

**March 1, 2009**

--"Alleluia" is the song of the angels. "Alleluia" is the song of heaven because heaven is all about praise. On Sunday when we come before the throne with the angels in heaven – so our song will always be "Alleluia".

--St. Augustine once said that a Christian should be "Alleluia" from head to foot. During the season of Lent we're not to be down or down-in-the-mouth but rather "Alleluia" from head to foot.

--I'm hearing the words, "New beginning, new beginning." Every Sunday is a feast of the resurrection. It's a day of rising again – a new beginning. The Lord is giving us a new start today, a new life for you have been created anew in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Lord says, "You are a new creation. I have made you, so it's time for you to rejoice and give thanks and praise my name. For I have created you in My image. And in My image you go forth that My word may go forth from your mouth; that My life may be lived through your life and My light may shine from your eyes. For you have been created in My image, and in the image of Christ you are now remade. Be alive! Says the Lord, for I have risen you. I have risen you. I have risen you now in My life. And you are now light and life to those who need most."

--We give thanks for new beginnings, Lord. The first four days of Lent are always horrible for me because I say I'm going to lay things down, and they just try to jump back in. But in Jesus' name we can cancel any plans the enemy has against us right now. Sundays are celebrations, a time to be healed and to reflect on what's happened in our lives this week. So Lord, we just pray if You want us to pick up... or lay down... start Monday.

--This morning during confession, the Lord told me that my spirit of selfishness extends to more that I thought it did. He said my selfishness includes things like not wanting to pay full price for something, wanting someone to have less and trying to keep more for myself. And it came to me that this spirit is all through our country. We want to take from those who have and give to those who don't have. And it's not out of a spirit of love that we do this but out of the spirit of envy and greed. And He convicted me of wanting to do this: take from others and not wanting to pay my way and not wanting to fulfill my end of the bargain. And He made me confess it to you.

--We pray first, God, that we sacrifice at Your altar ourselves. We give up worshipping ourselves, our own stuff, ... our own ideas of how the world should run or how our lives should go. We pray You will give us the grace to sacrifice ourselves and to kill that god of our lives.

--Somebody shared this beautiful image with me yesterday that I think is really apropos to Lent and what it would be about. She was talking about – she knew somebody in her family who was a painter. The first thing when you get out a canvas; the first thing they would do is use this white stuff called, "getso", I guess – gesso, I'm sorry – and put it all over the canvas to prepare the canvas before you could paint. And she told me that's ... I kind of feel like that's what God's doing: is just covering everything up and washing off all the other stuff so He can get ready to paint. And I think that's a lot of what Lent is about ... loving God – is that, I'm not going to pronounce it again – that stuff on our canvas so that He can ... paint His picture ... It's just such a powerful image to me of what Lent is about.

--We also were given another image similar to that in the women's Bible study at the Cove this week through Jane Garrett. And she was telling us about a painting – I'm trying to remember; I think it's a Rembrandt; I'm not positive. But it's called, "Night Watch". And when – it was called "Night Watch" because it was a very dark painting. There was only one real area of light, and you couldn't even really see that. And then, it was painted, of course, hundreds of years ago. But then (I don't think it was until the 1940s that) they discovered there was a dark varnish that covered the whole painting. And once they cleaned that off, that area of light was made, just, made so much more vibrant. And that's where the eye

is drawn to when you look at the painting. And so she compared that to sin in our lives – that we have this dark varnish on us and God comes and removes it with the blood of Jesus. So, thank you, Lord.

--Christopher received a copy of the Furman magazine this past week. In it is one the most encouraging and enlightening stories you will never hear in the news media. You all are familiar, I'm sure, with the genocide that happened in Rwanda back in the mid 90s. The Hutu and the Tutsi – the Hutu being the predominant tribe in Rwanda systematically trying to wipe out the Tutsis, and, deliberately, hundreds of thousands of people were killed. And there were death squads of Hutus that went into villages and wiped out all the Tutsis that withstood. Well, over the last couple of years, the president of Rwanda has opened up the prisons because of overcrowding and has released over 40,000 prisoners from the prisons in Rwanda including large numbers of those who were in the death squads who had been captured. And these Hutus are going back into the villages where they came from because they had nowhere else to go. But what is truly remarkable and what is so encouraging about this story is that when they are going back into these villages, many of them are going back in and asking for forgiveness. And this article that was in the Furman magazine is about a young lady who went over there, (And she is a media specialist. She is a film student – I forgot what school it is, but it's in Washington, D.C. – American University; a film student at American University getting her Master's degree there.) and a friend of hers who is a writer who also went over to Rwanda. And the two of them have put together a documentary and then a book about these reconciliations that are happening in Rwanda. And just incredible stories! If you would like to see a brief clip go to, and you might want to write this down:

[www.asweforgivemovie.com](http://www.asweforgivemovie.com) or [www.asweforgivebook.com](http://www.asweforgivebook.com).

And some of the stories just, let me give you two real quick ones:

One – She was interviewing this lady whose whole family had been wiped out, and the man who had done the killing was right there. And the young lady asked, "How can you forgive him for what he has done to you?" And she said, "How can I not forgive since God has already forgiven him?"

Another was – they wanted to get on film one of these reconciliations actually happening. And it was this lady, Chantale – who, again, her whole family had been wiped out by a man named John. And they arranged the meeting for the two of them to come together. And John was asking Chantale, "Please, please forgive me." And she was just in his face, "Why should I forgive you? What have you done that I should forgive you?" It went on for over an hour. And no reconciliation happened at that specific meeting. And then the young lady who was doing the documentary film went home, but the author who was going to be writing the book came back. And she ran into Chantale later. And she said in the book, she says that, "This looked like a woman who was at peace with herself." And she had the chance to talk to her. And what happened was Chantale had gotten to the place where she was ready to forgive John. And so they called a public forum, a public meeting, and – which is apparently the tradition in Rwanda. And John was told to ask for forgiveness again. So he got down on his knees, and he asked for forgiveness. And, in front of the whole community, she forgave him. Now he works for her. He's helping her plant. He's helping her build a house. He's helping her with all her personal chores.

It just puts us to shame in the West. We hold on to the slightest insult, the slightest hurt of any variety that comes at us. I've had people literally tell me, "I will never forgive." And these are over the simplest, stupidest, dumbest things in the world. Imagine having your whole family wiped out by machete. And then seeing this murderer being released and coming back and wanting to live in your community and being able to have the grace of God to say, "I forgive you." - and then living with that person. It puts us to shame, but it also proclaims the Gospel so proudly, so beautifully. We have so much to learn from those who are in the third world. We have so much to learn from those who are living the Gospel in ways we haven't even begun to imagine. I encourage you: go to this website. I've ordered the book for the church. As soon as the DVD is once again available, I'll get a copy of the DVD for us as well. But this is just a truly remarkable story. You'll never hear it on CNN; I guarantee it. But it is something that we all

can learn from, and it is a wonderful message for us in this season of Lent. So let us stand, and let us give thanks to God for all of His graciousness.