



A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: APRIL 2020

by Lee Shipp

THOUGHTS AND MEDITATIONS

CRAVING THE BODY OF JESUS BY MICHELLE VALLET

“Joseph of Arimathea an honorable counselor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.” Mark 15:43

I have heard it asked, *“Do you crave the body of Christ?”* When Joseph went to Pilate to beg for the body of Jesus, it was bloody and beaten, His visage was marred more than any man, His form more than the sons of men (Isaiah 52:15). His body had nothing to offer. There was no life in His body, but Joseph loved Jesus. He desired Him. He knew His worth. He knew the life and the power that had been in that Body, the miracles His hands had worked, and the Love that laid His life down.

Tonight, our first meeting at church was cancelled because of the pandemic. And I am living this scripture in a deeper way than I ever have. My heart is broken, and I am craving the body of Christ. I am longing to be with His church for this is the place that God has commanded His blessing. *“Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity ... there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore”* (Psalm 133). It is the place where we bear one another’s burdens, where God’s perfect love casts out our fear. It is the place where we are free and we are set free. Church is the place of the supernatural. Church is the manifestation of divine love – where people of all walks of life, even from every tribe and tongue are one! This love is manifest, for we have been accepted in the Beloved! Now, by His blood, we are members one of another! To be separate from one another is such a blow.

It is often said you don’t know what you have until it is gone. Do you know what you have? Are you a part of a fellowship? I don’t just mean – do you attend church? John says, *“That which we have seen and heard we declare unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”*

Are you craving the body of Christ, or is church an address? Are you longing for the members of your body, or can you take church or leave it? Maybe you say the church has hurt me, I was slandered there, I was gossiped about, no one *“got me.”* Perhaps you were abandoned or hurt. And the truth is ... maybe so ... likely so.

Though the church on earth is full of the glory of God, we being earthen vessels are prone to sin. The glory of the church is not in its sinlessness, but in its power to forgive. The love of God that covers a multitude of sin is redemption, reconciliation, an evergreen life in a world of decay! We do not yet appear what we shall be, but when we see Him we shall be like Him!

It did not yet appear what Jesus would be when Joseph craved

His body. For the most part He just looked defeated; He was dead. It looked like He wasn’t really who He said He was. He still smelled of sweet perfume that was poured out on Him ... that worship must have been an extravagant waste to many watching that day. But three days later, when others went to bring sweet spices to His tomb, they were told by an angel that *“He is not here; He is Risen!”*

I wonder if you are able to pour out your worship in the church now, or do you think it is a waste to worship God? When the doors open back up after the days of this pandemic will you run there? Will you be in your place, fitly joined? Will your prayers be effectual there? Will your giving be eternal there? Will you bear the burdens of others and have your burdens carried there? Will you receive grace there? Will you say come Lord Jesus there?

Or will internet church be enough for you? Will you seek your own kingdom? Will you need the church? Maybe you mock the church and you say you have never seen her worth: she has nothing to offer me, she is not what she says she is. I would like to humbly warn you that as sure as Jesus did rise, the day is coming quickly that the church will rise too!

“[...] And we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Dear friend, if you wait till that day to run to the church for answered prayers, you will be too late! Bring your woes and bang on the doors all you like, but there will be no life left inside to answer, for we are not there! We are risen! Woe unto you in that day! There will be no brotherly love dwelling together in unity. Oh, I plead with you, seek the Lord while He may be found, oh that you would crave the Body of Christ, now!

“I BELIEVE WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF EVERYTHING WE HAVE PRAYED FOR, EVERYTHING WE HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR.”

PROVE BY KAYLA MURPHY

Prove (verb) /*proof*/

- a. to test to solidly evidence of reality
- b. to demonstrate the truth of something by evidence

The Lord has been stirring my heart for probably two weeks with this word and what a time to be alive and prove the realness of God!

Think of it like this: you don’t prove a cure on healthy people - you prove it on the sick! You don’t prove the peace of God in good times – you know it then, but you prove Him in the confusing and fearful times ... like now!

- Pandemics and worldwide fear prove His peace!
- Frailty proves His power!
- Weakness proves His strength!
- Instability proves His stability!
- Chaos proves His soundness!
- Sadness proves His joy!
- Tears prove His comfort!

This is not a time to draw back believer! It’s a time to prove the realities of Christ that we’ve been preaching to the world who is watching how we will respond. We preach His power and peace! Let’s let the Holy Spirit rise up in us and PROVE who He is to the world! It’s not that we ignore what’s happening, we would be fools to do so, but let’s prove Him in the midst of it!

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace. In the world you have tribulation and distress and suffering, but be courageous [be confident, be undaunted, be filled with joy]; I have overcome the world." [My conquest is accomplished, My victory abiding.]"

IN THIS TOGETHER BY KRISTY FURLOW

I'm sure you will all agree with this, but times of crisis make me desire the church so much more than I ever have. I literally long to be with all of you in the presence of God. You help me. You encourage me. You lift me up. Last night, I was tired and a little overwhelmed. When I entered the sanctuary at 6:40, there were about 35 people in there. They were spread out around the room – not touching each other. Just praying. Crying out to God. Worshipping. I just sat there and cried. I couldn't help it. I was so grateful to be surrounded by my friends who love Jesus. Who desire the Holy Spirit to have His way. I needed it so badly y'all. I needed the peace that came when I entered the room. I needed the strength that I gained from hearing the prayers of those around me. I needed the confidence that filled my spirit when I saw the resolve of those around me.

I'm so thankful to serve the Lord with each of you. So, while these times are challenging, and we are being forced to consider many things, we can continue to lift one another up and help one another. Let's do that. I'm praying that God will give us all peaceful hearts, a great deal of patience, understanding for one another, and love. Pastor Lee has been preaching about mature Christian love. Reflect on those messages and let's ask God for that.

GOD IS WATCHING BY LEE SHIPP

It's easier to be led by the voice of fear than the voice of faith. The immediate **APPLAUSE OF MEN** seems more beneficial than the **SILENCE OF GOD**. However, faith is always seen by the one facing the giants rather than the masses huddled in fear. Be careful you are not one of the ten spies who speak fear rather than faith – **GOD IS WATCHING**.

What pastor has ever walked through this valley before? The Pastor is compelled to Hear the Good Shepherd and walk after him through this valley of the shadow of death and if the Pastor does not walk with the Good Shepherd then how could you ever take his messages seriously again? How could he ever stand before you and preach faith? The Pastor takes his orders from above ... not from men here below! And whatever he does among men he is damned if he does and damned if he does not!

DON'T OPEN YOUR MOUTH UNLESS GOD HAS FILLED IT. Most have spent more time before the TV than before God. Most have heard the logic of scientist more than the God who made science and the scientist. Most have spent more time thinking rather than praying. Most have spent more time worrying rather than praising. And every one of these have an opinion but, hear the man who is coming out of the prayer closet, who is getting up off the altar – who has the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone has an opinion but, thank God for those who have the Word of the Lord. Speak faith and encourage those who want Jesus to have the preeminence.

DEAR FNT FAMILY BY LEE SHIPP

President Trump said that we are fighting an invisible enemy. I believe he was more correct than he even knew. For I believe the invisible enemy that we are fighting is the spirit of antichrist. This spirit of antichrist has revealed to governments how to curtail the global population into submission to its will.

So many panicked and prayerless voices are declaring theories and suggestions. It is so easy to be led by fear, to be manipulated by

the media, or to bow to the wishes of authority, when these directives lack the validity of such hysteria. We have never faced anything like this in the history of the world.

I have been desperate to hear God and to follow Him. I believe that what is going on is spiritual in its nature and in its intent. I refuse to be led by fear of the very loud rantings of men. I am listening for the still small voice of the Lord, and I will do whatever He asks me to do. I would never impose my faith on anyone, but I will live my faith.

It saddens me to see so much of the church world blindly complying and succumbing to the fear that the rest of the world is in, and then denying that fear by saying they are just being concerned for the good of others. So much of this has the tenor of the Israelites spying out the land of promise and reporting to the nation of Israel that those promises are real, but then saying, *"We are unable to do it: we must think about our wives, we must think about our children, we must think about our elderly – for there are very powerful forces there that will threaten our well-being and our life."* This report struck fear into the entire nation and left them as unbelievers who would not inherit their promise.

But Caleb had a different spirit in him, and he believed God. I believe we are on the verge of everything we have prayed for, everything we have been prepared for, and everything we have seen written in the Word of God. And, what will the army of God do in this moment? Retreat? From what? Is God not able? Are our sermons only good in a pulpit? Are they not true everywhere?

It is my intent to hear God and have the spirit of Caleb. I am not afraid of what is going on. The only solution to this problem is found in the church! The only solution is the gospel of Jesus Christ and an assembled church bombarding heaven for mercy. But, if our government will not allow this, then Jesus will say to them, *"I would have, but you would not."*

I have absolutely no fear in this moment.

But, to you I say, **DO NOT** get out of your house and **DO NOT** go to church unless God has told you to do so. You must live by your own faith regarding what God has spoken to you. You cannot blame your circumstances or sicknesses on anyone else, and you should only do what you are willing to do by faith. My faith does not assure me that I will **NOT** get COVID-19. But my faith does assure me that I will not be ruled by its demonic fear.

Our staff is in constant communication regarding this pandemic. The situation is constantly evolving and therefore a decision made today may change by tomorrow. We are closely monitoring the situation, and I am in communication with local authorities.

God has blessed us with an amazing staff who is working around the clock to stay informed and to get the information to you. They are amazing people. I can assure you – the church will become more precious to you in the days ahead as a result of this pandemic. Don't think for one minute the government will give up the ground it has gained over the populace.

Be sure to send your tithes and offerings, as this is the only means by which so many have to live. Those who you support are living every day to make sure you are cared for and ready to meet Jesus in the air. Remember, when the groom came, the ten virgins woke up, and half were not going to make it to the wedding. Make sure you have oil.

I believe this moment is one we have been praying for. Men are afraid. They have no God. We must give them hope. Why have we been praising and seeking diligently for the presence of God? Is it not so the church could be unique and holy unto the Lord? It is time to live in faith. It is time church, if we cower in fear of sickness or death then the devil will defeat us. They overcame him by the blood of the lamb, by the word of their testimony, and they did not fear death (Revelation 12).

Love, Pastor Lee Shipp
Tuesday, March 31, 2020