

THE GREAT 50 DAYS OF EASTER

with Pastor Faith

*A Daily Prayer Devotional for the 50 days of Easter - the weeks
celebrating the Easter Season April 4 - May 23, 2021*



WAIT...
EASTER IS A
SEASON?

Yes. Easter is a 50 day season. Not just a one day event. Just as Lent offers 40 days of spiritual preparation, the 50 days of Easter are for spiritual formation. This daily devotion spends time deepening this understanding of faith that "Christ is Risen!"

EVERY SUNDAY
IS A
"LITTLE EASTER"

For our ancestors in the faith, every Sunday was a celebration of the Good News that "Christ is Risen". Every Sunday was a mini-Easter, in a way.

The 50 days after Easter took on an intentional focus where they would follow the stories of how the disciples encountered the Risen Lord, and the lessons learned. This study will retrace these lessons also, in order to help us wrap our hearts and minds around the profound truth that death doesn't get the final word. That life and love always triumphs over death and hate. As we follow these 50 days together, may the message of Easter speak anew to you!



*Join Pastor in 50 days
of spiritual awareness
of the power of the
resurrection in our
daily life.*

READINGS FOR WEEK 1

Monday, April 5, 2021

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."– John 11:25-26

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him." -Romans 6:8-9

Wednesday, April 7, 2021

The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. - Romans 6:10

Thursday, April 8, 2021

"Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." -Romans 6:4

Friday, April 9, 2021

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. - Romans 6:5-7

Saturday, April 10, 2021

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." John 20:19

Sunday, April 11, 2021

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Pastor Faith's Reflections for Week 1

THE GREAT 50 DAYS OF EASTER

Thought for this week: Like the disciples after the events on that Easter morning, we too are not sure how to wrap our minds around resurrection. We may still be so disturbed by the events of the crucifixion that we can't let go. In these first days of the Easter season, take note of the ways you think about losses, failures and heartache.

As you think of these things, pause and ask Christ to show you the new life "on the other side."

Monday: On Easter morning, the crucified body of Jesus is not found in that empty tomb as expected. His physical body, once battered and lifeless, is now alive, unsuffering and eternal. What occurred was a resurrection, which is different from a resuscitation. We hear of many occasions when a person is resuscitated, after an accident perhaps or a heart attack, and the body is brought back to life. First responders bring their body back to life and we rejoice.. but we know that person has not become immune from death forever. One day, they will eventually take a final earthly breath. Not so with a resurrection. A resurrected body is one that will never die. When Jesus says, "believe in me and you will share in my resurrection" (my paraphrase) he is saying that the life we live now can tether us to eternity by simply placing our trust in believing he crossed the barrier of mortality and entered into immortality.

Tuesday: Although comforting, the message of Easter is not just that Jesus died and showed us that death is conquered. We are not just to be comforted by knowing there is a heaven, or immortal life, beyond this physical life. We are to actually "die" now in order to live fully alive today. We can die to self and gain the peace that comes from losing pride, arrogance or bitterness.

Wednesday: When we try to make changes in our lives, like deciding we want to be more peaceful, gentler or forgiving, we often get discouraged because it is impossible to rid yourself of the crap that triggers the worst aspects of yourself. This is because sin holds us in a place of repeating the same unwanted behaviors over and over again. Here is where Easter sets us free: when Jesus broke the power of death, he also set loose a life force for mortals that breaks the power of sin for us today. The life he is living now as the resurrected Christ is not distant, it is right here for you to intercede and break the power of sin in your heart today.

Thursday: From the earliest of Christian teaching, the message of Easter was more than a religious doctrine people ascribed to. It was a living reality for how people would face every hardship and obstacle of daily life. What they saw on the Cross is how Love entered the darkest places of the human condition, the darkest night of the human soul, and reversed the ending.. created a beginning. Brought light, hope and love to darkness, dismay and even hate. Be not dismayed and walk in newness of life. Walk with a lightness in your step because the life and love of Jesus Christ is not limited to space and time.

Friday: Christian spirituality invites us to consider the incredible change that takes place within us when we accept the miracle of life over death: it is a death and rebirth within our very soul. Other branches of spirituality may require the person to rid themselves of bad habits, attitudes through personal disciplines of meditation, prayer or fasting. But Christian spirituality is different. We do not will ourselves to be better people. Instead, we unite our heart and soul with the One who dies and rises - meaning our spiritual practices of prayer or meditation are to tether us to Christ. We do not accomplish the act of freeing ourselves from sin, instead we hold on to Him as he changes us from an Old Self who knew nothing of the conquering love of Christ.. to the new self who is free to love and be loved. This is lifelong journey.

Saturday: The disciples fearfully lock themselves in a room after women say the tomb is empty. Why? Because with his body missing, they certainly would be questioned, accused and put to death themselves. Jesus enters the place of their hiding and says, "Peace be with you." What a powerful image for how Peace can reach us no matter how afraid we are. You may lock your heart away from feeling love out of fear of being hurt. You may be certain no one will find you. But the Risen Lord can and will. When he enters, he will not judge you or shame you. He offers peace. The peace that passes all our greatest barriers.

READINGS FOR WEEK 2

Monday, April 12, 2021

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.– Romans 8:5

Tuesday, April 13, 2021

Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice.
Phillipians 4:8

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Romans 12:2

Thursday, April 15, 2021

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.
Romans 12: 12-13

Friday, April 16, 2021

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. - Romans 12:14

Saturday and Sunday, April 18, 2021

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."
Luke 24:36-29

THE GREAT 50 DAYS OF EASTER

Thought for this week: Like the disciples who meet the Risen Lord, we too may be surprised to discover that life is not always what it seems. In this next week of the Easter season, we take note of our need for a change of mind. To believe in the Risen Lord means to believe that no matter the circumstances we see on earth right now, Love wins. Forgiveness wins. Grace wins. Peace Rules. With this as our new governing truth, how will we live differently?

Monday: Last week, I asked you to take note of what you think about during the course of the day. Did you notice that you think about certain people or situations more than others? Perhaps you noticed that you ruminate on the past, an unforgiven relationship or something you never speak about aloud. In Paul's writings, he often asks believers to be mindful of their thoughts. If our minds are set on negativity, our hearts can not be carrying joy or peace. To set your mind on what the Spirit desires, is to set your mind on that which is good, beautiful, pleasing, loving. It is not easy - but it is a key component to a growing faith.

Tuesday: Think on these things. The scripture is clear that to set a course of life in Christ, is to set our mind on the goodness of life now. The author of this scripture did not write from a place of comfort. He wrote from a prison cell, a place of daily suffering. He knew the importance of keeping his mind set on Life and Love. In the last year, many church members have described how they discovered the importance of tending to good thoughts in the face of daily stress. At the start of the pandemic, they would seek out every bit of information on the news of Covid-19 cases.. until months had passed and they slowly realized that it was not balanced out with thoughts of hope. One church member shared that it became clear that in dwelling on the thoughts of the pandemic, her mind and soul was heavy in worry and anxiety. It is not that we are to just "think positive." Rather, we are to name what is negative and then cling to the positive message of resurrection. We hold to the truth of the Easter Dawn even if we are stuck in the darkness of Good Friday.

Wednesday: There is a pattern of the world, Paul writes in the letter to the Romans, and it is a dead-end pattern of living for the moment, satisfying today's desires, and putting self first. He says we don't have to be conformed by the culture that teaches us to grab for more, to fear losing. We can instead be filled with a mind that knows all things are held in the completeness of a loving God. We can experience the mystery of the resurrection in our mind - a renewing of your mind that will result in us living quite differently! To be renewed in our mind, is to be transformed by a daily relationship with God where we dwell in gratitude, goodness and love. As we do, we become aware of the next steps we must take each day and follow in God's will.

Thursday: God's will is always for further expansion of the love of the cross. Love for others who feel they don't deserve it. Love for people who have been "outside" or disenfranchised. When we begin to accept that Christ's death on the cross released forgiveness for all of humanity, we become a channel for sharing it with others.

Friday: When our minds are renewed, we begin to let go of enemies. We can say a kind word to those who don't agree with us or see things as we do. We realize that everyone of us has a limited perspective - the only view of humanity is from the cross and the One who saw the world from the cross chose to extend love and forgiveness, not condemnation. Here is a simple action for today - Everyone of us can widen our heart to someone who stands in disagreement with us. In a time of prayer, use your imagination to offer "an enemy" a blessing of love.

Saturday: Doubts arose in the hearts of the disciples when they saw the Risen Lord. As much as we can strive to be people with a strong faith, remember that to have doubt is not disobedience or failure. It is human. Likewise, some will ask me if their doubt or fear is a sign of not believing enough. Jesus knows our every weakness, our every doubt, and he still comes to us with loving open arms.

READINGS FOR WEEK 3

Monday, April 19, 2021

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away--and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

- John 10:11-14

Tuesday, April 20, 2021

The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.

Psalm 23: 1-3

Wednesday, April 21, 2021

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me;

Thursday, April 22, 2021

your rod and your staff-- they comfort me. - Psalm 23:4

Friday, April 23, 2021

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us--
and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

1 John 3:16-18

Saturday and Sunday, April 24 and 25, 2021

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away--and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

- John 10:11-14

Pastor Faith's
Reflections for Week 3

THE GREAT 50 DAYS OF EASTER

Thought for this week: The disciples taught Jesus teachings to new believers sharing his message while at the same time deepening in their their own understanding of the profound truth he had given them. This week, we consider how Jesus called himself A Good Shepherd. This was not just a statement of identity - it was a declaration of the kind of relationship he has with us. This week, I invite you to consider Jesus as an ever-present, guiding, protector of your life.

Monday: The earliest art of the Christian church, dating back to the 2nd century, is found in caves where worshippers secretly gathered. The wall of these hidden catacombs, depict paintings of the earliest images of Jesus. Time and again, Jesus is painted as a shepherd, often holding a lamb on his shoulders. Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd and it likely meant much more to the early Christians than it does to us today. They knew the weakness of a sheep and the need for a protective shepherd. Our relationship to Jesus is one of complete dependance - we are like sheep too vulnerable to protect ourselves or know where to find nourishment. The Good Shepherd leads us to still waters and is willing to lay down his life for us. Do you think of Jesus in this way? Many of us like to think we are self-sufficient and only need to "check in" with God when we have questions or need a bit of encouragement.

Tuesday: When we come to see ourselves as no longer "self-made", but regard ourselves as fully reliant on this loving Jesus who guides each moment of the day and night..something within us is quieted. Even in the smallest things that we face each day: we can trust that we will have the answers to questions that loom on the horizons of our day. Why? Because our Sheperd will take us to the answers, lead us to the still waters. Living with this kind of certainty that you are provided at every level removes the anxiety of life.

Wednesday: For many, the pandemic has been a fearful walk through a dark valley. We strive to protect ourselves and others, only to sometimes discover that we are unable: persons get ill, the death toll rises. Psalm 23 describes how when we "walk through the valley of the shadow of death," we do not have to be afraid. We are comforted not because we gain more knowledge of the darkness, but because we know that we have God with us. Fear can take over any of us, when you navigate life's valleys. When it does, remember you are not expected to know your way through, you are only expected to trust in the Shepherd to guide you. The presence of Jesus the Good Shepard is with you. He is alive and is with you now. He can help you face each day no matter what it brings.

Thursday: I used to assume that the rod and staff were the same object in the hands of The Good Shepherd. But they are not. The staff (picture a crook) is used for directing the flock and helping the flock. The rod is a smaller club-like object that would be used to defend from an enemy. To know that Jesus can both guide and guard us is of great comfort. Ultimately, we are not the navigators of our journey. In prayer, we ask for his guidance. We also don't have to fight off every foe, or even worry about if we will see them coming. Jesus has the tools to help us as a guide and a protector of our life.

Friday: There are some heroic occupations that call persons to lay their life down for complete strangers. Firefighters, police officers, emergency responders enter into the places of danger, risking their lives. Consider the persons who lay down a life for stranger.

Saturday: Putting love in action was the hallmark of the people who called themselves Methodists. The movement of Methodism was fueled by an understanding that to love as Christ loves, is to create communities of love such as hospitals, schools, orphanages and ministries to the poor. John Wesley set forth a personal template for Christian living that asked persons to give of their time to acts of charity, social justice and compassion.