

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



A New Beginning

Noah's ark from Genesis 6-9

The Jesus Storybook Bible
Every story whispers his name
Written by Sally Lloyd-Jones

Time Passed and many people filled the earth. Everyone everywhere had forgotten about God and were only doing bad things all the time.

God's heart was filled with pain when he saw what had happened to the world he loved. Everywhere was disease and death and destruction -- all the things God hates most.

Now, Noah was God's friend (which was odd in those days because no one else was). Noah listened to God. He talked to God. He just loved being with God, like you do with your best friend.

"Noah," God said. "Things have gone wrong. People have filled my world with hate instead of love. They are destroying themselves...and each other...and my world. I must stop them. First, we'll build an ark." (Do you know how to build an ark? Neither did Noah. Luckily, God knew and he would show him.)

"A storm is coming," God told Noah. "But I will rescue you. I Promise. I'll send the animals to you -- ones that creep and crawl and slither and slime and gallop and hop and bound and climb. And don't forget to pack everyone's food."

The storm was going to wash away all the hate and sadness and everything that had gone wrong, and make the world clean again. God had thought up a way to keep Noah safe, but Noah would have to trust God and do exactly what God told him.

So Noah built an ark (short for very large boat).

Noah's neighbors came out to watch...and point...and laugh, because they didn't believe Noah about the boat...or the storm... or needing to be rescued. And Noah must have looked rather silly. His boat was in the desert, the desert was nowhere near the sea, and there wasn't even a cloud in the sky. Why would anyone need an umbrella, let alone a boat?

But Noah didn't mind so much what other people thought, he minded what God thought. So he just did what God told him to do.

When the ark was ready, God said, "All aboard!" and Noah's family and all the animals climbed inside. Then God shut the door.

And it started raining--for minutes, that joined up into hours, that joined up into puddles, that joined up into rivers, that joined up into lakes, that joined up into a flood that covered the whole world.

Their boat that had once seemed so big, suddenly seemed very small. But in the middle of the huge storm, in the crashing waves, in all the thunder and lightning--through it all--God was with them. And God kept them safe for 40 long days and 40 long nights.

Finally, the rain stopped. The sun came out and Noah threw open all the windows. "Hooray!" everyone shouted.

Noah sent his dove out to explore, and it wasn't long before she brought him back a fresh olive leaf. Everyone knew exactly what that meant' she had found a tree--and land! The water was going down.

At last, the boat landed quite suddenly on top of a great mountain. As soon as it was safe. God said, "Out you come!" And so they did--everyone skipping and dancing onto dry land.

The first thing Noah did was to thank God for rescuing them, just as he had promised.

And the first thing God did was make another promise. "I won't ever destroy the world again." And like a warrior who puts away his bow and arrow at the end of the great battle, God said, "See, I have hung up my bow in the clouds."

And there, in the clouds--just where the storm meets the sun--was a beautiful bow made of light.

It was a new beginning in God's world.

It wasn't long before everything went wrong again but God wasn't surprised, he knew this would happen. That's why before the beginning of time, he had another plan--a better plan. A plan not to destroy the world, but to rescue it--a plan to one day his own Son, the Rescuer

God's strong anger against hate and sadness and death would come down once more--but not on his people, or his world. No, God's war bow was not pointing down at his people.

It was pointing up, into the heart of Heaven.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT



Son Of Laughter

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16

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Years passed and things didn't get any better. People were still just as cruel and mean to one another. They still got sick and died. God's world was still full of tears. It was never meant to be like this.

But God was getting ready to do something about it. He was going to make all the wrong things right, and he was going to do it through...a family.

"Abraham," God said. "How many stars are there?" (God was about to tell his friend and wonderful secret.)

"Let me see," Abraham said, rolling up his sleeves. (But have you ever tried counting stars? Then you know how hard it is.) "993, 994, 997. Uh-Oh. No. Wait. 1, 2," Of course, he kept losing count, "Too many!" he said.

"Guess what!" God laughed.

"I will give you so many children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, you won't be able to count them either."

Abraham couldn't help giggling at such a wonderful idea. But he stopped himself. How could he have a family? Don't be silly. He didn't have any children, let alone grandchildren. He wiped away a tear. Anyway it was far too late for him to start having babies at his age, he was 99 years old! What could God mean?

"Abraham," God said. "Believe me."

And then God told Abraham his Secret Rescue Plan. "Abraham, I will make your family very big," God promised. "Until one day, your family will

come to number more than even all the stars in the sky.”

Abraham looked up at the dark night sky, thick with stars.

“You will be my special family, my people, and through you everyone on earth will be blessed!”

It was an incredible promise--God was going to rescue the world through Abraham’s family! One of his great-great-great grandchildren would be the Child, the Promised One, the Rescuer.

“But, it’s too wonderful!” Abraham said. How can it be true>“

“Is anything too good to be true?” God asked. “Is anything to wonderful for me?”

So Abraham trusted what God said more than what his eyes could see. And he believed.



THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



Ten Ways to Be Perfect

Exodus 20: 1-17

The Jesus Storybook Bible
Every story whispers his name
Written by Sally Lloyd-Jones

God called Moses up the mountain. The great mountain shook. A thick cloud fell. Thunder roared. Lightning crackled. An God gave Moses Ten Rules, call "Commandments."

"I want you to love me more than anything else in all the world--and know that I love you, too," God told them. "That's the most important thing of all."

God gave them other rules, like don't make yourselves pretend gods; don't kill people; or steal; or lie. The rules showed God's people how to be happy. They showed how life worked best.

"God promises to always look after you." Moses said. "Will you love him and keep these rules?"

"We can do it! Yes! We promise!"

But they were wrong. They couldn't do it. No matter how hard they tried, they could never keep God's rules all the time.

God knew they couldn't. And he wanted them to know it, too.

Only one Person could keep all the rules. And many years later God would send him--to stand in their place and be perfect for them.

Because the rules save them.

Only God could save them.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

HE'S OUR
Rescuer.
THAT'S THE
good news.

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Get Ready!

John 3: 14-21

The Jesus Storybook Bible
Every story whispers his name
Written by Sally Lloyd-Jones

I can't stop loving you,
You are my hearts treasure.
But I lost you.
Now I am coming back for you.

I am like the sun that gently shines on you,
chasing away darkness and fear and death.
You'll be so happy--
You'll be like little calves running free
in an open field.

I am going to send my Messenger--
The Promised One.
The One you have been waiting for.
The Rescuer.

He is coming. So, get ready!

It had taken centuries for God's people to be ready,
but now the time had almost come for the best part
of God's Plan.

God himself was going to come. Not to punish
his people--but to rescue them.

God was getting ready to wipe away every tear
from every eye.

And the true party was just about to begin...

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

**...I will forgive
their iniquity,**



**and remember
their sin no more.**

Jeremiah 31:34, NRSV

Written in the Hearts

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Rev. Meghan Lindsey Sweeney Cook

Jeremiah was a prophet. Prophets are special people who speak for God. Through Jeremiah, God spoke to God's people saying; "the day is coming when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the ones I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant though I love them" says the Lord. God was sad that the people kept forgetting how much God loved them. God promised, through the prophet Jeremiah, to write instructions deep on the people's hearts reminding them that God is their God. God helped Jeremiah dream of a day when people would no longer have to tell others about God because it would be written on their hearts. People would know how much God loved all of creation. The prophet Jeremiah reminded God's people that God would never leave or stop loving God's people. The prophet Jeremiah reminded God's people that God had promised to never destroy the earth again and that God is sending a rescue who would take away all of our sins and restore our relationship with God.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT



The Servant King

The Last Supper, from Mark 14 and John 13-14

The Jesus Storybook Bible
Every story whispers his name
Written by Sally Lloyd-Jones

It was Passover, the time when God's people remembered how God had rescued them from being slaves in Egypt. Every year they killed a lamb and ate it. "The lamb died instead of us!" they would say.

But this Passover, God was getting ready for an even Greater Rescue.

Jesus and his friends were having the Passover meal together in an upstairs room. But Jesus' friends were arguing. What about? They were arguing about stinky feet. Stinky feet? Yes, that's right stinky feet.

(Now the thing about feet back then was that people didn't wear shoes; they only wore sandals, which might not sound unusual, except that the streets in those days were dirty--and I don't mean just dusty dirty--I mean really stinky dirty. With all those cows and horses everywhere, you can imagine the stuff on the street that ended up on their feet!)

So anyway, someone had to wash away the dirt, but it was a dreadful job. Who on earth would ever dream of volunteering to do it?

Only the lowliest servant.

"I'm not the servant!" Peter said.

"Nor am I!" said Matthew.

Quietly, Jesus got up from the table, took off his robe, picked up a basin of water, knelt down, and started to wash his friends' feet.

"You can't," Peter said. He didn't understand about Jesus being the Servant King.

"If you don't let me wash away the dirt, Peter," Jesus said, "you can't be close to me."

Jesus knew that what people needed most was to be clean on the inside. All the dirt on their feet was nothing compared to the sin inside their hearts.

"Then wash me, Lord! Peter said, tears filling his eyes. "All of me!"

One by one, Jesus washed everyone's feet.

"I am doing this because I love you," Jesus explained. "Do this for each other."

Now, one of Jesus' friends had made a bad plan. No one else knew what the bad plan was. But Jesus knew--and so did Judas. Judas was going to help the Leaders capture Jesus--for 30 pieces of silver.

"Go on, Judas," Jesus said. And Judas got up from the meal, left the room, and walked out into the night.

Then Jesus picked up some bread and broke it. He gave it to his friends. He picked up a cup of wine and thanked God for it. He poured it out and shared it.

"My body is like this bread. It will break," Jesus told them. "This cup of wine is like my blood. It will pour out."

"But this is how God will rescue the whole world. My life will break and God's broken world will mend. My heart will tear apart--and your hearts will heal. Just as the Passover lamb died, so now I will die instead of you. My blood will wash away all of your sins. And you'll be clean on the inside--in your hearts."

“So whenever you eat and drink, remember,” Jesus said, I’ve rescued you!”

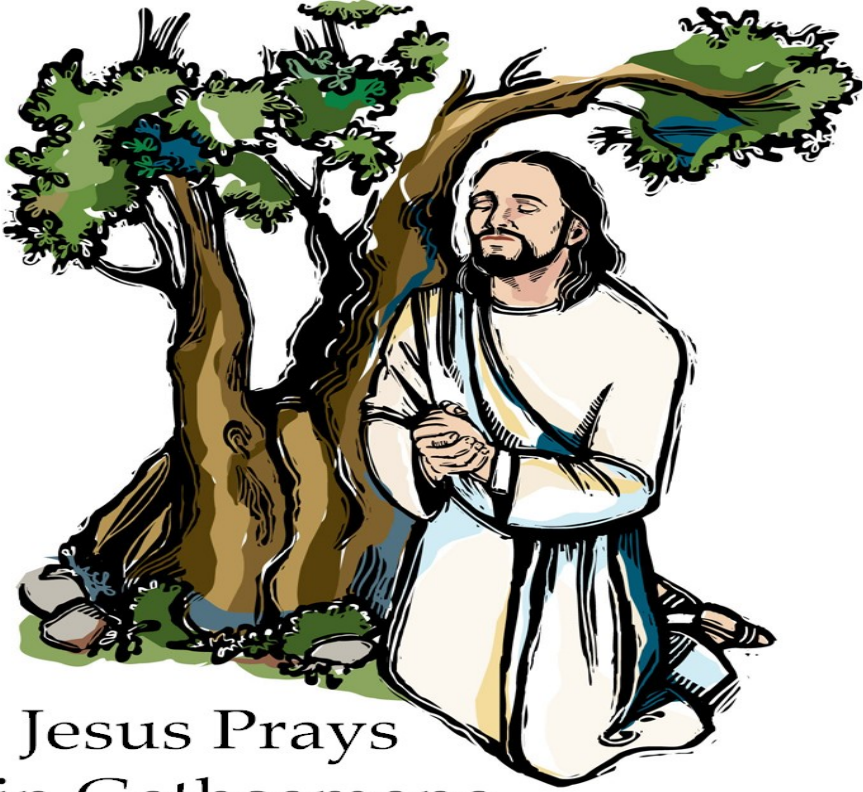
Jesus knew it was nearly time for him to leave the world and to go back to God.

“I won’t be with you long,” he said. “You are going to be very sad. But God’s Helper will come. And then you’ll be filled up with the Forever Happiness that won’t ever leave. So don’t be afraid. You are my friends and I love you.”

Then they sang their favorite song. And walked up to their favorite place, an olive garden.



GOOD FRIDAY



Jesus Prays
in Gethsemane

A Dark Night in the Garden

The Garden of Gethsemane, from Luke 22, Mark 14, John 18

The Jesus Storybook Bible
Every story whispers his name
Written by Sally Lloyd-Jones

The Wind was picking up now, blowing clouds across the moon, shrouding the garden in darkness.

“Stay up with me?” Jesus asked his friends. They said yes and waited under the olive trees, but they were tired and soon they fell asleep.

Jesus walked ahead alone, into the dark. He needed to talk to his heavenly Father.

He knew it was time for him to die. They had planned it long ago, he and his Father. Jesus was going to take the punishment for all the wrong things anybody had ever done, or ever would do.

“Papa! Father!” Jesus cried. And he fell to the ground. “Is there any other way to get your children back?” To heal their hearts? To get rid of the poison?”

But Jesus knew--there was no other way. All the poison of sin was going to have to go into his own heart.

God was going to pour into Jesus’ heart all the sadness and brokenness in people’s hearts. He was going to pour into Jesus’ body all the sickness in people’ bodies. God was going to have to blame his son for everything that had gone wrong. It would crush Jesus.

But there was something else, something even more horrible. When people ran away from God, they lost God--it was what happened when they ran away. Not being close to God was like punishment. Jesus was going to take that punishment.

Jesus knew what that meant. He was going to lose his Father--and that, Jesus knew, would break his heart in two.

Violent sobs shook Jesus' whole body.

Then Jesus was quiet. Like a a lamb. "I trust you, Papa," he said. "Whatever you say, I will do."

Suddenly, through the trees, a glitter of starlight flashed off steel. Into the quiet garden came whispers, muffled voices, clanking metal--and the sound of boots marching.

Jesus stood up.

He woke his friends. "Now is the time," he said gently. "Everything that was written about me--what God has been telling his people all through the long years--it's all coming true."

And into the night, with burning torches and lanterns, with swords and clubs and armor, they came--an army of soldiers. Judas led them straight to Jesus so they could arrest him.

Jesus was waiting for them.

Peter leapt up, took a sword, and tried to defend Jesus. He sliced of a guard's ear. Jesus immediately touched the guard and healed him.

"Peter," he said, "this is not the way."

Peter didn't realize that no army, no matter how big, could ever arrest Jesus. Not unless Jesus let them.

Then Jesus who had never done anything except love people, was arrested, as if he were a criminal.

Jesus' friends were afraid. So they ran away and hid in the dark shadows.

The guards marched Jesus off and took him to the Leaders.

The Leaders put Jesus on trial. "Are you the Son of God?" they asked.

"I Am," Jesus said.

"Who do you think you are? To call yourself God? You must die for calling yourself the Son of God!"

Only the Romans were allowed to kill prisoners, so the Leaders made a plan. "We'll tell the Romans, 'This man wants to be our King!' And then they will crucify him."

But it would be all right. It was God's Plan.

"It was for this reason that I was born into the world." Jesus said.



GOOD FRIDAY



The Sun Stops Shining

The Crucifixion, from Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19

The Jesus Storybook Bible
Every story whispers his name
Written by Sally Lloyd-Jones

“So you’re a king, are you?” the Roman soldiers jeered. “Then you’ll need a crown and a robe.”

They gave Jesus a crown made out of thorns. And put a purple robe on him. And pretended to bow down to him. “Your Majesty!” they said.

Then they whipped him. And spat on him. They didn’t understand that this was the Prince of Life, the King of heaven and earth, and had come to rescue them.

The soldiers made him a sign-- “Our King” and nailed it to a wooden cross.

They walked up a hill outside the city. Jesus carried the cross on his back. Jesus had never done anything wrong. But they were going to kill him the way criminals were killed.

They nailed Jesus to the cross.

“Father, forgive them,” Jesus gasped. “They don’t understand what they’re doing.”

“You say you’ve come to rescue us!” people shouted. “But you can’t even rescue yourself!”

But they were wrong. Jesus could have rescued himself. A legion of angels would have flown to his side--if he’d called.

“If you were really the Son of God, you could just climb down off that cross!” they said.

And of course they were right. Jesus could have just climbed down. Actually, he could have just said a word and made it all stop. Like when he healed that little girl. And stilled the storm. And fed 5,000 people.

But Jesus stayed.

You see, they didn't understand. It wasn't the nails that kept Jesus there. It was love.

"Papa?" Jesus cried, frantically searching the sky. "Papa? Where are you? Don't leave me!"

And for the first time--and the last--when he spoke, nothing happened. Just a horrible, endless silence. God didn't answer. He turned away from his Boy.

Tears rolled down Jesus' face. The face of the One who would wipe away every tear from every eye.

Even though it was midday, a dreadful darkness covered the face of the world. The sun could not shine. The earth trembled and quaked. The great mountains shook. Rocks split in two. Until it seemed that the whole world would break. That creation itself would tear apart.

The full force of the storm of God's fierce anger at sin was coming down. On his own Son. Instead of his people. It was the only way God could destroy sin, and not destroy his children whose hearts filled with sin.

Then Jesus shouted out in a loud voice, "It is finished!"

And it was. He had done it. Jesus had rescued the whole world.

"Father!" Jesus cried. "I give you my life." And with a great sigh he let himself die.

Strange clouds and shadows filled the sky.
Purple, orange, black. Like a bruise.

Jesus's friends gently carried Jesus. They laid
Jesus in a new tomb carved out of rock.

How could Jesus die? What had gone
wrong? What did it mean? They didn't know
anything anymore. Except they did know their
hearts were breaking.

"That's the end of Jesus," the Leaders said.

But, just to be sure, they sent strong soldiers
to guard the tomb. They hauled a huge stone in
front of the door to the tomb. So that no one
could get in.

Or out.



EASTER SUNDAY



God's Wonderful Surprise

The Resurrection, from Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20

The Jesus Storybook Bible
Every story whispers his name
Written by Sally Lloyd-Jones

Jesus's friends were sad. They would never see their best friend again. How could this happen? Wasn't Jesus the Rescuer? The King God had promised? It wasn't supposed to end like this.

Yes, but whoever said anything about the end?

Just before sunrise, on the third day, God sent an earthquake--and an angel from heaven. When the guards saw the angel, they fell down with fright. The angel rolled the huge stone away, sat on top of it, and waited.

At first glimmer of dawn, Mary Magdalene and other women headed to the tomb to wash Jesus' body. The early morning sun slanted through the ancient olive trees, drops of dew glittering on leaves and grasses--little tears everywhere. The friends walked quietly along the hilly path, through the olive groves, until they reached the tomb. And immediately noticed something odd--it was wide open..

They peered through the opening into the dark tomb. But wait. Jesus' body was gone!

And something else: a shining man was there, with clothes made from lightning.

"Don't be scared," the angel said.

But (they couldn't help it) they screamed anyway.

The angel asked them, "What are you doing here? This is a tomb and tombs are for dead people.

The women couldn't speak.

“Jesus isn’t dead anymore!” he said. He’s alive again!”

And their hearts leapt. And then the angel laughed with such gladness that they felt for a moment, as if they had woken from a nightmare.

Mary ran and ran, all the way to the city. She had never run so fast or so far in all her life. She felt she could have run forever. She didn’t even feel like her feet touched the ground. The sun seemed to be dancing and gleaming and bounding across the sky, racing with her and shining brighter than she could ever remember in the clear, fresh air.

And it seemed to her that morning, as she ran, almost as if the whole world had been made anew, almost as if the whole world was singing for joy--the trees, tiny sounds in the grass, the birds. her heart.

Was God really making everything sad come untrue? Was he making even death come untrue?

She couldn’t wait to tell Jesus’ friends. “They won’t believe it!” she laughed.

She was right of course.

