



**LIBERATING**  
**FAITH STUDIES**

***JESUS CALLS US***

# **LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**Vol. 60  
Spring Quarter 2023**

**MARCH, APRIL, MAY**

**No. 2  
Price \$4.00**

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**Ages 18-Up**

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**LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY – USPS 006 – 820**

Volume 60, No. 2, March, April, May 2023. An official quarterly of the African Methodist Episcopal Church prepared by the AMEC Sunday School Union. Published quarterly by the AMEC Sunday School Union, 900 13th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37212. Periodicals Postage paid at Nashville, Tennessee. Copyright © 2023 by AMEC Sunday School Union.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Liberating Faith Studies Sunday School Quarterly, 900 13th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37212.

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**Entered as Periodicals Postage Paid Matter, March 20, 1942, at the Post Office at Nashville, Tennessee, under the Act of March 3, 1879.**



# The Order of Service

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary  
as a signal for silence
  - II. Singing
  - III. The Apostles' Creed
  - IV. Prayer, closing with the  
Lord's Prayer in concert
  - V. Singing
  - VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
  - VII. Responsive reading  
of the lesson text by school
  - VIII. The Decalogue
- 

## The Lesson

- I. Organ interlude while  
the classes are being arranged
  - II. Class study of the lesson
  - III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
  - IV. Closing bell — silence
- 

## The Closing

- I. Singing
- II. Review and application  
of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

### Editorial Staff

Publisher • Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin

Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

### The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.



### The Church School Creed

I believe my A.M.E. Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

A.M.E. Discipline

Hello, AME Church School Member!

The Home Daily Bible Readings will continue to appear at the end of each Sunday's lesson but they will be the readings for the following week. We made this change in response to your requests. The readings for the first week are on the following page.

For over a year we have used Zoom and Facebook to facilitate our weekly Connectional Church School with teachers (lay and clergy) from around the AME Connection. They generously share their knowledge, talents, and expertise with a weekly average of 500 participants viewing via Zoom and 1500 on Facebook.

This virtual AME Connectional Church School was birthed due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The blessings from the teachings have been immeasurable. We will continue this Connectional Church School on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. EST. Join us! Zoom Meeting ID: 829 9325 1894. Visit our website- [www.iamame.org](http://www.iamame.org)- to find worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

Like our Facebook page so you will be informed about programming and important announcements from the Publishing House and *The Christian Recorder*: [www.facebook.com/amecpublishing](http://www.facebook.com/amecpublishing).

Join our Facebook Group to continue conversations after Church School and share ideas, thoughts, and best practices with other AME Church School members and teachers: [www.facebook.com/groups/amechurchschool](http://www.facebook.com/groups/amechurchschool).

Thank you for purchasing *Liberating Faith Studies*. We are working every day to fulfill our mission to provide high quality resources to empower us to spread Jesus Christ's liberating gospel, pursue justice, and enhance the social development of all people.

And, always remember, I am praying for you.

Roderick D. Belin  
President/Publisher

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**February 27–March 5**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Psalm 28 (Lord, Hear My Prayer)                       |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Matthew 11:25-30 (Come to Me, You Weary)              |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Matthew 14:13-21 (Jesus Shows Compassion)             |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Psalm 71:1-12 (I Take Refuge in the Lord)             |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Psalm 71:13-24 (I Will Proclaim God's Wondrous Deeds) |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Luke 15:1-10 (God Rejoices When Sinners Repent)       |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Luke 15:11-24 (A Rebellious Son Restored)             |

## The Prodigal Son

Lesson Scripture: Luke 15:11-32

Focus Scripture: Luke 15:11-24

*Key Verse: "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" Luke 15:21(NRSV)*

### LUKE 15:11-24 (NRSV)

11 Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons.

12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them.

13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.

16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!

18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;

19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."

20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

21 Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

### LUKE 15:11-24 (KJV)

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;

24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate."

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

## KEY TERMS

- **Parable** – The Greek meaning is to place alongside. In the Old Testament it was considered non-proverbial wisdom; a story, with allegorical methods, used to convey moral and religious principles.

- **Prodigal** – Wastefully extravagant; a person who is lavish of his or her money and possessions; modern interpretations have altered the definition to mean one who wanders away and then returns.

## INTRODUCTION

The story of the prodigal son is well known. However, does the title completely characterize the depth of this parable? What is truly at the heart of this tale? Does this parable simply reflect

This story is about the father who has a deep enduring love for his son. It is the tale of someone who looks past the hurt and pain inflicted by a loved one, and the parental enduring love that is willing to forgive. In fact, this is a love story.

the reckless lifestyle of an unappreciative and immature young man, who leaves the blessings of his family and loving father, to squander and waste his inheritance? Is the lesson about the need for good stewardship, humility, and repentance? Is this narrative imploring readers who

have benefitted from their privilege, to recognize the strong forgiving hand of God in their lives? It warns the reader to resist temptations that lead to ingratitude. This story presents these themes and more. It is about the father who has a deep enduring love for his son. It is the tale of someone who looks past the hurt and pain inflicted by a loved one, and the parental enduring love that is willing to forgive. In fact, this is a love story. It is about a wayward child who receives unimaginable love and forgiveness. Yet it is also about the



people surrounding the lost son and his father. It is a lesson about learning from another's mistakes and remaining humble, ensuring that the onlooker would not commit the same atrocity. This story provides a lesson for anyone. From the wealthy father to the servants, to each of the sons, the foolish behavior of one son becomes the lesson of love for an entire community.

The story of the prodigal son offers all these lessons to the reader. It embraces the complex challenges that face communities, who experience dramatic tensions and rifts in families that often are witnessed by others. Jesus teaches this wise proverbial parable to not only his disciples, but to any of God's children. As he narrates the love of this father for both sons, he illustrates God's desire that all his children can be reconciled to the family of God.

This famous and thought-provoking story enables anyone to consider his or her potential fall from grace as well as reexamine forgiveness as the means to restore broken relationships.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke begins with Jesus teaching a collection of parables to observers, who are described as tax

collectors and sinners. The text notes that the Pharisees and scribes are also present, and critically object to Jesus' interaction with these people. As a result, Jesus uses this as an opportunity to teach about God's redemptive love, and his intention to save lost souls. The first two parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep establish the common theme of losing something that is valuable. They confront his critics to self-assess whether they would also seek what they had lost.

Therefore, the third parable of the two sons illustrates that the same situation is often found in human relationships. From the beginning, the father is portrayed as loving and sensitive to the younger son's impatient desire for more out of life. The backdrop of an older and more committed son is given credence as an example of those who have not fallen to the temptations of the world. The younger

son's life begins to unravel due to the hardships of a famine, which illustrates the realities of life. Unwise decisions can quickly turn one's fortune to despair. The use of the phrase "came to himself" is the recognition that humans often will realize that the grass is not greener on the other side. The son's acknowledgement of his mistake leads to his return to the father, to do any job, without complaint. This



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is a symbol of a sinner's remorse and repentance. The scripture suggests that the father saw the boy at distance, an indication that he was hopeful that one day his child would return. Therefore, the father receives his child with open arms. The reconciliation of the lost son is now compared to the shepherd who seeks to find his lost sheep, or the woman who searches anxiously for her valuable coin. Although there are still treasures with the woman and the shepherd, there will always be a desire to find what was lost and return it home.

### SANKOFA

*"There is always something left to love. And if you ain't learned that, you ain't learned nothing." – Lorraine Hansberry from A Raisin in the Sun*

*A Raisin in the Sun* is a classic fictional story of an African American family living in the south side of Chicago in the early 1960s. This classic drama tells the troubling conditions of the community through the eyes of each member of the Younger family, who each seek hope and happiness through a more prosperous life. The struggles of this family were common. The matriarch's recent loss of her husband opens an opportunity for some financial relief through an anticipated insurance check. Like many

black people, this family is searching for the American dream, whether it is a home, a business venture, or becoming a doctor. Tensions rise, however, as the older son continues to pressure his mother for a piece of his late father's insurance payout, to invest into a liquor store. His obsession to improve his life clouds his judgment and ignores the impact that his high-risk endeavor has on himself and the other family members. Meanwhile, his sister, Beneatha, watches the actions of her brother. Although she claims to be more responsible, she reveals her own immature weaknesses, resentment, and pride.

The same problems arise in the story of the prodigal son. The younger son becomes restless with his current state of life. Although he has far more privileges than others, his desire is to take ownership of his inheritance and make his own decisions. He

He seeks the immediate gratification that is found in a world of sin. His irresponsible behavior leads to him exhausting his inheritance and living in the wallows of a pig pen.

seeks the immediate gratification that is found in a world of sin. His irresponsible behavior leads to him exhausting his inheritance and living in the wallows of a pig pen. The son, Walter Lee, in *Raisin* has a brief moment of happiness, believing that the funds he has taken from his father's insurance would surely lead to a prosperous life. When he realizes the funds were stolen from him, he

wallows in an emotional state of self-pity and shame. His guilt overwhelms him, and he lowers himself to accept that he is not good enough to live in a white man's neighborhood. He prepares himself to accept a payoff, if necessary, to correct the wrongs of his sin. But every action that Ruth, aka "Mamma" Younger, took, was a sign of her love for her family. The story concludes with the mamma revealing the necessity of love, even towards those who have betrayed those closest to them. Despite all the wrongs that Walter Lee Younger had done, his mother recognized his pain, forgave him, and led her family to claim their new home.

The scripture lesson of the prodigal son reminds us of the Christian responsibility to love and forgive. It is those whose greatest pain is self-inflicted that need the greatest love from others. Through God's love, we are redeemed from the hurt and shame, and find a way to become whole again.

### CASE STUDY

The story of the prodigal son may be more common than we think. The definition of prodigal leads us to two different interpretations. The first definition is of a wanderer, or someone who has gone astray. This concept can be seen

in the modern-day church. According to recent research released by the Pew Research Center, there has been a steady decline in the number of persons in the United States who believe in God, as well as a decline in those who affiliate with organized religion. The recent report states that three-in-ten U.S. adults are affiliated with a religious institution. In addition, the number of adults who self-identify as Christians has declined from 75% of the population recorded ten years

ago, to 63% in 2021. Not only have people become discontent in their faith, but there is also a trend upward in reckless lifestyles. Many believe this is contributing to an increase in gun violence and opioid use and addictions. A new report by the Council on Criminal Justice tracks that in 2021, the homicide rate rose by 5 percent. This was an increase, but by a much smaller margin than in 2020,

when homicides rose by 29 percent. Yet, unlike the scripture reading, people are not quickly recognizing the benefits of returning to their religious roots. In fact, this may be part of the problem. Many people do not have those roots.

The causes for religious disaffiliation are often blamed on the assumption that there is a growing population of a younger



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generation that aspires to a different set of values. However, according to research, this is not entirely accurate. According to the Survey Center for American Life, there is new evidence that the traditional belief of generationally driven dissatisfaction with authority and traditional views as the cause for the decline in church affiliation does not reflect the complete story. Instead, studies indicate that young adults today have had entirely different religious and social experiences than previous generations. Many parents of Millennials and Generation Z did less to encourage regular participation in formal worship services. Parents and guardians did less to model religious behaviors for their children than previous generations had done. Consequently, childhood religious activities that were once common, such as saying grace, have become more of the exception than the norm. Children are given more options for activities on what was once considered the sacred Sabbath day.

If this is true, prodigal sons and daughters were not really rooted in the church to begin with. Instead, their experiences may have been intermittent, seasonal, or simply for special occasions. Unless they have experienced the blessings and love that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit offer in fellowship with a church community, younger souls may not realize what they have missed. The case for reconciliation, however, is not lost. Instead of reflecting simply on the scripture that speaks of the son's return, the modern version focuses on the parent's vigilant search. As the text

points out, the father saw his son from a distance. No matter how far the children wander off, the parents must be willing to seek them out, and welcome them home.

### **LIFE APPLICATION**

Parents face many challenges raising children in the complex world in which we live. Young people are exposed to greater risks and compromising situations today. The modern world offers easy access to social media platforms, which enable young people to witness inappropriate content. Exposing children to sound moral principles is available through strong Christian communities that promote Bible studies, church schools, and spiritually empowering activities. These are crucial options for rising generations. In addition, adults may also be lured into promiscuous behavior that can impact homes and families. The church must remain relevant to address these issues, with sound teaching and a place for healing and reconciliation. The Christian community should always remain a place of refuge for those who seek to return to a loving and supportive environment. Furthermore, the church must demonstrate the same compassion and forgiveness that is seen by the father of the prodigal son. After Peter denied knowing Jesus on the night he was betrayed, Jesus still stretched his arms wide to die on the cross for Peter and all of humanity. Those arms are stretched wide to receive every lost soul, including yours.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What are some methods the church can use to welcome back members who have not attended church in a while?
2. Who do you know of, personally or indirectly, that reminds you of a prodigal son or daughter? Imagine the feeling of witnessing that person being welcomed back into the home or church. Pray for them and their families.

**CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymn #378 – “Lead Me, Guide Me”

**Closing Prayer:** *A Community Prayer for Reconciliation Closing* written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke:

Dear Lord, we would have fainted, unless we had believed that we would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Our souls cry out in deep

contrition, recognizing the wrongs each of us has done. And so, we look to you, Lord, for our refuge. Yet, we realize that there are many others who may find themselves lost, needing to hear your voice of comfort and forgiveness. We join the Psalmist who declares, “*Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart*” (27:14). This fellowship of believers will wait patiently in prayer for the Lord to bring back our children! We wait for every child who has lost their way in this world. We wait for the return of those who have forgotten they are your children. We wait, and trust that you will keep those who foolishly waste their time and talents on riotous living. As the world rejects those who have lost everything, we wait for their return to the one who gives all things. We wait, Lord, for your sons and daughters to return, for our hearts to be reconciled, for our families to be made whole. We wait in positive expectancy for the celebration of every soul that is saved and delivered. Hallelujah and amen!

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**March 6-March 12**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Matthew 15:21-28 (Jesus Heals a Gentile Girl)            |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Matthew 19:13-22 (Let the Little Children Come)          |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Proverbs 1:7-16 (Learn Wisdom, My Child)                 |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Deuteronomy 4:7-14 (Teach Your Children God’s Laws)      |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Jeremiah 1:1-10 (Consecrated from the Womb)              |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Matthew 21:12-17 (The Praises of Children)               |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Matthew 18:1-9; Mark 10:15 (The Greatest in the Kingdom) |



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## A CHILD IS GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM

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Lesson Scripture: Matthew 18:1-9; Mark 10:15

Focus Scripture: Matthew 18:1-9

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*Key Verse: "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."  
Matthew 18:4 (NRSV)*

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### MATTHEW 18:1-9 (NRSV)

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

2 He called a child, whom he put among them,

3 and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

6 If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!

8 If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire.

9 And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell of fire."

### MATTHEW 18:1-9 (KJV)

1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."

## KEY TERMS

- **Millstones** – Stones used in ancient times to grind grain, olives, or seeds. consisted of two stones: one stationary at the base and the second one moved for grinding at the top. The idea of placing the apparatus around one's neck conveys the excessive weight and burden one would carry.
- **Maim** – To mutilate, cripple, or disable; a person in the Bible who experienced this at birth would remain disfigured and be defenseless throughout their life.

## INTRODUCTION

It is counterintuitive in our society for a humble person who avoids attention and resists being credited for his or her accomplishments, to be classified as one who is great. Greatness is associated with one who is popular, strong, out in front. People associated with greatness are considered older, and therefore wiser and stronger. They are the ones who hold a high status with honors and an extensive list of achievements. Some historical figures have had the term “great” even associated with their names. We know of a few like the Great Gatsby, Alexander the Great, Ramesses

As Jesus takes a child onto his lap, he uses the opportunity to show that greatness is not about power and wealth, but instead it is about love and compassion.

II “The Great” of Egypt, Cyrus “The Great” of Persia, and Charlemagne, also known as “Charles the Great.” Being considered better than others may appear to be friendly competition, but it can also lead to the dangerous sin of pride. It is in the quarrels and conflict of pride that resentment and envy arise. Hearts become hardened and minds turn to revenge. Therefore, Jesus warned the disciples to avoid being considered greater than their peers. Jesus teaches them of a new understanding of greatness. As Jesus’ ministry continues to grow, the disciples believe that they are preparing for the reinstatement of the Israelite nation. They begin to position themselves in a place of status next to their teacher. Jesus informs them that no one can be considered great unless they are able to see the world through the eyes of children.

They must be willing to show the love and caring for every child, and thus recognize the love that God has for the children of Israel. As Jesus takes a child onto his lap, he uses the opportunity to show that greatness is not about power and wealth, but instead it is about love and compassion. Only this type of response, would make anyone great. On the other hand, those who do

harm to God's children, will face dire consequences from the Father. The instruction to love others is intentionally followed by a warning. Those who agree to follow the Lord but fail to see love at the core, will suffer in the end. Those who hear this message would certainly be compelled to heed these words.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The gospel writer presents this lesson with Jesus responding to a question: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? The question may have been posed to clarify the true understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, Jesus does not stumble into a narration of his own power or greatness, instead he brings a child to him as a means to teach on the character of humility. Matthew ensures that of primary

importance is that a person is converted, changed, transformed into a believer of this new gospel. This conversion process leads a believer to take on a new perception, one in which common social contexts are no longer valid. Instead of power and position determining a person's greatness, their status is elevated based on their willingness to be humbled. Jesus declares a new type of believer, one who

Jesus declares a new type of believer, one who is like a child. A childlike posture is one that suggests innocence which appropriately compliments a humble spirit.

is like a child. A childlike posture is one that suggests innocence which appropriately compliments a humble spirit. Children are teachable, willing to learn, and follow their guardian. This analogy effectively illustrates the responsibilities of every disciple who commits to follow Jesus. Those who accept the calling are required to receive instructions that will mold them into a strong teacher themselves.

However, Jesus warns them of the potential consequences that pride and arrogance would cause. He uses the concept of a millstone, a two-part block of stone used to grind grain. Such an apparatus around one's neck would not only drown the individual but cause them to break their neck with every effort to be set free. For those who state they would never harm a child, but entertain harmful thoughts,

is equally called to be accountable. Jesus illustrates that even thoughts of misdeeds, which are signs of weakness and temptation, are not allowed. If there is any area of one's body that causes them to be weak, it is best to be without it all together. This stern teaching is obviously intended to give the disciples and others present the understanding of the sacrifices that must be made as

a follower. The eternal blessing of being a citizen of heaven is intended for those who embrace a humble life, committed to serve others, and are unwavering in one's faith and determination to be true to the Lord.

## SANKOFA

The Black and Missing Foundation, Inc. (BAMFI) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to bring awareness to missing persons of color. Society has historically failed to give the same attention to minorities who are reported missing that is traditionally applied to Caucasians. Cases of missing black people remain unresolved four times longer than those of white people. Due to the slow response that often results from the report of a missing person who is black, Hispanic, or Native American, the BAMFI provides a platform to provide a broader exposure of the missing person to the public. The BAMFI provides vital resources and tools to missing person's families and friends. The Foundation also educates the minority community on personal safety. *Black and Missing* is a four-part HBO documentary series by Geeta Gandbhir, a recipient of multiple Emmy awards, in partnership with award-winning documentarian, journalist, author, and activist Soledad

This issue of black missing persons is one in which all people of color can collectively bring to the forefront of today's issues which require social change.

O'Brien. The HBO series looks through the lenses of sisters-in-law and Black and Missing Foundation founders, Derrica and Natalie Wilson. These sisters in the spirit reveal their determination to bring to light cases of black missing persons that have gone unnoticed due to the marginalization by law enforcement and disinterest by national media. *Black and Missing* exposes systemic practices, behaviors, and attitudes that are a direct result of centuries of deeply rooted racism and misinformation regarding minority

populations. The series also exposes the stark personal pain felt by the families left behind. This issue of black missing persons is one in which all people of color can collectively bring to the forefront of today's issues which require social change.

## CASE STUDY

*Taken from Me: The Tiffany Rubin Story* is

a true story regarding a mother whose 7-year-old son was abducted by his father from his home in Queens, NY, and taken to South Korea to live. Rubin told the story of the long ordeal to return her child home. Although she made attempts to get her son back through U.S. authorities, it was to no avail. Her hope was renewed when she received an online anonymous tip on her Myspace page. The tip told her the location of her son, Kobe, in Korea.



Rubin sought the aid of the American Association for Lost Children founder, Mark Miller, but she was so emotionally battered by her previous efforts to find Kobe, she didn't accept his assistance. During a TV interview on *Good Morning, America*, Rubin stated "I really felt hopeless for a long time almost to the point where I didn't accept Mark's help because I was afraid. I had been so disappointed and then God spoke to my heart and said, 'Let him help you.'"

Miller and Rubin designed a plan, which took months to craft. They decided to travel after an extended school break to ensure Kobe would be at school when they went to retrieve him.

On March 23, Rubin took a 15-hour flight to South Korea and met with the tipster. That person, whose name remains anonymous, told her how she would be able to enter the school unnoticed. Rubin discreetly got her son's attention and quietly escorted him away from the school. Through the assistance of others, they were able to bring Kobe home to the U.S. Their incredible story was later made into a film by Lifeline and can be watched on YouTube.

## LIFE APPLICATION

As we watch the troubling incidents of child abductions, we cannot help but relate to the pain and suffering of the parents who struggle to recover their children. Parents and others who hold strong bonds to these children are gripped with fear that their child might be harmed. Therefore, when Jesus uses children as the standard for discipleship, we are also reminded of every adult's responsibility to this vulnerable population. Whether

a parent or not, the thought of children being harmed is unsettling and can bring the strongest person to their knees. Having a heart for children encourages us to love those who need us the most. It also reminds us that we are all God's children. God calls all of us to have that spirit of humility in our daily walk with him. Jesus walked through the region, he felt the sorrow and pain

of the people. Jesus was both human and divine, so he humbled himself to be with the least and the lost. Jesus modeled the humility that all disciples should have. Life as a believer in Jesus the Christ means that we take on the same humble posture as our redeemer. Our goal is to protect and defend those who cannot protect themselves. Jesus teaches us that our reward is to find greatness in humility, thereby finding our reward in heaven.

Through the assistance of others, they were able to bring Kobe home to the U.S. Their incredible story was later made into a film by Life and can be watched on YouTube.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What examples have you seen of true humility by believers in Jesus Christ?
2. How can the church be intentional about watching over those who cannot care for themselves?

**CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymn #54 – “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

**Closing Prayer:** Dear God, Lord of heaven, protector and sustainer of all creation, we come with humble hearts, confessing our shortcomings, and praying

for your forgiveness. We look to our savior, Jesus the Christ, to continuously teach us how to live and how to love. Let our hearts be open to care for the sick and the downtrodden. Give us the patience to see each person’s value and advocate for their rights to live. Let our eyes see through the eyes of Jesus, to recognize each of us as unique children of God and collective citizens of your kingdom. And may our hearts and minds be content in knowing that you love each of us as your children and gave your life so that we can live. Thank you, Lord, for your steadfast love for us. In the unmatched name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**March 13-March 19**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Monday</b>    | John 7:37-43 (Rivers of Living Water)                  |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | 2 Kings 17:24-34 (Worship God Alone)                   |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Ezra 4:1-8, 11b-16 (Handling Opposition to God’s Plan) |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Isaiah 44:1-8 (Water on a Thirsty Land)                |
| <b>Friday</b>    | John 4:1-15 (Jesus Offers Living Water)                |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | John 4:16-26 (Worship in Spirit and Truth)             |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | John 4:27-29, 31-42 (Jesus the Savior of the World)    |

## JESUS TALKS WITH A SAMARITAN WOMAN

Lesson Scripture: John 4:1-42

Focus Scripture: John 4:7-15, 28-30, 39-41

*Key Verse: Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." John 4:39 (NRSV)*

JOHN 4:7-15, 28-30, 39-41 (NRSV)

### John 4:7-15

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,

14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

### 28-30

28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,

29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

30 They left the city and were on their way to him.

JOHN 4:7-15, 28-30, 39-41 (KJV)

### John 4:7-15

7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

11 The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?

12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?

13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

15 The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.

### 28-30

28 The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men,

29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?

30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

**39-41**

39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."

40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.

41 And many more believed because of his word.

**39-41**

39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.

40 So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days.

41 And many more believed because of his own word;

**KEY TERMS**

- **Messiah** – In Judaism, the expected king of the Davidic line who would deliver Israel from foreign bondage and restore the glories of its golden age. The term, Christ, became more commonly used as the understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, and it incorporates an eschatological understanding of eternal life, rather than a political desire for an earthly kingdom.
- **Samaritan** – An ethnic group of people that remained in Israel following the Assyrian conquest in 721 B.C. Their doctrine for Judaism differed from the Jews who returned from exile in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. This along with intermarrying with non-Jews, led to a bitter rift between Samaritans and Jews.

**INTRODUCTION**

There is nothing more intriguing in the chronicles of Jesus' ministry than the encounter he had with the Samaritan woman. Throughout the gospels, Jesus sees the suffering of people and heals many along the way. In some cases, Jesus is met by an interceding family member, who asks him to come and heal their sick child or servant. Those who were

blessed to hear Jesus' teaching usually experienced it among a crowd of others. This would occur along with witnessing the healing of those with diverse diseases, and other physical and mental infirmities. In some cases, they would see great signs and wonders of the dead being raised. But John's gospel account of Jesus passing through Samaria is different. Physically fatigued from his own travels, Jesus stops at Jacob's well. At that very moment, a woman comes to draw water. She is able bodied. She is neither blind nor deaf, and quite capable of drawing water from the deep well as well as carry it back to her home. This was not a person in a crowd, nor a person seeking out the Lord. In addition, it does not appear to be a chance meeting. Jesus appears to know that this woman would arrive, and so he requests water from her. This petition to the woman led to a much deeper conversation surrounding the differences between one's physical and spiritual health. Jesus tells the woman about her entire life, her past marriages, and her current relationship. He identifies the flaws that most people have in seeking physical satisfaction, while still being spiritually deprived. By stating that the water she drew from Jacob's well would only temporarily satisfy her, he revealed the yearning that the woman had for so



much more. Despite physical water's life-giving quality which is needed by every living creature, it would never be enough. Physical thirst would return. The physical needs of the body will continue to seek further nutrients, but there is a way to be replenished spiritually. The living water of God's Spirit through Jesus the Christ gives eternal life. This woman recognized that Jesus may be the Messiah. Her conviction was not in physical healing, but the healing he performed in her soul. She runs to tell others, as her hope is renewed, and her spiritual thirst is quenched.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

According to historical records, the path Jesus took to Samaria was a common one. Yet the author intended for the reader to understand that there was a divine compulsion that led Jesus to Jacob's well that day. His path led him through the village of Sychar (modern Askar), close to land purchased by Jacob and believed later given by him to Joseph. Most believe that Jesus intentionally selected this unnamed Samaritan woman to be a messenger of a new life-giving water. Despite the historical prejudice that Jews

had towards Samaritans, Jesus speaks to her and requests water. Jews in the first century thought it inappropriate for a rabbi to talk to a woman (v. 27). Furthermore, there was a history of tension between Jews and Samaritans. Jews were always uncertain that Samaritans had properly observed the purity laws. Therefore, Jews would not use vessels in common with Samaritans.

Jesus changes the subject (v.16) to reveal his knowledge about the woman's marital history, and her present unmarried relationship (vs. 17-18). Impressed at his prophetic knowledge, she raised the main question that divided Jews and Samaritans, which was whether Jerusalem or Mount Gerazim was the right place to worship God (vs. 19-20). Once again Jesus deepened the discussion (vs. 21-24).

If it were simply a matter of deciding the place and manner of worship, then Jesus would have obviously said the Jewish way was right. But he responds with a spiritual explanation. The worship in which God and humanity find a true union is in Jesus, who is the Messiah. He informs her that God is seeking these authentic worshippers who believe in

Despite physical water's life-giving quality which is needed by every living creature, it would never be enough. Physical thirst would return. The physical needs of the body will continue to seek further nutrients, but there is a way to be replenished spiritually. The living water of God's Spirit through Jesus the Christ gives eternal life.

Jesus as Christ.

For once in her life, this woman is not judged by her ancestry or lifestyle. She has been offered a different type of healing, the healing of her soul. The discussion ignites a renewed hope within her that Jesus must be the Messiah. She is no longer a water bearer, but has become an evangelist, sharing the opportunity for others to receive this living water. This encounter was intended not to heal one woman, but to change the hearts of many. Despite the woman's initial apprehension of who he was, she followed his explanations all the way to acceptance of him as Christ. She becomes a paradigm of faith, with only one thing left to do. She drops her waterpot and tells the other villagers. Others are attracted to the woman's testimony about Jesus and believe for themselves that he was the savior of the world, and not simply of the Jews. As Jesus remained in the village, the account of her testimony and his further teaching resulted in the broader acceptance and response by Samaritans, that Jesus was the Christ.

### SANKOFA

*He who wants to cross a river must not be afraid of getting wet. – Zambian proverb*

A closer look at the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, as well as other Bible stories, compels many readers to believe that even the worst systemic issues in life can change.

A closer look at the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, as well as other Bible stories, compels many readers to believe that even the worst systemic issues in life can change. Some would say that things will never change. Some would say that that's just the way things are. Some would say that opportunities don't come around for some people and that some are always destined to be marginalized and oppressed. There are people who will believe that there is no hope for their neighborhoods. Their communities will always be considered negatively. These are the voices of people who are afraid to cross the river to the other side. They may be afraid to believe that they can make it. Some would even suggest that the water will pull them down before they get to the other side. Yet, the proverb teaches us that one must first pursue the thought that there may be even a slight chance in what you believe. Like the Samaritan woman who dropped her water jar and ran to her village, she asked, "Could this be the one?" Life presents these same opportunities to see hope again. Is this the moment you've been waiting for, the chance of a lifetime, a glimmer of hope in the midst of darkness? Should I try to get to the other side, and see? The African proverb suggests that one must sometimes take the chance, even if the

water is very deep. Swim to the other side. Who knows what is waiting there for you?

### CASE STUDY

Florence Spearing was born in South Carolina in 1866 to one of the few free black families in that state during the Civil War. At an early age, while living with her family in Charleston, Florence was active in the Methodist Episcopal Church. In Jersey City she became affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church as a Sunday school teacher and youth class leader. After the war she became a dressmaker.

In 1885, she visited her older sisters in New Jersey, where she discovered that dressmaking was a profitable enterprise, resulting in her relocation to Jersey City. The following year she married Hugh Randolph, a cook in the dining car service of Pullman Company. Soon afterwards, she set up her own dressmaking business in their Jersey City home. The couple had one child. Sadly, her husband died in 1913.

She would not remain a dressmaker for long, however. The twin fervor of her Christian faith coupled with an

unquenchable desire to right social wrongs soon made Randolph a towering figure in New Jersey's religious, social, and political arenas. Reverend Randolph carried her prophetic ministry and missionary work into the social concerns that faced women as well as the African American people. She was ordained a deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church in 1901 and then an elder in 1903. Reverend Randolph went on to pastor five churches. For 25

She would not remain a dressmaker for long, however. The twin fervor of her Christian faith coupled with an unquenchable desire to right social wrongs soon made Randolph a towering figure in New Jersey's religious, social, and political arenas.

years Rev. Randolph was president of the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the New Jersey Conference. She was general president for four years.

For the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Randolph worked in a variety of churches in New York and New Jersey, gaining a reputation as a powerful preacher and advocate. She became active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and organized the New Jersey State

Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, which she served as president for 12 years. From 1922 to 1924 Randolph traveled throughout Liberia and the Gold Coast preaching and gaining knowledge of the AMEZ foreign mission, particularly the educational, health, and service needs in Africa. When she returned, she

brought home an African girl home named Charity Zumala. Charity was educated at Summit High School and graduated with honors.

In 1926 Randolph became the first black woman to enroll in Drew University and the first woman to be awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Livingstone College in North Carolina.

Randolph is fondly remembered as the pastor of Wallace Chapel AME Zion Church in Summit, New Jersey, where she pastored from 1925 to 1946. The church experienced tremendous growth, starting with no physical building and 35 members. By the time she retired in 1946, the congregation had grown, and a red brick chapel had been constructed. Reverend Randolph was committed to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### LIFE APPLICATION

Often, a person may question past decisions in life. The *what if* question is often raised when reflecting on financial decisions or relationships. Regardless of the choices made in the past, there are still opportunities for the future. Those opportunities are often revealed when encountering Jesus and God's divine

plan. Each day is a reminder of the past, but also an opportunity to shape that day, and future days ahead. The greatest hardships of the past can also lead to a stronger resolve for the future. But one must be willing to step into that opportunity and believe there is a greater path ahead. The story of the Samaritan woman illustrates that Jewish laws restricted a rabbi from engaging with her.

Despite these laws, Jesus met her where she was. He gave her the opportunity to receive a refreshing spiritual drink of a new life through Jesus the Christ. All her haunting history was erased. But she had to be willing to receive the message he offered, and drink of the living water. Everyone can drink of the living water and share this life-giving reward to others. Don't get stuck in your past. Run forward into a better future.

### QUESTIONS

1. Jesus looked beyond the woman's ethnicity and past, but his disciples were uncomfortable with this encounter. In what areas of ministry can the church be more inclusive and open to sharing the gospel to others?
2. What groups of people (age, ethnicity, race, social/economic status) are you

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less comfortable with sharing your faith? Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you in the future.

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymn #364 – “My Hope Is Built”

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, my savior and redeemer, you looked beyond my faults and recognized my needs. You see the common thread that lies within all of us as children of God, created in God’s image. Lord, teach us all to love our neighbor as ourselves. Teach us to realize that the material things of the

world are fleeting, but your life-giving Spirit is eternal. Remind us that you gave yourself as a sacrifice so that all have access to be reconciled with God the Father. Open our eyes to see the opportunities to witness to others, to offer hope to the hopeless, to give the gift of life through a relationship with you. And touch our hearts and our minds, that we will recognize you along the journey of life. When you speak, Lord, we pray that we hear your voice, your words, and tell others about it. This we pray together in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 20-March 26

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | James 4:1-10 (Resist the Devil)                           |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 (The Weapons of Our Warfare)         |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Psalms 106:1-7, 36-41, 47-48 (Lord, Remember Your People) |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Psalms 34:1-15 (Take Refuge in God)                       |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Numbers 10:29-36 (Let God’s Enemies Be Scattered)         |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Mark 5:1-13 (Jesus Sets a Demoniac Free)                  |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Mark 5:14-20 (Sent to Bear Witness)                       |

## JESUS OVERPOWERS LEGION

Lesson Scripture Mark 5:1-20 (cf. Luke 8:26-39)

Focus Scripture: Mark 5:1-13, 18-20

*Key Verses: He went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed. Mark 5:20 (NRSV)*

### MARK 5:1-13, 18-20 (NRSV)

1 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.

2 And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him.

3 He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain;

4 for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him.

5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him;

7 and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."

8 For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"

9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

10 He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country.

11 Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding;

12 and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them."

13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and

### MARK 5:1-13, 18-20 (KJV)

1 And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

3 Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

4 Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.

5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

6 But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,

7 And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

8 For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

9 And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

10 And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

11 Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

12 And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

13 And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a

were drowned in the sea.

**18-20**

18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him.

19 But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you."

20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

**18-20**

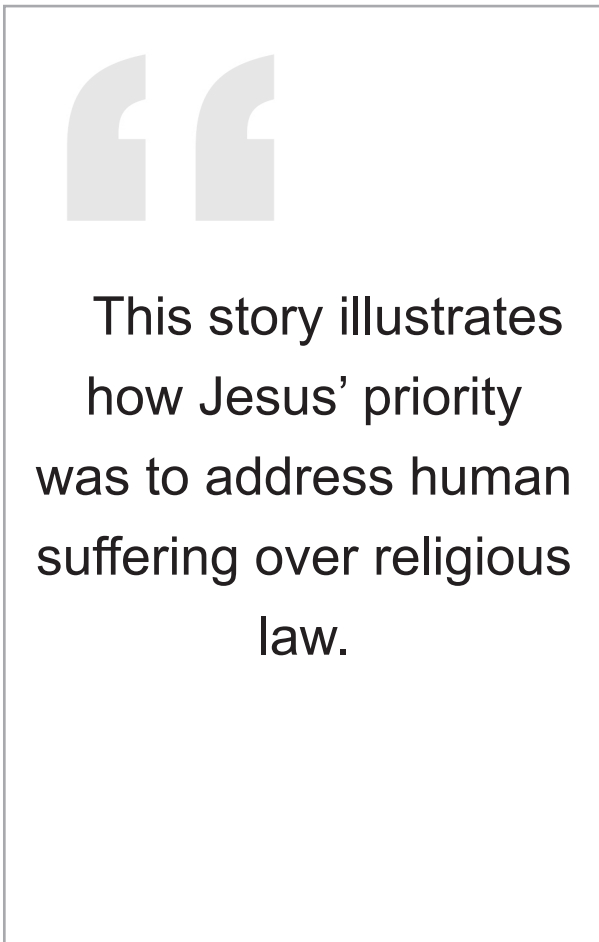
18 And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.

19 Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.

20 And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

**KEY TERMS**

- **Decapolis** – A group of ten cities which formed a Hellenistic or Greco-Roman confederation or league located south of the Sea of Galilee in the Transjordan. The Decapolis was one of the few regions where Jesus travelled in which Gentiles were in the majority.
- **Swine** – A pig or hog, which for non-Jews furnishes a large portion of nourishing food options, including using the fat or lard for various dishes in cooking. Under the dietary laws given by God for Israel (Lev. 11:7-8), the pig was a forbidden, unclean animal for Jews. First-century Jews often referred to Gentiles as



swine, metaphorically, because they considered them unclean.

**INTRODUCTION**

Mark provides the story of a man living in tombs and possessed by demons. This story illustrates how Jesus' priority was to address human suffering over religious law. In this case, a person living in the tombs would be enough for most Jews to reject any involvement with this man (Lev. 21:1). In addition, the man suffered from a

mental illness that caused him to behave erratically. His demons were so violent they led him to cut himself and to have incredible strength to break through restraints applied to him. If that were not enough to discourage Jews to enter this

area, the non-Jewish inhabitants of this region raised pigs, a forbidden animal in the Jewish culture. The tombs, the pigs, the mental illness were all deterrents for the strongest of heart. But Jesus set his sights to restore hope and a quality of life to those that others would consider hopeless cases. Breaking systemic and cultural barriers are a critical part of this narrative and are the key components of today's lesson.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The scripture unfolds with a clear understanding that the geographic region that Jesus and the disciples had entered is clearly outside of acceptable Jewish boundaries. Jesus is approaching the resting place of the dead, a major restriction for religious leaders. Jesus is not there to pay respects to a deceased loved one. He is there to cure the living. The man in the tombs is physically alive but spiritually living a life of death and despair. He suffered a chronic condition that ancient texts would consider possession, whereas modern wisdom would assume is severe schizophrenia. The man is unable to differentiate the voices from himself, calling the throng of dark spirits that dwelled within him,

Jesus set his sights to restore hope and a quality of life to those that others would consider hopeless cases. Breaking systemic and cultural barriers are a critical part of this narrative and are the key components of today's lesson.

Legion. Although contemporary logic would say this is a classic mental health condition, the narrative illustrates that the man's condition possessed his life. The interruption by Jesus indicates there was a spiritual presence that lurked beyond the man's mental condition. The text also reminds the reader that this is Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus is fully aware of the diagnoses that will be established in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but he is equally familiar with the devils that have roamed the earth

throughout time (Eph. 6:10-12; Matt. 12:43; Mark 1:23-26\ Acts 19:13-14; 1 John:3:8). The gospel writer is clear that these are beings beyond the natural realm, which are making an appeal for mercy. It indicates that Jesus' authority over disease extends far beyond physical infirmities but encompasses the spiritual and emotional states of humans. In one command, the demons are redirected to inhabit alternative hosts such as spoken

in the gospel of Matthew (Matt. 12:43). With screams of terror, the legion of spirits enters the swine owned by the residents. They would not find rest there, however, as they continued their torment on the poor creatures until their fatal fall off the nearby cliffs. The terrifying sounds



must have alarmed the villagers. There was no explanation for the pigs and hogs' behavior and suicidal inclination, nor a reasoning for the man who suffered in the tombs to suddenly sit calmly and speak rationally. The man's behavior was not only calm, but his testimony spoke with wisdom. His pain and suffering had ceased, leaving him with a new life ahead. His testimony was a declaration of good news that spread throughout the territory igniting a message for the Gentiles across the region.

### SANKOFA

*"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting the same results." – Albert Einstein*

Habits are hard to break, especially bad ones. There are numerous types of habitual behaviors that can lead to poor health outcomes. Some of these include smoking, gambling, excessive eating and drinking, and hoarding to name just a few. Yet, it is difficult for many people to step away from these behaviors and incorporate healthier lifestyles. When these habits seem impossible to break, people become frustrated and even angry. Depending on the impact these lifestyles

have on others, the habits may destroy relationships, undermine financial stability, destroy reputations, and even threaten families and communities. But nothing is impossible with God.

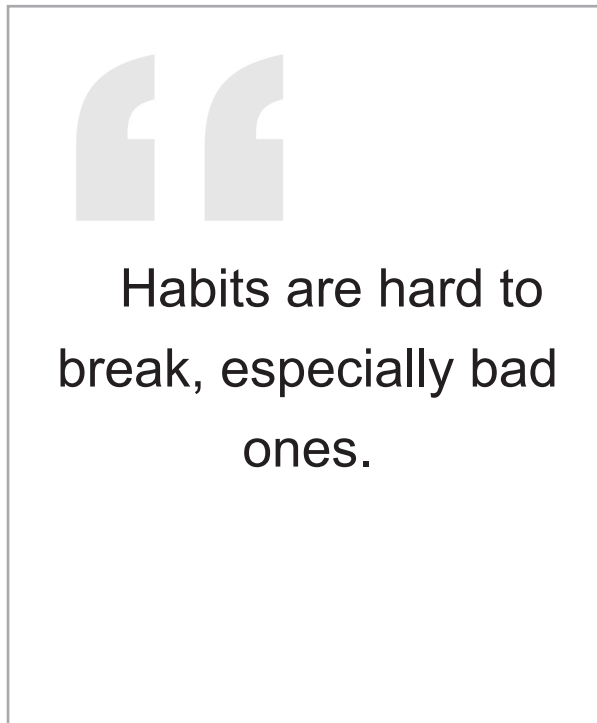
Overcoming addictions can be difficult but possible. One of the most effective ways to improve a recovering addict's chances of a successful recovery is to incorporate spirituality into their lives. Research has shown that those who

incorporate spirituality into their lives are more resilient and display a lower level of anxiety, higher stress tolerance, and increased optimism. This is one of the greatest benefits of faith-based addiction treatment programs. The Center for the Study of Addictions and Recovery (CSAR) published a study that reveals these positive effects of faith in the treatment of addiction.

Faith helps people remain sober by providing hope for the future, whether that is tomorrow, or years down the line. Faith, which should always be rooted in love, can guide the addict closer to their purpose in life.

### CASE STUDY

According to the Health and Human



Services Office of Minority Health, black adults in the U.S. are more likely than white adults to report persistent symptoms of emotional distress, such as sadness and hopelessness. Black adults living below the poverty line are more than twice as likely to report serious psychological distress than those with more financial security.

Despite these feelings, only one in three black adults who need mental health care receive it. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Mental Health Facts for African Americans guide, black Americans are also less likely to receive consistent care and are more likely to use emergency rooms or primary care doctors, rather than seek out mental health specialists. Some of the barriers to mental health care are socioeconomic disparities such as fewer options and resources. For instance, 2018 data showed 11.5% of black adults in the U.S. had no form of health insurance. Black adults are more likely to experience socioeconomic disparities such as exclusion from health and educational resources. Unfortunately, these disparities may contribute to poorer mental health outcomes. Like the man in the tombs, fewer people in the community are

**Black adults are more likely to experience socioeconomic disparities such as exclusion from health and educational resources. Unfortunately, these disparities may contribute to poorer mental health outcomes.**

willing to reach out and offer assistance to someone suffering from mental health problems. Furthermore, it may sometimes appear easier to confine someone from the mainstream community and simply look in the opposite direction. This occurs due to the stigma associated with mental illness. Negative attitudes and beliefs towards people who live with mental health conditions is pervasive within the U.S. and can be particularly strong within the black community. One study showed that 63% of black people believe that a mental health condition is a sign of personal weakness. As a result, people may experience shame about having a mental illness and worry that they may be discriminated against due to their condition.

For many in the black community, it can be incredibly challenging to discuss the topic of mental health due to concerns about others' perceptions. This fear could prevent people from seeking mental health care when they really need it. Black people have historically been negatively affected by prejudice and discrimination in the health care system in the U.S. And, unfortunately, many black people *still* have these negative experiences when they attempt to seek treatment. Provider bias, both conscious and unconscious, and a lack of cultural competency can result in

misdiagnosis and inadequate treatment.

One step towards improving the chances for better services and outcomes is to engage the faith community. Providing sound education in churches can promote more positive discussions and greater options for families who need mental health services. In addition, the church can assist in removing the stigma of mental illness. Providing a loving and compassionate support system through the faith community can assist in obtaining needed services. It may also bridge the gap between not only needed services, but also the desperately needed support. Living alone with mental illness only strengthens Satan's attack on the individual, their family, and their community. Through prayer, education, access to resources, and faith in God, healing is possible.

### LIFE APPLICATION

If willing to admit it, everyone has had some experience with a family member or friend who suffers from a mental health condition. Most people can confess that they have been directly or indirectly exposed to mental health conditions such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), addictive behaviors towards alcohol, drugs or gambling, depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder,

dementia, schizophrenia, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). During the COVID-19 pandemic, more people became aware of their increased levels of stress and the impact on their mental health. The pandemic along with police shootings, mass shootings, and economic instability, have caused tremendous strain on everyone's personal well-being. The entire world has experienced some form of vicarious trauma or personal grief over the past few years. With that said, there

Providing a loving and compassionate support system through the faith community can assist in obtaining needed services.

must be an intentional plan to protect one's mental health. A strong spiritual belief in God that reinforces a faith that overcomes all things is proven to be one of the strongest coping mechanisms. Christians who have an active prayer life and supportive church community are better equipped for the tumultuous issues that occur in society. The gospel message is a message of hope and love, constantly

promoting a spirit of peace that passes all understanding. If there is still a struggle to maintain a healthy mental outlook, seek out professional counseling services. Be prayerful that God will guide you to a professionally trained counselor that can support your spiritual beliefs. And trust God that he will provide the resources to obtain whatever you need to live a productive, peaceful, and fruitful life.

## QUESTIONS

1. Do you know someone who has been impacted by any of the conditions listed in the **Life Application** section? If so, what would you do or say to them to encourage them to believe they can overcome their struggles?
2. What can your local church do to increase awareness about mental health and provide resources for the community?

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:**  
“Waymaker” by Leeland

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, we live in a chaotic world. We sometimes question how things got to this point. Yet, you knew. You were there from the beginning when there was nothing but a void upon the waters. Lord, we look to you today, to pull back the covers that hide realities. We know that things are

not always as they seem. Our lives are not perfect. But whenever you come into the midst, our environment changes and miracles happen. So today, Lord, we know you as our waymaker, who comes into the deepest darkest places of our souls, and you bring light. Regardless of whether we experience physical pain or emotional pain, or spiritual suffering, we call upon you, you as the ultimate healer. You will cast out our demons of helplessness and fear and restore us to perfect peace. Touch those who help us, every clinician, doctor, nurse, social worker, therapist, and friend. Support every family member who faces the demons. Protect us from all harm. And bring us all back to a place of peace. We ask that you break the chains. We pray for healing for all whose minds are trapped by the enemy. Set them free to receive your grace today, Lord. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

## HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 27–April 2

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Luke 19:28-40 (The Stones Would Shout)          |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Luke 19:41-48 (Jesus Weeps Over Jerusalem)      |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Job 14:1-15 (If Mortals Die, Will They Live?)   |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 (This Is My Body)        |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Psalms 22:1-2, 7-19 (Why Have You Forsaken Me?) |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Psalms 22:20-31 (Deliver My Soul, O Lord)       |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Luke 24:1-12 (The Angels Call the Women)        |



## THE EMPTY TOMB

Lesson Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

Focus Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

*Key Verse: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."  
Luke 24:5b (NRSV)*

### LUKE 24:1-12 (NRSV)

- 1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.
- 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,
- 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body.
- 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.
- 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.
- 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,
- 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."
- 8 Then they remembered his words,
- 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.
- 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.
- 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.
- 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

### LUKE 24:1-12 (KJV)

- 1 Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.
- 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.
- 3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.
- 4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:
- 5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?
- 6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,
- 7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.
- 8 And they remembered his words,
- 9 And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.
- 10 It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.
- 11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.
- 12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

## KEY TERMS

- **Spices** – Spices, perfumes, and other oils such as myrrh and aloe were used for the burial process. Since Jesus' death occurred so close to the Sabbath, his body may have been prepared in haste. The women planned to continue this process after the conclusion of the Jewish Sabbath.
- **Wrappings** – As was the manner of the Jews (John 19:39-40), the body of the deceased would first be washed, then anointed with various aromatic spices and oils, then wrapped with linen cloths to retard decay.

## INTRODUCTION

The story of the resurrection of Jesus the Christ is not commonly reviewed on Palm Sunday. However, there is a long-standing Christian tradition in some churches to acknowledge every Sunday, during the season of Lent, as smaller celebrations of Easter. This Sunday's text recognizes this tradition by studying the resurrection story through Luke's gospel.

To transition to this text, readers must acknowledge the events of Good Friday. As stated in Luke 23, both men and

women followed Jesus at a distance, as he carried the cross to that fateful hill. "All his friends and the women who came with him from Galilee, were waiting at a distance, watching these things" (Luke 23:49, BBE). A few came to the foot of the cross. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19:25). After Jesus was pronounced dead, Nicodemus and Joseph took his body for burial in the

tomb given by Joseph (Matt. 27:6). Jesus' body had to be quickly prepared. The women appeared unafraid to see Jesus' final resting place at the tomb and were determined to complete the anointing of his body. These dedicated and loving women from Galilee continued their services by preparing burial spices of their own, with all intentions to carry out their task. But these things must wait until Sunday morning sunrise,

the day following Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath (day of rest). They waited until Sunday, only to be surprised by what they found. Suddenly, everything changed for them, and for all of humanity.

They waited until Sunday, only to be surprised by what they found. Suddenly, everything changed for them, and for all of humanity.

## TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The resurrection story, as told in

Luke's gospel (24:1-12), provides some similarities to the other gospel accounts found in Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, and John 20:1-19. Yet, there are variations of the same event. What is common in all four gospels is that the women who loved Jesus made a decision to return to the gravesite and anoint the body. As was tradition in the Jewish faith, they were determined to honor his burial, despite the injustice of the crucifixion and the Roman guard expected to be stationed there. The three women who are identified are Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James (10a). But what must be noted is that there were other women with them as well (10b). In addition to the women finding an empty tomb, they are suddenly joined by two angels. These angels, however, are not described as appearing with the dramatic entrance found in the gospel of Matthew (vs. 2-3). However, their dazzling appearance and unseen entrance was no less frightening to them. Although the angels did not have lightning or earthquakes to announce their presence, their words alone were riveting, as they indicated that Jesus was alive. The statement moved the women to quickly return to the disciples and alert them of their experience. The disbelief by the disciples is not surprising, since

The grave no longer symbolized the finality of death. Instead, it now represented the miraculous possibilities through faith.

they often failed to recognize Jesus' deity during their three-year journey with him.

However, Peter, who is also referenced in the gospel of John, reacts differently. Peter, who is also considered a possible source for Luke's writings, is identified as the key disciple to respond to the women's report. Peter's role had always been the disciple who accompanied Jesus in every situation. Yet at the fateful moment in which Jesus was crucified, Peter failed the test, by denying his relationship with Jesus. Although Peter's fear overwhelmed his ability to stand by Jesus on Good Friday, Peter was compelled to run to Jesus' tomb on Easter Sunday. Despite his confusion and even disbelief, he ran to the place where his hope was kept alive. The grave no longer symbolized the finality of death. Instead, it now represented the miraculous possibilities through faith.

Luke's narrative provides the reader an opportunity to resonate with any of the diverse members of this story. Those who have faced tragedies and disappointments can find hope for a greater future, through the power of the resurrection. The women receive a greater calling among the believers since

they are the first to witness the miracle of the resurrection. People who are living with regret and guilt can relate to Peter who is not only given hope but is drawn to believe that anything is possible.

### SANKOFA

*“Don’t lose hope; no situation is permanent.” – African Proverb*

A person’s faith is often tested when one faces challenging and tragic events. Faith survives through the power of hope. As the writer of Hebrews stated, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” One must hold onto a glimmer of hope to activate one’s faith. Many situations in life may appear hopeless, but the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:24 (NRSV), “Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees?” Thus, the reader will witness the conundrum of the troubled disciple, Peter. Peter hears the reports from the women who returned from the tomb, proclaiming that Jesus must be alive. The women’s memories were triggered by an angel who reminded them of Jesus’ prophecy that he would

die at the hands of the religious leaders, but on the third day he would rise again. Fragile and broken dreams were transformed into bodacious hope.

The embrace of hope in this story can cultivate hope in anyone’s hopeless situation. When President Barack Obama was still a young senator in the United States Congress, he penned a powerful book titled, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American*

The women’s memories were triggered by an angel who reminded them of Jesus’ prophecy that he would die at the hands of the religious leaders, but on the third day he would rise again. Fragile and broken dreams were transformed into bodacious hope.

*Dream.* Although his book reflects on the divided political climate within America, he imparts a thoughtful assessment of the underlying causes and an interesting purview of the threats to America’s fragile democracy. One need not assume the reading is strictly an analysis of the historical conflicting assessment of the United States Constitution or a negative valuation of America’s political landscape. Rather, President Obama’s powerful manuscript speaks to the common values that most people place on their families,

communities, and country. If these values were collaboratively united and directed towards common goals, it could result in the greatest accomplishment of



social unity and prosperity in our society. Witnessing the reality of terrorism was a reminder of the immediate and looming threats to the social systems in which people live. The book even prophetically spoke of the threats of a pandemic, unfortunately unheeded, however. All of which demands a unified society to combat these concerns. Yet, this book was not a dismal prediction of the apocalypse, but rather a testimony of what can occur through positive beliefs and faith. The man the world now knows as President Barack Obama was known for his “dogged optimism” which would be coined as the audacity of hope.

It reminds us of the risks of losing hope as well as the power of having it. African proverbial wisdom further reminds future generations that life situations are not permanent. Hope will suggest that tomorrow will be better, even when things appear despairing.

As the women approached the bleakness of the tomb, they returned with dogged optimism of the Lord’s resurrection. As Peter heard these words, he too became filled with a renewed hope. Every Christian believer who professes the name of Jesus is urged

to reflect on the words of the angels that day, “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” Have hope in all things. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ overcame death, so the power of God can breathe life into your dead situations. Have the audacity of hope.

### CASE STUDY

Women have historically been left behind in opportunities to pursue high level vocations such as becoming a medical doctor. These barriers are more intensified upon African American women and other women of color. The lack of financial resources and peer supporters, complicated by the presence of racism, sexism, and traditional stereotypes create further hindrances for black women who sought non-traditional roles. Despite these challenges, history informs us that there were women who never lost hope.

One of these historical figures was Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler. Dr. Crumpler was the first black woman to earn a medical degree in the United States. She battled deep-rooted prejudice against women and African Americans

African proverbial wisdom further reminds future generations that life situations are not permanent. Hope will suggest that tomorrow will be better, even when things appear despairing.

in medicine. She was truly a pioneer by earning her medical degree from the New England Female Medical College in 1864, becoming the first female African American doctor. Her official degree was “Doctress of Medicine.” She began practicing in Boston, Massachusetts. However, at the end of the Civil War she found herself drawn to Richmond, Virginia, a place she called “a proper field for real missionary work.”

In Virginia, Dr. Crumpler worked with missionary organizations and collaborated with the Freedmen’s Bureau to care for freed African Americans. The abolition of slavery created many questions regarding redefining the lives of previously enslaved black people. The Freedmen’s Bureau was established by Congress in 1865 to assist the recently emancipated slaves in their transition to freedom. The Bureau distributed food and clothing, offered medical services and educational aid, and worked to protect the freedmen from serfdom and violence. In 1883, Dr. Crumpler published her *Book of Medical Discourses*. It chronicles her experiences as a doctor and provides guidance on maternal and child health.

Dr. Crumpler was born in Delaware

in 1831 and was raised by an aunt in Pennsylvania. While living there, she often helped care for sick neighbors. Those experiences created a desire within her to work to “relieve the suffering of others.” In the early 1850s she moved to Massachusetts and became a nurse, and later made the commitment to become a medical doctor.

### LIFE APPLICATION

As Christians draw closer to the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believers are compelled to reflect on their faith and their hope in God. Luke’s gospel is a reminder that the heavy burdens a person bears today are not an indication of the future. Instead, hope in God through Jesus the Christ is a reminder that the greatest loss can be a pathway to the greatest gain. The test for every believer is to remain

The test for every believer is to remain hopeful. Believe in God for the miracles that only God can do.

hopeful. Believe in God for the miracles that only God can do. Have audacious hope. As the Psalmist wrote, “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” (Psalm 30:5)

### QUESTIONS

1. What are some examples of words, phrases, and other comments that are often made that dismiss the power of

- God and eradicate a believer's hope?
2. How can the church better demonstrate to non-believers that nothing is impossible with God? What can your local church do to share the message of hope to others?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymnal #446 – “I Don't Know About Tomorrow”

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Lord, we call upon you today for forgiveness, for anything done that is contrary to your Word and to your command to love one another. We pray for the fruit of the Spirit to give us love, joy, peace, patience, and the will to overcome the problems we see in our Christian fellowship. We pray for our Connectional church that your Holy Spirit will change hearts to be patient

and kind, and to have hope in tomorrow. We pray for peace, for the power to overcome any of the adversaries' attacks upon us personally, upon our families, and upon our communities. We pray for our country and its politicians who have committed to the welfare of the people and nation, but often fall short. We pray for wisdom and clarity of thought to know the right decisions. We pray for the gift of discernment and to test every spirit that enters our gates and our affairs. We pray for healing, that any and all things lost will be restored. And as we enter this Holy Week, we pray for a heart of forgiveness just as Jesus forgave us for all of our sins on Calvary's cross. Thank you, Lord, for redemption, for restoration, for reconciliation through Jesus Christ. This we pray in Jesus' holy and righteous name. Amen and Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

April 3-April 9

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | John 20:11-18 (I Have Seen the Lord!)             |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | John 20:19-31 (Blessed Are Those Who Believe)     |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Psalms 118:1-14 (The Lord Is My Strength)         |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Psalms 118:15-29 (I Shall Not Die, but Live)      |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Luke 24:13-24 (Jesus Meets Two Disciples)         |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Luke 24:25-35 (Jesus Opens the Disciples' Eyes)   |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Luke 24:36-49 (You Are Witnesses of These Things) |

## DISCIPLES COME TO BELIEVE THE RESURRECTION

Lesson Scripture: Luke 24:13-49

Focus Scripture: Luke 24:13-27, 30-31

*Key Verse: Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. Luke 24:31 (NRSV)*

LUKE 24:13-27, 30-31 (NRSV)

### Luke 24:13-27

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them,

16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.

18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"

19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,

20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,

23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.

24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had

LUKE 24:13-27, 30-31 (KJV)

### Luke 24:13-27

13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.

14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15 And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

17 And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?

18 And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

19 And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:

20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.

21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

22 Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;

23 And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.



said; but they did not see him.”

25 Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!

26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

**30-31**

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

**30-31**

30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.

31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

**KEY TERMS**

- **Glory** – The meaning in the Greek is power, illustrating the power of the resurrection.
- **Prophet** – A person who speaks God’s truth to others; a person illuminated, inspired, or instructed by God to announce future events

**INTRODUCTION**

This scripture passage offers one of the most beautiful

narratives of witnessing the risen Lord. There is a level of suspense that Luke interjects in this story on the Emmaus Road. Here, two unnamed travelers encounter Jesus unexpectedly. Jesus accompanies them as they walk and

share their remorse and grief for the loss of their leader. Jesus’ presence is a ministry of both comfort and conviction, enabling them to share the tragic loss of their hopes and dreams. The realization that the traveler alongside them was Jesus would not come until the breaking of bread. The words of thanksgiving prior to partaking of the bread is an apparent symbol of the importance of communing with one another under the providence of God. The communion act, with

The communion act, with the elements of bread and wine, triggers the remembrance of our victory through Jesus the Christ.

the elements of bread and wine, triggers the remembrance of our victory through Jesus the Christ. What begins as a solemn walk along the road is transformed into a joyous return to their comrades to share

what they have seen. These two disciples are added to the host of witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. Their experience provides a normalization for others to encounter the divine in even the most common daily acts of life. Jesus is walking alongside them and with each of us today, teaching, consoling, and giving hope and reassurance for tomorrow.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

From the beginning of this text, the story of Jesus' appearance to two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus captures an atmosphere of fellowship and community. Jesus is unrecognizable at first, only to be identified as a fellow traveler. This depicts Jesus as one who walks with his disciples each day, without our notice or appreciation of his presence. Even in our darkest moments, he is there. He shows compassion for them as he recognizes their sadness and questions them about their conversation. As the report unfolds, they attempt to illustrate their knowledge of scriptures by identifying their hopes that Jesus was the Messiah. But it would be Jesus that informs them. He enlightens them of the need for his death and reminded them that this was necessary to fulfill prophecy. Luke emphasizes this meeting was intended to enlighten these

men of the fulfillment of prophecy, and to promote the sense of community as they shared their visions. Like the common thread among most cultures, the sense of community is established at the time of sharing food. The table gathering and breaking of bread then brings them back to remembering what occurred on the fateful night Jesus was betrayed.

This account of these two witnesses to the resurrected Lord can be affirmed in other biblical texts. In the gospel of Mark (16:12-13), it speaks of Jesus appearing to two people walking along the road to the country, and who joyfully returned with their report. Mark's gospel indicates that this occurred on the same day the women gave their account of Jesus being at the tomb. The failure of the two disciples to recognize Jesus connotes the need for divine intervention, to open one's eyes to see God. There is an irony

He (Jesus) enlightens them of the need for his death and reminded them that this was necessary to fulfill prophecy.

that these two disciples illustrate their personal desires, rather than recalling the divine plan that Jesus had shared with his disciples prior to his death. Yet Jesus patiently reveals himself in ways they could understand.

### SANKOFA

*If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk with others. – African Proverb*

*National Geographic* explorer Paul Salopek is walking from Africa to the tip of South America. He has entitled his walk, *The Out of Eden Walk*. Some may ask the question, why? Well, storytelling is what he loves. He has committed to take walks through the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Asia, North America, and South America. The path he mapped out is very intentional. Salopek is following the path that our human ancestors took out of Africa about 200,000 years ago. It took ancient humans around 50,000 years to migrate from Africa to South America. Salopek will make the trek much faster, estimating his journey, which began in 2013, will be completed in approximately ten years.

Paul Salopek is a longtime journalist who has written for *The Atlantic*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *National Geographic*, and other publications. His work has earned many awards, including two Pulitzer prizes. Traveling the world is not new for Salopek, either. He crossed his first border at age six when he moved with his parents from the United States to Mexico. He spent more than ten years traveling through Africa as the *Chicago Tribune's* chief foreign correspondent. Salopek has covered conflicts and crises around the world. He has reported on topics ranging from the environment to

immigration to human DNA. In 2006, he was jailed in Sudan while working on a story for *National Geographic* about the Sahel region of Africa.

This storytelling is the main focus of Salopek's walk. He is documenting the landscapes and cultures as he takes this historical trek. Fortunately, he is not walking alone. During each leg of his journey, Salopek has a local guide. He also takes time to meet the people along the way. The residents range from

inhabitants of small villages to cities and rural farms. Sometimes, they offer him a place to stay for a couple of nights, so they can share a little bit about their lives with him.

Outside of an occasional ride on boat or ship, Salopek is walking the entire way, making the title of *trek* quite fitting. He does not use or ride in automobiles, nor does he ride bicycles, horses, or donkeys.

An important part of Salopek's mission is to tell the stories of ordinary people. Walking gives him more time to look around and to talk to the people he encounters. Salopek has conversed with everybody from Turkish pistachio farmers to Saudi generals to Afghan cobblers. He has spoken to thousands of people since his walk began. As he puts it: "I am engaged in a seven, eight, nine-year-

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long conversation with total strangers.”

### CASE STUDY

*The Green Book* was a publication launched by Victor H. Green to assist African American travelers in locating safe business locations while they were traveling. It was published from 1936 to 1966 and was the only travel guide in American history that the editor looked forward to its own obsolescence. It was designed explicitly to help African American travelers find hotels, restaurants, and gas stations that would accommodate them during the era of segregation. African Americans during this time of American history needed a roadmap to consult for safe stops throughout the day or night.

“There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published,” the editor and publisher, Victor H. Green, wrote in the introduction to the 1948 edition. “That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment.”

Before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination by private business owners, it was extremely difficult for African Americans to find businesses that would serve them, even in their own hometowns. Therefore, for obvious reasons, it was far more difficult and even treacherous finding accommodations or friendly business establishments when traveling. Even AAA, which was established to help motorists find accommodations, openly discriminated, and would not accept black members.

Travelers found themselves wondering whether or not to stop at a hotel. Meal and bathroom breaks were at the mercy of local restaurant and service station owners. African American travelers who didn’t have friends or family members along their routes took great risks stopping at random businesses for services.

Green, who was a mail carrier by day, believed firmly in the power of black-owned business and specifically in the power of black advertising. *The Green*

*Book* celebrated the fact that African Americans were a growing consumer market. Black people were taking road trips just as white travelers had done for decades. This was especially common

“There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published,” the editor and publisher, Victor H. Green, wrote in the introduction to the 1948 edition.



after the Great Migration, when African Americans travelled between the northern and southern areas of the country to see family members. *The Green Book* was a means to promote black business owners and take advantage of the growing market. Not only did *The Green Book* offer a safer means for black people to travel, it also promoted a stronger economic system for the black community.

### LIFE APPLICATION

There is an Emmaus Road in everyone's life. These are times when life's journey becomes difficult and confusing. At times, the road seems too difficult to endure. Yet, that is when God intervenes. Just as the two disciples walked with heavy hearts to Emmaus, they encountered Jesus along the way. The days preceding their journey were not at all as they planned. This text reminds us that there is a divine plan that does not always fit into the plans of humans. Although the outcomes may be disappointing, the Lord is always with us and provides us what we need. Jesus understands every problem and painful struggle we experience. Whatever road you may travel, this text is the reassurance that

you're never alone. The Resurrected Christ is by your side.

### QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever felt defeated and realized the resurrected Christ was with you the entire time? Witness to others about your experience.
2. How can the church grow stronger as a community to help one another during challenging times, such as personal tragedy and systemic oppression? Give examples of what your church can do.

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymn #441 – "Never Alone"

(Or) "Never Alone" with Tori Kelly and Kirk Franklin

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/srGlp4LO-XM>

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, we thank you today that we are never alone. As we go through life, we are grateful for the many blessings and incredible wonders you have shown us each

day. Just as the disciples walked with Jesus for three years and witnessed miraculous things, we also see Jesus in our daily lives. Yet their journey also brought them to a place of great grief and pain. At times we also face the same challenges of sickness and sadness, fear,

There is an Emmaus Road in everyone's life. These are times when life's journey becomes difficult and confusing. At times, the road seems too difficult to endure. Yet, that is when God intervenes.

and pain. But you show us that we are not alone. In fact, Lord, you have already addressed the issues we face and are creating new beginnings in our lives. Give us strength, Lord, to continue along the path you have given us. Renew our faith that we will always trust you in every circumstance. And open our eyes to see

your presence in all aspects of our lives. Thank you, Lord, for this momentous day we call *Resurrection Sunday*. We rejoice that you are alive; and, we look for signs that you are with us even now. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen!

Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

April 10-April 16

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Luke 7:36-50 (Hospitality and Redemption)                   |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | 1 Corinthians 15:27-31, 35-44 (Raised with Christ in Glory) |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | 1 Corinthians 15:45-58 (Death Is Swallowed Up in Victory)   |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Psalms 5 (God, Hear My Morning Prayer)                      |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Lamentations 3:21-36 (Great Is God's Faithfulness)          |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Psalms 30 (Joy Comes with the Morning)                      |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | John 21:1-14 (Jesus Appears by the Sea)                     |

## JESUS COOKS BREAKFAST

Lesson Scripture: John 21:1-14

Focus Scripture: John 21:1-14

*Key Verse: Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. John 21:12 (NRSV)*

### JOHN 21:1-14 (NRSV)

1 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.

2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples.

3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

5 Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No."

6 He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.

7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea.

8 But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.

10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught."

11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many,

### JOHN 21:1-14 (KJV)

1 After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself.

2 There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.

3 Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

4 But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

5 Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.

6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.

8 And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.

9 As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.

10 Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.

11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to

the net was not torn.

12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord.

13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

12 Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.

13 Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.

14 This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.

### KEY TERM

- **Fish** – (noun) A primary staple for food; (verb) a critical industry for sustainable livelihood, as Peter, James, and John were all fishermen. Fish became a symbol for ministry, first in terms of the great multitude of souls to be saved, and secondly to feed those who are hungry for the gospel. (Matt. 4:19; 14:14-16)

From the shore,  
Jesus calls out to them  
and instructs them cast  
their net on the opposite  
side. The miracle that  
follows reveals it is the  
Lord.

recognize him. This account compels the reader to recognize how easily a

follower of Christ may become despondent and return to their prior life. However, it also reassures the believer that Jesus will appear at times when he is needed the most. When the disciples return to their prior vocation of fishing, they catch nothing. A sense of failure and emptiness can be sensed in this portion of the text. Their lives seem to fall apart as they go back to shore. However, a

night of disappointment was transformed into a morning of extraordinary joy. From the shore, Jesus calls out to them and instructs them cast their net on the opposite side. The miracle that follows reveals it is the Lord. This testimony by John gives contemporary readers a reason to search for Jesus, even in their darkest hour. The gospel of John concludes with an encouraging chronicle of Jesus appearing to the disciples to

### INTRODUCTION

This scripture lesson centers around Jesus' appearance to seven disciples along the Sea of Tiberias. Unlike the story of the two disciples traveling on the road to Emmaus, found in the gospel of Luke, several of these disciples are named. Yet the two stories have the similar theme of Jesus' unexpected appearance, after his resurrection, and their failure to initially



reinforce their true mission. They were called to be fishers of humanity.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The gospel writer, John, adds this concluding chapter to emphasize the fulfillment of Jesus' promises found in prior texts. This text also builds on the establishment of this new community of faith. The first section provides an account of Jesus appearing to seven disciples after his resurrection. Embedded in this account is not only the miracle of witnessing the risen Lord, but also the manifestation of a miraculous catch of fish. The key members of this story are those who had a previous occupation of fishing. Nathanael, a disciple not frequently mentioned, can be found in the call narrative found in John 1:45-50. Because of Nathanael's honesty, Jesus noted him as a man without deceit. As the disciples launch out to fish, there may have been some motivation to return to their prior life, which suggests an abandonment of their prior three-year ministry with Jesus. However, recognizing the difficulty in processing what they had seen over the past few days, it would seem reasonable to find an activity such as fishing to clear the mind. Their intentions would be divinely discerned and as such, Jesus appears on the shore. Their futile efforts to catch anything was an ideal environment for

Scholars believe that the need to establish an exact number of one hundred fifty-three large fish not only validates the catch as miraculous, but also had a symbolic purpose.

witnessing a miracle. As they returned from their unsuccessful venture, they noticed a person on the shoreline. Like the story of the Emmaus Road found in Luke 24, the disciples did not initially recognize him as the Lord. Jesus calls them children (v. 5), illustrating his role with God the Father. He commands them to cast their net on the other side, resulting in an unimaginable catch of fish. Scholars believe that the need to establish an exact number of one hundred fifty-three large fish not only validates the catch as miraculous, but also had a symbolic purpose. For instance, the number one hundred fifty-three is a sign of abundance for the church as well as fullness of the gifts of God demonstrated through Jesus. In the earliest days of the church, Augustine proposed a mathematical explanation where the number 153 is obtained when all the integers from 1 to 17 are added together. The sequential mathematical process can be considered a means to illustrate divine interaction and control of time and space, a sign of God's continuous plan and order. There is also a correlation of the number seven, in which seven disciples were present, suggesting a moment of completion. The means in which Peter draws the fish to the shore without the net breaking indicates the miracle would withstand the challenges the believer faces. It also highlights how the fish are drawn

to the Lord, just as Jesus stated in John 12:32. As the disciples arrive back to shore, Jesus invites them to breakfast, affirming the new community and the early church. Bringing the fish to Jesus is directing the disciples to continue to bring new believers to the community. Jesus giving thanks, breaking the bread and offering it to the disciples, is a reminder of renewed commitment to one's faith, and remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice for everyone's sins.

### SANKOFA

*If the herders are lost  
the sheep will get lost.  
– African Proverb*

A person who is called to lead must remain focused on the vision and be clear of the direction in which to lead others. Those who are in positions of leadership are the primary players for not only their success, but the success and even the survival of others. What looks easy to others can be a tireless and thankless job, sometimes resulting in disappointing outcomes before achieving your goal. Jesus used the metaphor of a shepherd to illustrate the needed traits of a good leader. Herding sheep, for instance, may seem like a simple profession. However, sheep are unaware of the dangers surrounding them. Sheep are unable to navigate some terrains and frequently need help to find food

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and water. Sheep are also dependent on shepherds for sheering their wool. If their wool becomes too thick, it can become a health hazard, harvesting insects and disease, while also preventing their ability to run from predators. Shepherds are leaders of these animals. They ensure their sheep are protected, well fed, and have sufficient water. They shear the sheep at the proper times and use the wool for clothing and for a profitable income. If there is a drought, the shepherd must find other watering holes,

or develop a strategy for providing water for the sheep. Depending on the size of the flock, shepherds will need help. Therefore, the sheep dog is a common companion and helper to herd the sheep. And good shepherds care about their flock. They do not see the sheep as simply an economic commodity, but also as vulnerable creatures who depend on their shepherd. Finally, shepherds cannot afford to get lost, confused, or discouraged. They must remain committed and steadfast in their vocation.

Although everyone is not a shepherd, everyone can learn from them, whether in the position of a leader or follower. As a leader, be determined and committed to the work you have been called to do. When uncertain times come, seek the Lord, and obtain advice from wiser and


more experienced people. As a leader within the church, you have a calling. Whether you are clergy or a lay person, officer, or member, young or old, your assignment is connected to the greater mission to fish for souls. And as a follower, listen and learn from those who lead. Whatever your role may be, have faith in the Lord, and follow the guidance found in God's Word.

### CASE STUDY

The AME Church evolved out of the Free African Society at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Society was a response to the discriminatory practices against black Methodists by a white Methodist fellowship. When white congregants objected to Richard Allen praying at the altar rail, the wheels were set in motion. St. George Church became the place for Richard Allen's unique calling to advocate for spiritual freedom and social liberties. Even during the early years of the Free African Society's existence, the organization surpassed its immediate purpose. The group evolved to include religious, social, and intellectual aspects. The first religious gathering was documented about nine years before the African Methodist Episcopal Church's official organization. While oppression was less severe for free

blacks in Philadelphia than in many other cities, the strong discrimination of white Methodists served as the catalyst for the new congregation with Richard Allen as pastor.

The founding document of the church was worked out between Allen and white Methodist leaders. Church hierarchy was a primary component of the agreement. Allen's congregation was initially planned to remain a part of the Methodist Church, while becoming a self-governing unit. A level of oversight by church hierarchy



Whatever your role may be, have faith in the Lord, and follow the guidance found in God's Word.

was expected, and the hope was to create a system of checks and balances between white authorities and black leadership. However, tension ignited after the membership at Bethel Church grew from 40-400 between 1794 and 1810. The growth threatened the white Methodists' authority. Their desire from this point was to impress upon this new dynamic community that there were still limits of their

independence.

Eventually, the agreement between the Bethel congregation and the white Methodist church broke down. White Methodists threatened to prevent church meetings and used other tactics to discourage Bethel's self-governance. By 1807, Richard Allen obtained legal support and wrote an African supplement to the church's founding document. The

document stated even stronger claims of independence, but still maintained that Bethel was an equal member in the Methodist Conference. Meanwhile, Bethel's membership continued to grow because the church was known for its advocacy for black rights and its opposition to oppression. On the flip side, the tactics of Methodists became more extreme. There were obvious signs they resented and even feared the church's growth. A group of them went as far as to create an inaccurate circular stating Bethel's baptisms and marriages were invalid.

But God had a different plan. Legal action went as far as the Pennsylvania's Supreme Court to address Bethel's legitimacy as an independent church. Although the Bethel congregation lost the initial lawsuit, a second and more direct legal challenge was launched in 1816. Richard Allen had the legal right of self-determination as a pastor, leading to the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

By 1906, the AME Church had a membership of half a million congregants, exceeding the combined total of the two other predominantly black American denominations. This made the AME Church the largest major African American denomination of the Methodist traditions. The struggles of church growth

continue to be real in this modern society. However, when the church focuses on the main mission of drawing souls to Christ, all things are possible.

### LIFE APPLICATION

The story of the disciples meeting Jesus after his resurrection is an uplifting testimony of victory and hope. Like the disciples, we face tragedies and disappointments. Life can become

frustrating and confusing. The disciples also experienced these challenges, but their calling would still become clear. They were selected, chosen by Jesus, to share the gospel with the world. Therefore, every believer is also reminded that life will have difficulties and even failures. However, the Lord is still guiding each of God's children to lead others to Jesus. The Lord will provide everything we

Bethel's membership continued to grow because the church was known for its advocacy for black rights and its opposition to oppression.

need, even when our nets are empty. And the Lord will bring us together to share in the joy of his resurrection. Those moments of fellowship are reminders that we are collectively blessed as God's children. Give thanks for the signs of hope and look for every opportunity to see Jesus directing you along the way.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why is the fellowship between believers so important to the body of Christ?



2. What can the church do to incentivize others to gather together more often?
3. How does the church motivate people to build larger communities of faith in this post-pandemic era?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymn #576 – “We Gather Together”

**Closing Prayer:** Almighty God our Father, dear precious Lord Jesus the Christ, and to the sweet Holy Spirit, we thank you this day for your blessings of grace and mercy, and your tireless faithfulness in our lives. We pray for continued strength and direction to share the gospel with others.

Through you alone, others will be drawn to Jesus, and many will understand and believe in the message of salvation. We pray, Lord, for renewed strength. We pray that we do not grow weary in well doing but instead we continue to cast our nets, and even move our nets when directed by you. We pray for the fellowship of all believers that brings unity and harmony among us. We pray to see Jesus in our midst and to obey his commands. We pray for your power to move and guide us today and every day hence forth. This we pray in the name of our risen savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

April 17-April 23

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Matthew 10:28-42 (Jesus Brings Danger and Conflict)    |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | John 18:13-27 (Peter Denies Jesus)                     |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Ezekiel 18:13-27 (Repent, Turn, and Live)              |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | 2 Corinthians 7:1-11 (Godly Grief Produces Repentance) |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Psalms 51:1-9 (O God, Blot Out My Transgressions)      |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Psalms 51:10-19 (Create in Me a Clean Heart)           |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | John 21:15-25 (If You Love Me, Follow Me)              |

## JESUS REINSTATES PETER

Lesson Scripture: John 21:15-25

Focus Scripture: John 21:15-19

*Key Verse: When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." John 21:15 (NRSV)*

### JOHN 21:15-19 (NRSV)

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."

16 A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."

17 He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."

19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

### JOHN 21:15-19 (KJV)

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

## KEY TERM

- **Sheep** – Symbolically refers to God’s people; the animal also symbolizes innocence and vulnerability.

## INTRODUCTION

The final section of the closing chapter of John’s gospel ends with a specific focus upon Peter and his calling. The story transitions from the new sighting of Jesus, as he performs another miracle, to the critical conversation held at their morning breakfast. The reader can imagine the suspense felt by the seven disciples as they waited to hear from Jesus. The awkward silence is not because they are fatigued from an exhausting night fishing on the lake. Their passive attention

suggests they are wise enough to say nothing at all. Therefore, the spoken words that are the primary focus of this text are Jesus’ words to Peter. As Jesus poses the question of Peter’s love, Jesus carefully follows it with a command. Care for the people. Feed the people. These thoughtful words are not an indication of Peter’s need to provide physical food, shelter, or clothing for the needy or start sheep herding. This was Peter’s ordination into prophetic and pastoral ministry. This section reinforces and affirms Peter’s calling to lead this new movement and provide the spiritual food and oversight for the church. It was not

simply reinstating Peter but assigning him with the task of protecting the church at all costs. Peter’s acknowledgement and acceptance was assured only through his steadfast love to Jesus, the Christ.

## TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The statement that they had finished eating (v. 15) confirms that this section is a continuation of the earlier verses. Jesus let them complete their meal, before questioning Peter about his love and devotion to Jesus. Jesus asks the question, “Do you love me?” three times. Of note, the first inquiry by Jesus is unique from the others. Jesus gives the question as a comparison to the other disciples. This suggests Peter is being singled out to

model this love, and to become a leader of the church. The naming of Peter, as Simon Peter, is also reminiscent of the apostolic commission given to Peter (Mark 8:29; Matt. 15:18-19, 16:17-20). Each time, Peter’s response was the same. “Yes, Lord, you know I love you” with the final affirmative that Jesus also knows all things (v. 17). This is a characteristic of Jesus often illustrated in John’s gospel (1:48; 2:24; 6:6; 13:1; 16:30; 18:4, 28). Jesus

commands Peter to feed his sheep and then care for his sheep. Sheep are used metaphorically to symbolize other followers, as well as those who are lost and need to be found. Peter is given this

“Peter’s  
acknowledgement  
and acceptance was  
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his steadfast love to  
Jesus, the Christ.”

mantle as a shepherd, to lead the flock when Jesus departs.

Earlier, there was a similar questioning of Peter that parallels this one (Luke 22:54-62; Matt. 26:69-75). Peter's failure to acknowledge Jesus three times prior to his crucifixion was a sign of Peter's weakness. Yet, this series of questions results in a more favorable outcome. Peter appears stronger, not simply demonstrated by his carrying the net full of fish, but his resolve to see the Lord. Knowing that Peter must grow spiritually to take this

mantle, Jesus informs Peter that the weight of this commitment grows heavier over time. He advises Peter that his zeal to share the gospel would result in many adversities, even the event of his own death through crucifixion. Jesus then gives the command, "Follow me." These words were a reminder of their first encounter (Matt. 4:19), and a reaffirmation that his journey was not over. There was no

need for Peter to return to his prior life as a fisherman. He must now continue to follow Jesus, tend to the sheep, and fish for the souls of humanity.

### **SANKOFA**

*You know who you love but you can't know who loves you. – Nigerian Proverb*

The use of the term *love* is frequently misunderstood. Love can be defined in many ways. There is agape love which is

unconditional love. Eros love is considered romantic love. Philia love is the love of affection. Those who are inwardly focused have philautic love, selfish love, or self-love. Pragma love is the enduring love that continues throughout time. Therefore, the question of whether someone loves another person is relative to their definition of love. It may be difficult to understand what type of love is being felt for you. The Bible frequently speaks of God's love for humanity. In the third chapter of the gospel of John, Jesus states that God loved the

world so much that he gave his only Son, Jesus, to die for all our sins. This type of love is sacrificial, willing to take the pain of another person. This love is the type that does not demand anything in return, nor is it limited to familial relationships. This is the love we call agape. When Jesus questioned Peter about his love for him, he intended for Peter to think carefully about his answer. Even though

Jesus knew the answer, he needed Peter to reflect on everything that had happened over the past three years and be willing to still confess his love for the Lord. Peter would have to realize the sacrifices he would make. He would need to face his past mistakes and avoid repeating them again. Peter would have to remember all of Jesus' teachings and plant them deep in his heart. His professed love for the Lord was a statement of his commitment to the work of the church. This is the same type

There was no need for Peter to return to his prior life as a fisherman. He must now continue to follow Jesus, tend to the sheep, and fish for the souls of humanity.



of love that every Christian should aspire to. This type of love realizes the pain and suffering of others and seeks to find justice at every cost. This love is sacrificial. And although there may be uncertainty of how others love you, be assured that Jesus loves you unconditionally.

### CASE STUDY

Alberta Williams King was the first lady of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church and the mother of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. What many people don't

know is that Alberta King made significant contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. Not only was she a profound influence on her son's commitment to serving others, but she was also one of the original mothers of the movement. Her youngest granddaughter, Angela Farris Watkins, stated that what she loved about her grandmother was that she was gifted, loving, and skilled.

Her father, Adam Daniel Williams, was the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church. After he died, her husband, Martin Luther King, Sr., began to lead the church.

He was better known in the community as *Daddy King*. Alberta Williams King was the glue for Ebenezer Baptist Church as a devoted wife, mother, and church

member. She was college-educated, led the choir, played the church organ. She served as a proud member of the NAACP and several organizations that focused on social justice. She educated her children on society's hardships, and racism. She encouraged them to make a difference in their lifetime. Martin Luther King III stated, "Her greatest task was developing her own children. She was one of the last people that dad talked to before he was killed. My grandmother explained the vestiges of racism. This is the way it is today, and we

must work to make the world better."

Alberta Williams King's last moment alive was in the same church she loved, grew up in, and raised her children in. On June 30, 1974, the beloved community member was shot and killed while playing the organ for Sunday service at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Mrs. King was playing "*The Lord's Prayer*" when she was killed. She died six years after the murder of her son.

Five decades following her death, more attention has been given to preserve and honor her life and legacy.

The world should never forget the first lady of Ebenezer Baptist Church, the centerpiece of Sweet Auburn in Atlanta, Georgia.

What many people don't know is that Alberta King made significant contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. Not only was she a profound influence on her son's commitment to serving others, but she was also one of the original mothers of the movement.

## LIFE APPLICATION

Accepting an offer for a job, loan, or entrance into a university may seem to be an easy decision. It can be exciting to consider a position that offers additional money or increases the potential for a stronger career path. Marriage proposals are posted online as happy couples announce their engagements. Each of these events require time and emotional commitment to fulfill it. In many cases, loving the ideas, the goals, the vision, and the people make the decisions much easier. The decision to follow Jesus can also be an easy one. Realizing Jesus' love for you will change your life forever. Your life meant more to God than anything in the universe. Therefore, Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice for yours. The question is, will you accept his love. Do you love the Lord? The best decision you can make today is not a job offer, but the offer to follow Jesus.

## QUESTIONS

1. How can the church expand its reach and bring more souls to Christ?
2. What are examples of the church's fulfilling the call to fellowship as a community and care for those in

the community? Can the church do more? If so, how?

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymn #393 – “Precious Lord Take My Hand”

Closing Prayer: Psalm 23 (NRSV)

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

<sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my

cup overflows.

- <sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

“The decision to follow Jesus can also be an easy one. Realizing Jesus' love for you will change your life forever.”

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**April 24-April 30**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20 (Go and Make Disciples)    |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Joel 2:1-15 (The Day of the Lord Approaches)      |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Hebrews 1:1-14 (Jesus Seated at God's Right Hand) |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Hebrews 8:1-13 (Jesus Our Great High Priest)      |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Hebrews 9:8-22 (Jesus Has Entered the Holy Place) |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Psalms 24 (Lift Up Your Heads, O Gates!)          |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Acts 1:1-11 (You Shall Receive Power)             |

## A PROMISE IS MADE TO JESUS' DISCIPLES

Lesson Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

Focus Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

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*Key Verse: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."  
Acts 1:8a (NRSV)*

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### ACTS 1:1-11 (NRSV)

1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning

2 until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

3 After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

4 While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me;

5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

### ACTS 1:1-11 (KJV)

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;



11 They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

## KEY TERMS

- **Baptized** – The Greek root-word *baptizein* means to plunge, immerse, sink; hence to wash; to be immersed; turned from the old life of sin to a new life; “baptized in the Spirit” indicates an outward sign of an internal reality of joining with the Holy Spirit (crosswalk.com).
- **Heaven** – The dwelling of God, as well as of angels, and chosen deceased. It is often conceived as an expanse that overarches the earth; also refers to the spiritual heavens, or spirit realm, a level of existence higher than and outside of the physical universe.

Jesus promised them that they would not be left alone. Instead, his Spirit would join them and empower them for their work ahead.

and to rejoin again soon. These moments motivate everyone to do whatever it takes to recapture these experiences again. The beginning verses of the book of Acts document how the disciples must have felt when they realized their moments of joy with Jesus were coming to an end. He would no longer be with them as he had been before, in a physical state. His mission was now complete. However, Jesus promised them that they would not be left alone. Instead, his Spirit would join them and empower them for their work ahead.

## TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The book of Acts is believed to be written by Luke, friend and traveling companion to the Apostle Paul. Luke

was known to be a physician and is also credited for authoring the gospel that bears his name. The opening verse indicates that this is his second correspondence to Theophilus, who was the recipient of Luke’s gospel (Luke 1:1-4). The gospel is strategically connected to the book of Acts, since it states the occurrence of the ascension of Christ, and the promise to

## INTRODUCTION

There are times when family and friends gather for holidays, weddings, and other special occasions. Moments like these are often considered the best memories of our lives. These occasions are so full of joy that no one wants them to end. They inspire commitments to never be far apart

the disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:48-53). Therefore, Acts is the inspiring documentation of the continued work of Jesus Christ, through his disciples.

The text intentionally mentions that the encounters with the risen Lord occurred between his resurrection and ascension, over a period of forty days. This indicates that his disciples and others offered consistent evidence over time of Jesus' physical resurrection. During this period, the text reveals that there were still inquiries about the restoration of Israel's kingdom. Again, Jesus reminds them that they had no need to know such things. Instead, their focus must be on their assignment. This is where Jesus promises that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit. This power would quench their fears, doubts, or any hindrances to their ability to minister.

This promise was accompanied by a command to preach the gospel to others in Jerusalem and beyond. The disciples could no longer avoid their calling, nor question it. Jesus then ascended to heaven, which can be compared to the story of Elijah's departure to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). This continues an interwoven connection between Jesus and the prophet Elijah, as it was

Moses and Elijah who appeared on the mountain with Jesus (Matt. 17:1-3). Like other supernatural occurrences, this was out of the disciples' control. They stood watching, in shock and amazement. Needing redirection to the mission by heavenly messengers, two "men dressed in white" were standing next to them, questioning their gaze into the sky. This reminded the disciples of Jesus' promise to return. Although human beings will not know when the Lord will return, it will occur in the same manner as he left; swift

and without warning (Matt. 24:36; 25:13). Therefore, all souls should be mindful that no one knows the day nor the hour in which Christ will return.

### SANKOFA

*We desire to bequeath two things to our children. The first one is roots; the other one is wings. – Sudanese Proverb*

What is the meaning of the Sankofa bird?

The bird is rendered as twisting its beak behind itself, in order to bring forth an egg from its back. Sankofa is an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana. The meaning of the syllables is broken down as follows: San (return) Ko (go) Fa (look, seek, and take). The literal translation of the word and the symbol is "it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind." The word "Sankofa" can

Jesus promises that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit. This power would quench their fears, doubts, or any hindrances to their ability to minister.

also be translated to mean “go back to the past and bring forward that which is useful.” The Sankofa bird has therefore been adopted by various organizations as a symbol of retrieving our rich African history and striving to bring meaning and critical importance of African and African diaspora studies.

The Akan people believe that the past serves as a guide for planning the future. To the Akan, it is this wisdom in learning from the past which ensures the strength of future generations. Connecting the past with the present allows us to be more effective agents in shaping our understanding of the forces that have impacted us. This knowledge can collectively shape the future for everyone. The Sankofa concept honors the elders of the past. It gives life to the teachings, wisdom, and strategies that would otherwise be lost.

There is a wealth of knowledge that can be obtained from the experiences of the past. Even the tragic events that illustrate injustice and oppression are opportunities to plan and commit for a better future. The worst tragedies are ignoring the history of the past, and blindly continuing to forge an uninformed and ignorant path for the future. The Bible repeatedly

teaches that prosperity and success arise from learning from past mistakes. The fate of the future is dependent on the commitment to teach future generations the history of the past.

Therefore, there is tremendous merit in the argument to ensure the accuracy of reporting historical events in every nation’s historical records. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is often feared by those who have benefited from the darker side of America’s history. Yet, presenting

Connecting the past with the present allows us to be more effective agents in shaping our understanding of the forces that have impacted us. This knowledge can collectively shape the future for everyone.

a clear and truthful account of history offers redemption and reconciliation for the collective body. Countries like Germany, for instance, recognized the atrocities of their history during World War II. Instead of ignoring their history or distorting the realities of their shameful attempts at genocide, they acknowledged it. They promoted a place of healing to those who had suffered from Nazi Germany’s terror. Slowly, the United

States acknowledges its past sins, one Confederate monument at a time. However, the true redemption occurs when future generations are taught the past, so they can work towards a better future.

## CASE STUDY

The early disciples must have felt an indescribable feeling as they waited for God's Spirit to appear to them and guide them in this new religious movement. They were excited and joyful to see the risen savior, Jesus, and to receive a commission to return to Jerusalem. But they were still under great scrutiny by religious leaders and Roman guards, which was exasperated by their reported sightings of Jesus being alive. This close-knit group of believers, however, were still held together by their faith and renewed hope. The birth of the church would be the support system for this new life.

The early church gives a historical image that is relatable to black Americans. Shortly after the Civil War, nineteenth-century black churches were the meeting place for most black people. It was the Black Church that ministered to the needs of the souls of those who feared what might happen next. The church also served a host of secular functions, which placed them squarely in the center of black social life. Church buildings doubled as community meeting centers and schools until permanent structures could be built. The Black Church provided shelter for visitors as well as temporary places for social events.



The early church gives a historical image that is relatable to black Americans.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church emerged as the second-largest black denomination following the Civil War. Because of its independence, the AME Church had always been viewed with suspicion in the antebellum south, which was the time following the War of 1812 and prior to the Civil War. Although legal discrimination forced the AME Church out of South Carolina in 1822, the church was later reorganized in South Carolina in 1865 by Bishop Daniel Payne. The power of God caused the church to grow to forty-four thousand members by 1877.

This immense church growth was not received well by those who disapproved of black independence. In 1908, *The Christian Index* published the "Colored Methodist Bishops' Appeal to White America-1908." In their statement, church leaders responded to the surge of mob violence and lynching occurring across the country. They denounced Jim Crow laws and advocated for an end to the spread of anti-black violence. Anti-black terrorism proliferated into the twentieth century. The more black churches vehemently vocalized a call to end racial violence and terrorism, the more targeted churches and their members became.

Extensive assaults on members and



black communities took place by burning black churches, which was interpreted as an attack on civil rights activism and the larger black religious community. The worst example of these racist attacks and church destruction occurred on September 15, 1963, when the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama was bombed. Four children were killed in the attack, along with many church members injured.

These racially motivated arsons did not destroy the souls of black communities. Just as the early church of 2000 years ago faced tremendous prejudice and persecution during their growth, they also persevered and faithfully continued to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. The Black Church in America persevered also. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the resilience and faith of the people, the message of a liberating gospel continued. The message from black churches was twofold, freedom from sin, and freedom from oppression.

### LIFE APPLICATION

On any given day, the faith of Christian believers will be tested. Increasing gun violence, wars and threats of wars, health

threats and disparities, and an underlying racial division and cultural insensitivity are just a few of the hazards of the black and brown communities. The Bible informs us that although the world is in chaos, God is still in control. Those who believe in the saving grace of Jesus Christ will also receive power to overcome these threats. That power comes from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit not only provides strength and courage, but it also equips believers with gifts of wisdom, healing, discernment, and more. The battles we

Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the resilience and faith of the people, the message of a liberating gospel continued. The message from black churches was twofold, freedom from sin, and freedom from oppression.

face require unrelenting advocacy and social action. But we must also remember to fight on our knees, praying for God's Spirit to move the mountainous evil we face each day. Jesus told the disciples that he would send the Spirit to equip them for what was ahead. Every believer can be confident that with God's Holy Spirit within them, victory will one day prevail.

### QUESTIONS

1. What are the issues that many Christians' face, in life and in ministry, that the body of Christ can work together to overcome?
2. What are the signs that the world is not ready for Christ's return? What can be done to strengthen the church's

witness about Jesus in preparation of his return?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymn #7 – “Come, Thou Almighty King”

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Lord, we as a church collectively thank you for all that you have done. I personally thank you, Lord, for sacrificing your life for me. Thank you for giving me new life and restoring my soul. Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to strengthen, guide, and

comfort me. Thank you for removing all fear and doubt and enabling me to see all things new. You are great and greatly to be praised. You have prepared us all, as a community, to witness to others of your great love. In your name, I believe that your Spirit rests upon me and has equipped me, along with the entire body of believers, to accomplish this great mission. In the name of Jesus, the Christ, I pray. Amen.

Written by Reverend Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 1-May 7

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Psalms 68:17-19, 24-35 (God's Strength Revealed) |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | John 14:15-27 (The Spirit of Truth)              |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | John 16:1-15 (The Spirit Testifies of Jesus)     |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Psalms 16 (The Lord My Chosen Portion)           |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Acts 2:1-13 (Amazement at the Spirit's Power)    |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Acts 2:14-28 (The Promise Fulfilled)             |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Acts 2:29-42 (Receive the Gift of the Spirit)    |

## THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

Lesson Scripture: Acts 2:1-42

Focus Scripture: Acts 2:1-8, 14-24, 37-39

*Key Verse: "For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, every-one whom the Lord our God calls to him." Acts 2:39 (NRSV)*

ACTS 2:1-8, 14-24, 37-39 (NRSV)

### Acts 2:1-8

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

### 14-24

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

ACTS 2:1-8, 14-24, 37-39 (KJV)

### Acts 2:1-8

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

### 14-24

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all

and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

22 You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—

23 this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.

24 But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power."

### 37-39

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:

21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

### 37-39

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

## KEY TERMS

- **Pentecost** - The Feast of Pentecost is also known as Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Harvest, and the Latter First Fruits. It is celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover, to

present offerings for the summer wheat harvest. Over time, Pentecost came to be celebrated as the anniversary feast of the giving of the Mosaic Law and the establishment of the covenant at Sinai.



- **Proselyte** – (Gr. to approach) One who lives in a foreign community. A convert from one religion to another, more specifically, a convert to Judaism.

## INTRODUCTION

There are various seasons of celebration in the Jewish laws and traditions. One of these is the Feast of Pentecost, an annual celebration of the first summer wheat harvest, which was celebrated seven weeks and one day (50 days) after the first day of Passover.

Like other celebrations, many Jews would set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to honor the Lord God for their success, and to bring a sacrificial offering. However, for the disciples, it was another day of waiting for a sign from God. Their lives had been a whirlwind of events beginning with meeting Jesus three years prior. They saw the miraculous signs and wonders he performed, only to be devastated

through betrayal by one of their own brethren, Judas. The events that followed horrified all of them as they watched Judas' actions result in Jesus' crucifixion. However, their despair was turned to joy as they witnessed Jesus being alive on more than one occasion.

The reunion with the risen Lord was short lived, as they received direction from him to return to Jerusalem and wait for God to send his Spirit. They watched as he ascended into heaven and were told by angels to follow his command to return to Jerusalem. Although they were stunned and confused by the myriad of events that occurred, they obeyed. They selected a replacement for Judas, and they prayed. The evangelist author of Acts, Luke, documents this point of their journey by intentionally recording that the group was

prayerful and on one accord. As the masses around them celebrated a feast of harvest, they would soon witness a greater celebration. They witnessed the manifestation of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the newly anointed disciples. This moment changed not only the lives of the people in Jerusalem, but people across the world.

They witnessed the manifestation of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the newly anointed disciples. This moment changed not only the lives of the people in Jerusalem, but people across the world.

## TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The book of Acts brings to life the birth of the church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Luke is believed to have recorded this account from the Apostle Peter, who would be the first to evangelize under the Spirit's power. The disciples were

waiting for a move from God. Jesus had instructed them to return to Jerusalem, where they would receive the Holy Spirit. It was a feast day, in which many other Jews and new Jewish converts traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate and bring their sacrificial offerings. The disciples are described as returning to Jerusalem with extraordinary joy after having been with the risen savior and witnessing his ascension to heaven (Luke 24:52). They were in good spirits, anticipating further signs from God. The record illustrates how difficult it would have been to describe this event. Peter would have to use terms such as “like,” and such as whirlwinds, tongues, and fire in attempts to compare the experience with other powerful natural occurrences. The sound of a violent and roaring wind was distinguishably different from other windstorms. The description indicates unfathomable intensity, yet it left those present unharmed. Scholars sometimes debate the visual description as not referring to actual fire but as a figure of speech. Divided tongues of fire are suggested to indicate the power in which the newly anointed apostles were able to speak in languages beyond their native tongues. Their discourse and inflection can be

considered fiery tones and weighty speeches that pricked the hearts of many hearers. Yet there is also a significant group that believe there must have been a visual aura of light that hovered above their heads, enabling them to suddenly have advanced abilities in linguistics and debate, that no natural human being could possess.

What is apparent in the text is the boldness and courage that suddenly filled their spirits. They no longer dreaded the authorities, nor cared whether they would be received with any favor. It was like *a fire shut up in their bones* (Jer. 20:9). God’s favor provided them the honor to be the manifestation of Joel’s prophecy. Based on the prophecy, it is assumed that the spirit not only fell upon the men, but the women as well. As Peter preached to the doubters among the crowds, thousands of souls felt the urging to know how they could be saved. It was not a trick of magic, nor a byproduct of new wine. A crowd of thousands were moved to the core, that this gospel was real. From that day forward, the message of salvation through a belief in Jesus Christ would change the region and the world.



What is apparent in the text is the boldness and courage that suddenly filled their spirits.

## SANKOFA

The American Negro spirituals are the folk songs created by the enslaved Africans after their arrival in North America between 1619 and 1860. Although slavery ended with Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the enslaved people in Texas did not receive the notice until June 19, 1865, hence the Juneteenth Celebration. The anguish of oppression continued and so did the songs. These songs created and sung by enslaved women, men, and children were born in North America and recant with dignity and determination their struggles. The heart of each singer may have communicated joy as well as sorrow. Each song was a tale of their stories of life, death, faith, hope, escape, and survival. The melodies along with the tales that formulated them were passed down orally from generation to generation. Some were sung in the plantation fields, some in churches, others at camp meetings in the field. Today, the beauty of Negro spirituals can be heard resounding in concert hall stages and recital series around the world.

Spirituals play a significant role in churches. Although they are Negro

spirituals, churches from various diverse groups embrace their meaning and power. Eileen Guenther, director of music at Wesley Theological Seminary, felt it was important to capture and share the diversity of Christian music by incorporating spirituals in many worship services. Spirituals began with chants, Guenther wrote in the *Choral Journal*. Dr. Everett McCorvey emphasizes that these songs which originated from the North American slaves were distinctive

These songs created and sung by enslaved women, men, and children were born in North America and recant with dignity and determination their struggles. The heart of each singer may have communicated joy as well as sorrow.

because the history and ongoing experience of slavery in America was different. Whether hums, groans, or chants, they served as modes of communication in the fields, a way to ease their burdens of labor, their painful grief of another lost child, sold to another plantation. What must be considered is the genre is named *spiritual* for a reason. The inner spirits of every Negro man and woman were expressed in these songs. The power to overcome the oppressive system came from God's Spirit.

Just as the Israelites were freed from the bondage of Egypt, there was hope, and a plea to the Lord, to let our people go.

## CASE STUDY

Most Christians are familiar with the term *revivals*. Revivals were historically an

opportunity to bring communities together for vibrant, spirit-filled worship. In rural areas, they were also known as camp meetings. These meetings originated with circuit-riding Methodist preachers who gathered congregations in open fields and town squares for preaching opportunities. However, the sermons had messages that were not always welcomed by mainstream Protestant churches in the colonial and antebellum south. With the help of white itinerant preachers, enslaved African Americans organized their own camp meetings in conjunction with the white revivals. These celebratory events were spiritual, with preaching, worship, and communion. They also offered a venue for family gatherings and reunions. After the Civil War, independent African American congregations built on this heritage by establishing permanent camps. Some camps even continue to welcome meetings today.

In *A Place to Worship*, Minuette Floyd shares an intimate portrait of the culture, traditions, and long history of the camp meeting. It was known as one of the most vital institutions in the lives of rural African Americans in North and South Carolina. As a young girl, Floyd attended camp meetings each year in North Carolina, and she renewed her interest in them as an adult. For more than eighteen

years, Floyd travelled to campgrounds throughout the Carolinas, documenting the annual tradition through photographs and interviews. Her current research focuses on utilizing ethnographic methods and photography to document the camp meeting traditions throughout areas of the United States. Her interest in folk life, folk traditions, and self-taught artists is also developing into curricular materials for teachers to use in their classrooms. Floyd has sought to record not only a visual record of the places and practices of each meeting, but she wanted to capture the rich and inspiring stories of the people who made them thrive. Her work captures the experiences of real people, filled with the Spirit. Camp meetings embraced the Holy Spirit as well as a spirit of family and community.



Camp meetings embraced the Holy Spirit as well as a spirit of family and community.

### LIFE APPLICATION

Those who have faced stiff competitions in sports, politics, wars, or oppressive systems will tell anyone that the first step towards victory is a strong, determined spirit that believes. You must have a determined mind and a steadfast heart, completely unmoved by the challenges ahead. The Bible continuously illustrates the need to believe, not simply in oneself, but in a power greater than you. Whether it was Moses as he faced Pharaoh, Daniel in the lion's den, or the

disciples after Jesus' crucifixion, each situation required faith in God. But when faith begins to waiver, God will send a booster shot. The Holy Spirit provides the additional courage and fortitude needed to face insurmountable odds. The Holy Spirit also provides wisdom and understanding regarding the situations we face. Seek the Lord in all situations. Pray for God's Holy Spirit to direct and guide you in all decisions. Ask for comfort in times of grief. The Spirit of the Lord will also give you insight and even the ability to communicate in ways you never have before. Trust God and pray for a daily booster shot of the Holy Spirit.

## QUESTIONS

1. How can the Holy Spirit guide you in your daily life activities, whether at work, home, school, or other personal decisions?
2. How can the Holy Spirit guide the church in decisions regarding evangelism, missionary work, and

social advocacy?

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** African American Heritage Hymn # 322 – “With Thy Spirit Fill Me”

Or William McDowell – “Spirit Break Out” YouTube video (<https://youtu.be/wOSLtqxD-bM>)

**Closing Prayer:** Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, keep me. Come, Holy Spirit, into this place, this broken vessel. Fill the cracks of my heart with your love. Close the void spaces with your power. Strengthen my soul that I may always seek your kingdom and righteousness. Shower me with your anointing so I may be used by you for your glory. Come, Holy Spirit, into this vessel, I pray. Amen.

Written by Reverend Dr. D. Melynda Clarke – inspired by the Daniel Iverson hymn “Spirit of the Living God”

## HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 8-May 14

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Luke 10:1-9 (Sent to Preach and Heal)                 |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Luke 10:10-24 (Rejoice in Salvation, Not Power)       |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Psalms 41 (God Protects and Preserves)                |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Psalms 42 (My Soul Longs for God)                     |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Isaiah 35:1-10 (Then the Lame Shall Leap)             |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Acts 3:1-11 (Peter Heals in Jesus' Name)              |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Acts 3:12-26 (Peter Preaches Salvation through Jesus) |



## JUMPING FOR JOY

Lesson Scripture: Acts 3

Focus Scripture: Acts 3:1-11

*Key Verse: Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. Acts 3:8 (NRSV)*

### ACTS 3:1-11 (NRSV)

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon.

2 And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple.

3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms.

4 Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."

5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.

6 But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk."

7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

8 Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

9 All the people saw him walking and praising God,

10 and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished.

### ACTS 3:1-11 (KJV)

1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God:

10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

## KEY TERMS

- **Alms** – Greek (pity, relief of the poor); in historic Christianity, alms giving was the act of filling a material need for someone less fortunate, usually by giving money. A regard to the state of the poor and needy is enjoined as a Christian duty
- **Portico** – Colonnaded porch or entrance to a structure, or a covered walkway supported by regularly spaced columns. Porticoes formed the inner entrances to ancient Greek temples.

## INTRODUCTION

This lesson reveals the newly endowed disciples embracing the great commission mandate by Jesus. They are now empowered by the Holy Spirit and walk in the authority of God's gift. Peter, who was previously critical of what could be done for the poor, is confidently walking with the gift of healing in his hands.

The scripture illustrates the disciples are not concerned about religious objections to their message as they boldly walk into the temple. The story validates the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit and the disciples' obedience to Jesus' final instructions. As all the disciples were able to speak in foreign tongues, they

now demonstrate the ability to heal, just as Jesus did. The miracle would not go unnoticed. The recipient of this great gift openly praises God, which draws more people to inquire of what has occurred. Like any situation in a public space, people want to know what happened. They were not disappointed. The scriptures now provide information of how a small band of disciples would suddenly make an impact on this very restrictive, politically driven region. The news spread fast. These disciples of Jesus are continuing to share this message that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, and everyone can receive this wonderful gift of salvation.

These disciples of Jesus are continuing to share this message that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, and everyone can receive this wonderful gift of salvation.

## TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The scene of this narrative begins with a lame man sitting at one of the temple gates. The text indicates that his disability was so limiting that it required others to carry him to the temple's entrance to beg for alms. This was a frequent practice for this man. He obviously depended on the

mercy of others to collect enough money to purchase food. This day would be different. As he waits at the entrance, the three apostles, Peter, John, and Andrew approach the entrance. He presents his condition to them, as evidence to support his plea. Peter, however, ensures that

the man recognizes that they have no money to give. What Peter offers is beyond what money could buy. He offers him the healing power through the name of Jesus.

What is significant in this text is that the apostles were familiar with the people who often gathered at the temple to beg. Their motives were likely to evangelize and share the gospel. Their recent empowerment of the Holy Spirit strengthened their resolve to enter even the religious settings in which Jewish leaders would object to their teachings.

This account also specifically identifies their location in the temple. Their backdrop was Herod's restored temple where builders had doubled in size the area with an elaborate Hellenistic portico. This portico bearing Solomon's name ran along the eastern wall in the Court of the Gentiles, where warning signs were posted as barriers to separate the Court of the Gentiles from the other courts in the temple. This same portico was the scene of Christ's teaching at the Feast of the Dedication (John 10:23), where many people flocked to him for healing of the lame. The reaction by the people of Peter's actions of healing the lame man were similar. As they entered with

the man close by, leaping and jumping, others present gathered in amazement. The miracle provided a sign that God's work of redemption and hope through Jesus would now continue through his disciples. The gospel message spread as they continued to testify of Jesus' death and resurrection and demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit.

## SANKOFA

*Kindness is a language which the blind can see and the deaf can hear. – African Proverb*

The gospel message spread as they continued to testify of Jesus' death and resurrection and demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit.

The country of Ghana in West Africa is known for many things. It is considered the main location in which Africans were enslaved and sent to the Americas. This makes Ghana a popular tourist destination for African Americans who want to learn of their history.

Ghana is also a highly multilingual nation. It has a population of over 25 million people with different ethnic groups. There are over 80 ethnic languages spoken in Ghana, but English is Ghana's official language. This is due to its history of colonization. Ghana is rich in precious minerals. After South Africa, Ghana is Africa's second largest and the world's seventh largest producer of gold. In 2016, the country exported \$2.39 billion dollars worth of gold. Thus,

the reason for Ghana previously being named the Gold Coast. Besides gold, Ghana is also rich in diamonds.

Ghana has been able to maintain parts of its ethnic history. The Ashanti Empire was a major African kingdom that occupied the land that now belongs to present-day Ghana. It is one of the most internationally famous African empires and was studied extensively by the British. Although Ghana is a presidential democracy, the Ashanti kingdom still survived in the country as a sub-national proto-state that enjoys constitutional protection. This means that Ghana has managed to protect its tradition without losing its democratic nature.

Ghanaians do not simply boast of what they have obtained or maintained. The people of Ghana pride themselves as being friendly and hospitable. While Americans are likely to keep to themselves, Ghanaians are much more open to making friends in any setting. Ghanaians emphasize communal values such as family, respect for the elderly, honoring traditional rulers, and the importance of dignity and proper social conduct. Individual conduct is seen as having impact on an entire family, social group, and community. Everyone is

Individual conduct is seen as having impact on an entire family, social group, and community. Everyone is expected to be respectful, dignified, and observant in most every aspect of life.

expected to be respectful, dignified, and observant in most every aspect of life. Ghana, however, is not immune to crime. The country experienced an 8% increase in 2016. Yet compared to the U.S. crime rate statistics of 5.32, Ghana's rate is still lower at 2.09. What this may teach us is that kindness and respect can improve the status of most communities. Regardless of the wealth and prosperity that people may have, the richest component of the society will always be in how they treat others.

### CASE STUDY

Dr. Velma Scantlebury earned her Doctor of Surgery in 1989 and has performed more than 2,000 transplants. She is the United States first black female transplant surgeon. She says that while donated organs are allocated equitably along racial lines in America, African Americans continue to face unique disadvantages in the life-saving process.

According to Dr. Scantlebury, the black community needs to become more aware of the need for more organ donors among nonwhite Americans. It is more difficult for African Americans to be placed on kidney transplant lists, even though they are more likely to have end-stage renal disease. Dr. Scantlebury said her black

patients face inequality in health care, poor treatment by some doctors, lack of insurance, late referrals to specialists, and a lack of health literacy. “They are often diagnosed late, due to a lack of equity of health care. When referred to receive a transplant, many have difficulty navigating the system to get the required tests. Hypertension and diabetes are more common in African Americans, and despite this, many patients are neglected when it comes to getting their kidney function checked,” said Scantlebury.

“My parents taught us that education is important and that we can be anything we want to be. I did not grow up seeing obstacles. I saw possibilities,” she said. “My parents knew I wanted to be a doctor, and despite not having any means, my mother came to the United States to clean floors ... suffering much humiliation to bring us from Barbados to this country.”

“She wanted to make it possible for me to become a doctor. So, with the strength and belief of my parents, my belief in God, and that all things are possible, I pursued my dream.”

Today she is a professor of surgery at Texas Christian University and the University of North Texas Health Science Center and Medical School in Fort Worth,

Texas. She retired in 2020 where she worked in the Christiana Care’s Kidney Transplant Program in Delaware.

“Racism was very evident. On a few occasions patients objected to my being their surgeon. Only in one situation did the Japanese surgeon defend me, and spoke up,” she said. “Patients assumed I was there to clean their room, take their trays, but never the doctor. I had to maintain my self-esteem and keep telling myself, ‘Yes, I can! I am capable; I am talented, I can make it with the help of God.’”

“She wanted to make it possible for me to become a doctor. So, with the strength and belief of my parents, my belief in God, and that all things are possible, I pursued my dream.”

#### LIFE APPLICATION

It is common to see someone on a street corner with a sign asking for assistance. The person may have a legitimate need, challenged by job loss, health issues, or mental health concerns. Much of the homeless population in the United States are persons who suffer from mental health problems. In addition, some are U.S. veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Every person has a right to a decent quality of life, including the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. The church’s responsibility is to help meet these needs and to help the disadvantaged get back on their feet. Furthermore, the church is commanded to be the beacon of life for the less fortunate. In addition to the material items needed for survival,



people need the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The next time you go out, try to keep a gospel tract with you, along with some spare change to give to someone in need. That may be the best gift they ever received. It may not pay for a steak dinner, but it could easily give them hope through Jesus Christ.

**QUESTION**

1. What can Christians do to help displaced Americans who suffer from physical disabilities and mental illnesses?

**CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymn #352 – “I Know the Lord’s Laid His Hands on Me”

**Closing Prayer:** He who dwells in the secret place of the most high God shall abide in the shadow of the almighty. Lord, we are grateful on this day to know you have kept us, saved us, and made us whole. We may not have gold and

diamonds, but we are richly blessed to know Jesus. Lord, we pray for those who have not received the gospel. We pray for souls to be saved and bodies to be healed. We pray for the sick, those who suffer from diseases and other hardships. We lift a special prayer for those who are waiting for an organ donation. We thank you for many who have already been healed miraculously and through the gift of scientific research and advancements. We pray for healthcare workers everywhere. And we thank you, Lord, that your power is real. Nothing is impossible with God. And as Jesus stated, if we ask in his name, we can receive it. So, we wait in faithful expectancy for the manifestation of your power to be revealed for **(enter name)**. We believe that your power is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We are grateful for what you’ve already done. And we will be witnesses to the world of your goodness, your grace, and your mercy. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**May 15-May 21**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Acts 6:8-15 (Full of Grace and Power)                   |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Acts 7:48–8:2 (The First Martyr)                        |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Isaiah 60:9-14 (The Far Countries Wait for God)         |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Zechariah 8:1-8, 20-23 (Peoples Shall Come to the Lord) |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Psalms 139:1-10 (God Is Present Everywhere)             |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Acts 8:4-17 (Samaritans Embrace the Gospel)             |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Acts 8:26-40 (The Spirit Guides Us)                     |

## AN ETHIOPIAN OFFICIAL BAPTIZED

Lesson Scripture: Acts 8:26-40

Focus Scripture: Acts 8:29-40

*Key Verse: He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. Acts 8:38. (NRSV)*

### ACTS 8:29-40 (NRSV)

29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."

30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

31 He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.

32 Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth."

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"

37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

39 When they came up out of the water, the

### ACTS 8:29-40 (KJV)

29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

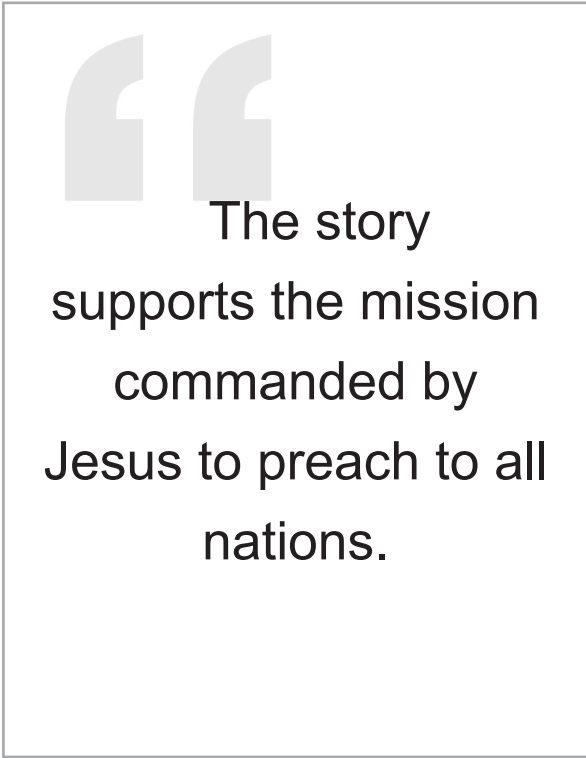
40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

**KEY TERM**

- **Candace** – The name and term “Candace” was given to the queens of the kingdom of Kush who ruled from the city of Meroe from 284 BC - 314 AD, eight of whom ruled independently in what is now Sudan. Queen Amantitere reigned during an extremely prosperous period of Meroe’s history, leading scholars to believe she is the Candace referenced in Acts 8:27



The story supports the mission commanded by Jesus to preach to all nations.

directions. Despite the tragic events that were unfolding, it became a catalyst for the growth of the church. Peter and John made their way to Samaria, where Samaritans would be converted. However, the growth of the church would not be limited to the immediate areas surrounding Jerusalem. The Apostle Philip receives a vision that sends him to witness to an Ethiopian eunuch. The story supports the mission commanded by Jesus to preach to all nations. This report of the conversion of the Ethiopian official has been offered as a component of the traditional background

**INTRODUCTION**

Occasionally, Christians will look back over their past and recognize that God divinely orchestrated their path. Such a revelation is certainly recognized in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official. The eighth chapter of Acts offers the anguish as well as excitement of the rapidly growing Christian community. Christians were hunted by Saul, and Stephen had been killed. The tight-knit group of believers were scattered in all

and history of the Christian community in Ethiopia, which promoted the establishment of the Ethiopian Church. This text notes the conversion of a person of great wealth and influence. This is a stark difference from the predominance of Greco-Roman conversions within a much lower socio-economic community. Despite the potential consequences of torture and imprisonment for continuing

to spread Christianity across the region, Philip enthusiastically brings a soul to be baptized and receive Christ. The Ethiopian is now able to inform others of this new teaching. The gospel message continues to spread to other nations.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

This story reveals how far the Jewish faith extended. Although the Ethiopian in this text is assumed to be a proselyte, he was nonetheless a Jew. This is based on the report that he had been to the temple in Jerusalem to worship and possessed a copy of the Jewish scriptures. He demonstrates great commitment to his new belief by the evidence of him traveling to the temple in Jerusalem, and the time he took to continue to study and ponder the scriptures after his visit. Despite his devotion to his faith, he was disrespected by Jewish leaders and looked at with disdain. Not only was he a high official of a pagan foreign government, but a eunuch. For any pious, observant Jew, this man would be excluded from rituals and would be unclean in the community because he was physically impaired. But the gospel message was different for this Ethiopian eunuch. Luke portrays the Christian community reaching out to

the greatest extent possible in contrast to traditional Judaism.

Philip was extremely obedient to God, which resulted in a successful encounter with the stranger. Instead of questioning God about going out on a desert road, the scripture says he ran to the chariot. This would appear unwise to be a lone stranger rapidly approaching an undoubtedly well-protected caravan of a man with wealth. Yet, Philip not only approached the royal entourage, but he aggressively ran up to it. The Holy Spirit moved him to teach this perfect stranger and he was received without facing any objection. The power of the Holy Spirit guided him to a place where water could be found, and the eunuch was baptized. The Spirit of the Lord seized Philip, and the eunuch did not see him again, but he went on his way rejoicing. Once the task was complete, the Spirit moved Philip to his next assignment in Azotus (Greek name), also known as Ashdod (Hebrew). The next city was once a Philistine city. Philip continued

Philip was extremely obedient to God, which resulted in a successful encounter with the stranger. Instead of questioning God about going out on a desert road, the scripture says he ran to the chariot.

his work of evangelism to diverse people throughout the region. This fits the mission perfectly, which is to preach the gospel to all nations, and baptizing them in the Father, Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

## SANKOFA

According to experts that research the history of the African continent, the original ancient name of Africa was Alkebulan. This name translates to “mother of mankind,” or “the garden of Eden.” Alkebulan is an extremely old word, and its origins are indigenous. Many African nations identified with this word, including the Ethiopians, Nubians, Moors, and Numidians. The continent has always been viewed as a “motherland,” meaning the area of mother earth that richly supports all other areas of our planet.

Africa is a major producer of important metals and minerals. Metals exported by African countries include uranium, used to produce nuclear energy; platinum, used in jewelry and industrial applications; nickel, used in stainless steel, magnets, coins, and rechargeable batteries; bauxite, a main aluminum ore; and cobalt, used in color pigments.

Africa has always been known for being wealthy in resources, therefore, also considered a source for outside civilizations to obtain their wealth. Africa’s two most profitable mineral resources are gold and diamonds. In 2008, Africa produced about 483 tons of gold, or 22 percent of the world’s total production.

South Africa accounts for almost half of Africa’s gold production. Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Tanzania are other major producers of gold. Africa dominates the global diamond market. In 2008, the continent produced 55 percent of the world’s diamonds. Botswana, Angola, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Namibia are Africa’s largest producers of diamonds.

Unfortunately, several African conflicts and civil wars have been caused and funded by the diamond industry. Diamonds that come from these regions are known as conflict diamonds or blood diamonds. It holds 65 percent of the world’s arable land and is ten percent of the planet’s internal renewable fresh water source.

But Africa’s greatest resource has always been the people. For over four hundred years, more than 15 million men, women, and children were the victims of the tragic transatlantic slave trade, one of the darkest chapters in human history. The slave trade had devastating effects in Africa. Economic incentives for warlords and tribes to engage in the trade of enslaved people promoted an atmosphere of lawlessness and violence. Depopulation and a continuing fear of captivity made economic and agricultural development almost



But Africa’s greatest resource has always been the people.



impossible throughout much of western Africa. A significant percentage of the people taken captive were women in their childbearing years. The colonization of the continent did not promote Christianity as much as it eroded the rich culture, erased the historical magnitude of prior empires, and increased internal tensions and strife. Despite these obstructions, the continent of Africa remains a place of tremendous wealth and potential. There is an ethical and most importantly a Christian responsibility to protect the amazing and incomparable resources and cultures that are found in the heart of Africa, the birthplace of humanity.

### CASE STUDY

Most people who live in western civilizations think of people who live in Africa as impoverished, uneducated, and starving. The causes of many of the woes that have beset African countries can be researched through colonization and foreign influences that intentionally divided the communities on the African continent. This stereotype of African people must be changed and updated to reveal the tremendous accomplishments and economic success stories that are currently prospering on the continent.

One such report is that of Akiko

Seyoum Ambaye, the daughter of the late and well-known contractor Seyoum Ambaye. Dr. Ambaye is the founder and major shareholder of Orchid Business Group and Construction Company PLC.

Orchid Business Group (OBG) holds government contracts for a variety of highly lucrative endeavors. It is involved in the construction of the GERD or Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the Awash/Kombolcha/Woldiya Railway construction, as well as many other foundational works and roads.

This stereotype of African people must be changed and updated to reveal the tremendous accomplishments and economic success stories that are currently prospering on the continent.

Furthermore, Akiko's OBG also engages in construction machinery rental, spas, gyms, and logistical works. Recently, Akiko, along with the Italian Enel Green Power, collaborated to sign a \$120,000,000 project to develop, operate, and build a solar power generation plant in Metehara. Akiko's deal with the EEP or Ethiopian Electric Power would make her

the first Ethiopian to build a privately owned and operated solar plant in the country. The extensive business dealings of the Orchid Business Group cement Akiko as one of Ethiopia's richest citizens and legitimately qualifies her as a female billionaire.

## LIFE APPLICATION

Money, wealth, and riches are not absent from the Bible stories. In fact, Jesus often used money as a tool to teach parables and demonstrate miracles to his disciples. The church also understands that money is a component of Christian life. Just as seen in this story, believers of Jesus Christ came from diverse backgrounds. However, what is noted in this passage is that although the eunuch was returning to his home and vocational commitment, his focus was still on the scriptures. He sought understanding from Philip and was thrilled to bring this message home. The passage teaches the church today that whatever the social economic status each member holds, the focus should always be on the sacred scripture. There is a responsibility to study the Word and seek understanding from a wise teacher. God's Word is the foundation of all things and is the basis for every future decision. As Jesus taught the disciples in Matthew 6:33, seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. The eunuch realized that his greatest task at hand was to believe and be baptized. So should each Christian today, to seek the Lord first, and he will take care of the rest. Finally, just as Philip was led to share insight into the sacred texts, look at ways you and/or your church can share

The passage teaches the church today that whatever the social economic status each member holds, the focus should always be on the sacred scripture.

the gospel to other communities and even other nations. Research technology applications to expand Bible teachings. Consider buying Bibles for the homeless or persons in prison. Be ready to be used by the Holy Spirit when he leads you to evangelize to others outside of your local community.

## QUESTIONS

1. The Bible gives many examples of diversity among God's people. How can you reach out to other diverse races and cultures and share the gospel?
2. The scripture states that the Spirit took Philip to the place where he met the eunuch. Do you recall a time when you felt the Holy Spirit was moving you to engage in a conversation about Jesus with someone you did not know? Be prayerful that you are alert to the Spirit's guidance and direction in the future.

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** AME Hymn #395 – "He Leadeth Me"

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Lord, we thank you this day for the blessing to study your Word together. We are blessed to have a church and denomination that invests in sound biblical teaching. We pray for all of

our pastors, clergy, Sunday school and Bible study teachers, writers and editors, and others throughout the church who are sent to teach your Word. We pray for innovative approaches that will reach souls across our communities and across the world. Strengthen our faith that we

will enthusiastically go where you send us. We pray that all of these efforts will not be ignored but will accomplish your will in the saving and recommitment of souls to Jesus Christ. It is in his name we pray. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 22-May 28

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Psalm 19 (The Heaven's Tell God's Glory)           |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Galatians 1:10-24 (A Heavenly Gospel)              |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Philippians 3:1-14 (Only Christ Matters)           |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Philippians 3:15-21 (Our Citizenship Is in Heaven) |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Acts 9:1-9 (Blinded by the Light)                  |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Acts 9:10-22 (Saul Begins to Preach Jesus)         |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Acts 9:23-31 (Saul Escapes to Jerusalem)           |

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## SAUL OF TARSUS

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Lesson Scripture: 1 Acts 9:1-31

Focus Scripture: Acts 9:9-17

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*Key Verse: So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Acts 9:17 (NRSV)*

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### ACTS 9:9-17 (NRSV)

9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord."

11 The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying,

12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."

13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem;

14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name."

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel;

16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

### ACTS 9:9-17 (KJV)

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

**KEY TERM**

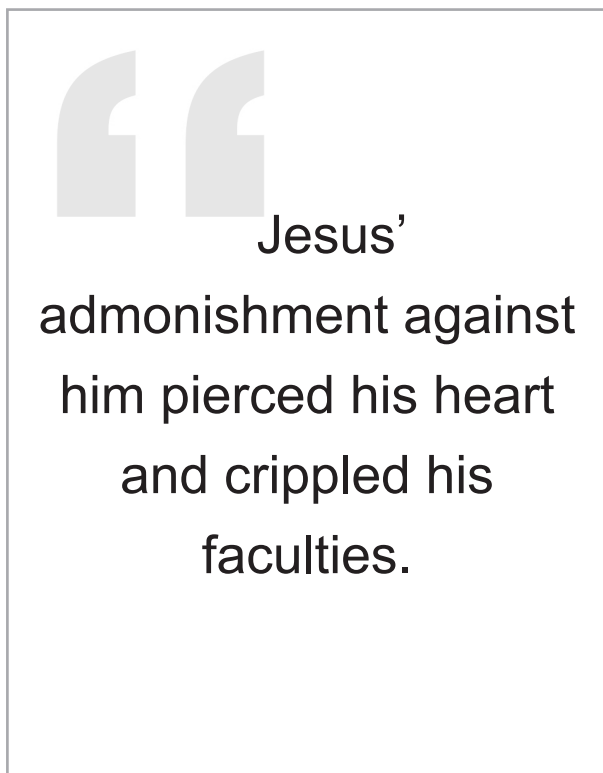
- **Gentile** – A person who is not Jewish. The word stems from the Hebrew term *goy*, which means a “nation,” and was applied both to the Hebrews and to any other nation. The plural, *goyim*, especially with the definite article, *ha-goyim*, “the nations,” meant nations of the world that were not Hebrew.

incapacitated him both physically and emotionally, requiring the soldiers who accompanied him to lead him to refuge. Yet, it would be the hands of those he persecuted which would bring Jesus’ healing power to his eyes and reveal the gospel message that would heal his heart. It was not his choice. God chose him to carry the gospel to the Gentiles and plant churches in other nations.

**INTRODUCTION****TELLING THE BIBLE STORY**

Encountering people who display hatred towards a group of people because of their race, ethnicity, or even their religious beliefs can be an unsettling and frightening experience. The early church witnessed this when Saul of Tarsus knocked on their doors or interrupted their meetings. His hatred towards these new believers compelled him to drag them from their homes, imprison them, and even justify their death. Saul was

a man to be feared. Yet, the Lord had other plans for him. What better way to close this quarter’s theme of *Chosen Not Choice*, but to read of Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. His encounter with Jesus in a vision blinded his natural sight, but enabled him to audibly hear the voice of the risen savior. Jesus’ admonishment against him pierced his heart and crippled his faculties. It



Damascus was the largest Jewish population center next to Jerusalem. It was also a center of trade and was a fitting location to facilitate further spread of the Christians’ new way. Saul would have realized that this was an ideal region for Christians to further evangelize, thereby to him it would be a threat to Judaism. During Saul’s journey to Damascus, he encountered the

risen Christ, which would have been a profoundly shocking and traumatic event (9:3-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-18). Paul’s physical blindness paralleled his prior spiritual blindness. It realigned his sight to knowing Jesus as the Christ and believing the Christians’ claims and witness. He went without food for three days, apparently an indication of fasting while in prayer. Saul must have wrestled with his blindness to the truth, while also



being humbled by the presence and power of God through Jesus, all of which he witnessed for himself.

The other key person in Saul's conversion story is Ananias (vs. 10-19). Ananias received a vision of what was to come, and the instruction to go to Saul. To most believers in Christ, Saul was considered a threat. Unaware of what to expect, Ananias acted in faith and obediently followed the Lord's exact instructions. As a result, God used Ananias to lead the man who was once an abuser into a committed life of service to the Lord Jesus Christ. The healing power of the Holy Spirit moved through Ananias and Saul's sight was restored. Ananias witnessed to Saul of the gift of salvation, which brought light and sight to his dark heart. The words spoken to Saul by Ananias enlightened him to the truth. If Saul could be saved even with his horrible past, then all could be saved. Saul of Tarsus was no more and would then be known as Paul. He regained his strength and began his missionary journey across Asia to preach the good news to all nations. Once again, it was not Ananias or Paul's choice. Instead, they were both chosen. The obedience of this otherwise unknown disciple transformed not only Saul's life but the nature of the Christian outreach.

## SANKOFA

The criminal justice system should provide not only the means to take dangerous criminals and unwanted behavior from the streets but should also offer opportunities for people to reform. Although 600,000 individuals are released from prison annually, three-quarters of them are rearrested within five years of their release. When men and women are released from correctional facilities, they receive minimal preparation to

It is important to transform the current criminal justice system to shift the focus from reincarceration to successful re-entry into their communities.

successfully assimilate back into society. They do not receive adequate assistance and resources during their incarceration, which makes their re-entry into communities challenging. Therefore, it is understandable that a criminal conviction or a record of any kind limits employment prospects, public housing assistance, and social services. Even having a minor criminal record creates substantial barriers and

impacts families and the communities. It is important to transform the current criminal justice system to shift the focus from reincarceration to successful re-entry into their communities.

Socioeconomic factors play a significant role in determining successful re-entry outcomes. An approach to reducing recidivism and assisting those who were previously incarcerated to

re-enter society successfully is prison education and re-entry programming. Many states have responded by offering adult education, adult postsecondary education, career and technical education, and special education. A focus on pre-release programs, which prepares individuals to be productive members of their communities, is essential. The Black Church can play a critical role in advocating for equal justice in the judicial system and provide the necessary tools for reformation of incarcerated individuals. The church plays a vital role in addressing an issue that has become the contemporary form of slavery in the United States.

### CASE STUDY

Elijah Anderson is an American sociologist born in Hermondale, Missouri in 1943. He is the Sterling Professor of Sociology and of African American Studies at Yale University, where he teaches and directs the Urban Ethnography Project. Professor Anderson is one of the nation's leading urban ethnographers and cultural theorists. According to Elijah Anderson, churchgoing black men are significantly less likely to participate in what he calls the "code of the street": an ethos marked by violence, criminal activity, a live-for-the-moment mentality, and a desire to protect oneself by projecting strength. This culture has emerged partly from the structural disadvantages

that black men face, including racism, concentrated poverty, police brutality, and fatherless households.

Most African Americans will agree that historical social injustices within the United States are the primary cause for why some young black men end up struggling in America. Persons like journalists Ta-Nahesi Coates bring this message to the forefront of legal and political debates.

Yet the church also has a tremendous role to play in filling the gap with support and

...the church also has a tremendous role to play in filling the gap with support and services for reentering citizens.

services for reentering citizens. Professor Nicholas Wolfinger, a professor of Sociology of the University of Utah, stated in his *Atlantic* article, "The Black Church's success validates the cultural arguments made by conservatives and the structural arguments made by liberals regarding race in America. The messages of the Black Church afford black men a sense of dignity,

purpose, and inspiration."

W. Bradford Wilcox, a professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, is senior fellow at the Institute for Family Studies and a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. Drs. Wilcox and Wolfinger shared interviews like the one below from a recipient of a local church's intervention.

"One 32-year-old African American man from Harrisonburg, Virginia, who we

interviewed said he became a Christian while in prison. "I only came to know Christ when I got locked up," he said. "God met people like Paul on the Damascus Road. He met other men on the crack pipe. He met me when I was selling drugs in prison. So, you know, that was a big thing for me, knowing that I have a relationship with God."

### LIFE APPLICATION

The story of Paul's conversion is not only a history lesson in the expansion of the church, but it is a reminder that anyone can be chosen to do God's work. Paul represents those who adopted a cultural belief that promoted the abuse of others unlike himself. He did not understand that Jesus came to save everyone from their sins, which included Paul as well. Paul was the one most would consider the least qualified to spread the message of Jesus

as the Christ. Yet it would be Paul who would author the majority of the New Testament of the Bible for Christians today. He did not choose this path on his own. Jesus Christ chose him. Be prayerful that you are never blind to Jesus calling you or others to a specific mission in life. Consider those who may have even been in prison or made errors that have damaged their reputation. All have fallen short of the glory of God. Be willing to believe that God can choose anyone for

**Be prayerful that you are never blind to Jesus calling you or others to a specific mission in life.**

his master plan. On this Pentecost, when we celebrate the coming of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit still has the power to change minds, hearts, and lives and to help us understand each other, even those different from us, and to help us all to live into our callings.

### QUESTIONS

1. Have you experienced a calling in your life that you would not have chosen for yourself?
2. Are there opportunities for your church to minister directly or collaboratively to people in prison or to the families that are affected? Discuss with the group and develop a plan.

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise: AME**

Hymn #461 – "Love Lifted Me"

**Closing Prayer:** *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.*

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come, 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*

Lord, I am so grateful for your amazing

grace. Your grace that gave me salvation I did not deserve. Your grace that opened my eyes and brought me through many challenging times. And despite my mistakes, you still love me and even chose me for the work at hand. I pray not only for me, but all who are chosen by you, that we hear you and respond. I pray that my sisters and brothers and I will be open to minister and mentor anyone who is called to the gospel. I pray that

our churches will open more branches of ministry to the lost who are in or recently out of prisons. I pray that our nation looks beyond prior biases and sees all people with value. I pray for healing and evangelism, through the power of your Holy Spirit, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.  
Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke –  
Inspired by the hymn, "Amazing Grace,"  
written by John Newton

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 29–June 4

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Isaiah 42:1-7 (God's Servant Will Establish Justice)      |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Galatians 2:16b-21 (Live by Faith, Not Works)             |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Isaiah 49:1-13 (My Servant Shall Restore Israel)          |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Isaiah 49:14-23 (God Will Not Forget You)                 |
| <b>Friday</b>    | 1 Thessalonians 3:11–4:8 (God Desires You Live in Purity) |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Colossians 3:8-17 (Clothe Yourselves with Love)           |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Isaiah 52:1-12 (You Shall Be Redeemed)                    |

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# DECALOGUE

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**Superintendent**—And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord hath made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

My soul be on thy guard;  
Ten thousand foes arise:  
And hosts of sins are pressing hard  
To draw thee from the skies.

**Superintendent**—Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not kill.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not commit adultery.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not steal.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and write these laws upon our hearts.

Nearer, my God, to thee,  
Nearer to thee!  
E'en though it be a cross  
That raiseth me;  
Still all my song shall be,  
Nearer, my God, to thee!  
Nearer to thee!

**Superintendent**—Hear what Christ, our Savior, saith: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great Commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

**All**—Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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