

HOLY WEEKS

2024 DEVOTIONAL

MT PULASKI CHRISTIAN CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

My friends,
Welcome to the 2024 Holy Week and Easter devotional guide. I am so excited to share this with you, as it is unique from all the others in two ways.

First, this *two week journey* invites you into the *Passion Narrative* (the events between Palm Sunday and Resurrection Sunday) and the hopeful beginning of *Eastertide* (the 50 days from Resurrection Sunday to Pentecost).

Second, *it has been prayed over, prepared for, and written*, not just by me, but *by eleven other people in the congregation*. Some of these voices will be familiar, some will be new -- no matter, the voice of the Spirit calls clearly through each of them. I have been encouraged by their willingness to share with us and formed by the fuller image of Christ they have pointed to. I hope the same is true of you after spending time with this devotional. They have truly given us a gift. Please share your gratitude with them.

You are encouraged to start each day's devotional by spending a minute or two in silence to focus your attention, acknowledging in prayer you've come to be with and hear from the Lord, and reading the passage.

*May our crucified Savior and risen Lord be with you,
Ellie*



PALM SUNDAY

Brittany Witkowski || Luke 19:37-40

THE UNCONVENTIONAL "YES"

One of the most helpful lessons that I've learned as a parent is the power of the word, "no." If you have ever considered telling a young child "no," you know it can really make or break the next hour of your parenting. When my kindergartener wants to use the sawzall unsupervised, that is a hard no. But, when he wants to experiment with ingredients after I just cleaned the kitchen, that can be a yes. No, I don't want to deal with a messy kitchen again. No, I don't want to redirect him to ingredients that will actually taste good. No, I don't want to throw his clothes in the laundry after the inevitable mess. But the big picture is that my "no" can ultimately quash something good- my child learning, creating, and gaining joy from reflecting God's image as our Creator.

Along Jesus's journey to Jerusalem on what we now call "Palm Sunday," there are a few stories that show Pharisees or even Jesus's followers rebuking or rejecting Jesus or the good that he was doing. Families were rebuked by the disciples for bringing their children to Jesus, the blind and lame were rebuked for desperately calling out through the crowds to get Jesus's attention, and here, the Pharisees were wisely rebuked for wanting the worshiping crowd to be silenced.

But stories like these leave me considering the fear, the pride, and ultimately the rejection of God and his plan for humanity. Is this unconventional man, claiming to be the Son of God, worth following? Is he worth the sacrifice of my conventional and predictable life? We see that Jesus was turning the Jewish community upside down through his unconventional life and mission, and he does the same for us in the most unexpected ways.

I have to consider how Jesus healed and carried out miracles in the Bible because there are dozens of examples that highlight the out-of-the-ordinary ways that Jesus lived out his ministry. Even his “triumphant entry” into Jerusalem is unconventional. He’s riding a borrowed donkey, traveling with a future betrayer and disowner, while the people shouting “Hosanna” believe he’s going to free them from Roman oppression. How incredible it is that he was doing so much more!

Jesus’s journey to Jerusalem has a purpose, and it doesn’t end with a triumphal entry. Palm Sunday celebrations will cease, and he will be abandoned by the same people that cried out praises. Even so, he will obediently journey to the cross with a resounding “YES!” to fulfill God’s promises and make a way for all people to be close to Him, both now and for eternity. Through God’s unprecedented plan for all of humanity, He made a way for us to draw near to him through Jesus’s death and resurrection. On Palm Sunday, you and I can look forward to the fulfillment of this unconventional, yet perfect, plan—his plan to save the world from their sins through Jesus, who never rejects or rebukes anyone that wants to come to him.

HOLY MONDAY

Brian Lowery || Matthew 26:6–13

THE ONE WHO IS CLEARLY BEST

Some words never fail to draw a shudder. Some even have the power to conjure up near-convulsion—like these words from Judas to the religious leaders: “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” The “him” in his inquiry is Jesus, which means Judas is entertaining the most foolish trade imaginable. It doesn’t matter one lick what the religious leaders will choose to offer; it won’t be enough. But Judas takes his paltry thirty pieces of silver and runs. *Foolish*. But familiar, too. Holy Week is *filled* with foolish trades. Jesus is swapped for a few winks of sleep, the warmth of a charcoal fire, a little political peace and quiet, an insurrectionist. *Almost* everyone spends Holy Week looking to trade the one who’s clearly best for what’s at best merely good. Almost everyone. There are a few who refuse to even *entertain* trade talks—and one woman in particular who Jesus himself demands we mention wherever the Gospel is preached: the woman who shattered an alabaster flask to pour priceless, perfumed ointment over the head of Jesus. The lavish act garners whispers from the peanut gallery that *she’s* made a foolish trade. We know of one self-righteous charge—“That could have been used to help the ministry!”—but it’s safe to assume others tsk-tsked over just how much the ointment, and the ornate vessel in which it had been stored, could have helped her financially somewhere down the road. But she knew she was in the presence of the One who’s clearly best, and in such a situation you look to give, rather than get, and especially when you know anything you can get in return is at best merely good.

In a week populated by people quick to swap the Son, how is it that this woman clings to Jesus with a white-knuckled tenacity? It'd be good to find an answer, given we far prefer looking more like her than, say, Judas. And the answer is peeking out from within the last sentence of the previous paragraph: *she knew*. She knew she was in the presence of the one who's clearly best. You can see it in one seemingly small detail: she poured the perfumed ointment *over top Jesus's head*—an act most often reserved for royalty in the ancient world. She knew Jesus was *king*. And—this is so obvious, I'm a bit embarrassed to write it (but write it I will)—she knew because she was the kind of person who simply takes time to *know*. John's gospel (12:1-8) identifies the woman who anointed Jesus as Mary of Bethany. Mary who “chose the good portion” (Luke 10:38-42)—that is, sitting still at the feet of Jesus, a student with their teacher, while the world around her rushed along from one thing to the next. She knew who Jesus was—king, clearly best—because she'd known his teaching through and through, his miracles (including the coaxing of her brother from the tomb) through and through, *him* through and through, and this deep knowledge put to rest any talk of a trade. It only inspired that white-knuckled tenacity.

We want to look like Mary—to look like someone who would never trade the One who is clearly best for what's at best merely good. This means we have to work to deeply know just as Mary deeply knew. It all reminds me of a short and searing word from the Puritan Richard Sibbes—and what this looks like for each of us will vary. Aching to commission a people to remain faithful to Christ, he offered one clarion plea: “Study the excellencies of Jesus.” That is, sit at his feet there with Mary. Work to hear his words. Work to let his miracles bear witness to you. Work simply to behold him. That you might know and—like Mary—remain.

HOLY TUESDAY

Jen McCormick || Mt 26 or Mk 14

THE LAST SUPPER & THE PASSOVER MEAL



We hear this often during Communion - that Jesus calls bread his body, and wine his blood (Mk 14:22-24). We know Christ's body was broken for us - that he was sacrificed for our sins. But what did the Bread and Wine actually symbolize?

In John 6, Jesus teaches about how he is the Bread of Life. A crowd asks Jesus for a sign that they can see and believe in him. They mention, "Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" (Ex 16:4, Jn 6:31). Sure, that makes sense! Why wouldn't they want a sign, a miracle, a way to know that he was who he said he was?!

Jesus replied to them, "I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (Jn 6:48-51 NIV).

Jesus is the bread that came from heaven - sent to satisfy all our worldly hungers.

In Exodus 12, the final plague is set to strike in Egypt. The Lord tells Moses that He will pass over Egypt and take the life of every first born son. However, he will spare the sons of those who ready themselves by sacrificing a lamb without defect, eating its meat, and spreading the blood over the top and sides of their door frames. "When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood...and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down (v 23). In Leviticus 17, God tells the Israelites not to eat/drink the blood of any creatures they kill to eat or sacrifice. "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (v 11).

So why does Jesus tell his disciples to drink the Wine, which symbolizes his blood? "Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Mt. 26:27-28 NIV) Jesus is calling himself the perfect and final sacrifice for the sins of those who have eaten the Bread of Life (those who have chosen to believe and follow Jesus).

On this Holy Tuesday, we remember the sacrifice Jesus was about to make. We remember that, as followers of The Way, Jesus has satisfied our every longing. We remember that he is the Perfect Lamb of God, who forgives all our sins.

HOLY WEDNESDAY

Krystle Deibert || Mt 26, Mk14, or Lk 22

KEEP WATCH AND PRAY

As we read the events of Holy Week, we are told that Satan entered one of Jesus' own disciples, Judas, who made a deal with the chief priests to betray Jesus. Judas then *watched* for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them. I imagine Judas knew Jesus' habits well, having spent a lot of time with Him, so he may have suspected Jesus would be getting away to have his regular alone time

with his Father. While Judas used his intimate knowledge of Jesus to betray him, Jesus made time to be alone with his Father in intimate, relational prayer. This time, knowing his betrayer was near, Jesus asked his disciples to *keep watch and pray*. But the disciples fell asleep, not just once, but three times while Jesus prayed with his whole being, to the point of sweat "like drops of blood falling to the ground."

Take a few minutes to imagine yourself as each of the people in this story. Can you relate to any of them? Do you relate to Jesus, being wrongfully deceived and handed over to enemies, maybe by seemingly close friends or family? Maybe you can relate to feeling distant from Jesus, not able to gain anything from Him, or wanting to give up on Him all together, like Judas. I think the reason I'm drawn to these specific moments in Jesus' last week on earth, is because I relate greatly to the disciples falling asleep.

With my current stage in life, I tend to be in “go mode” throughout the day, so as soon as I sit anywhere, my body automatically assumes it’s time to sleep, making it hard to keep focus when reading, praying, or anything stationary. But, further, can you relate to struggling to *keep watch*? To intentionally keep aware of the spiritual warfare happening all around us and in your own life? To watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation” (Mt 26:41)? To make it your first priority, as Jesus did, to have an intimate relationship with your Father, so natural, that in all circumstances, you are in constant two-way communication with Him?

The disciples were THE closest people to Jesus on earth, and yet they fell asleep during His pivotal final hours, after being told the time was near and tasked with keeping watch. One of them even betrayed Him, and another denied Him. All of them had confidently declared their allegiance to Jesus hours before, vowing they would never fall away from Him. If these choices were made by His 12 closest followers, how much more vigilant should we be *to keep watch and pray*? So, no matter who you relate to today, can you commit to being more spiritually alert, and more intentional in prayer specifically for God’s will (as Jesus did while the disciples were sleeping)?



MAUNDY THURSDAY

Wyatt Waterkotte || Mt 27, Mk 15, or Lk 23

WHICH JESUS DO YOU WANT?



After Christ's arrest, pseudo-trial, beatings, and shuffling from authority to authority; he arrived before Pontius Pilate who was convinced of his innocence. Pilate was aware that the charges against Christ were made up out of jealousy and that the demands of the chief priests were over-the-top. However, faced with a large crowd of nationalistic people with insurrection in their hearts, what was he to do? Pilate employed the only politically viable option available to him and utilized a custom of the area in which the people could choose a criminal to be released before their sentence was officially passed on them. Pilate's hope, and likely his expectation, was that the people would call for Christ to be released, thereby saving Pilate himself from a difficult position.

Alas, it was not to be and the people called for another to be released instead and Pilate was forced to pronounce on Christ the sentence that the people demanded, crucifixion.

Who was this other criminal? Why would the people choose him? His name, incidentally, was also Jesus. Jesus Barabbas is how it is recorded in many manuscripts and it is believed that the "Jesus" was removed in other manuscripts out of reverence to Christ. He was being held on charges of insurrection and murder. Pilate offered the people a choice, essentially asking them which Jesus they wanted. In context of the story, it was just days ago that Christ entered Jerusalem to throngs of supporters who were anxious to meet him and learn from him. It seems so confusing

that all that adoration could evaporate so fast. The fact is, it probably didn't. Christ is likely no less popular at the moment of Barabbas' release than he was when he entered the city. What has changed is the efforts put forth by the powers working against him.

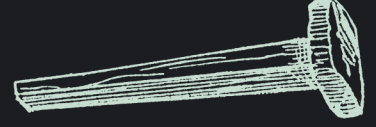
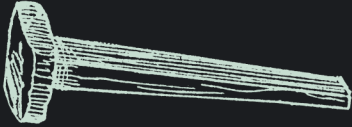
We look at the situation presented in scripture as a clear choice between Jesus Christ the Messiah and Jesus Barabbas the murderer. That may be true, but after some campaigning it may not be altogether clear. There were then very clear forces working against Jesus. The chief priests were desperate to be rid of him and they were spread amongst the crowds reminding them of Barabbas' good qualities. He was a freedom fighter; part of the insurrection trying to remove the yoke of Roman control from around Israel's neck. He had murdered, but only the enemies of the Jewish people. In addition to this active campaign, Jesus also faced another force working against him...apathy. Many of those in the crowd would have found it hard to believe that Jesus was actually being tried. After all, what had he done wrong? Surely they will not convict him of anything. Why put my comfort, reputation, or position at risk to defend him when nothing is probably going to happen anyway?

We face the same decision today nested within so many other decisions that we make. Whether in issues of our attitude, behavior, habits, or something else; we are really deciding "Which Jesus do I want?". Jesus loses so often in this world. He is almost never society's first choice, but he does not have to lose in our hearts. We must train ourselves to resist apathy, undue influence by those with ulterior motives, and the calls of the crowd. Jesus should be our first choice, our fast choice, our only choice every single time. That is the prayer of my heart and I would ask that it be the prayer of yours as well.

GOOD FRIDAY

Tad Blacketer|| Mark 15:21-41

WHO IS THIS MAN ON THE CROSS?



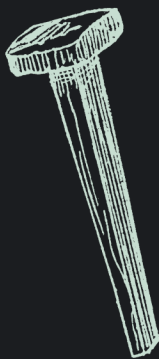
In the Gospels Jesus' identity is often shrouded in mystery. No one seemed to completely understand this man who cast out demons and taught with greater authority than the experts of the day. In a way, it is not until the end of the book that the answer is fully revealed. In Mark Chapter 15, we have a tension between Jesus' identity as an earthly authority and that of something more. Jesus is brought before Pilot, who inquires about a title that has obviously been floating around. Pilot asks "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "these are your words, not mine." What follows is a series of five more usages of the title "King of the Jews" or the counterpart "King of Israel."

Pilot goes out to the crowds and asks them about releasing the "King of the Jews." After the crowds dismiss his offer, he again asks them "then what shall I do with this man you call the 'King of the Jews'?" They shouted "crucify!" Later, Roman soldiers mocked Jesus, saying, "hail 'King of the Jews.'" On the cross, they placed a sign above his head that read the "King of the Jews," and at the foot of the cross, scribes and priests mocked Jesus and said "let the 'King of Israel' come down and save himself."

As Jesus breathed his last and the temple curtain was torn in two, it was a Roman centurion that made a different confession. One must wonder if he, too, was one of the soldiers who mocked and reviled and spit on Jesus. But here in Jesus' last moments, facing the cross, the Centurian proclaims, "Truly this man was *the son of God*."

The centurion's confession functions as a bookend to the entire gospel. Even though Mark shrouds Jesus' identity and mystery, he gives us the answer at the very beginning. Mark 1:1 says, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, *the son of God*." The next time we read this phrase, it's on the lips of one who was in charge of making sure the prophet of Nazareth preached no more.

So, who is this man on the cross? Do we anticipate a Jesus that looks like the leaders of the world? A king with a specific people. Do we anticipate a Jesus that will free us from our oppressors? Or do we see a Jesus that is far greater than human understanding? Do we contemplate the mystery of the cross with a perspective of Jesus as God in the flesh?



HOLY SATURDAY

Kevin Rosborough || John 19:38-42

FROM FEARFUL TO FEARLESS

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus the Pharisee played important and fearless roles in the run-up to the trial of Jesus prior to his crucifixion, and they showed tender care of our Lord's body after crucifixion. These bold, public actions contrasted sharply with their first meetings with Jesus, which were more secret and hidden from the public eye. What made the difference? What would cause these men to be fearful of losing out of their positions and status and wealth at one point in their lives only to do an aboutface and boldly advocate for the Lord?

Nicodemus was not just a Pharisee, but a ruler of the Pharisees, which meant that he was a powerful and learned man, respected in the Jewish community, a teacher of the law. We see in the third chapter of John that Nicodemus came to meet Jesus at night because he was afraid of what others might say about him if they saw him meeting this new and controversial teacher. We note in this Scripture that Jesus did not scold him for his fear or refuse to meet with him in secret; he accepted Nicodemus, but also challenged his thinking and learning. In John 7, we see that Nicodemus was already changing his views when he spoke out against the unbelieving Pharisees, warning them not to seize Jesus in a devious manner.

Joseph of Arimathea, only mentioned a few times in the gospels, was part of the



Sanhedrin, a powerful ruling body of the Jewish council. Joseph would have been well known and respected in the community, would have possessed status and riches. We note in Luke 23 that Joseph stood up for his principles and would not agree with the Sanhedrin's decision to crucify Christ; a momentous decision to make because we see in John 19 that Joseph had heretofore been a secret follower of Christ and not upfront in his beliefs. Yet both Nicodemus and Joseph decided to make a public stand for Christ after his crucifixion, with Joseph going to Pilate and asking that the body of Jesus be given to him for burial, and Nicodemus bringing spices and aloes to wrap the body in preparation for burial. Of note, this was the time of Passover; high holy days and they were making themselves ritually unclean and unable to participate in the Passover celebration because they had handled the dead body of Jesus. Joseph also went an extra step by donating his own tomb for Jesus' burial, which fulfilled a scripture in Isaiah 53:9.

These men had been fearful and disciples in secret, but on this day, they became fearless for the Lord. There would be no hiding their actions which would have invited scorn from their fellow Jewish leaders and most likely disgrace and possible banishment from their powerful positions, which would have meant loss of status and riches, but they followed their convictions. They had been changed; they had been transformed, because they had been with the Lord. They might have been fearful at one time, but after their encounters with Jesus, they became fearless. May our encounters with Jesus during this time of Easter also fill us with boldness to go and tell others what Jesus has done for them.

RESURRECTION

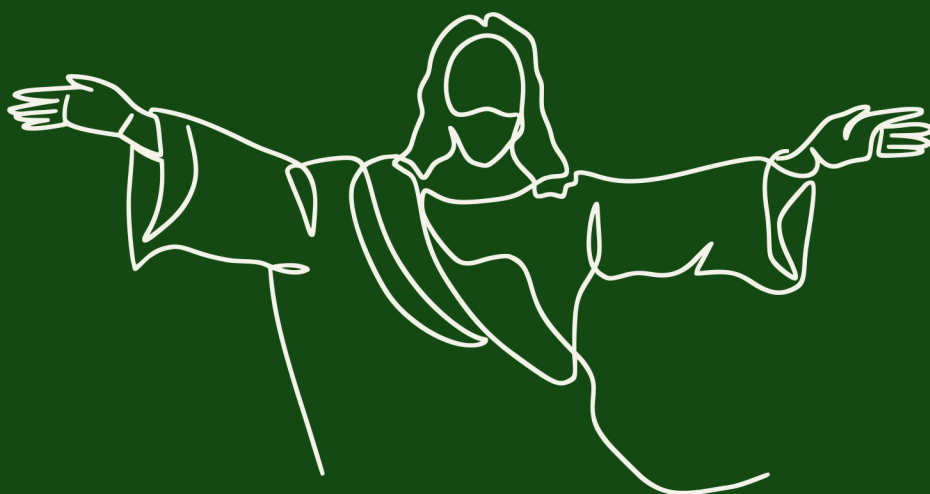
SUNDAY

Hannah Blacketer || John 20:1-18

MARY MAGDALENE

There are many things I love about this story including how John outruns Peter. But what I love the most is the glimpse we get into the relationship that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had. Mary is among a group of women that went to the tomb early, before sunrise early, to clean and properly prepare Jesus' body for burial. They were unable to do these things properly when he was first taken off the cross because the Sabbath was approaching. How hard it must have been on that Sabbath day to just sit in grief and wait. They could not distract themselves from their grief with their work, because work was not done on the Sabbath. Instead, they waited and went to the tomb early Sunday morning. But to their surprise they did not find Jesus' body. They found a tomb that contained only the linen cloths that had been wrapped around Jesus' dead body. They didn't understand yet that he was alive. Instead, they thought that someone had moved the body. I would have probably wondered, "Are we at the right tomb? Maybe it was the one by that other tree." Not knowing what to do, Mary ran to tell Peter and John. They all returned and investigated the tomb. Peter and John now believed and went home. But not Mary. She stayed and wept for Jesus. She could not get past the idea that his body was gone.

As she wept, she looked into the tomb and saw two angels sitting where Jesus' body should be. They didn't tell her to "fear not". Instead, they asked why she was weeping. As she was explaining to them her confusion she saw him, the one she was looking for. But she didn't recognize him. How often is Jesus right in front of us, ready to help and comfort us but we don't recognize his presence? But when he speaks her name, "Mary," she knows who it is. "Only one person says her name like that," writes Sally Lloyd-Jones in The Jesus Storybook Bible. Oh the joy that she must have felt! The nightmare of Jesus' death and missing body was instantly replaced with the pure joy of knowing that he was alive again. I'm sure that she didn't fully understand all that his resurrection meant for the salvation of mankind, but she knew a joy that can only come from intimately knowing the resurrected Jesus. It is my hope that we would all know Jesus on the same personal level that Mary did. It is my hope that we would have ears to hear him calling us by name through the chaos and grief that this broken world offers. It is my hope that we would know the joy that Mary felt that day as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and his defeat of death forever.



EASTERTIDE DAY I

Ellie Koranek || John 20:3-9

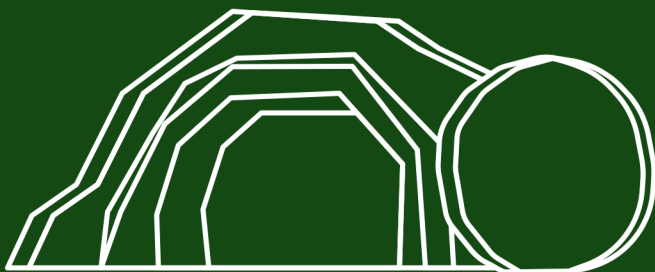
HE SAW AND BELIEVED

Sandwiched between Mary Magdalene visiting the tomb to find it empty and her search for (and the revelation of!) Jesus, is a playful story of two excited disciples running to the empty tomb.

Simon Peter and “the other disciple, the one Jesus loved” (supposedly John himself), were two of Jesus’ closest friends. The two of them, and John’s brother James, had been his disciples and privileged moments of revelation none of the others were. Simon was even given a new name (Peter) to represent his future leadership among the disciples and the early church.

There are not a lot of details given in this passage about what the conversation looked like, but in my imagination Peter and John always take on these childlike qualities that we often find endearing. Wide eyes. Stilled bodies. Jaws a little slack, until finally “noooooo waaaay!” breaks through. And they take off running. At the very least, curiosity had taken over them. They couldn’t help but believe that maybe something truly miraculous had happened again. Hadn’t Jesus been redefining what was possible from the very beginning? Hadn’t he been laying the groundwork for the

unbelievable to rewrite what was believable? There was no time to lose, no status or title that could keep them away from the tomb or from being the first. Embracing curiosity they raced to it.



I wonder if they laughed at their own abandon. If they shouted and teased. If they found relief in the exhilaration of an unexpected run. If joy and hope, awe and curiosity carried them faster than they had ever gone before. The race ends with John as victor, but Peter is the first to take a brave step into the tomb. To lead the way into whatever reality they now found themselves in.

The reality was a risen Lord.

The reality was something so incredible most wouldn't believe it, but John did. "He saw and believed." All that Jesus had said to them that once seemed cryptic was clear. All that had been promised came true in ways better than they probably imagined.

And yet, "they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." They did not understand the fullness of the need for resurrection. They did not understand all of the implications this new reality had for them, for their friends and family, for the world, for the completion of history, prophecy, and even poetry.

But they believed.

They had heard about Jesus and gone running, joyfully uninhibited, unabashedly curious. What was he up to now? They had stepped into a new reality, bravely facing a world turned upside down. What would it mean? And still, they trusted it to be true. They trusted it to be good and right and just. They believed Jesus.

What about you? Do you run to hear about Jesus? Do you believe even when you don't understand?

EASTERTIDE DAY 2

Rob Pal || Luke 24:13-49

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

In Luke 24, beginning with verse 13 we read the story of two of the disciples walking along a road going to a village named Emmaus. The great Catholic priest Henri Nouwen describes it this way in his work

With Burning Hearts:

"You can see from the way they walk that they are not happy.

Their bodies are bent over, their faces are downcast, their movements slow. They can hardly imagine that it was only a few years ago when they had met someone who had changed their lives, someone who had radically interrupted their daily routines. The stranger from Nazareth had made everything new. Now he is dead. His body that had radiated light had been destroyed under the hands of his torturers. All had come to nothing. They had lost him. Not just him, but, with him, also themselves."

In many ways, we are like them. We know it when we dare to look into the center of our being and encounter there our lostness. Aren't we lost too? If there is any word that summarizes well our pain, it is the word "loss." There are so many things we have lost. Safety of the womb, freedom of youth, as we grow old our good looks and friends, and when we die...we lose it all.

There are other types of losses as well. Loss of safety through violence, loss of friends through betrayal, loss of home through war. The list goes on and on. Maybe many of these losses are far from most of us. They happen to "other" people in "other" places in the world. What about our dreams? We thought we would be more successful and loved.

We had planned to become more forgiving and caring. Somehow-

and we're not even sure how it happened—we lost our dream. We became worrying and anxious people.

As we walk together on this journey of life, as the two on the road to Emmaus had walked together, we listen to each other and realize these losses are part of our journey as well as the journey of our companions. As we grow older we discover that what supported us for so many years—prayer, worship, community life, and a clear knowledge of God's guiding love—has lost its grip on us. We remember the time when Jesus was so real to us that we had no question about his presence in our lives. And now? We no longer think of him very much, we no longer desire to spend long hours in his presence. We no longer have that special feeling about him. Gradually we have come to the realization that for us too he has become a stranger—somehow we lost him.

Take some time this week and mourn your losses. Do not ignore them or try to wish them away. We need to shed tears over them and allow ourselves to grieve. To grieve is to allow our losses to lead us to the painful truth of our brokenness. As we feel the pain of our own losses, our hearts are opened to see the losses of others beyond our own little world of family and friends.

Notice the transition in the story. They first believed that Jesus was gone forever and they thought someone took his body. But then, they saw him, knew him, and returned to the others to tell them. They transition from believing he was permanently dead, his body stolen, to witnessing, knowing, and hearing about him being alive once more.

As you approach communion time this coming Sunday, take some time to reflect on God's grace and mercy. Do our losses lead to resentment or gratitude? Approach the table with gratitude and not resentment. What greater hope or comfort could the kingdom provide than a Christ who has risen?

FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED

EASTERTIDE DAY 3

Brittney Taylor || John 20:24-29

THOMAS



Up to this point Jesus had appeared to many of the disciples but Thomas had not yet seen the resurrected Christ. “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

Thomas was one of the twelve disciples, a man who walked side by side with Jesus daily for years, a man who broke bread with the Son of God, a man who saw many miracles and wonders before his eyes. This is the man doubting Christ’s resurrection.

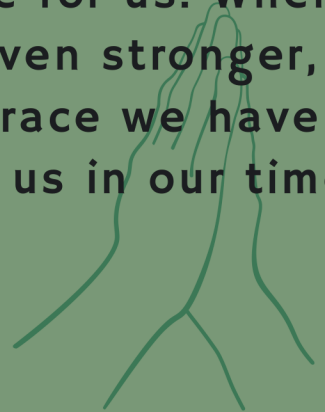
Did Jesus rebuke Thomas for his doubt? Did He burn with anger at the unbelief and take away his salvation? No, far from it! Jesus offered himself to Thomas saying “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” How comforting it is to see Christ showing such mercy and grace to Thomas for his doubts!

Christ said "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." How blessed are we as those who have not seen yet have believed; and how much more comforting to know that during times of doubt Christ does not turn His head and fold His arms at us, but instead lovingly offers himself to us just as He did Thomas.

We all will face times of doubt. We all will have trials to come that will make it easy to forget the miracles we have seen God work in front of our eyes; that will make it easy to forget the One who has been beside us each and every day. May we turn towards Christ during these times, digging deeper into His word and into prayer.

PRAY

Father, thank you for this sweet story tucked into Scripture. Thank you for showing us such a beautiful example of Your mercy and grace and love for us. When doubt creeps in, may You hold onto us even stronger, reminding us of Your presence and the grace we have through Christ Jesus. Lord we believe, help us in our times of unbelief. Amen.



EASTERTIDE DAY 5

Ellie Koranek || Acts 2:1-12

THE HOLY SPIRIT

“We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

Reading through Acts 2 this cry of amazement caught my attention. The Holy Spirit had just descended to the Twelve and immediately started working through them. And what was its *first* work? Not to give sight to the blind or words to the mute, not to give prophetic messages or to put the lowly in power, not to strike down or to resuscitate, but *to declare the wonders of God*.

Together, Peter and the Spirit deliver a powerful yet humble sermon about Jesus. You can read it in Acts 2:14-36. I would encourage you to do so, and then take a few minutes to reflect on these questions:

What, specifically, are the wonders of God according to this passage?

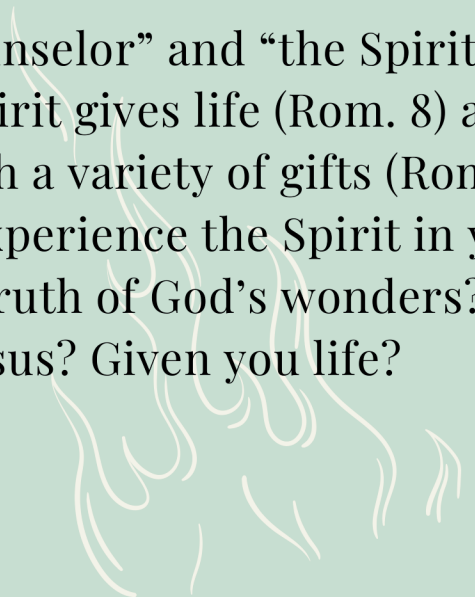
In light of this message, the crowds ask Peter and the others “what shall we do?” What is Peter’s reply?

When was the first time you truly heard and understood the Spirit
“declaring the wonders of God”?

How did the Spirit speak in your “own tongue”? Or, how did the Spirit
communicate the message in a way that was personally meaningful to
you?

In response to hearing the wonders of God in your own tongue, how did
you respond? What has repentance looked like in your life? Have you
stepped into the waters of baptism? Why or why not?

In John, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “the Counselor” and “the Spirit of
truth” (14:16-17, 16:5-16). Paul tells us the Spirit gives life (Rom. 8) and
empowers us to continue Jesus’ works through a variety of gifts (Rom 12, 1
Cor 12, Eph 4). How have you continued to experience the Spirit in your
life? How has it counseled you with the truth of God’s wonders?
Empowered you to do the work of Jesus? Given you life?



EASTERTIDE DAY 6

Annette Sowers || Acts 6-7

STEPHEN

The first Christian martyr was set apart to care for widows.

What? That doesn't sound dangerous. Now, we know Stephen was doing a lot more than quietly "waiting tables," but it is a little bit shocking to me that we are introduced to Stephen first as an early church "deacon." He was taking care of an unglamorous duty that was very necessary and important to God and his vision for the Church. The Holy Spirit filled Stephen's every day, when he was caring for widows and when he was "doing great wonders and signs among the people," (6:8). Same Spirit, same faith, same conviction, same wisdom. (6:3, 6:10)

We see the breath of the Almighty, His "Ruah," the Spirit of God, speaking with wisdom as Stephen defends the gospel and calls his accusers to repentance in Acts 7.

Stephen is accused of badmouthing the temple and the law in chapter 6, and he replies with honesty and clarity. He gives honor to the ways God instituted the temple and the purpose it served, but exposes their hypocrisy of killing the promised Messiah even while they claim to be listening to the Law. They may think they follow God in their flesh, but he calls their hearts and ears uncircumcised..unclean, unacceptable to God. They weren't open to believing how God is continuing his Story, answering prayers, fulfilling promises.

Stephen retells the story of God living among his people, with or without a physical dwelling place. From the garden to the tabernacle to the temple, from the burning bush to the whisper in a cave, God has made ways to draw near to us until He fully renews heaven and earth, most of all in the life of Jesus himself and the sending of the Holy Spirit to actually be within us, empowering us. Take a minute or two to be filled with gratitude for God's patience and grace over thousands of years, his long-lasting love, his pursuit of his most precious creation, people, you and me.

The Church is the people following Jesus. The Church is the people choosing to serve those in need—both physical and spiritual, choosing to be in awe of God and shun evil, choosing to faithfully represent the gospel in what they say and do—even when it brings pain or death. As you reflect on this passage today, I invite you to ask God how he sees you living out these things. How has he uniquely placed you where you are to serve, to be wise, to represent the good news of Jesus, even when it carries hard truths?

It gives me goosebumps and misty eyes to be included, wanted, and equipped, into this global community, into the Kingdom of God.



EASTERTIDE DAY 7

Ellie Koranek || Colossians 1:15–23, 2:9–15

THE CRUCIFIED SAVIOR, THE RESURRECTED LORD, & YOU

We began this year with a series in Colossians, and I hope you don't mind that we are going to venture back there together today.

These passages don't miss a single thing about who Jesus is--from eternity to the cross and back again, the beauty and complexity of Jesus is fully revealed.

He is the image of the invisible, unseeable God described as “compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiving, holy and just” (Exodus 34:6–7).

He is the creator and sustainer of all things, and all things exist for his good purposes.

He is the head of the Church, giving life to the Body.

He is the firstborn of the dead, resurrecting so as to say “*even this* is redeemable when placed in my care.”

and

by his *physical body* through death (because in all of the

glorious splendor of being divine, it was decided he needed to take on a physical human body), he reconciled humanity from alienated enemies to his Father

and

in him we have been given fullness and have been raised with him from the dead

AND

he made public spectacle of all the things that kill us and separate us from God. Our evil: sentenced to death. Our sin: nailed to a cross. Our guilt: held in the grave by an immoveable stone.

AND

all of this --who he is, what he has done-- so that we can be alive *in him*. He knew we are more than our evil, our sin, our guilt, He knew they were only killing us and we were helpless to save ourselves. So he joined us in our death, that we might join him in his life.

He gave the unconventional “yes,” his body, his blood. He let himself be traded for money and a murderer. He -- the Son of God-- was mistaken for a mere man. He humbled himself to a grave. Resurrected, he calls your name to enter a new reality. He walks in your loss and reveals hope in himself. He settles your doubt with his scars. He gives his Spirit and repurposes our entire lives. And there is no doubt of this, for he is risen indeed.

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