I say the wrong thing or put my foot in it.
 But you **have** chosen me,
 with my weaknesses, faults and confusion.
 I guess if I was perfect or could do it all by myself,
 people would focus on me, not you.
 I don't want them to focus on me.
 You're the best thing that ever happened in my life.
 I want them to move from hearing about my God
 to them knowing you for themselves.
 So, I put myself in your hands.
 I want to be more available to you, and to the people around me.
 I know that I'm nothing impressive or special,
 but in my weakness let your strength be revealed.
 As you and I work on making me more like you,
 let people notice the changes in my behaviour.
 I want to explain to them – **that's God, that is.**
 Father, being vulnerable and sharing weakness can hurt.
 Please give me the courage to follow your path
 and accept pain, ridicule or rejection.
 But let me know the power of your presence
 both now and when those times come.
 Amen*

Sarah Bingham

Friday, April 22: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

"The point of the resurrection," says Tom Wright, "is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die ... What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it ... What you do in the present – by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself – will last into God's future. These activities are part of what we may call building for God's kingdom." The point of the resurrection is that we live differently now, knowing what we do now matters.

In 20-28, Paul states that since Jesus is risen, then everything changes. The world and cosmic order of things is radically different as a result:

- all who are "in Christ" will be resurrected, and
- death itself will be destroyed.

What does it mean to be **"in Christ"**? Paul contrasts this with being **"in Adam."** Simply by being born into this fallen world, our nature is fundamentally marred by sin. We are "in Adam." In very practical terms, try as we like we just don't behave perfectly all the time. We've all messed up at least once.

Being **"in Christ"** means are we are "re-born" into a redeemed humanity, and a whole new nature. Jesus uses this idea of being "born again" spiritually (John 3:1-19). Paul (2 Corinthians 5:17, Titus 3:5), Peter (1 Peter 1:22-23), and John (1 John 5:1) all use the metaphor of new birth, too. When we put our faith **"in Christ"** we are born anew as spiritually-alive beings. The old **"in Adam"-life** is replaced by a brand new **"in Christ"-life**. Our sins are forgiven; we are saved; we look forward to a resurrected life with Jesus.

This is not JUST a future reality: we are "born again" – now. We are "in Christ" – now. We are called to live as we were created to live – now. We are invited to live as Jesus would live if He were living our life – now. Yes, one day, someday, we will be with Jesus. But we are also living in the reality of His resurrection power and presence, right now. You don't have to wait till you die to enjoy that relationship. Live it today.

"We currently suffer physical limitations, we get weary in our work, and we groan in our illnesses. We do so knowing that the full redemption of our bodies is promised. Our hope is to have glorified bodies like that of our risen Lord. This is in marked contrast to Greek philosophy of immortality of the soul or the rational aspect of the self in a future escape from the body. We believe in resurrection and in a transformed body. We will have our identity in all eternity." (Myron Augsburger)

*Lord, make me see your glory in every place.
If mortal beauty sets my heart to glow,
help me see your grace shining even brighter.
If natural wonders stop me in awe,
may your Majesty cause me to worship you even more.
You have given me on earth this spiritual life,
That struggles within my weak, mortal flesh.
How can my spiritual passion break free?
How can my spirit find its true life?
Dear Lord, I cry to you for help.
Your Spirit alone can save me.
May your Spirit flow through my will and my senses,
redeeming what is sinful, empowering and inspiring what is good.
All goodness, Lord, must fail without your Spirit:
for you alone have the power and glory.
Amen.*

Michelangelo (1475-1564)

Saturday, April 23: 1 Corinthians 15:29-34

In 15:29-34 Paul tackles some more, "If Jesus were not raised ..." issues. The first one is intriguing: baptism for the dead??? Apparently some of the Corinthians were doing this. But **if** they didn't believe in the resurrection **then** this would be pointless. Paul is not condoning the practice. He is pointing out the inconsistency between their words and their actions.

(Aside: Is baptism for the dead right or is it wrong? Consistently the Bible emphasizes that **we are saved by faith in Jesus** not by works or spiritual rites, be it circumcision or baptism. Paul would say that any sort of baptism for any other person is foolish – it is that person's faith in Jesus, whether they are baptized or not, that saves them. Commentators have lots to say about this: they are unanimous in agreeing that Paul is not condoning this practice since it is at odds with every other teaching on baptism and salvation in Scripture. Salvation is always based on a person's decision of faith. Baptism is a public affirmation of that faith but carries no "magical" or "salvation-effectiveness" in itself. Baptism for people who are dead is

simply pointless: those who died with faith in Jesus are saved (15:22). Those who died apparently without faith? Their fate is in God's hands. He's the judge. This is a motivation to share our faith, isn't it?)

Back to Paul's point. Paul is emphasizing how illogical it is for people to be doing this at all if they do not even believe in resurrection. If they don't believe in resurrection, then why do this crazy thing?

Paul is calling us back to appreciate the wonder, mystery, and power of the resurrection. *"Without the victory of the resurrection, the death of Jesus would have been in vain. For death by itself is no victory, no matter how well-meaning the sacrificial lamb, no matter how noble the cause. Through His resurrection, Christ broke the power of death once and for all time. Salvation was not completed only because of the cross. It was completed by the victory of the empty tomb"* (Katherine Walden).

- What difference does **Jesus'** resurrection make in your life? What would your life be like if **Jesus** had NOT been raised from the dead?
- What difference does knowing **you** will be raised and made alive in Christ make in your life? How does that change how you live?
- We know people who have not experienced the life transformation that comes through knowing the power of Jesus' resurrection in their lives. Pray for them. Share your faith with them, if you can.

"What you do in the Lord is not in vain," affirms Tom Wright. *"You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that's about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that's shortly going to be thrown on the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that's about to be dug up for a building site. You are – strange though it may seem, almost as hard to believe as the resurrection itself – accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God's new world.*

"Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings and for that matter one's fellow nonhuman creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world – all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make." How then shall I live, today?

"Take with you the joy of Easter to the home, and make that home bright with more unselfish love and more hearty service. Take it into your work, and do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Take it to your heart, and let that heart rise anew on Easter wings to a higher, a gladder, a fuller life. Take it to the dear grave-side and say there the two words 'Jesus lives!' and find in them the secret of calm expectation, the hope of eternal reunion." (John Ellerton)

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I bless your name this day.

Let all creation praise you.

Let the daylight, and the shadows praise you.

Let the fertile earth and the swelling sea praise you.

Let the winds and the rain, the lightning and thunder praise you.

Let all that breathes, both male and female, praise you.

There is no plant in the ground that does not tell of your beauty, O Jesus.

There is no creature on the earth, there is no life in the sea, that does not proclaim your goodness.

There is no bird on the wing, there is no star in the sky,

there is nothing beneath the sun, that is not full of your blessing.

Awaken my understanding of your presence all around me, Lord Jesus.

And kindle my will, to be caring for your creation.

Kindle within me, a love for you in all things.

Amen

Philip Newell

Sunday, April 24: Psalm 47

"A Christ-centred worship ... can never be static and merely intellectual because what happens is an actual and real communication of the power and benefit of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Worshiping churches recognize that every gathering of worship is ultimately a praise and thanksgiving for the overthrow of evil by God in Christ. This victory not only happened two thousand years ago, but it happens today in the lives of people who bring to worship their own struggles against that evil which shatters relationships, oppresses the poor, and brings constant dislocation into life." (Robert Webber)

As we gather for worship today, we do so celebrating that Jesus is alive. Death is destroyed. God is King. Sins are forgiven. New life is a reality. Resurrection is our hope. Our lives matter. We have purpose.

As we gather, we come together expectantly ... the living God is here among us. The Holy Spirit is ministering to us and through us. He is within us. None of us will ever be the same again ...

"The resurrection completes the inauguration of God's kingdom. It is the decisive event demonstrating that God's kingdom really has been launched on earth as it is in heaven. The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you're now invited to belong to it." (Tom Wright)

*My God, I believe you watch over all who hope in you,
and that we will need nothing when we rely upon you in all things.
Therefore, I am resolved to cast all my cares upon you.
People may deprive me of worldly goods and status.
Sickness may take from me my strength and the means of serving you.
I may even jeopardize our relationship by sin.
But my trust shall never leave me.
I will preserve my faith to the last moment of my life,
and the powers of hell shall seek in vain to grab it from me.
Let others seek happiness in their wealth and in their talents.
Let them trust in the purity of their lives,
the severity of their sacrifices,
in the number of their good works,
the enthusiasm of their prayers.
As for me, my rock and my refuge,
my confidence in you fills me with hope.
For you alone have given me hope.
Amen.*

Claude de la Colombière (1641-1682)

Monday, April 25: 1 Corinthians 15:35-57

C.S. Lewis once observed, *"The best is perhaps what we understand least."* There is SO much about we God we don't understand. But we know He is the ultimate BEST of all.

There is a lot about resurrection we don't understand either, but we know it will be fantastic.

Some people in Corinth denied the resurrection of believers. Two issues seem to be driving this:

1. They knew that a dead body rots and deteriorates. Everyone knows that. So how could God reanimate rotted flesh, when it had decomposed?
2. They were fascinated with the Holy Spirit. They seemed to think their physical bodies were holding them back (remember the anti-sexuality passages in chapter 7). It would be good to get rid of their physical bodies, once and for all, and just be "spiritual" beings with no physical body. Resurrection implied new bodies. They didn't want them. The dominant **Greek** philosophy of the time was that

spiritual was good, and physical was bad. The Corinthians were caught up in the popular **secular** philosophy of their times, too, emphasizing "spirituality" while denying one's "physicality."

Paul deals with the first, practical issue, by using analogies from the world with which we are familiar – seeds, animals, the cosmos. A plant is radically different from its seed, for example: a seed "dies" to produce a beautiful plant. Certainly, a God who can raise Jesus from the dead can raise other people.

He goes at the second issue by reaffirming that resurrection does involve our bodies. That was certainly the precedent set by Jesus. Jesus was very much a physical being when He met with His disciples after His resurrection. But exactly what **our** resurrection bodies will look like, how they will work, etc. is very much still a mystery. They will be "imperishable" and "immortal" – beyond that we don't know much.

Perhaps we are presented with this as a mystery because we cannot possibly comprehend what resurrection life will be like. It is simply beyond our wildest imagination. For instance, if you were to try to describe the internet to a first century Jew like Paul, his eyes would glaze over – it would be incomprehensible. The internet could not fit his concept of what is possible. (Once upon a time my son tried to describe to me what a 4-dimensional cube, a tesseract, would look like – I could not even begin to get my mind around it (check out "tesseract" on Wikipedia – see how you do). It was beyond my ability to begin to comprehend)

The same may be true of resurrection and life in Christ. Paul uses the word "mystery" (15:51) to remind us some things are just beyond us. He tries to describe it in metaphors we can understand, but ultimately – like the internet to Paul or the tesseract to me – it's so far beyond our ability to comprehend, we just have to accept it. We know it's real. We know it's good. We cannot begin to understand more.

Tom Wright comments, "*Jesus doesn't give an explanation for the pain and sorrow of the world. He comes where the pain is most acute and takes it upon himself. Jesus doesn't explain why there is suffering, illness, and death in the world. He brings healing and hope. He doesn't allow the problem of evil to be the subject of a seminar. He allows evil to do its worst to him. He exhausts it, drains its power, and emerges with new life.*" It is all a mystery, but it is a mystery that gives us life – real life.

Having received this mystery of new life from Jesus, we can share His love with a hurting world. When we read the Bible carefully, we see God's plan is NOT to abandon this world (which He says is "very good"). Rather, He is colonizing it with His people, redeemed by His love, so ALL might know Him ...

Read the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Notice there is nothing here about going to heaven ... it's all about God's Kingdom coming **here** and God's will being done **here** ... How is that going to happen? Through us living and loving as Jesus did ...

*I do not know, my God, what may happen to me today.
I only know nothing will happen to me that you haven't foreseen from all eternity.
That is sufficient, my God, to keep me in peace.
I adore your eternal designs.
I submit to them with all my heart.
I desire them all and accept them all.
I make a sacrifice of everything.
I unite this sacrifice to that of your dear Son, my Savior,
begging you by his infinite merits, for patience in troubles,
and for the perfect submission which is due to you
in all that you will and design for me.
Amen.*

Madame Elizabeth of France, written in prison while awaiting the guillotine (1764-1794)

Tuesday, April 26: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Resurrection boggles my mind. In our attempts to get our minds around all this, let's not overlook Paul's conclusion: "*So, my dear brothers and sisters, **be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.***"

- Since Jesus has been raised – and since we will be raised – be strong and immovable. We know the ultimate future – and it's great. We can face anything and everything, thanks to Jesus.
- In the meantime, make your life count for the Lord now. Our lives here matter. We can make an eternal difference.

People need Jesus. In our postmodern world where we don't want anyone to feel badly about their own personal beliefs, we often downplay this glorious future for those who put their faith in Jesus ... We do know for certain that those who do love Jesus are reborn into this new life. We don't understand everything about the judgment of God and the fate of those who do not place their faith in Jesus. Our mission is to invite others to experience the great good we do know for certain, incredible new life in Jesus.

The blessing of being reborn into the "in-Christ-life" is not just the certain hope of future life with God. We experience the blessing of having purpose, meaning, and God's presence in this life. How we live and what we do matters. It's not pointless. This is not a "waiting time." The Holy Spirit is within us – inspiring, growing, challenging, empowering, changing us, today. We can partner with God in building His kingdom, today. Your life – your time – your decisions – your contributions (of time, skills, resources, talents, gifts, education, experience) – all are significant ... today. Eternal life begins now.

"Our task as image-bearing, God-loving, Christ-shaped, Spirit-filled Christians, following Christ and shaping our world, is to announce redemption to a world that has discovered its fallenness, to announce healing to a world that has discovered its brokenness, to proclaim love and trust to a world that knows only exploitation, fear, and suspicion" (Tom Wright). We have good news.

The "work of the Lord" – the work Jesus modeled – includes love, concern, and practical care for those in need. We can be those who bring hope, joy, peace, and love in our homes, communities, and the world.

(Sadly, some people choose to be people of bad news: judgment, condemnation, division, anger, and hatred. Let's NOT be those people)

May the Lord help us to **be** good news to our fallen, broken, exploited, fearful, suspicious world. What does it mean for me to be God's good news to my family? My friends? My neighbours?

*Use me, my Saviour, for whatever purpose
and in whatever way you may require.
Here is my poor heart, an empty vessel;
fill it with your grace.
Amen*

D.L. Moody (1837-1899)

Wednesday, April 27: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

The real "meat" of Paul's letter is over, but he still has some housekeeping details to tidy up. One is a collection for the poor people in the Jerusalem church (see also Galatians 2:9-10). At the end of the lofty celebration of resurrection in chapter 15, Paul had reminded the people, that an essential part of their response to Jesus' resurrection – and their own future resurrection – was to "*Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.*" Caring for the poor is an essential aspect of the work of the Lord. This is a very practical application of the truth of resurrection in their lives.

We may think the “work of the Lord” is high-folluting stuff like evangelizing the masses, solving world hunger, finding a cure for cancer, bringing peace in the Middle East, or (in the Corinthians’ case) speaking in strange tongues. These are all good. But there are things – ordinary things – we can all do in the course of our daily lives that matter. There are all sorts of practical ways we can do the work of the Lord – giving to the needs of the poor is just one of them.

What are some other ways we can do the work of the Lord?

- Calling/visiting a shut in?
- Encouraging someone who is down?
- Volunteering (in some way that fits with your gifts, skills, talents and abilities)?
- Taking a meal to someone going through a difficult time?
- Listening to someone who just needs to talk?
- What else?

In 1 Corinthians, Paul has emphasized the reality of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives, love, and the truth and power of the resurrection. The Spirit may manifest Himself in dramatic ways. But, more often, He changes how we go about doing the ordinary things in life. In the light of Jesus’ resurrection, nothing and no one is ordinary anymore. In the name of Jesus, everything we say and do can be a holy act of grace.

The rule of love, modelled by Jesus in His death and resurrection, is described profoundly in 1 Corinthians 13. Love is not an optional extra. It is the very essence of who we are and what we are about as God’s people. Who can I love today, in the name in the name of Jesus? Practically, what will that look like?

*My God, I believe in you, but strengthen my faith.
All my hopes are in you, but please protect them.
I love you, but teach me to love you more and more dearly.
I am sorry that I've sinned against you.
I adore you as my first beginning, and I aspire after you as my last end.
I give you thanks as my constant benefactor, and I call upon you as my supreme protector.
My God, conduct me by your wisdom.
Control me by your justice.
Comfort me by your mercy.
Defend me by your power.
I desire to consecrate to you all my thoughts, words, actions, and sufferings.
From now on, may I think of you, speak of you,
offer all my actions to your greater glory,
and suffer willingly whatever you shall bring into my life.
Lord, I desire that in all things your will may be done –
because it is your will, and your will is perfectly good.
I beg you to enlighten my understanding, inflame my will,
purify my body, and sanctify my soul.
Amen.*

Richard Challoner (1691-1781)

Thursday, April 28: 1 Corinthians 16:5-24

After all Paul’s deep theological reflections on love, gifts, worship, and the resurrection, these personal notes seem anticlimactic, and, frankly, rather boring. After all, we don’t know any of these people.

These verses are very significant.

1. People are important – **all** people are important. While we may skip over Timothy, Apollos, Stephanus, Fortunatus, Achaicus, and the rest, but Paul doesn’t. God certainly doesn’t. Neither

does God skip over you. Or me. He loves each of us, individually and personally, in ways we cannot imagine. He know each of us, loves each of us, and is with each of us, always. God loves **you**.

2. We are part of an amazing community of saints that goes back centuries. The church continues in the present. These people in Asia back in the 1st century are our brothers and sisters. We are part of a family of believers all over the world today, too: Greece, Turkey, the Philippines, Bolivia, South Sudan, Italy, Russia, Thailand, Guatemala, Iceland, the Middle East, Nunavut ... Being a Christian is not a solo activity – you are part of this church and the global church through all time and space.
3. "*Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love.*" If you remember nothing else from 1 Corinthians (although I do hope you remember lots!) remember these exhortations. This is what Paul wants us to take away with us.

- How can I **be on guard**?
- How can I **stand firm in the faith**?
- How can I be **courageous**? **Strong**?
- How I do **everything in love**?

*Here we are in front of you, Holy Spirit.
We feel the weight of our differences,
but we are united together in your name.
Come to us, help us, enter into our hearts.
Teach us what we should do, what path we should follow.
Do for us what you ask us to do.
Be the only one to offer and guide our decisions.
Only you – with the Father and the Son – are all wise and holy.
O Spirit who loves order and peace,
do not allow us to miss out on doing what is right.
Don't let ignorance lead us away from you.
Don't let human sympathy bias us.
Don't let people or positions influence us.
Keep us intimately close to you, using the gift of your grace,
so that we may be as one with you.
May nothing separate us from your truth and love.
Amen.*

Isidore of Seville (560-636)

Friday, April 29: Psalm 102

We have finished 1 Corinthians. We have thought a lot about life, faith, worship, ethics, and resurrection.

But life – real life – still carries on. And sometimes we wonder how we can carry on. We're all so tired.

Psalm 102 is entitled, "*A prayer of one overwhelmed with trouble, pouring out problems before the Lord.*" Can you relate to that?

On the one hand, this a psalm all of us can relate.

- 102:1-11 are a personal lament in tough times. If we're having difficulties, we can bring any and all of it to God. He can handle our prayers of pain as well as our prayers of praise.
- 102:12-17 are a corporate prayer for our nation, as the author prays for all his people. It is good to pray for our family, friends, neighbours, fellow citizens, and people all around the world. We all need Jesus.
- 102:18-22 are a prayer for the future. Ultimately, our hope is that one day, some day, God will make all things right.

Reread 102:25-27. Now read [Hebrews 1:10-12](#). Do you notice anything?

The author of Hebrews sees Jesus as the fulfillment of the hope presented in Psalm 102. This a prophetic psalm, looking forward to the coming of Jesus. Our personal prayers, our prayers for our nation, and our prayers about the future are only fulfilled – and are totally fulfilled – in Jesus. Only in Jesus.

*"Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth and made the heavens with your hands.
They will perish, but you remain forever; they will wear out like old clothing.
You will change them like a garment and discard them.
But you are always the same; you will live forever.
The children of your people will live in security.
Their children's children will thrive in your presence."* (Psalm 102:25-28)

As you think about Jesus as the fulfillment of these words, how is God giving you hope? Living hope?

*Dear God ... it can get tough to believe in You.
From time immemorial when our lives have taken hard hits,
many of us have lost our faith. Our ideals too.
When things get tough, some of us grow cynical,
tighten ranks, and look out for number one.
But together, we can be tougher than that.
So please, hang with us while we stumble through hard times.
Help us keep our ideals.
Stick with us as we work to stay true to the values You taught us,
values we've always loved and by which we've tried to live.
And may we help our beloved nation remain steadfast
in its commitment to the ideals on which it was founded.
A little girl may have said it best, "God is my shepherd, that's all I want."
May Your gifts from days-of-old continue to guide us
in building lives that bring blessing to ourselves,
to our loved ones,
and to all the world.
Amen*

Saturday, April 30: Psalm 103

David writes, *"Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name. Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me."*

As we take a breather after making it through 1 Corinthians, let's pause. Let's take time to praise the Lord. To worship Him. Let's remember the good things He does for us:

- *He forgives all my sins.*
- *He heals all my diseases* (certainly the "disease" of sin. Ultimately, He will raise us to perfect health).
- *He redeems me from death.*
- *He crowns me with love and tender mercies.*
- *He fills my life with good things.*
- *My youth is renewed like the eagle's.*
- *The Lord gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly.*
- *The Lord is compassionate and merciful.*
- *He is slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.*
- *He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever.*
- *He does not punish us for all our sins.*
- *He does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve, for his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.*

- *He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.*
- *The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him.*
- *He knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.*
- *The love of the Lord remains forever with those who fear him.*
- *His salvation extends to the children's children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments.*

Prayerfully reflect on those promises that speak to you.

What challenges you from this psalm? Why? How is God speaking to you through David's words?

"Praise the Lord, everything he has created, everything in all his kingdom. Let all that I am praise the Lord"
(Psalm 103:22).

*You are holy, Lord, the only God, and your deeds are wonderful.
 You are strong.
 You are great.
 You are the most high.
 You are Almighty.
 You, holy Father, are King of Heaven and Earth.
 You are three and one, Lord God.
 You are good, all good, supreme good, Lord God, living and true.
 You are love.
 You are wisdom.
 You are humility.
 You are endurance.
 You are rest.
 You are peace.
 You are joy and gladness.
 You are justice and moderation.
 You are all our riches, and you suffice for us.
 You are beauty.
 You are gentleness.
 You are our protector.
 You are our guardian and defender.
 You are our courage.
 You are our haven and our hope.
 You are our faith, our great consolation.
 You are our eternal life, great and wonderful Lord,
 God Almighty, merciful Savior.
 Amen.*

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

Sunday, May 1: Psalm 104

Psalm 103 (yesterday) focussed on God's love and care for humanity – people like us. Psalm 104 celebrates God's creation of and care for ALL creation – the sun, moon, atmosphere, Earth, sea, mountains, valleys, rivers, birds, animals, sea creatures ... you name it, God created it. God loves it. God cares for it.

Sometimes we limit ourselves to a very human-centred gospel (good news) – God loves people and ONLY people. How would the author of Psalm 104 respond to that?

Perhaps we're concerned that, if we acknowledge that God loves and cares for non-human creation, we are suggesting God loves humans less. That's nonsense. As Psalm 103 taught us yesterday, God loves us

(people) passionately. But He can love ALL of His creation just as passionately. God is more than big enough to love EVERYTHING He created. God's love for His non-human creation doesn't reduce His love for people in the slightest.

In Genesis 2:15, one of the primary purposes of human beings, created in the image of God is to "*to tend and watch over*" God's good creation. This is one of the fundamental tasks given to us, as people, in the beginning. Nowhere is that role revoked. That's still one of our core purposes.

The natural world around us is God's art gallery. It is created by Him. It belongs to Him. It is created to praise Him.

If ALL of creation is created by God and loved by God, how then ought we to live within it? How do we live wisely and well as stewards of God's good creation?

*Lord, teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me as I seek you.
For I cannot see you unless you first teach me.
I cannot find you unless you first reveal yourself to me.
Let me seek you in my longing and long for you in seeking.
Let me find you in love and love you in finding.
Lord, you have mercy on us all.
Take away from me all my sins.
Set me ablaze with the fire of your Holy Spirit.
Take away from me the heart of stone, and give me a human heart,
a heart to love and adore you, a heart to delight in you,
a heart to follow and enjoy you.
Amen*

Ambrose of Milan (340-397)