

# River Community Church

## Closing the Gap Devotional Easter Season



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## Closing the Gap 3.12.18

### The Humility of Christ:

**"Adam ate the fruit of his own pride and died, we eat the fruit of Christ's humility and live."**

### Week 10 Day 1

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### Reflect:

Are we really this far off? The challenge is that nothing be done out of selfish ambition. The reality is that virtually everything is done out of it. There is no room here for "some" or even very "little." This is an absolute demand, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition." This is as unrealistic a goal as has ever been stated. First, who even wants such a goal? Should I not reserve some of my life, my wishes for myself? Second, who could possibly accomplish such a goal even if they wanted to? Who wants such a goal? We all would if we really knew our own hearts. Why do we do put ourselves first anyway? We do so in order to experience happiness; we do so because we think it is the "good life." Does this ever work well or for long? Has selfishness ever taken anyone into a life that is "good"? Certainly not and it never will. Jesus, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame. God incarnate showed the path to real human happiness, it was in giving his life away for others. Who would want to live a life for others first? Jesus did. We also would, if we saw as clearly as he does. But then who can live such a life, apart from Jesus? "Nothing" done from selfish ambition is unrealistic. No, "nothing" is the only reasonable goal. If we were told to do just a little, or half of what we do from selfish ambition, we would remain on the path away from God. The challenge to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit is the way of Jesus. Never mind whether you will pull that off perfectly, that is the direction to head with your life. Do not settle for anything less. When you fail, do not turn back or stay down long. Get up and close the gap. Nothing less will do.

**Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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## Closing the Gap 3.13.18

### The Humility of Christ:

**"Adam ate the fruit of his own pride and died, we eat the fruit of Christ's humility and live."**

### Week 10 Day 2

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### Reflect:

It is assumed you will look out for your own interests. This is not wrong; it's normal and it's wise. You should care for your body and your soul. You should care for your family and possessions. All of this falls under the category of stewardship. It is being faithful with what has been given to you, but the challenge here is to make the interests of others your interest as well. You are to have the attitude of Jesus in regards to others. Attitude describes our essential orientation to others. The attitude of Jesus was humility; he put the interests of others ahead of his own. So, if it is normal to look out for our own interests and we are to look to the interests of others as well, what happens when those interests come into conflict? What happens when it seems you are in a situation where it seems to be "either" their interests "or" yours? What happens when the "also" doesn't appear to be possible? Throughout history many heroic people have given their lives for someone else. They have, in an ultimate sense, chosen to put the interests of others ahead of their own. Although this scenario is possible for you, it is not probable. What is most likely is that the conflict of interests will happen in many, mundane, normal sorts of ways. Will you maneuver, moan or manipulate to get your way? Or will you put others first by refusing to act this way, even if it means you do not get your way? Will you stay seated while others serve? Or will you get up and go? Will you listen to another's words and heart when you just want to detach and be left alone? Will you rejoice with others when you are feeling down? There are so many ways where you might experience a conflict of interests, yours or theirs. In those situations it is ultimately in your own best interests to put the interests of others first. How can this be? Because when you do so, you will be

following the lead of Jesus. You will maximize your joy by closing the gap between what is true about your life and what can be true about it.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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## Closing the Gap 3.14.18

### The Humility of Christ:

**"Adam ate the fruit of his own pride and died, we eat the fruit of Christ's humility and live."**

### Week 10 Day 3

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### Reflect:

It is impossible for humans to get their minds fully around the incarnation. This doesn't mean we should not contemplate it, meditate on it, and have growing wonder for it, because we can understand it, in the same way we understand other things that are real. Our knowledge of Christ being made in human likeness is accurate and adequate even though it is not exhaustive or comprehensive. In nature, there are believed to be four fundamental forces, one of which is gravity. How these forces work and how they are tied together is not fully known. The lack of full knowledge does not keep us from living on the earth, launching rockets into space and any number of other human activities related to gravity and the other three forces. Knowledge of God is real knowledge; it is not in a separate realm than knowledge of gravity. All knowledge is in the realm of what is real. If it is not real, it is not knowledge. The reason this is important is that, for many people, talk of "knowledge of God" is pushed into the realm of "religion" which is different than the realm of "reality" where things like gravity exist. This is silly, but it has impacted many people's perceptions of faith, perhaps it has impacted yours. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. He has always been, and always will be. In space and time, he was born to a virgin as an infant. This is real knowledge, though it is fantastic knowledge. The fact of God becoming man is no more impossible or implausible than the fact of the existence of the universe itself. Gravity is a subject of academic study. There are formulas written in books that describe it. But, of course, gravity exists as an actual force in the

real world; it is more than theory in books. In the same way, the Incarnation is a subject of study written about in the Bible and in other books. But, like gravity, it is something that is real in the world. The implications and applications are profound for human existence. In many ways, it is more profound even than the reality of gravity. The knowledge of the Incarnation tells you how you are to live your life; that is very important knowledge to have. Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth. His life, death, and resurrection inform everything about our lives, deaths, and eternal destinies. He took the form of a human, which is the form of a servant. This means your essential nature, as a human, is servant. You cannot completely close the gap on understanding the Incarnation, but if you will think about it, you will grow in your understanding and appreciation for it. As you do, it will change how you see things in and around you. When you are treated as a servant, instead of becoming angry, you will understand this is who God has made you to be. This is the very form God incarnate took on himself.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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## Closing the Gap 3.15.18

### **The Humility of Christ:**

**"Adam ate the fruit of his own pride and died, we eat the fruit of Christ's humility and live."**

### **Week 10 Day 4**

#### **Pray:**

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### **Read:**

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### **Reflect:**

How does humility impact obedience? Surely sin is pride, so obedience is humility. Sin believes you know better than God what will lead to your own fulfillment and happiness. In order to believe you know better than God, you have to somehow, maybe subconsciously, believe you are smarter than him. Or, perhaps, if he just had all the facts, he would side with you. However, sin often isn't that well thought through. Sometimes it is just people wanting what they want in spite of the facts of the matter. But, how do we come to want what we should not want and to not want what we should want? Pride seems to be a key factor. We are used to believing ourselves. When our thoughts or emotions tell us something is real or true we are accustomed to believing it rather than subjecting it to the truth of God. Sometimes people will say "I know better...but." How is it that we "know...but?" If we know, actually know, won't we act in line with that knowledge? Sometimes another factor comes into play. We have practiced pride so long, in the form of believing ourselves implicitly, that we have trained our mind and even our will to do what seems right for us to do. What are we to do? To start with, humble yourself today. Admit your absolute need for God, to God. Absolute means total. Without him, you have and are nothing. Confess your long-held pride in all its forms. Even insecurity and feelings of inferiority are a form of pride. Confess all of it to him. Then, enter into a pattern of retraining your reflexes for humility. Confess pride every time it appears in your life. Choose the humility of obedience. Christ did not sin, but he faced temptation with the same advantages you have...a will, a set of desires, the opportunity to choose, the Holy Spirit, and the word of God. He humbled himself to obedience on the cross. This was the culmination of a life of training for the

humility of obedience. Use the resources God has made available to you and close the gap in your life. Train for obedience, humble yourself before God and others.

**Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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## Closing the Gap 3.16.18

### The Humility of Christ:

**"Adam ate the fruit of his own pride and died, we eat the fruit of Christ's humility and live."**

### Week 10 Day 5

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### Reflect:

Consider whose name is currently on everyone's lips? What celebrity is most famous right now? Answer quickly, because in a moment their name and their fame will be forgotten. Sometimes the famous names become infamous before their lives are complete. Their names become a "byword" even before they pass into death. The ones who die while still famous may have a name and fame that lingers like an echo for a time, but eventually the echo fades. There is a name that is currently on the lips of many as they pray, as they confess, and as they worship. The name of Jesus is famous throughout the world, but only those who follow him find his name consistently on their lips and in their hearts. When all the famous among us are "said and done," there is a single name that will be on every lip. His name will rise above all the names of the dead and formerly famous. The bowed knee of every person will acknowledge that, in the end, there is a single celebrity. The confessing tongue of every human power player will verbalize the reality that they had no power that was not delegated from above and what they believed about themselves was illusion, or delusion. Look at that beautiful person strut. Watch that talented person perform. Listen to that brilliant person persuade. Are you impressed with that powerful person's impact? Do you know that they are like dust and their glory is like a fading flower? Do you really "know" that? Does that knowledge impact how you watch, think, speak, believe, and live? Do you rejoice that you know "The Famous One?" Are you able to respect men and women without fearing them? Can you appreciate what God has given them without envying them? Will you close the gap today on time and eternity in your own life? Do now what all will do then. Bow your "heart" to Jesus and put his name on your lips today in prayer, confession, and

worship. Say the name of Jesus much today. Speak it to yourself and speak it to others. When he is first on your tongue and your heart, you will be positioned to bless and not merely be impressed by others. You will live to bless and not live trying to impress others. Jesus is the famous one, say so today.

**Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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## Closing the Gap 3.19.18

### Christ the Servant

#### Week 11 Day 1

##### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

##### Read:

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. 12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

##### Reflect:

Have you been disrespected? Has someone treated you as if they were better than you? Have you been ignored, felt as if you are invisible? Has someone laughed at you, treating your ideas as a joke? Have you been cheated, and were unable to do anything about it? Have you been abandoned, disregarded, or despised? Who are you then? Are you worthless? What will you do? Fight for your rights, your self-esteem, your worth? Or will you wash the feet of the people who mistreat you? It is unlikely it would be appropriate to actually wash the feet of the people around you, especially those who think and speak ill of you. But will you forgive them? Will you ask God to bless them? Will you pray that they will live lives that bring God glory and bring them joy? Jesus had loved these men for years in practical and powerful ways. Now he was going to show them the full extent of his love by dying for them. In return, he knew

they would all turn from him in fear and even betrayal. What did he do? Rise from dinner, stand above them and rebuke them for their ingratitude? No, he knelt at their feet and washed the dirt of the world from them. He would soon wash the sin from their hearts as well. What about you? How will you respond to the people God has given you to love? What if they are ungrateful? What if they are hateful? Will you wash their feet by responding to them as Jesus would? "This is too much to ask! Who can live this way?" It is not too much to ask, Jesus has already demanded you give him your entire life. This, too, is included. You can, if you will. Close the gap on your love for Jesus and others. Right now, pray for the people who are the most difficult for you to love. Pray that Jesus would give you his heart for them. Your joy will increase; your experience with God will deepen. You can do this...if you will.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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## Closing the Gap 3.20.18

### Christ the Servant

#### Week 11 Day 2

##### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

##### Read:

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. 12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

##### Reflect:

Self-sufficiency can be a liability. Perhaps the big question in your life is whether you will ever get to the place where you have learned to not rely on your own abilities. This is counterintuitive and countercultural, but not "counter gospel." Peter did not want the master to serve him. This may look like humility in his life, but at this point Peter still knew little about that. It was his pride. In part, it was also no doubt his respect for Jesus and his position as "rabbi." But much of Peter's refusal to be served was the fact that he still did not understand the nature of the mission of Jesus, that he came to serve and not to be served. He also did not understand the true nature of his own need. In the garden Peter would try to rescue Jesus with a sword. In the dark hours after Jesus was arrested, Peter would try to rescue himself with a cowardly lie. Such is the result of self-sufficiency; it is never ultimately sufficient. Of course we should

take care of ourselves, work hard, and provide for our families. But the person who believes that their own energy, gifting, skill, drive, or talent will carry them through life will end up like Peter. At the worst possible time, all they relied upon will fail them. Their self-reliance will prove to be utterly unreliable. When Jesus offers to wash your feet, let him. When others offer to wash your feet, let them. Train yourself to abide in the sufficiency of Christ. Not by being passive, or lazy, or cowardly, but by refusing to put the full weight of your confidence in yourself. The direction this "Jesus sufficiency" will take you is not into low self-esteem. In fact, it will take you to the place where you esteem him much and, as you learn that he is sufficient, you will find that his sufficiency unlike your own, does not fail. In your weakness you will find what his real and reliable strength is.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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## Closing the Gap 3.21.18

### Christ the Servant

#### Week 11 Day 3

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. 12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

#### Reflect:

Jesus was much more than an example. He was the savior whose death atoned for our sins. The fact that he was more than an example does not mean he was less than one. To follow in his footsteps, as Peter said we are to do, no doubt means many things, but it surely means that we must be ready to be mistreated for doing the will of God. Many are confused when they do the right thing and bad things happen to them. For some, all it takes to have a life free of challenge is to "check the boxes" on the obedience list. If we do our part, then God is obligated to do his. Our part is to do good things and avoid bad things as much as possible. His part is to respond by doing good things for us and keeping bad things from us; it is a convenient arrangement. It is also an illusion. It is a deal God never signed on to. Much of the promises of God are not for this life. In this life and beyond, the most precious of the promises is that

we get to have relationship with God. There can be no doubt that living life in line with the will and ways of God maximizes human happiness and potential. God does delight in those who delight in him. Furthermore, God's ways "work" because they are in line with the way he has designed life. Yet, Jesus said that he was setting the example and we will be blessed if we follow it. What was his example? It was to serve others sacrificially. What was his blessing? He was betrayed, he was tortured, and he was crucified. His blessing was not betrayal and torture, that was his sacrifice. His blessing was the glory of his Father revealed through his obedience. His blessing was our salvation. If we follow his example, we should not be surprised if people do not appreciate us, or even reject us. Our sacrifice will not bring about anyone's salvation, but our example of patience in the face of suffering might lead someone to the Savior. But even if it does not, it will bring glory to our Father. Close the gap on your faith and love today...that anger, disappointment, resentment which you have in your heart...turn from it. Jesus has set the example, now follow it. If you will, you will be blessed, even as he was; it is likely you will feel a decrease in anxiety and an increase in peace even in this very moment. Try it and see for yourself.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 3.22.18

### Christ the Servant

#### Week 11 Day 4

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. 12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

#### Reflect:

If you have given your life to Christ, you are clean. He has washed your sins away. This is a settled fact. As you live your life as a "washed person," though you do not have to sin, you will sin. When you do sin, it is not necessary to go back and be "washed again" you need only to have your feet cleansed. One of Jesus' twelve disciples refused the cleansing of Jesus. He heard, he saw, but he did not receive. There is mystery in his rebellion, but there is also mystery in the belief of the other eleven. Eleven received the grace of his cleansing life while one refused it. What is not a mystery is that even those who are "clean" will be in need of having their feet washed by the Savior as they walk through life. Peter and the other eleven were clean, but they would still fail the Savior. They would need him to wash their feet again, and he would do so. Are you in need of having your feet washed by the Savior? Are they soiled by the places

you have walked in your mind, heart, and life? Have you been putting off looking fully at him because of shame or fear? Have you been hiding from his gaze? If you have been, then you have also been sliding away from his peace. If you will look at him right now, you will not see him standing over you in judgment. You will see him with towel in hand ready to wash your feet again. The day will come when he will return as the judge of all the earth. On that day nothing will matter more than whether you have been "washed" by Jesus. But today, he is the Servant Savior...he is ready to forgive and to cleanse again. Close the gap between you and him now. Let him wash your feet. If you have "messed up", "fess up" and then get up and move on. Do not walk into another day or lie down for another night with this sin between you and the Savior.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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## Closing the Gap 3.23.18

### Christ the Servant

#### Week 11 Day 5

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. 12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

#### Reflect:

What kinds of gods come from the minds of men? Some are far off, aloof, and uninvolved. Some are powerful judges, handing out prison sentences and capital punishment. Some are just like the men who invent them, gods made in their own image, conveniently approving of their actions and attitudes. What kind of God actually exists? How do we know? We look at Jesus. Imagine that the entire physical universe is like the mall. There are stores and restaurants, and it is filled with people. In this "mall-iverse" there are a variety of beliefs regarding ultimate reality...who or what has always been. Some believe the mall is self-creating and self-sustaining; it is all that is or ever has been. They believe they are the products of the mall. Others believe in different kinds of gods and goddesses. Some worship other people who live in the mall or who used to live in the mall, but have died. Then, imagine a door opens into the

mall. This does not sound surprising, but remember, they believed the mall was the entire universe...there could be no door because there is no "outside." Through the door stepped a person who looked and sounded just like them, but he lived a life like no other human ever had. He did things inside the mall that were impossible for anyone else to do, then he was killed by other mall dwellers, but did not stay dead. Just as he had said he would, he came back to life. He said this would be part of the proof that he was not just another mall dweller, but that he had, in fact, made the mall and everyone in it. Now people can stop guessing; they can know. They can know who God is, what he is like. They can know who they are and how they are to live. Think! Use your mind to consider God. Not a god who looks somewhat like you, instead think of the God whom you look a bit like. Have you shaped Jesus into your image? Will you close the gap between your perception of him and the reality of him? Ask him to help you escape your own imaginations and to see him as he really is. Look to understand him in the Bible. Read it with fresh eyes and an open heart. Don't guess what he wants from you, rather read and know. The details of your life may remain mysterious, but the direction of your life is clear. You are to know and love Jesus and to make his love known. You are to live much like he did. He will help you unpack that today, if you will tell him that you are "all in." Are you all in?

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 3.26.18

### The Sacrifice of Christ

#### Week 12 Day 1

##### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

##### Read:

John 19:16 Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18 Here they crucified him, and with him two others — one on each side and Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. 21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, “They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” So this is what the soldiers did. 25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” 27 and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. 28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

##### Reflect:

People will die during the time you read this devotion. You may be healthy, but you are dying; everyone is. Avoidance of the reality of your death does not help you live well. To remember and reflect on your own death can make you wise. But to think of death absent the hope of the gospel often makes people fearful or foolish. When death is believed to be the loss of everything, people can live in fear. They will desperately avoid considering the reality of death, or they live with their hearts and minds imprisoned in fear. In a sense, death has already won in their lives, because it controls how they live. Others live foolishly. They recognize death is the end and, instead of living in denial or despair, they live trying to "squeeze the life out of life." This sounds like a better approach, and it can lead to certain good choices,

but often it just leads to folly. Those who try to "seize the day" without gospel hope will frequently live only for the day. This doesn't lead to choices that have a long time horizon. Good life choices ask questions that are bigger and better than: "What is best for me today?" Jesus' life and death was a singularity. In all of human history there have only been four types of people. Those who are not usually wise and good, who do not claim to be God. This includes most of humanity. Those who were unusually wise and good, who did not claim to be God. This includes a limited number of "great" humans. Those who are not unusually wise and good, who claimed to be God. This includes a small number of people who were insane. Finally, there are those who were usually wise and good and also claim to be God. This includes a single human, Jesus. His life was absolutely unique. His death was absolutely unique. He did not die for his own sins; he died for the sins of others. His resurrection confirmed the gospel hope, therefore death and sin do not have the final word. As you think about what you will think about today, pay careful attention to whether gospel hope will inform those thoughts. What you think most about is what most shapes who you are. As you think about your life today and all its various components, think some about your death as well...but think about both your life and your death in the context of the gospel hope. Choose carefully your thoughts because you are making them and they are making you. Think of life and death through the lens of the hope of the gospel.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 3.27.18

### The Sacrifice of Christ

#### Week 12 Day 2

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

John 19:16 Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18 Here they crucified him, and with him two others — one on each side and Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. 21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, “They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” So this is what the soldiers did. 25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” 27 and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. 28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

#### Reflect:

Close your eyes and smell the crucifixion. Do you smell the fresh hewn lumber of the crosses, still leaking sap? Smell the sweat, pungent and strong, from the nervous guards and the anxious crowd, and from Jesus' body, heated in the throes of death. Now hear the crucifixion. The rattled breathing and the tortured final breaths of three suffering men. Hear crying, laughing, gasping, and idle banter; those are the sounds of the bystanders seeing in vastly different ways what is happening in front of them. Now, feel the crucifixion. Feel your own heart racing as an innocent man is being executed, feel the dread, the anger, and the fear in your own body. Feel the air change, as the sky grows dark and clouds roll in. Feel the earth shake under your feet. If you were there, you could have smelled it, heard it, felt it, and seen it. But unless

God had given you the grace, you would not have understood it. Unless he is giving you grace right now, you are not able to understand it. This was the historical account of how God became a man to die for men and women. It is a not a "religious" story. It is a real story. It is not just a man dying in the Middle East in the first century; it is God's intersection with human history. It is not silly, nor unbelievable, nor disconnected from where you live now in your own space and time. What has happened there has real bearing on your life now. Now, read it again, but do so as if you were there and you are remembering. Read it as it is, real and true. Do you see Jesus dying and, yet, taking care of his mom? He is concerned with the sins of the world and he is concerned with what will happen to his mother. He is thirsty, with a terrible, terrible thirst. This is no two-story account of a religious fairy tale. This is an eyewitness account of the Messiah, God in human flesh, dying a real death for the real sins of the world. Close the gap today between what happened then and what is happening in your life today. Refuse to turn the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection into "sort of real" things, while viewing the sights, sounds, feelings, and smells around you as "really real." It is very important that you understand this is real so that you will live in line with its truth and reality. Since this happened, and if God has allowed you to understand not just that it happened, but why it happened...then think carefully before you go into the world today. Think about the implications for your life today of the crucifixion of Jesus.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 3.28.18

### The Sacrifice of Christ

#### Week 12 Day 3

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

John 19:16 Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18 Here they crucified him, and with him two others — one on each side and Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. 21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, “They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” So this is what the soldiers did. 25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” 27 and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. 28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

#### Reflect:

Why the cross? God is really smart and really powerful, so why the cross? Surely there was a better, less violent, more creative way to accomplish what needed to be done. Some theologians who do not take the Scriptures seriously have called this "cosmic child abuse." They mock the idea of a substitutionary atonement for sins. But if we start with God's wisdom and not our own, then we would conclude that since God did it this way, this is the best way. If we begin our questions with the wise, all-powerful God (and we should), then the assumption must be that if God did something a certain way, it is the best way it could be done. Why the cross? There are a number of answers and undoubtedly many more than we are even aware of, but one of those answers is the fact that there is no greater love than to give your life for

another. Jesus prayed in the garden for his Father to show him another way, but there was not one. So he declared that he would obey at all costs and his will was surrendered to the will of the Father. Why the cross? Because Jesus loves you. Because you were part of the joy set before him. The cross of Christ should never lead us to think much of ourselves, but rather to think much of Jesus. When you realize Jesus went to the cross because he loved you, that is not self-centered thinking, at least not if you are thinking clearly about yourself and about him. It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us. He did not wait until we were "better" before he loved us. He did not demand we change before he changed us. Jesus did not die for "good" people; he died for rebels, for sinners. His death for us reveals how great his heart is. What about your circumstances right now? Why are they such as they are? Perhaps some of them are the results of your own poor choices, even so God still loves you, but he is a good Father so he will not automatically and easily remove consequences from your life. But what of the issues of your life that are not tied to your own choices? What of the difficult and even heartbreaking situations you are enduring right now, why does God allow them? Will you begin with a God who is smart, powerful, and loving? Then will you yield to him as Jesus did? Will you ask him, appropriately so, to give you another way? If he says "no", then will you say, as Jesus did, "not my will but yours?" Close the gap on your faith today. Begin your questions with thoughts of who God is. He is all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 3.29.18

### The Sacrifice of Christ

#### Week 12 Day 4

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

John 19:16 Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18 Here they crucified him, and with him two others — one on each side and Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. 21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, “They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” So this is what the soldiers did. 25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” 27 and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. 28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

#### Reflect:

"Finally" Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified. Pilate had tried many things to get himself out of this "Messiah mess." He tried to use a Passover loophole, but the crowds demanded that a notorious prisoner be released instead of Jesus. He sought desperately for a way to set Jesus free and at the same time protect himself, but he could not. Finally, he gave up and handed Jesus over. Finally, like "finale" and "final" indicates the end of something. In this case, it was the end of Pilate's attempts to avoid handing Jesus over to death. But this particular finally was not just related to Pilate, at least not in the larger sense of the Messiah. Finally, in the fullness of God's timing, Jesus went to the cross. Finally, after years of loving people, healing people, teaching people truth, and setting people free, it was time for him to show the full

extent of his love. No other person in human history had much of their biography written before they were even born. Finally, Jesus was crucified as had been foretold long before he was born and as had been determined since the foundation of the world. But this finally was not the "finale." Jesus would be killed, but he would not remain dead. If he had remained dead, then there would be no gospel, no good news. He would be just another teacher of morality killed for standing against the establishment of the day. But he was not merely proclaiming a new kind of ethic; he was finally bringing the Kingdom of God directly to the hearts of men and women. Your own life will be full of "finally(s)." Finally you get that job. Finally your child graduates from school. Finally you buy a house or retire. Finally you recover from that illness. Finally this life will be over for you. Then because of the gospel, the "finally" of your death will lead to the "finally" of your entrance into eternal life. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. There are likely some "finally(s)" you are waiting for and it seems they may never come, and they may not. These deferred "hopes" may be making you heartsick. But there is a "finally" that is guaranteed for you by God himself. That "finally" will be a tree of eternal life. Let that sure hope encourage your heart today.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 3.30.18

### The Sacrifice of Christ

#### Week 12 Day 5

#### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

#### Read:

John 19:16 Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18 Here they crucified him, and with him two others — one on each side and Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. 21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, “They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” So this is what the soldiers did. 25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” 27 and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. 28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

#### Reflect:

Jesus was handed over to be crucified, but only because he was willing for it to be so. He was in control of all of the outcomes of his life and death. When he had completed all that he had come to do, he declared, "It is finished." A mob had also wanted to kill Jesus at an earlier date, but he was not yet finished at that time, so he simply walked through them unscathed. Unlike every other human being who has ever lived, Jesus was in control of the exact circumstances and timing of his own death. When people attempt suicide, it is often because they feel they have lost control of important circumstances in their lives. Jesus was never in a situation where circumstances were out of his control. He did not give up on life; he willingly gave it away. His cry was not of resignation or failure; it was the sound of success. He

had successfully completed what he had come to do. You are not in control of all of the circumstances of your life, but you are in control of the final outcome of it. You can determine to be found faithful in the end and no one and nothing can deter you. Faithfulness is independent of external circumstances and the impact of other people's choices. You can be found faithful whether you accumulate great amounts of money or die poor. You can be found faithful whether you are married with many children or never marry and never have children. You can be faithful if you have ongoing physical health or live with painful physical ailments. Faithfulness is your response to God in all of the circumstances of your life. This does not imply that you cannot make good choices that will impact much of what happens to you; you certainly can and must. However, no matter how many good choices you make, there will always be certain factors that are completely outside of your control. In either case, you must set your heart on faithfulness. Faithful to make the choices you have been given by God and faithful with the circumstances you did not choose but must endure. Cancer and poverty or wealth and health, nothing can stop faithfulness except you. Jesus faithfully finished his work and accomplished our salvation. Will you finish well and accomplish a life of faithfulness for the good of others and the glory of God? Close the gap. What small thing can you be found faithful in today?

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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## Closing the Gap 4.2.18

### The Living Christ

#### Week 13 Day 1

##### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

##### Read:

John 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

##### Reflect:

Confusion. What is true? What is real? What is right? What is wrong? What do I believe? What do I doubt? The word "confusion" comes from two words that mean to "mingle together." Confusion is where competing ideas, beliefs, and feelings are jumbled up inside of you. There is no clarity, there is only confusion. Confusion unnerves us, it causes us to doubt what we thought was true. When deeply held beliefs are under attack, the confusion shakes a person to their very core. When the pegs on which life was hung all fall to the ground, then life's meaning itself can fall to the floor in a jumbled mess. Jesus was not supposed to die. Certainly not like this. Not this soon. The reality and finality of his death had to be surreal to those who loved him. Perhaps Mary went to Jesus' tomb early on that Sunday, while it was still

dark, because she had not been able to sleep. Confusion steals your sleep. She went to touch the tomb, to see it, to try and make it all feel real, because in her mind she just could not comprehend what had happened. Then when she arrived at the tomb, hoping to bring some order to her confused mind and heart, what she saw made things worse. Not only had they killed Jesus, now they had stolen his body. She ran. Confusion can make you feel like running away from what is in front of you. She fled to her friends and cried, "They have taken the Lord and I don't know where they have put him!" Stop, Mary. Breathe. They did not take his life; he gave it away. They could not take his body; he is not dead. Confusion makes unreality feel real. Are you confused right now? Do thoughts of some potential dark future make you feel like fighting, or fleeing? Or maybe you freeze and are unable to do anything? Take a deep breath. Do you feel the air in your lungs? It is giving you life right now. It is infusing your blood with oxygen, with life that is pumped throughout your body to your heart and brain. Most often you don't know you are breathing, even though breath is life. Has confusion come into your world? Take a breath. Do not trade what you feel for what is real. What is real? What has Jesus said? He has sustained you even when you were not aware he was there – like those life-giving breaths that you took for granted. He will sustain you now, when you are desperately aware of your need for him. Breathe deeply of air and of his peace. Air is life, Jesus is life. Confusion can make us acutely aware of what we have been taking for granted.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 4.3.18

### The Living Christ

#### Week 13 Day 2

##### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

##### Read:

John 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

##### Reflect:

Peter and John both ran to the tomb. John outran Peter and reached the tomb first, but he stopped at the entrance and examined the evidence he found there. Peter caught up and went past John straight into the tomb. He ignored the burial cloth; he wanted to see the body. Eventually John left the evidence at the door of the tomb and went inside, and what he saw there caused him to believe. What did he see? Nothing, he saw nothing...and yet he believed. Many have set out to prove that the resurrection is a hoax. This will continue to be true, some people will believe that they will be the first to do what has not and cannot be done – which is prove that the resurrection of Jesus did not happen. A number of those who set out to prove the resurrection of Jesus did not happen, instead, became followers of Christ in the process.

The compelling fact of the resurrection of Jesus changed the course of their lives. Often these men did not begin their quest with neutrality about the Jesus. Often they had already decided what was real and they went looking for evidence to confirm what they believed. This fact makes their conversion even more compelling. God did not just have to take them from being neutral to being positive about Jesus, he had to take them from negative to positive. The disciples themselves went from cowardly, hiding, and self-protective men to bold, public, and life-sacrificing men. How can you explain this change? If the resurrection had not happened and these friends knew it, then they would surely not have given their lives for a lie. But the fact that all of them would die because of what happened on that Sunday is conclusive evidence that Jesus has risen from the dead. The tomb was empty and not because someone stole Jesus' body but because Jesus rose from the dead. The evidence is compelling. What evidence? The fact of "nothing." No other grave or tomb in human history was empty and remains empty. Empty not because of human intrigue, but because of divine power. Close the gap today on your confidence in God. The evidence of nothing is life-changing. When John looked into the tomb of Jesus on that first Easter morning, he saw nothing and he believed. Reflect on the empty tomb today. What does it mean for your life?

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 4.4.18

### The Living Christ

#### Week 13 Day 3

##### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

##### Read:

John 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

##### Reflect:

Peter and John went home, Mary Magdalene stayed at the tomb and cried. It is no wonder that Mary was heartbroken; remember, Luke wrote that Jesus had set her free from demons. She was a woman who had experienced liberty and now she had to be confused. She knew the demons submitted to Jesus, but now he was dead. If Jesus were dead, then who would stop the demons from returning to her? Whether Jesus rose from the dead or not had implications for more than just the life to come. For Mary, it was the difference between living in confident freedom or in fear of being taken back into demonic bondage. If Jesus was dead, who stood between her and the demons? No one. Perhaps this is why she stood at the tomb and wept. Was she hoping against hope that Jesus would appear? Was she terrified to leave even his burial

site because she remembered what it was like to be controlled by demonic forces? Of course she stood outside the tomb crying, who wouldn't? She had lived in freedom and now it seemed there was no one who could keep her from being dragged back into dark bondage. Paul wrote that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then you are still in your sins. Whether he rose from the dead or not has direct bearing on your liberty or bondage every bit as much as it did for Mary. If you have experienced the liberty of the gospel, your sins have been forgiven. Since Christ has risen, this liberty is a life-altering reality. It is not merely religious "mumbo jumbo" that makes guilty people feel better about themselves. Mary did not just feel badly; her life was bad. She was controlled by evil and then she was set free. The guilt of sin is not merely feeling bad, it is a terrible weight that drags us down and away from God and others. Since Jesus has risen from the dead, then he stands between us and condemnation always. He intercedes for you even now. Close the gap on gratitude today. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Since Christ has risen, he stands, alive, between you and condemnation. Thank him now for liberty.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 4.5.18

### The Living Christ

#### Week 13 Day 4

##### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

##### Read:

John 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

##### Reflect:

It seems that Mary did not immediately recognize Jesus when he appeared. Bowed down with grief, or maybe fear, she did not look at him right away. Perhaps her face was in her hands and her eyes blurred with tears as she wept. Jesus asked her an odd question, "Who is it you are looking for?" Wasn't it obvious? Jesus frequently asked questions that appeared obvious, but were designed to get at human hearts. In the Garden after the fall, God asked the first couple, "Where are you?" Jesus asked some of his first followers, "What do you want?" He asked Peter, "Who do you think I am?" Now he asked this grieving woman, "Who is it you are looking for?" He was not playing games with her; he never played games with people's hearts. Perhaps he was challenging her thinking... "Mary, remember what you have

seen and heard. You saw me be Lord of life as I set you free and raised the dead. Now, who are you looking for and why would you be looking for the living among the dead?" Maybe the wheels started turning in her head, her senses starting to clear up, when he said her name, "Mary." That was it, the fog was gone in an instant. She knew that voice and, finally, she turned her face towards him and saw Jesus alive. "Teacher!" she cried in joy. Then she grabbed him and hung on for dear life. He finally had to tell her, "Don't hold on to me. I am going to return to my Father." Before his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus limited himself to single places and times, just like us. He could be here with me or there with you. Now he lives in a resurrection reality where he is not limited by time and space, he is available to you and to me, all the time. This is no science fiction story; this is the gospel truth story. Years after his experience at the empty tomb, Peter wrote, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:8-9) Jesus could choose now to make himself available to your physical senses, but you do not have to see him in order to know him, to love him, and to experience his joy and salvation. Think for a few minutes of the reality of Jesus' presence with you right now. Take your mind to the fact of his presence with you throughout this day. His presence is an unseen reality in your life; embrace that reality by faith.

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

## Closing the Gap 4.6.18

### The Living Christ

#### Week 13 Day 5

##### Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

##### Read:

John 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

##### Reflect:

What is the bad news of the day? What natural disaster has devastated lives somewhere near you or far from where you sit and read? What manmade horrors are unfolding today? Wars, refugee crises, murder...the list is long and it is ever-present. Perhaps the bad news is very close to you. Maybe disaster has struck in your own life or in the life of someone you love. Does the fact that a man lived in the Middle East in the first century and was executed at around age thirty-three, and then supposedly rose from the dead have any bearing at all on the bad news of this day? It depends on whether he actually rose from the dead or not. If he did not, then no, there is nothing there to mediate today's bad news. There is no echo of future hope in Christ's death. But if he did, then yes, the resurrection is the good news that

impacts all bad news. At the very least, it is the good news that tells bad news that its days are numbered. When difficult things happen, one of the first places people go in their minds is to the question, "Is there meaning in this suffering?" Their question is "Why?" When they find no meaning, their suffering is multiplied; when they find purpose in it, their suffering takes on a very different tone. It remains suffering, but when there is perceived purpose in it, it's just not the same. Another question that comes with suffering is, "How long?" When will I be free from this? Will I ever be free? That question is "When?" When the answer is unknown or "No, you will not be free," then suffering can become unbearable for many people. When the answer is, "Yes, you can be free of this, but it will take some time", life remains hard, but it becomes hopeful. How does the gospel good news potentially impact all current bad news? If you are in Christ, then to the "why" question, "Is there meaning in this?" The answer is "Yes!" To the "when" question, "When will this end?" The answer is "Soon!" Though the soon may be years away, it will someday be experienced as having been "soon." Are you in feeling despair? Don't lose heart! "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

### **Pray:**

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.