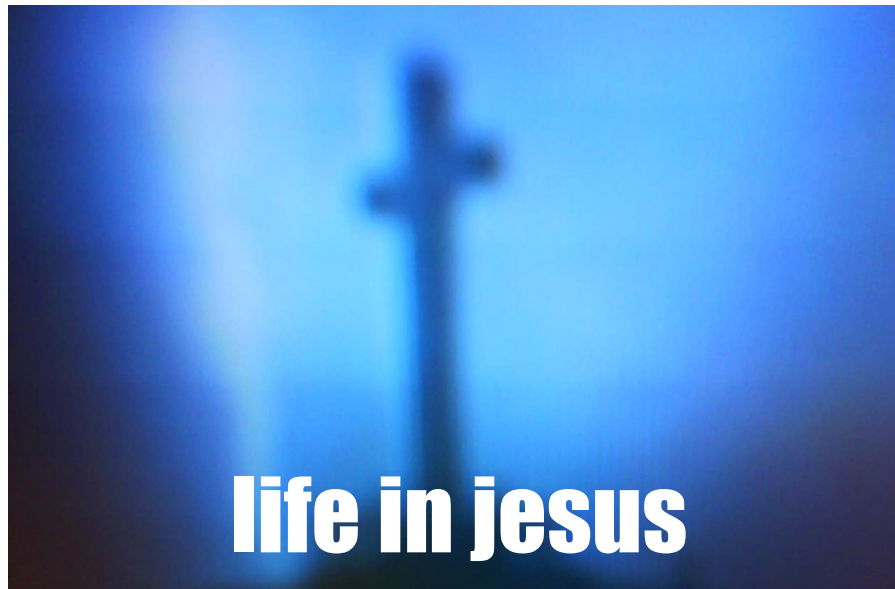




human



becoming human

life in Jesus

2013 Lent Series introduction

I'll be honest about it. It is not atheists who get stuck in my craw, but agnostics. Doubt is useful for a while. We must all pass through the garden of Gethsemane. If Christ played with doubt, so must we. If Christ spent an anguished night in prayer, if He burst out from the Cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' then surely we are also permitted doubt. But we must move on. To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation.

(From *Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel)



He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...
(Colossians 1:15)

When I was a kid, I loved Ash Wednesday. I went to a Catholic school, which meant a special Mass in the morning that marked the beginning of Lent. At the close of Mass we would stream to the front of the church where the Priest marked our foreheads with a cross made of ash. While marking us, he would say, "from dust you have come and to dust you will return." My mom found the practice morbid. She told me that it was a wholly depressing service. But I loved it, I think because it reminded me of the creation story in Genesis 2 where God makes Eve from the dust and breathes life into her. That is what we are: dust enlivened by the *Ruah* (breath or Spirit) of God.



Marking our foreheads with ash is not morbid. It marks us as human. It is a wonderful thing, being human. We live between the dependencies of childhood and old age, we are fragile and failing bodies; and yet this bone - and - blood *lives* by the very breath of God. The New Testament insists that *we* have become the temple, the place where God dwells. We are both dust and breath. Creatures created in God's

image and made complete in God's Spirit. We are vulnerable and frail and yet dearly loved by God.

We have trouble living a human life, however. Some of us ignore our frailties and we live as though we will never die. We try to be all things to all people, we think ourselves a kind of god. This life leads to hell on earth in one way or another. Others of us focus exclusively on our vulnerabilities and we live afraid to risk and to love. We protect ourselves and close ourselves off from others and God. This life leads to hell on earth in its isolation and boredom. Both approaches operate under the illusion of control and with the mirage of life with no end.



Jesus shows us another way. Jesus fully embraces his identity as dust enlivened by the *Ruah* of God. As 1 Peter 2 says, Jesus "entrusted himself to him who judges justly." His entire life is characterized by *trust* or *faith* in God. Yes, he teaches with authority and accomplishes great things, but he does so as enlivened dust. He does so in the way we are all meant to live: in complete trust in God and acceptance of our limitations. If we can receive the faith of Jesus, we too might become more fully human. This might come as a surprise. In focusing on how Jesus shows us God's nature and character, it is easy to forget the fact that Jesus lived by faith such that he shows us the shape of our humanity.

JESUS' LIFE IS
CHARACTERIZED
BY TRUST IN GOD

In our previous series, "Missio-n-aries," we reflected on what Jesus the Son reveals to us about God the Father. We agreed that if God came to us in Jesus, then God is the kind of God whose very life as Father, Son and Spirit is given for the sake of God's world. Put another way, Jesus shows us that the love of Father, Son and Spirit is an ek-static (an outward, outside of oneself) love characterized by sending: the Father sends the Son into and for the sake of the world, Father and Son send the Spirit. Those who find themselves in the love of Jesus are included in this ek-static movement. Jesus says "As the Father has sent me, so I send you..." We live in the love of God by going in Christ's name and for God's sake into God's world in faith, hope and love.

But we need to say more, for the New Testament invites us to look at Jesus from another set of concerns. Romans 5:12ff compares Jesus and Adam. Just as Adam's faithlessness led to sin and death for all creation (and, we might add, the sin of our forefathers and foremothers, as well as ours), so now Jesus' *faithfulness* (or, in other places, his "obedience") leads to righteousness and life "for all humanity" (Romans 5:18). It is not just that Jesus shows us who God is, but Jesus also shows us who *we are as human beings*. For this reason, Jesus is called the "image of the invisible God" in Colossians 1:15 (remember, human beings are created in God's image in Genesis). Jesus' faithfulness before the Father, Jesus' life as a full human partner with God becomes good news for us because his faithfulness to God the Father leads him to *identify in solidarity* with sinful humanity. His righteousness does not separate him from us, but causes him to make *our* curse *his*, transforming the human condition from the inside out. For example, Galatians 3:13 says "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" and 2 Corinthians 5:21 says "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us *so that in him* we might become the righteousness of God." The righteous and resurrected one, Jesus Christ, also wears an ashen cross on his forehead.

All this to say: *in Jesus* we can learn to live *by the same faith as Jesus*. In Jesus we can learn to become enlivened dust; we can live into our identity as image bearers of God. This Lent we will follow Jesus on a journey toward our own humanity. We will look at how Jesus entrusted himself to God in the daily acts and intentions that make up our lives: working, resting, playing, eating, crying, dying and hoping.

The Lenten Study Guide does not invite us into the usual practice of fasting from one thing throughout Lent. Instead, we have organized each week around prayers, texts, and a project that is intended to shape how we see ourselves, our world, and God. These projects will help us to practice our core practices in new or creative ways as we explore the faith and invitation of Jesus.



work

becoming human - life in jesus

Matthew 3:1-17

*Vocation...is where your deepest hunger
meets the world's deepest need...*

(From *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer)

Take these hands - teach them what to carry
(From "Yahweh" by U2)

My kids frequently talk about what they will "be" when they "grow up," by which they mean which career path they think they will pursue someday. Right now, it is a toss-up between a marine biologist and a hair stylist. At least their interests aren't too diverse!

When we are kids, our unknown future occupation often frames our sense of *becoming*. Even as children, we know intuitively that our lives are lived in a particular direction, they have an orientation or a horizon. The great Canadian philosopher and theologian Jean Vanier says it this way:

We humans are conscious of our growth from the nakedness of birth to the nakedness of death, and we are conscious of the freedom we have to orient our lives in one direction or another. This freedom can lead us into anguish and a fear of becoming, or it can lead us into growth and new life
(*Becoming Human*, 2-3).

When my kids dream about what they will become, they are wondering about the orientation and shape of their life. In what direction will they grow? What will they become? For us adults, our occupation tends to carry the opposite meaning. Since we have chosen and trained in an occupation, we can experience it as an 'end,' and so we wonder about what is next beyond our career, or we dream about what we might be able to do if we were not stuck in our current job. Either way, we live in light of hopeful anticipation and expectation: what will we become?



It is not by mistake that our occupation factors strongly in our sense of growth and becoming, for the Scriptures insist that God made us to and for work. Work orients the shape of a fully human life. In the book of Genesis, God works to create all that exists. On the sixth

day, he creates man and woman and calls them to “image” or reflect God’s own nature by “exercising dominion” over God’s creation. The second creation story in Genesis 2 provides a picture of what such rule looks like when God invites Adam to partner with God in naming the animals, and to walk alongside God in tending to the garden. By allowing Adam to name the animals, God demonstrates the *creative* aspect of human work. We are not robots in God’s universe, but creative and constructive partners with God. By inviting Adam to garden with him, God shows us that his earth requires ongoing care and stewardship. We are not only recipients of God’s provision, but stewards who daily tend and cultivate the good world that God has made.

We can make at least two claims about work from the creation stories: (1) Work is an all-inclusive word in the Bible that refers to the ways in which we partner with God in creating a trustworthy world. It is not only our occupation, but also our care for neighbours, our financial decisions and our creativity. (2) Work is not accidental to humanity nor is it our own creation. It is the way in which we reflect or image God to the rest of creation. Work originates with God and is *responsive* to God.

When my kids talk about what they will “be” when they “grow up” they unknowingly reflect both ideas. They wonder aloud what they will grow into, what purpose or orientation their life will take. Whenever we talk about our “vocation” we also (unknowingly) refer to this basic framework for understanding work, for it comes from the Latin *vocare*, and it means “to call.” Discovering our place in the world - a calling or life’s work that includes but also transcends our occupation - is one of the universal and consuming desires that we have as human beings. It is inseparable from our discipleship to Jesus, for Jesus himself responded to and entrusted himself to God’s call.

WORK ORIENTS

THE SHAPE OF A

FULLY HUMAN LIFE

Our text this week is Jesus’ baptism. At first glance, it does not appear to have much to say about work. But this story is both the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry and the moment of Jesus’ public anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is where Jesus responds in faith to God’s call and where the shape of Jesus’ life-work becomes clear. As Christians, *our* baptism is also a vital and critical moment of call. Our baptism also clarifies the general features of our life’s work and sets the orientation for our lives. In fact, the key for understanding *all* our work - or our life’s work - is a fulfillment of our baptismal promises. In our baptism, we are given our life’s work.

work Daily Practices

Morning Prayer

Use this poem to reflect prayerfully on the work you have to do today: where is it that your work will contribute to the peace and trustworthiness of the world?

*Creation waits now for the gardener to speak:
And the eager weeds await their release
From the bondage of being weeds.
Eden and Zion lie far apart
But atom and ocean, beasts and plants
Wait for the one who will grant them peace.
Then the planet will spin in a Sabbath dance
(And the dancing place will be the heart).
Fruit will burgeon from scattered seeds
And garden and town be clean as fleece
Early in the morning, on the first day of the week.
(From “Imago Mundi” by Loren Wilkinson)*

Evening Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.*

What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and Albania... never leaves for rest or sleep.

The Eternal keeps us safe,

so close to Him that His shadow is a cooling shade to us.

Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.

The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils,

From our first breath to the last breath we breathe,

from this day and forever.

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

work Daily Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 3:1-17

Read the text, where does your attention rest? What questions emerge for you in the text? Throughout the week, read the text in different translations (www.biblegateway.com) and follow the Old Testament references.

The Word En-Fleshed: We trust in God's leading

Day 1

Have you been baptized? When? Spend some time reflecting on your baptismal experience. Why were you baptized? What did that mean? What did you promise? To whom?

How is your baptism like and unlike Jesus' baptism?

Day 2

In the Bible, *water* is a profound symbol of life and renewal. It was a sign of God's salvation: God saved Israel from Pharaoh by leading Israel *through* the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17-15:21), and when Israel almost died in the desert, they were renewed when God brought water from a rock (Exodus 17). It was also a sign of *renewal*, repentance and consecration: in many places, Israel is instructed to wash themselves, their clothing, even their sacrificial animals when they gather to worship (see Ex. 19:10, for example). John's baptism is the second of these two: it is a sign of consecration and repentance. *Our* baptism is different because it is a sign of both our repentance *and* our salvation. We both confess our sins *and* commit ourselves to new life in Jesus.

A baptismal liturgy and covenant from the *Book of Common Prayer* is below. Read through it carefully and answer the questions below each section.

There is one Body and one Spirit;
There is one hope in God's call to us;
One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism;
One God and Father of all.

Baptism is an act where we die to an old life and are raised into a new one. "There is one baptism" refers to the fact that when we come to Christ and receive his baptism we have a new family, a new nationality, a new people. How does your life reflect this new identity and reality?

Day 3

Baptism requires a verbal confession from the one being baptized. This confession is understood as a commitment or perhaps a covenant. It marks a turning from an old way and an entrance into a new one. We all promised or confessed something like what is below. Read through it in light of your present life and work.

Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

I renounce them.

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

I renounce them.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? *I do.*

Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? *I do.*

Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord? *I do.*

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers? *I will, with God's help.*

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? *I will, with God's help.*

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

I will, with God's help.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

I will, with God's help.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

I will, with God's help.

In what practical and concrete ways do these baptismal promises challenge, shape and re-shape your day to day life?

How do these baptismal promises direct and shape our life with our neighbours and work colleagues? Write down one way you feel challenged by this and plan to do something about this challenge.

How do these baptismal promises direct and shape the stewardship of our finances, time, and talent? Write down one way you feel challenged by this, plan to do something about this challenge.

Day 4

In his baptism, Jesus submitted himself to the Father and received his vocation, his sense of direction and his life's work. In our baptism, we also received a general sense of our vocation and life's work (as we see above). Since we have particular interests, gifts, skills and opportunities we still need to discover how we *uniquely* fit within our baptismal promise. Parker Palmer says that our vocation (our calling, our life's work or orientation) is where our gifts and desires intersect with a real need in the world: "vocation is where our deepest hunger meets the world's deepest need."

In looking at our work from this week, and in thinking about your everyday life begin answering these questions with a photo-essay: how does your workday, your family life, your time among neighbours provide clues about the shape of your life's work? Where do the gifts that God has given you intersect with real-world needs? What do you hear God calling you to do or to be?

In reflecting on the above questions, take pictures of your everyday life that demonstrates either gifts that God has given you or real needs that you come across. Bring these pictures to Mission Group on Wednesday.

Day 5: Family Connect

Opening Prayer

*O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty:
Open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works;
that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve
you with gladness; for the sake of Jesus, through whom all
things were made. Amen.*

Reflect

What gifts has God given you this week?
What concerns do we bring to God today?

Read

Matthew 3:13-17
What happened?
What do you think this shows us about Jesus? About God?

Respond

Pray for one another based on what you have shared.

Closing Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and
Albania... never leaves for rest or sleep.
The Eternal keeps us safe, so close to Him that His shadow is a
cooling shade to us.
Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.
The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day
and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

becoming human

life in Jesus

“work” - sermon notes

rest

becoming human - life in jesus

Matthew 7:28-8:27

*You are great and small, you are tiny and tall
(From "Great and Small" by Butterflyfish)*

*Oh Great God give us rest
Have you seen the place? It's all a mess
I've done my part too well, I guess... Oh Great God give us rest
(From "Oh Great God Give us Rest" by David Crowder Band)*

One has to admit, the popular TV show *24* had a pretty gripping premise: the US government becomes aware of an imminent terror threat that puts millions of lives in danger. The pieces are already in play such that law enforcement has exactly 24 hours to foil the intricate terror plot. In the first season, it was a truck with a "dirty" nuclear bomb en route across America to New York City. The show contained 24 one-hour episodes, where a timer displayed the seconds ticking away toward total annihilation. Of course, the terrorists - having taken into account hundreds of scenarios in developing an incredibly sophisticated plan - could never take into account the determination, violence and righteous fervor of agent Jack Bauer. Each season ended with Mr. Bauer thwarting the plan within the final hour.



Like any action movie, *24* required a certain suspension of belief. I mean, how many times can agent Bauer be captured by the enemy and escape within a 24 hour period? And when they discover a clue on the opposite side of Los Angeles at the beginning of an episode, why doesn't the episode just end with the agents sitting in traffic? However, the biggest problem with the show was always Agent Bauer's ability to remain sharp, focused and intense in hours 23 and 24. I understand that adrenaline might flow when you hold the fate of the world in your hands, but - as every parent knows with their kids - the *will* to stay awake is never as powerful as the *fact* of

oncoming sleep. None of us can go without sleep for long without losing significant physical and intellectual capacity.

Sleep is one of the strangest, yet ubiquitous, things that we do. We all need sleep; we cannot function for long without it and yet we do not understand why. Mountains of research still cannot explain the basic purpose that sleep serves for our bodies. But it continues to confirm the daily importance of sleep; we now know that sleep

SLEEP IS ONE OF
THE STRANGEST
THING THAT WE DO

cannot be "made up" when missed and that severe insomnia can cause death in certain cases. We do not know why, but we do know that no matter what, our bodies crave rest for a significant portion of every 24 hour period regardless of the important things we have to do. Sorry, Jack Bauer, but if we really were in such a "ticking-bomb scenario" the series would end with a crater in the ground and Mr. Bauer "sawing Z's" in front of a computer he was trying to hack. Our will is just not as powerful as our need to sleep.

Right after the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus faces his own 24 kind of scenario. His teaching moves the crowds; it becomes clear that he not only teaches as one with authority, but that he actually *has* authority over sickness, disease and demons as well. The crowds press in bringing their questions, their sick, their broken and Jesus patiently demonstrates the nearness of God's Kingdom: the sick are healed, the oppressed set free, the ignorant enlightened. We are tempted to think of Jesus as superhuman at this point. But he's not. At, perhaps, the most desperate of circumstances that Jesus and his disciples face up to that point, we find Jesus passed out on a cushion. The dinghy carrying Jesus and his disciples is stuck in a storm at night. The disciples - including the experienced fishermen - are certain that death is near. But Jesus is sound asleep! The storm rages. The Lord sleeps, exhausted. It is both a picture of Jesus' humanity *and* the trust that Jesus placed in God.

We are all Jack Bauer at some level. We run around as if the world hangs in the balance. We put off sleep, we multi-task out times of rest and over-caffeinate the difference. We live compulsively busy lives and then convince ourselves that we have no choice - there is so much work that needs to be done! We are the disciples running around on the boat. We are Jack Bauer running to save the world. We push away the weakness of fatigue, rest and sleep because the sake of the world hangs in the balance.

If we believe the New Testament, then we can say that the sake of the world *did* hang in the balance for Jesus. Yet, strangely, he did not live like we do. He slept. Even as the storm raged around him. He practiced the Sabbath even though his work was so important and urgent. Jesus helps us to see that to rest is human; and we cannot really do this unless we trust God.

rest Daily Practices

Morning Prayer

Where is it that your rest will contribute to the peace and trustworthiness of the world?

*Creation waits now for the gardener to speak:
And the eager weeds await their release
From the bondage of being weeds.
Eden and Zion lie far apart
But atom and ocean, beasts and plants
Wait for the one who will grant them peace.
Then the planet will spin in a Sabbath dance
(And the dancing place will be the heart).
Fruit will burgeon from scattered seeds
And garden and town be clean as fleece
Early in the morning, on the first day of the week.
(From "Imago Mundi" by Loren Wilkinson)*

Evening Prayer

Read slowly. Pause between lines for prayer for those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place; He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and
Albania... never leaves for rest or sleep. The Eternal keeps us safe, so
close to Him that His shadow is a cooling shade to us.
Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.
The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day
and forever.
From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)*

rest Daily Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 7:28-8:27

Where does your attention rest in the text? During the first part of the week, read 7:28-8:17. What does this story reveal about Jesus? About God? The second part of the week, read 8:19-27 everyday. What do these stories reveal about Jesus' relationship with God?

The Word En-Fleshed: We Trust In God's Generosity

Days 1-2

Rest is part of the rhythm of all that God has created. We have a hard time believing this because we have a hard time trusting God. In the Old Testament, God instructed Israel to have a Year of Jubilee every fifty years where they were to let the land rest and to entrust their well-being completely to God. They were not to work the land or plant crops, but to live simply off the fruit of the land (see Leviticus 25). This strikes us as radical. Why? Because we do not see the world from the perspective of God's trustworthiness. Jesus did, and so he could rest and practice the Sabbath.

Spend the rest of the week continuing your photo journal. Now look for pictures of God's provision and grace. Where do you see signs of God's provision? Where do you see signs or evidence of God's grace? Bring these pictures to Mission Group.

Day 3

Assemble your photos from your photo journal from the past two weeks. Select 10-15 pictures and organize them in the appropriate categories. Write a short paragraph (or perhaps a sentence for each photo) reflecting on what God said to you about both yourself and his care for you in the exercise.

Day 4

Look back over your week. Answer the following questions and bring them to Mission Group:

How much sleep did you get each night on average?

What worries are you carrying this week?

How did you practice Sabbath this week? In what ways did you trust God?

How can you structure your *next week* to reflect your trust in God

Day 5: Family Connect

Opening Prayer

*O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty:
Open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works;
that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve
you with gladness; for the sake of Jesus, through whom all
things were made. Amen.*

Reflect

What gifts has God given you this week?

What concerns do we bring to God today?

Sing a favourite worship song

Read

Matthew 8:23-27

What happened?

What do you think this shows us about Jesus? About God?

Respond

What troubles or storms are you facing or in right now? Can we trust God in the midst of them? Where do we see Jesus in our troubles?

Closing Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and
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Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.
The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day
and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

becoming human

life in jesus

“rest” - sermon notes

play

becoming human - life in jesus

Matthew 19:1-30

The more language is a living operation, the less we are aware of it...
(From *Truth and Method* by Gadamer)

*And the tree said 'Come boy,
come and climb up my trunk and swing from my branches
and eat apples and play in my shade and be happy.'*

'But I am too big...' said the boy...

(From *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein)

According to the *New York Times*, a ground-breaking approach to early-childhood education has begun to filter its way through elite pre-schools in North America. Since its research-based pedagogy has been confirmed in numerous studies, it has upwardly-mobile parents clawing each other to get their kids accepted into these diamond-in-the-rough childcare centres. What, you might ask, is this revolutionary approach to education? What curricular strategy can turn my three year old into a child prodigy? Play. Turns out, kids learn best from doing what they want to do anyway: imaginative play.

A wave of research has recently discovered that imaginative and cooperative play among preschool children teaches the self-discipline, social skills and problem solving crucial to early-childhood development. Since the famous “marshmallow” study, early childhood education looks to teach (among other things) self-discipline and social responsiveness. In the marshmallow study, researchers discovered that kids who learned how to delay gratification in their pre-school years (Johnny, if you don't eat the one marshmallow while I am out of the room, I will give you five marshmallows when I return) were more likely to graduate high school, attend college and avoid dangerous addictive behaviours. The problem with this study is that researchers have difficulty identifying how to teach such self-discipline. In the new play-based studies, they discovered that they could teach children to delay gratification in significant ways if they placed it within imaginative play. For example, if they told a child to stand in place to receive a reward, the child - predictably - could not

stand long. But if they told the child that he was a soldier protecting a castle and he must stand at attention until the researcher came back into the room, the child was capable of remaining still for an exponentially longer time.

As with what we observe in other social animals, a primary mode of learning for us when we are young is through play. For in play, we suspend belief and reconsider ourselves, our world, and others from an alternative view. Play, it turns out, is hard work.

What we don't always realize, however, is that play is a critical part of adulthood as well. We don't really ever grow out of play; it's just that the game has changed. Although we now must get on with the business of providing for our families, stewarding our resources and managing our various responsibilities, we still play our way into new skills and behaviours. We still learn and change through play. Like the child guard in the study, we learn through the suspension of belief and the consideration of new possibilities; any kind of learning requires us to say, "what if," and to consider what the world (or ourselves) might look like from that position. Learning requires us to "play" with our perspective, our image of the world and our sense of self in much the same way. This is why we have trouble learning new things if we take ourselves and our work too seriously. The more firmly and seriously we grasp ourselves, the less likely we are to learn, grow, laugh and change.

Not surprisingly, we see glimmers in the New Testament of Jesus at play. Many of his parables are told in a way that would have elicited a laugh or a gasp from his audience. In his teaching, Jesus would take ordinary and everyday scenarios - working farmland, family disputes, unemployment lines and landless peasants - and then play with them in a way that brought about unexpected and surprising twists: the farmer scatters seed on good and bad soil or the father runs toward his wayward son and takes the family shame upon himself or the wealthy landowner pays all the unemployed peasants the same salary. Jesus did this because he was trying to help his disciples wake up and imagine a new world that comes as the gift of God; he was inviting them into play, to experiment with this new possibility. *What if* the Kingdom of God has come near? *What if* the poor in spirit will be filled to all the fullness of God? *What if*?

PLAY IS
HARD
WORK

Jesus' sense of humour and openness to play is perhaps most apparent in his response to the children who interrupted his (let's face it, pretty awesome...) teaching. Rather than shushing them - "hey kids...Son of God speaking here...pipe down" - Jesus stops, welcomes, and plays with them. Even in this act of play, Jesus demonstrates something of God's kingdom and invites us into a world in which we don't need to take ourselves, our tasks or our understanding of things too seriously. The kingdom comes as something new and unexpected and it comes as the gift of God. In play, experiment and humour we learn to trust God for that Kingdom: *what if*?

play Daily Practices

Morning Prayer

Use this Psalm to reflect prayerfully on the work you have to do today: Where is it that your work will contribute to the peace and trustworthiness of the world?

Psalm 96

*Sing a new song to the Eternal God;
sing in one voice to the LORD, all the earth.*

*Sing to the LORD of all the good things
He's done. Bless His name;*

broadcast the good news of His salvation each and every day.

For the LORD is great indeed and praiseworthy;

feared and revered above all gods, the True God shall be.

For all human-made, lifeless gods are worthless idols,

but the LORD plotted the vast heavens, shaped every last detail.

Honor and majesty precede Him;

strength and beauty infuse His holy sanctuary.

Give all credit to the LORD, families of the world!

Credit Him with glory, honor, and strength!

Credit Him with the glory worthy of His magnificent name;

gather your sacrifice, and present it at His temple.

Bow down to the LORD, adorned in holiness;

lay awestruck before Him, trembling, all people of the earth.



*Shout out to the nations, "The LORD reigns!
 Yes, indeed, the world is anchored and will not shake loose.
 He governs all people with a fair hand."
 And so, let the heavens resound in gladness!
 Let joy be the earth's rhythm as the sea and all its creatures
 roar.
 Let the fields grow in triumph, a grand jubilee for all that live
 there.
 Let all the trees of the forest dig in and reach high with songs of
 joy before the LORD*

Evening Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
 He will not let us fall.
 He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
 He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
 What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
 Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and
 Albania... never leaves for rest or sleep.
 The Eternal keeps us safe, so close to Him that His shadow is a
 cooling shade to us.
 Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.
 The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
 From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day
 and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

play Daily Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 19:1-30

Read the text, where does your attention rest? Pay attention to all the different responses to Jesus in this chapter. What do these stories say about Jesus? About us?

The Word En-Fleshed: We Trust In God's Sufficiency

Day 1: Love

Break the mould of self-important seriousness. Plan a fun outing, games night or get-together for the upcoming week that combines different circles of relationship: neighbours, Mission Group members, Southsiders, non-Southsiders.

Day 2: Faith

Dan often talks about budgeting so that we can have "fun money." Look at your finances and after you have tithed, set aside anywhere from \$10-100 for the week that is not spoken for. Carry it with you and wait prayerfully for an opportunity to meet a need or bless another person.

Days 3-4: Hope

Scripture should engage our imagination and not just our mind or our heart. But sometimes in our study of it, or our praying through it, we don't dwell in it imaginatively. Over the next few days, take some time to respond creatively to the text for this week. Imagine that when you were a child, you were one of those brought to Jesus in the midst of his argument with the Pharisees. What do you see? What do you feel? What concerns do you bring to Jesus? What does he say to you? Write it as an imagined dialogue, as a poem, a short story, a drawing, or a painting. You don't need to share it with MG, but there will be an opportunity to do so. OR...if you don't feel particularly inspired by the children, imagine that you are a character in the following story of Jesus and the rich young ruler. But let me encourage you to become like a child!

Day 5: Family Connect

Opening Prayer

*O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty:
Open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works;
that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve
you with gladness; for the sake of Jesus, through whom all
things were made. Amen.*

Reflect

What gifts has God given you this week?
What concerns do we bring to God today?

Read

Matthew 19:13-15

What happened?

What do you think this shows us about Jesus? About God?

Respond

What concerns, hopes, and fears do we bring to Jesus for this week?
Pray and picture Jesus receiving us and those concerns the same way
he did the children.

Closing Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for
those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of
your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and
Albania... never leaves for rest or sleep.
The Eternal keeps us safe, so close to Him that His shadow is a
cooling shade to us.
Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.
The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day
and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

becoming human

life in jesus

“play” - sermon notes

eat

becoming human - life in jesus

Matthew 9:9-17

*On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear
(Isaiah 25:6)*

*Let justice roll down like a mighty waters...
(Amos 5:24)*

Matthew 9 groups two different stories about Jesus and food. The first expresses concern about *with whom* Jesus ate. The second expresses concern *that* Jesus ate. In Bible scholarship, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were consumed by “the search for the historical Jesus.” At various points, this search degenerated into scholars showing one another why Jesus could not have said or done much of what the gospels report. One of the interesting features of such conversations, however, is that scholars who think the gospels are wrong about just about everything *still* insist that, “the historical Jesus” *must* have been known for his dinner parties. The historical evidence is just too great. Whoever Jesus “really” was, he shared his table with a surprising crowd *and* he did so in an exuberant and public way. Now, I don’t mean to suggest that such scholarship is worth considering; the gospels have held up under such scrutiny - they *are* our inspired and reliable picture of both the Jesus of history and the Jesus of our faith. I simply want to emphasize how central the *who*, *what* and *where* of Jesus’ table is to understanding his life and work. It is also central to understanding what it means for us to become human in Jesus Christ.

The first story reports a controversy regarding Jesus’ table fellowship. They were the wrong kind of people. The religious leaders were scandalized. Jesus responds to this criticism with a Bible Study assignment. He draws from Hosea 6:6 to say, “go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” Here Jesus shows his critics that his eating and drinking is a sign of something

greater. Jesus’ dinners with sinners is a sign of God’s solidarity with and his inclusion of the least, the lost and the lonely. Eating, for Jesus, is a moral and ethical practice. It is for us too. We will consider our eating *and* our fasting as moral behaviours through which we enact God’s kingdom in and through our bodies.

The second story criticizes Jesus for the fact that he parties too much. John the Baptist expresses concern that the community around Jesus doesn’t look nearly serious enough in relationship to the world-shaping work they have been given. Why don’t they fast more? Why all those smiles and celebrations? Jesus’ responds by talking about a wedding party. Do the guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? Of course not. The presence of the bridegroom is reason to party. In fact, a party is *required* given the context. There is something about Jesus’ presence - as a sign of God’s goodness, abundance and faithfulness that makes celebration necessary.

EATING,
FOR JESUS,
IS A MORAL
PRACTICE

We all must eat. This is part of our human frailty (from dust we have come; to dust we will return). Jesus shows us that even this most basic structure of our existence is to be given over to God. In *how* and *with whom* we eat, we enact, embody and demonstrate God’s kingdom. As we will discover this week, this means sharing our table in hospitality *and* fasting in solidarity with the poor, the outcast, the forgotten. So also, in *what* we eat, we will naturally demonstrate the abundant generosity of God’s presence. We will celebrate, for God is *for us* in Jesus Christ.

eat Daily Practices

Morning Prayer

Use this prayer to reflect prayerfully on the work you have to do today: where is it that your work will contribute to the peace and trustworthiness of the world?

*Our Father,
You, you giver!
You have given light and life to the world;*

eat Daily Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 9:9-17

Read the text, where does your attention rest? Alternate days in the two stories. For the first story of Matthew and Jesus (9:9-13), pay attention to the phrase 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' On the alternate days, read 9:14-17. Why should Jesus-people be known for their celebration?

The Word En-Fleshed: We Trust In God's Presence & Provision

Day 1 - Mercy, not sacrifice: Fast

When Jesus says "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" he is referring to a broad prophetic tradition in Israel. This tradition criticized Israel's practice of religious holiness at the expense of the poor, the needy, the sinner and the outcast. These prophets insist that worship of God leads to a new form of humanity, unity and justice rather than exclusion and punishment. Read Isaiah 58:1-12. In Isaiah, what is the purpose of fasting? What is the result of such fasting?

Plan a 24-36 hour 'Isaiah-style' fast in the next week. Do this fast at a time when you can serve the needs of another person: donate food to a food bank, volunteer with Nightshift or Homeward Bound, donate money to a local charity that works on food insecurity issues, etc. Spend your fasting day in prayer and service. You might want to plan this with your discipleship partner or your Mission Group.

*You have given freedom from Pharaoh to your people Israel;
You have given your only Son for the sake of the world;
You have given yourself to us;
You have given and forgiven,
and you remember our sin no more.*

And we, in response, are takers:

*We take eagerly what you give us;
we take from our neighbours near at hand as is acceptable;
we take from our unseen neighbours greedily and acquisitively;
we take from our weak neighbours thoughtlessly;
we take all that we can lay our hands on.*

It dawns on us that our taking does not match your giving.

*In this Lenten season revise our taking,
that it may be grateful and disciplined,
even as you give in ways generous and overwhelming.*

Amen.

(From Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth by Walter Brueggemann)

Evening Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and Albania... never leaves for rest or sleep.
The Eternal keeps us safe, so close to Him that His shadow is a cooling shade to us.
Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.
The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

Day 2 - Feast

Parties tended to pop up wherever Jesus went. In Matthew 9:14-17, Jesus gives a reason why. Do you think this reason is still valid? Should we also celebrate where we see Jesus present?

Plan a feast with your Mission Group for this weekend or the upcoming week. Plan to invite friends and neighbours to it as a celebration of Jesus' presence and abundance. How should a celebration of God's abundance look? What should you do?

Days 3-4

Based on your experiences of fasting and feasting this week, write a table prayer to be said before you eat. How should we pray when we are gathered around a table? What should we bring before the Lord? What posture should we take?

Day 5: Family Connect

Opening Prayer

*O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty:
Open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works;
that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve
you with gladness; for the sake of Jesus, through whom all
things were made. Amen.*

Reflect

What gifts has God given you this week?
What concerns do we bring to God today?

Read

Matthew 9:9-13
What happened?
What do you think this shows us about Jesus? About God?

Respond

Where can we show mercy this week? Who can we serve because of the gifts that Jesus has given us? Make plans to do this and pray.

Closing Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and
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Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.
The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day
and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

becoming human

life in jesus
“eat” - sermon notes

cry

becoming human - life in jesus

Matthew 26:36-46

*Jesus, Jesus help me
I'm alone in the world...*
(From “Wake Up Dead Man” by U2)

*If I can't be all that I can be
Will you, will you wait for me?*
(From “Wait” by Alexi Murdoch)

Crying is for the weak, for losers. We want a faith that creates winners. We so desperately want to be strong, to be invulnerable. But we cannot be invulnerable and also authentic. From dust we have come. The movie, *Little Miss Sunshine*, portrays a highly dysfunctional family on a road trip to California so that Olive (their 8 year old daughter) can participate in a children's beauty contest.



Greg Kinnear plays the role of Olive's father. He is an aspiring motivational speaker who divides the world into “winners” and “losers,” the “strong” and the “weak.” Kinnear echoes the vacuous “power of positive thinking” mantra so dominant in our society and our churches. As the movie progresses, the realities of brokenness, grief, loss and disappointment overwhelm Kinnear's constructed enthusiasm. The family discovers a kind of strange joy in admitting this. Authenticity requires weakness and vulnerability - we cannot become human without it.

But this is unsettling, particularly when we think of vulnerability, weakness and crying with respect to Jesus and God. In the first centuries of the Christian Church, Greek-speaking theologians loved to talk about Jesus' divinity, but they struggled to talk about his humanity. One early group started to talk about how Jesus only *appeared* to suffer pain, disappointment, temptation, or hunger. They could not imagine how God could suffer the indignity of humanity. Other groups began to talk about Jesus as just a tad less than God - as

the first of all created beings - for similar reasons. Scenes like the Garden of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion scandalized such theologians. How could the raw emotions of Gethsemane - where Jesus pleads with the Father to remove the cup of suffering and becomes deeply wounded by his disciples' inability to stay up and pray with him - be attributed to *God*? The early church realized that there was no good news if God did not completely take on human flesh and so these theologians that tried to 'protect' God from human indignity lost out.

Our saviour wept for himself, his disciples and his world. He plunged into the black depths of our damnation - our Godforsakenness, our loneliness, our betrayal, our brokenness, our death. We must never lose sight of this. One cannot be a Christian and be a rosy optimist. To know Jesus is to know the truth about our world and about ourselves. To know Jesus is to know authentic grief, to know lament, to cry.

At first glance, such an admission seems morbid and depressive. This is only because we see grief and rejoicing as oppositional realities. The truth is, we cannot have authentic joy in a broken down and messed up world unless we can grieve the loss we see and the pain we know. The good news of the gospel is that the light shines *out* from such darkness (2 Corinthians 4). We miss the light if we ignore the depths of the darkness. Jesus - as do the Psalmists - gives us a picture of grief and lament before God. They disclose such grief and lament as a type of honesty we can only express out of a place of trust. If we are going to avoid fatalism, we can only grieve our brokenness and broken world out from a place of trust in the God who raises the dead, in the light who shines out from our deepest darkness.



Let us go, then, into the garden with God.

cry Daily Practices

Morning Prayer

Use this Psalm (42) to reflect prayerfully on the work you have to do today: where is it that your work will contribute to the peace and trustworthiness of the world?

*My soul is dry and thirsts for You, True God,
as a deer thirsts for water.*

I long for the True God who lives.

When can I stand before Him and feel His comfort?

Right now I'm overwhelmed by my sorrow and pain;

I can't stop feasting on my tears.

People crowd around me and say,

"Where is your True God whom you claim will save?"

With a broken heart, I remember times before

When I was with Your people. Those were better days.

I used to lead them happily into the True God's house,

Singing with joy, shouting thanksgivings with abandon,

joining the congregation in the celebration.

Why am I so overwrought? Why am I so disturbed?

Why can't I just hope in God?

*Despite all my emotions, I will believe and praise the One
who saves me and is my life.*

Evening Prayer

The Creator God holds us firmly in place; He will not let us fall.

He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.

He will never drift off to sleep as we will.

*What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and
Albania... never leaves for rest or sleep.*

*The Eternal keeps us safe, so close to Him that His shadow is a
cooling shade to us.*

Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.

The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils

*From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day
and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

CRY Daily Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 26:36-46

Why couldn't the disciples stay present with Jesus?

The Word En-Fleshed: We Trust In God's Healing

Day 1 - Grief over *our* sin

Jesus' anguish in the garden was the cup of suffering the Father had given him. This, of course, refers to the religious and Roman powers conspiring against him. At a deeper level, this suffering was Jesus' full identification with *us and our sin*. It was Jesus' determination to fully identify with our sin, brokenness and death. Indeed, we cry, mourn and grieve because of all sorts of bad things that happen to us and around us. Jesus in the Garden reminds us that we *participate* in this destruction; in our idolatry, our fickle commitments, our lying, we contribute to this broken world.

Real grief before God *must* include confession. Use this prayer from Brueggemann or Psalms 15/24 to confess your sins of commission (the wrong we do) and omission (the right we don't do).

*We yearn, in every season, for your presence;
We know that our hearts will be restless, until they rest in you;
We are like deer who seek a watering hole in the drought;
We hear invitations for "all who are weary and heavy-laden..."
And approach to you seems ready and easy.
Truth to tell, we do pant restlessly, but not always for you.
Sometimes, instead for security or sex and beer and sports,
or power and success, or beauty and acceptance...not seeking you.
Truth to tell, we know you to be no easy mark,
with your rigorous requirements of blamelessness, truth-telling,
no bribes and all manner of neighbourliness.
We yearn for you in every season, making you too easy, imagining
you too difficult, bewildered and unsure until you give yourself
concretely to us...as you have done and as you do. Amen.*
(From Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth by Walter Brueggemann)

Day 2 - Grief over the *world's* sin

Karl Barth is considered the most influential theologian of the twentieth century. He famously told his students that one should not prayerfully hold Scripture in one hand without having today's newspaper in the other. What Barth meant by this is that our prayers, our theology, and our God-centeredness must be rooted in God's world. There is something universal about Jesus' grief in the Garden. He grieves for himself, but also the state of things. Over the weekend, buy a newspaper and spend time praying through it. You will be tempted to read online news. Don't. A paper newspaper forces us to read or see stories we might skip over on the internet. Some questions to guide your praying/reflecting:

- What do you see that breaks the heart of God?
- Where do you see the presence of God? Or glimmers of hope?
- Where do you see God's people, those blessed to be a blessing?
- Where do you see God's people *failing* to respond?

Journal your reflections afterwards.

Days 3-4

Over the next two days write a prayer of confession and dedication that comes out of the above exercises. Note that Jesus in Gethsemane doesn't get resolution from the pain or grief: God does not tell him to keep his chin up. Rather, Jesus commits himself - entrusts himself - to God. Write a prayer or a poem that confesses our sin, expresses our grief and then commits our trust to God.

Day 5: Family Connect

Opening Prayer

*O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty:
Open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works;
that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve
you with gladness; for the sake of Jesus, through whom all
things were made. Amen.*

Reflect

What gifts has God given you this week?
What concerns do we bring to God today?

Read

Matthew 26:36-46

What happened?

What do you think this shows us about Jesus? About God?

Respond

What makes you sad or anxious? What in our life and in our world
makes God grieve? Can we trust God in the same way Jesus does?
Pray for one another.

Closing Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for
those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession
of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and
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The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day
and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

becoming human

life in jesus

“cry” - sermon notes

die

becoming human - life in jesus

Matthew 21:1-17

*Love of mine, someday you will die, but I'll be close behind
I'll follow you into the dark...*

(From "I will follow you into the Dark" by Death Cab for Cutie)

*For if the many died through one man's trespass,
how much more fully has the grace of God and the free gift in the grace
of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many*
(Romans 5:15)

*Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?*
(Romans 6:23)

The bestselling book (and movie) *Life of Pi* displays a fundamental struggle at the core of all people: that we are each caught in a dynamic tension between vulnerable creatureliness and a transcendent hope for meaning, purpose, beauty and love. In the story, Pi Patel is adrift on the Pacific Ocean with a tiger. The tiger is both an existential threat and a source of life for Patel; he must manage it and train it so that it won't eat him and yet in the managing and training of the tiger Patel finds a purpose, an aim, a hope, a project, even an 'other' to love. In living with the threat of the tiger, Patel *becomes* human. On the one hand, the tiger provides an existential threat. It puts him in touch with his fierce will to survival and the frail conditions of his life lost at sea. On the other hand, the fact of the tiger gives him a project - even a love - and so helps him to transcend the drudgery of self-survival.

All our lives bear a similar tension. We live within the horizon of death and are occupied at some level or another with bodily survival. If we do not attend to the "tiger," to the threat of death and to our basics of our existence as creatures, then we will certainly die.

Yet our survival depends, in some way, on learning to love. We will simply not tend to our basic survival unless we find a purpose, a project, a life orientation. This is the great irony: we all live within the

horizon of death and unless we spend our lives pursuing something that transcends what is still inevitable (death) we will not survive. If we live to avoid death, we will likely die much sooner than if we live to abandon ourselves for a greater or transcendent cause. We cannot really live unless we come to terms with death; true life comes to us when we abandon it for the sake of love.

Each of the gospels emphasize, in their own way, Jesus' intentionality with death. At various crucial points in his ministry, he "sets his face to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51ff). In the scope of the gospels, this means that Jesus intentionally walks toward his sacrifice and suffering. He does not live to avoid it, but lives in such a way that he freely gives himself up in and for love. As such, Jesus teaches us how to die. He teaches us how to live.

WE CANNOT
REALLY LIVE
UNLESS WE
COME TO
TERMS WITH
DEATH

die Daily Practices

Morning Prayer

Reflect prayerfully on the work you have to do today: where is it that your work will contribute to the peace and trustworthiness of the world?

*Our Father of the Heavens, Into your hands, I commit my work, my family and friends, my reputation, my anxiety, my hope and future
Into your hands, I commit my life, this day and forever. Amen.*

Evening Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and Albania... never leaves for rest or sleep.*

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The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

die Daily Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 21:1-17

Read the text, where does your attention rest? The triumphal entry story leads directly to Jesus' confrontation with the temple. Why is this? What connections do you see between the stories?

The Word En-Fleshed: We Trust God With Our Life

Days 1-2

Loving commitment and death are interrelated. On Palm Sunday, Jesus' commitment to the Father seals his death. The crowds and leaders want him to act one way, but Jesus refuses their pressure because he understands God's call. For all of us, our greatest commitments are the ones that are sealed by death: Marriage, parenthood, discipleship to Jesus, and our vocation are all commitments in which we give our life. Pick up your Lent photo journal again. Throughout the week and weekend, take pictures that symbolize different ways that (or things to which) we lovingly commit ourselves. How do we give our lives to these things or people?

Day 3

Palm Sunday comes to us like tragic foreshadowing in a movie. What appears to be Jesus' moment of triumph is really a sign of the fate that awaits him. The crowds expect him to come as a conqueror who will drive the Romans out of Jerusalem. But Jesus marches straight into the Temple and kicks out the religious leaders, not the Romans. Only the children singing at the end of the passage see that Jesus is, in fact, a

different kind of king than anyone expected. *This* is what led to Jesus' crucifixion. It is "the nail in the (soon to be useless) coffin." The temptation for Jesus to give the people what they wanted must have been great. But Jesus knew *who* and *whose* he was. He fulfills God's call to the very end. The life of faith follows Jesus into this kind of commitment. The journey of becoming human requires that we follow Jesus in this kind of commitment. God calls us to participate in his Kingdom. He *gifts* us so that we might participate in a unique way. How would you articulate God's call in your life?

Go back over the study guide and answer the following questions:
What grieves your heart that also grieves the heart of God?

How has God gifted and placed you for participation in his work in the world? What gifts and desires has God placed in you?

Where do these gifts and desires intersect with real needs in the world? Can you commit yourself to this work?

Day 4

Based on your answers to the above, take your photo journal from the study guide and write a prayer, a confession, or a poem of commitment and trust. What does it look like for you to trust God with your work, your rest, your play, your eating, your grieving and your very life?

Day 5: Family Connect

Opening Prayer

*O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty:
Open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works;
that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve
you with gladness; for the sake of Jesus, through whom all
things were made. Amen.*

Reflect

What gifts has God given you this week?
What concerns do we bring to God today?

Read

Matthew 21:1-11

What happened? What do you think the crowd expected Jesus to do when he got to Jerusalem? What did he do? (Look ahead if you need to) What do you think this shows us about Jesus? About God?

Respond

What does it mean to you that Jesus is Lord, or that Jesus is the King?
Pray for one another that we would see Jesus as Lord this week.

Closing Prayer

Read slowly and meditatively. Pause between lines for prayer for those people and places that come to mind. Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us. He will never drift
off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
Grove, Edmonds, RP, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and Albania...
never leaves for rest or sleep.
The Eternal keeps us safe,
so close to Him that His shadow is a cooling shade to us.
Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.
The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils,
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe,
from this day and forever.
From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)*

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Matthew 28:1-20

Expect the end of the world.

Laugh. Laughter is immeasurable.

Be joyful though you have considered all the facts...

*...Be like the fox who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction. Practice resurrection.*

(From "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" by Wendell Barry)

Why do you look for the living among the dead?

(Luke 24:5)

*Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith who,
for the joy set before him, endured the cross,
disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat
at the right hand of God.*

(Hebrews 12:2)

For the apostle Paul, the resurrection of Jesus Christ *is* the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul insists that if Jesus did not rise from the dead our faith is for nothing. When Paul says "resurrection" he is talking about something altogether new and unexpected: a *new creation*. The NT is very careful to emphasize that Jesus' resurrection appearances were not an imaginative or spiritual vision. For example, Jesus prepares and eats food and Thomas feels his hands and feet in the gospel of John. The resurrected Jesus was embodied and whole. They also want to emphasize that Jesus was not a resuscitated corpse. He appeared bright, healthy, renewed - and even slightly unfamiliar (like in the Emmaus Road appearance). Why? Because if Jesus was only a corpse brought back to life, like Lazarus, then we can expect Jesus to die again sometime. A person brought back from the dead is impressive, but it doesn't break us out of the confines of historical causation, and of death in this broken world. Similarly, if Jesus was only a 'really-real' spiritual vision, we might be inspired but we also know that our destiny to return to the dust remains untouched. If Jesus is only a living spiritual being, then there is no hope for our earthy, embodied selves.

This insistence on a bodily resurrection is vital. If Jesus was only a resuscitated corpse, we are still gripped by the confines of death and dust. We can be stoic fatalists to the very end. We will make the most of life and then slip - incomplete and fragmented - into the sleep of death. And if the resurrected Jesus was really just a spiritual vision, then there is no future for the earth and for our bodies. We should live only 'spiritual' lives and try to escape our bodies and our creaturely existence. In fact, it might be better to just end our lives right now (which is close to the extent that some extreme mis-interpretations of Christianity have done). If *the new age* of God's *new creation* has not broken into this present age in the resurrected Jesus, then we have no gospel. We have no good news.

Put positively, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a surprising interruption in the usual processes of history (one *dang* thing after another...), where God breaks into the confines of death and dust to bring about a body that will never spoil or fade, which lives in perfect communion with God and the earth. The *gospel* is that Jesus is a sign of the future *and present* for all who put their faith in him. Our resurrection faith is that God will do for all creation what he has already done in Jesus Christ. This is gospel: a new world that will never fail or fade, where we will finally be in communion with God, one another, God's world, and ourselves.



When we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, we bear witness to the fact that this world has already begun. What God did with the crucified one, God will do for those of us who respond to his invitation to come and follow. And this new world is purely and completely the surprising gift of God. It is only possible through God's power and because of God's grace. This is Gospel. This is resurrection.

Note: This week, our "Word En-fleshed" and "Family Connect" sections will be provided by our Easter Weekend of Prayer.

hope Daily Practices

Morning Prayer

Where is it that your work will contribute to the peace and trustworthiness of the world?

*My soul is dry and thirsts for You, True God,
as a deer thirsts for water.
I long for the True God who lives.
When can I stand before Him and feel His comfort?
Right now I'm overwhelmed by my sorrow and pain;
I can't stop feasting on my tears.
People crowd around me and say,
"Where is your True God whom you claim will save?"
With a broken heart, I remember times before
When I was with Your people. Those were better days.
I used to lead them happily into the True God's house,
Singing with joy, shouting thanksgivings with abandon,
joining the congregation in the celebration.
Why am I so overwrought? Why am I so disturbed?
Why can't I just hope in God?
Despite all my emotions, I will believe and praise the One
who saves me and is my life.*

Evening Prayer

Use this as a confession of your trust in God.

*The Creator God holds us firmly in place;
He will not let us fall.
He who keeps us will never take His eyes off us.
He will never drift off to sleep as we will.
What a relief! The One who watches over Southside, over Forest
Grove, Edmonds, Robson Park, over Burnaby, Surrey, Langley and
Albania... never leaves for rest or sleep.
The Eternal keeps us safe, so close to Him that His shadow is a
cooling shade to us.
Neither bright light of sun nor dim light of moon will harm us.
The Eternal will keep us safe from all of life's evils
From our first breath to the last breath we breathe, from this day
and forever.*

From Psalm 121 (Adapted from The Voice Translation)

hope Daily Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 21:1-20

Read the text, where does your attention rest? Pay attention to your emotions throughout the week as you read this text. What do you feel? Why? Where do you see yourself in the story? Also, what do you think it means to be a witness of the resurrected Jesus today?

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