

February 2023 (A Note From Seth)

Salem Family,

This past Sunday we started the book of Ruth, where the opening verses are filled with loss and emptiness. A reality that many of us are all too familiar with. And yet the book is a beautiful reminder not just of our need for salvation, but that we have a Savior in Jesus. Today is known to many as Ash Wednesday, which starts a season of anticipation and preparation, including 40 Days of Prayer.

As we move towards **Good Friday**, I'm reminded of the moment when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). It's like he looked to the south, gazing towards the far-off city, reflecting on his purpose and intent to fulfill his mission. Later in the story, Jesus finally makes entrance to the city in his triumphal entry (this is how we'll connect the end of Ruth on Palm Sunday). As you read the gospels the story begins to crescendo as we know what is coming. But Jesus' mission didn't start in that moment. It started when he chose, of his own will, to come to humanity. It's something we should be mindful of – that Jesus came to die. The book of Judges points very clearly to the fact that in the absence of a king, humanity will take the crown upon themselves. We each will do what is right in our own eyes. That's why Jesus came. Ashes are a reminder that from dust we came and to dust we will return (you may remember that in Hebrew the word ground is *adamah*, which is where *Adam* gets his name from - see also Genesis 3:19). I don't know about you, but that's a humbling reminder. In connection to the opening verses of Ruth, we find that these things line up rather perfectly. We are reminded of the tension between our strength and our frailty. Our life and our mortality. Our sin and our hope. We are reminded of our *struggles*.

As we move towards **Easter**, we are also reminded that Jesus didn't come just to die, but to bring us new life through the resurrection. And so, we are reminded that we are not like those who grieve without hope (1 Thess. 4:13). Life is very much present to us right now. We long for renewal. We long for revitalization. We long to see God creating fresh possibilities. So, while we are reminded of our struggles, we are also reminded of our need and ability to *struggle well*.

As we move towards both **Good Friday and Easter**, like Jesus our Savior, we can set our own face towards the coming season. How can you do that? Let me safely and humbly suggest two simple things: **First**, that less is more. I encourage you to dive into your Ruth companion journal. Use it for your Cave and Table time. Do it alone, with family and friends, and especially with your life group (if you're not already in a life group – I suggest finding out more!). The more you immerse yourself in Ruth and meditate on it the more it will point you to

Jesus. **Second**, is prayer. This past spring, we did a series in Jeremiah called *For this City (Jeremiah 29:7)*, in which we prayed for different people groups every week. While we can struggle well, many are entrenched in struggle without Jesus and without hope. What if as an entire church of people and households, we all weekly prayed for the salvation of a people group leading into Easter? And what if we all humbly held the disposition listed in the prayer below?

It's my prayer that the Spirit work in us, pointing each of us to Jesus in the midst of our struggles, while at the same time working through us to point others to Jesus who don't yet know him. Like winter giving way to spring, we can move from grief to grace.

In anticipation of celebration,

Seth Dunham
Senior Pastor

40 Days of Prayer

Week 1 – Pray daily for students/universities and teachers/professors

Week 2 – Pray daily for New Americans and refugee families

Week 3 – Pray daily for city officials and workers

Week 4 – Pray daily for local business owners and places you frequently visit

Week 5 – Pray daily for your neighborhood (live), business (work), recreation
(play)

Week 6 – Pray daily for specific names of people God has given you influence
with

The Disciplemaker's Prayer (Cadre Ministries)

Dt. 6:1-9, Mark 3:13-14; 12:30-31, Mt. 28:18-20, John 17:20, Acts 1:8, 1 Cor.
4:16-17

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for giving me a disciplemaking way of life in Christ Jesus. As I go through every part of this day, help me to love You and love the people who cross my path—starting with my family.

Don't let me miss the adventures You are sending my way to live and speak the Good News about Jesus today. Draw my heart to You and to specific people You want me to pull close for Jesus-like disciplemaking friendships.

By Your Word and Spirit, transform me into a follower of Jesus who loves You, loves people, and makes disciples—who make more disciples, ad infinitum.

-In Jesus' name, amen.