

Day One

Therefore...

“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore . . . stand firm” (1 Corinthians 15:57, 58).

Each year, Christians look forward to the penitential season of Lent. That seems strange to some who don't understand the blessings this time affords. Among these is time set aside to focus on our own sins and then to place them purposefully at the foot of the cross, knowing that Christ has already paid the penalty in our place.

Another blessing arises from knowing that Lent is a period of time that culminates in Easter, that day the whole Christian Church rejoices together over the victory Christ won as he rose from the dead. His resurrection is ours! The apostle Paul wrote, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

He followed this declaration with the word “therefore,” implying that something should happen as a result of this great victory: we should “stand firm.” We should “let nothing move [us].” We should “give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because [we] know that [our] labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Therefore, we keep our eyes on Jesus, and we do the work our Father has prepared for us to do, for we know our labor is not in vain.

Prayer: Dear Savior, we rejoice in the victory you have won for us! Give us eagerness to live in that victory as we go about your work on earth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Read Ephesians 6:10-18. How does God equip you to stand firm and give yourself to his work?

Day Seven

We Want to Give . . .

“Each one should give what he decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Isn't it great to please your parents, spouse, children, or friends by giving them gifts? Both the anticipation of the person's reaction to the gift and the actual response can be priceless. Giving is a wonderful expression of love. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

When we as Christians give to Jesus out of love, we are giving for the right motive. The motive for our giving is more important than the gift itself. God is not glorified if we give him only our leftovers out of a sense of obligation, or if we give to receive earthly recognition or to get a tax break. Jesus gave his life even for the person who will not acknowledge his gift.

Our heavenly Father showed how much he loved us and was willing to give to us. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God's nature is to love and give. When we spend time in God's Word and participate in the sacrament, the Holy Spirit matures our faith and leads us to give from hearts that he has filled with love and joy.

God, who first loved us, enables our faithful response to his love and grace. Because our hearts are filled with his love, we give cheerfully and generously. Love motivates us to be givers rather than takers. Giving puts our love into action. May God grant us all loving hearts and make us cheerful givers of the gifts that he has entrusted to us.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for your continuous love for us and for all that you give us. Help us to show our love for you through our giving. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Read Luke 6:38 and 2 Corinthians 9:6. How do these verses relate to one another?

Day Fifteen

Where Is Your Fruit?

“If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit” (John 15:5).

Daily the gardener went out to his garden to check on his melon patch. He smiled in delight to see exactly what he expected to see: each day his melons were growing bigger and bigger and changing color as they ripened. That pleasure turned to puzzlement one day as he noticed the melons on one plant starting to shrivel up. Upon closer inspection, he saw that the vine had been nearly completely severed. There was nothing he could do. There was no way to save the fruit parted from its source of nourishment.

Jesus told us that we are like the branches that bear fruit and that, just like the plants in the garden, we need to be connected to the Vine in order to bear that fruit. As stewards, we are expected to bear fruit. That’s what stewards do. Apart from our Vine, however, we can do nothing (John 15:5). Through our connection we are empowered to minister to the needs of others just as Jesus did. In Christ’s name, we provide shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry, and clothes for needy. As God’s people, we discover through prayer and the study of his Word what his will is for our lives and what fruit he wants us to bear. God invites each of us to come to him, but he does not force us to abide in him. Only when we stay connected through his Word and sacrament will our lives have purpose, and we will bear the fruit he wants us to bear.

Prayer: Lord, we give you thanks and praise for the gift of life. Help us always to be mindful that you have created us to give you praise and to be fruitful in your kingdom. Through Christ Jesus we ask it. **Amen.**

Read Colossians 1:9-10 with a prayerful heart. Nurture your connection to Christ through word and sacrament.

Day Twenty-Six

Is Your Light Shining?

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

One of God’s greatest blessings is sunlight. Light is so basic, so necessary, and so wonderful. It is essential for life. Because of the light from the sun, we can see the beauty of God’s creation. We have light because God said, “Let there be light, and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). Until God made light, the world was dark.

What the creator God did for the earth, the Redeemer God does for us humans. John, the apostle, tells us how this has come about. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us . . . (John 1:1,14). In Jesus, John told us, “The true light that gives light was coming into the world” (John 1:9).

Jesus is that true light, and he told us, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). It is his light within us being reflected that allows us to carry out his command: “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). We are called to keep the light that God gives us burning brightly and shining for the entire world to see. “Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house” (John 5:15). Nourished through word and sacrament, we can be faithful reflections of God’s light.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being our light in a dark world. We pray for faithfulness as we shine your light to those around us. **Amen.**

Read Ephesians 5:8-14.