

Excerpts from

50 *Days*
Abblaze!

Daily Devotions
for Disaster Relief Teams

TM

*Were not our hearts burning within us
while He talked with us on the road
and opened the Scriptures to us?
(Luke 24:32)*

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Excerpts from *50 Days Ablaze! Daily Devotions for Disaster Relief Workers* were taken from:

50 DAYS ABLAZE! DAILY DEVOTIONS

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Celebrate the Carefree Life

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4)

Sometimes in life you just have to laugh at yourself and not take yourself too seriously. Being care-free is no easy thing. There is a lot that bogs us down each day. What I love about God’s Word is that it can be so deep while, at the same time, so practical:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” But is that practical? Paul continues, “. . . Do not be anxious about anything.” I kind of like the way the King James Version expresses it: *“Be careful for nothing.”* That is actually a way of expressing the negative side of “rejoicing.” Paul says that the way in which we can rejoice is to be full of care about nothing. Jesus was taught the same when He said, *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?” (Matthew 6:25).*

Both Paul and Jesus use the same word for “anxious.” When you look closely at what Jesus is saying, isn’t He teaching us to not get all hung up about all the daily necessities that so often occupy our minds, such as the clothes we have or don’t have? So much time and so much energy spent being full of care on things that, in the end, rob us of joy. It is hard, though, to break those thoughts. We have been trained since childhood to think just the opposite.

As my girls would go off to school or out with their friends, I said what every dad says: “Be careful.” Being full of care for nothing does not mean that we are careless. It does mean, however, that we rely on God to provide, rather than constantly worrying about it ourselves. We are able to relax our minds and our hearts, knowing that we are in His hands.

It is no accident, having said that we should be full of care for nothing, that Paul then says, “. . . in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6). In the original language, the word for “guard” is a military term for “sentry,” one who keeps watch over something valuable.

The best way to deal with worry is to stop focusing on me and to begin focusing on God. The best way to do that is in prayer and in worship. The result will be that God’s peace, beyond my understanding, will keep watch over me. His peace helps me to let my mind and heart be at rest. Rejoice. Relax. Rest. These three make it possible for me to celebrate.

I wish I could say that joy comes simply through prayer and telling ourselves not to worry. It isn’t that easy, as you know. I am saved by grace alone. I have no part in that whatsoever. Once I am in the faith, however, God has certain expectations of me. Living with a spirit of joy and celebration is rooted in the peace that God alone provides me. Paul, in the way of a command, places this right at our feet: *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9).*

Each day, we are faced with decisions as to what we will focus on. I cannot expect my day or my heart to be filled with joy if I choose to let my mind dwell on sinful or ungodly thoughts, or if I fill my calendar and time with issues that have no eternal significance.

Paul’s teaching is not easy, but it is right on the mark when he guides us to re-direct our focus and thinking. Joy begins in the heart. All of our efforts will not give joy to life if the heart is not right. The only way to make the heart right is when we are covered in the righteousness of Jesus. If we are not right in Him and with Him, there will be no joy.

While His righteousness gives me joy, I must remain alert. Satan wants nothing less than to steal away the peace and joy I have in Jesus. He will seek to do this by filling my mind with worry. My confidence, however, rests in knowing that God’s peace, like a military sentry, will patrol the boundaries of my mind and keep me in Christ Jesus.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. What are some things that you worry about?
2. What are some practical ways that would enable you turn these worries over to God?
3. Read Philippians 4:8-9. What things could you focus on that are “true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable and praiseworthy?”
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Jesus, may the peace that you alone give guard my heart and mind in you this day. May your peace that passes my understanding halt every anxious thought from entering in. Amen.

Sent to Do Whatever We Can

*“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”
(1 Corinthians 12:7)*

July 24, 2002 in Sipesville, Pennsylvania, was a hot and muggy day. At 8:50 p.m., nine men working the second shift in the Quecreek Mine broke through an old mine which held an unseen danger—ground water. When the wall was breached, 50-60 million gallons of water poured into the Quecreek Mine, trapping the nine men 240 feet below the surface.

Over the next 77 hours, the story of their rescue would capture the attention and the hearts of the nation. The story of how they survived is inspiring. Huddled in darkness 240 feet below surface, these men supported each other. They used their body heat to warm each other in the subsurface cold. They encouraged each other when one became down or anxious. They were committed to each other, even binding themselves together with rope so they would not become separated. At first I thought, “What a great example of the Church.” People huddled together in the darkness supporting each other while binding themselves together no matter what might come.

Later I would re-think my first impression. Viewing the Church as those huddled beneath the surface is indeed the way many see the Church. The Church to them is only a place of refuge where people gather to support each other. It is, to say the least, a weak and tepid view that does little to inspire joy or enthusiasm.

Consider if you will, the Church from the view of those who are above the surface, sent to do whatever they can to rescue those beneath. This is a much more exciting and true picture of what the “one holy Christian and apostolic Church” is to be.

Consider the details of the miners’ story from the view of those on top. There had never been an attempt such as this—the rock was of such density that it could take weeks to drill through. Someone knew of a special compressor in the area that would make the drilling easier. But soon the drill bit broke, and they had to send for a replacement from Roanoke, Virginia. While waiting, they were not idle. There was urgency to their task. Using satellite technology and the global positioning system, they were able to pinpoint the miners’ exact location. They held strategy sessions and gathered resources from many locations. Geology, engineering, medical and space science, as well as other disciplines, were joined together for the sole purpose of saving these nine men. As they worked and waited, they understood it was very possible that getting to the miners in time was slim. None of this caused them to waver in their effort.

Can you see the parallels between this story and that of the Church? It is a much healthier and dynamic picture. The “one holy Christian and apostolic Church” is a team sent out by Christ with an urgent mission: People are trapped—trapped in bondage to sin, burdened with guilt, and facing unknown fears, living in darkness, helpless and unable to save themselves. Time is short. We cannot sit idly by. Nor can we be deterred when we think that the chances are slim. Christ sends us out, empowered and gifted by His Spirit, for the sake of those who are lost. We are told in Scripture: *“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”*

The Spirit has gifted each and every one of us with various spiritual gifts and abilities for the common good. God expects that we will use them to serve and bless His Church. When we do not, the work of the entire team is diminished. It may seem at times that what we are trying to accomplish is impossible. Not enough time. Not enough resources. Not enough knowledge or experience as to how to get it done. Yet lives are at stake—eternally. We are sent to do whatever we can in order for people trapped in sin to know the freedom that Christ offers.

LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick has laid out a vision before us: “We in the Lutheran Church-Missouri have ONE Mission—to seek lost people for Christ! We proclaim ONE Message—that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world! We do so as ONE People—united by God’s love in Jesus Christ.”

All of this is not to suggest that we can save anyone. Only by the effort and work of the Holy Spirit does one come to the faith. Our work is to present the opportunity for that Word to have its way with them.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. How are unbelievers like the miners who were trapped underground?
2. How is the Church like the rescuers above the surface?
3. Read 1 Cor. 12: 6-7, 14-26. How is the work of the Church diminished when we don’t work like a team?
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Father, you did whatever you could to win me back. You were even willing to give up your own Son. I ask that you move us to love others as you have loved us so that we too are willing to do whatever we can to reach others in your name. Amen.

Tell it Boldly

“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” (1 Corinthians 2:3-5)

I did not know her as an outspoken person. We never had cross words with each other. Physically she was not an imposing woman, actually rather thin and frail. Why then did she intimidate me so? Those who know me would say that I am not one who lacks boldness in expressing my opinion or views. Yet in this relationship I felt inhibited, even timid. I understood this at first as early jitters. But as the years went by and she became my mother-in-law, I thought time would help me to relax and grow a little more confident. It never happened. Maybe a lot of sons-in-law can tell the same story. There are, after all, more mother-in-law jokes than one can remember. Beyond the humor, there was within me a burden that intensified with every visit. The more I got to know Margaret, the less I was certain where she stood with Jesus. Was she a believer? This became the burning question—one I was too timid to ask. It remained this way for years. Until the phone call: “Margaret has lung cancer. It is not good. Time is short.”

We packed up the kids and drove back home to visit for a few days. On the final day, I remember waking up that morning and offering this prayer: “Jesus, forgive me for being timid and for saying nothing all these years. Give me one chance this day and I will not blow it. I will give witness to you.”

The day went its course as I looked for that opportunity. Nothing seemed to present itself. As we went in to say our goodbyes, I was still looking for a moment alone with her. Amazing, isn’t it? As a pastor, I have shared the Gospel before hundreds, and yet in this moment I needed it to be with no one else around. Her hospital room was packed with family. Kids running around and everyone gathered around the bed. “It isn’t going to happen,” I thought to myself. Then one by one they all began to leave. So weird as I look back on it now. No one knew of my prayer or my burden of the last 10 years. One by one they left, until it was Margaret and me and Jesus.

I am not exactly sure how I began or even what I said. My words did not exactly flow out of my mouth. Stumble would be a better word. As I try to recall, it went something like this: “Margaret, I uhmmmm. . . believe that Jesus. . . uhmmmm. . . is my Savior. Uhmmmm. I believe that we are all sinners and unable to save ourselves by what we do or don’t do. Uhmmmm. . . I believe that He died on the cross so that you and I might be forgiven.” Then there was

silence. What followed was as sweet as I could have imagined. She took hold of my hand. That was the first time that our two hands joined together. She looked at me and said, “I believe that too!”

Phewwww! I let out one eternal gasp of air that I had been holding for ten years. “I believe that too!” Those four words snatch life out of death. Those four words breathe hope. Those four words are lifegiving. They still ring the sound of joy as I write them now. Then I remember praying with Margaret and we said our goodbyes. That was the last time we would speak until I see her again before the Lamb on His Throne.

That may not appear to be a strong example for “Telling it Boldly,” yet I see it as one of my boldest moments in witnessing—a boldness not rooted in me or my efforts, but a boldness rooted in Christ. I believed that should the opportunity present itself, He would give me the words use. Just as important, I believed in the very words I stumbled to share with her. My presentation was weak, but the Spirit was not.

We may stumble over the words, but the power of God will not. Tell it boldly in the power of God. Have you been burdened for someone in your life as to where they stand with Jesus? Tell it boldly! Not bold with words necessarily, but bold in the confidence that the Spirit will give you the words to say and will work with those words long after you have finished. Tell it boldly in the confidence that what you are sharing with them is lifegiving, breathing with hope. I pray that you will hear in response, “I believe that too.”

Discussion and Debriefing

1. Have you ever tried to witness for Christ with someone who was potentially an unbeliever? What happened? How did it feel?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. How do these words make you feel about sharing the Gospel with others?
3. Are you burdened for someone in your life as to where they stand with Jesus? Pray for them and ask God to give you the discernment as to what He wants you to do.
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Lord, help me to be bold in my witness for you—bold in my conviction that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and bold in the confidence that the Spirit will use my witness to bring Life to others. Amen.

Go and Don't Stop

"We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance." (2 Thessalonians 3:4-5)

There are many people I admire in the Scriptures, and Caleb is near the top. Caleb is one of the 12 spies who were sent into Canaan early in Israel's exodus from Egypt. Ten returned and reported to Moses that entering the Promised Land was next to impossible. Two spies, Joshua and Caleb, said it could be done. Israel listened to the 10, refusing to enter. God punished their disobedience and lack of faith by letting them wander in the wilderness for 40 years. When they finally entered, only two people remained who had left Egypt—Joshua and Caleb.

What happened next makes me want to be like Caleb. They are dividing up the inheritance of the land, and some parcels are better than others. Read what Caleb says in Joshua 14:10-12. At 85 years young, Caleb asks for the toughest and most formidable property that exists. "Give me the hill country." No beach-front property for this man. "Give me the hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified." There is still a good fight left in this faithful senior citizen. "The Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as He said." Caleb's confidence is not in his strength but in God's.

Go and don't stop. There is so much that can stand in the way of our going. Maybe right now you find yourself discouraged, defeated and tired. Is there any good fight left within you? Going forth in the name of Jesus can be very discouraging at times. We can end up feeling, "What good does this do? Who really cares after all?" In those moments when haunted by these types of questions I find strength not in my desire or my ambition, but in His command, "Therefore go and make disciples." No one may care. It may do little good in my eyes. This does not matter in the end. What matters is that I am going in response to His command. He does not let me go alone. Jesus promises, "and surely I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

When I think about His promise, a picture comes to my mind of something that occurred in the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona. From his seat in the top row of the Stadium, Jim Redmond saw what 65,000 others were seeing unfold. It was the semi-finals of the men's 400-meter race. A British runner by the name of Derek was in trouble. While others gasped and watched as Derek fell to the track surface, Jim Redmond reacted in a far different way. Derek was his son. Derek had ripped his hamstring and was now picking himself up in a brave effort to go and not

stop. Jim Redmond left the stands. He raced down the stairs, brushed aside a security guard and bounded over a 41 2-foot wall, rushing onto the track. When he reached his son, he told him, "You don't have to do this." Derek was determined to finish. So arm in arm the young sprinter and his father limped toward the finish line. The stadium fans arose and applauded what was unfolding before their eyes. Millions of viewers across the world watched an unforgettable demonstration of a father's love.

God does this very thing for you and me. He comes by our side, hurt and limping, to help us to go and not stop. The beauty of this is that He has already secured the victory for us. Yet, as we run the race set before us, He is by our side to assist and strengthen us.

Remember Caleb's faith: "... the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said." I have experienced this when His Word has spoken to my heart at just the moment when I no longer wanted to go, when I just wanted to stop. He has come by my side through the workings and teaching of the Holy Spirit, as He did with the men on their way to Emmaus. He sends Christian friends to walk along my side who encourage me and remind me that I am not alone.

Go and don't stop. Along the way, should you find someone else limping in their race, take the time to walk by their side. Remind them of the words of 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5. When the going is a little rough . . . When you find your strength sagging a bit . . . Remember Caleb. Forget about going downhill. Say with Caleb, "Give me the hill country," and start climbing. Go and don't stop.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. When are some times that you get discouraged as you have tried to live out the Christian faith?
2. What does "burn-out" feel like? Are you feeling that now?
3. What practical things can you do to support and encourage your teammates today? How can you practically support and encourage the people you serve today?
4. Which of today's experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever me from any tie but the tie that binds me to your service and to your heart. Amen. (David Livingston)

Give What You Have

“Moses answered, ‘What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to You?’’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ ‘A staff,’ he replied. The Lord said, ‘Throw it on the ground.’” (Exodus 4:1-3)

Changing one’s path or routine is not always an easy task. We are creatures of habit and easily get stuck in the comfortable and predictable ruts of life. I doubt Moses was any different. Forty years in the wilderness tending sheep had more than likely given him his fair share of routines.

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God” (Exodus 3:1). How many times had he traveled this familiar route? But this time there was something different. “Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up’” (Exodus 3:2-3). Burning bushes in the desert were not out of the routine of the day. A burning bush that “does not burn up” is a different story. Moses broke his routine and went over to check it out. As he came close to the bush, God spoke:

“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land . . . and now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So, now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:7-10).

Then the well known excuses begin to fly: *“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’” “O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”*

When I study that litany of excuses, I see a reoccurring theme: I don’t have what it takes—send someone else. God listens to him for a while and then

he asks, *“What is that in your hand?”* Moses responds, *“A staff.”* God tells Moses to throw it down on the ground, where it becomes a snake. God says, *“Pick it up by the tail.”* It turns back into a staff. Amazing. What follows is even more fascinating. When all the excuses have been thrown out and Moses is willing to go to Pharaoh, consider this one last verse: *“So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand” (Ex. 4:20).*

“He took the staff of God.” The staff of Moses has become the staff of God. God owns it. That one small verse says volumes to me about how God engages us for His service. He calls us to serve Him even as we offer every excuse in the book. *“I don’t have the ability.” “I don’t have the credentials.”* God in response says, *“Then give me what you have.”*

When it comes to serving God, He asks us to use what He has given us—our time, talents, possessions, jobs, hobbies, relationships and opportunities. God hears the cries of his people today as He did in the time of Moses. He is calling us to respond to them on His behalf. He is not looking for us to offer excuses or to play it safe and hold back. He is asking us to offer Him what we have.

Discussion and Debriefing:

1. What are some of the excuses you have found yourself using in response to God’s calling?
2. How can you help others get past their uncomfortable feelings in sharing a witness for Christ?
3. Read Exodus 3:7-10. What difference does it make in the world for us to give what we have to God’s service?
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Father, I offer you what I have. No excuses. What I own and possess, make it your own and use it to bring relief and comfort to those who cry out to you. I ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

Go Because He Says So

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . .’” (Matthew 28:18-19a)

For years my primary passion has been for the lost, for those who are dying without Christ. Recently, I took a closer look at Matthew 28:18-19: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . .”*

Many are familiar with this Great Commission. But do we know what should compel us to carry it out? I have always assumed it was because of our love for the lost, our concern that without Christ people will spend an eternity in Hell without Him. But this is not the basis He gives for the Great Commission. He says, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go. . . .”*

Jesus certainly wants our hearts to be filled with love for the lost. This, however, is not the primary motivator He gives for us to reach out with the saving message of the Gospel. His Lordship is what should compel us. Nothing less. All authority belongs to Him, and He commands us to do this.

Jesus came through the crucifixion and the three days in the grave as the Victor! His blood has not only freed me from my sin, the fear and punishment of death and the power of the devil—His blood has made me His own. *“That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him. . . .”* (Luther). He is my Lord. He has the right to ask of me whatever He wishes. I am His slave.

The disciples understood this on the day of His Ascension. *“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted”* (Matthew 28:16-17). Not everyone that day was convinced. But, those who understood worshipped in response. Next Jesus said, *“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go. . . .”* Those who worship Christ as Lord must also be willing to hear Him say, *“I have authority over your life; here is what I want you to do.”*

My passion continues for the lost who will spend an eternity in Hell without Christ. The “aha moment” for me is in recognizing a greater, more abiding passion—I want to live my life in response to His authority. I want to be His servant and no one else’s. My love for the lost is rooted in a first love for Jesus.

Responding to the Great Commission first out of obedience and love for Jesus rather than the needs of the lost affects my daily walk. First, my life’s mission will reflect His own. The primary reason that Jesus came to this earth was not His love for you and me. It

was not even so that He could die on the cross or rise from the grave. The primary reason that Jesus came to this earth was out of obedience to His Father. The result of that obedience was that He would die on the cross and be raised on the third day. Within that obedience there was, of course, His love for you and me. Clearly, though, His first love and passion was to follow His Father’s will. I tend to so often focus on the loving Jesus that I diminish His primary motivation and purpose—obedience to His Father:

Second, responding to the Great Commission out of obedience and love for Jesus will also give me strength and guidance. There are many times in our lives that the expectations and needs of other people will tug at our hearts. What determines what we say yes to and what we turn away? The answer rests in living our lives before an audience of One. The demands of a hurting and hungry world were always before Jesus, but he was constantly reminding, *‘I can do nothing by myself . . . my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me’* (John 5:30).

Third, responding to the Great Commission as a matter of obedience frees me from getting all hung up as to what I accomplish in life. It is about His will for my life as His servant.

As you are going into the day and week ahead, go as a person under authority. As you do, your mission will be a reflection of His; you will have guidance as to when to say yes and when to say no; and you will have a lot less concern about your accomplishments. You will find that being His servant is the most freeing thing that you will experience in life.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. What does it mean to “live under Him in His Kingdom and serve Him” (Luther’s explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed)?
2. How will living your life in response to Christ’s authority personally affect your daily walk?
3. Where in your life is God waiting for you to submit to His authority? Pray for His help in turning it over to Him.
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Jesus, You are my Lord. You have all authority over me. Show me what you want me to do. Give me the power by your Spirit to carry it out. I am your servant. Amen.

Celebrate the Day

*“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”
(Psalm 118:24)*

There is a story of a little boy who came home from Sunday School on Easter Sunday very excited about what he had learned. He raced into the kitchen and shouted, “Wow, I learned what Jesus said when He burst out of the tomb on Easter morning!” His mom and dad were excited too, and they asked him, “Well what did He say on the first Easter morning?” And the little boy ran up to them, threw his hands up in the air, and shouted “TA-DA!” (Bimler, *Let Their Be Laughter*, p. 14).

Obviously, the young boy has paraphrased Jesus a little bit. I suspect, though, that he is capturing the essence of joy and celebration that were evident that first Easter morning. “TA-DA—Here I am! I am alive, just as I said!” As a result, our lives are “TA-DA!” lives. We are able to enter each day in the confidence that Jesus is alive. Wherever we go, we give witness and bear testimony to the truth that Jesus is alive and ready to reveal Himself. Even in those days when the challenges are overwhelming, Christ stands ready to say to us, “TA-DA!” His resurrection gives us the ability to say with joyous defiance, “*This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it*” (Psalm 118:24). What day is the Psalmist referring to in this verse? Look two verses earlier at verse 22:

“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:22-24).

What so many thought to be worthless (the life of Christ, and so they discarded it), God raises up and uses as the cornerstone for what He is building. The day He has made is the Day of Resurrection, which makes every day a “TA-DA!” day—a day for celebrating. The joy of the resurrection is so great and timeless that it cannot be confined to one single day.

If, then, there is to be celebration, let it be today. Why wait? So often we fall into the illusion that joy will come. We try to sing “The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow,” but it is not only our voice that ends up flat. We go to school and think, “I will be happy tomorrow.” Then we graduate and get married. She or he is not exactly what we bargained for and we say, “I will be happy tomorrow.” It never ends. Resurrection faith says in the face of it all, “*This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*” We have seen through the eyes of faith what God can do with what others saw as worthless. The day we are in can then be redeemed by this same power.

Can this be said in the presence of tragedy? What I have seen in ministry is that so often it is precisely in these moments that those touched most deeply by suffering experience the joy of hope.

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:1-5).

Even in the midst of pain or in days when we are confused and torn, the Cross assures us of God’s love, and the empty Tomb proclaims His victory. Yes, this day too can be and is a “TA-DA!” day. “*This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.*” This is the day upon which His Son shines down upon us in righteousness.

“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall” (Malachi 4:2).

Today is the day. Don’t worry about tomorrow. Today is the day to invite others to join you in being glad. This is the day, with the Sun of Righteousness shining down on us, to leap like calves and say, “TA-DA!”

Discussion and Debriefing:

1. How does Jesus’ Resurrection enable you to have joy even in days when challenges overwhelm you?
2. How does God reveal His love to those who are suffering, even in the midst of tragedy?
3. Memorize Psalm 118:24 and repeat it to yourself throughout the day.
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: You, O Christ, are the Victor. You have defeated Satan and death and sin itself. I praise you and honor you, offering you my life this day in thanksgiving for making your victory my own through my Baptism. In your name, Amen.

Sent Out to a Shaken World

“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:54)

December 26, 2004—the day after Christmas. For most of us it was a quiet day, but in one part of the world, an entirely different day was unfolding. Five miles below the ocean, the most powerful earthquake in 40 years shook the earth. Earthquakes occur when tectonic plates that make up the earth’s surface shift. When this happens beneath the ocean floor it sometimes generates immense sea waves known as tsunamis, sending an energy surge through the water at the speed of a jumbo jet. Amazingly, to a boat on the surface, the wave is barely detectable, yet it is estimated that the force of an earthquake of this magnitude is equal to the explosion of one million atomic bombs.

When this energy surge gets closer to shore, a telltale warning sign occurs: the water near the shore recedes, and the ocean returns to shore all the receding water plus the surge of energy generated by the earthquake. The momentary recession serves as a warning for some, but others are foolishly enticed to come in to collect the fish and the shells, only to be swept away in the onslaught of water that follows.

It is estimated that anywhere from 228,000 – 310,000 people died as a result of the 2004 Tsunami. As unimaginable is the destruction and the loss of life, the question that causes me even greater burden is, “What of their souls?” Many of the countries affected by this disaster are populated heavily by Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. The horrific destruction and suffering inflicted by the tsunami pales in comparison to the destruction and suffering awaiting those whose lives have been fractured from God by sin.

Beginning with Adam and Eve, the fault lines that were caused by man’s disobedience have, like the slipping tectonic plates, released a power surge throughout the world—for all of time. The Bible tells of the disastrous results of sin that continue to sweep over all generations. Often times, like it is with a tsunami wave, the destructive power of sin is not initially detected. People go about their lives, engaging in sinful habits, unaware of the destructive power that lies beneath the surface. It is deceiving at first because it offers something that entices people to come closer. As they do, sin releases its destructive power over them, and they are swept away in its path. The pages of Scripture and of newspapers are filled with the carnage that is the result.

As Christians sent into a world that is shaken to its core, we must ask ourselves, “What is our responsibility?” The one holy Christian and apostolic Church is sent into the world with a mission to rescue

the lost—those who are drowning in their guilt and shame. In the mission He has given us, the Church is sent to cast the net of His grace and forgiveness to a world drowning in hopelessness and despair.

The power of sin has shaken the earth to its core; people’s lives and homes are being shaken and torn apart daily. Into this world we are sent with the message of two earthquakes of even greater magnitude than that of sin or of the tsunami. Our confidence in the midst of a shaken world is that Christ’s crucifixion and His resurrection (both surrounded by earthquakes) provide us with an unshakable foundation, enabling us to echo the hope of Psalm 46:

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging . . . Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

Be steadfast. Let nothing move you. The world is being shaken at its core by the fault lines of sin. The Cross and the Tomb shook loose the hold Satan had on us. They also shook loose the power and grip of death. The aftershock of those two ‘quakes was still felt 50 days later on Pentecost when the Spirit, sent from Jesus, came upon the disciples. Their witness from that time forward would shake the world upside down. The aftershock is still being felt today when we proclaim the Good News of His message of salvation to others.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. Describe how sin in the world is like a tsunami. What are the things that shake peoples’ lives?
2. Describe how the Church is like a rescue boat. How does our witness of Christ make a difference?
3. Read Matthew 27:54. Describe the impact Jesus’ death and resurrection have had in your life and in the world.
4. Join with others in prayer for the shaken world and for rescuers. For further meditation, read all of Psalm 46 and 1 Corinthians 15:54-58.

Prayer: Lord, in a world shaken by sin, I stand on the steadfast promise of your Word. Yours alone is the Kingdom and the power and glory forever. Amen.

A Farmer's Prayer

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” (Matthew 9:35-38)

The marines are looking for “The Few and The Proud.” The army is looking for those who are willing to “Be All That You Can Be.” The Navy is looking for those who want “Not Just a Job, but an Adventure.” The Air Force is looking for those who want to “Aim High!” Jesus is looking for “Laborers”—laborers who are willing to go out into the fields of the world.

“The harvest is plentiful.” Ask any farmer what those words mean and you will hear words like “urgency,” “immediate,” and “no time to waste.” When the fields are “plentiful,” there is a window of opportunity for harvesting the crop. Wait too long and the crop is in danger of being lost.

Jesus saw the potential for a great spiritual harvest. Yet there were not enough laborers to send into the fields. Two things impress me about Jesus in this particular moment: His passion and His priority. His passion is rooted in love. His love reminds me of what a former Jehovah’s Witness, now a Christian, once said about witnessing: “Do not attempt to witness to a Jehovah’s Witness at your door unless you have love within your heart for that person.” That makes sense. Our most effective witness is the love of Christ within our hearts.

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). Jesus’ heart went out to the crowd. That is no small thing when you read the chapters that precede this. The crowds were pressing in on a daily basis. It would have been enough to cause anyone to crave a little space and time to self. Jesus’ reaction, however, was one of great compassion. He was moved by their situation. They were *“sheep without a shepherd.”* Sheep are not only fairly dumb animals; they are defenseless. Without a shepherd, they stand little chance against attack. These people were no different. They were without direction or defense.

The second thing that impresses me is His priority. His first thought is to ask us to pray. *“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest fields” (Matthew 9:38).* While prayer is too often my last resort, it is the first thing Jesus thinks of. That speaks to my heart in many ways. First, it convicts me. If Jesus depended so much on prayer, certainly I need no less. It also humbles and

even perplexes me. Jesus connects the spiritual harvest of the world to the people of God falling on their knees in prayer. This raises the bar extremely high for me as to prayer being one of the most important works that a believer can do as a mission response.

The forces of good and evil are contending for the world. When you look over the decay and decadence of Jesus’ day, He saw the potential. *“The harvest is plentiful.”* He saw the opportunity to offer people hope and direction. It is no different today. There is a growing spiritual curiosity in the world. It may not seem that way, but there is a spiritual awakening going on around us. Do you find that hard to believe? Go into a bookstore and see how many books there are on meditation and spiritual matters. Not necessarily Christian, but the quantity demonstrates the interest of people who are hungry to know more about spiritual matters. People are hungry for hope. Surveys reflect that almost 50 percent of those not presently attending church say they would consider going if someone were to invite them. The fields are white unto the harvest, and there are plenty of them. The task before us can seem rather intimidating. It all depends on our view of things. We can either look out over the world and see the problems, or we can look out over the whitening fields and see the potential.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. What is your passion (a thing you feel strongly about)? What is your priority (the most important thing that you see yourself doing on a regular basis)?
2. In what ways are you a “laborer in the harvest?” How do you show compassion to others?
3. Why is the routine of prayer sometimes frustrating? Read Matthew 9:35-38. How is prayer an act of love?
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, the fields are plentiful. There are so many in this world who are hungry and searching. They are restless until they are at rest in you. Raise up workers who will serve you in the mission fields and within our churches. By means of your life saving Gospel, bind Satan so that nothing stands against your Word of Salvation from being proclaimed throughout the world. Amen.

Go the Extra Mile

“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” (Matthew 5:41)

Jesus has a knack for saying things that seem so simple, yet when you look at it more closely, the depth is difficult to fathom. In His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7), Christ says things that turns the world upside down: *“The way to be first is to be last...The way to be strong is be weak...The way to gain is to lose...The way to be free is in surrendering everything to Him...The way to live is to die...The way to find yourself is to deny yourself.”*

Then there is this from Matthew 5:41: *“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”* This may appear innocent enough. Understood in the culture of Jesus’ day, it is hard to stomach. The Jews were living beneath Roman occupation. If a soldier asked a Jewish citizen to carry his pack, then that person must carry it for 1000 steps—the equivalent of one mile. It was insulting. It was an infringement on the rights of all Jewish citizens. They hated the Romans. They hated being asked to do something this demeaning.

Jesus also said: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matthew 5:38-42).*

The tunic was the long linen or cotton inner garment. People normally would have more than one of these. The cloak, however, was the blanket-like garment that was worn as an outer layer. People normally had just one of these. The cloak was important enough that God sought to protect the ownership of it: *“If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate” (Exodus 22:26-27).*

Jesus then says, *“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”* Slapping the cheek was a way of insulting a person. Jesus is not suggesting that we never defend ourselves. He is addressing how we handle it when someone insults us.

What are we to make of this? The Sermon on the Mount confronts us with radical truths that challenge our day-to-day living. Those who are called to follow Christ have a higher calling. We are not called to a life of fairness but to a life of righteousness. We are

citizens of a Kingdom guided by much higher values and standards than those of the world

This is not to suggest that we must become doormats and open ourselves up to abuse. Jesus put limits to His teaching. He did not say that we should go as far as they would like. He said “go with him two miles.” He did not say we should not resist evil. He did tell us, though, to not resist the evil person. When Jesus was being questioned and beaten before Pilate, He asked why they did not ask for witnesses. He also asked why He was being struck. These were His lawful rights that belonged to Him according to Jewish law. There is no doubt a tension we walk as Christians in an unredeemed world between going the extra mile while holding up healthy boundaries.

Jesus knows that we live in a world that operates by different values and principles than what He taught. He calls us to a different way of thinking and a different lifestyle. But how will the world ever know that unless we demonstrate it, not only in our speaking but in our willingness to go that extra mile?

As the Spirit empowers us, I believe our willingness to not insist on fairness, and even willingly forfeiting our rights, gives us credibility before an unbelieving world. As we do this, we reflect the very image of Him, *“who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Php. 2:5-6).*

When Jesus said, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . .”*, He knew our going would be into a world that is unfair and takes advantage, and so His promise becomes even sweeter: *“Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Discussion and Debriefing

1. If you have ever been “used” or taken advantage of, how did it make you feel? How did you respond?
2. Recall a time when you have gone the extra mile for someone. What was their response?
3. How can we maintain the tension between going the extra mile and holding up healthy boundaries?
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Lord, it is so hard to go that extra mile. You know that better than anyone. How did you do it? Help me. Give me a heart that is willing to go the extra mile with those people that are so hard to live with at times. I can do all things as you give me the strength. Amen.

Celebrate His Greatness

“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy.” (Psalm 96:11-12)

Microscopes and telescopes caught my interest as I was growing up. Looking through the lens of a microscope was as if I was looking at another world within a world. As for the telescope, I stood in wonder looking through it at the vastness of the universe. The lens of the microscope and of the telescope gave witness to God. Microbes and stars shout out with His praise: *“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy” (Psalm 96:11-12).*

Look with me through the lens of a telescope for a moment and behold the wonder of His glory and majesty. If you could travel at the speed of light (186,273 miles per second or 5,874,305,328,000 miles per year—a light year), then you could travel:

- around the Earth at the leisurely pace of seven times in one second.
- to the moon in 1 1/3 seconds.
- from the sun to Earth in 8 1/3 minutes.

At the speed of light, you could travel from Earth to the center of the Milky Way in 33,000 years. It is estimated that the Milky Way contains about 100,000,000 stars. It would take you more than 3,000 years to count them at the rate of one per second! That is just our galaxy. There are thousands of others.

Now look with me through the lens of a microscope and behold the wonder of His glory and majesty on a smaller but no less grand scale:

- In the human body, one square inch of skin contains 1,300 nerve cells, 100 sweat glands, three million cells and three yards of blood vessels.
- The human eye can distinguish up to one million color surfaces, taking in more information than the world’s largest telescope.
- In one square inch of our hand we have nine feet of blood vessels, 600 pain sensors, 9,000 nerve endings, 36 heat sensors and 75 pressure sensors.

The lenses of the microscope and the telescope reveal the glory and wonder of God in fascinating ways, but they fall woefully short of revealing the most essential things about God. They cannot show me those things that matter eternally. I need a third lens through which I can see God—a lens that reveals to me what the microscope and telescope cannot: His holiness and grace. This is the lens of His Word.

The Word of God reveals His law that warns and convicts us. The same Word reveals His love that forgives us and allows us to call on Jesus as our Redeemer. The Word of God is, as Luther says, the very “cradle of Christ.” Each page is a lens through which I see Christ and the unfolding plan and wisdom of God. The Word of God enables me to answer the question that God asked Adam and Eve in the Garden: “Where are you?” Ever since, people have been trying to respond. The Word alone is able to give us the answer. It is found only at the foot of the Cross.

As the Lord is revealed through the lens of His Word, we are invited to magnify that view through one more lens—the lens of worship. God-pleasing worship is about Him. When Mary was told that she was pregnant with The Christ, she worshipped. Her first words were, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” What a great definition for worship: “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Worship focuses on Him. He even provides me with the words to offer Him, the water that cleanses, and the bread and wine that nourish me. He gives me the Spirit to enlighten me as to His goodness. It is truly all about Him. He serves me before I can serve Him.

On a clear night, look up at the stars and try to count them. Stand in awe of Him. Look at your eye in the mirror. Your retina is thinner than paper, yet its tiny surface contains 137 million light-sensitive cells. Blink your eyes in wonder. Then look into His Word and see Him on the Cross. He is there for you. See the empty Tomb. You need not fear the grave any longer. Then with other believers let your soul magnify Him in worship.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. What things do you see around you that demonstrate the wonder and majesty of God?
2. What is the significance of The Cross in the world, and what does it mean to you personally?
3. Read Psalm 96:10-13. Let your soul magnify the Lord in worship. Who can you invite to worship with you?
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: I stand in awe of all that you have created. The universe declares your glory. Even greater, though, I stand at the foot of the Cross in awe and wonder of your mercy and love for me. All praise be to you, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Learn the Secret

I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:12-13)

A few years ago, a movie came out entitled, “Pleasantville.” Nothing changed in Pleasantville. Everything remained the same. Everyone was happy. Same routines, same daily schedules, and the same cycle of events day by day. Slowly, through a chain of events, things began to change. The change was very unsettling to most as they did not know how to respond to it.

We do not live in Pleasantville. Life changes rapidly. Years ago, the world around us embraced stability as something to be valued. That has changed. Today, the world values change. Remaining the same as we were yesterday is considered a weakness. Doing things the same way we used to is a sure way to failure in the technology and life style of today’s world.

The problem I find in all of this is adjusting to change. Just about the time that I finally catch up to the changes around me, things change again. I was just beginning to catch on to VCR’s—at least how to change the clock on them—and then out came DVD’s. I was just beginning to catch on to DVD’s, and out came the MP3’s. There is no end. Change in technology is one thing. Change in my personal life is another. Life can be such a yo-yo at times. Calm one moment and chaotic the next. Exciting one day and exasperating the very next. How does one adjust to the sudden changes around us and within? We don’t live in Pleasantville.

However, this very characteristic of our world is what God can use to open the doors of mission for us. Our mission is to enter into the lives of people torn by change and offer them a changeless Christ. His Word assures us, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8).

This was the secret that Paul discovered through the many changes in his life. He knew what it was like to experience the highs and the lows of life. He knew what it was like to have food on the table and what it was like to wonder where tomorrow’s supper would come from. He knew what it was like to be respected by many and what it was like to be reviled by others. Paul did not live in Pleasantville either, but he did live in contentment. His secret: “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:13).

This is not mere positive thinking where we say with the little red engine in a children’s story, “I

think I can, I think I can.” This is a confidence that is rooted in Christ, not me, who enables me to accomplish what He calls me to do. The changes of life can be overwhelming, flooding over us and filling us with despair and fear.

The disciples knew all too well the unsettling nature of change. Anticipating the death of Jesus, their lives were soon to be turned upside down. Listen to what He says to them and to us, “*Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me*” (John 14:1). These words, “let not your hearts be troubled” are a command of Christ. When the spirit is troubled and we find ourselves worrying, there is something we can do: “*Believe in God; believe also in Me.*”

The way to stop worrying in the midst of change begins when we stop focusing on ourselves. That is what worry is all about. When I worry, I focus on me. When my heart is directed to focus on Him, I worship. In the midst of changes, Jesus invites and even commands us to focus on Him, the one who never changes. He alone is the One who can offer an abiding contentment.

“*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” This is the secret to contentment. This is our message to a world no longer living in Pleasantville.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. Can you think of a time when it was difficult to adjust to change in your life? How did you handle it?
2. Read Philippians 4:11-13. How should we encourage others in any and every situation?
3. How does God use change in the world and in people’s lives to open mission doors for us?
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Father, may I in the hours that lie ahead keep close to mind and heart that I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me. On His strength alone may I rely, not mine, and at the end of the day, may the glory be yours alone. Amen.

Go and Wash Feet

“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:17)

It had been such a hectic day, a trying week, and each of them looked forward to this moment. At some point in the middle of their evening gathering, he got up from the table and grabbed the two objects that everyone seemed to be ignoring. He took off his outer garment, picked up the basin and wrapped the towel around his waist. Then one by one (one foot at a time), he began to wash their feet. Twenty-four feet—each of which would run away from him within a few hours (or in the case of one, within moments).

What he was doing should have been done by a servant—in fact, by the lowest of servants. Maybe no servant was available, but no one else was stepping up and volunteering. Why? You know the reason for that. It is the same reason that would have prevented any one of us from offering to do it. So he did.

“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. ‘You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:12-15).

Ever since that night, the gentle splashing of water has been heard from those who follow Him. A basin and a towel. Touching images, but let no one be fooled. Washing feet is rarely easy. Ask Jesus. He knows the future of the feet He washes, and yet He bends down to wash each one of them.

I like the way Max Lucado expresses it: “Hands that shaped the stars now wash away filth. Fingers that formed mountains now massage toes. And the one before whom all nations will one day kneel now kneels before his disciples” (Just Like Jesus).

Jesus’ act of service is a beautiful story of love. It is also the mission that He asks each of us to do as well. *“I have set an example for you to do as I have done for you” (John 13:15).* Washing feet is not easy. It requires a humbleness that goes against our nature. We are so in the habit of making everything about us. Washing feet is anything but that. Yet, this very act can transform our going into the world and lives of people into such a powerful witness. The world grows tired of power that struts. It is hungry to witness power that serves. Our human nature is so apt to resist this mission Jesus places before us. How does one get beyond the pride or the fear? What enables us to look beyond the feet of those we are called to wash when we know that they are bound to disappoint us and let

us down? The key is at the beginning of John’s account of this night:

“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” (John 13:1).

Jesus knew who He was and where He was going—back to the Father. He had nothing to prove. People are often reluctant to offer help because they see it as beneath them. They are afraid that it will hurt their image. When we know our purpose in life and our identity, we are freed to serve others without fear or resentment. In actuality, our lives are lived out of three basins. One is the basin used to wash feet. Another is the one Pilate chose to use to wash his hands. The second is the basin of indifference that lacks passion and conviction. The first is the basin of servanthood out of which we serve as He has served us.

Jesus calls us to go out into the world and wash feet in service to others as He has done with us. Just as the disciples let Him down, so we are bound to disappoint Him. Many times over we will choose to live out of the basin Pilate chose rather than the one Jesus used. That is where the third basin comes in—the basin that holds the water of our Baptism. It is here in this basin that we not only can know who we are and to whom we are returning—it is in this basin that we are cleansed again and again for all those times when our feet are the ones that turn and walk away from Him. It is in this basin that we are cleansed and renewed in His baptismal grace. It is in this basin that the gentle splashing of water can still be heard in our hearts as Jesus cleanses more than just our feet.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. What makes it difficult for us to “wash feet”?
2. Read John 13:1. How does knowing who you are and where you are going enable you to humble yourself?
3. Who are the people in your life for whom it is difficult to “wash feet”? In what ways could you offer them a humble act of service?
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Your servanthood humbles me. Who are we that you are this mindful and humble before us? Thank you for cleansing me through your servanthood. Help me to follow your example this day. Amen.

Living with Hearts Ablaze

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us? They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon. Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.’” (Luke 24:32-35)

They ran down the road like those who know the privilege of carrying the Olympic Torch. The flame they carried, however, was burning within their heart.

Not long before they had walked this road. At the beginning of their journey, the flame in their heart was barely flickering and beginning to fade. As He walked with them, His teaching began to rekindle that flame. Then, as they sat at the table with Him, He broke bread and their eyes were opened. They recognized Him. In the breaking of the bread, He made Himself known. Then He disappeared. He was still present, just no longer visible to them.

Filled with joy and wonder, they sat there looking at each other, probably thinking, “What just happened? Did you see what I saw?” Then the question recorded in Scripture: *“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

A fire had been set ablaze within their hearts. This fire would not be extinguished. As is fire’s nature, this fire would consume them—not in a destructive way, but in a purifying fashion. This fire could not be contained. It had to spread. They went back to tell their friends. Those who have learned of Christ as He is revealed in His Word understand the urgency of going and sharing the Good News with friends and neighbors. How can a believer be silent? How could these two men in Emmaus keep the Good News to themselves? They have news that will satisfy the spiritual hunger of a world. They returned to Jerusalem: “It is true! The Lord has risen!” Out of breath but full of joy, they excitedly shared with the eleven and those gathered what they had seen and heard.

The fire that was burning in the heart of these two men began to spread. There in that locked room, Christ unlocked the storehouse of God’s riches. Peace, joy, hope and a sense of purpose are the gifts of God at Christ’s expense. He had paid the price. Now, they could be at peace because Jesus had overcome the world. Peace is not easy when we strive to balance the world on our own backs. But we don’t need to. Jesus invites us to cast the weight of the world into His hands where He holds it with ease.

Along with peace, the disciples were overcome with joy—so joyous that they had a hard time believing at first. *“And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement . . .” (Luke 24:41).*

Have you ever had trouble believing the Good News of His love and grace for you because of the

sheer joy of it? The joy of the believer is one of the most influential and convincing proofs of faith. The reality of Christian joy is compelling. The joy of the believer, be it in persecution or in times of suffering or in great celebration, is one of the most winsome qualities of the Christian witness and life.

The room was ablaze. It was ablaze with peace and joy like they had never known. What fueled all of this was nothing less than hope. Everything that was written about Jesus had come to pass. Everything Jesus said was fulfilled. *“He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms’” (v. 44).*

They could trust the Word. It had not let them down. Christian hope is not mere wishful thinking. Christian hope is the certainty and assurance of what cannot yet be seen but is known without a doubt through the Word of God.

The hearts of those in the room were on fire. It was a fire fueled by the peace that Christ was giving them. It was fueled by the fullness of joy that is only found in the emptiness of a tomb. It was fueled by a hope that God’s Word cannot be stopped. Fire like this is all consuming. It cannot be contained. Jesus does not want it to be contained.

Their mission was to the world. They were called to carry that flame burning within their heart to a world lost in darkness. It is the mission before you and me today.

Discussion and Debriefing

1. Describe the fire that is in your heart because of knowing Christ, the Living Word.
2. In what ways does a Christian’s joy become a compelling witness for Christ?
3. What opportunities are before you today to share the flame of Christ’s peace, joy and hope with others?
4. Which of today’s experiences do you want to remember? What was your most difficult experience today?

Prayer: Father, in the Resurrection of your Son you have lit a fire within my heart. Your Spirit has ignited me with His love, peace, joy and hope. Help me carry that flame into the lost and darkened world that I enter into now. In all that I do and in all that I say, may your name be glorified and honored. Through Jesus I ask this. Amen.



“On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick, But go and **learn** what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

(Matthew 9:13)

“This, then, is how you should **pray**: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’” (Matthew 6:9-10)

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

“The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon [Peter] and **tell** him, ‘We have found the Messiah.’” (John 1:41)

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I **send**? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Isaiah 6:8)

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore **go** and make disciples of all nations’” (Matthew 28:18-19a)

“But we had to **celebrate** and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (Luke 15:32)

Ablaze!