

January 24-28, 2022 Edition

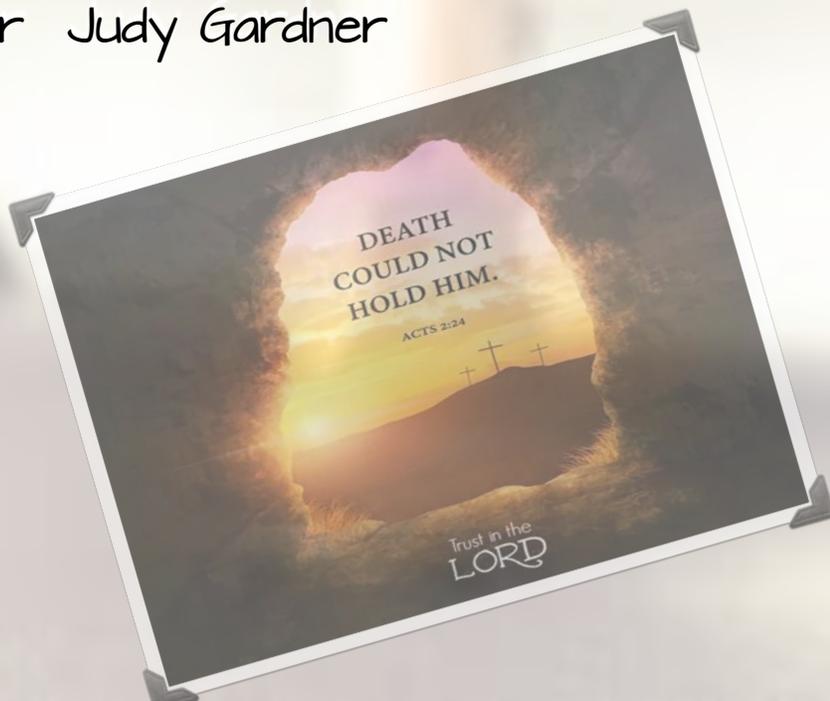
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The Year Of ^ Jesus Part 5

God's Three Day Rule & His Mysterious Timing

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January 22/23, 2022



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest :D) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: A reprint of reflections I did a few years back. FYI.

Well, yesterday was April 1st and it was the first time I can remember that Easter Sunday and April fools day fell on the same day. I don't know for sure how many times that's happened in the last 2,000 years but I know it happened on the first one (figuratively speaking at the very least). It's incredibly difficult to trace the timeline of Jesus' last week on earth because of the differences in the Jewish calendar and the way the Jews marked days (sundown to sundown verses sunup to sunup) and with the western calendar that we follow in the US the way the Jews calculated what day the passover was supposed to be on and the way the western church calculates what day Easter is supposed to fall on things get awfully confusing really quickly.

But we know this- this year the Passover lines up with Good Friday (the day Jesus died) and it doesn't always. That means there's at least a possibility that Jesus' resurrection occurred on, that's right- you guessed it- April fools day. I remember seeing someone post on Facebook a few months ago that Easter would fall on April 1 and trying to figure out which "holiday" to celebrate on that day and I can remember thinking, "why not both? Jesus did..."

It was the original April fools joke. It was Jesus' prank on Satan, hell & death that ended once and for all time the question as to who would win. I remember hearing about a Sunday school teacher who asked her kids if anyone knew what the first words that Jesus spoke after coming out of the tomb were. The kids thought and thought and finally one little girl raised her hand and when called upon to answer simply said, "tada!!!!"

I don't know if that's true or not (I REALLY hope it is and someday in Heaven we'll get to see a replay of that moment) but I know this- it was one of Jesus' finest moments. Maybe THE finest moment of His existence but I don't want to assume anything because I've heard that's not a good idea but I can't remember why at the moment. It was also a pretty fine moment for His first century followers that thought He was gone for good. They thought death had won. They thought Jesus had lost. But it was only a momentary setback for Jesus. It was nothing more than a snake bite on the heel for Him. Did it hurt? Sure. But it wasn't enough to keep Him down forever- only for three days.

From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. Matthew 16:21 (NLT)

So what was up with the third day? Why the third day? Why not the second day or the fourth day? What was so important about the third day to God. Well, it turns out our God is a third day God and He wants to teach us to be becoming (yes I know that's awkward phrasing but it's the closest in English to get across what God wants from humans- to be becoming more like Jesus) third day people. What does that mean and what will that look like? We'll focus on that this week as we talk about the wisdom of God's timing- a timing we have a REALLY tough time understanding but if there's anything the resurrection should teach us it's to recognize God's timing might not make sense to us but it's far superior to our own timing:

He does everything just right and on time, but people can never completely understand what he is doing. Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NCV)

Tuesday Reflection: So this week we're focusing in on the importance of the third day to God. Jesus told His followers over and over that He would be killed and buried but would be raised to life on the third day. Why the third day? Because God had established Himself as a third day God and was attempting to establish His people as third day people. And to understand that a little bit more we need to go to the Old Testament and talk about a fairly obscure story found in the opening pages of 1 Samuel.

The nation of Israel is fairly young and is struggling to figure out what it means to be God's kingdom of priests, His holy nation, His treasured possession. They have come into the promised land and have occupied it but they didn't fully possess it like they were supposed to. They left the canaanites and all the other "ites" that they were supposed to drive out of Israel to live all around them and it was causing some pretty serious issues with them (and would ultimately lead to their downfall but that's another story for another time). They are constantly pestered and harassed by surrounding nations and at this point in their history it's the Philistines that are the main problem. The Israelites are attacked by the Philistine army and the Philistines win. The Israelites ask themselves why God would let them lose a battle when He promised that if they did what He told them to do they would never lose a battle in their lives. Now they've lost a battle. What could it be? Hmmmmmm...

After the battle was over, the troops retreated to their camp, and the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the Lord allow us to be defeated by the Philistines?" Then they said, "Let's bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Shiloh. If we carry it into battle with us, it will save us from our enemies." 1 Samuel 4:3 (NLT)

Rather than looking at the history of their people and how as long as they did what God asked them to do they had won every battle. And rather than look at how in the couple of times they had decided to go their own way and ignore God's plan how they had been defeated they decided to keep their focus squarely off themselves (boy don't we hate to look at ourselves as the possible problem in our own life?). They decided the problem was God. They decided they'd go get the Ark of the Covenant and bring it into battle with them. The problem with this reasoning is that it's trying to force God into a box. Did you notice in the scripture we just read how the Israelites say, "it" will save us from our enemies rather than God will save us? That's a pretty big mistake. Rather than the Ark being the symbol of God's presence with the Israelites they looked at it as the box that contained God and through which they could manipulate Him and force Him to their way of thinking. God would NEVER let the Ark get taken so we will have to win the battle.

But they didn't. They lost. Big time. It was the single greatest loss Israel had ever suffered in battle. It was devastating. And not only did Israel lose the battle- the Ark of the Covenant was captured and taken back to Philistia.

After the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they took it from the battleground at Ebenezer to the town of Ashdod. They carried the Ark of God into the temple of Dagon and placed it beside an idol of Dagon. 1 Samuel 5:1-2 (NLT)

And what ensued was a lesson for the Israelites, the Philistines and for me and you. It's a lesson in what exactly it means that our God is a third day God and He wants us to be becoming third day people. More on day number one tomorrow but maybe for today spend some time thinking

about how often we refuse to look at ourselves as the possible problem in our lives and instead try to look everywhere else- maybe even at God Himself- as the reason for the failures in our lives.

Wednesday Reflection: Ok so we're looking at the reality found in the Bible that God is a third day God and that He wants us to be becoming third day people. But what does that mean? Well, let's start by looking at what these three days look like while we're experiencing them and we'll start logically enough with day one. What does day one look like for the people who are experiencing it? Well, let's start with some examples of day one experiences in the Old Testament (turns out the third day isn't something God comes up with off the cuff or arbitrarily when it comes to the resurrection- it was a well established pattern that the Jews fully understood).

Way back in the book of Genesis when Abraham is asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac we find one of the first "three day" stories. What do you think Abraham felt like on Day one? I'm guessing we've all got a pretty good idea, right? When the people of God arrived at Mt. Sinai after being led out of Egyptian captivity they spend three days at the foot of the mountain before God enters into covenant with them. During that time there was quite a bit of uncertainty for Israel as they watched Moses ascend the mountain but were told that they shouldn't even touch the base of the mountain or they would die. When it was time to cross the Jordan river so that Israel could enter the promised land Joshua told the people to consecrate themselves for three days and on the 3rd day they would cross over into a land filled with giants who were their enemies. How do you think they felt on day one? Once they had crossed over into the promised land when Joshua sent spies into Jericho to scope out the enemy a woman named Rahab hid them when they were discovered and told them that they would be safe on the third day but can you imagine how the spies must have felt on day one? When Queen Esther finds out that her people are being targeted for genocide she knows she must go before the king but doing so was incredibly dangerous for her so she prayed and fasted for a certain number of days in preparation for her courageous act. Guess how many days? Yup- three. I wonder how she felt on day one? And then there's the story of a guy named Jonah who decides to run from God rather than doing his job (he was the prophet of God in Israel which was fine by him until God gave him a job he didn't want to do). He gets swallowed by a great fish and spends three days inside that fish but imagine how he feels on day one.

Day one is a day of darkness and despair for the people who are experiencing it. Think about the people of Israel after they lose their battle and the Ark of the Covenant is captured by the Philistines. They are devastated. Not only have they lost the Ark, but the two sons of Eli (the priest of God) die in the battle and when messengers return and tell Eli what happened he dies too. The people of Israel are feeling crushed beneath a wave of despair and darkness. The wife of one of Eli's sons gives birth while all this bad news is being delivered:

She named the child Ichabod (which means "the glory is gone!"), for she said, "Israel's glory is gone." She named him this because the Ark of God had been captured and because her father-in-law and husband were dead. Then she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God has been captured." 1 Samuel 4:21-22 (NLT)

The people of Israel believed that the glory was gone. They had declared "ichabod" but God hadn't. God still had plans for Israel. One day far in the future God would finally declare for Himself "ichabod" and His glory would indeed depart from Israel but not forever- just until "The Glory" returned as the Light Of The World but even when He had returned to bring God's light to a world stumbling in darkness (a world in desperate need of God's glory) we had a tough time understanding It/Him:

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory. John 1:21 (NLT)

The disciples "saw" His glory but they had a tough time understanding it. The glory of God had returned but it was such a strange kind of glory. It confused everyone. In fact, it still does. It came in a strange mix of humility and fearlessness and courage and servanthood that confused everyone. Nobody could tame Jesus. Not the politicians, not the Zealots, not the religious leaders. Nobody could manipulate Him to get the THING they wanted (which was exactly what had happened with the Ark Of The Covenant in 1 Samuel chapter 4- remember? They thought they could manipulate God by bringing the box that they believed contained Him and thereby control Him- BIG MISTAKE). So in the end those who were in power took Him and lashed him with a whip and pierced Him with a spear and hung Him on a cross and laid Him in a tomb. And it was an awfully dark day. Day one was a VERY dark day for those who loved Jesus. It looked like hate had won:

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land... Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart... Matthew 27:45-51 (NLT)

But it only looked that way. Looking back we now know that this is not a one day story- it's a three day story but on day one everything looks bleak. Day one is hopeless and filled with utter despair. How could this have happened? Where is/was God when we needed Him most? How could He have allowed this? The. Glory. Is. Gone.

But it wasn't. It only felt like it was. And yet when we find ourselves in day one of a three day story (unfortunately the things we continue to go through don't limit themselves to three 24 hour periods of time but rather are a much more symbolic and fluid sort of time where all of us progress at a different pace as we experience them based on the intensity of the event and how we believe it will impact the rest of our lives) it's so hard to remind ourselves that we serve a three day God and all of His stories (including the ones we are experiencing) are really three day stories- not one day stories (again, figuratively speaking and I'm sorry for the confusing language but I'm really hard pressed to explain it any clearer). If experiencing a "day one" event in your life I feel for you and I think I know what Jesus' disciples would say to you- don't give up hope. I know it's impossible to see it right now but this is a God Who turns crucifixions into resurrections. He is the God of the third day and your third day is coming so hold on. Lean on your community and together we will all get through our "day one"s together.

I was totally going to stop there but I want to point something out that's important to me this year as we celebrate the God of the third day. This last 9 months has had its very dark moments for all of us at Riverside. When Pastor Jeff unexpectedly passed back in August we found ourselves in a sort of "day one" experience. It was a season of darkness and despair that we as a

church had never had to experience before. In fact, I can remember not too long before that day feeling kind of guilty that life seemed to be so easy. Church was rolling along and life was good. I'll never forget that the week that Jeff died so unexpectedly he was giving the communion thought (if you remember he led worship on Sunday August 13th for the 9 AM service and the 10:30 AM service and then felt crummy during the "intermission" so Connie took him to the hospital and we showed the worship that we had recorded to the Noon service folks that came. Jeff never made it to the hospital) and as he was talking about Jesus (something he loved to do) he started quoting a passage of scripture. That's not that strange except he didn't have his Bible opened and the words weren't being beamed up on the back wall for him to read. He was quoting from memory and this is the passage he quoted:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.
2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NIV)

I remember at the time being impressed at the fact that he had that whole thing memorized. I remember thinking later that night how impressed I was at the fact that he believed it with all of his heart and it was one of the last things he left Riverside (and me) with. And I remember today how even knowing that Jeff's story was not a one day story and even knowing that my story was not a one day story and even knowing that Connie's story was not a one day story and even knowing that Riverside's story was not a one day story how that "day one" felt for all of us (well, not for Jeff- "I can only imagine" that that day ended up turning out pretty good as he fast-forwarded to his own personal "day three" and going from these "light and momentary" troubles to the "eternal glory" that far outweighs them all.

So for all of you going through a "day one" experience- we feel you. We really do. But on day one there's not a lot that can be done on this side of eternity but experience the darkness and despair that "day one"s bring to those of us who are still here on this side of the third day.

Thursday Reflection: This week we're focusing in on the fact that our God is a God of the third day. Jesus told His friends over and over that he would be raised to life on the third day. This wasn't a brand new thing for the people of God (well, the resurrection part was but the idea of a third day God and third day people wasn't new). All of them knew the stories from the Old Testament of how God works so often over the course of three days but none of Jesus' followers knew quite what to do with His claims that His own story would be a three day story. And NONE of them knew what to do when they were caught up in His three day story and were experiencing a three day story of their own.

Yesterday we talked about what day one feels like when we're caught up in a three day story. It's a day filled with darkness and despair. We saw that in our story of the capturing of the Ark of the Covenant from 1 Samuel chapters 4-6 that on that particular "day one" the Israelites felt hopeless. They felt like the glory of God had departed from Israel and left them alone. It wasn't true but that's how it felt. I imagine the same can be said for Jesus' disciples on their own (and Jesus' too) "day one". They felt hopeless. They felt despair and they were plunged into darkness. That's how "day one"s feel. So now let's talk about how "day two"s feel.

They feel pretty much the same as day one. You know, it's interesting when you think about it—we know a ton about what happened to Jesus and His disciples on day one. We know a ton about what happened to Jesus and His disciples on day three. But there is very little information about what happens to Jesus and His disciples on day two. Maybe that's because there was very little to report. Why? Because day two is very similar to day one except maybe worse because it's this strange in-between day. In between despair and joy, confusion and clarity. It's in between bad news and good news. It's in between darkness and light. Jesus' friends believe at this point in time that His great dream had failed. Day two feels an awful lot like day one. But there is one very important difference. Day two is a day of behind the scenes combat.

Let's go back to our story from 1 Samuel. If you remember the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistine army. The Philistines take the Ark back to Philistia and they place it in the temple of their chief deity, Dagon. They celebrated their victory and partied into the night and then they turned out the lights and went home for the night. In Israel the people believed all hope was gone but God was working behind the scenes:

When the citizens of Ashdod went to see it the next morning, Dagon had fallen with his face to the ground in front of the Ark of the Lord! So they took Dagon and put him in his place again. 1 Samuel 5:3 (NLT)

I wonder what the priests of Dagon thought about what they found on day two? Hmmmm. Maybe it's a coincidence. Surely everything's ok, right? Let's just pretend nothing happened. So what do they do. They celebrate some more and party into the night on day two and when they're done they turn out the lights and go home and man what I wouldn't give to have been a fly on the wall in the temple of Dagon that night:

But the next morning the same thing happened—Dagon had fallen face down before the Ark of the LORD again. This time his head and hands had broken off and were lying in the doorway. Only the trunk of his body was left intact. 1 Samuel 5:4 (NLT)

At this point the priests of Dagon decide they're dealing with something they can't control. We'll talk about what happens next tomorrow. But that's day two. During day two of these three-day-stories it seems like nothing is happening but there is hidden combat going on in the spiritual realms that we can't see. Same thing in Jesus' story. Day one it looks like all hope is lost. Day two feels the same way for Jesus' disciples but little do they know behind the scenes there is all kinds of stuff going on:

The earth shook, rocks split apart, and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people. Matthew 27:51-53 (NLT)

In the interest of full disclosure that actually happened on day one but still people had to be wondering what the heck was going on, wouldn't you think? The Bible doesn't tell us much but we do get hints that Jesus wasn't just laying in His tomb twiddling His omnipotent thumbs waiting for Sunday to come. Jesus was busy during day two:

And in the spirit he went and preached to the spirits in prison who refused to obey God long ago in the time of Noah. 1 Peter 3:19-20 (NCV)

Now nobody knows exactly what Peter is referring to here. Scholars and theologians have debated for centuries what Peter's getting at. One thing I know- day two for Jesus was not spent lying down (at least not spiritually speaking). What exactly is He doing? We don't know for sure. Just like last week when we discussed the cross and why Jesus had to die and why His death saved us the Bible doesn't paint a comprehensive picture. CS Lewis does a great job of explaining the cross situation in *The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe* and I hope you took the time to watch it last week. When it comes to what was going on in the spiritual realms on day two I like the picture Calvin Miller paints in his book, *The Singer*. He paints a picture of "Earth-Hater" leaving the place where he watched "The Troubadour" (the One Who came to sing God's song to a world that had forgotten it) being put to death. As the Earth-Hater travelled back to hell he was gloating until he noticed that something was different about his home. It almost appeared as if the gates of hell were opened. But that was impossible since he was the only one who had the keys... (picture the Earth-Hater reaching down to pat his pocket to make sure he still had the keys only to realize they were gone). Earth-Hater started to feel a familiar sinking in his stomach as he wondered if the Troubadour had somehow pulled another one over on him as he started running towards his home only to realize that not only were the gates of hell opened- they had been torn off their hinges.

Great book! Is that what happened? I hope it was something like that. The truth is we don't know for sure but the Bible makes it plain that SOMETHING was happening that day. We just couldn't see it. That's the problem with day-twos, right? We wake up and the darkness and despair are still there. Even if we believe that God is doing something we still can't feel it.

Day two "is the day your dream died. You wake up and you're still alive. You have to go on, but you don't know how. Worse, you don't know why." John Ortberg

That's day two in a nutshell, isn't it? And the really tough question at least for me is, why does there have to be a day two? Why didn't God just get a move on and do this in a much shorter time frame. Doesn't He know what we're going through? Can't He see what's happening to us while he lets another day of confusion and despair and darkness go by? And that's the real problem, isn't it? The lack of answers on day two. On day two we aren't just filled with despair but completely mystified by God's deafening silence. On day two we feel like God isn't there. But He is. And He's active and there is hidden combat whether we know it or not. Day two is another day when we need our community to rally around us and lend us their hope. It's a day we have to continually remind ourselves, it may be Saturday, but Sunday's coming.

Friday Reflection: So we have spent the week talking about how God is a God of the third day. We've looked closely (probably more closely than most of us appreciate) at what day one and day two looks like in the stories of God's people. It's a bummer that we have to go through day one and day two to get to day three but as Tony Campolo so famously put it- it's Friday... but Sunday's a coming! So if day one is filled with darkness and despair and if day two looks and feels extremely similar to day one except we KNOW that during day two there is behind-the-scenes hidden combat then what does day three look like? Well, day three is the day that the glory shines and God returns.

We've talked about how many third day stories there were in the Old Testament. Abraham is told to sacrifice his son Isaac and day one and two must be unbearable but on day three he looks up and finally sees the sacrifice that God intended to be the substitute for his boy all along and can you imagine the relief? We know that when the Israelites got to Mt. Sinai God told Moses to have the people consecrate themselves for three days and on the third day God came down. We know that when Queen Esther knew she would have to intervene on behalf of her people or they would be snuffed out she prayed and fasted for three days not knowing if she would be welcomed by the king or killed for interfering when she shouldn't have and the third day is when she is welcomed by the king and the enemy of God's people loses a fight he didn't know he was in. And let's not forget the prophet Jonah who spent three days in the belly of a great fish and his greatest prayer was finally answered- "just let me go out the same way I came in!" And God granted Jonah's prayers (being vomited onto the beach is not a great outcome but it really is the lesser of two evils when you think about it...).

And day three is the day that the Ark Of The Covenant begins its journey back to Israel. The priests of Dagon decide they want nothing more to do with that Ark and so they get a cart and hitch some oxen to it and load the Ark onto the cart and point it towards Israel and give the oxen a slap on the rump and pray it never comes back to Philistia.

And day three is the day the tomb could no longer hold a penniless carpenter turned Rabbi from Nazareth by way of Egypt by way of Bethlehem. When the women went on Sunday morning to finish preparing the body for burial they found an angel who rolled the stone away (Jesus didn't need to have the stone rolled away to get out. He was already gone. The stone gets rolled away not so Jesus could get out but so we could see it was empty):

"Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day." Then they remembered... Luke 24:5-8 (NLT)

The women were amazed and filled with joy. That's what day three does for us. It reminds us that our God is indeed a third day God and no matter how much darkness and despair we experienced in days one and two, day three will make it all worth the trouble we had. Mother Teresa said that she believes that when we finally walk into Heaven (on our own personal day three) all the hardships and suffering we went through on this earth (days one and two) will seem like nothing more than an bad night at an unfortunate hotel. But here's the problem (well, one of the problems): with third-day stories you don't know it's a third-day story until the third day- and even if you are trying to believe it is with all of your heart it so often does not FEEL like it's a 3 day story, does it? While we are on this side of eternity we may experience a shadow of what our Third-Day-God has in store for us but many of us will spend far more time in days one and two than we would like. The testimony of the entire Bible and especially the New Testament is, hold on! Your third day is coming and the resurrection is your guarantee:

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is worth nothing, and your faith is worth nothing... But Christ has truly been raised from the dead- the first one and proof that those who sleep in death will also be raised. 1 Corinthians 15:14-20 (NLT)

I read a story once about a student at Harvard who was invited to speak at one of their student chapel services. She was a fairly new Christian but she knew enough about her faith to know it either stood or fell entirely on the resurrection. She read the scripture you just read to her fellow students and then tried to find a way to make that statement real to them in words they'd truly understand and never forget. So once she read 1 Corinthians 15:14 she said, "do you know what that means? That means if Christ has not been raised from the dead... we are HOSED!"

I like that. We aren't really a traditional, liturgical church at Riverside where we do readings and responses but if we were going to start here's one I could get behind- "If Christ be not raised from the dead we are hosed!" and then the congregation would respond, "we are hosed indeed!" Like I said I don't think we'll ever start doing that but if we did I could get behind that one. This third day God is the God of the resurrection & the crucifixion. But when we remember the crucifixion we now call it "Good Friday" but I guarantee you Jesus' disciples didn't see it that way when they were living out days one and two. They were frightened mice one day and then the next they were the bravest, most courageous and powerful men and women who have ever lived on the face of this planet. What happened? The third day.

The third day is God's day and it changes everything! The third day is when slaves become the Treasured Possession of the God of the universe. The third day is when idols like Dagon come tumbling down and God starts making His way back to His people. It's the day when simple harem girls like Esther face down the most powerful king on earth and save her people. It's when stubborn prophets like Jonah get dropped off at the beach by a giant fish. It's the day stones are rolled away, death is shown to be the sham that it really is for God's people and the day that crucified carpenters walk back into the light of day with a spring in His step and a twinkle in His eye. That's the third day and the testimony of the Bible is that for every child of God the third day is coming:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ...thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 (NIV)

Can you believe it? He gives US the victory. Victory over death. Victory over the grave. All because of and through Jesus who is the only one to go through death's door and live forever to tell about it. So if you're going through a dark time right now I hope more than anything you'll remember that days one and two won't last forever. God promises some relief here and now on this side of eternity but He has MUCH bigger plans for you and me. And when we finally get to our own personal third day I really do believe everything we've gone through here will seem like a bad night in an unfortunate hotel. But until we get there we've still got to deal with the bedbugs and the loud party in the room above us and the bursting pipes and the yelling and screaming in the hall (I know what you're thinking- what hotels have you stayed at?!?!?).

Over the last 9 months I've had a song that I've been wearing out on repeat on my phone (I guess you can't wear out mp3s can you? Well, you know what I mean...). It's a song by a guy

named Kristian Stanfill called The Lord Our God. There's one particular section that speaks to me every time I've heard it and has since the day after Pastor Jeff passed away:

The Lord our God is ever faithful
Never changing through the ages
From this darkness You will lead us
And forever we will say
You're the Lord our God

Some days I had to just keep repeating that phrase over and over again- from this darkness, You will lead us. And forever we will say, You're the Lord our God. I knew exactly what God was trying to say to me through that line- this isn't a one day story you're living out. It's not a two day story either. It's a three day story and trust Me when I tell you, the third day is coming. Towards the end of that song there's a phrase Kristian Stanfill repeats over and over:

We won't move without You ~ We won't move without You ~ You're the Lord of all and all that we need, Lord. So We won't move without You ~ We won't move without You ~ You're the Lord of all and all that we need, Lord.

Another refrain that's been running through my brain on repeat for the last 9 months. As a leader at Riverside I wanted so badly to answer the question, what will we do now? with some impressive and confident reply. But I didn't have one other than trust that God would somehow lead us out of the darkness and despair we (and I) found ourselves thrust into on August 13th. So we waited and did our best to trust and believe that our story was in fact a three day story. I can't say we've fully experienced it yet but finally I am starting to see some light. God is indeed leading us and has since the day the darkness set in- I just had a tough time seeing it back then. For the first time in quite a while I am actually feeling the hope and not just believing and trusting that hope will eventually return.

I don't know exactly where you are today as you read this. Heck, maybe we don't even know each other and you're just reading this because one of your "religious" friends shared it to their page on Facebook. I may not know your name but I can share this hope with you because the One Who guarantees that hope does (know your name that is). He knows you and He knows what you're going through and I believe with all my heart that what He wants you to know more than anything is, you may find yourself in a day one or day two situation (lots of darkness and uncertainty and fear and despair) but your story isn't a two day story. It's a three day story. And God OWNS the third day.

So. Don't. Give. Up. Hope.

Edit: I wrote these reflections about a year and a half before I would experience a heart attack on the day after the 2 year anniversary of Pastor Jeff's sudden and devastating death. I once again had to rely on faith to try to remember and live out the fact that I believe my story (and all of yours) are not one day or two day stories but three day stories. I won't say it was easy but it was made all the more possible because of what I saw God do in my life and the life of Riverside Community Church in the two years after Jeff's death. How will my story end? I don't know. God's still writing it out and all I (and all you) can do is take the next step but I believe this with all my heart on this day- December 28, 2019 at 2:25 PM- the Lord our God is ever

faithful. Never changing through the ages. From this darkness You will lead us. And forever we will say. You're the Lord our God. We won't move without You ~ We won't move without You ~ You're the Lord of all and all that we need, Lord. So We won't move without You ~ We won't move without You ~ You're the Lord of all and all that we need, Lord.

Happy new year everyone.