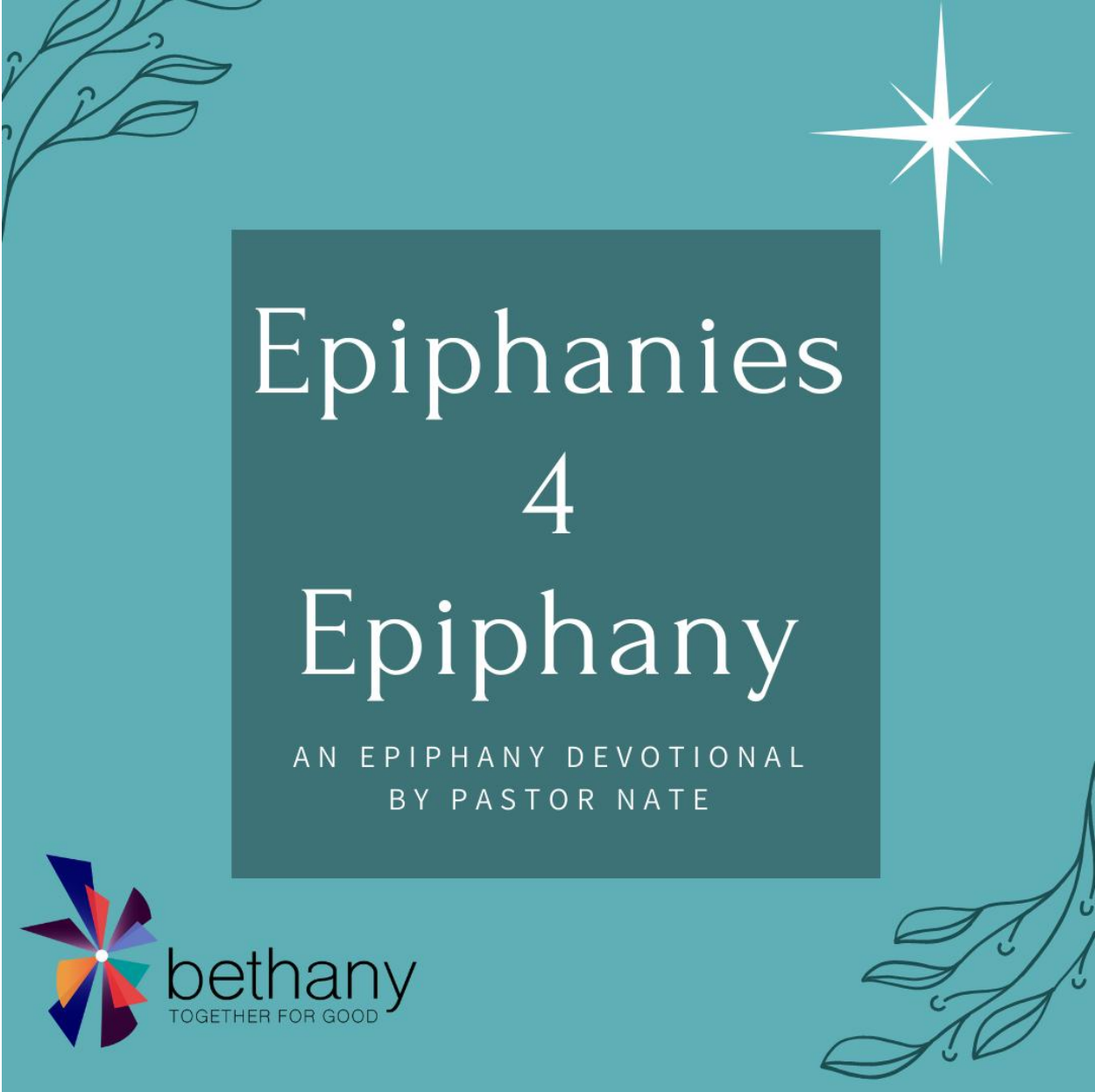




Epiphanies 4 Epiphany

AN EPIPHANY DEVOTIONAL
BY PASTOR NATE



bethany
TOGETHER FOR GOOD

Introduction

Epiphany is a time of discovery and insight. Throughout this liturgical season we are invited to allow the light of Christ to illumine our hearts and minds as we grow in faith and come to know Jesus more personally.

This devotional looks at six different “epiphanies” from my journey of faith. Each week we will explore one of these epiphanies and the ways that scripture, theologians, music, and our life of worship speak to the specific insight.

I hope that these reflections provide you with epiphanies of your own as we all grow in faith during this season.

Peace and Grace,

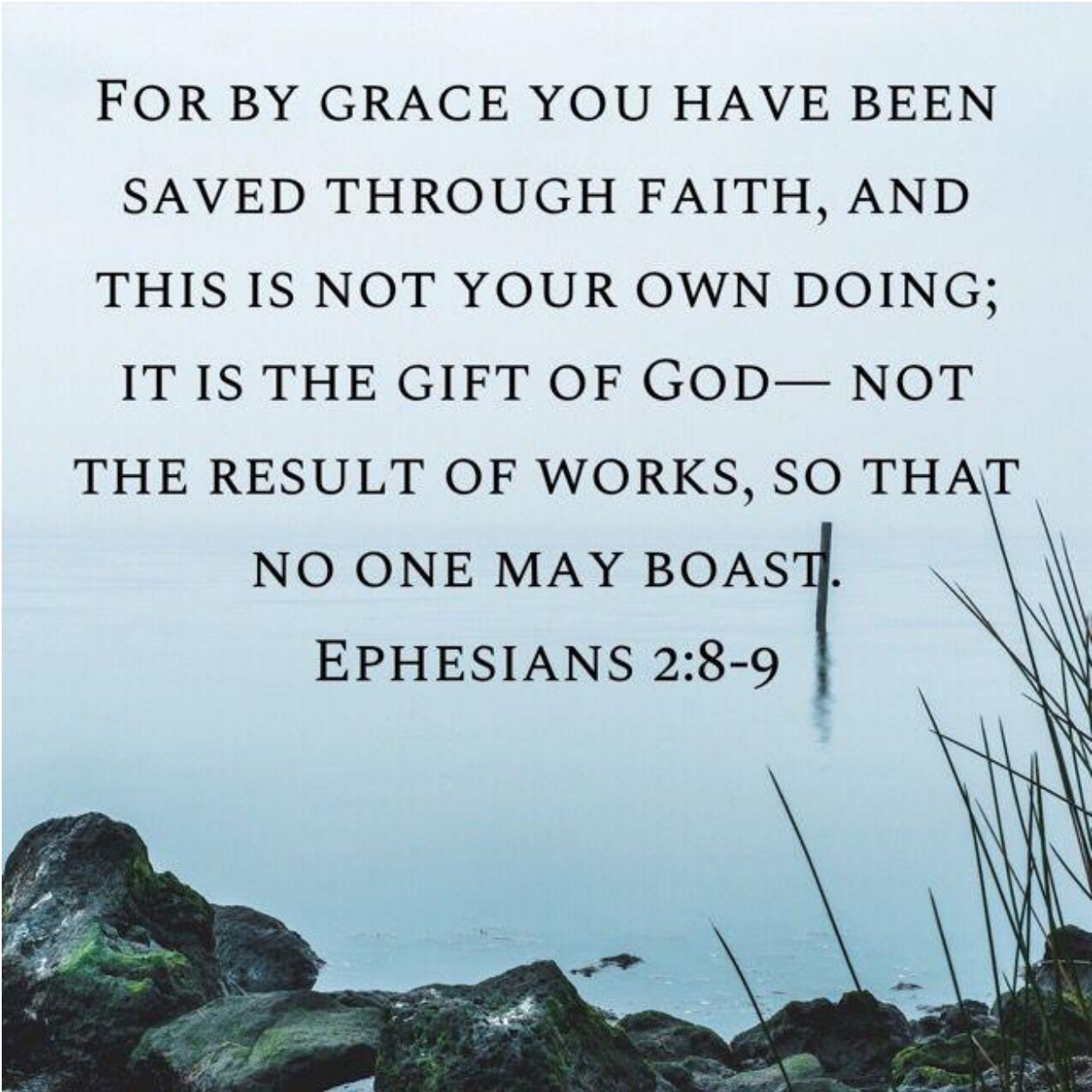
Pastor Nate



Epiphanies 4 Epiphany , Week 1: Grace

Grace - Day 1

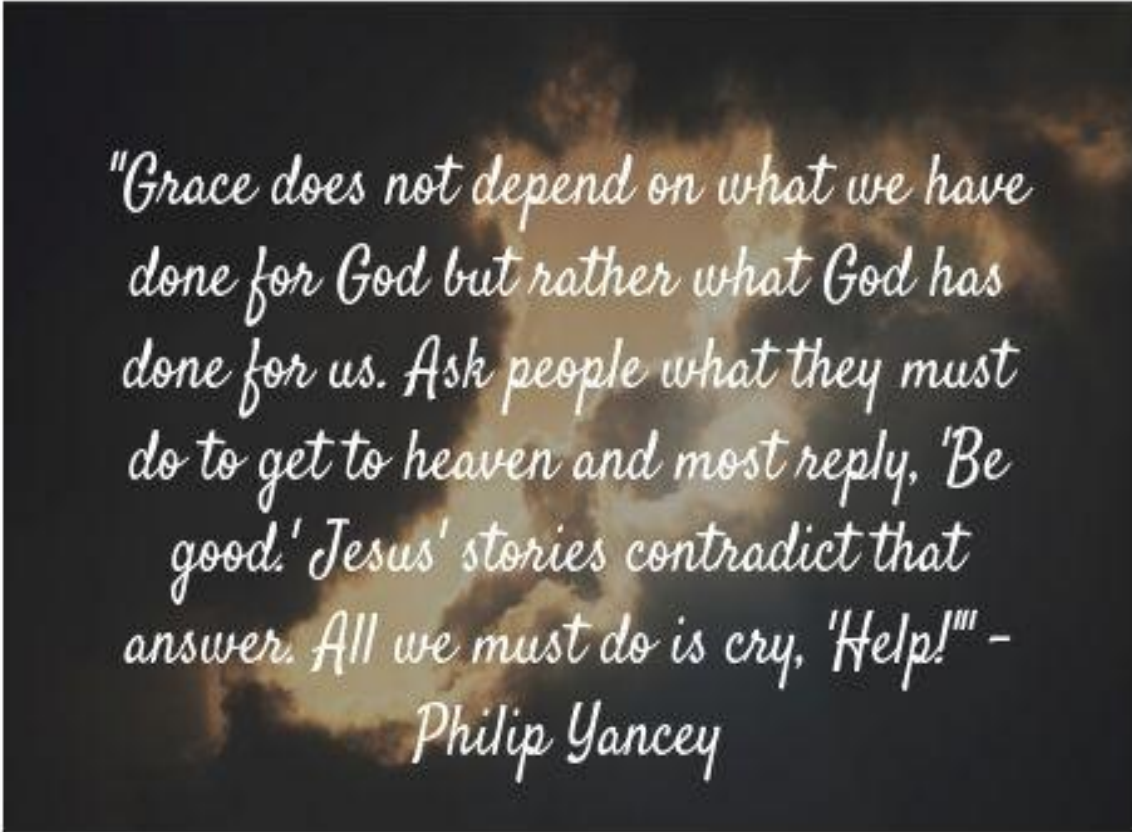
Unfortunately, many people often see the Christian faith merely as a set of rules that must be followed in order to avoid punishment. However, at the very heart of the Christian faith is a belief in God's grace. A belief that God loves all of creation not because we follow the rules but simply because God can't help but love each and every one of us. This week, our posts will focus on this epiphany of Grace.



FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN
SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND
THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING;
IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD— NOT
THE RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT
NO ONE MAY BOAST.
EPHESIANS 2:8-9

Grace - Day 2

This week we are exploring the promise of God's grace. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians gives us this succinct explanation of what grace does for us.



"Grace does not depend on what we have done for God but rather what God has done for us. Ask people what they must do to get to heaven and most reply, 'Be good.' Jesus' stories contradict that answer. All we must do is cry, 'Help!'" - Philip Yancey

Grace - Day 3

What is Grace? Author Philip Yancey provides this explanation:

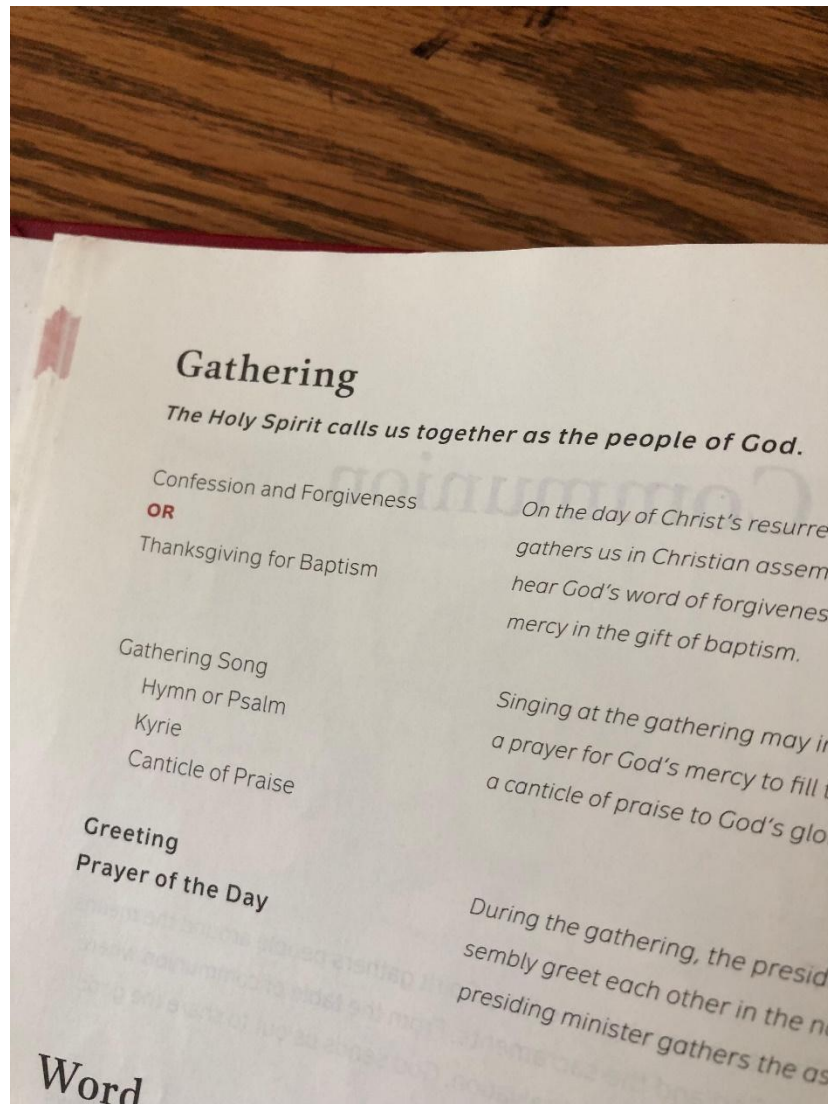
"Grace does not depend on what we have done for God but rather what God has done for us. Ask people what they must do to get to heaven and most reply, "Be good." Jesus' stories contradict that answer. All we must do is cry, "Help!""

"Amazing grace
how sweet the
sound that
saved a wretch
like me, I once
was lost but
now am found
was blind but
now I see."



Grace - Day 4

Today, listen or sing that famous song about Grace, "Amazing Grace". Reflect on the lyrics and this revelation about God's ways: By God's grace the lost are found and the blind see.



Grace - Day 5

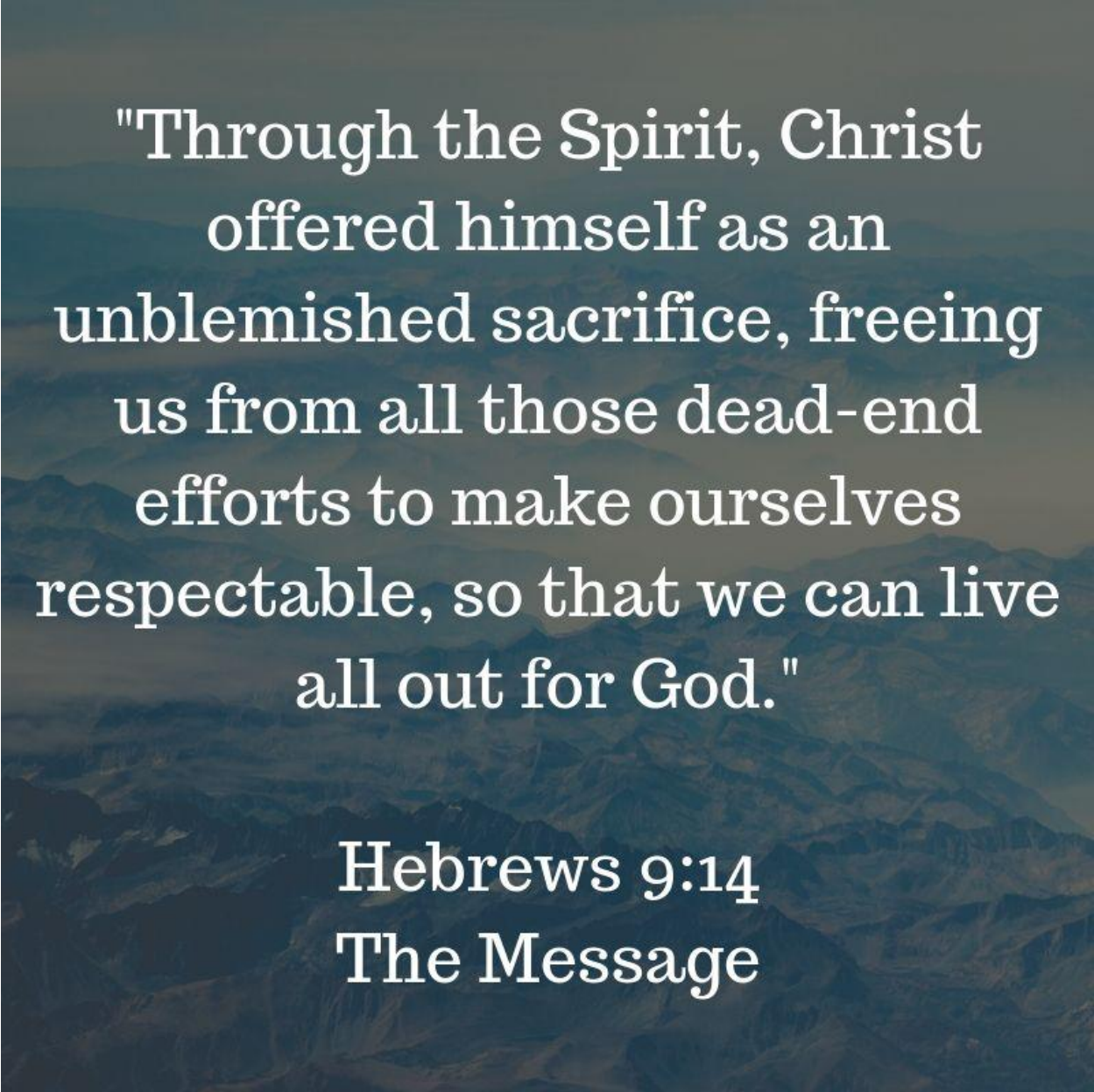
Where do we see Grace when the Church gathers for worship? During worship the Invocation and opening hymn acknowledge that grace has brought us together. As the worship service continues, the confession and forgiveness of our sin, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the sharing of Holy Communion all point us to the reality and promise of God's unending grace in our lives.



Epiphanies 4 Epiphany , Week 2: Sanctification

Sanctification - Day 1

"Sanctification" literally means "the process of becoming holy". The beautiful truth of our faith is that our sanctification takes place as a result of God's gracious action. It is not our job to become more holy, rather in light of and in response to all that God has done for us we become more holy. The goodness of God molds us into the people we are called to be.



"Through the Spirit, Christ
offered himself as an
unblemished sacrifice, freeing
us from all those dead-end
efforts to make ourselves
respectable, so that we can live
all out for God."

Hebrews 9:14
The Message

Sanctification - Day 2

The author of Hebrews provides us with many passages, including this one, about the ways that the work of Jesus Christ frees us to more fully be the people of God. (Hebrews 9:14)



Sanctification - Day 3

Reflect on this quote today: God loves you exactly the way you are AND God loves you way too much to let you stay that way. How does this Truth cause you to look at your life differently?

Lord, let my heart be good soil,
open to the seed of your Word.
Lord, let my heart be good soil,
where love can grow
and peace is understood.

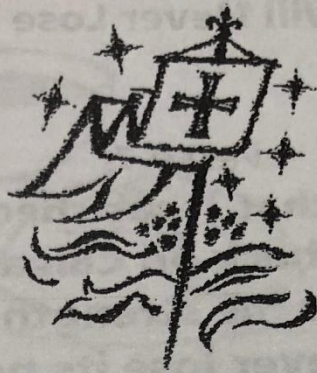


Sanctification - Day 4

Listen to the beautiful hymn "God Soil" and reflect on these lyrics today. How can our faith in God change us to more fully serve those in need?

This QR code will link to a version of the song:



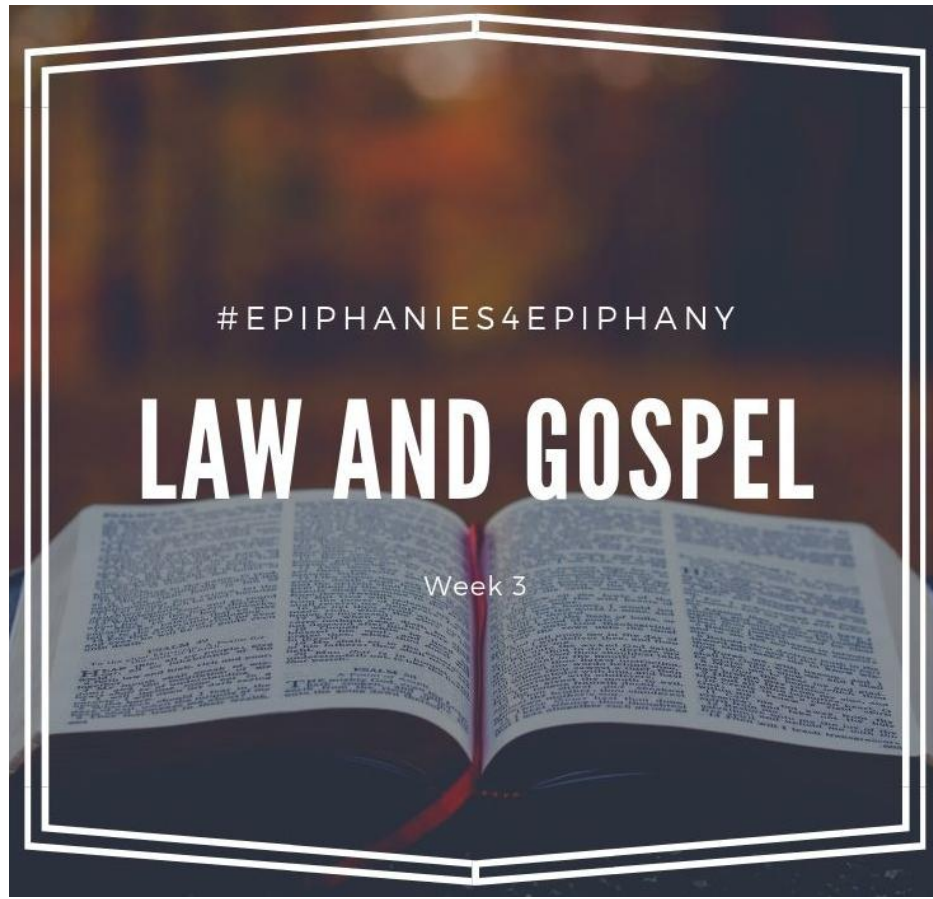


SENDING

*God blesses us and sends us in missions to the world.
(Matthew 28:19)*

Sanctification - Day 5

Every Sunday our worship ends with the following call and response: Go in peace, and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God. This ending reminds that God's peace in our lives allows us to serve God's mission in the world with a grateful heart.



Epiphanies 4 Epiphany Week 3

Law and Gospel - Day 1

Early on in my faith journey, I saw the 10 Commandments and the Commands of Jesus as rules that I was required to follow or risk punishment. But as I've grown, I've come to see these commands as rules lovingly given by God to help guide me.

"The Law" is what helps us to see how our life is out of alignment and thus helps us to more fully understand the Good News ("The Gospel") of Jesus Christ.

This week we will be exploring this theme of Law and Gospel.

"AND IT'S CLEAR ENOUGH, ISN'T IT, THAT WE'RE SINNERS, EVERY ONE OF US, IN THE SAME SINKING BOAT WITH EVERYBODY ELSE? OUR INVOLVEMENT WITH GOD'S REVELATION DOESN'T PUT US RIGHT WITH GOD. WHAT IT DOES IS FORCE US TO FACE OUR COMPLICITY IN EVERYONE ELSE'S SIN."

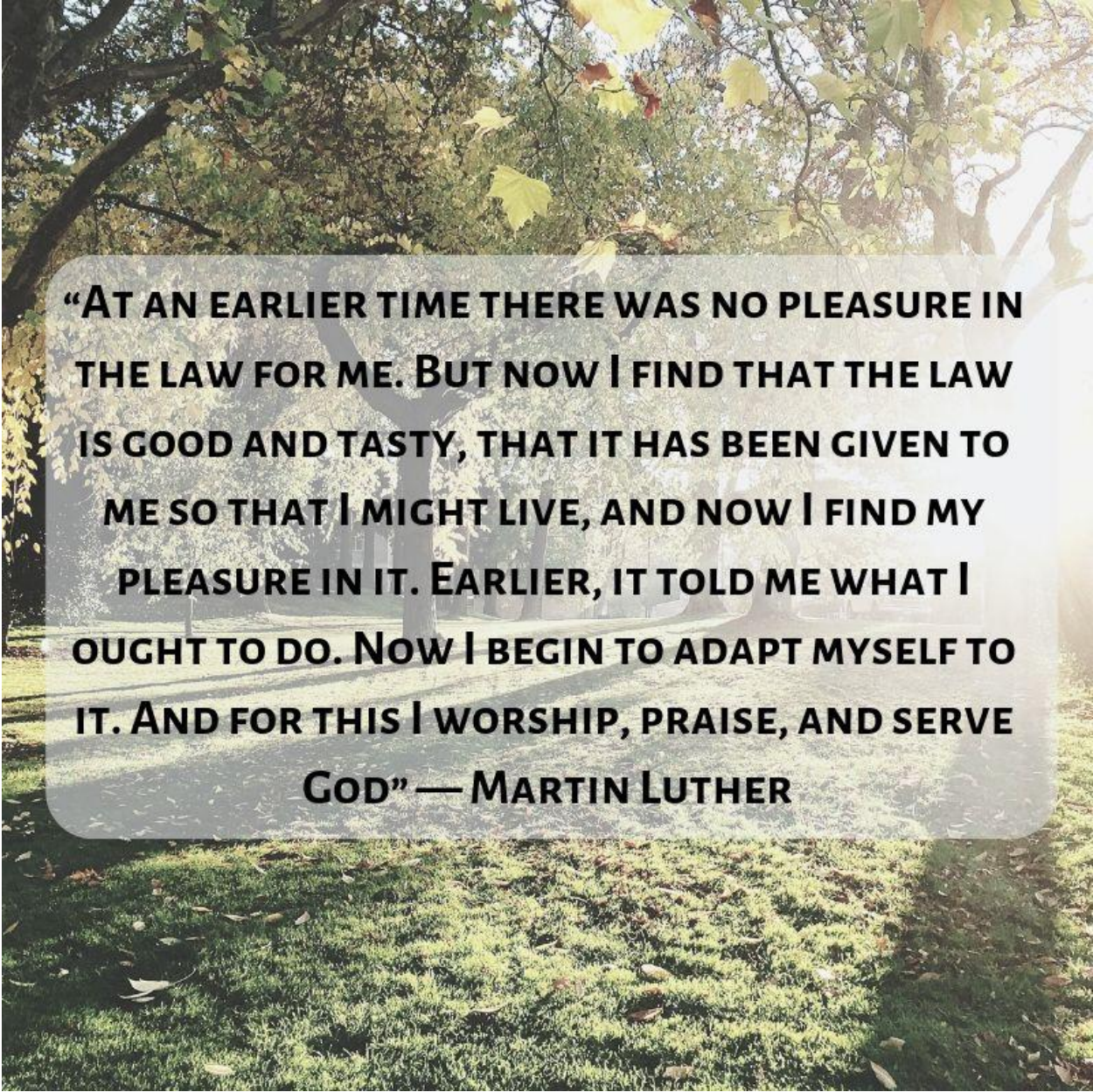
- ROMANS 3:19-20 MSG



Law and Gospel - Day 2

In Paul's Letter to the Romans we are reminded of the ways that the Law makes us aware of our sin and that we are responsible for one another. A few verses later Paul provides us with this encouraging reminder:

"we are now justified by Christ's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." - Romans 3:24



“AT AN EARLIER TIME THERE WAS NO PLEASURE IN THE LAW FOR ME. BUT NOW I FIND THAT THE LAW IS GOOD AND TASTY, THAT IT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME SO THAT I MIGHT LIVE, AND NOW I FIND MY PLEASURE IN IT. EARLIER, IT TOLD ME WHAT I OUGHT TO DO. NOW I BEGIN TO ADAPT MYSELF TO IT. AND FOR THIS I WORSHIP, PRAISE, AND SERVE GOD” — MARTIN LUTHER

Law and Gospel – Day 3

Many often see the Law as a list of things we ought to do, but Martin Luther reminds us that the Law invites us to adept our lives to its instructions; to see the Law as a guide toward living our lives more in tune with God's desires for our life.

Drawn to the Light

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1 Peo - ple who walk in dark - ness have sought a light in the
2 How can we tell a heav - en from hell if ev - 'ry - one
3 Where is the sun? Oh, there will be none! The Lamb is the
heart of the dark - est night. Just when we thought all would be
dwells in the dark of night? Morn - ing dis - pels, gent - ly com -
one who is shin - ing bright, bids us to come! Life has be -
lost, we were drawn to the light of God.
pels, and we're drawn to the light of God.
gun when we're drawn to the light of God.
Refrain
Dawn is in sight! Gone is the night, drawn to the
light and the morn - ing. Glo - rious and bright, oh, what a
sight to be drawn to the light of God.

Text: John C. Ylvisaker, b. 1937
Music: John C. Ylvisaker
Text and music © 1990 John C. Ylvisaker

LA CROSSE
9 10 8 8 and refrain

Law and Gospel - Day 4

The Hymn "Drawn to the Light" articulates a beautiful understanding of the ways that God draws us out of our darkness and into the Light of living in the Gospel. Above is a picture of the entire song.



Law and Gospel - Day 5

On most Sundays we pray our way through a time of Confession and Forgiveness. During this portion of our worship service we, as a community, come before God to repent of our faults and to ask God for forgiveness. This happens at the beginning of our worship service to remind us that we are all struggling to live in The Way of Jesus. But it is then followed by a pronouncement of God's forgiveness, reminding us that the knowledge and admission of our sin is always followed by God's forgiveness and grace.

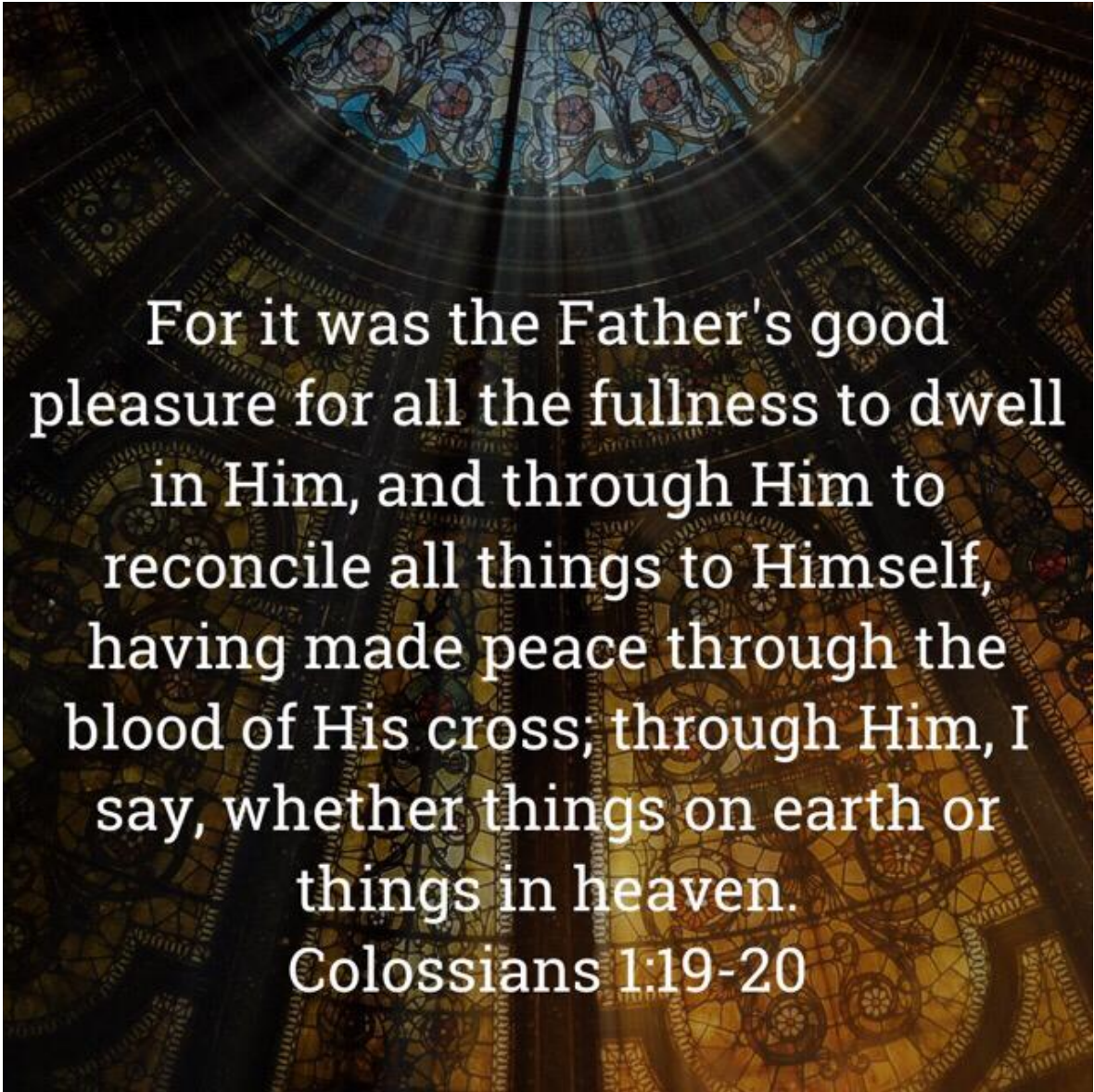


Epiphanies 4 Epiphany - Week 4 - Creation

Creation – Day 1

I never gave much thought to the importance of believing in God as the Creator of everything. I realized that to say God is the Creator of Heaven and Earth means that all of creation is important, beautiful, and sacred because it was made by God. As such, simple acts like recycling, planting trees, or gardening could be viewed as spiritual practices that are deeply connected to the character of God.

This week, our devotions will focus on Creation and the different ways that we experience God through the goodness of creation.

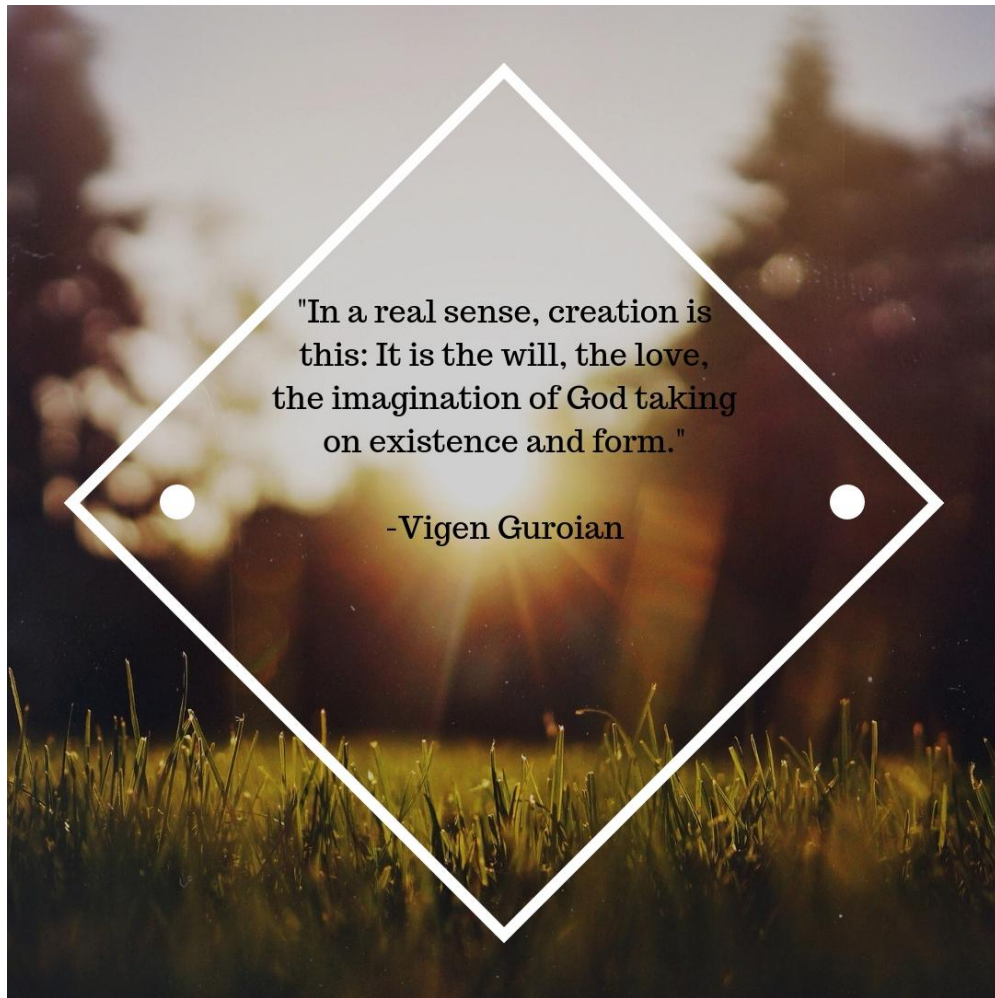


For it was the Father's good
pleasure for all the fullness to dwell
in Him, and through Him to
reconcile all things to Himself,
having made peace through the
blood of His cross; through Him, I
say, whether things on earth or
things in heaven.
Colossians 1:19-20

Creation - Day 2

This beautiful passage from the book of Colossians reminds us that God's ultimate plan is to redeem all of creation. All that is broken, all that is incomplete, all that is polluted or decaying or dying or sick will be put back together by God.

Today, reflect on this promise. What small action could you take today to participate in God's grand redemption plan?



Creation - Day 3

Often times a sunset or walk in the woods or mountain top view will remind me of the immeasurable beauty of this world. In these moments, I'm reminded that creation is in fact the "imagination of God taking on existence and form"

Find a picture (or better yet get out and take one yourself!) of creation that you find beautiful or meaningful. Keep it in a place where you will see it often to remind you of God's beauty and presence.

PRAISE, THANKSGIVING

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For the Beauty of the Earth

1 For the beau - ty of the earth, for the beau - ty of the skies,
 2 For the won - der of each hour of the day and of the night,
 3 For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's de - light,
 4 For the joy of hu - man love, broth - er, sis - ter, par - ent, child,
 5 For each per - fect gift of thine, peace on earth and joy in heav'n,

for the love which from our birth o - ver and a - round us lies:
 hill and vale and tree and flow'r, sun and moon and stars of light;
 for the mys - tic har - mo - ny link - ing sense to sound and sight;
 friends on earth and friends a - bove; for all gen - tle thoughts and mild;
 for thy - self, best gift di - vine, to our world so free - ly giv'n:

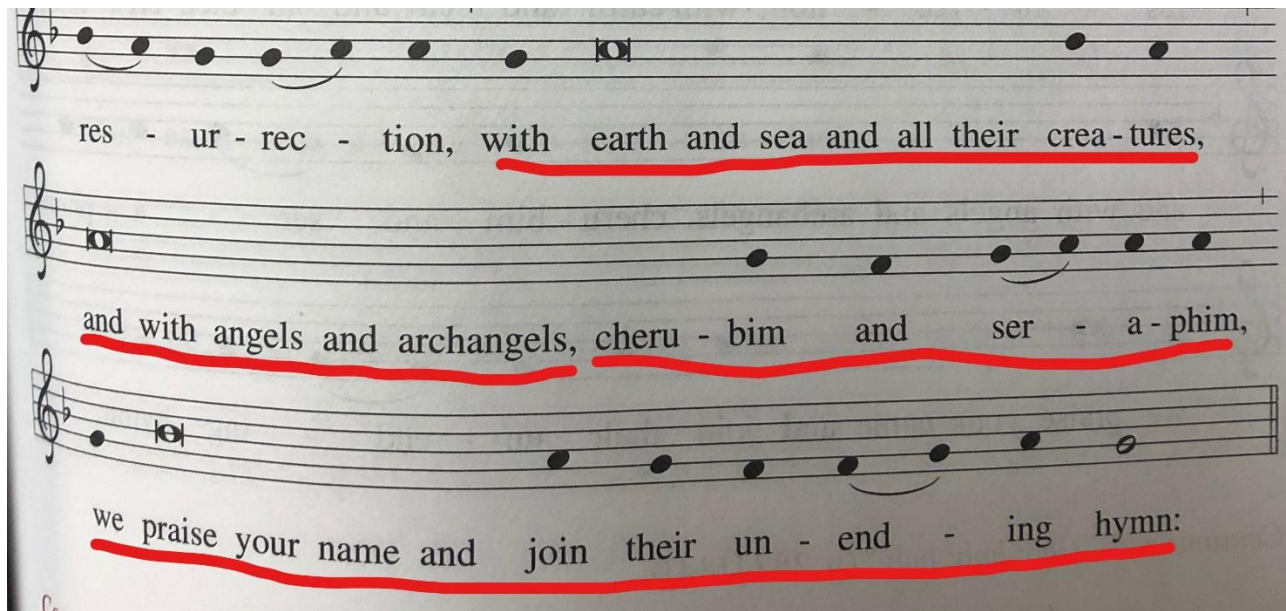
Refrain

Christ, our God, to thee we raise this our sac - ri - fice of praise.

Creation - Day 4

The Hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth" does a wonderful job of speaking about the many and various ways that God's beauty is found in creation. You can listen to a recording of the song by scanning this QR code:





Creation - Day 5

On some Sundays the Pastor will sing words similar to the ones highlighted above. This occurs as part of the communion liturgy. The idea is that when we gather for Holy Communion we rejoice with ALL OF CREATION (and with angels too!) praising God for the blessing of our salvation.



Epiphanies 4 Epiphany - Week 5 – Trinity

Trinity – Day 1

This is a picture that hangs in my office. It is a print of Rublev's Icon of the Trinity. The three angel figures are in fact The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What I love about this picture is that it depicts all three figures seated around a 4-sided table. The viewer is seemingly invited to sit at the table with the Holy Trinity.

This week, we will be exploring this complex idea of the Trinity. What does it mean for our life of faith to say that God is Three-in-One?

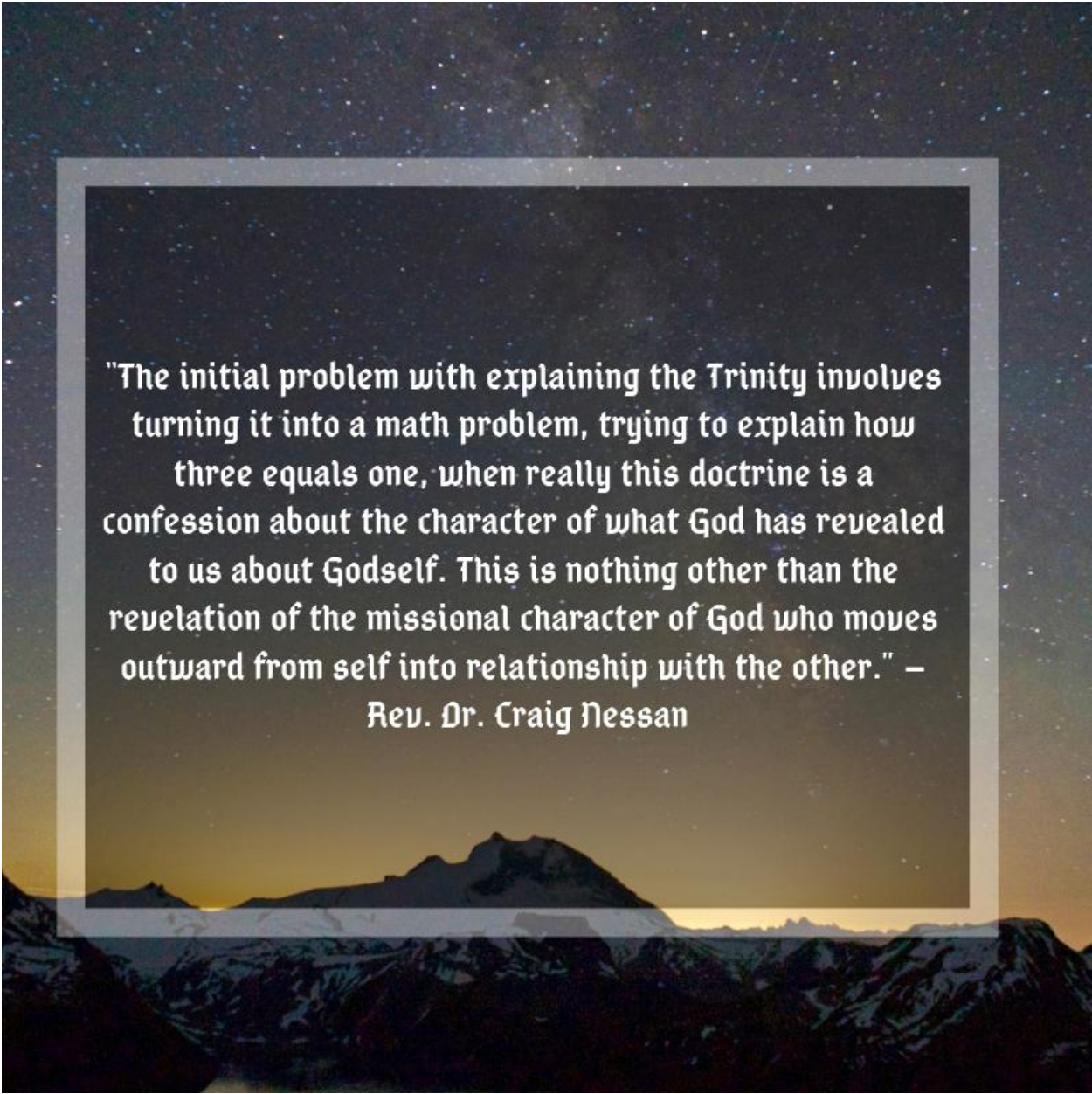


BUT THE ADVOCATE, THE HOLY
SPIRIT, WHOM THE FATHER
WILL SEND IN MY NAME, WILL
TEACH YOU EVERYTHING, AND
REMIND YOU OF ALL THAT I
HAVE SAID TO YOU.

JOHN 14:26

Trinity- Day 2

In John's 14th pastor we see a clear picture of God existing in Three Persons: The Holy Spirit, God the Father, and Jesus Christ the Son are each an expression of the One True God.



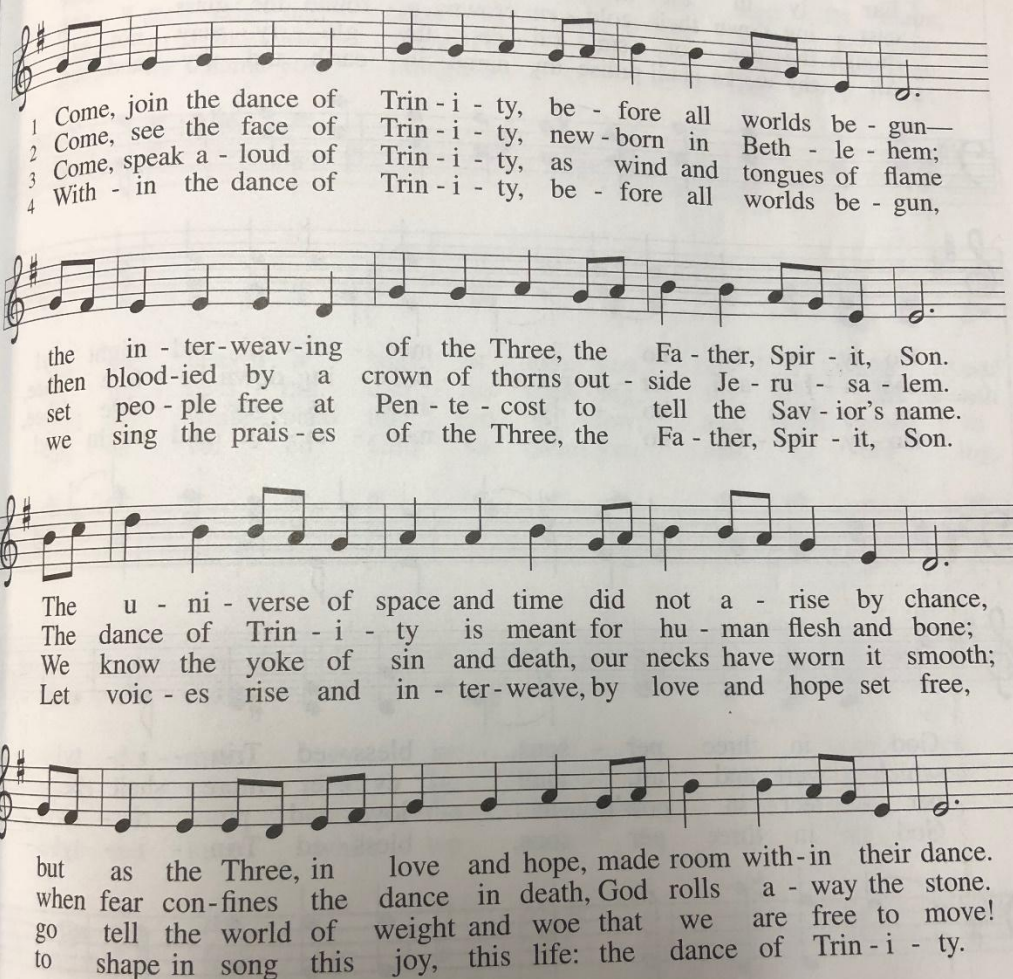
"The initial problem with explaining the Trinity involves turning it into a math problem, trying to explain how three equals one, when really this doctrine is a confession about the character of what God has revealed to us about Godself. This is nothing other than the revelation of the missional character of God who moves outward from self into relationship with the other." –
Rev. Dr. Craig Nesson

Trinity- Day 3

The above quote from Rev. Dr. Craig Nesson encourages us to see the doctrine of the Trinity as something that reveals God's character to us. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in relationship with each other, we in turn know that God desires to be relationship with us.

Come, Join the Dance of Trinity

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1 Come, join the dance of Trin - i - ty, be - fore all worlds be - gun—
 2 Come, see the face of Trin - i - ty, new - born in Beth - le - hem;
 3 Come, speak a - loud of Trin - i - ty, as wind and tongues of flame
 4 With - in the dance of Trin - i - ty, be - fore all worlds be - gun,

the in - ter-weav - ing of the Three, the Fa - ther, Spir - it, Son.
 then blood - ied by a crown of thorns out - side Je - ru - sa - lem.
 set peo - ple free at Pen - te - cost to tell the Sav - ior's name.
 we sing the prais - es of the Three, the Fa - ther, Spir - it, Son.

The u - ni - verse of space and time did not a - rise by chance,
 The dance of Trin - i - ty is meant for hu - man flesh and bone;
 We know the yoke of sin and death, our necks have worn it smooth;
 Let voic - es rise and in - ter - weave, by love and hope set free,

but as the Three, in love and hope, made room with - in their dance.
 when fear con - fines the dance in death, God rolls a - way the stone.
 go tell the world of weight and woe that we are free to move!
 to shape in song this joy, this life: the dance of Trin - i - ty.

Lyrics: Richard Leach, b. 1953
 Music: English folk tune
 © 2001 Selah Publishing Co., Inc.

KINGSFOLD
 CMD

Trinity- Day 4

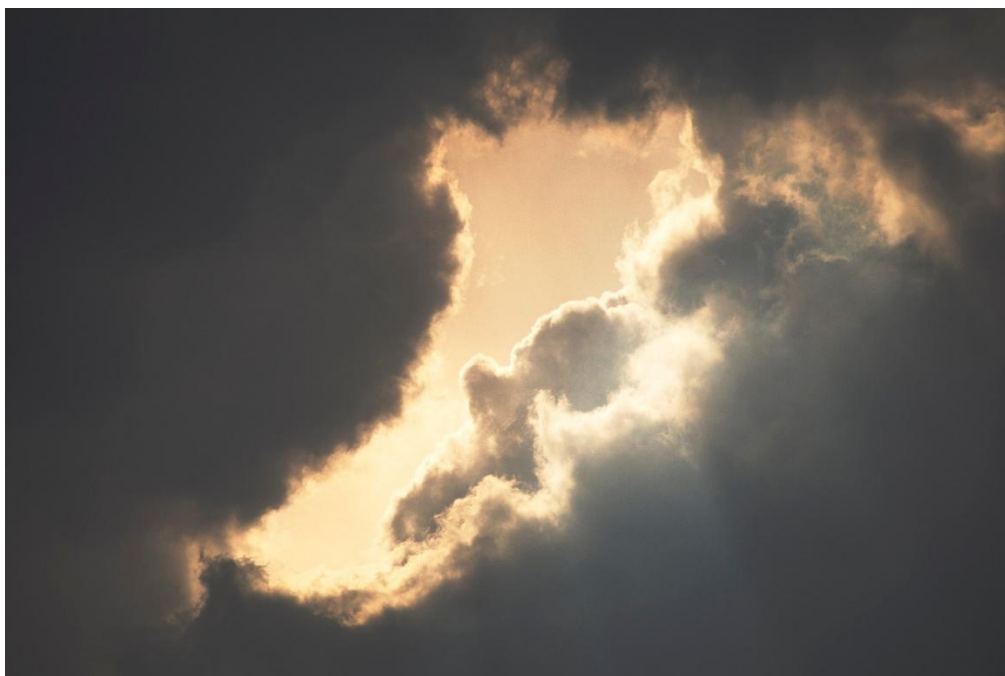
The Hymn, "Come, Join the Dance of Trinity" contains a beautiful picture of the ways that creation, the life of Jesus, the power of Pentecost, and our lives today all interweave just as the Trinity interweaves. The overall picture of the Trinity as a dance is also a powerful image that captures the creative, joyful, and expressive nature of God.



**As you go on your way, may God go with you,
May God go before you to show you the way,
Above you to watch over you,
Beside you to be your friend,
And may God be within you to give you peace,
this day and always,
In the name of
The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.
AMEN.**

Trinity - Day 5

At the closing of every worship service the Pastor offers similar to the ones above. The Benediction is a blessing that asks for God to be present in, within, around, and under us. When we say we believe in a God that is Three-in-One, we are acknowledging this very idea-- that God is present in our world in many and various ways.



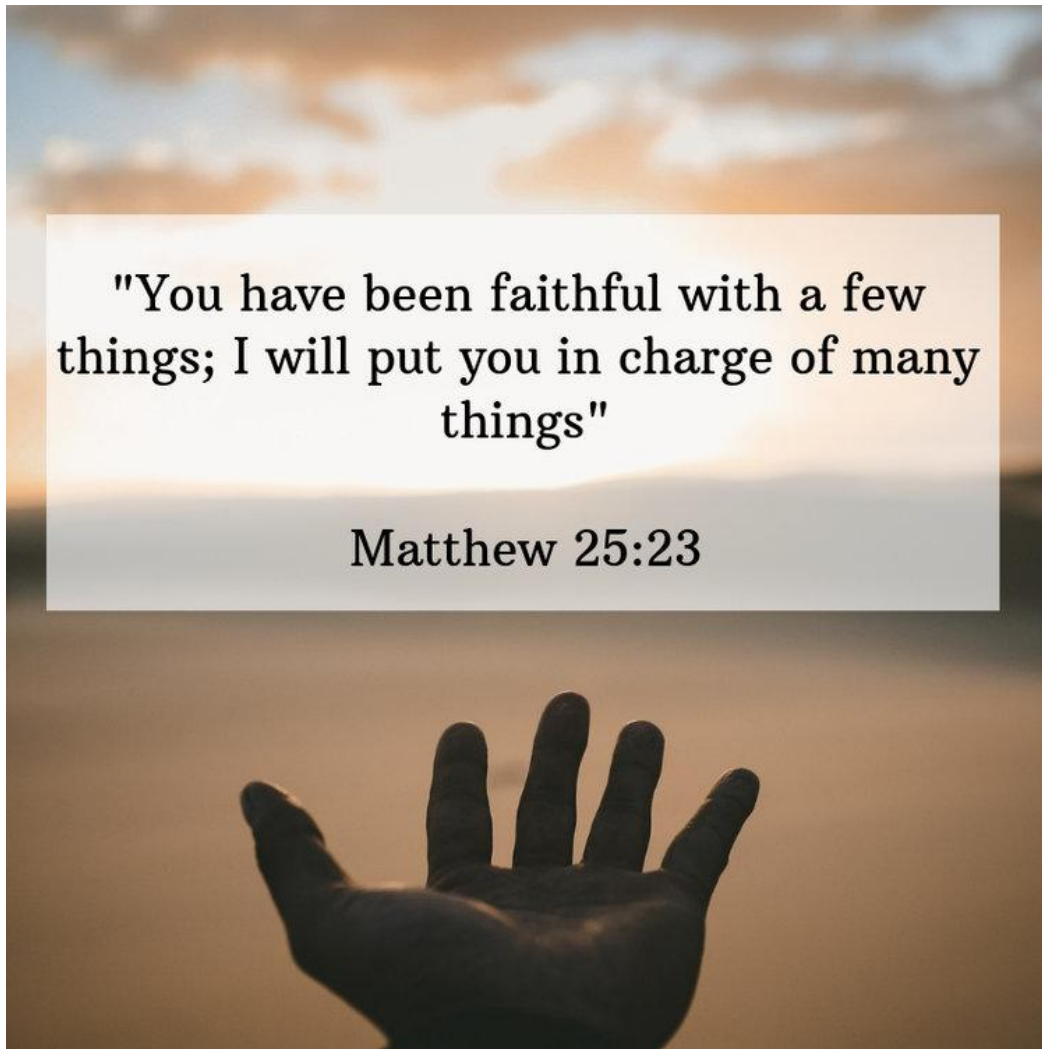
Epiphanies 4 Epiphany Week 6 - The Importance of Faith

The Importance of Faith – Day 1

Growing up, I often thought of church as a place with lots of rules: where you nice clothes, don't run in the building, no talking during the service etc. I was also taught the 10 Commandments, which while valuable, only reinforced this idea that church and faith was all about getting everything right.

While working at a church in my adult years I tried so hard to get everything exactly right, after all, I assumed that because it was church, things had to be perfect. But a wise mentor freed me from this mindset and told me that our job is to be faithful, not necessarily successful.

This week, we will be reflecting upon the importance of faith; the importance of simply believing in the promises of God above all else.



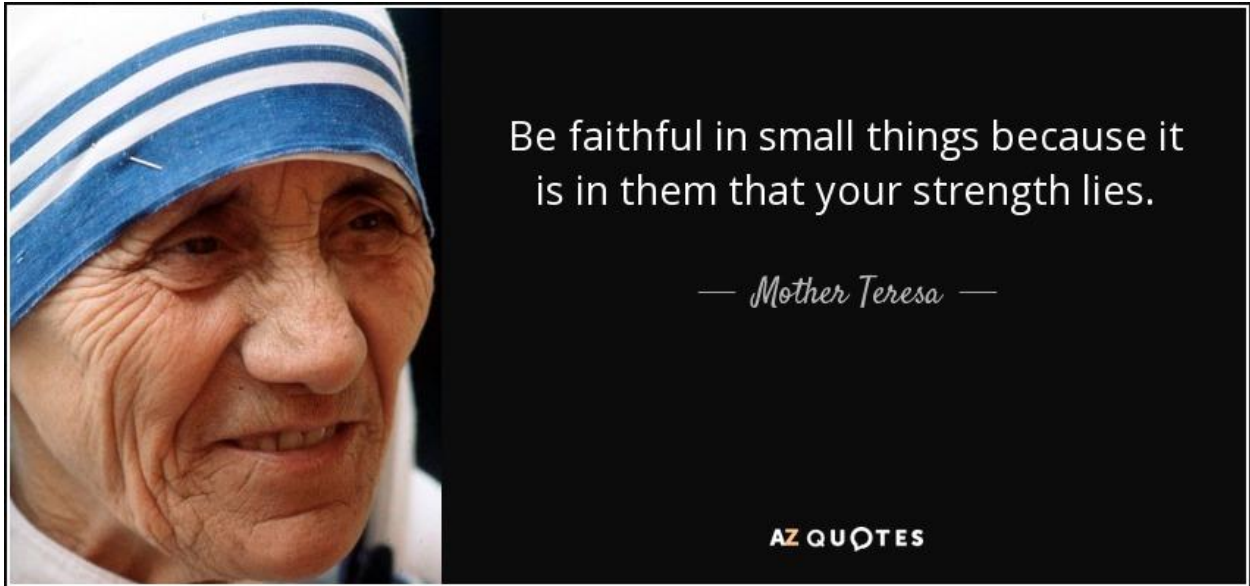
"You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things"

Matthew 25:23

Day 2 - The Importance of Faith

The Parable of the Talents found in Matthew 25 illustrates God's emphasis on faith. The last servant was so concerned about doing everything right and carefully preserving the owners money, that he failed in the end.

Towards the end of The Parable, the Master says this: "Well done you good and faithful servant, you who have been faithful with few things, I will put in charge of many things." The message is clear, God asks us to be faithful, not necessarily successful.



Day 3 - The Importance of Faith

Faith doesn't always have to be expressed in huge and heroic displays. Faith also means remembering God during the seemingly insignificant moments of your day.

Today, remind yourself again and again, that faith in God happens right now. In whatever little action or chore, you are taking right now, that is an expression of your faith.



Day 4 - The Importance of Faith

The song "Give me Faith" has some beautiful lyrics that serve as a prayer, asking God to give us the faith we need to continue believing in the promises of God.

"Give me faith to trust what you say

That you're good and your love is great

I'm broken inside, I give you my life"

Listen to a version of the song by following this link:



I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Day 5 - The Importance of Faith

As part of our worship service each week, we recite together the Apostles' Creed. The creed is an ancient statement of faith that has been used in the Christian church for well over a thousand years.

By proclaiming this statement of faith together each week, we are reminded that the journey of faith isn't something that we do alone. We support one another in our walk of faith and lift each other up when doubt and struggle arise.



Epiphanies 4 Epiphany - Week 7 - Silence

Silence – Day 1

In our world of commercials, billboards, push notifications, and endless talking heads, connecting with God can often happen through simply being quiet.

When I began including extended periods of silence into my prayer life I was amazed by the ways that I quickly felt more settled and connected to God.

This week, we will be looking at the important role silence can play in our life of faith.

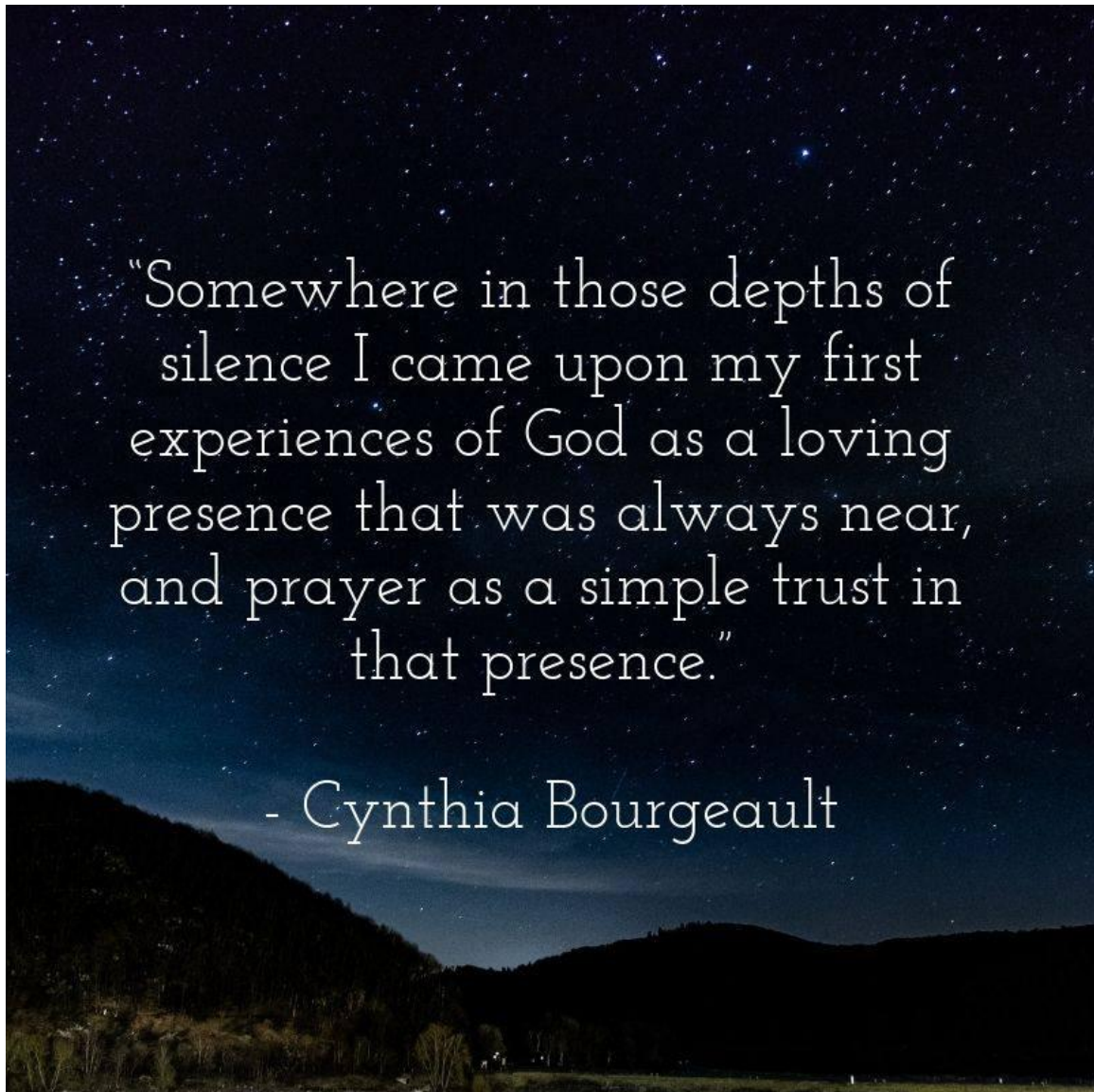
**"AND AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE A FIRE,
BUT THE LORD WAS NOT IN THE FIRE;
AND AFTER THE FIRE A SOUND OF SHEER
SILENCE. WHEN ELIJAH HEARD IT, HE
WRAPPED HIS FACE IN HIS MANTLE AND
WENT OUT AND STOOD AT THE
ENTRANCE OF THE CAVE. THEN THERE
CAME A VOICE..." - 1 KINGS 19:12-13**



Day 2 - Silence

The prophet Elijah once waited in a cave for God to speak. From his spot in the cave, he saw fires and earthquakes and mighty winds and yet, God chose to speak to Elijah through "the sound of sheer silence."

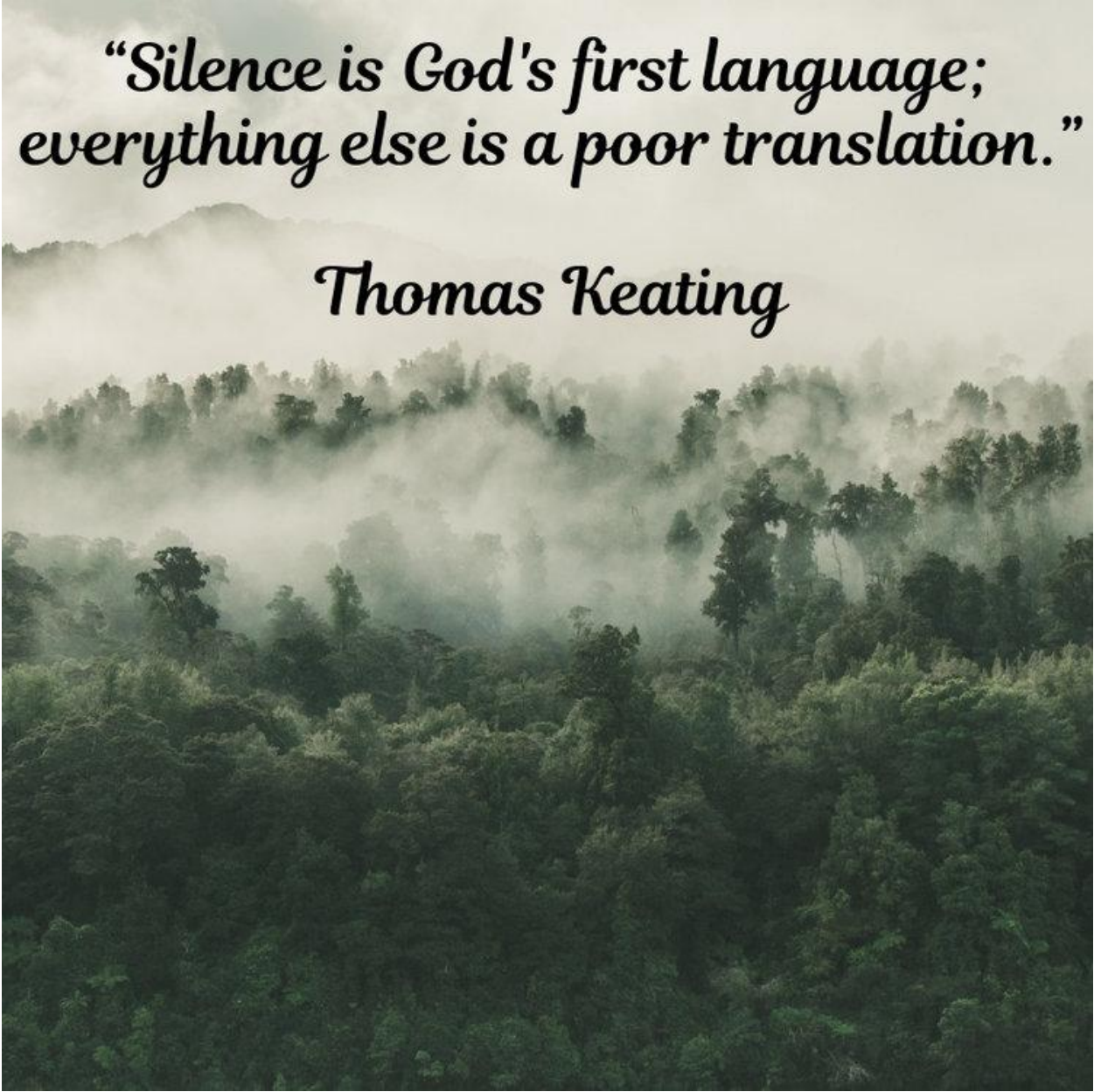
This is a powerful reminder that the grand, powerful, overwhelming moments of life will not always be the places where God speaks to us. Rather, sometimes the voice of God will find us in simple moments of silence.



Day 3 - Silence

Cynthia Bourgeault has written several books on the practice of Centering Prayer, a type of prayer where individuals are encouraged to simply sit in silence and trust in God's presence.

The above quote encourages us to see prayer not just as the words we say, but rather as a position of our heart; a type of resting in the reality of God.



*“Silence is God's first language;
everything else is a poor translation.”*

Thomas Keating

Day 4 - Silence

Father Thomas Keating wrote extensively on the gifts that practicing silence can have in one's life of faith. To Keating, silence is the way God speaks to us and thus should be an integral practice for people of faith.



Day 5 - Silence

At the beginning of our worship the worship leader will sometimes invite people to take a moment of silence to collect ourselves; to prepare our hearts and minds for worship; to encounter God.

Today, as we come to the end of our week focused on silence, take 5 minutes to simply sit in the presence of God.