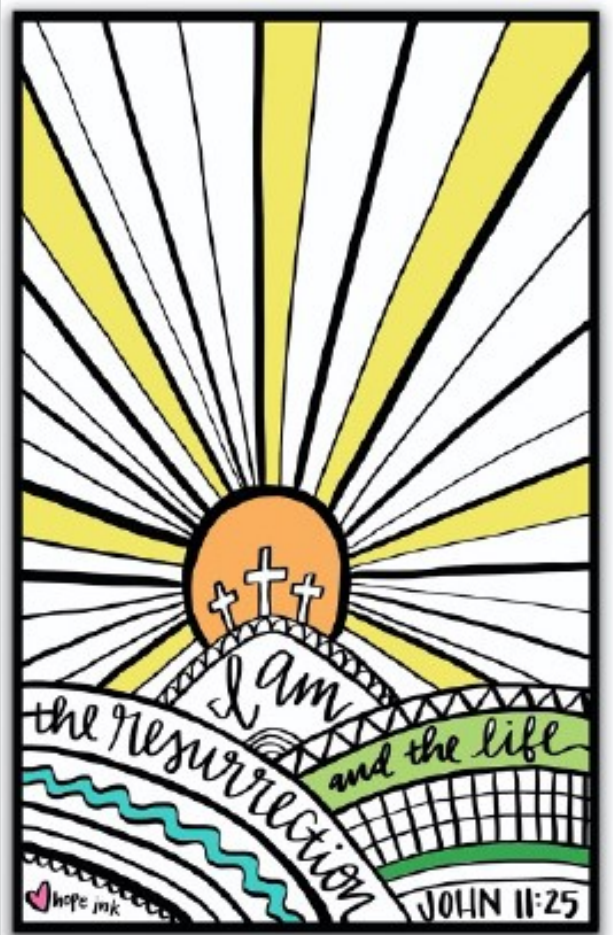


**Pastor Nathan Johnson
is inviting you to join the
Tabernacle MBC Family
in a
2021 Lenten Devotion
“Arising Son”**



“Arising Son”
2021 Lenten Devotional



Jesus said to her,
“I am the resurrection and the life. Those
who believe in me, even though they die,
will live...”

~ John 11:25

Week Four: Amid The Darkness



March 7-13

Monday, March 8, 2021

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 7:59

While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

REFLECTION: This story starts when Stephen is put in charge of charity among Christians to fulfill God's command, allowing the apostles to continue spreading the good news. He is arrested by the Jewish authority on false charges and in his trial he compares the Priests' denial of Jesus' divinity to the followers of Moses turning to idols. The scene of his death is a powerful one to me. Presumably steeped in despair and anger, he prays that his spirit be revived, and he goes on to pray for the forgiveness of his executioners, just as Jesus had.

This act of grace in the face of annihilation gives me ample food for thought. I can think of no greater epitome of forgiveness than this circumstance. I wonder whether they knew how their deeds would inspire those who heard of them, if that light shone in the distance amid their darkness. And that such a miraculous moral feat was done by not just the messiah but also a follower demonstrates how anyone can embody Christ's Holy Spirit. It is evident how personal crisis can influence the arc of an individual's life, I often consider how spiritual and social crisis, championed by small groups of individuals through history, have and continue to expand the horizons of human's endeavors and increase the synergy among conflicting groups of people.

PRAYER: *I pray for more tenderness in discourse, so that we may each better see where another person stands through the veil of our ignorance. And more aggressive devotion in our personal pursuits of those principles which we believe to be supremely valuable.*

Amen.

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 10:21[The Ninth Plague: Darkness]

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt."

REFLECTION: In the Book of Exodus, the ninth plague was darkness to cover the face of the land. God was angry. He was fed up with the Egyptians' sin.

Like Moses, we are living in dark times indeed. I'm pretty sure that after the last year we know how the people felt. Sickness surrounds us. Death has touched everyone we know in one way or another. Countries are dealing with climate woes and famine threatens already fragile food supplies in parts of the world. Wars still rage and people are enslaved. Is this all a punishment from God? Certainly not. The God I know and worship just does not work that way. All these terrible events were wrought by human hand. Greed and lies, envy and anger have all contributed to getting us to the point where our world itself is rising up against us to say "enough."

Unlike the Pharaoh of Exodus, we know through Jesus that no matter how dark things appear, God hears our cries and is there to comfort and defend us.

Can we change the direction of our world? Of course we can. With a prayer in our hearts and our eyes turned to Jesus we can become the people God wants us to be. We can heal our world and each other. We can become a people of love for our God and our fellow man.

Pharaoh feared the darkness. We need not fear. We have the light of the world. We have Jesus.

PRAYER: *Help us to go forth Lord out of the darkness of our sinful past and once again walk into the future in the light of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 4:19

The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what they stumble over.

REFLECTION: Amid the Darkness...PWC! A command with dire consequences? Secret code to go somewhere and carry out a mission? Or both? When I was a young kid my Dad announced my birthday by telling me my birth story. "Joe, it was a cold dark night when you were born. I was notified your Mom was taken to the delivery room and I began to run like crazy to the hospital. I ran through the snow-covered park and I crashed into a lady carrying groceries, helped with the groceries, yelled back to her 'My wife's having a baby!!' and kept running." When he finished, he just muttered under his breath...PWC.

"Amid the Darkness" sounded intriguing and I had not read Proverbs in some time. Proverbs is plain old good advice, passed down generations after generations! Chapter 4 is interesting because it's advice given to sons by the father who reminds his boys he was also a son to a father. He knows whereof he speaks! In this case, stay away from Dumb Wicked People Who Don't Know What They Fell Over! Wisdom always leads to a better and new life.

REFLECTION: But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. (NKJV)

The thought of walking in darkness is scary at best. You know, when it's so dark you can't see your hand in front of your face. Can you image being blinded and having to navigate life in total darkness? The sorcerer sure found out that God wasn't messing around. God didn't want anyone keeping people from hearing the teaching of the Lord.

We spend so much time, looking at social media and absorbing news reports which constantly bombard us with, self-loving, self-serving, political and moral negativity. When these are our only source of daily input, it can cause us to feel like we're walking in darkness. Joy is gone, hope's depleted, love is out the window, you desperately want to know your purpose is and you wonder why you're even alive. That is darkness. But we are never without hope. If we spend more time reading God's word, ingesting it daily, listening to positive Christian pod casts and loving our neighbors as ourselves, we will be uplifted and walking in the light. We do get to choose how we walk through life, in darkness or in the Light.

PRAYER: *God, help me to read your word more, hear your voice clearer and feel your Love deeper so I can help others walk out of darkness and into your loving light. Amen.*

Friday, March 12, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 2:11

But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

REFLECTION: As a child growing up, we were not allowed to use the word HATE when referring to anything we disliked and certainly refrained from using the "H" word when referring to a person. My Mom would say "hate is the opposite of love and we should try to love everyone around us as if they were Jesus." This explanation has always stuck with me, especially now that I have got children of my own. I find myself scolding my boys for the same reasons today. There is no doubt that the last few years have been a challenge in our society: hate and blindness are a mainstream topic that seem to be around every corner. Even if this darkness has always been a part our lives, it is crucial that we replace it with the LIGHT of Jesus. When we see hate between one another, we are blind to the possibility of love.

PRAYER: *Dear Jesus, help us to lead our lives in love. As we wander through dark paths, help us to see the light, YOUR LIGHT. Steer us from the hate we have within and help us to find love that exists in all of us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

Saturday, March 13, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 1:13

He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

REFLECTION: Even though daylight starts to increase after the Winter Solstice on December 21, darkness predominates during the winter and those with Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.) feel blue, lack energy, and are subject to weight gain from eating too many carbs during the darkness. Add to that, the year-long Corona-virus Pandemic and the darkness seem unbearable.

Recently I was treated for a mass behind my left eye with a gamma knife (a method using gamma rays instead of cutting into the brain). Having something growing in your head pressing on your eye is very frightening and distorts your vision. The neurosurgeon explained I would first be fitted with a mask so I didn't move my head during the procedure. He put a hot material on my face and explained it would cool down rapidly and conform to my skull. Next, I was moved into a very narrow chamber and told not to move for the duration of about 6 or 7 songs on the Oldies station. The nurse put a warm blanket on me and turned off the lights. I felt alone and was frightened. My heart was beating a mile a minute. It was very dark! I decided to pray. I prayed that God would guide my doctors and that Jesus would be with me in that dark chamber. I had the urge to blink and clear my throat but didn't want to get yelled at. It seemed like an eternity before the procedure ended. They turned on the lights and I was grateful that the Lord was with me and with my doctors and nurses. Jesus was with me in the darkness. My doctor told me he prayed for me too.

Have you had an experience where you felt you were in darkness? What restored light in your life?

PRAYER: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the blessing of your son, Jesus Christ, for forgiveness of sin and for all the blessings you have bestowed on me. Thank you for being with me in the darkness. Be our ray of light. Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Amen.*

