

## Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 16, 2023

### Weekly Prayer

Good and loving God, we know that you call all of us to follow with our whole heart, soul, and mind. You have called people, young and old, to make known your love for the world. Thank you for the ways you have encouraged and invited me to follow you. Bless our children and youth, that they love you fully, follow you faithfully, and live courageously. May their witness inspire and strengthen your church. In the name of Jesus, your Son, and my Savior, I pray: Amen.

**Note: Sunday, April 16 was Youth Sunday at Messiah. Our youth led us in worship, proclaiming the good news and love of Jesus thru their stories, songs, and messages. This week, our GPS will focus on stories of young people in scripture, reminding us how children and youth have long been a critical part of the story of God.**

### Monday, April 17

#### Scripture: John 6:1-15

After this Jesus went across the Galilee Sea (that is, the Tiberias Sea). A large crowd followed him, because they had seen the miraculous signs he had done among the sick. Jesus went up a mountain and sat there with his disciples. It was nearly time for Passover, the Jewish festival. Jesus looked up and saw the large crowd coming toward him. He asked Philip, "Where will we buy food to feed these people?" Jesus said this to test him, for he already knew what he was going to do. Philip replied, "More than a half year's salary worth of food wouldn't be enough for each person to have even a little bit." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, "A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for a crowd like this?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass there. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, each getting as much as they wanted. When they had plenty to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather up the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten. When the people saw that he had done a miraculous sign, they said, "This is truly the prophet who is coming into the world." Jesus understood that they were about to come and force him to be their king, so he took refuge again, alone on a mountain.

#### Observation

More than 5000 people had gathered to listen to Jesus, and by the end of the day the people were hungry! Caring for the crowds, Jesus tasked the disciples with feeding the people gathered. One of the youth present offered his five barley loaves and two fish. With his offering, Jesus invited the crowd to sit and (in a familiar rhythm) Jesus blessed, broke, and shared the bread. At the end of the meal, more than twelve baskets were collected as leftovers.

#### Application

The feeding the 5000 is the only miracle told in all four Gospels. In John's Gospel, it is a young person whose faith in Jesus provides the bread and fish. I wonder how the adults around this youth responded? Did they try to shush him, feeling embarrassed that he might think such a small offering would make an impact? Did they encourage him, seeing his hope and trust? Did they learn from this youth that day, seeing how big an impact we can have when acting in faith? I wonder, how do we respond and encourage the children and youth of today? How might we build up a generation who courageously and generously share their gifts with the world, so that Jesus might transform and multiply them? How might we trust, as this youth, that Jesus can work through us, too?

#### Prayer

God of miracles, thank you for inviting me to be generous with my gifts, however small. Continue to call and encourage our children and youth to boldly share their gifts with you and our world. Help me to learn from and celebrate their witness. Amen.

**Tuesday, April 18**

**Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:4-10**

The LORD called to Samuel. "I'm here," he said. Samuel hurried to Eli and said, "I'm here. You called me?" "I didn't call you," Eli replied. "Go lie down." So he did. Again the LORD called Samuel, so Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, "I'm here. You called me?" "I didn't call, my son," Eli replied. "Go and lie down." (Now Samuel didn't yet know the LORD, and the LORD's word hadn't yet been revealed to him.) A third time the LORD called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "I'm here. You called me?" Then Eli realized that it was the LORD who was calling the boy. So Eli said to Samuel, "Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD. Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down where he'd been. Then the LORD came and stood there, calling just as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel said, "Speak. Your servant is listening."

**Observation**

Samuel's mother, Hannah, prayed for many years for a child. His name means, "I asked the Lord for him." She promised God to have her son raised by a priest named Eli. In the passage today, Samuel is about 12 years old. He is awoken in the night by a voice calling out to him. After some confusion and discerning, Samuel realizes it is God's voice.

**Application**

Samuel hears God's call when he is just 12 years old, already devoting his life to becoming a prophet and messenger of God. This story is the inspiration for the much-loved hymn, "Here I am, Lord" and is a reminder to us that we are never too young, or too old, to be called by God. What is your earliest memory of God's presence in your life? How are you, like Eli, encouraging youth around you to listen to God's voice?

A quick story. I've shared before how I heard God calling me to become a pastor when I was very young, about 6 years old. I was able to discern and grow in that calling *because* adults in my life encouraged me. One way that Pastor Tami and I encourage our children and youth is by reminding them that God might be calling them, too, to be pastors. When we teach about baptism and communion, especially, we invite kids to consider that *maybe* God is inviting them to be a pastor in God's church. We have many, many kind and loving kids and youth at Messiah; our world will be blessed and changed by their witness in the world, just as it is changed by yours. Thank you for listening, speaking, and encouraging the voice of God to be heard.

**Prayer**

Here I am, Lord. You have called me, and I am listening. Speak to me today and reveal the people and places you are inviting me to serve. Fill my heart with your love, guiding my words and actions with your grace. Amen.

**Wednesday, April 19**

**Scripture: Genesis 39:1-5**

When Joseph had been taken down to Egypt, Potiphar, Pharaoh's chief officer, the commander of the royal guard and an Egyptian, purchased him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man and served in his Egyptian master's household. His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made everything he did successful. Potiphar thought highly of Joseph, and Joseph became his assistant; he appointed Joseph head of his household and put everything he had under Joseph's supervision. From the time he appointed Joseph head of his household and of everything he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's household because of Joseph. The LORD blessed everything he had, both in the household and in the field.

**Observation**

Joseph was about 17 when his older brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 37). By the end of the chapter, Joseph was a government official and military commander. In the passage today, we read how God was faithful to Joseph, blessing him and the home in which he served.

**Application**

Joseph's story is one that has been told (and sung!) about by many, is appreciated because Joseph overcomes significant challenges, reminds us of God's enduring presence, and models forgiveness. Today, I'm reflecting on the fact that this teenager has played such a significant role in the story of God and has so much to teach even those of us double or triple his age. I wonder what the teens in my life can teach me about how God is acting in the world today? I think about teens around our country who are speaking out about climate change, gun violence, mental health accessibility. And I wonder, are we listening? How might they, like Joseph, be leading the way for God to do something new, something good?

### **Prayer**

Faithful God, thank you for teachers like Joseph who show us how to remain courageous, forgiving and kind, even amid hard circumstances. Thank you for teachers, like our teenagers today, who continue to embody that same confidence as Joseph. May the passions and longings of our youth inspire people of all ages. May your voice and presence continue to be revealed through the teenagers in our world. Give me the willingness to see you, and hear your voice, through them. Amen.

### **Thursday, April 20**

#### **Scripture: 1 Samuel 17:4-11, 37-50**

A champion named Goliath from Gath came out from the Philistine camp. He was more than nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore bronze scale-armor weighing one hundred twenty-five pounds. He had bronze plates on his shins, and a bronze scimitar hung on his back. His spear shaft was as strong as the bar on a weaver's loom, and its iron head weighed fifteen pounds. His shield-bearer walked in front of him. He stopped and shouted to the Israelite troops, "Why have you come and taken up battle formations? I am the Philistine champion, and you are Saul's servants. Isn't that right? Select one of your men, and let him come down against me. If he is able to fight me and kill me, then we will become your slaves, but if I overcome him and kill him, then you will become our slaves and you will serve us. I insult Israel's troops today!" The Philistine continued, "Give me an opponent, and we'll fight!" When Saul and all Israel heard what the Philistine said, they were distressed and terrified.

"The LORD," David added, "who rescued me from the power of both lions and bears, will rescue me from the power of this Philistine." "Go!" Saul replied to David. "And may the LORD be with you!" Then Saul dressed David in his own gear, putting a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David strapped his sword on over the armor, but he couldn't walk around well because he'd never tried it before. "I can't walk in this," David told Saul, "because I've never tried it before." So he took them off. He then grabbed his staff and chose five smooth stones from the streambed. He put them in the pocket of his shepherd's bag and with sling in hand went out to the Philistine. The Philistine got closer and closer to David, and his shield-bearer was in front of him. When the Philistine looked David over, he sneered at David because he was just a boy; reddish brown and good-looking. The Philistine asked David, "Am I some sort of dog that you come at me with sticks?" And he cursed David by his gods. "Come here," he said to David, "and I'll feed your flesh to the wild birds and the wild animals!" But David told the Philistine, "You are coming against me with sword, spear, and scimitar, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of heavenly forces, the God of Israel's army, the one you've insulted. Today the LORD will hand you over to me. I will strike you down and cut off your head! Today I will feed your dead body and the dead bodies of the entire Philistine camp to the wild birds and the wild animals. Then the whole world will know that there is a God on Israel's side. And all those gathered here will know that the LORD doesn't save by means of sword and spear. The LORD owns this war, and he will hand all of you over to us." The Philistine got up and moved closer to attack David, and David ran quickly to the front line to face him. David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone. He slung it, and it hit the Philistine on his forehead. The stone penetrated his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. And that's how David triumphed over the Philistine with just a sling and a stone, striking the Philistine down and killing him—and David didn't even have a sword!

### **Observation**

"*Only a boy named David, only a little sling...*" Anyone else singing that old Sunday school song as you read the story today? Chapter 17 tells the full story, if you want to read it in its entirety, but I'm guessing many of us have memories of David and his sling! David was probably a teenager here and was far less experienced than his older brothers or the gathered army. But David trusted God.

## Application

David was a young man who trusted God to do great things! While those older and more experienced failed or felt afraid, David was willing to stand up *for* his people, and stand up *to* Goliath. He didn't wear the armor offered to him, but instead used the skills and tools he felt comfortable with (a sling and 5 stones). I wonder: what are the skills and tools God has given you? I think we often minimize our own abilities or gifts, but God can do great things through you! How might you imitate the confidence of David, believing that God has given you every gift and tool necessary to complete the task to which God has called you?

## Prayer

Ever-present God, thank you for today. Help me appreciate the gifts you have given me and enable me to trust that you are always at work in my life, and in our world, in good and loving ways. Amen.

## Friday, April 21

### Scripture: Daniel 1:3-17

Nebuchadnezzar instructed his highest official Ashpenaz to choose royal descendants and members of the ruling class from the Israelites— good-looking young men without defects, skilled in all wisdom, possessing knowledge, conversant with learning, and capable of serving in the king's palace. Ashpenaz was to teach them the Chaldean language and its literature. The king assigned these young men daily allotments from his own food and from the royal wine. Ashpenaz was to teach them for three years so that at the end of that time they could serve before the king. Among these young men from the Judeans were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. But the chief official gave them new names. He named Daniel "Belteshazzar," Hananiah "Shadrach," Mishael "Meshach," and Azariah "Abednego."

Daniel decided that he wouldn't pollute himself with the king's rations or the royal wine, and he appealed to the chief official in hopes that he wouldn't have to do so. Now God had established faithful loyalty between Daniel and the chief official; but the chief official said to Daniel, "I'm afraid of my master, the king, who has mandated what you are to eat and drink. What will happen if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men in your group? The king will have my head because of you!" So Daniel spoke to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: "Why not test your servants for ten days? You could give us a diet of vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance to the appearance of the young men who eat the king's food. Then deal with your servants according to what you see." The guard decided to go along with their plan and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king's food. So the guard kept taking away their rations and the wine they were supposed to drink and gave them vegetables instead. And God gave knowledge, mastery of all literature, and wisdom to these four men. Daniel himself gained understanding of every type of vision and dream.

## Observation

Today, we read about Daniel and his three friends who have been captured, taken to Babylon, and brought to the palace to serve the King. The King has given Daniel's friends names you might remember from the story of the fiery furnace: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. *(And if you, like me, are singing another Sunday school song, you're maybe also realizing how many stories of the Bible you've learned through singing!)*

But before the fiery furnace, Daniel and his friends take another kind of stand. In our reading today, the boys are offered food and drink that goes against their traditional Jewish beliefs and dietary customs. Having already gained favor with their captors, they request to have their diets changed. We don't know precisely how old the boys are here, but general consensus is that they may have been as young as 8 years old! Now, many young children are picky eaters - but how many of our little ones dare to stand up to adults in authority in this way? How brave these young ones are!

## Application

As the story continues, we read that because of their decision to keep the commandments, God *"gave knowledge, mastery of all literature, and wisdom to these four men. Daniel himself gained understanding of every type of vision and dream."* (V 17) The rest of the book of Daniel tells how this knowledge and wisdom impacted Daniel's life. His courageous actions, standing to do what's right, changed the course of his life. As a

parent, I sometimes wish my kids would “think first, act second” when they do things that feel risky or dangerous. But Daniel reminds me that sometimes the courage of our youth sets a course for our whole lives! I wonder, if I could muster a bit of that courage, what impact God might have in the world through me? Through you?

### **Prayer**

Beloved God, help me to pay attention to how you are working in my life today. When I feel afraid, give me courage. When I am unsure, give me wisdom. When I am lonely, give me friends to accompany me. Mostly, dear God, help me to trust fully in you, now and always. Amen.

### **Saturday, April 22**

#### **Scripture: 2 Kings 5: 1-15**

Naaman, a general for the king of Aram, was a great man and highly regarded by his master, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. This man was a mighty warrior, but he had a skin disease. Now Aramean raiding parties had gone out and captured a young girl from the land of Israel. She served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, “I wish that my master could come before the prophet who lives in Samaria. He would cure him of his skin disease.” So Naaman went and told his master what the young girl from the land of Israel had said. Then Aram's king said, “Go ahead. I will send a letter to Israel's king.” So Naaman left. He took along ten kikkars of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. He brought the letter to Israel's king. It read, “Along with this letter I'm sending you my servant Naaman so you can cure him of his skin disease.” When the king of Israel read the letter, he ripped his clothes. He said, “What? Am I God to hand out death and life? But this king writes me, asking me to cure someone of his skin disease! You must realize that he wants to start a fight with me.” When Elisha the man of God heard that Israel's king had ripped his clothes, he sent word to the king: “Why did you rip your clothes? Let the man come to me. Then he'll know that there's a prophet in Israel.” Naaman arrived with his horses and chariots. He stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent out a messenger who said, “Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored and become clean.” But Naaman went away in anger. He said, “I thought for sure that he'd come out, stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the bad spot, and cure the skin disease. Aren't the rivers in Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than all Israel's waters? Couldn't I wash in them and get clean?” So he turned away and proceeded to leave in anger. Naaman's servants came up to him and spoke to him: “Our father, if the prophet had told you to do something difficult, wouldn't you have done it? All he said to you was, ‘Wash and become clean.’” So Naaman went down and bathed in the Jordan seven times, just as the man of God had said. His skin was restored like that of a young boy, and he became clean. He returned to the man of God with all his attendants. He came and stood before Elisha, saying, “Now I know for certain that there's no God anywhere on earth except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant.”

### **Observation**

Alright, this is a story about Naaman going to Elisha to be healed from his leprosy. It's a great story! And nestled in here, is a story of faith about a little girl mentioned so briefly, you maybe didn't even notice her. Read verse 2 and 3 again: *“Now Aramean raiding parties had gone out and captured a young girl from the land of Israel. She served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, ‘I wish that my master could come before the prophet who lives in Samaria. He would cure him of his skin disease.’”*

This girl was in a land not her own, serving people who had captured her and taken her from her family. But this girl so believed in the power of God, and the prophets God raised up, that she shared this with Naaman and his wife. Naaman went to Elisha, because this young girl spoke up and told them the stories of her God. She invited Naaman and his wife to go and see how *their* lives might be transformed.

### **Application**

Isn't this a great story of evangelism? Naaman's life was changed, because this young girl gave an invitation and told her story about a God who heals. What's the story of God that you can tell others?

### **Prayer**

God, write your story on my lips and in my heart. Like this young girl, help me to tell others about you. And remind me that even if our part of the bigger story is small - that our invitations and kindness to others can make a lasting impact. Amen.