



Daily Devotionals – May 15 to May 21, 2021

By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church

We have concluded our weekly exercise of writing a daily reflection for a year. I hope you'll consider this good news, though. We plan to loop around and continue sending these to you weekly until they are published in book form. We'll keep you posted as we know more about that.

A word about how this will work. Now they will come simply by date with no mention of the day of the week. Remember, these devotions were written for a specific year in time. This means occasionally you may find mention of it being "Easter" even though at a given time the calendar that year may see Easter, Christmas, etc. fall on a different day. If that is the case, then be flexible and just enjoy that special day as it falls within the Devotional. We hope you'll enjoy these as they continue to speak to the year ahead.

Faithfully,

Dr. Charles Qualls, Pastor

May 15 - Genesis 6:5-22 **by Rev. Steven R. Gibson** ***The Great Flood***

⁵ The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ⁶ And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created -- people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.

Noah Pleases God

⁹ These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. ¹⁰ And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹² And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. ¹³ And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. ¹⁴ Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁵ This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. ¹⁶ Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks.

¹⁷ For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²⁰ Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. ²¹ Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." ²² Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Devotion:

Many of us remember the story of Noah and the flood from our childhoods. It was easy to remember because it was full of vivid imagery and moving parts, but what was the flood story really about?

- The Flood Story is a study in the faithfulness of God. Verse 6 states that God was sorry to have created humankind because of its wickedness. God was so troubled with the conduct of humankind that he even made preparation to blot out not only humankind, but every animal and birds and creeping things. What could possibly make God so grieved about creation? Verse 5 states that the wickedness of humankind was great because their thoughts were evil continually. But in the midst of all this wickedness and God's broken heart we find God's faithfulness to the creation.

Question: What are some of our thoughts and actions that grieve God? How can we remedy them?

- The Flood Story reveals the heart of God. Yes, God's heart was broken even to the point of destroying the earth. But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord. (Verse 8) In the midst of chaos, greed, and wickedness, Noah found favor in the sight of God. Theologians have debated this point for hundreds of years -- did Noah cause God to change God's mind? To put the matter more bluntly, can God's mind be changed? We believe in God of infinite power, not bound by time and space, and one who is a covenant God. To be sure, God's heart of pure love is broken when God's children act in sinful ways.

Question: How can we find favor with God? Are we able to share with others how to find favor with God?

- The Flood Story has a set remedy for sin. First, Noah was a righteous and blameless man. Second, Noah was given God's remedy for sin -- God would provide an escape for Noah and his family. Noah's wife, sons, and his son's wives were allowed to enter the ark, along with two of every kind of animal. God also made provisions for food for the people -- "take with you every kind of food that is eaten and store it up."

Question: Why do we find having faith in God such a difficult obstacle in life? Are you able to live out your faith in God in your daily life?

We all remember the rest of the story -- Noah believed God, built the Ark to God's exact specifications and by his obedience saved his family and the animals on the earth.

What difficulties did you encounter today? It is one thing to admit your difficulties, but another to admit them to God. Are you prepared to surrender them to God?

You probably know that my son's name is Noah which is a Biblical and family name. What you probably do not know is that when we were preparing to bring Noah home from the hospital, we experienced a flood and needed to find a new route home from the hospital. The Flood Story serves as a reminder that God is faithful, even when our circumstances appear to be the bleakest.

Prayer:

Faithful God, remind us that no matter the circumstance, you are faithful to your people. Amen.

May 16 - Psalm 66:8-20
by Dr. Charles Qualls
God Has Surely Listened

8 Praise our God, all peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard; 9 he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping. 10 For you, God, tested us; you refined us like silver. 11 You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. 12 You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance. 13 I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you -- 14 vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble.

15 I will sacrifice fat animals to you and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats. 16 Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. 17 I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. 18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; 19 but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. 20 Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

Devotion:

There is so much going on here. But we have so little space and time. So let me pick a note or two and let them play through. First of all, you know this psalm. It's just that you're used to hearing its beginning more than starting where we did today. *"Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; 2 sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise. 3 Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!"*

See! I knew that you knew it.

Here is what I think to be significant, in light of the challenging days of first a global pandemic and then the resulting economic recession. The psalmist acknowledges that life has not been easy. I won't take up my quibble with him about it being "God" who has tested him. I can point a lot of fingers about our current situation, but my faith doesn't allow me to make God the author of a terrible disease that has killed so many across the world. I cannot set God up as having "tested" us to teach us something through all of this. That would leave far worse things for you or me to have to explain if that were the way life worked. However...will our God lead us and teach us because of what has happened? Why, my very faith is grounded in nothing less.

Verses 9-12 attest that life has been brutally hard. Although not part of our assigned verses today, verses 6-7 identify what the writer is reflecting on: the deliverance from and escape of Egypt's oppressive hand of slavery for the Children of Israel. That is the backdrop upon which much of this psalm reflects.

J. Clinton McCann, in his notes on this psalm, believes that "life" is the psalmist's focus now. Whomever wrote this psalm marvels at what God has managed to preserve and give: life! Maybe for we who have lived largely inside our homes lately and who wonder if each trip to work or to Food Lion or Walmart might be the one where we catch a virus -- maybe we might find it timely to stop and reflect likewise. Life is a gift that, somehow in the middle of all this inconvenience and suffering, we ought to emerge more thankful for.

I get a kick out of what happens in verses 13-15. In troubled times, you may have heard yourself utter some version of "God, if you'll just let _____ happen, then I will serve you. I'll go to church more often. I'll give more money to the church...or I'll behave better." The psalmist has headed to the temple to make good on those vows. Probably all but a few of us have been there.

Verses 16-19 beckon us closer. They ask us to be sure we are listening. Because now the psalmist wants to testify. He or she wants to tell us the insights that have grown their faith. *"I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue. 18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. 19 But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer."*

On the other side of suffering, despair and pain the psalmist has found a very present and listening God. I'll just bet we will, too!

Prayer:

God of our days and God of our lives, hear our prayers. Hear the honesty of our hearts as we search each day for what you would teach us about life! Amen.

May 17 - Acts 17:22-31

by Dr. Charles Qualls

I See How Extremely Religious You Are

22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. 23 For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. 26 From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 27 so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him -- though indeed he is not far from each one of us. 28 For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'

29 Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. 30 While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Devotion:

I've been there. In 2016, just months before we moved to Franklin, Elizabeth and I stood there. The place where the apostle Paul spoke in Acts 17, in front of the Areopagus in ancient Athens. Well, at least the place that Christian tradition holds to be...the place. We can never be certain. Except that in this case, I believe there is a good reason we can have some confidence.

For one reason, local tradition says that Mars Hill is where the Areopagus met back then. It was just atop a small rock hill, kind of a miniature Stone Mountain for those of you who have been. Not far from the local Forum, a staple of Roman-era business and leadership. A second reason I believe this is the location is that when one is up on the top of Mars Hill, you can see a spectacular backdrop that would have fit perfectly with Paul's message here in Acts 17.

The Acropolis of ancient Athens is right next to Mars Hill. In the Hellenistic world, each major city had an acropolis. That was usually the highest point or nearby hill. There, prominent temples were built so that the city could come and worship the Greek gods.

Hanging in a dramatic panorama behind him, as he addressed the Areopagus, Paul would have gestured up toward the great Parthenon and perhaps another dozen sanctuaries and temples all around it. These venues were committed to the worship of various Greek gods. Apparently, Paul had noticed that one of them even carried an inscription "To an unknown god." His invitation to speak before the Areopagus was probably less about him being in trouble and more about him being new in town. They would simply ask someone to audition or explain themselves before they allowed the stranger to join the normal public discourse.

Athenians in the Hellenistic period enjoyed public debates. Almost like a sport or a favorite pastime, they loved for people to stand and wax eloquent about new ideas. Then, the discussion would begin. Now, Paul pointed toward that miscellaneous temple on the hilltop behind him, dedicated to an unknown god. Skillfully, he used the dramatic backdrop of the Acropolis and declared that he had come to tell them about that previously "unknown god."

How does your story of faith contribute to the public awareness of our God? Oh, I'd like for us all to be articulate about our faith when the appropriate times come. I am far more interested in how our daily living tells the story

of our faith for us. For *“In him we live and move and have our being.”* Paul left after a brief stay in Athens, pretty beaten up emotionally. He retreated to live and heal among the Corinthians immediately afterward. The Athenians were not exactly won over by his testimony or “case for Christ.” However, some few were left changed by the way he lived -- and in light of what he had said. They ended up forming a church at Athens, and the faith eventually grew there. Boy, did it grow! But that’s another story.

Prayer:

God of our days, help us even in relative isolation to live and move as though the very being of Christ resides within us. Help us to look and act more like Jesus. That is our very best testimony. It is our most powerful sermon. Amen.

May 18 - Acts 27:39-44

by Dr. Charles Qualls

They Did Not Recognize the Land

39 In the morning they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned to run the ship ashore, if they could. 40 So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea. At the same time they loosened the ropes that tied the steering-oars; then hoisting the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach. 41 But striking a reef, they ran the ship aground; the bow stuck and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the force of the waves. 42 The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none might swim away and escape; 43 but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, 44 and the rest to follow, some on planks and others on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

Devotion:

Fascinating thing that happened here in Acts 27. The apostle Paul was off on his Roman-sponsored trip to the seat of the holy empire. (Read: Paul was a prisoner of the state and had requested a hearing in Rome). A terrible storm hit while the ship he was being transported on was crossing. Now, they were going to run aground and hope for the best.

As a prisoner, Paul was designated among those who should be thrown overboard to keep them from escaping. The choice was to kill the prisoners rather than risk them surviving a crash unsupervised. Instead, Paul had earned the respect of the Centurion and offered a different strategy. When the ship finally crashed, and all survived, the sailors did not even know what island they were on.

Have you ever been near to a familiar place, but just far enough away that you were still disoriented or lost even? When I turned 16, my parents allowed me to take the family car and go to a high school basketball game. Afterward, I drove toward home which was about 2 miles away from the school. The whole time, a terrible fog was drifting in. Finally, I saw a driveway and turned in to stop. I got out of the car, thinking I had just turned in to our own property. Instead, as I got my bearings, I realized it wasn’t our place at all. Eventually, I figured out where I was and made my way the short distance home.

In Paul’s time, sailors would have been quite familiar with stopping at the island of Malta. However, they normally stopped in the grand harbour there. In Acts 27, they were just around the way-- in a place now known as St. Paul’s bay. They could have walked to the well-known harbour from there. Instead, they wondered what island they were on.

We are still living our lives in this Coronavirus age. It’s just that nothing is normal right now. We are still ourselves, but sometimes our world is so twisted around that we don’t recognize it all. The novelty, if there ever was any, has worn off of being at home so much. For “essential workers” and front-liners, the tiredness and risk have grown into resentment and strife. The church -- for a bit longer -- is still the scattered church rather than the gathered church. Each week, we find each other in the online “bay” we currently occupy -- and still manage to worship and pray together.

We don't recognize this island we are currently on, even though the normal harbour we are more accustomed to might be just around the bend. Figure out some way to rediscover your true essence, including the heart of your faith. You are still you! God is still God. That's what Paul clung to on his journey, and throughout his transformed life.

Prayer:

God of time and space, transform our lives. Help us, like Paul, to grab onto our faith for the living of these strange days. May we trust that you lead us still, and that we are still who we are -- even if the place we occupy seems strange. Amen.

May 19 - 1 Peter 3:8-12
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Suffering for Doing Right

8 Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 9 Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called -- that you might inherit a blessing.

10 For "Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; 11 let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Devotion:

Well, Charles...no good deed goes unpunished.

I remember that familiar phrase catching me a little off-guard under the circumstances. One of our sharpest leaders in a former church had served in a way we needed him to. But, he had paid a small cost in the process. That's when he said it... "No good deed goes unpunished."

That strikes me as a little pessimistic. Then again, we've all probably been there. You try to do something good, but you get bitten. Or, you try to be a decent person and still something bad happens. It's easy to feel this way. In 1974, fellow-Baptist John Claypool released his little book, Tracks of a Fellow Struggler. In 1981, Rabbi Harold Kushner asked the questions we all ponder in his best-seller, When Bad Things Happen to Good People.

"Finally..." is where we start in today's scripture. You'd have to drop back and read more from 1 Peter to know what all has come before this text we look at today. Fact is, what happens earlier in this 3rd chapter makes me cringe a little. In the spirit of trying to encourage people to serve one another, the writer of 1 Peter has reflected the patriarchal culture of that time and place. He has codified some marriage assumptions that simply don't work today in our modern Western reality.

At any rate, here is what the writer of 1 Peter was trying to instill: "hope." That's right, hope. Christian believers were living in tough times when this was written. As these New Testament letters were being written and sent, they were somewhere between 20-35 years after the time of Christ. Some of the churches were nicely established, but the Roman and Judeo authorities were resisting them. People were dying for the cause of Christ.

That left plenty of discouraged believers. So, "hope" was a quantity all too short in supply. What's hard to see in tough times is that God is doing God's part. Now, what is ours? If I were so bold as to try to sum up this segment in 1 Peter chapter 3, this is what I'd say -- Life is hard enough as it is. Let's don't make it even harder on each other.

Prayer:

Lord, life really can be hard enough without us making it tougher on each other. Help us to learn that the gospel of Christ really could be summed up in this way, too. One day at a time, help us to be more like him. Amen.

May 20 - John 16:16-24
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Sorrow Will Turn Into Joy

16 “A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.” 17 Then some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying to us, ‘A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and ‘Because I am going to the Father’?” 18 They said, “What does he mean by this ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” 19 Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Are you discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said, ‘A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’? 20 Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. 21 When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. 22 So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. 23 On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.

Devotion:

This passage in John’s Gospel is part of the extended Farewell Discourse of Jesus. This lengthy passage (Chapters 13-16) occurs in the Upper Room where Jesus and his disciples spend one last night together. This is when Jesus washed their feet, is betrayed by Judas and instituted the Lord’s Supper. All of this moving drama combines with Jesus trying to share his last minute instructions with his disciples -- even though his disciples did not understand.

The passage includes the phrase, “a little while” a total of seven times. The disciples were confounded and perplexed with Jesus’ teaching. Jesus was foreshadowing his impending death, three days in the tomb, his glorious resurrection. This also refers to the time between Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension (which will be celebrated Thursday). “A little while” becomes a significant phrase to the disciples, but people’s definitions will vary according to personality and outlook. We would do well to remember that after the ascension of Jesus, people literally thought that Jesus would return any moment -- “a little while.”

Jesus tells his disciples that they will experience both pain and joy. How could they comprehend the pain that Jesus’ impending death would cause? How could they realize the joy that comes from experiencing the resurrection of Jesus? This human roller coaster of emotions begs another question -- can a person experience pain without joy?

This coupling of pain and promise reminds us that Jesus knew that doubt would plague his disciples. He also reminded them not to dwell on their doubts because joy will come. The pain of watching their Messiah crucified is so immense that only an indescribable joy could counter that emotion. How could they anticipate viewing the horror of Jesus’ crucifixion right before their very eyes? What could the disciples learn about the coupling of pain and joy?

It was obvious that the disciples could not understand what Jesus intended, so Jesus speaks in a parable-like metaphor. They had, no doubt, witnessed the pain of child birth giving way to the joy of parenthood. Finally, a tangible example that the disciples might be able to grasp! The Psalmist states it this way “Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning.” (Psalm 30:5)

The disciples had the benefit of living with Jesus, but they could not comprehend his message. Likewise, we can become so caught up in the present, that the future appears cloudy at best.

During this time of social distancing and quarantine, it is natural to look at the here and now. It is natural to focus on the present pain and the bleak outlook of today. Because today's pain is so great, it is challenging to look forward to the promise -- "a little while."

As followers of Christ, we know that the end result is that Christ overcomes all obstacles in this life -- even sin and death and the grave. Our task is to continue believing in Christ and his love because "joy comes in the morning."

As dark as our world is now, I believe that it will be brightly overshadowed in the days to come. Later in Chapter 16 we find these words of Jesus, "But take courage; I have conquered the world!" (16:33)

Prayer:

Remind us, dear Lord, that our obstacles, though significant in our eyes, are as nothing to you and that our present pain will ultimately give way to joy everlasting! Amen.

May 21 - Psalm 47

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

God's Rule Over The Nations

Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy. For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth. He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm. God is king over the nations; God sits on his holy throne. The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted.

Devotion:

Several years ago, I spent a week in Atlanta in continuing education. The host church for the event was Peachtree United Methodist, a large, affluent congregation. It was during that week that we celebrated the Feast of the Ascension, marking the 50 days after Easter when Christ ascended up into heaven. Psalm 47 is one of the appointed Psalms for this occasion. This Psalm is filled with praise that is due to God for all that God has accomplished. The imagery is full and tells of the wonderful nature of God, not only to us, but to the entire world. This Psalm is broken into two parts and the first part reminds us of the following:

- God is the object of our praise.
- All people are to praise God, with loud songs of joy and with the clapping of hands.
- The Lord, the Most High is king over all the earth.
- God has subdued all people and nations.
- God has chosen our heritage for us.
- God loves us and calls us the pride of Jacob.

The second part reminds us that:

- God has gone up with a shout and the sound of the trumpet.
- All creation is called to sing praises to God, our King.

- God is king over all the earth.
- Sing praises to God with a psalm.
- Because God is king, God sits on his holy throne.
- People gather as the people of the God of Abraham.
- God is highly exalted.

What a beautiful sight, Christ going up to heaven! This Psalm provides the framework for liturgical worship. The assembly has gathered with loud songs and clapping offered as praise to God. During this opening section, no doubt they recalled their salvation history and God's covenant with them. God is due our praise because of his actions -- he has subdued peoples and nations; he is awesome and is a great King over all the earth. This promises to become an extraordinary service of worship because God is an extraordinary God!

Can you imagine the scene? The scene was at Bethany where Jesus lifted up his hands and blessed his disciples. Luke states that Christ was carried up into heaven while blessing them. (Luke 24: 50-53) They continued to worship, with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Do you remember where you were and what you were doing on 9/11? I served a church in Fayetteville, NC, home to Ft. Bragg and Pope Air Force Base. I was in my office on that morning when the receptionist called to relay the news that a plane had hit the World Trade Center in New York. And then a second plane, and then the Pentagon, and then the crash in Pennsylvania. I tried to call my family to let them know that I loved them and the horrific events that had happened. People in Fayetteville were actually looking into the sky, fearful that another plane might be headed toward us. This was because Ft. Bragg was often among the first troops to depart in an emergency.

I returned to my office and began to compile a list of scripture passages that deal with uncertainty and fear. I emailed that list to the entire staff as an attempt to encourage them. We opened the church each day at noon to provide for people a place to gather, to hear promises from God and to sing hymns of assurance. As you can imagine, the church was crowded for some time following 9/11, but then things returned to what was considered normal. The return to normal was sad because people's need drove them to worship, but now they seemed not to have the need to worship.

It is in that context that we find ourselves today. We are trying valiantly to keep ourselves safe, to protect our family and friends and to move beyond the horrors of Covid-19. Because we are a close knit community, all of us know someone who has been affected.

The Ascension of Jesus into heaven was a monumental event. The Ascension captivated people's hearts and minds. For a short moment, the routine became second place to the immediate. While it is true that all of us desire the church to open for worship soon, there remain many questions to be answered. But, chief among them is this -- will we allow ourselves to return to what has been, or will we be willing to forge forward in faith, trusting God during these unsettling times?

Prayer:

O God over all the earth, instill in our hearts and minds the ability and desire to love and serve you and our community this day and every day. Amen.