

Saturday, April 18

Psalm 20 *The LORD answer you in the day of trouble! ... May he send you help from the sanctuary ... May he remember all your offerings ... May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans.* (vv.1-4)

I imagine the words of this psalm as an ancient greeting card. In fact, these verses might be nice to include in a birthday card or a note of encouragement. God wants the best for us. He wants us to succeed! He delights in helping us.

But we tend to forget how involved in our lives the Creator of the Universe longs to be. We look for support and assistance from earthly sources and are often disappointed. After a few false starts and flubs, we realize that perhaps we should have called upon the Lord to start with. He recognizes and is proud of our offerings and our service, and longs to fulfill our hearts' desires—when these are consistent with God's values and His will.

Psalm 37:4 reminds us: "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." God takes delight in you, so return the favor—and the love. Things will turn out better. Just wait and see!

Exodus 17:1-16; Psalm 21; 1 Peter 4:7-19; John 16:16-33

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Sunday, April 12

John 14:1-7 *"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"* (v.2 NRSV)

This Gospel passage is often read at funerals, and sometimes preceded or followed by the hymn, "How lovely is Thy dwelling place," inspired by Brahms' Requiem. Whenever I hear these words of Scripture, they give me great hope and encouragement that this life is not all there is.

Yes, I know that already because I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior God's salvation is a double gift: Forgiveness *and* eternal life. But there are times when, because I am a flawed human being, I get nervous about the hereafter and need reassurance.

The parent who raised me moved a lot when I was a child, and sometimes I didn't know we would be packing up, or where we were going next. So, it is especially meaningful to me that Jesus promises us an unshakeable, forever home. Even more wonderful, in verse 3, He says, "I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." What wondrous love is this!

Exodus 14:5-22; Psalms 146, 147; 1 John 1:1-7

Monday, April 13

Psalm 1 *Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked ... They are like trees planted by streams of water ... everything they do shall prosper.* (vv.1a, 3a,c BCP).

When we moved to a townhouse in Maryland it had a bland back yard. So, we added a terracotta-colored stamped concrete patio and planted some flowers. Also, we were told about a tree we had never heard of before—a river birch. These love to be near water and their peach-colored bark peels in beautiful ways. Because we suspected an undergrown stream ran through our back yard (it tended to be sunken and wet), we bought and planted a river birch. It grew like crazy and flourished beside our patio.

This psalm always reminds me of that beautiful tree, and I think the psalmist chose a good symbol to describe those who follow God's law, refuse to consort with the wicked, and shun evil. For such a tree to do well in soggy circumstances, it must be strong and resist potentially damaging elements—helpful spiritual advice, too.

Exodus 14:21-31; Psalms 2, 3; 1 Peter 1:1-12; John 14:8-17

Tuesday, April 14

1 Peter 1:13-25 *Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.* (v.13 NRSV)

BibleGateway.com titled this passage, “A Call to Holy Living.” As a refugee from the fundamentalism to which I was exposed as a child, I tended to downplay the role of holiness in my life. I associated it too much with rigid rules, negative judgmentalism, and a theology that had no room for grace.

However, due to a succession of circumstances in the past couple of years, I realized I needed to revisit the idea of “holy living.” The root meaning of “holy” is to be set apart, as in set apart for, or consecrated unto God. In Christianity, holiness usually refers to believers striving for a life of moral purity and separation from sin. Those criteria still make me a little “itchy,” because I find that the original meaning of “set apart for God” better informs my discipleship. It makes room for Jesus’ grace, mercy, patience, and forgiveness, so that we can “set all our hope” on that grace He will bring us when He is revealed in glory. Hallelujah! I’m pretty sure God isn’t nearly as uptight as those church people I once knew.

Exodus 15:1-21; Psalms 5, 6; John 14:18-31

Wednesday, April 15

John 15:1-11 *“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”* (v.4)

For most of my adult life, I did not eat enough fruit because it was hard to always find good produce, and most fruit required a lot of work to wash, peel, core, section—or whatever. Then, a few years ago, I resolved my love-hate relationship with fresh fruit by starting to make weekly fruit salad that combines fresh, frozen, and canned fruit. And it’s delicious!

As part of this endeavor, I discovered specialized grapes—“cotton candy” green grapes and “candy snap” red grapes. Grapes were not a favorite of mine before, but these are scrumptious. As I prepared my fruit salads, I began noticing that in the packages of grapes, if any became disconnected from the piece of vine that’s in the container, the grapes almost immediately shriveled or rotted. This brought home to me in a powerful, concrete way Jesus’ teaching about himself as the vine, and us as the branches that must bear good fruit. We truly do need to *stay* connected to Jesus, for life!

Exodus 15:22—16:10; Psalm 119:1-24; 1 Peter 2:1-10

Thursday, April 16

1 Peter 2:11-25 *For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.* (v.25)

I’ve always loved depictions of Jesus as the Good Shepherd that are seen in stained-glass windows, paintings, greeting cards, and even the tiny sculpture atop a music box that stands on the hutch over my desk. So many of these images are filled with tenderness and love as Christ cradles a lost or injured sheep, carries a lamb gently on his shoulders, or bends to feed a hungry ewe. Psalm 23 tells us the Lord is our shepherd, and Psalm 100:3 says, “we are [God’s] people, the sheep of his pasture.”

St. Peter has a wonderful way of describing our salvation as returning to our Shepherd after going astray like lost sheep. Long ago, Isaiah wrote (53:6), “All we, like sheep, have gone astray.” Going astray—sinning, or omitting to do God’s will—is the default setting of our human nature. Praise God, He has given us a Good Shepherd to rescue us and be the “guardian of our souls.”

Exodus 16:10-22; Psalm 18:1-20; John 15:12-27

Friday, April 17

Exodus 16:23-36 *Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.” ... So the people rested on the seventh day.* (vv.25-26, 30)

This story tells how God gave the Israelites manna in the desert, instructing them how much to gather daily. They learned the hard way about collecting too much or not enough. Finally, they figured out that gathering a double portion on the sixth day would last through the Sabbath—when they were not to do any work such as manna-getting (or, in 2026, grocery shopping).

Like many Christians, my husband and I used to do “junk” after church on Sunday—paid bills, mowed the lawn, did the laundry, shopped. But then God convicted us with Scriptures such as this Old Testament passage (and many others): Take the Sabbath seriously as a day of rest! God is *very* serious about sabbath-keeping. Now, after church, we eat simply, watch a movie, go for a walk, or take a nap—resting from the cares and distractions of the world as well as relaxing. If even God needed to rest on the seventh day, so do His people. In our 24/7 culture, rest is in short supply and we all need it more than ever. It’s both a physical and a spiritual obligation.

Psalms 16, 17; 1 Peter 3:13—4:6; John 16:1-15