

Animate Talk 3 – Holding up Your Body

Good morning. So good to see all of you here this morning. We are in the middle of this Animate series. Animate means to breathe life into something else and we're looking at ways that we can open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit to breathe life into our relationship with God and therefore in our relationship with ourselves and with every other person and all the things that God's called us to be. I am really starting to like this intro, it kinds of sets the stage. I really like Shauna doing the announcements more than me; she's better at them, she's more succinct and she's a lot cuter, would you agree with that? *Applause* Not so enthusiastically! You're supposed to go 'no Greg you're cute really'. But it's kind of nice, a nice pattern.

We're doing a number of things different during this series; you've noticed the artwork that's out there, we've got this prayer chapel and if at anytime while I'm speaking you just decide that this is just a little too boring and you want to go back and pray, feel free to do that. I may be offended but so what! They have stations back there and you can come before the service and pray or after the service and pray. I invite you to be part of the Animate online community at Woodland Hills Bridge, get online and talk with others who are sharing their experiences with this series that we're a part of. Just some very cool things that are going on.

It's all about seeing the Lord, encountering the Lord, hearing the Lord, experiencing the Lord in the inner sanctum. This very unique place that God has put in our heart and mind to encounter Him. What we today call the imagination. So we're looking at how to open up our imagination and have that be used by God in our personal encounters with God and in our reading of scripture and in our times of worship. It is powerful, it is powerful. For the first two weeks we've looked at foundational issues, so we examined some of the biblical foundation for imaginative prayer or spirituality, what in the church tradition was called cataphatic spirituality. And we looked at how people in church history have understood the power of praying and interacting with God where you open up your imagination for the Holy Spirit to sanctify your imagination and encounter the Lord. We've even looked at how neuroscience has confirmed that we think with all five senses; we don't think with abstract information as many people think but rather we think by replicating our experience on the inside. So the way we think, the way we're wired is such that imaginative spirituality is going to have power in our lives.

Now what we're going to do, starting this morning and for the next two weeks after this is going to be applying all of that, to really what is the centre of the Kingdom. The centre of the Kingdom is the call to love God with all of our heart, mind, body, soul and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. So we're going to look at what it means to apply cataphatic or imaginative spirituality to our relationship with God, and then to our relationship to ourselves, next week and then to our relationship with others, the week after that. I encourage you to be a part of that.

We're entitling this message 'Holding up Your Body', speaking to Jesus, because as we're going to see here, our relationship with God is to be centred on the body of Christ; the physicality of Jesus, the incarnation of God. So it's all about using our inner sanctum to encounter Christ as the living, true, accurate representation of God; the incarnation of God.

To start I want to go to Genesis chapter 3. Let's go back to the beginning, when the problems on the planet first began, back in the garden. We read, starting in Genesis 3 *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman 'Did God really say you must not eat of any tree in the garden?'"*. Note already there's a spin there; *'did God not say you're not supposed to eat of any tree in the garden?'*. The woman corrects him and says *'no, we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say 'you must not eat from the tree, that one tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it or you will die'.* *'You will not certainly die' the serpent said to the woman. Here's the real deal, God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, you will be like God, knowing good and evil'. When the woman saw the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it". It's when the troubles first began.*

Pray with me here for a moment.

Father, I thank you for every person in this auditorium and every person who is pod casting or watching television, and Lord I pray, we together pray that You would open up our minds and hearts to receive deeply the truth of Your word. That You would invade our lives into the inner nook and cranny, those secret places, even the dark places, and Lord would You be in the process, Holy Spirit be in the process, of ridding out of

our lives any element of our mental picture of You that is not consistent with the truth of who You are. Free Your people. Establish Your Kingdom in our hearts and minds, we pray in Jesus' name. All God's people said...

Ok, I want us to notice this pattern here, this episode which I just think is so profound. It starts with a lie, a lie about God. The first thing the enemy does, as he's trying to co-opt humanity into his war with God, that's what's going on here, the first thing he does is implant a lie in Eve's mind. God had placed that tree in the middle of the garden as a loving 'no trespassing' sign. Saying 'Eve, listen, Adam and Eve don't try to be like me in terms of what you think you know, what you can judge, just walk in my ways, and love like I love but don't try to judge as I judge'; it's a 'no trespassing' sign. But the enemy made it look like God was threatened by that tree. The enemy made it look like God was this pathetic deity who was threatened by Eve's potential, in fact the enemy made it look like God got to be God; knowing good and evil, by eating from that tree, as though the tree was really God as though God was afraid of the competition. So instead of this outrageously loving, gracious God, we have a pathetic, threatened deity. So there's this lie about God.

Following that there comes this temptation, where now Eve looks at the tree and all of a sudden this 'no trespassing' sign looks desirable, looks good, she wants it bad. Following that comes sin, based on a temptation which is itself based on the lie of the enemy, she reaches out grabs the tree and disobeys God and that's where the gulf between us and God first began. This is the structure of all sin, and what I want us to see is that it all goes back to; hangs on, then and now, it hangs on our picture of God. Is the picture of God you have in your mind accurate or not? To the degree that its not, your life is going to be affected, every area of your life is going to be affected and God won't be reigning in your life. It all goes back to your representation of God.

Now to really get in on this, and understand how crucial this is; the topic we're talking about this morning is as foundational, as important as anything could be, I want us to look at God's original design. Here's what God intends for human beings. God is the fullness of life, the fullness of love, the fullness of beauty, the fullness of all that's good. He wants to overflow in the fullness of his life towards us and then have us overflow, like a cup running over, back to God and then towards our neighbour as ourselves. He creates us with this inner non-negotiable need, we need, like lungs need air we need, like our body needs food, we need, to receive life from God, which is worth. We need to experience fullness of life, fullness of worth, fullness of significance, everyone needs to feel important, we need to feel like we're loved, we need to feel like we're secure, those aren't carnal needs, those are what it means to be human. God creates us with those needs; non-negotiable needs that will never go away, so that He can overflow with the abundance of His life and meet those needs, fill us up, more than fill us up, have us overflow so now we then feedback to God, reflect back to God, praise and worship and adoration. We love ourselves and we love our neighbour as ourselves. To the degree that this is happening, this original plan of God's is happening; God is reigning, to the degree that this is happening we are the dome over which God reigns. This is the Kingdom of God. God intended us to live life out of a centre of celebration, expressing the glory of a fullness that we get, not from the world, but that we get from Him and therefore share with the world. That's how life is to be lived as a dance with the Triune God.

Here's the enemy's design, it's the opposite of this. The enemy lies and that's what we just read in Genesis 3, lies about who God is. Now God is always God, God is always love, God is always overflowing, so the lie doesn't affect who God is, but it does affect how we view God, and when our picture of God is less than accurate, when its not reflective of the beauty that He is, we no longer trust God for that source of life. You see the need in our heart, in our innermost being doesn't go away, we still crave unsurpassable worth and significance and security, but now we're not going to God to get it, so we start sucking air, we start being empty, we start feeling this inner futility. If we're not getting that life and significance and security from God, because of a misconception of God that's going on in our mind, we don't trust Him to be the absolute source of our life, we now try to get it from other sources. If I'm not getting my life from God, I'll try to get it from you or I'll try to get it from some other achievement I have...people try to get their life; that's what idolatry is all about; we try to suck life and worth and significance and security of how we look or how people think about us or how big our house is or how big our car is or how much power we have or what our reputation might be. The all-time great idol is religion; we try to suck life and significance and worthwhileness and security from how right our beliefs are, as opposed to everyone who's wrong and who righteous our behaviour is as opposed to all the sinners. We get life from judging others, the most common idol in the book. But when we're not getting fullness of life from God, we've got to be trying to get it from other sources and so life now

instead of being a celebration from the inside out, it now becomes desperation, where our centre is desperate and we're trying to feed ourselves to get the worth and the life and the significance and the security that God wants to give us for free. This is what Paul calls 'life in the flesh', its life in idolatry and it is **inevitable** if we're not getting our life from God. You may hate your idolatry, you may hate how much importance you put on your appearance and how much importance you put on what people think about you, you may feel the bondage of that, because it is bondage, but you will not be able to stop. Not unless you're getting your life from Christ. You can shame yourself, have all the oughts and the shoulds and the got to dos in the world, but, it may trade your idolatry, it may transition your idolatry to something else, but you're still be an idolater, its inevitable. If we're not getting our life from God, we've got to get it from other sources.

Everything hangs on our seeing God as being the beautiful God that He is, and trusting Him to meet the core needs in our lives; trusting Him to be the source of our self esteem, the source of our feeling fully alive, the source of our feeling loved and the source of our feeling secure. You will be as healthy as your picture of God is accurate, you will be as unhealthy as your picture of God is inaccurate. The enemy has blinded us, we saw this last week, for aeons the enemy has blinded our minds and our hearts so we cannot see the true God. It started in Genesis 3. One of the main reasons, the foundational reasons, why Jesus came into the world as a human being was to reveal to us the truth of who God really is. After aeons of being under this cloud that's darkened our capacity to see the sun, Jesus breaks through the cloud as it were and reveals to us clearly and unambiguously who God is, because only when we see clearly and unambiguously the truth of who God is will we be able to return to that trusting relationship, life giving relationship that God always designed for us. This theme goes on over and over again throughout the New Testament. Jesus is called, for example, 'the Truth', the word 'truth' in Greek is 'alethea' comes from the combination of two words 'a', which means 'not' and 'lanthanos' which means 'to cover'. So Jesus is the 'not covered' God. He is God unveiled. After aeons of having the truth about God veiled, Jesus comes and discloses the reality of who God is. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Bible says. The Way, the Truth, the uncoveredness and the Life. He is the Way, because He's the Truth, He's the Life because He's the Truth, because when we see who God truly is, now we can begin to get our life from Him. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It says elsewhere 'you will know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free', that means you shall know the uncoveredness and the uncoveredness shall set you free. When you see God for who He really is; everything hangs on our picture of God. When you see God for who He truly is it sets you free. Why? Because when you see who God truly is, and begin to relate to God as He truly is and begin to trust God as your source of life, you now begin to experience the life you were created for and the more you experience it from God, the less you need to be trying to experience it from other sources, you are set free. When you're reconnected with who God is you don't need to be obsessing about how you look and how you perform and what you own and how much power you have and what your reputation is, or how right you are and how wrong everyone else is, or how you're holier than somebody else, you can begin to let go of that. You are free from the idolatry of religion and idolatry of reputation and the idolatry of possessions or whatever; you are free. Why? Because you're getting your life from the one true source of life you shall know the truth – 'alatheia' – uncovered God and that will set you free.

Everything hangs on our picture of God, that theme is found in other ways in the New Testament, for example the Bible says that Jesus is the Word of God; Logos. It means that when God expresses Himself it looks like Jesus Christ. He is the expression of God. The Bible says that Jesus is the image of God – iconos – He is the icon of God. When God makes Himself into an icon of form and image it looks like Jesus Christ. Everything hangs on our locking this in and making Jesus our sole source of information about who God truly is.

It says in John 1: 18, this theme gets played out again 'no one has ever seen God' He is spirit, He is invisible, 'but, the one and only Son, who is Himself God, and is closest relationship with the Father, He has made Him known'. What the author is saying here is that apart from Jesus Christ, the unveiledness of God, apart from Jesus Christ, God is veiled, God is invisible, God is not known, but in Jesus Christ God has become a human being, the Word has become flesh and now we see and experience the truth of who God is. This is why Jesus says 'if you see me, you see the Father. Why then are you asking 'show us the Father'? If you see me you see the Father'. Don't go looking for the Father over here, over there, up there down there or whatever, keep your eyes fixed on me, why? Because I am the truth about what God is really like. In fact in Matthew 11 He goes so far as to say that no one knows the Father except the Son and whoever the Son reveals Him. Now think about that statement. This blows sky high the sort of silliness that we have a lot of today, where people are going around saying 'Jesus is a wise teacher, He is ascended master, He is the greatest human being that ever lived'. If here Jesus is claiming, and making a singular claim that of all the people that have ever lived and shall live, none of them know God except for Him, that's not the way a good,

wise normal human being talks folks. What would you think about me if I were to say right now 'you know what, no one has ever known God, you don't know God and no one ever will know God except for me, and whoever I want to show God to. It's a little bit arrogant, unless its true, but I'm here to tell you that its true because He is Himself God. He is the revelation of God. Note how universal this claim is; no one has ever really known God, that encompasses all other people. You can glimpses for sure, glimpses of God in this holy book and that statement, and nature over here and whatever, you find glimpses of God but you don't see the truth of God unambiguously revealed, except in the person of Jesus Christ. This even includes Old Testament authors – no one has really known God except for the Son. You find this made exclusively in Hebrews, chapter 1. It says, 'in the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets, at many times and in various ways' it was all good, all good, 'but in these last days', which simply means in this last epic, He has spoken to us by His Son whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom also He made the universe.' God has revealed Himself in various ways at various times through the medium of various people, and that's good, and in so far as that revelation is true it looks like, resembles, what God looks like when He shows up as Jesus Christ. You can see God reflected in various ways in nature and in wonderful sunsets, but you see nature is also corrupted and so you find a lot of stuff in nature that doesn't unambiguously reflect the glory of God and the two are mixed up. So you can appreciate the beauty of nature, but don't go basing your picture of God on nature and you see God reflected through the prophets and apostles and various wise things that people have said, that's wonderful, but it's also mixed up with a lot of other stuff. God is constantly capitulating to the fallenness of the world. He gets involved in stuff that He Himself hates. You know He gets mixed up with a lot of junk there, it just shows you how gracious God is that He's willing to mix Himself up with all of our ungodly violence and whatever. So you can see glimpses of God in the Old Testament and elsewhere and to that degree it looks like Jesus, but you also find a lot of other stuff there that just is not God's heart and not God's ideal, so the author of Hebrews says here, 'Jesus alone, the Son alone is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of the Father's hupostasis' Everyone say 'hupostasis'. Now you know Greek! Hupostasis is the essence of the Father's heart, this isn't just a reflection of one aspect of God, if you want to know God's hupostasis you've got to look at the Son, Jesus Christ. He is the one and only accurate self portrait of the Father's hupostasis. He is the only one who gives us the true picture of God's heart, not just an aspect of God here or there, the essence of God is revealed in the Son, the essence of God is revealed on Calvary, where God Himself suffers a forsaken human death, for the sake of sinners such as you or I. We've got to lock it in.

Here God is restoring the pipeline, the trust that is necessary for us to be going to God and relying on Him to get all of our sense of worth and significance and value and security. To trust God for the core of our identity and in so far as we do that, only in so far as we do that, will we be receiving the fullness of life and now all that we do expresses what we already have, rather than this demonic thing where all that we do is trying to get something we don't have. The other thing is that, knowing about this, as we've seen in this series, knowing about this, having this information that's not going to do it. You can know all the information I just gave you, and agree with all the information I just gave you, and you should, because its all true, but that itself is not going to give you fullness of life. Information never results in transformation, rather what needs to happen on the basis of that information, now we have to go a step further and ask the Holy Spirit to make it real to us. So we really encounter, a la 2 Corinthians 3, 17-18 as we saw last week and the week before that, we encounter, we behold, we experience the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is one thing for me to say well God is revealed in Jesus Christ, its another thing for me to experience the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Its one thing for me to know that God is love, but it's a whole other for me to experience in the core of my being, the love of God towards me expressed on Calvary in ways that impact my being. Its as we experience God that we're transformed from one degree of glory to another. Its got to be enfleshed, its got to be embodied, its got to become concrete. The place where that happens, as we've said in the first two weeks, is what the church tradition has always called the 'Inner Sanctum', what Paul calls the heart and mind, the place where the things of the Spirit become embodied, concrete, tangible, experiential and therefore transforming.

So it looks a little bit like this, here's one example. I referred to this episode in a book that I wrote with Called 'Escaping the Matrix' a chapter there about our picture of God and there's a young lady I'll call Jill, and she was a student at When I was teaching there and Jill came up to me one time after a chapel and she said to me... she asked me this question; "I notice that when you talk about Jesus and the Bible and that stuff, you get really excited, you seem to be really passionate. Is that just part of your schtick? It isn't it?". I said "I'm not sure I know exactly what you mean. Do you mean am I just faking this as part of my job?" she says "well I won't tell anybody, that's what's going on isn't it?" Now what happens here is that Jill actually had no passion for God. She believed in Jesus, she believed in God, believed in the Bible, believed everything, but she had no passion about it. She was just flat about it and since we always tend to ascribe to others our own

motivation, and since if she were acting like me, she would have been faking it, she assumed I must be faking it. I reassured her that “no, this comes out of my inner being, in fact I have trouble fathoming how a person can really believe that God is, who God says He is, and Jesus is who He says He is and how a person can know what God’s up to in this world, and know the value that they have for God and how much God loves them and not get excited about it! If you can’t get excited about that then what can you possibly get excited over! This is the most mind blowing, fantastic stuff in the world! So what I’m wondering is why don’t you experience this?” What I know is that all of our emotions are associated with the representations in our mind. We talked about that in the first two weeks. The heart and mind aren’t two different things they’re two sides of the same coin. So if Jill doesn’t have passion towards God, what I know even before I ask any other questions, is that she’s got a picture of God that is boring, at best. Anybody who saw and experienced what she experienced in her mind when she thinks about God, would be devoid of passion. Therefore she wouldn’t be going to God to trust God and to receive her whole source of life, so there’s got to be other ways that she tries to get life. And in her case, and she knew exactly what this was, she was obsessed with her appearance. She was a real attractive young lady and she put all sorts of time and energy and money and obsession into how she looked, everything had to be perfect, she spent so much time and energy on that. Which is what you’d expect, we’ve all got to get life, we’ve got to feel significant, got to find something that works for us, she’s good looking so she’s going to work it, as a way of feeling good about herself and feeling fully alive. The reason she needs to do that is that she’s not getting it from God. I asked Jill, ‘share with me your picture of God, I want to know really what’s going on in your head’. So she proceeded to tell me that God is omnipresent, God is omniscient, God is omni-benevolent, God is all-powerful. You know here are the moral attributes of God and here are the metaphysical attributes of God, and she was in my theology class, so all of her answers were absolutely correct (laughter). She was orthodox to the core, oh yeah. But what you believe is not really the issue, it’s what is actually going on in your head that is the issue. So I said “Jill, I’m not interested in the information that you know, I’m interested in what is actually going on when you think about God.” Now it took a while because most people aren’t aware that they think in images, they’re not aware that all thought is imagination. They think they’re thinking with information but they’re not. So I helped Jill to start to get in touch with how she actually does God in her mind, and over time she was able to get this. She finally got an image and the image was of herself standing at the edge of a cliff or canyon and Jesus was way on the other side of this canyon. It was like the Grand Canyon and about a mile away on the other side was Jesus and Jesus was looking in the other direction, off interested in something else. This is how she was, one of the ways she was representing Jesus. Now anybody who saw that would not be very excited about Jesus. She feels distant, she feels unloved, she feels uninteresting, Jesus is somewhere out there in outer space and you can’t get excited about that, that’s not surprising. She’s not trusting God for fullness of life. Her representation is such that it would provoke an entirely different kind of emotion. So I said to Jill “ I know that that feels right, it feels true, but you believe the Bible right? You believe Jesus, so you know that Jesus is the Word of God, the image of God, the form of God, the truth and Jesus is not looking off somewhere else, and Jesus is not a mile away, Jesus rather has died for you, He loves you, He’s with you, He’s in You. So would you agree with me that this picture that you have in your head is not right?” And she goes well “Yeh I agree with that, but it feels true”. I go “I know it feels true because you’ve always done it! Whatever you’ve done for a long time is going to feel right but it’s not. Will you work with me and the Holy Spirit and invite the Holy Spirit in here to give you a true picture of who Jesus is?”. To make a long story short, what happened was that she opened up her inner sanctum to the Lord to begin to work there and I did a little bit of directing to try to bring thoughts captive to Christ. At one point she sees Jesus turn around on the other side of the Grand Canyon and actually begin to wave to her. She was blown away; ‘he notices me, he notices me’. That already changed a great deal but there’s still this gap and I began to speak into her life truths about what the Bible says about her but now applied to her personally. I said ‘Jill can you hear the Lord shouting ‘I love you with an everlasting love, I will never leave you or forsake you? You are the bride who ravishes my heart. You are the apple of my eye. I dance over you, I delight in you, I count it a joy to die for you’. As I spoke those words into her the gap began to close and He gets closer and closer and closer. She is taking every thought captive to the true Christ. And as the gap gets closer and closer, the emotions begin to change. Eventually they are right up against each other, there is a little crack in the ground separating them and Jesus waves his hand and now there is no crack at all, because the truth is, that once we were far off, once we were alienated from God, but we are no longer – there is no longer any gulf, there is no longer any gap (applause) there is no longer any wall, it has been bridged and Jesus embraces her and begins to shower on her the love, all the stuff that was in the Bible - she’s not making this up. This is all the truth that He has already said about her in scripture, but now it’s concrete, now it’s tangible and for the first time, as far as I knew in this young lady’s life, she is experiencing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. You know what? She is beginning to fall in love with Jesus. This is a God that’s worth getting passionate about. The creator of the universe loves me likes this? Did this for me? This is a God I can fall in love with, this is a God I can trust my inner essence to. And as that begins to happen, at it took a while, I mean folks, the Bible says

to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, its not a magical moment where all of a sudden everything changes – that hardly ever happens. It is an act of discipleship where we have to daily take thought captive to Christ. The patterns in our life are strong, and they go on auto-pilot and so it takes time, but over time what happened with Jill was, the more she fell in love with Jesus Christ and spent time just enjoying being in His presence, in ways that were concrete, vivid – hearing what He said, seeing who He is, experiencing His hug, as that got restored, she got life from Him, her sense of worth and value was gotten from Him. Which means she didn't have to get it from how pretty she was, or how sexy she was, or who was noticing her. She still struggled with that a little bit; being obsessed about this, that and the other thing, but now she was empowered to begin to walk away from it. Whom the Son sets free is free indeed and Jill is in the process of being set free. Amen.

So it all hangs on ... Jill could try to not care so much about her hair, or not care so much about her appearance or whatever, but I guarantee you, even if that did work because someone shamed her enough to stop doing it, she would just change obsessions. She would just become really religious and start judging people for how they are too preoccupied with their looks or something. You see the only way to be free is to get all of our life and worth and value from God and that means we've got to lock it in, lock it in. The Bible says over and over, fix your eyes on Jesus, fix your eyes on Jesus, fix your mind and heart on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Spend time doing that.

Now there's another way that we can encounter the living Lord in concrete, experiential and transforming ways and that is as St Ignatius in the sixteenth century saw so well, it's by encountering the Lord in scripture. The Bible says the Word is living and active, its not a dead book, its sharper than any two edged sword. It comes alive when God animates it, breathes life into it. And so we can enter into the narrative of the gospels with all five senses and when we do that its one of the ways that God brings the living Lord to us. What I want to do, and there are lots of exercises like this in the booklet, the Animate booklet, I want to end this message by spending five/six minutes doing that right here. We are going to encounter the Lord in the narrative of the gospels. We are going to be leading a meditation on the Garden of Gethsemane story, where Jesus is in the garden praying before He's going to be brought to trial and executed. His disciples are with Him, but His disciples keep falling asleep. We've asked Jon Padden, who did the CD for the Animate series, to play a little background music, because music is one of the ways that God can use to melt our hearts and make us open and Terri's going to read a reflection she wrote. She's the author of the material in the Animate booklet and so she has this narrative on the Garden of Gethsemane. This story is a story where Jesus invites us in. Into the most intimate place of His humanity; invites us to share in His fear, and in His suffering, His agony. It is also a story that communicates that Jesus understands perfectly what we are going through when we suffer and have doubts and have fears and are in agony. It is also a narrative that communicates the truth that we often fall asleep on God and aren't there when God needs us. It's a story that reflects the character of God and so we want to enter into this story with all five senses. Terri will be reading the story, the narrative, from the perspective of Peter and so you might want to be asking yourself the question as she's reading this – what is Peter seeing? What is Peter hearing? What is Peter sensing? Or maybe the Holy Spirit will lead you to be experiencing this narrative from your own perspective as you watch Jesus and the disciples – the Holy Spirit will lead you. I just encourage us to enter this with all five senses, to shut out everything else and let the Lord encounter us. Terri will pause on occasion as she's reading this and use those times of pause to just ask the question, what do I see? What do I hear? What do I sense? How is the Spirit leading us, and watch how He reveals dimensions of God's character and love as we encounter Him in Scripture.

So Holy Spirit we surrender this next period of time to You and ask that You would be present here and make this real in our life in transforming ways. Bring us the real Jesus. Amen.

The heat of the desert is giving way to a biting cold as evening descends. Peter wraps his clothing tighter around him as he approaches the garden with Jesus and James and John. They are Jesus' closest friends, but he finds no comfort or pride in that now. They've just come from the Passover meal and the words of Jesus are echoing in his mind. Words like, 'death' and 'betrayal' and 'before this day is ended, you will deny me three times'. The taste of the bread is still in his mouth and it tastes like crushed dreams and disappointed hopes. This is not what he expected when they entered the city on a path of palm branches to the shouts of 'Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'.

The darkness of the olive grove is heavy around them and the narrow trunks provide no place to rest. Jesus whispers 'my soul is crushed with grief to the point of death, sit here while I go and pray'. Something in Jesus' voice and eyes is startling. Is that fear? How can Jesus be afraid? The knowledge of it shoots through Peter's heart like an arrow and he searches the faces of his friends for something more familiar than this but there's only terror and confusion. He feels the strength draining from his limbs like water as he watches the one he loves walk a little distance from them and fall to His knees.

He hears little ribbons of Jesus' prayer. He hears Him praying that if it were possible the awful hour awaiting Him would pass Him by, that the cup of suffering would be taken away and then he hears the words 'Yet I want Your will to be done, not mine.'

Peter's eyes feel like heavy wooden doors. His head is pounding and his thoughts are impossible to catch. Against his will he drifts into a fitful sleep, with vivid and tormenting dreams.

Peter wakes to Jesus standing over him, shaking him gently with searching eyes. 'Couldn't you stay awake for even one hour? Keep me company and pray with me a little while so you won't be tempted. I know your spirit is strong but your body's weak'. Even here, in Peter's first betrayal, Jesus is his friend, caring for him, watching out for him. A stab of regret goes through Peter and he shakes off the tangled cobwebs of sleep. Jesus goes to pray again. The same words, the same groaning, the same requests going up to a silent heaven; His body is shaking and His words come in sobs. His clothing is drenched and clinging to Him. It appears strangely dark; it's too much to take in, too much for Peter to grasp. Fatigue and confusion descend on him like a curtain and he falls asleep again.

Once more Jesus shakes Peter and pleads with Him 'Stay awake with me Peter, I don't want to be alone. Please pray with me.' Peter lifts himself up and sees that Jesus' clothing is soaked with blood but there are no wounds to make sense of this. Then he sees the beads of sweat, tinged dark red across His face. Then he understands and this knowledge comes with the terrifying certainty that Jesus is actually going to die. Peter and James and John promised to stay awake and they huddle together for warmth as Jesus goes one last time to pray.

When Peter wakes the third time, his heart sinks with the knowledge that he has already begun to deny Jesus. He hears the sound of a crowd in the distance and sees the glow of fire flickering off the leaves of the olive trees. Jesus has changed somehow. He is calmer now and He speaks the words 'look my betrayer is here'. Jesus shivers as Judas approaches and kisses the face of Jesus; the sweat and blood leaving their mark on his lips. Jesus glances at Peter and there is a kindly reassurance in His eyes as the soldiers lay their hands on Him.

Where are you in this story? What is Jesus' invitation to you?

Greg

Thank you Lord for putting Yourself in a position where You were utterly alone and forsaken so that we need never feel alone or forsaken. For loving us to that degree, that you did sweat drops of blood and later be crucified and considered it joy to do so in order to spend eternity dancing with us. Thank You Lord.

God help us to see so clearly Your pure, passionate, unimprovable beauty and love towards each and every one of us individually and as a whole. Amen.

I so encourage you to take that booklet and go through the exercises and just incarnate; have the Holy Spirit incarnate the passage and watch how it animates it.

So we've talked about having these personal times with God where we envision and encounter the living Lord as He really is in the person of Jesus Christ and now we've talked about encountering Him in the narrative of scripture. There's a third way that I want to briefly allude to because we're going to do that right now as well, and that is in encountering the living Lord through worship: Individual and corporate. Here too, in the same way that we pray with all five senses as St Ignatius says, and we should read the Bible with all five senses, we should worship with all five senses. Allowing the Holy Spirit to envision the One we're singing to and what we're singing about; to incarnate concretely the material that we're worshipping with. The first song we're singing for example talks about God's love like a hurricane and we are the tree bending beneath the weight of His love. He is jealous for us because He sees how destructive the idols in our life are. Now that jealous love – He loves us like a hurricane. 'I am a tree, bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy'. His love for me, for you, for us is like a Katrina that just blows down everything in its path. We sometimes futilely say, 'God You couldn't love me like this, You can't be this beautiful, You know what I've done, You know what I struggle with, You know my shortcomings' and if we're seeing correctly, and having every thought brought captive to Christ, what we'll see is that God just blows those objections over and says 'shut up, because I am the hurricane and you're nothing but a flimsy tree' and He blows us over and the best thing we can do is be blown over by the hurricane of His love. When we can envision that concretely and experience that it goes so far beyond the information that God so loved the world – no let Him be the hurricane. So also for other lyrics; we're drowning in the ocean of His grace' – let the Holy Spirit make that real to you – drowning in the ocean of His grace. I invite you now to worship the Lord with all five senses. Stay seated for the first part of this as I call the ushers forward, we'll worship God by taking up an offering, but let's together, individually and together worship God. See the one we're singing to, and what we're singing about.

Holy Spirit come now, make this real, transform Your people by Your love and beauty. Amen.