

**March 19<sup>th</sup> – Saturday**

**Centering Breath Prayer: Loving Savior...thank you for eternal life.**

**Opening Prayer:**

*Awesome God, where did you find enough love to forgive me, to send your Son to die for me, and to invite me to spend eternity in your presence? I can't thank you enough for such love! As we walk together this day, I praise your loving name with all that is within me. Fill me with as much of your love as I can hold and send me out to deliver your love to someone else today. In your awesome and loving name, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: John 3:9-17**

**Key Verses: John 3:16-17: (16) *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved”* (NRSV).**

Earlier this week we talked about Nicodemus and his night-time visit with Jesus. In his conversation with Jesus he learned about being born from above. It is in the context of this conversation that we arrive at the climax of the conversation in our key verses for today. After explaining to a confused Nicodemus the need for a second birth, a spiritual birth in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven, Jesus speaks these immortal words: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* These words have become so familiar to us that John 3:16 has become the standard of the gospel message. And, in a nutshell, they contain all we really need to know in order to have a spiritual re-birth and enter into God's eternal kingdom to dwell with our loving God. Because the key to eternal life begins with God's eternal love. Have you ever wondered why the last hours of Jesus' earthly life is called Christ's Passion? Live Passion plays have been given for centuries depicting Christ's last week, Holy Week as we call it. A few years ago a graphic film called *“The Passion of Christ”* was made depicting the last hours of Christ's life. Why passion we ask. Why, indeed! *“God so loved...”* Our eternal life begins and continues with God's love, because God loves us wildly, passionately! That passionate love brought forgiveness and grace and mercy to sinners like you and like me. But, God is a just God. Justice needed to be satisfied. God knew that we were incapable, unwilling and stubborn enough not to pay the price justice demanded. So, God sent God's very own Son, the only one who was, by very nature sinless and God incarnate, to pay the price for us. God became human to die for us, so that we might live. God became like you and me, so that we could be born from above, re-born into the kingdom of God. *“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”* We were already condemned by our own sinfulness. Justice demanded condemnation. But Jesus came to bring mercy, forgiveness and grace by paying the price for us. His passionate love for us brought us salvation and that salvation is the gift of an eternal, spiritual, born from

above life that embraces those who receive it. What does it cost us? Not much...only to accept the gift by believing in God's love given passionately by Jesus on the cross.

Max Lucado, well known author and pastor of Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas, has written what may be his most powerful book yet, "3:16, the Numbers of Hope." In this book, he reminds us that birth is a passive event on the part of the one being born. We had no part in our delivery into this world. In the same way, we have no part in our delivery into the kingdom of heaven. God provides the action for our rebirth in Christ's sacrifice, his passion for you and for me. Our one and only action in this process is to accept the gift which was given. A gift, no matter how perfect the gift, no matter how well it is packaged, which just sits on the shelf and is never accepted and unwrapped, can't be of value to the one for whom it was intended, even God's gift to us. Let's accept, unwrap and value the gift which was given for us. Let's believe in Jesus, our companion on our journey of love to the cross and beyond and our eternal Savior.

#### **Questions for reflection and/or journaling:**

1. How often do I take out my gift of salvation and praise the Lord, thanking God for the infinite and passionate love with which God showers me?
2. How do I return that love to my Savior?
3. Who do I know that needs to receive God's loving gift of eternal life?

#### **Suggestions for action:**

1. Phrase for your path: **GOD'S PASSIONATE LOVE**
2. Write a passionate love letter to God.
3. Tell someone today that God loves them passionately, preferably someone who doesn't already know.
4. Write out John 3:16-17 on an index card. Put it where you can see it during the rest of your Lenten journey. Read it often and say a little prayer of thanksgiving each time you read it.

#### **Closing Prayer:**

*Holy God, Father of my Savior and passionate lover of my soul, I accept your gift of love and salvation. I lovingly unwrap it and hold it close. Let me never let it sit on a shelf, forgotten and unused. May I share it with those who don't know just how passionately you love them and desire to spend eternity with them. Open my eyes to see those who don't yet know their worth to you. In the name of Jesus, who died in my place out of infinite and passionate love, I pray. Amen.*