

## **Monday, March 12<sup>th</sup>**

John 6:60-71

Have you ever been betrayed? Have you ever had people who you believed to have had your back, but then left because they no longer could support what you were sharing with them? That's like Jesus in this text. In today's passage, Jesus was abandoned by some of the disciples. To be clear, Jesus' following extended beyond the 12 Disciples that we are familiar with. There were hundreds of people that followed Jesus regularly. Some of these people failed to believe in what He was teaching, thus they left.

Being a disciple of Jesus is intentional work. It is a commitment that often needs examining because discipleship comes with a cost. Discipleship requires sacrifice. Being a disciple of Jesus is a decision worth making; however, all cannot see it. In this text, Jesus is showing us that His teachings are hard and not for the fainthearted. Often, Jesus is depicted as a sweet, soft-spoken savior who goes around healing and teaching about the kingdom of God. However, there are moments where Jesus is firm and bold with his words. Jesus is calling out host disciples who do not believe in the assignment that He has come to fulfill. As a result, many disciples offended and deserted Him.

As we draw closer to the end of the Lenten Season, we must examine ourselves and consider our loyalty to Jesus. We are either with Him, or we are not. Are we going to take His message seriously or are we not? Jesus has chosen us and trusted us. We ought not to let Him down.

### **Meditation:**

Do you remember when you first became a disciple of Jesus? How did that make you feel? How has your relationship with Jesus grown over the years? How can you grow closer to Him and not abandon the call to discipleship?

### **Prayer:**

Lord, help us to stick with Jesus. Being a disciple is hard at times. We are not perfect, and we strive to do our best. Help us to know that no

matter how hard or challenging that it might be, remind us that being with Jesus is better than being without Him. Help us to be better disciples and to spread your Gospel. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Rev. Porsha D. Williams**

## **Tuesday, March 13<sup>th</sup>**

Proverbs 3:5-6

All throughout this fast, we have been making a dangerous decision to trust God. I call it dangerous but it involves making ourselves vulnerable and in some ways putting ourselves at risk. When we trust God, when we let go of our own understandings and truly trust the Lord to step out in faith, we let go of control. This goes against our very being. It is not in our nature to give up control. We want to control how we're viewed by others, we want to control our environments for maximized comfort, we want to control what our children see on T.V., and the list goes on and on. We are both by nature and by learning people that want to be in control. But one of the most difficult aspects of the Christian walk is to learn to give up control, to let go, to trust God with all of our heart, to lean on God's understandings instead of our own. This comes from a very famous Proverb but I believe that it is worth noting that it calls for complete trust, "All of our heart." As wisdom literature, there is often hyperbole or exaggeration for the sake of making a point, but still it is clear, we are to trust first, lean not on our own understandings, acknowledge the Lord first, and THEN God will direct our paths. If we are going to grow deeper in this time of devotion and discipleship, then we need to make the choice to trust God first. Let us pray together for the courage to trust our God to walk down this dangerous path together.

**Meditation:** What are you most afraid to trust God with? Your finances? Your time? Your career? Your family? Or something else? What will it take for you to let go and truly trust God?

**Prayer:** Most Gracious God, help us to make the simple but vulnerable choice of trusting in You. Help us, dear God, to trust in You, that we might experience the joy of having our steps ordered by You. In Jesus' powerful name, we pray, Amen.

**Wednesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>**  
**Romans 6:12-23**

In this chapter, we find Paul in Corinth, addressing the church about not letting sin reign in their bodies and not using their bodies as instruments for the use of sin. Here, sin is described as being not of God. We all know the origin of sin and how Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit. But here Paul is discussing the wages of sin, i.e. what happens to us if we keep on sinning. If we offer our bodies to sin, we will be in a state of disobedience to God and we can't serve two masters. The question becomes, shall we continue sinning because we are not under the law but are instead under Grace? We are not under the law because Jesus took on our sins. Jesus was not a sinner. Jesus was pure and untouched by sin, but Jesus saw fit to take on all the world's sins so that we may have eternal life. Everyone is a slave in the spiritual sense. WE are slaves to sin, which is our natural state, or we are slaves to Christ. Paul uses the example of a slave to remind us that slaves have no will of their own. If we are honest with ourselves, we used to be slaves to the world. Our surroundings weren't always going to Bible Study or Church on Sundays. Matter of fact, we probably were at the club, bar, drinking, getting high, gossiping, boasting in ourselves. Let's keep it real, and there are some things we dare not repeat that we have done because we are ashamed of them. The key to living a righteous life is to sin less so that we can get to the natural state where God wants us to be in our lives. God has a way to bring us back into His fold, but first, we must do our part by repenting and asking for forgiveness, not just with our minds and mouths but also with our hearts. Once we do this, God's sanctification process can begin. This process will not happen overnight. It's a lifetime process continuing until we stand before God. We have been buried and resurrected with Jesus and are able to walk in the newness of life.

Aren't you thankful that God gave His only begotten Son to take all the world's sins upon himself that we may have Eternal life?

**Meditation:** Are you tired of being a slave to sin? Do you find yourself worshipping two masters in life? Are you ready to give your whole self to Christ?

**Prayer:** Eternal and Heavenly Father. Forgive us for conforming to the things of this world, for we have allowed ourselves to be distracted from Your ways by our possessions, not realizing that they have no merit in Your Kingdom. We admit we are sinners Lord, so help us to sin less so that we may see a glimpse of Your Grace. Continue to sanctify our bodies that we can be used for Your purpose. Surround us with Your unwavering love. We pray. Amen.

MIT Crispin Johnson

**Thursday, March 15<sup>th</sup>**  
**Psalm 23**

Psalm 23 is one of the most popular and the most beautiful of all the scriptures in the Bible because it gives a clear description of the great Shepherd's protection, provisions, and praises. It was written by David the King, who had been a humble shepherd boy. His job was to make sure that his sheep did not wander off and get lost or get eaten by predators.

Thinking about this Psalm, at first, I wondered how a shepherd boy could become a mighty king. Then I realized that both roles have similar responsibilities. They both care for something. A shepherd cares, leads, and cares for his herd of sheep, and a king cares for and leads his people. It then became even more obvious why David refers to God as a shepherd in Psalm 23. David knew that during his time, it would have been unacceptable to call God a king. So he compares Him to a loving shepherd who leads and cares for his sheep.

When you think of Psalm 23 you get an instant feeling of comfort and safety. Like many Christians, it is my go-to prayer when I am scared, saddened, angry, or confused. It reminds me of the care and protection of my Lord, the Good Shepherd. It is the prayer you turn to when you are surrounded by debris from devastation, being chased by someone who wants to harm you, on the battlefield, or when the lights go out and you are sitting in a cold jail cell, or simply don't know where to turn for help. These are the reasons why it's one of the first things we make our children learn so that they will know that God is always there to protect them – when we are unable to. For those of you who question how Psalm 23 is still relevant today, let's break it down.

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Psalm 23:1-3*

We are all God's sheep. He is there to comfort and protect us. We are helpless without Him.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:4*

In life, we often have hardships. It may seem as though before one storm passes, another one is already whipping up. Whether the hardship is financial, a painful relationship, a wayward child, or an unexpected tragedy, hardships can make us feel like lost, lonely sheep. While our first thought might be to give in to fear and despair, we must remember that there is no need to worry because God our shepherd is always there to guide us, His sheep.

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Psalm 23:5*

Of all the wonderful passages in Psalm 23, this is perhaps the most glorious. Think about it, your great Shepherd will make sure that you have all that you need. A good meal to satisfy and comfort you.

Despite all the harm that your enemies try to inflict on you, they instead can only sit on the side and watch you enjoy all of the provisions that God has given to you.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23:6*  
David ends Psalm 23 by reminding God's sheep that He will never leave or forsake them.

### **Meditation**

Now that you know about the Shepherd's protections, ask yourself this question. Are you in the herd? If you are not, then you are wandering around without protection. God is waiting to fulfill His promises in Psalm 23, but you need to do your part and get back in the herd.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, You have always provided for me. I have never been alone. Through my difficulties and darkest days, You have been by my side to guide and comfort me. Thank you, great Shepherd, for Your love, Your protections, and Your many blessings. I pray that You teach me to follow You more faithfully and to include You in everything that I do.

Dr. Donna Beck

### **Friday, March 16<sup>th</sup>**

Jeremiah 18:1-11

### **REPENT!**

As we approach the end of our Lenten journey together, before we finish we have a bit of housekeeping to do. One of the main purposes of LENT is the consideration of repentance. However you desire to word it, repentance, turning from evil ways, reforming our ways, regrets, remorse, contrition - when offered with sincerity brings us closer to God. We know when we are headed in the wrong direction;

our soul yearns to get right. Yet, we are uncomfortable concentrating on repentance; the thought of repentance makes us feel guilty about our wrongdoings. Wrongdoings, errors we have tried to dismiss and forget. We also feel shame when we recall the disobedience/rebellion that got us into trouble in the first place. These are difficult feelings to reconcile. If we tell the truth about it, even now some memories haunt us. However, we cannot fix what we will not face! Repentance is required to maintain an intimate relationship with God.

Jeremiah in this text is sent on a mission of discovery, to the Potter's House, so that the warning he is about to give the people has a context that the people can readily relate to in their community. Everyone knows the potter. Everyone understands that a useless, broken or marred clay vessel is headed for the trash. Jeremiah on behalf of God confirms destruction is in the people's future if the clay (US) refuses to be molded by God (the potter). The people must REPENT.

We too are those clay vessels. We are commanded by God's Holy hands to be shaped, reshaped and purposed for God's plans. When we resist "molding" (BY NOT REFORMING OUR ACTIONS) disaster follows. When we yield to God, God is able to remake us, smooth over our defects, put us back on the potter's wheel and turn us into useful vessels. If we turn to a later Jeremiah text, we see God's desire for us is confirmed in these words, "**I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. This is God's aspiration for us.**" We are the clay (surrendering) to the hands of the Potter; let us repent so that God can use us.

**Meditation:** Let's visit a potter's house. In her studio are the wheels, wet clay, beautiful pots readied for use, but scattered haphazardly on the floor are broken clay vessels, pieces of discarded vessels some misshapen and some unusable pieces. They will never hold water, flowers, or grain. They will never be put to use outside the studio. They are destined to be destroyed because they did not submit to the potter's hands.

**Prayer:** Most Holy God, our Creator, and Potter. How awesome is Your love for us that You would desire to smooth our flaws, fix our cracks, heal our brokenness and reshape us into useful servants. You created each of us with a Divine purpose whether we see that purpose or not, we surrender our desires to You. Help us, Lord, not to get in the way of Your plans, quell our rebelliousness. Let us submit to the work of Your hands; bring us into genuine repentance when we stray. We don't want to be cast aside, worthless and destroyed. We know this is not Your will for us either. Repair what needs to be repaired and help us to follow Your plans dutifully. Amen and Amen.

### **Saturday, March 17<sup>th</sup>**

Jeremiah 7:21-34

My mother always said she wouldn't talk to a brick wall, but that isn't quite true. Though that might be our feeling, even our reality, when folks refuse to listen, we still shout. We still protest. We still make known. Even to the most block-headed among us. Hoping they won't have to learn the hard way. Hoping that even the most silenced of surface will be just porous enough to hear some sense.

Why don't people just listen? So much of the world's problems would be solved if we could just pay attention to ourselves, to one another, and be willing to separate the idols from our own personal gains and comforts from some false idea of God's blessing. The prophet Jeremiah still finds us today as he found the people of God—this time, the nation of Judah—active, busy, full of piety, full of praise, 'a church on the move' if you will.

And yet, they are completely missing "the point."  
They are completely missing God.

And the Lord is OVER IT. Over you, over your false sacrifices, over your grand displays of faithfulness. That's right. God is like, Sure! Go on, boast in yourselves, come before the altar, do "all the right things" and say the right words. But I see you. You go through the motions but

have not yet managed to move your hearts. Elsewhere, the book of Samuel puts it like this ... Obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22), and these are a people who do not *truly* obey.

And God knows, as does Jeremiah. Their work in the world is not enviable. The job description of a Biblical prophet could, for all intents and purposes be, “Talk to brick walls.” Yell, scream and say it. But know they won’t listen. They won’t respond.

With this preface in mind, the text today moves to a far more serious condemnation of the evils of the world. The people of Judah have built high places, altars, idols in Topheth, which in Hebrew means “fireplace.” Hebrew is a language built around consonants, so the way that vowels are assigned or ‘marked’ and a word can shift or intensify the meaning greatly. Here, the vowel pointings for Topheth are those for the word “shame.”

Topheth—this fireplace of shame—is in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, the trash heap of the city. Not only is this the place where things are piled up and discarded, rotting and burning, but this is also the place of the altar of Molech—a god who required child sacrifice (2 Kings 23:10). This is why the Lord is so angry: “[You] burn your sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.” (v.31)

Who do these people think God is?

Well, as it were, *we* burn our sons and daughters, too.

Have you not seen, have you not heard, the slaughter of our innocents?

Our babies are burned through with bullet holes.

In our schools, on our streets.

While singing in churches, while dancing at concerts.

We might not be the people of Judah, but we sure are making their same grave mistakes.

We are a nation, a people, that claims to worship, comes to church to clap hands and sing songs, to wear nice outfits and give great offerings, to taste and see that the Lord is good, and yet,

*we don’t* always care that we are surrounded by those who are starving.

And God says, Jeremiah? This is what you can tell them: They can keep it. They can have it.

*This is the nation that has not obeyed the Lord its God or responded to correction.*

*Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips.* (v. 27-28)

We love our guns in America more than we love our people.

We are willing to sacrifice our children on the altars called the Second Amendment.

[Not that people have read, or understood, the amendment that well].

We will burn one another before we will do background checks.

We are more like Judah than we think.

As we watch, students around this country are begging politicians to help keep them safe, walking out of their schools to try to end gun violence, grieving, crying out. When we remember the forbearers of CORE and SNCC, protesters from the streets of Ferguson to Baltimore to Palestine are still unheard, and worse, targeted, disabused, re-traumatized.

We realize that the altars of this world are much alive and well aflame. And they are trying to incinerate the dreams of God.

Ironically, this valley of sacrifice will eventually become the place where the people of Judah are slaughtered by Babylon.

When we live by the gun, we die by the gun.

Christ’s crown of thorns, now a crown of bullets?

And an AR-15 rifle shot piercing his side.

The prophets shout on.

March on.

Fight on.

Oh that the Word of the Lord would penetrate our brick hearts.

## **Meditation**

Have you put sacrifice in place of obedience?  
Have you taken time this Lenten season to discern the difference?  
When it comes to the Topeth's of this world, take stock of your heart.  
Are you actively fighting to extinguish injustice, or satisfied watching it smolder and burn?  
What would it look like for us, for our church, for all of our churches and communities, to lead the water brigade?

## **Prayer**

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, Have mercy on us.  
Tear away the bricks that build altars in our life.  
Quench the flames of our greed and ignorance.  
Keep yelling, screaming, and speaking.  
Rend our hearts to hear, to respond.  
Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal.  
Please, have mercy on us.

Dr. Amey Victoria Adkins-Jones

# **Bethany Baptist Church**

## **Lenten Program**

**March 12 — March 17, 2018**

**“Being Faithful Over a Few”**



**Matthew 25:23**

**<sup>23</sup>His Lord said to him, ‘Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’**

**275 West Market Street  
Newark, NJ0710 07103  
973 623-8161  
[www.bethany-newark.org](http://www.bethany-newark.org)**

**Rev. Timothy L. Adkins-Jones, Pastor**