

I am sending you these materials as a way for us to be together, to be church, during this time of isolation and separateness. It is a strange time indeed—but I hope that you feel the ways in which we are connected—and I look forward to the time when we can all worship again at Christ Episcopal, not just WITH Christ Episcopal.

Our congregation will be “meeting” in the evenings to read and reflect together. For one week, March 29-April 4, we will read the seven penitential psalms—the psalms of David that he prayed as he faced the evil he had committed, and the evil that had followed—death, break up of family, despair, and broken hearts. There is never a time in our lives that we do not have sorrow, and these deep sorrows will visit every one of us—but in this time of pandemic the pain of the world is very much at the surface.

Holy Week we will follow Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew, reading chapter by chapter and walking with Jesus.

I’ve included materials for you to read at home so that may help you move into these final weeks of Lent and into Holy Week. Although we can’t hear each other’s voice, we are all journeying with this material together.

I invite you to find verses and phrases that especially speak to you. Write them down, say them throughout the day, try to memorize them. These words that connect to the deepest parts of ourselves can be the living water in desert times.

Sending you prayers, blessings, and thanksgiving for all that we share,

Jennifer+

CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH XENIA
CHURCH DURING COVID-19
March 29-Easter Sunday April 12

Dear Ones:

I saw a sign on a church notice board that said, "I didn't expect to give up THIS much for Lent."
I think many of us feel that way.

For the next two weeks, we will worship in our Xenia community; I also invite you to worship with the wider Christian community for principal services.

Virtual Worship at Christ Episcopal Xenia

March 29: Morning Prayer

March 30-April 4: The Penitential Psalms

Each evening by 8.00 pm I will say Evening Prayer on the CECX Facebook page—with an extra psalm. Through the week of March 29-April 4, we will ponder the 7 Penitential Psalms. I will give a reflection on each of the psalms during Morning Prayer. I will email a lovely copy of these psalms, but of course you can find them in your prayerbook in the Psalter section which begins on p. 585.

Holy Week and the Gospel According to Matthew: April 5-April 12

Each evening by 8.00 pm I will say Evening Prayer on the CECX Facebook page—and will offer a reflection on one of the chapters of the Gospel According to Matthew leading up to and including Easter Sunday. The readings in Morning Prayer for this week are from Mark and John, so reading Matthew will be another perspective on the Passion.

I won't read the whole chapter on the video; I'll reflect on a sentence or a section from the chapter.

Individual Devotion: Stations of the Cross

I will be joining the diocese to reflect on the Stations of the Cross each evening. This will be a private devotional for me, but if you do also choose to participate in this devotional, know that we will be doing this together. You will find the diocesan Stations of the Cross here <http://diosohio.org/doing-church-during-covid19/> under "Worship Resources."

Worship in the wider Communion: Palm Sunday, Triduum and Easter

For **Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday** principle services, I invite you to join the National Cathedral, Christ Cathedral Cincinnati, or any of the churches in our diocese that have live services.

Daily services from [Washington National Cathedral](#), follow this link.

Christ Church Cathedral Cincinnati Morning Prayer Sundays at [8 a.m.](#) and [10 a.m.](#), plus [Noon Service on Zoom](#)

To find other churches in diocese: <http://diosohio.org/doing-church-during-covid19/>

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Morning Prayer on 3/29

Evening Prayer 3/30-April 12

Go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/christepiscopalchurchxenia/>

Find “video” on left hand list.

Click on video.

If the video is not live, scroll down and find the recording of the day.

Evening Prayer on CECX Facebook by 8 pm daily	Penitential Psalms March 29-April 4	Gospel of Matthew for Holy Week April 5-April 12
Sunday 3/29 (Morning Prayer)	Psalm 130	
Monday 3/30	Psalm 6	
Tues 3/31	Psalm 32	
Wed 4/1	Psalm 38	
Thur 4/2	Psalm 51	
Fri 4/3	Psalm 102	
Sat 4/4	Psalm 143	
PALM SUNDAY		Chapter 21
Monday 4/6		Chapter 22
Tues 4/7		Chapter 23
Weds 4/7		Chapter 24
MAUNDY THURSDAY 4/9		Chapter 25
GOOD FRIDAY 4/10		Chapter 26
HOLY SATURDAY 4/11		Chapter 27
EASTER SUNDAY 4/12	Note: I will send in a 30 sec greeting from CECX that will be part of the diocese’s Easter Service	Chapter 28

Other things

I will be mailing devotional resources to congregants who do not have computers. I will send that material to you by email.

Please continue to look out for each other.

Please do let me know if there are concerns from our parish for me to lift up in Evening Prayer.

And although this time in a kind of isolated desert may not be what we want, may it turn out to be a catalyst for refreshment and renewal that we could not have planned or otherwise known.

--J+

The Seven Penitential Psalms

Psalm 6: Domine, ne in furore



Petrus Comestor's Bible Historiale 1372

O God, do not rebuke me in your anger; do not punish me in your wrath.

Have pity on me, O God, for I am weak; heal me, for my bones are racked.

My spirit shakes with terror; how long, O God, how long?

Turn, O God, and deliver me; save me for your mercy's sake.

For in death no one remembers you; and who will give you thanks in the grave?

I grow weary because of my groaning; every night I drench my bed and flood my couch with tears.



Belleville Breviary 1323-6, Saul attacks David



My eyes are wasted with grief, French Bible of Hainburg
1300-20

My eyes are wasted with grief and worn away because of all my enemies.

Depart from me, all evildoers, for God has heard the sound of my weeping.

God has heard my supplication; God accepts my prayer.

All my enemies shall be confounded and quake with fear; they shall turn back and suddenly be put to shame.

“The Seven Penitential Psalms, devotional series by Suzanne Guthrie, *The Edge of the Enclosure*, <http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/>

**All psalms from The Saint Helena Psalter
© Order of St. Helena**

Psalm 32: Beati quorum



David playing bells, Petrus Comestor's Bible Historiale, 1372

Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away!

Happy are they to whom God imputes no guilt, and in whose spirit there is no guile!

While I held my tongue, my bones withered away, because of my groaning all day long.

For your hand was heavy upon me day and night; my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to God."

Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.



David points to his eye, Petrus Comestor's Bible Historiale, 1372

Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble; when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.

You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye.

Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;

who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you."



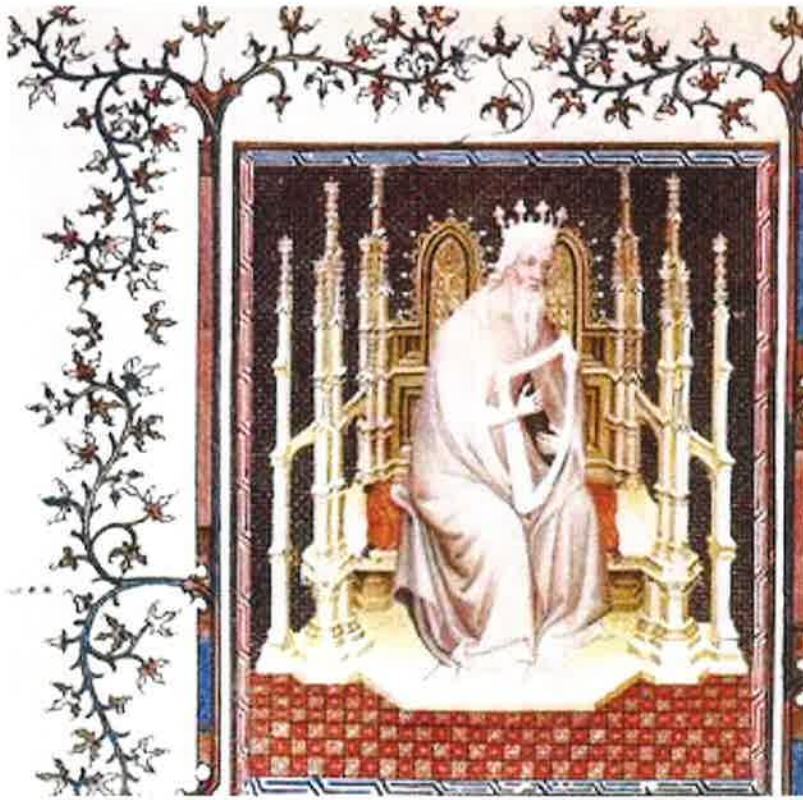
Balaam beats his ass, Petrus Comestor's Bible Historiale, 1372

**Great are the tribulations of the wicked;
but mercy embraces those who trust in
the Most High.**

**Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in
God; shout for joy, all who are true of
heart.**

The Saint Helena Psalter

Psalm 38: Domine, ne in furore



Andre Beauneveu, before 1402

O God, do not rebuke me in your anger; do not punish me in your wrath.

For your arrows have already pierced me, and your hand presses hard upon me.

There is no health in my flesh, because of your indignation; there is no soundness in my body, because of my sin.

For my iniquities overwhelm me; like a heavy burden they are too much for me to bear.

My wounds stink and fester by reason of my foolishness.

I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; I go about in mourning all the day long.



Bathsheba Bathing and David sends Uriah to the battle front, Book of Hours for use of Bourges, C. 1500,

My loins are filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body.

I am utterly numb and crushed; I wail, because of the groaning of my heart.

O God, you know all my desires, and my sighing is not hidden from you.

My heart is pounding, my strength has failed me, and the brightness of my eyes is gone from me.

My friends and companions draw back from my affliction; my neighbors stand afar off.

Those who seek after my life lay snares for me; those who strive to hurt me speak of my ruin

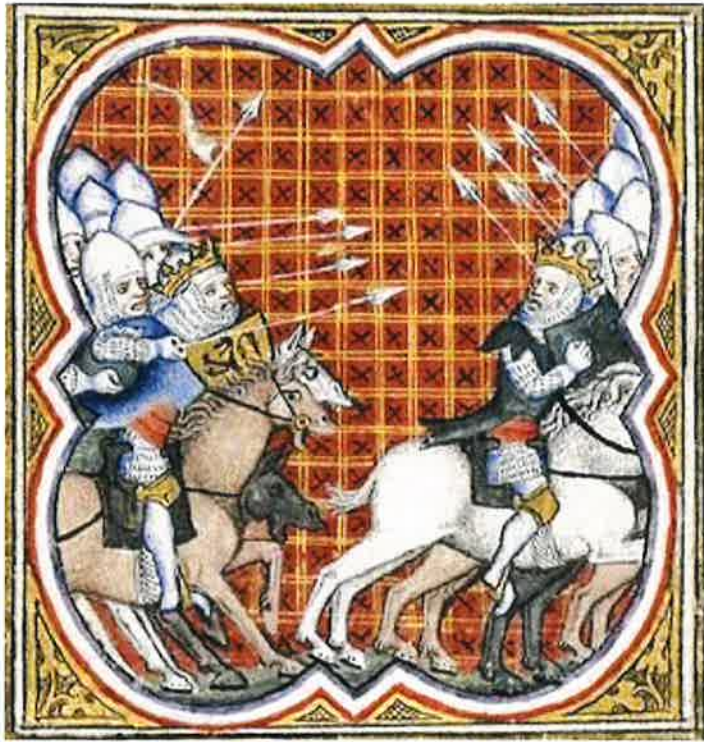
and plot treachery all the day long.

But I am like the deaf who do not hear, like those who are mute and do not open their mouth.

I have become like one who does not hear and from whose mouth comes no defense.

For in you, O God, have I fixed my hope; you will answer me, O my God.

For I said, "Do not let them rejoice at my expense, those who gloat over me when my foot slips."



David flees Jerusalem, Petrus Comestor's Bible
Historiale, 1372

Truly, I am on the verge of falling, and my pain is always with me.

I will confess my iniquity and be sorry for my sin.

Those who are my enemies without cause are mighty, and many in number are those who wrongfully hate me.

Those who repay evil for good slander me, because I follow the course that is right.

O Holy One, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God.

Make haste to help me, O Lord of my salvation.

Psalm 51: Miserere mei, Deus



King David in Letter O, Fra Angelico, 1443-45

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

Wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

And so you are justified when you speak and upright in your judgment.

Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, a sinner from my mother's womb.

For behold, you look for truth deep within me,
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.



David watches Bathsheba bathe, Petrus Comestor's Bible Historiale, 1372

Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.

Make me hear of joy and gladness, that the body you have broken may rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence and take not your holy Spirit from me.

Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

I shall teach your ways to the wicked, and sinners shall return to you.

Deliver me from death, O God, and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness, O God of my salvation.



David pointing to his lips, Unknown Illuminator, Burnet Psalter,
Early 15th century

Open my lips, O God, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice, but you take no delight in burnt-offerings.

The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Be favorable and gracious to Zion, and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Then you will be pleased with the appointed sacrifices, with burnt-offerings and oblations; then shall they offer young bullocks upon your altar.

Psalm 102:

Domine, exaudi



David playing the harp in letter B, Unknown
Miniaturist, French Bible, 1280-90

O God, hear my prayer, and let my cry
come before you; hide not your face
from me in the day of my trouble.

Incline your ear to me; when I call,
make haste to answer me,

For my days drift away like smoke, and
my bones are hot as burning coals.

My heart is smitten like grass and
withered, so that I forget to eat my
bread.

Because of the voice of my groaning I
am but skin and bones.

I have become like a vulture in the wilderness,
like an owl among the ruins.

I lie awake and groan;
I am like a sparrow, lonely on a house-top.

My enemies revile me all day long,
and those who scoff at me have taken an oath against me.



David sends Uriah (dressed as knight) to the battle front, in a letter D, French Miniaturist, Hainburg Bible, 1300-20

For I have eaten ashes for bread and mingled my drink with weeping.

Because of your indignation and wrath you have lifted me up and thrown me away.

My days pass away like a shadow, and I wither like the grass.

But you, O God, endure for ever, and your Name from age to age.

You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to have mercy; indeed, the appointed time has come.

For your servants love its very rubble, and are moved to pity even for its dust.

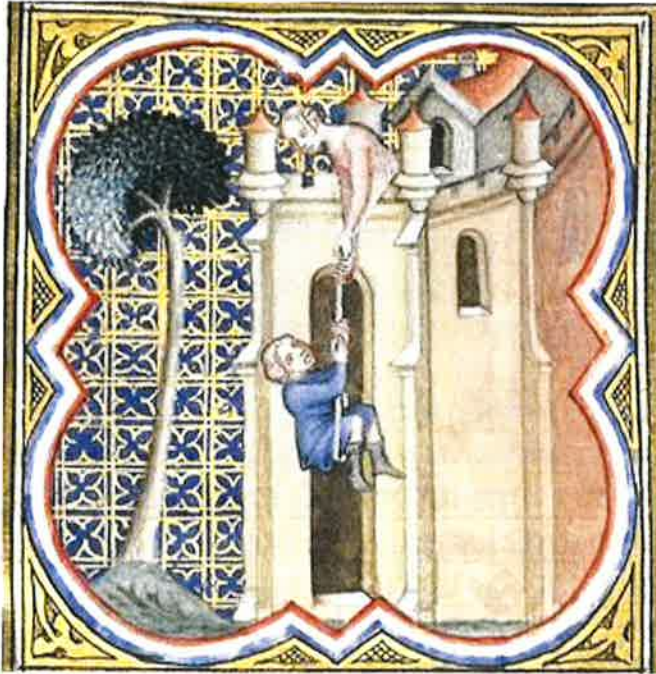
The nations shall fear your Name, O God, and all the rulers of the earth your glory.

You, O God, will build up Zion, and your glory will appear.

You will look with favor on the prayer of the homeless; and will not despise their plea.

Let this be written for a future generation, so that a people yet unborn may praise you, O God.

For you looked down from your holy place on high; from the heavens you beheld the earth;



David escapes through window, Petrus Comestor's
Bible Historiale, 1372

That you might hear the groan of the captive and set free those condemned to die,

That they may declare in Zion your Name, O God, and your praise in Jerusalem,

When the peoples are gathered together, and the nations also, to serve you.

You have brought down my strength before my time; you have shortened the number of my days.

And I said, "O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days; your years endure throughout all generations.

In the beginning, O God, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They shall perish, but you will endure; they all shall wear out like a garment; as clothing you will change them, and they shall be changed,

But you are always the same, and your years will never end.

The children of your servants shall continue, and their offspring shall stand fast in your sight."

Psalm 130: De profundis



David praying, Letter B, Zanobi Strozzi, 1450's

Out of the depths have I called to you; O God, hear my voice; let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.

If you were to note what is done amiss, O God, who could stand?

For there is forgiveness with you; therefore you shall be feared.

I wait for you, O God;

my soul waits for you; in your word is my hope.

My soul waits you,
more than sentries for the morning,
more than sentries for the morning.

O Israel, wait upon God,
for with God there is mercy;

With God there is plenteous redemption,
God shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

Psalm 143: Domine, exaudi



David praying in letter A, Francesco di Antonio
Del Chierico Psalter

O God, hear my prayer, and in your faithfulness heed my supplications; answer me in your righteousness.

Enter not into judgment with your servant, for in your sight shall no one living be justified.

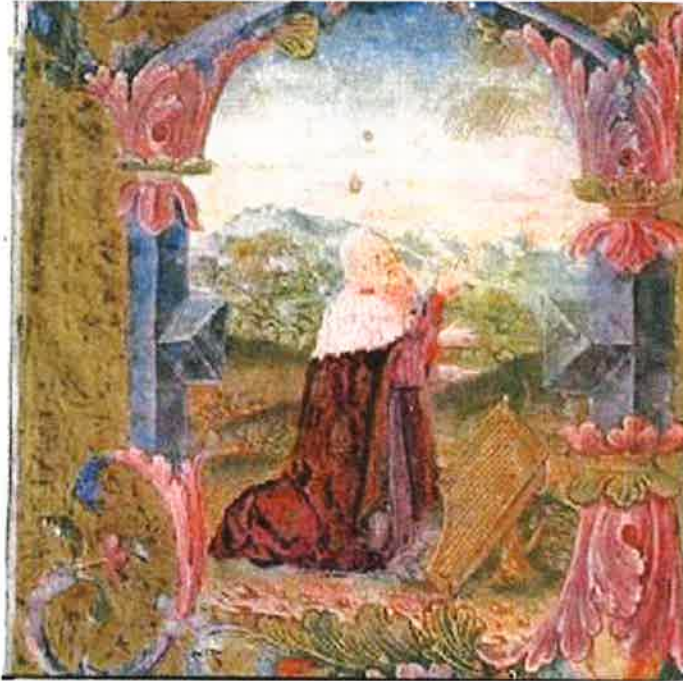
For my enemy has sought my life; has crushed me to the ground; and has made me live in dark places like those who are long dead.

**My spirit faints within me;
my heart within me is desolate.**

**I remember the time past;
I muse upon all your deeds;
I consider the works of your hands.**

**I spread out my hands to you;
my soul gasps to you like a thirsty land.**

**Teach me to do what pleases you
for you are my God;
let your good Spirit lead me on level ground.**



David stretches out his hands in prayer, Hungarian
Gradual, 1500-20

O God, make haste to answer me; my spirit fails me; do not hide your face from me or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

Let me hear of your loving-kindness in the morning, for I put my trust in you; show me the road that I must walk, for I lift up my soul to you.

Deliver me from my enemies, O God, for I flee to you for refuge.

Teach me to do what pleases you, for you are my God; let your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

Revive me, O God, for your Name's sake; for your righteousness' sake, bring me out of trouble.

Of your goodness, destroy my enemies and bring all my foes to naught, for truly I am your servant.

Palm Sunday

A Prayer to Begin Holy Week

Assist us mercifully with your help, O Lord God of our salvation,
that we may enter with joy upon the contemplation of those mighty acts,
whereby you have given us life and immortality; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- The Book of Common Prayer

Opening Sentence

All glory, laud, and honor to thee, Redeemer, King!
To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.

-Theodulph of Orleans d.821 (trans. John Mason Neale)

Song of Praise

Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter them; I will offer thanks to the LORD.
"This is the gate of the LORD; he who is righteous may enter."
I will give thanks to you, for you answered me
and have become my salvation.

The same stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the LORD'S doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.
On this day the LORD has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it.
Hosanna, LORD, hosanna! LORD, send us now success.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; we bless you from the house of the LORD.
God is the LORD; he has shined upon us;
form a procession with branches up to the horns of the altar.

-Psalm 118:19-27



Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
-Psalm 24:7

Art: Entry into Jerusalem
Pietro Lorenzetti c.1320, details



Reading from Scripture

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." - Matthew 21:1-11

Meditation 1

An extra company of Roman soldiers rides through the gates of Jerusalem on magnificent horses alongside uniformed infantry with gleaming weapons - an ostentatious show of strength to control crowds coming to the city to observe the Passover. Meanwhile at another gate, a man humbly rides in on an ass, its foal along side, and a rather motley crowd spontaneously gathers. What is he doing? Why draw attention to himself in these dangerous times? What is it about this man, this prophet from Nazareth in Galilee that evokes a feeling of "turmoil" in the city? What will happen as these opposing powers meet - oppression and freedom, war and peace, fear and love? -sg

Imagine that Jerusalem is your own heart, your own walled city "in turmoil." How do you reconcile the powers competing within you?

Meditation 2

Let us go together to meet Christ on the Mount of Olives. Today he returns from Bethany and proceeds of his own free will toward his holy and blessed passion, to consummate the mystery of our salvation. ...So let us spread before his feet, not garments or soulless olive branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace, or rather, clothed completely in him. ... [We] must ourselves be the garments that we spread before him. ... Let us present the conqueror of death, not with mere branches of palms but with the real rewards of his victory. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children's holy song: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel.' -Andrew of Crete c.660-740

The crowds offered their cloaks, olive and palm branches to lay at the feet of Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem. At this moment as you pray, can you offer your soul, your life, your virtues, your weaknesses, your courage, your fear, your good deeds, your failings - your very self – at the feet of Jesus, as a garment of your life clothed in grace?

Personal Prayer: Intercessions, Petitions, Thanksgivings

Closing Prayer

As we enter Holy Week, help us to walk the way of the Passion with courage, truth, and openness to a radical change of heart. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

Maundy Thursday *Part 1 The Lord's Supper*

Let thy Blood in mercy poured, let thy gracious Body broken,
be to me, O gracious Lord, of thy boundless love the token.
Thou didst give thyself for me, now I give myself to thee.

-John Brownlie 1859-1925

Reading from the Gospel Luke 22:14-30

Meditation

As the body desires food and drink, just so closely does our individual life desire to be united with God. We hunger and thirst after God. It is not enough for us to know him and to love him. We would clasp him, draw him to ourselves, hold him fast, and, bold as it sounds, we would take him into ourselves as we do our necessary food and drink, and thereby still and satisfy our hunger to the full. ...

In deepest reverence, and yet without fear, let us acknowledge the longing which God himself has planted in us, and rejoice in this gift of his exceeding goodness. "My flesh," Christ says to us, "Is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed... He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him ... As the Father hath given me to have life in myself, so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me." To eat his flesh, to drink his blood, to eat him, to absorb into ourselves the living God – it is beyond any wish we might be capable of forming for ourselves, yet it satisfies to the full what we long for, - of necessity long for, - from the bottom of our souls.

-Roman Guardini 1885-1968

Reflection question

Our sharing bread and wine is both collective – something we do together, and intimate – something we take into our souls. I am moved by the intimacy evoked by this quote by Aelred of Rievaulx. *Who is that, I ask, who is reclining on his breast and bends back his head to lay it in his bosom? Happy is he, whoever he may be. O, I see: his name is John. O John, tell us what sweetness, what grace and tenderness, what light and devotion you are imbibing from that fountain. There indeed are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the fountain of mercy, the abode of loving kindness, the honeycomb of eternal sweetness.* No doubt John's affection comforted Jesus, as much as Jesus comforted John. How might you comfort Jesus as John did?

And, even while we can't be together to share our communion this evening, how can you comfort the Christ in others at this time?

Prayers Petitions, Intercessions, Thanksgivings

Closing How shall I repay the LORD for all the good things he has done for me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the Name of the LORD. -Psalm 116: 10-11



Art : Above - The Sforza Hours, 1490-1504

Below - detail from The Last Supper, Pietro Lorenzetti, c.1320

***Maundy Thursday Part 1 The Last Supper
Gospel Reading***

And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold the hand of him who betrays me is with me at the table. For the Son of man goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" And they began to question one another, which of them it was that would do this.

A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves.

"You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

-Luke 22:14-30

Maundy Thursday Part 2 The New Commandment

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. -John 13:34-35

Where charity and love are, there is God.

*The Love of Christ has gathered us as one.
Let us rejoice and be glad in him.
Let us fear and love the living God
And in purity of heart let us love one another*

*Where charity and love are, there is God.
When therefore we are gathered together*

*Let us not be divided in spirit.
Let bitter strife and discord cease between us;
Let Christ our God be present in our midst.*

Where charity and love are, there is God.

*With all the blessed may we see for ever
Thy face in glory, Jesus Christ our God.
Joy that is infinite and undefiled
For all the ages of eternity.*

-At the Feet Washing, Maundy Thursday, Western Rite
The Oxford Book of Prayer, George Appleton, ed.



Art: Washing the Feet of Disciples, Duccio 1308-11

Reading from Scripture John 13:1-35

Meditation

John's account of the supper begins as Jesus removed his garments, pours water into a basin, and washes the feet of his disciples. This baptismal gesture signifies a passage, an entering, an initiation, a new beginning. Our journey arrives, like a pilgrimage, at its goal, and we must be washed for the solemn meal. We have arrived at another threshold, like the Jordan of John the Baptist. The water flows gleaming over our feet as we pass over into this new country. Here within this room the life and teaching of Jesus will pool to a fullness. "I have called you friends."

-Bruno Barnhart 1931-2015

The Good Wine

Jesus gives a "New Commandment" - that is, "to love one another." What challenges do you face on the threshold of this life of loving? Who is hard for you love? What steps can you take to broaden your love in the face of this challenge? And here is some wisdom from Julian of Norwich: *If I look at myself I am nothing. But if I look at us all I am hopeful; for I see the unity of love among all my fellow-Christians. In this unity lies our salvation.*

Prayers Petitions, Intercessions, Thanksgivings

Closing Give me that love that thou desirest of me. Amen

Maundy Thursday Part 2 The New Commandment
Gospel Text

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

-John 13:1-35

Maundy Thursday Part 3 Gethsemane

*My heart is ready to break with grief;
stop here and stay awake.*

Reading from the Gospel

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake."

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."

He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.

And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him.

He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand." -Mark 14:32-42



Meditation - "The Comforting of Christ"

The following prayer takes us intimately into the presence of the suffering Jesus. The second quote invites us to see Christ in the suffering of others, written during World War II.

O Jesus, how many generous souls...have kept Thee company in the Garden, sharing Thy bitterness and Thy mortal anguish...How many hearts in the course of the centuries have responded generously to Thy invitation... May this multitude of souls, then, in this supreme hour, be a comfort to Thee, who, better than the disciples, share with Thee the distress of Thy heart, and cooperate with Thee for their own salvation and that of others. And grant that I also may be of their number, that I also may offer Thee some relief. -Padre Pio 1887-1968

We do truly comfort him most when, recognizing him in our neighbor for the love of him. All that we do in the war ought to be done with that single idea, it is our real war work and our real worship. Put his love into everything. It is not only saints who comfort Christ, sinners can do it, all sorts of people; in his passion all are drawn together in one act of suffering and love. ...[T]here are none, rich or poor, respectable or not, sound or ill, who cannot take part in the passion and comfort Christ; and they comfort by receiving as well as giving, passively as well as actively. It is by loving and being loved that we endure today. --Caryll Houselander 1901-1954

Closing Let us love and be loved. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY

Passion Prayers

The musical Passions of St. Matthew and St. John by J. S. Bach interweave scripture texts with commentary and responses of prayer. In that tradition I gathered hymns and prayers as responses to the text of the Passion according to St. Mark. In addition to these breaks in the text, I invite you to pray personally and directly, within the moment to moment events of the Passion. -Suzanne

ONE

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Mark 14:1-9

*Have mercy,
my God, for my tears' sake;
Look hither,
heart and eyes
weep bitterly before Thee.
Have mercy!
my God, for my tears' sake*

*Picander (Christian Friedrich Henrici 1700-1764)
Devotional Thoughts on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday 1725
aria for alto, J.S. Bach*

Personal Response

TWO

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

Mark 14:10-21

*Man, that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to life,
and is full of misery, He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower;
he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.*

*In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek for succour,
but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?*

*Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty,
O holy and most merciful Saviour;
deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.*

*Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts;
shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer;
but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty,
O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal,
suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee.*

Burial of the Dead, Book of Common Prayer (1928)

Personal Response

THREE

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

Mark 14: 22-31

*Bread of the world, in mercy broken,
Wine of the soul, in mercy shed,
by whom the words of life were spoken,
and in whose death our sins are dead:
look on the heart by sorrow broken,
look on the tears by sinners shed;
and be thy feast to us the token
that by thy grace our souls are fed.*

*Reginald Heber 1783-1826
The Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

FOUR

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Mark 32:42

*If the tears on my cheeks can achieve nothing,
O, then take my heart! But for the streams,
when wounds do gently bleed, let it also be the sacrificial cup.*

from the Saint Matthew Passion by J.S.Bach, libretto by Picander (Christian Fredreich Henrici)

*O Jesus, how many generous souls... have kept Thee company in the Garden,
sharing Thy bitterness and Thy mortal anguish... How many hearts in the course
of the centuries have responded generously to Thy invitation...
May this multitude of souls, then, in this supreme hour, be a comfort to Thee,
who, better than the disciples, share with Thee the distress of Thy heart,
and cooperate with Thee for their own salvation and that of others.
And grant that I also may be of their number, that I also may offer Thee some relief.*

*Padre Pio
1887-1968*

Personal Response

FIVE

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." All of them deserted him and fled. A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

Mark:14:43-52

*Ah, great King, great throughout the ages,
how can I sufficiently make known this fidelity of yours?
No human heart or mind could think of a gift worthy of you.
With my poor faculties I could never experience
anything approaching the compassion you feel.
What can I do then to repay you for your goodness and mercy?*

*from the Saint John Passion,
text adapted from several sources by J.S.Bach*

Personal Response

SIX

They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'" Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

Mark 14:53-65

*O Loving Wisdom of the living God,
O everlasting Word
and Power of the Eternal One:
Grant us what you have promised;
and give us, unworthy as we are,
what you have offered to all alike;
that your passion may be our deliverance
and your death our life,
your cross our redemption
and your wound our healing;
and that, being crucified with you,
we may by your gift be exalted
to the Holy One on high,
with whom you live and reign with the Holy Spirit,
one God, blessed for evermore. Amen.*

*adapted from the Missale Gallicanum Vetus
late 7th or early 8th century*

Personal Response

SEVEN

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Mark 14:66-72

*Ah, holy Jesus, how has thou offended,
that man to judge thee hath in hate pretended?
By foes derided, by thine own rejected, O most afflicted.*

*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, that undone thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee: I crucified thee.*

*Lo, the Good Shepherd for the sheep is offered;
the slave hath sinned, and the Son hath suffered;
for our atonement, while we nothing heeded, God interceded.*

*For me, kind Jesus, was thy incarnation,
thy mortal sorrow, and the life's oblation;
thy death of anguish and thy bitter passion, for my salvation.*

*Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,
I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee,
think on thy pity and thy love unswerving, not my deserving.*

*Johann Heermann 1585-1647
The Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

EIGHT

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Mark 15:1-15

Consider, my soul, with a tortured joy, and with a bitter burden half stifling my heart, your highest good in the sufferings of Jesus: consider how for you, on the thorns that prick him blooms the flowers that opens the gates of Heaven; from his bitter wormwood you can pluck sweet fruit in abundance. Therefore never cease to contemplate him.

Through you captivity, O Son of God, comes our freedom; your prison is the throne of grace, a refuge for all pious folk; for if you had not entered into bondage our bondage would have lasted for ever.

*from the Saint John Passion,
text adapted from several sources by J.S.Bach*

Personal Response

NINE

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Mark 15:16-20

*To mock your reign, O dearest Lord, they made a crown of thorns;
set you with taunts long that road from which no one returns.
They did not know, as we do now, that glorious is your crown;
that thorns would flower upon your brow, your sorrows head our own.*

*In mock acclaim, O gracious Lord, they snatched a purple cloak,
your passion turned, for all they cared, into a soldier's joke.
They did not know, as we do now, that though we merit blem
you will your robe of mercy throw around our naked shame.*

*A sceptered reed, O patient Lord, they thrust into your hand,
and acted out their grim charade to its appointed end.
They did not know, as we do now, though empires rise and fall,
your Kingdom shall not cease to grow till love embraces all.*

*F. Pratt Green 1903-2000
The Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

TEN

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

Mark 15:21

*Commend your ways, and whatever troubles your heart, to the trusties care of him, who controls the
heavens; he who gives the clouds, the air and winds their paths, their course and track, he also will
find ways where you can tread and walk.*

from the Saint Matthew Passion by J.S.Bach, libretto by Picander (Christian Fredreich Henrici)

Personal Response

ELEVEN

Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

Mark 15:22-32

*I wish to stand beside Thee here;
do not then scorn me!
I do not wish to leave Thee
when thy heart is breaking.
when Thy heart grows pale
in the last throes of death,
then I wish to grasp Thee
in my arms and in my bosom*

from the Saint Matthew Passion by J.S.Bach, libretto by Picander (Christian Fredreich Henrici)

Personal Response

TWELVE

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Mark 15:33-39

*O sacred head, sore wounded, defiled and put to scorn;
O kingly head, surrounded with mocking crown of thorn:
what sorrow mars thy grandeur? Can death thy bloom deflower?
O countenance whose splendor the hosts of heaven adore!*

*Thy beauty, long desired, hath vanished from our sight;
thy power is all expired, and quenched the light of light.
Ah me! for whom thou diest, hide not so far thy grace:
show me, O Love most hightest, the brightness of thy face.*

*In thy most bitter passion my heart to share doth cry,
with thee for my salvation upon the cross to die.
Ah, keep my heart thus moved to stand thy cross beneath,
to mourn thee, well beloved, yet thank thee for thy death.*

*Paul Gerhardt 1607-1676
Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

THIRTEEN

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.

Mark 15:40-45

*What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend,
for this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?
Oh, make me thine forever! and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never, outlive my love for thee.*

*My days are few, O fail not, with thine immortal power,
to hold me that I quail not in death's most fearful hour;
that I may fight befriended, and see in my last strife
to me thine arms extended upon the cross of life.*

*Paul Gerhardt 1607-1676
Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

FOURTEEN

Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

Mark 15:46-47

Rest in peace, you sacred bones: I will not weep over you any longer; rest in peace, and lead me to peace as well. The grave, like your tomb, is not a place of agony but opens Heaven to me and shuts the gates of Hell.

*from the Saint John Passion,
text adapted from several sources by J.S.Bach*

Personal Response

AMEN

Holy Saturday

Be still, then, and know that I am God. - Psalm 46:11

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

-Matthew 27:57-66



detail from The Entombment of Christ, Rembrandt

Meditation

On this day we enter the Holy of Holies of prayer through the torn veil of the temple - only to meet God's Silence. Like the top of the intake of breath before exhaling, the day hangs in stillness between moments – between Good Friday and Easter, as between one phase of life and the next. The church calls this God's "Great Sabbath." For us, Jesus is dead and not yet risen. Finding holiness on this day is the great challenge, but it is good practice for the times in our life when God seems absent. -sg

What does the powerful Nothingness mean? For it is meaningful, exceedingly meaningful. It is not just a matter of "waiting." This is a high symbol, indeed the symbol to which everything else has led. All the exercises of Lent, all the concentration of Holy Week, all the final abandonments of Good Friday are intended to bring us to this Great Nothing. It is our way of pointing to that which cannot be said; this is why the Word is gone. There is no object outside us on which we may fasten. Nothing to observe, nothing happening, nothing to do. Our usual, finite, comparative, means-to-end activity is suspended. We are in the presence of the Infinite; we are in fact in the Infinite.

*- Beatrice Bruteau 1930-2014
The Easter Mysteries*

The most beautiful words, those that give the most genuine help, are often born in a silence filled with suffering. Silence is the glowing furnace of the word, the forge of true speech and sensitivity.

-Ladislaus Boros 1927-1981

Prayer

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!, Easter Day (A) - 2017

April 15, 2017

RCL: Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10

The Rev. Marshall A. Jolly

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Of course, proclaiming that joyful phrase today amidst the beautiful flowers, the gorgeous music, and in the company of those we love comes easily for most, if not all of us. And yet, for as much as we enjoy the more festive aspects of Easter, the truth is that these things, by themselves, don't tell the whole story.

Along with praise-filled shouts of "Alleluia," the *whole* story of Easter also includes shouts of war and hate; of fear and pain; of confusion and misunderstanding. In the wake of the recent terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom, and in the shadow of war and violence that plague our streets and our planet, these emotions are viscerally familiar to all of us. And although we may lose sight of it here this morning, these emotions also filled the hearts of the faithful on that *first* Easter morning.

The Gospel of John sets the scene: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed." Then, John tells us, she *ran* to share the news with the others. And while John doesn't tell us this part himself, when people get news, they don't typically run unless it's really good news or really bad news!

Mary, it seems fair to say, is distraught—shocked that the body of her beloved Lord isn't in the tomb where he had been laid just three days ago. When she reaches the other disciples with the news, they take off running as well, reaching the tomb only to confirm what Mary had told them. They depart, their hopes dashed; their Easter alleluias muted.

This is where Easter ended: The disciples returned home—confused, saddened, and unsure of what would happen next. John tells us that they "as yet...did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead."

And who could blame them really? They had put so much trust in Jesus, only to have it squashed by powers and principalities. What were they to do now? Where would they go? Who would they believe in next? These were the questions that raced through the disciples' minds as they came to grips with their grief and disappointment.

But Mary wasn't ready to let go just yet.

Mary stays behind, weeping while she examines the emptiness of the tomb, making sure that no detail or clue goes unseen or unexamined—desperately searching for some shred of evidence; grasping for even the faintest possibility.

Just then, she sees two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying. They ask her why she is weeping and she says, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

We can hear the weight of grief in her voice. And if we’re honest with ourselves, we’ve all had similar moments to the one Mary is experiencing. Moments when we’ve found ourselves desperately searching for God, only to be met with emptiness and sadness. Have you ever come to church, yearning for the peace and comfort of the sacraments, only to find that God doesn’t seem to be there? Has your prayer life ever felt dry and fallow? Have you ever found yourself wondering whether church itself might be futile?

In moments like these, we find ourselves in a kind of spiritual mourning, wondering where Jesus has gone, and why he seems to have been taken away. St. John of the Cross called these moments the “Dark Night of the Soul”—when prayer, sacrament, and community no longer bring comfort, and the transcendence of God’s presence seems to have evaporated.^[1]

There is a well-meaning tendency among many Christians—especially those who have never wrestled deeply with their faith—to liken these moments to a kind of spiritual weakness. “If you only *prayed a little harder* or *believed a little deeper* or *trusted a little more*, then everything would be okay,” they tell us. We needn’t look much further than the shelves of our local bookstore for a seemingly endless litany of books offering prescriptions that promise to *fix* our spiritual life.

But as the Trappist monk and priest Thomas Keating reminds us, “The spiritual journey is not a career or a success story. It is a series of humiliations of the false self that become more and more profound. These make room inside of us for the Holy Spirit to come in and heal.”^[2]

In other words, we can’t work our way into God’s good graces because God doesn’t deal in performance evaluations and goals and targets. God doesn’t show up on our time or in a manner of our choosing; and our relationship with God cannot be converted into a checklist or a “how to” guidebook.

This is the lesson that Mary learned on that first Easter, and it’s the one that God is still trying to teach us 2,000 years later. In the midst of her desperate search for clues about what might have happened to Jesus’ body, a man walks by and asks Mary why she is so distraught. And desperately hoping that he would know something she didn’t, she says, “If you know where he is—if you’ve taken him somewhere else—just tell me where and I will take him myself.” If you will just tell me what to do or where to go, I’ll do it! It’s as if she’s saying, “Give me a target! Give me a goal! What are the five simple steps that I need to accomplish?”

And that’s when it happens: Jesus calls her by name! “Mary!” And when she hears it, she is overcome! She cries out, “Rabbouni! Teacher!”

With these words, Mary experiences the very first Easter moment! She realizes that Christ's difficult and at times unbelievable teachings are true—that what he promised at the Last Supper has come to pass!

Mary's witness to the first Easter is about far more than beautiful worship and festive celebrations. Mary brings us face to face with the depths of our humanity. Her witness is a mosaic of the human experience—grief and joy; uncertainty and affirmation; depression and determination. This is the true witness of Easter!

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But if we're not careful, we'll close the book as if the story ends right here. Mary recognizes the Resurrected Lord and everyone lives happily ever after. But this isn't the end of the story. In fact, if we keep reading, we realize that Easter isn't a story at all! It's a commissioning!

Once Mary recognizes Jesus, he says to her, "...Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" The moment that Mary leaves the garden, the Good News of Easter gets loose and begins to transform the world! Mary bears witness to the fact that, even in the face of death itself, God will have the last word!

Through her first Easter witness, Mary teaches us that grief and joy, uncertainty and affirmation, desperation and determination, are all inescapable parts of our humanity. She teaches us that our lives of faith aren't about success or opportunities for advancement; rather, they are holy mysteries that will surprise, unsettle, and transform us. But most important of all, she teaches us that in the resurrection of our Lord Christ, we know that love, hope, and peace will ultimately prevail!

And so, in this Eastertide, may we proclaim that Christ is risen, not simply in church, but also in the world around us. May we proclaim it, not simply with our lips, but also with our hands and hearts. And as we live into the joy and promise of Easter, may we go forth into the world, looking for the Resurrected Christ in places we may not expect.

May we search for Christ amidst those who are cast down and rejected; among those who have nobody to care for them; and in the company of those who have never known the loving embrace of friendship. The world needs this now, perhaps more than ever before. But most of all, may we not simply proclaim the Good News, may we also believe it so that the whole world may see Christ in their midst and proclaim, "The Lord is risen indeed!"

Alleluia!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!, Easter Day (A) - 2017

April 15, 2017

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