



Easter

2026



the curse reversed

Holy Week Devotional

“Do you feel the world is broken? Do you feel the shadows deepen? Do you know that all this dark won’t stop the Light from breaking through? We do!” (Andrew Peterson, *Is He Worthy?*)

The great fall in the garden cut us off from God’s blessing. Fear. Shame. Hiding. Blaming others.

The serpent was cursed. Enmity and strife fractured God’s good order. Reproducing became painful. Marriage became tense. Our identities broke and we became disoriented. The ground was cursed and work became toilsome. Thorns would oppose man and choke out life. Finally, death.

Holy Week is an invitation to press into the reality of life under the curse, to contemplate the nature of true hope, and to linger over the events of Jesus’ last week and to be drawn into the heart of God for the world. During Holy Week we behold the unfolding of God’s plan to conquer death and undo the curse, decided long before he created (Ephesians 1). It is also an invitation to be drawn into God’s heart *for you personally*. He glorifies himself by redeeming sinners from the curse of sin.

We invite you to use this as a guide through the events leading up to the most sacred moment in history - the crucifixion of the Son of God. What followed three days later was the monumental declaration that everything - EVERYTHING - that had to be done to bring sinners back into relationship with God was done. Finished. Complete. Lacking nothing. Sufficient. Satisfactory. Enough. Accepted. The Lamb that was slain was the redemption for humanity’s bondage to sin, shame, and death.

Our prayer for you this Easter season is that you would be captivated, maybe for the first time, or maybe for the thousandth time, by the power of Christ’s death, the unfathomable love of God for you, and his commitment to free you from everything that seeks to keep you from the fullness of his goodness.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— // Galatians 3:13 (ESV)

PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 29 :: Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

MATTHEW 21:1-11

"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."

FOCUS

Jesus is making a fundamental declaration as passion week begins - He is the King. Those who acknowledged his kingship submitted to his will; those who did not shouted, "Crucify him!"

Jesus came not merely to save us from our sins, but to reign as King over our lives. This is how he taught his disciples to pray: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Holy Week is a time for us to reorient our lives to Jesus

as King. The remaining events of holy week teach us what perfect submission to God's will looks like as Jesus makes his way to Golgotha.

As this holy week began, we also get a glimpse into the heart of this King - why had he come? Why was he entering Jerusalem seated upon a donkey?

John 12:23-25 // ²³ And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man *to be glorified*. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies*, it remains alone; *but if it dies, it bears much fruit*. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

This King was the grain of wheat, and he had come to die so that much fruit would come - the reconciliation of sinners to God, to the glory of his Father (more about this on Tuesday).

Spend time today considering how you see Jesus. Is he King, or something less?

What *kind* of king do you believe him to be? Do you see his self-giving love for you?

Ask God to help you focus this week and to build your anticipation as Resurrection Sunday approaches.

PRACTICE

Holy Week is a unique time in which God's people can focus more purposefully on the glory and grace of Jesus' death and resurrection by abstaining from certain things. Each day we will encourage you and your family to abstain from an element of normal life. We encourage you to replace that element with prayer, singing, quiet, and discussion about the focus for that day. If taken seriously, it's likely that you will gain much more than anything you will give up.

Today we encourage you to fast from *screens*. When you long to pick up your device, find other ways to focus on God's glory and grace. Enjoy time as a family, go outside, read, or linger in quiet as you think about what we celebrate this week. Tune in to your emotions. Where have you suffered loss? Where are you grieving? Where do you groan? What seeks to rule your heart? Where is there joy? Where has God shown you his goodness? Resist being distracted. Enter in and take these things to the God who cares for you. Let your groaning for screens draw you into deeper fellowship with God.

HOLY MONDAY, MARCH 30 :: Mary Pours Out Her Costly Perfume

JOHN 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

FOCUS

The people gathered at this dinner could not have known exactly what was taking place, but Jesus knew. It was customary for the dead to be anointed in preparation for burial. In just a few days, he would go to the cross, die, and be buried in a borrowed grave. Mary's act of love and devotion serves to prepare Jesus for death. But it's not only that. She, as a recipient of gracious love, throws off restraint to express her love for Jesus. She "wasted" very expensive perfume on his feet and broke many social rules. How often do we respond to Jesus with such abandonment? In a culture fixated on self and image, we tend to be guarded and calculated in how we come across to others, but those who have received lavish grace should be free to express their love without fear of disapproval.

What keeps you from freely expressing your love for God? Is it conventional wisdom? Social norms? Fear of disapproval? Your own sense of sinfulness or unworthiness?

Consider what freedom would be like to simply respond in love to God's love for you.

He loves to be loved by his children, not because he needs it, but because, like a good Father, he delights in us. His grace affords us the right to go to him and love him without reserve.

Matthew 19:13-15 // ¹³ Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, ¹⁴ but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” ¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went away.

PRACTICE

Today we encourage you to fast from *leisurely eating*. When you long to pick up your favorite snack or drink, or when you find yourself wanting to eat out of boredom, redirect your hunger to remember the love of God that satisfies like no food or beverage ever will.

Try to find a fresh way to express your love for God. Write something, compose a poem, sing a song, draw a picture, or, if you're typically guarded in your relationship with God, try to respond to him like a child would to their father who loves them. Try to throw off self-awareness as much as possible. Rest and rejoice freely in God's love.

HOLY TUESDAY, MARCH 31 :: The Son Of Man Must Be Lifted Up

JOHN 12:20-36

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

FOCUS

Jesus knew all about suffering. His heart ached, his body got weary, he felt stress. The sweet thing about the gospel is that our God identifies with our suffering. Jesus didn't just come to rescue, he came to identify with us, to become like us. When you hurt, he knows your pain and wants to meet you in it and to love you through it. He is trustworthy with your suffering.

To do so, to become like us, Jesus came submitting to his Father's will rather than clinging to any rights of his own. He laid down his right to be treated like God in order to draw us to himself in grace. The King of kings became a slave.

Where are you prone to resist God in order to have your own way? Where are you stubborn? Rebellious? Disobedient?

Ask God for forgiveness. Thank him for submitting to the Father's will in order to draw you to himself, to love you, to forgive you, and to give you eternal life.

PRACTICE

Today we encourage you to fast from *unnecessary spending*. We declare our independence with our money. When you long to purchase something that you don't need, or click on the Amazon "buy now with 1-click," redirect your desires to what has eternal value. Seek the things that are above, where Christ is (Col. 3:1-4).

Praise God for not sparing his most precious Son in order to redeem you (Romans 8:32). Praise Jesus for pouring himself out without reserve to atone for your sin and reconcile you to God. Praise the Holy Spirit for being limitless in his ability to lead, teach, comfort, convict, strengthen, uphold, and sanctify.

Practice generosity somehow, whether by donating to a worthy organization or by meeting a need of someone else.

Whatever you do, rejoice that our God is generous and withholds nothing that is for our good from us.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9)

HOLY WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1 :: One Of You Will Betray Me

JOHN 13:21-32

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.

FOCUS

Fellowship is a word that has deep meaning for some and has become nearly meaningless to others. Biblically, the idea is associated with togetherness and depth of relationship. Intimacy, trust, affection. The table was a place of sweet friendship, but this table was a place of betrayal. Sometimes discomfort, even the extreme kind, is necessary for a greater work to be accomplished. Notice Jesus and Judas - Judas was offered the bread by Jesus. He too received a broken piece that represented a far more significant breaking. Jesus knew what was coming and he would not do a single thing to try to stop it. In this act of grace, he offers his betrayer the same broken bread offered to the other disciples. It doesn't mean that Judas understood, or received the substance of what this bread represented, but Jesus did not withhold it from him. This is grace. This is the grace extended to us, who, not unlike Judas, have given our allegiance to a thousand lesser gods and have often sold out for what amounts to trifles. But God's mercy is more. Abundant and ever flowing, Jesus extends his broken body and spilled blood to any and all who will confess their need and with humble faith, reach out and take - not as demanders, but as recipients who glorify the Giver.

PRACTICE

Today we encourage you to fast from *complaint*. There is enough to find complaint with these days. When you find yourself wanting to let complaint slip out of your mouth, hold your tongue and remember the betrayal that Jesus endured. He deserved absolute honor and yet he was betrayed by a friend. He who was worthy of utmost respect received scoffing by the wagging tongues of sinners. Fairness was not Jesus' primary concern. Personal justice was not what he was after. Comfort and convenience were not his desires. He came to show us his Father's glory. He came to show us the true nature of love. So he endured the cross, scorning its shame.

Perhaps you need to confess a grumbling spirit. The grace of God fills our lips with praise. Jesus purposefully endured suffering for the glory of God. Surely we can endure our "light and momentary afflictions." Difficult seasons will pass, but the hidden work God is accomplishing will endure to glory. This is our inheritance with Christ, by the grace of God. Use your breaths to glorify God today.

MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 2 :: Jesus Washes The Feet Of His Friends

JOHN 13:1-17

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.

FOCUS

Today we step backward and peer into a spectacular scene. Jesus' interaction with Judas is incredible. As we saw yesterday, he knows what Judas is going to do, and yet he loves him. He washes his feet and eats with him anyway. Why? How?

Glory, displayed in love, displayed in service.

Jesus was focused only on his Father's glory and he knew that his death was the way in which he and his Father would be most glorified. He knew that the elements of the meal he was sharing with his disciples represented something much greater than bread and wine. He knew the bread had to be broken and the wine poured out. He knew his Father's wrath was real and would be poured out on sin and sinners. He knew that giving himself to absorb the fullness of this holy wrath was the only way to rescue humanity from their sin.

Would he suffer? Horrifically.

Was he trying to escape it? Not at all.

Instead he was intent on being broken and poured out so that we could be reconciled with God. This was his joy, from "gladness of heart," for the glory of his Father.

How do you respond to those who might be considered enemies?

How do you treat the people in your own home?

Do you exhibit patience, or humility, or kindness, or gentleness toward them? Do you seek out ways to serve them? To do them good?

Must you always get the last word, or be vindicated when you have been wronged?

Jesus shows us a better way. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." It's the way of love - real love. Costly love. Painful love. But this love that covers a multitude of sins and binds everything together in perfect unity is our only hope.

PRACTICE

Today we encourage you to fast from *vindication* (parents, explain what this means to your kids). You may not have enemies in your home, although some of you may see the people in your home as just that. Each day brings many opportunities for being offended and for offending others. The gospel frees us from having to pay back sin for sin. So today, when someone offends you and you long to clap back with harsh words or sour attitudes, remember Jesus holding Judas' feet in his hands, knowing that he would hand him over to the very people that would crucify him. Absorb minor offenses and deal graciously with those that need confronted,

but deny yourself the need to get back. Jesus showed us the way of love. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy." "I have set an example for you to follow...blessed are you if you do likewise."

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 3

Good Friday: Jesus Is Arrested, Convicted, and Crucified

JOHN 18:1-19:42

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all

the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed. Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to

them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor." When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. After this, when

Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced." After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

FOCUS

What was Jesus' dread in the garden is now his reality and he is forsaken by his Father, bearing all the Father's wrath against the world's sin, alone.

When Paul says that love never fails, he means it never gives up, ever. Love simply does not stop pouring itself out. The events we remember today prove the extent of God's love for sinners. Jesus would not stop until the work was finished in its entirety. This is a wonderful truth for us to consider today because if Jesus had left the slightest remnant undone, we would have no ability to rest as those made righteous, no confidence that our full debt had been paid, no peace that we have been irreversibly reconciled to God. Because Jesus would not quit, God's wrath was poured out in its entirety, our sin judged, and righteousness satisfied.

*Oh precious cross, such vile thing
Has giv'n me life and made me clean
I will carry all my days
The cross of Christ what glorious thing!*

PRACTICE

Today we encourage you to fast from *entertainment*. Entertainment can be a gift, but we can also turn to it to avoid confronting things in our lives or in the world around us that are difficult. Over familiarity can lead to a "sanitized view" of the crucifixion. The general statement, "Jesus died for our sins", while wonderfully true, can subtly keep us at a comfortable arms length from the horror of the cross, and from confronting the sins that required an atoning sacrifice. Rather than zoning out through entertainment, tune in to the glory of Christ's suffering. Let passages like Isaiah 53 lead you to behold his glorious humility and meekness as he became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Spend time in quiet. Record your thoughts about this day.

Acknowledge that *your* sin required Christ's death.

Acknowledge the sins of our church, our city, and our nation.

"...for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame..."
(Hebrews 12:2)

He felt every strike, every blow, every drive of the nails. Feel the pang of Christ's suffering. But rejoice in Christ's own joy to make us sons and daughters of glory.

"He made him who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

**IF YOU'RE ABLE, WE WOULD LOVE FOR YOU JOIN US IN THE
SANCTUARY FROM 6-7PM FOR OUR GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE.**

“The Maker of man was made man,
that the Ruler of the stars might feed at the bosom;
that the Bread might be hungered;
the Fountain, thirst;
the Light, sleep;
the Way, be wearied by the journey;
the Truth, be accused by false witnesses;
the Judge of the living and the dead, be judged by a mortal judge;
the Chastener, be chastised with whips;
the Vine, be crowned with thorns;
the Foundation, be hung upon the tree;
Strength, be made weak;
Health, be wounded;
Life, die.

To suffer these and suchlike things, undeserved things,
that He might free the undeserving,
for neither did He deserve any evil,
who for our sakes endured so many evils,
nor were we deserving of anything good,
we who through Him received such good.”

// St. Augustine, *The Confessions*

HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 4 :: GOD RESTED

LUKE 23:54-56

54 It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. **55** The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. **56** Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.
On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

FOCUS

As Jesus' body was laid in the tomb, the Sabbath began - a day of resting. Stillness. Quiet. Work finished.

We don't know much about this Holy Saturday from biblical accounts except that the disciples observed Sabbath and Jesus stayed in the tomb.

Years of anticipation and countless hopes had come to a disappointing halt.

Wondering. Waiting. Weeping. Fearing. Grieving.

It is important to note that God did not spare his people from disappointment. He allowed them to sit with their crushed expectations and sorrow. He did not act quickly to rescue them from grief.

Christ's work was finished. Jesus had crushed the serpent's head, but glory was still coming. The waiting was essential to the Father's work. In the midst of grief, God was doing something magnificent - he rested.

Jesus told his disciples that a seed must fall to the ground and die if it is to bear fruit (John 12:23-24). But seeds don't bear fruit quickly. There is dying and there is waiting. Then, at the proper time, there is fruit.

Jesus came to fulfill the Law in its entirety and the Law commanded rest from work. If God had moved too quickly from atonement to resurrection, something would have been left unfulfilled. Jesus fulfilled the command to rest so that he could become our rest (Hebrews 4). As we wait for God's promises to be fulfilled, many will deem us fools. We are often left bewildered as to what good could possibly come from long periods of waiting. So much wasted time.

Remember that God will be proved right in the end and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. Those who scoffed at Jesus then will bow

in submission, as will those who scoff him now. Do not be discouraged by taunts, or even your own doubts as you learn patience. God is never late - never. He never wastes anything. He is always working, even if imperceptible at times. Our waiting is necessary, even when it hurts. Believe in the One who is everything he claimed to be. Hold out the truth for all to see that they might believe in the Savior as their righteousness and their rest. Cling ever so tightly all of your days to this glorious hope. It is in Christ's death that we have life, but even Jesus had to stay in the grave until the appointed time - the third day. God is wise and good. Praise be to God for the apparent foolishness of the gospel, for it is the power of God to save!

1991, V // Wendell Berry (Sabbath Poems)
The seed is in the ground.
Now may we rest in hope
While darkness does its work.

PRACTICE

Today we encourage you to fast from *activity*. Avoid busyness for busyness's sake. When you get antsy or restless, let it draw you into Christ's rest. Try to be purposeful in your activity today. Do those things which are necessary but attempt to actively and intentionally rest. Focus your attention on things that are good for your heart.

Read.

Take a nap.

Lay down and rest.

Lay on a blanket or a hammock and just be quiet.

Listen. Pay attention to the things you see and hear.

Rejoice that we will not forever be frantic and busy. One day, even our work will be marked by restfulness. Christ has finished his work and rested. We will enter that rest one day as well.

* I encourage you to listen to Andrew Peterson's song "God Rested" as a way to contemplate the weight of this day. (I commend his two albums, *Resurrection Letters I & II*)

RESURRECTION SUNDAY, APRIL 5 :: The Empty Tomb

JOHN 20:1-18

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 from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

FOCUS

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'"

The Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name and they hear his voice (John 10:3, 14).

When Jesus calls your name and you respond, he takes hold of you and makes you his own and chooses to give you the life he alone possesses. It is his delight to call us to himself and make us alive. When Jesus hung on the tree at Calvary and said that it was finished, he breathed the single greatest victory cry in history. At the resurrection, death was dead, sin lost its power, Satan was overthrown, and your sin was paid for. For you who have trusted Christ, Satan has lost all claim over you because Christ Jesus has made you his own. The eternal effects of your sin are dealt with and you are now free to live unto God. If you are in Christ, you have been buried with him so that you will also be raised with him (Romans 6:1-14). Resurrected life is guaranteed and that life begins now! Your experience of God's goodness will never diminish, but will only increase for the rest of eternity. The curse is overcome and reversed so that we will enjoy the blessedness of God forever. Hallelujah and amen!

*"No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from his hand
For I am his, and he is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ"*

PRACTICE

Today we encourage you to *feast and celebrate!* Rejoice in all that Christ accomplished in his death and resurrection. His love for you is *super-abundant*, as is his commitment to show you the Father's goodness. Make today a joy-filled day with the church and in your home centered on the glory and grace of Jesus!

"Where, death, is your victory?

Where, death, is your sting?^[a]

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

// 1 Corinthians 15:55-56

MONDAY, APRIL 6 :: Peace Be With You

LUKE 24:36-48

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

FOCUS

"Peace be with you."

Sweet words to the restless. This is what Jesus gives to those who trust him. His death and resurrection afford us peace - peace between us and God because the strife of our sin has been removed (Ephesians 2:14-22), internal peace because our consciences are cleansed (Hebrews 10:19-23), and peace with one another because we have been united in Christ's death and resurrection by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:3-6).

We who have witnessed with eyes of faith the risen Christ can enjoy peace that we otherwise could only groan for. Now our longings are satisfied, fulfilled in Christ.

As we know Christ through his Word, we grow in our enjoyment of his peace and our desire to invite others into that peace as well. Though it is partial now, it will never diminish when Christ returns. This is his promise to those who belong to him.



Services

GOOD FRIDAY

April 3rd // 6:00-7:15 p.m.
2897 Belcher Road | Dunedin, FL

SUNRISE SERVICE

April 5th // 6:30 a.m.
Dunedin Causeway
First left *before* the drawbridge
(bring a chair or blanket)

EASTER MORNING

April 5th // 9:00 & 10:45 a.m.
2897 Belcher Road | Dunedin, FL

PRACTICE

Today we encourage you to fast from *strife*. Do everything you can to live at peace with one another. Serve each other every chance you get. Seek one another's good in all you do.

Receive from his fullness grace upon grace.

Rest in the peace given to you through Christ.

Rejoice that your sins have been forgiven, you have been pardoned, and you are reconciled to God. His wrath is appeased and there is nothing left to achieve.

Peace be with you, in Christ. Praise be to God!