

First Fifteen: April 25-29
Focus Scripture: John 21:1-19

Monday: 1 Peter 1:13-24

Going Deeper: The letter we know as 1 Peter was most likely written in the early to mid 60s (ca) and it was not addressed to any one community of faith or church, but to the faithful who had dispersed after the death and resurrection of Jesus into the surrounding countries and regions. In some respects, to people just like us, who have moved beyond Easter back into our “normal” routines and life. That is the great temptation of our faith, to see Easter as single day and the resurrection as a solitary event that only happened to Jesus... but none of this is true as I understand it, and these words of encouragement seem to suggest this as well! As you read these verses, I will admit it is easy to get bogged down and distracted by one word... holy. Nonetheless we are challenged to embrace our calling as those whose lives have been changed by Easter, and Peter used the words of an ancient text that were addressed to the people of Israel from Leviticus 19:2 to also encourage us... *“You will be holy, because I am holy.”* (1 Peter 1:16 – CEB) We must understand the word “holy” simply means set apart, we are those whose lives are now distinctive although not necessarily “perfect.” We have been changed and challenged by what we know of God and what we have experienced from our faith in God’s grace or lovingkindness; or as the Message renders our calling... *“let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God’s life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness.”* (1 Peter 1:14 – MSG) Which Peter spells out for us in 1 Peter 1:22-23! This is our path beyond Easter forevermore.

Prayer: Lord of life and resurrection I thank you for this new day! I look forward to the opportunities, as well as the challenges it will bring and through them all I know you will be near me. Help me remember I am not the same because of Easter, and trust the gift of resurrection reaches out to all who will let your love lead them and who are willing to live as your holy people. Amen.

Tuesday: 1 Peter 2:1-6

Going Deeper: Again, as we read these words of encouragement from Peter, I do not want us to get bogged down in the language he chose to use. His intent was to help us understand our “salvation” (1 Peter 2:2) is not a static event, something that happened one time long ago. His words tell us salvation is more than an idea we embrace, or a creed we recite... Salvation is an active engagement with the Living Christ, where we work alongside one another, guided, and energized by the movement of the Holy Spirit as we seek to do the work of God’s kingdom. This is the essence of what 1 Peter 2:5 is saying to us, *“like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* (NRSV) Peter’s intent was to help us realize through these images of growth, that our faith and salvation are something we grow into as we move closer to God and one another discovering not merely how hard it is to love others but grasping the way to fully understand love comes from our embrace of God’s love for us. And in this discover we

realize our own heart expands as our does our spirit as well as it is filled with God's love. The ultimate work of the kingdom, or in the words used here "to offer spiritual scarifies" is simply to grow into Jesus' one command for those whose seek to follow him. (See 1 Peter 1:22 and John 13:34)

Prayer: Almighty God, you know where I struggle and where I am tempted. You know me better than I know myself, and you call me to join you in your work, the work of Easter, the work of sharing your love with others, the work of fully embracing your love for me. Open my heart, expand my thinking, and enlarge my spirit to both receive and share all that you have given me. Amen.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Going Deeper: Have you ever sensed the "voice" of God? It may have felt like an inner leading, or a nudge to act upon something. God's call may also be sensed as a deep longing, or a growing restlessness. I suspect you may have experienced a moment of God's calling but like Samuel you were unsure how to respond. This story about God's call to Samuel is rich with meaning, as you read it what elements stand out for you? There is a seeming irony of a blind priest who was attended by an inexperienced boy, neither of whom recognized what was happening in the moment. I am not being critical; it is made quite clear "This was a time when the revelation (or voice) of God was rarely heard or seen." (1 Samuel 3:1b – The Message) I think many might say the same today... that the voice of God is rarely heard or seen, but I wonder if this has more to do with us than God's desire to connect with us? I say this especially now as we are still so near to Easter, given our remembrance and celebration of God's gift and miracle of resurrection. I am afraid we are sadly often like Eli with eyesight than does not see clearly, but I believe we can all become more akin to Samuel. The message of Easter and the gift of resurrection is all around us, if we will allow ourselves to listen for and are willing to see it. It can be found in a sunrise after a long dark night of worry. It can be heard in the voice of another who has come to comfort us in our need. We typically do not equate these moments to divine intervention, but why not? God has always used the natural and obvious to get our attention. God continues to show up, whispering, nudging, calling out in the night and darkness of our lives. Will we heed Eli's instruction as Samuel did... are we ready to say to God I am here, and I am listening?

Prayer: Help me this day to be more attentive Lord. Help me to be ready to listen when you call, help me to respond and not dismiss your call because I am too busy, or because I am unsure if I trust you would call me. Help me Lord to listen and see and be ready. Amen.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 17:4-11

Going Deeper: This story, which you may know as "David and Goliath", builds upon the teaching of 1 Samuel 16:7 "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things humans look at. Humans look at the outer appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'" (NIV) The description of the Philistine champion was meant to create inner

disruption within the hearts and minds of those who heard it. His weapons were described as larger and far more lethal than anything the men of Saul's army possessed. These descriptions only reinforced what God had shared with Samuel... we often judge by appearance and what we can see. While this is a persistent temptation for all of us, Easter and the message of the resurrection encourage to rise above this and allow our faith to help guide us to look beyond appearance. Our faith, grounded in our belief in the power of resurrection, call us to become more deeply aware of the movement and presence of the Holy Spirit to help understand there is more than what we can see as we learn to trust what our heart senses.

Prayer: Lord our world judges by appearance, but you call us to consider a person's character. We often take things at face value when you call us to go below the surface. Give me grace Lord. Help me look beyond the surface and trust you will help me see the heart of what matters. Amen.

Friday: 1 Samuel 17:32-40

Going Deeper: The boy David embodies the faith God called Samuel, as well as you and I to embrace. As you read these verses what stands out for you? What I hear clearly is found in 1 Samuel 17:38-40. Look at these verses and consider their implication within the story. What do you hear? Saul gives David his armor and weapons, even though they were inadequate and over matched by Goliath. Saul did this because these were what he knew, and what he trusted, but they were not the tools needed to "fight" or live by faith. David's simple, what we might even call childlike choice of a slingshot and a few stones seemed even more inadequate for his stand against the Philistine giant. But as we consider his reasoning and response in 1 Samuel 17:33-37 we begin to understand his primary strength for engagement. His faith were not the stones in his pouch or the slingshot in his hand. His strength was within his heart, as well as his trust in God's salvation as he calls it in verse 37. I wonder if we can also begin to understand his faith... the faith to stand up to the giants in our lives are the foundation that helps us begin to understand our own experience of resurrection; where we trust God's presence and provision to face and overcome our fear, even our fear of failure.

Prayer: Lord help me know even when I feel as if all I have are a few small stones and a slingshot, because of your presence I will always have more than enough to face the giants in my life. Help me understand these experiences where you stand beside do stretch my faith, but they also become the building blocks that help me become who have called me to be. Amen.