

EASTER PRAYER & FASTING
25 March-03 April 2021

LOVE AT
THE  CROSS

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The cross of Jesus Christ is the focal point of all human history. It is the place where God and sinners are reconciled. The cross is also the place where two seemingly irreconcilable things have been brought together: the love of God and the justice of God. The love of God desires the salvation of sinners, while the justice of God demands their condemnation. How can love and justice meet together? The answer is, Jesus' love at the cross. The cross reveals the great heart of God, and that heart is filled with love.

Over the next ten (10) days, we invite you to join us on a spiritual journey to Easter with prayer and fasting. Each day there is something for us to reflect on life application as we think on "Love at the Cross". May God enrich and bless your heart during this season of prayer and fasting.

TYPES OF FAST



TOTAL FAST

Abstain from solid food and water or any beverage.



NORMAL FAST

Abstain from solid food. Take only water.



PARTIAL FAST

Abstain from solid food. Take only water and liquid food such as soup, milk.



DANIEL'S FAST

Abstain from meat. Take only vegetables, fruits and juices.

LENGTH OF FAST

• **NORMAL FAST**

12 hours or, from sunrise to sundown.

• **SELECTIVE FAST**

Fast one full meal a day, e.g. lunch or dinner.

**Note: If you have a medical condition, do seek your doctor's advice on the type and duration of your fast.*

SUGGESTIONS

• **INDIVIDUAL**

Commit to pray 15 minutes in the spirit every day, besides fasting.

• **FAMILY**

Fast and pray together as a family. Decide on one type of fast everyone in the family will commit to, and come together daily to pray for 15 minutes.

• **CONNECT GROUP**

During Open Connect Group, spend time to pray as a group using the booklet. Pray in the spirit for 15 minutes and allow the Holy Spirit to move in your midst.

DAY 1 • MARCH 25

LOVE AT THE CROSS

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." – Romans 5:8

There is no doubt that dying on the cross was the main reason why Christ came to live on earth more than 2000 years ago. Jesus was willing to suffer and die on the cross because only that could bring us back to God. We cannot understand the cross without giving a thought of the severity and effect of sins due to disobedience. Sin has not only brought physical and spiritual death but also permanent separation from God. The relationship with God was severely broken. As a result, our position before God was: weak, ungodly, sinners and enemies (Romans 5:6-11). The reality is that all sinners outside Christ are enslaved, held captive by sin, and therefore hostile towards God. We are also incapable of becoming morally strong or free ourselves from habitual sin. Self-centred motives are found in every word and action in our fallen nature. In short, we were "dead in sin" (Ephesians 2:1, 5) and while we were still sinners, "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6).

Why did Jesus have to die such a horrific death? We were too dead in sin to take the initiative to remove the enmity; God did it for us. It was love that caused Jesus to change places with us. We are condemned for eternity, and He died the death we deserve. Just as Christ's death on the cross is the ultimate satisfaction of God's justice, the cross is the ultimate expression of God's love in action.

Reflection: The wonder of the cross is that it is God's own way of both punishing sin and pardoning the sinner – "he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:26)

Pray for

- Deeper understanding and revelation of Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Spiritual renewal of all believers.
- The church to be unceasing in prayer during this season of prayer and fasting.
- Anointing on Evangelist Tom Elie – 26 & 28 March @ GTPJ.
- Witnessing to be our lifestyle.

"If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse." – Deuteronomy 21:22-23

God intended for men to live a life of blessings when they have a relationship with Him. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden of Eden, it brought evil and a curse upon all creation. "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field." (Genesis 3:17-18). The most painful sting of the curse was that, all of humanity would experience the sting of death. The good news is when Christ reversed the curse by redeeming us from the curse of the law (by becoming a curse for us); for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." (Galatians 3:13). Under the Mosaic Law, those who were hung on a tree were cursed and without blessings. Jesus took that curse on His shoulders when He died for us, although He had done no wrong. God poured out the curse on Jesus, so that He might pour out His blessing on us. Christ reversed the curse and we can now look forward to a life with God in true blessings.

Reflection: Sinclair Ferguson, "Jesus undid everything Adam did and did everything Adam failed to do." He became a curse in order to remove the curse from us. He kept the Law of God perfectly so as to merit righteousness for those who would believe.

Pray for

- God to break the cycle of continual poverty, chronic illnesses, barrenness and mental torments.
- God's blessing and restoration on all businesses.
- Decree on Deuteronomy 28:1-14 in your life.

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” – Colossians 2:13-14

Financial debt can be challenging, and even overwhelming. However, spiritual debt is much more severe, because its impact is eternal. All of us have a spiritual debt we cannot pay. Our sins are debts to God which we, the debtors, cannot pay. Sin is disobedience to God’s law; therefore, every sin is an offence to the holy God and incurs the penalty of spiritual death. Paul explained to the Colossians that although sin is a legal debt, it can be cancelled. How? Jesus Himself cancelled the record of our debt, the same way a legal pardon cancels the penalty for a crime.

God's forgiveness not only means freedom from the eternal punishment of sin. It means we can now have a living relationship with God. Paul uses a graphic metaphor here, of sin itself being crucified. On the cross, the Son of God took “the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands” and set it aside, “nailing it to the cross”. Christ settled our debt by becoming our sin at the cross, having given us his perfect righteousness. Our Heavenly Father has shown His great love for us, by allowing His Son to satisfy the debt for His people at the cross. In Christ, God is no longer counting our sins against us. The good news is that those who put their faith in Christ have their sins removed from His sight.

Reflection: How will it change the way you live for Jesus since He has paid your spiritual debt?

Pray for

- Some moments thanking God for the gift of eternal life.
- Churches to be channels of His love and blessing to the community.
- Believers – continue to be obedient to God’s word and to grow in faith.
- Economic stability and growth in our nation.

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." – 1 John 4:9

Sometimes it is hard to reconcile prevailing injustices and horrors of the world with God's love. Why does God allow these miseries? In the midst of pains and sufferings, the evidence of God's love is demonstrated at the cross. John's first letter mentioned that we know Jesus Christ's love when He laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16). Without Christ and His cross, the world will never have known what true love is. The only one act of pure love is God's sacrifice of His Son on the cross, for undeserving sinners at Calvary. 1 John 4:10 says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." We deserved to die under the righteous anger of God. However, Christ's death at the cross bore God's wrath. The cross is the demonstration of God's love in order that we might live through him. The words "might live through him" (1 John 4:9) shows our dire needs for a saviour.

The cross is where God's love was made visible more than two thousand years ago. We should not deflect from the love of God just because this world is filled with evil and pain. The cross of Jesus is also a glimpse of God's condemnation of evil, where the Son of God took God's wrath. One day everyone has to give an account of the injustices done, in this life or the life after.

Reflection: "If the cross is called a 'tragedy', it was a tragedy which illuminates all other tragedies." – John Stott

Pray for

- God's intervention against all forms of racism and economic inequality.
- God's favour and blessing upon all the churches in Malaysia. The government to uphold the Federal Constitution; every citizen has the freedom of religious beliefs.
- "Prodigal" sons and daughters to return back to God.
- Judges and lawyers to uphold justice and the rule of law.

Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." – Matthew 26:50

Most people have experienced some form of betrayal. Betrayal is an abandonment or violation of trust by someone close to us. Jesus too, experienced betrayal by Judas Iscariot who sold Him into the hands of the Jewish religious leaders. Judas was not an outsider but a disciple of Jesus whom He trusted. Jesus poured out His life and love for all His disciples, and Judas did not receive lesser love than anyone of them. Jesus had even washed Judas' feet in fulfilling the scriptures about Himself as the Suffering Servant. He humbled Himself and served Judas at the last supper. What kind of internal anguish did Jesus suffer, knowing that Judas would betray Him? Although Jesus' internal struggle of betrayal was not recorded, we can assume that He felt the pain. He knew Judas' heart had changed and did not stop Judas' plan. Instead, Jesus responded to the betrayal with gentleness and graciousness. At the very moment of betrayal, Jesus called Judas His friend.

The marvel is that Christ had not considered Judas as an enemy even though He knew of Judas' betrayal. He loved Judas till the end. Loving an enemy is not easy but this is what God commanded us to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44)

Reflection: No matter what your betrayal experience is, there is one who understands. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who understands betrayal, and He can shepherd you out of all your sufferings.

Pray for

- God's healing power on those who suffer betrayals and wrongdoings.
- Those despitefully used and persecuted, for the sake of the gospel.
- National reconciliation and unity of all races.
- Many souls to be saved during Good Friday and Easter weekend of all our language churches – English Church, Chinese Church, Tamil Church and Bahasa Church.

"and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again." – Matthew 27:29-30

Jesus' crown was not an earthly crown worn by monarchs, a symbol of their power and dignity. Instead, He wore a crown of thorns with much suffering, leading up to his crucifixion. It was at a governor's palace; the soldiers made the crown out of thorny branches which cut into Jesus' head. As has been described, "And they didn't set this 'crown' lightly on Jesus' head, but whacked him on top of it with the 'reed,' the mock sceptre they had put in his hand, whereby they drove the sharp points of the thorns into (his head), which must have given him inexpressible pain and torture." Here was the "King of the Jews" being beaten, spat upon, and insulted by the Roman soldiers for our eternity. The crown of thorns was one of the instruments employed by Jesus' captors to cause Jesus pain, and at the same time to mock His claim of authority. The crown of thorns was their final mockery: taking a symbol of royalty and majesty in a crown, and turning it into something painful and degrading.

The crown of thorns is a reminder that Jesus was, and is, indeed a king. One day, the entire universe will bow to Jesus as the "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16). He also took on the suffering servant who was willing to endure the pain, the insults, and the shame; all on our account. All these is because of His great love for us.

Reflection: The thorns of His crown were driven deep into His scalp. His body screamed in anguish yet He never uttered a word against His attackers. Jesus humbly submitted to unbelievable abuse out of love for not only his attackers, but also for the whole world.

Pray for

- God's restoration on those who suffer all forms of abuses.
- God's healing on all kinds of sicknesses and oppressions.
- God's protection on the MOH and front-liners against Covid-19. God's comfort on those who lost their family members to Covid-19.
- Wisdom for our government to navigate the battle against the spread of the pandemic.

"When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom." – John 19:23

Are you in the middle of some suffering? It could be a humiliating incident where you were powerless and unable to protect yourself, and it has left you vulnerable. The scar of bitterness robs you of the peace and the ability of loving again. You are not alone. Jesus knows suffering intimately and He will never, ever leave you. The Prince of Peace was not only inflicted with physical pain but was also subjected to public humiliation. Crucifixion was more than a very slow and painful death, it was intended to humiliate at all costs. The soldiers divided Jesus' garments among themselves. Each soldier took a portion of clothing and only left the undergarment for Him. His human dignity was stripped when His clothes were taken at the crucifixion.

Why would the Prince of Peace have to endure such anguish and humiliation? It was love that drove Him to take that path of suffering. Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser made this deep reflection: "In the crucifixion, Jesus was humiliated, shamed, brutalized. That pain stretched his heart to a great depth. But that new space did not fill in with bitterness and anger. It filled in instead with a depth of empathy and forgiveness that we have yet to fully understand." Our hearts may not have the space for love, but if we allow His love to melt our hearts, there will be space for grace to those who brought pain to our soul.

Reflection: Jesus' crucifixion stretched his heart and made it huge in empathy, grace and forgiveness. Will you allow Him to make space in your heart, to experience total freedom?

Pray for

- God's grace to forgive those who have brought pain to our soul.
- God's justice to defend the powerless and those without a voice in society.
- The Prince of Peace to reign over the affairs of our nation.
- God to bless our King. Wisdom for our Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Speakers of Parliament, Senators and Menteri-menteri Besar.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." – Luke 23:34

While Jesus was hanging on the cross, there were two other criminals who were also crucified - one on his right and one on his left. The criminals had committed serious crimes and deserved a just sentence. One of them reviled the Son of God who could not save Himself. Those who passed by hurled insults at Him and the soldiers mocked Him. Jesus did not waste His time defending Himself; He saw that they would be lost in eternity and had compassion on them. Jesus prayed for them and sought His Father's forgiveness for them. The scene was one of the most touching narratives in the entire Bible. The Father needed only look to where Jesus was praying on the cross. He was under God's wrath for the penalty of our sins. In spite of His excruciating physical, emotional and spiritual agony at the cross, Jesus still expressed the divine nature of His love for those who wronged Him. He made the effort to repress His pain and answered the needs of a sinner. He promised one of the criminals who had come to repentance that, on that very day, he would be with Jesus in Paradise. The big prayer spoken by Jesus, "Father forgive them" brought the change in one of the criminals' heart.

What is important is the criminal received forgiveness and hope when moments before, that criminal had absolutely no hope. This is the beauty of Christ; He takes the most hopeless situation and offers the very opposite - forgiveness and abundant life.

Reflection: "Jesus never strayed from His objective which was, to teach us unconditional love and acceptance of those whom we esteem not worthy in our eyes. God meets all scandals of human fallenness... at the cross of Jesus – where forgiveness freely flows" – Rev Edmund Chan.

Pray for

- Reconciliation and forgiveness in broken relationships.
- Families - protection, strength, and unity.
- Increase in compassion for lost souls.
- God's help on all the churches in Malaysia to advance the gospel.

HE UNDERSTANDS OUR DARKEST MOMENTS

Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
- Matthew 27:46.

"The most gut-wrenching cry of loneliness in history didn't come from a widow or a patient. It came from a hill, from a cross, from a Messiah."- Max Lucado. There was the darkness that came over the whole land of Jerusalem at the ninth hour (3.00 pm) and Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It was an anguished soul crying out of loneliness and separation from His Father. This is the deepest and darkest part of Jesus' suffering as it involved spiritual forsakenness, spiritual wrath from the Father that occurred deep down in the very Godhead itself. The judgment was to have God the Father pour out His wrath; instead of pouring it out on us, God poured it out on His Son. The Father gave His Son up, to suffer the weight and judgement of our sins. However, it involved a kind of abandonment momentarily "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus' soul also had to endure the punishment of our sins. His abandonment paved the way for our adoption into God's Kingdom.

Reflection: Jesus understands not only our bodily and spiritual suffering but He also understands our feelings of abandonment. He was like us in all things, except that He was without sin. We can trust Him to journey us out of all the dark moments in life.

Pray for

- God's strength on those who are experiencing dark moments in life. They will come out stronger, renewed and will find a new purpose in life.
- The church of God to reach out with compassion and empathy to the poor, homeless, orphans, marginalized, migrants and refugees in our nation.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay." – Matthew 28:5-6

Jesus was arrested, tried, and found guilty of claiming to be a king. He was hung on a cross between two robbers. After his death, Jesus' body was wrapped in linen cloths and placed in a tomb with a large stone rolled across the opening. On the third day, an early Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and another Mary came to the tomb and found it empty. Sitting on the rolled away stone was an angel of the Lord who told them not to be afraid because Jesus had risen. The resurrection was a literal and physical raising of Jesus' body from the dead. As the women left to tell the disciples, Jesus met them and showed them his nail-pierced hands and that truly, He had resurrected. The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith. Without the resurrection, belief in God's saving grace through Jesus is destroyed. When Jesus rose from the dead, He confirmed His identity as the Son of God and His work of atonement, redemption, reconciliation, and salvation. What does Jesus' resurrection mean for us today? It means there is hope and we are alive in Him.

Reflection: Christ triumphed over sin and death by being physically resurrected, so that all who trust in Him are raised to new life and everlasting life in the world to come. Death does not have the last word. Jesus lives. Life is stronger than death.

Pray for

- Believers to walk in the resurrected life.
- Salvation of our loved ones and our communities.
- The church of Jesus Christ – continuously dynamic and spirit-filled.



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