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DEVOTIONS
Lent 2025

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As an added feature, these devotions have reflection questions for each day's message. These can be used for self-study or as prompts for discussion when reflecting as a group.

Blessings from Christian Care Communities and the incredible chaplains who serve across the state:

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*Lenten Devotions were written by Dr. Kari Vo.
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BELOVED

TEXT: *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17)*

I love the name God gives to Jesus at His Baptism. He calls Him beloved, and what better name could there be for Jesus? What else could we call the One who loved us enough to come down from heaven to rescue us from the power of evil—and to do that at the cost of His own life?

At this point Jesus is just beginning His ministry. He will spend three years teaching and healing and caring for broken people, and training His followers to do the same. And then He will willingly go to the cross for our sake—breaking the power of sin, death, and the devil through His own death and resurrection.

Jesus knows what's coming. We do, too. Let's walk with Him through these days of Lent, following our beloved Lord who has made Himself the Servant of the Lord Isaiah wrote about—the One who saves us all.

WE PRAY: *Dear Lord, I love You. Set my heart on You to follow and trust You forever. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Why do you think Jesus chose to be baptized?
- Why was John disturbed?
- What do you know about your own Baptism?

FAITHFUL

TEXT: *And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. ... And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-2a, 13)*

I'm not surprised Jesus' ministry began with temptation. After all, it ended the same way—with the devil speaking through the people who mocked Him, tempting Jesus to use His power to come down from the cross.

Here Jesus faces a whole bunch of temptations—and if you look closely, every one of them is a way to get out of His future suffering and death. Turn stone into bread? Yes, and You can feed the people miraculously forever! They'll follow You anywhere! No need for the cross.

What about jumping off the temple, only to be saved by angels? Well, everybody likes a good show. And to be sure, such a display would make the Romans think twice before they took on an earthly king who had obvious divine power. Again, no need for the cross—take David's throne, and call it good.

But what about the worst one—where the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory—all for the low, low price of worshipping Satan? Not a chance.

Jesus would never dishonor the Father He loved that way. Nor would He risk us, even for a moment, by doing anything other than what the Father had given Him to do—to lay down His life for us on the cross, and then take it up again on Easter morning.

WE PRAY: *Lord Jesus, You loved us enough to stay faithful when it was hardest. Thank You. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- What sins tempt you the most?
- How do you find help when you are tempted?
- Does it comfort you to know Jesus was tempted? Why or why not?

PROVOCATIVE

TEXT: *And [Jesus preached in] Nazareth ... “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor.” ... Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. ... I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when ... a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to ... the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel ... and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” (Luke 4:16a, 18a, 21b, 25b-27)*

This is a strange sermon to preach in your own hometown! Oh, it starts well enough, with good news to the poor—until Jesus spoils it all by pointing out who benefited from that good news. In particular, foreigners—people with no claim on the mercy of the God of Israel, but He loves them enough to save them anyway. And Jesus’ listeners are enraged. What, a God who gives blessings to foreigners, and sometimes He even blesses them first, instead of me? God shouldn’t be so loving! And so they try to throw Jesus off a cliff.

It’s a good thing for us that God is so loving—because most of us aren’t Jewish, and so we have no rights in God’s covenant. We are saved because God’s mercy is so wide it stretches even to us. Jesus lay down His life and rose from the dead so that we all could live forever as God’s children—us, and every human being who trusts in Jesus, regardless of where they come from, where they live now, or whether they are welcome. To Jesus, they are beloved—and so are we.

WE PRAY: *Lord, widen my heart to love ALL the people You died and rose for. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- What kind of people are hard for you to love?
- Why would God heal foreigners before His own people?
- How can God use you to love unloved people?

CATCHING PEOPLE

TEXT: [Jesus said,] "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at Your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ... And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." (Luke 5:4b-6, 10b)

Simon is an experienced fisherman. Why should he listen to Jesus?

But he does, though he can't help protesting first. He obeys Jesus. And of course Jesus turns out to be right, and Simon is terrified. Who is this Man, who brings so many fish to the nets that the boats nearly sink?

During the next three years, Simon and his fellow disciples will find out. Because Jesus has come into the world to go fishing—not for fish, but for people. He wants to catch them all. And so Jesus is calling Simon, and Andrew, and us too—to learn from Him how to share our faith, so that we can bring more and more people into Jesus' nets.

Fish die when we catch them in nets. But the people Jesus catches aren't going to die—they will live forever, in joy and peace. How can this be? Because Jesus has given His own life for them on the cross. Because Jesus has risen from the dead, and gives love and life and salvation to all the people He catches.

And then He transforms them into fishermen, too, and sends them out to catch still more people for life—until the whole world has heard the story of Jesus.

WE PRAY: *Dear Lord, teach me to fish for You, too, please. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Are you nervous about sharing your faith with others? If so, what worries you?
- How could you find help to get past that worry?
- Ask the Lord to send you a chance to tell someone about Him—and to make it so easy that you're already doing it before you even realize it. See what happens!

DEPENDABLE

TEXT: *On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee ... When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there ... (John 2:1a, 3-6a)*

I love how dependable Jesus is. When the wine runs out at a wedding, His mother Mary goes to Him for help. But what is she expecting Him to do? After all, He's never done a miracle before. No wonder Jesus says, "What does this have to do with Me?"

But Mary knows her Son well. Absolutely Jesus will find a way to help. So she waves away His cryptic remarks, tells the servants, "Do whatever He tells you," and goes away, confident that Jesus will deal with it somehow.

And He does. He turns water into about 180 gallons of wine, and the party is saved.

But what about those words? "My hour is not yet come."

Jesus says that several times in the Gospels, and every time He's referring to His death on the cross. That's because Jesus' death and resurrection make it possible for all of us who trust in Him to join the wedding feast of the Lamb in heaven, where we will celebrate with Jesus forever. If you consider the image, He is the grape that is "squeezed" at the cross to provide the wine of heaven—His own blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

WE PRAY: *Lord Jesus, thank You for giving Yourself for our needs. You are our life and joy. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- If Jesus hadn't helped, what would have happened?
- Why do you think Jesus' first miracle happens at a wedding?
- When Jesus comes back, we are all invited to His wedding (see Revelation 19:6-9). Who is Jesus' bride?

CONSISTENT

TEXT: *[Jesus] asked His disciples ... "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." ... From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Then Jesus told His disciples, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." (Matthew 16:13b, 15b-17, 21-24)*

Poor Peter! At one moment Jesus is blessing him to the skies, and the next moment He's calling him Satan. What is going on?

If you think about it, Jesus is being completely consistent here. When Peter says the truth of God, Jesus praises him. When Peter speaks the words of the devil, trying to turn Jesus away from the road to the cross, he gets the opposite treatment—for Jesus will let nothing stand in the way of our salvation.

Nothing and nobody matters to Jesus as much as doing what God sent Him to do—laying down His life for all of us on the cross and then rising from the dead, to make us God's forgiven people.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Lord, for making our safety Your top priority. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- How do you think Peter felt each time?
- Do you think he was confused?
- Why do you matter so much to Jesus?

TRANSFIGURED

TEXT: *And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. 3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him. [And] ... a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." (Matthew 17:1-3, 5b)*

What an experience—to see Jesus in His glory, and hear God speak from heaven! No wonder the disciples were terrified.

I wonder if they looked at Jesus with new eyes after that—remembering the glory hidden in this quiet Man with tired eyes and dusty feet. They knew well enough what made Him tired and dusty—it was caring for God’s people day and night. Preaching and teaching and healing. Constantly caring for the sick and the broken.

But now they had seen His glory with their own eyes. And they would see it again in a very different way on Good Friday—when Jesus willingly hung on a cross to rescue every human being from the power of death and evil. Then Jesus’ heart was on full display to the universe—the glory of the Son of God who obeyed His Father and gladly gave His own life for us. Who else loves us so much? Who else is so endlessly kind, compassionate, patient, faithful?

WE PRAY: *Lord, I too have seen Your glory, in Your death and resurrection for me. Thank You. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- What part of Jesus’ transfiguration impresses you the most?
- Why do we call the cross Jesus’ glory?
- What does it show us about His heart?

RESCUER

TEXT: *[Jesus said,] "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over ... and they will condemn Him to death ... And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise." And James and John ... said to Him, "Grant us to sit, one at Your right hand and one at Your left, in Your glory." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at My right hand or at My left is not Mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." (Mark 10:33b-35a, 37-40)*

It was kind of Jesus to rescue James and John from themselves. How could they know that when they asked to sit by Him in His glory, they were actually asking for the spots next to Him at His crucifixion?

Jesus knew it. And He didn't mock them for their greedy request, but took the opportunity to remind them once again why He came: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Jesus has rescued us, too—every one of us who trusts in Him to give us life and peace with God. He died and rose for us, that we might be with Him always.

WE PRAY: *Lord, let me be with You forever. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- What did James and John think they were asking for?
- Have you ever asked for something and regretted it later?
- If we pray for the wrong thing, does God protect us? How do you know?

CONCERNED FOR US

TEXT: *Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is He, sir, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen Him, and it is He who is speaking to you." He said, "Lord, I believe," and He worshiped Him. (John 9:35-38)*

I love the way Jesus comes looking for the man He healed in John 9. You may remember the story—how Jesus healed a blind beggar, and the religious leaders investigated, got angry when he defended Jesus, and excommunicated him.

At this point the man has lost pretty much everything except his eyesight—his old job as a beggar, his family's support, and his "church home." And then Jesus comes looking for him.

Oddly enough, Jesus doesn't say a word about the trouble the man has suffered for His sake. He just starts out with, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" This is pretty much the same thing as asking, "Do you believe in the Messiah?"

Surely the man knew Jesus by His voice. And he isn't bitter about what he's suffered. He just asks eagerly, "Who is He, sir, so I can believe in Him?" Jesus' word is good enough for him. So when Jesus tells him, "It's Me," the man worships Him and is gathered into God's family as a believer.

Jesus doesn't restore to him the things he's lost. Instead, He gives him something better, the best thing He has to offer: Himself as Savior and Lord. And the man is happy. Who wouldn't be? He has Jesus Himself, in all His love and concern, forever.

WE PRAY: *Lord, thank You for finding me in my trouble too, and for giving Yourself into death to save me. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- How do you deal with major loss in your life?
- What could you not live without?
- How does Jesus get you through loss?

PROTECTIVE

TEXT: *And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. (Matthew 21:12-14)*

Imagine that—an animal market right where people were trying to worship! Jesus was angry. He made a whip and cleared the place, and He told the people why: "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

What's a temple for, then? Jesus' answer, "prayer," is obvious from His quotation. But He also used the temple to heal sick people and to teach people about God. And He smiled at the praise of the children who cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

If you belong to Jesus, you, too, are a temple of God, and Jesus is just as concerned for your welfare as He was for that of the temple in His day. Paul writes, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20a). You are not trash, and you shouldn't treat yourself that way—or allow others to do so. Jesus died and rose again to make you His own, so that you who "hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:12b).

WE PRAY: *Lord, help me to realize and believe the high value You set on me. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- What is the price you were bought with?
- Who do you belong to?
- People abuse God's human temples, too. What does Jesus want to protect you from?

FINAL ANSWER

TEXT: *And as Jesus taught in the temple, He said, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies under Your feet." David himself calls Him Lord. So how is He his son?" And the great throng heard Him gladly. (Mark 12:35-37)*

After so many days of having other people ask Him tough questions, Jesus finally asks one of His own: "How can the Messiah be David's son and David's Lord at the same time?" As far as we know, nobody could answer His question. He won the battle of wits, and probably drove His enemies crazy as well.

We can answer it—but only because we know something they didn't. We know that Jesus, the Messiah, is David's Son because He is a human being, born into the family line of David. But He is also David's Lord because He is God Himself, come down into this world to become our Savior. Since Jesus is both God and Man, He is the answer to His own riddle.

And He is the answer to the riddle of our lives, too—the question of how sinful, broken people can ever become the joyful, clean, blessed children of God we know in our hearts we ought to be. On our own we cannot do it—we've tried again and again, and we're just too deeply broken. But Jesus, who is both God and human, has given His own life to save us. Through His death He has put to death all the evil that destroys us; and through His resurrection He has become the Source of everlasting life for all of us who trust in Him.

WE PRAY: *Lord, You are the answer I need. Thank You. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Do you enjoy riddles?
- Why or why not?
- How is Jesus the answer to your needs?

CONFUSING

TEXT: *Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany ... So the sisters sent to [Jesus], saying, "Lord, he whom You love is ill ..."* Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that Lazarus was ill, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was. (John 11:1a, 3, 5-6)

There are times when Jesus behaves so much like God in heaven that it drives me crazy. This is one of them. His dear friend Lazarus is dying, and the family is begging Him to come—so what does He do? He stays two days longer somewhere else.

What? Why do that? By the time He finally gets there, Lazarus has been dead four days! And the only explanation He gives is to His disciples: "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe" (John 11:14b-15a). He doesn't explain Himself to Martha or Mary. And they're both upset with Him.

Of course we know how the story ends—Jesus does raise Lazarus from the dead, and the family is overjoyed. But what do they do with the question marks about Jesus' choices? The same thing we do when it seems like God isn't answering our prayers. They trust Him. They don't understand, and they may be angry, but they still trust Him.

Jesus says to Martha, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25b-26) She does, and we do—because we know His heart.

WE PRAY: *Lord, You died and rose again to save us. That's enough for me, even when You confuse me. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- When has God confused you by His choices?
- How do you deal with that?
- How does Jesus' death and resurrection help you trust His love?

DEEPLY MOVED

TEXT: *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. ... Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. (John 11:33-35, 38a)*

Some people think God has no feelings. I'm not sure how they can think that, when we see how Jesus reacts to Lazarus' death and his family's grief.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus saw them all weeping, "He was deeply moved in His spirit and deeply troubled." The Greek word for "deeply moved" seems to involve a lot more than sadness; it's agitation, even being stern or indignant. And then we see Jesus Himself crying. What is going on?

Of course Jesus knows that He's going to raise Lazarus from the dead. But knowing that isn't enough to stop the powerful grief He feels right now, looking at the tomb of someone He loves, and listening to the family cry. More than that, it doesn't stop the grief and anger God feels, seeing what the powers of death and evil have done to the human beings He made and loves. Jesus came into the world to put a stop to that suffering forever—and right now He's surrounded by it. No wonder He's moved!

And so He weeps. But then He raises Lazarus—just as He will raise us some day, when He returns to bring us home to Him forever. He can and will do that, because He gave up His own life on the cross to give us life. His resurrection guarantees our hope forever.

WE PRAY: *I'm glad that You're moved for us, Lord. Keep us in Your love forever. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Why would God feel anger at death?
- Is He angry at us, or for us?
- If God cares that much about what happens to us, what does that say about how He values you personally?

ANGUISHED

TEXT: *Some Greeks ... came to Philip... [and] asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ... 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. ... 27 "Now is My soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your Name. ... And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself." ... When Jesus had said these things, He departed and hid Himself from them. (John 12:20b, 21b, 23-24, 27-28a, 32, 36b)*

What a strange reaction! Why should the coming of the Greeks make Jesus think of His own death? Because He is thinking of it, with anguish and dread. Something about the Greeks has set this off.

I think it's because Jesus knows, and has always known, that bringing the Gospel to the non-Jewish world is the task of His church. Jesus' own short ministry was spent mainly with "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24b). But with the coming of the Greeks, it's clear that the age of the church is dawning. Jesus' own ministry is almost over. And it overwhelms Him.

It looks like the Greeks never got their meeting—but that's okay. Because in just a few days, Jesus would lay down His life to save us all, Jew and Gentile alike. After rising from the dead, He would send out His church—and the Greeks would get their chance at last.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Lord, for bearing the cross for us all. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Have you ever had to face the possibility of death?
- How did it make you feel?
- How do you feel about Jesus, knowing He bore that fear for you?

DEFENDER

TEXT: *Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany ... So they gave a dinner for Him there. ... Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot ... said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me." (John 12:1a, 2a, 3-4a, 5-8)*

I wonder how Mary felt, listening to Jesus defend her. All she had wanted to do was to thank Him, to express the love she felt for Him after He raised her brother from the dead. She didn't expect Jesus' own disciples to put her to shame!

But Jesus defends her. He sees the love in her heart and the beauty of what she did. And He speaks up for her, even though He knows that He's signing His own death warrant. Because Jesus' defense of Mary is the last straw for Judas. Angry and hurt, he goes to arrange to betray Jesus to His enemies right away (see Matthew 26:14-16).

Nothing will stop Jesus from protecting the ones He loves—not even His own suffering and death. And you and I are among the ones He loves, for Jesus died and rose to save everyone in danger from the powers of evil. He loves you that much.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Lord, my Protector. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- When have you done something good that was misunderstood?
- Did anyone defend you?
- Does it help to know that Jesus understands and cares for you?

HUMBLE LOVE

TEXT: *Now ... when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. ... Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper (John 13:1b, 3-4a)*

John tells us that Jesus knew “that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God.” And then He stands up from the dinner table. What is He going to do, given what He knows about Himself? Surely it will be some glorious grand response, worthy of the Son of God!

But no. “He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him” (John 13:4b-5).

Jesus knows that He is, literally, the center of everything. And He responds to this by loving His disciples in the humblest way He can.

But that isn’t enough for Him. Because just a few hours later He is doing something deeper, humbler, more loving. He who is the center of His Father’s love is now the center of shameful attention on earth, stared at by everyone as He hangs on a cross between heaven and earth, dying to wash clean the people He came to save.

Jesus is the greatest. And so He makes Himself the lowest, and the most loving—because that’s the kind of Person He is.

WE PRAY: *Dear Lord, wash me clean and make me Your own. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- When you are praised, how do you usually respond?
- Why can Jesus humble Himself this way so easily?
- What does this say about how He values you?

GLORIFIED

TEXT: *Jesus was troubled in His spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." ... So when [Jesus] had dipped the morsel, He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot [and said] to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." ... So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him at once." (John 13:21b, 26b, 27b, 30-32)*

It happened so quickly, so quietly, that most of the disciples didn't realize what was going on, right under their eyes. Jesus said to Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Judas got up from the table and went out, and it was night. And Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified"

What? Wait a minute! What has just happened? And why does it glorify Jesus?

Judas has just gone to betray Him. And Jesus, knowing this, has let him go—why? Because He loves us and He loves His Father, and this is the way it has to be, to save us all.

Surely this is Jesus' glory, that He has such a heart—that He loves us, and the Father, so deeply He accepts betrayal and suffering and death on a cross—all to save us and bring us home in peace to God as His forgiven children. Tomorrow, Jesus' death and resurrection will put that heart on display for everyone to see. And that will be His glory, now and forever.

WE PRAY: *Lord, no one loves us like You do. Thank You. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Why does Jesus let Judas go?
- Why does Jesus' choice bring glory to God?
- Why would Jesus consider the cross His own glory?

GUARDIAN

TEXT: *[Jesus prayed], "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ... I have manifested Your Name to the people whom You gave Me out of the world. ... I have guarded them ... But now I am coming to You ... Keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ... I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me."*
(John 17:1b-3, 6a, 12b, 13a, 15b, 16-18, 20-21)

Look at the love with which Jesus prays for us, the night before His death! All His concern is for us, not for Himself—though He is the One who will be hanging on a cross within hours. Jesus asks the Father to keep us trusting in Jesus, and to make us holy, loving, united people who will carry His message to the whole world.

Jesus will not be absent while God is doing all this. He will rise from the dead to live forever—and to share that everlasting life with everyone who trusts in Him.

WE PRAY: *Lord, thank You that You are with us and in us, forever. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Why is Jesus concerned for His followers?
- Who protects us now?
- Read John 17 to see everything Jesus prayed for you.

DESPERATE

TEXT: *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane ... And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me." And going a little farther He fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."* (Matthew 26:36a, 37-39)

Jesus fell on His face. Prayer doesn't get more desperate than that. And I am so glad that the Gospels show us our Savior that way—deeply troubled, crying out to God—because it means Jesus has been there, right where I've been—right where I'm terrified I'll have to go again.

Look at what He does. He goes to Gethsemane, though He knows absolutely He'll be leaving that place under arrest. He takes His three closest friends and begs them to stay alert while He prays. And He only makes it a little further before He falls on His face.

"Father," He cries. "If possible, let Me not have to go through with this." But He could not avoid it. Because what was at stake was us—you, and me, and everyone who needs a Savior. It was Him or us. And He chose to have it be Him.

Because of Jesus, none of us has to go through Gethsemane alone. We may suffer, we will certainly die—but we'll do it with Jesus beside us, holding us up, carrying us in His love. We'll do it with the sure and certain promise of everlasting life—because Jesus died and rose again for our sake, to save us and make us His own forever.

WE PRAY: *Stay with me, Lord! Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- When you're desperate, how do you pray?
- When have you had to choose between your own suffering and someone else's?
- What does Jesus' choice tell you about His feelings for you?

MERCIFUL

TEXT: *And He [Jesus] came and found them sleeping, and He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer Him. And He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand." (Mark 14:37-42)*

I can't imagine what it was like for Jesus to find them all sleeping. How could they? He had been praying out loud—they heard His anguish. And still, they fell asleep? Especially Peter, who swore he would lay down his life for Jesus.

But He looks at their scared, ashamed faces, and His heart melts. And so He urges them to try again, and goes back to His own struggle.

And it happens again. And again. And the last time, still, Jesus has no hard words for them. He simply tells them to get up—for Judas and his soldiers are finally here.

It would have been lovely if they had been able to support Jesus in His time of need. But the way it turned out—well, isn't it always like that? Jesus ends up carrying our burdens along with His own. In fact, His own burden is our burden—because the whole reason for His death and resurrection was to save us.

WE PRAY: *Lord, You are always there for me. Thank You. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Where is Jesus finding the strength to deal with this?
- When your friends let you down, where do you find help?
- How can you forgive those who let you down?

SUPERNATURAL

TEXT: *So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to Him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am He..." They drew back and fell to the ground. So He asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He. So, if you seek Me, let these men go." (John 18:3-5a, 6b-8)*

There is one part of the story in Gethsemane that gives me the creeps. It's the bit where Jesus says, "I AM," and the soldiers trying to arrest Him pull back and fall to the ground. Why? Because Jesus has just used the Name of God, "I AM"—and He's done it about Himself. The simple power in that Name blows them backward.

I wonder how they felt, trying to arrest Him after that. I would have been scared spitless. Arrest someone with divine power—arrest God Himself? And yet, somehow they managed it—*after* Jesus ordered them to let the disciples go free.

If there's anything in this whole story that should tell us who Jesus is, this is it. He is God Himself. He is God come into our world to save us, setting us free at the cost of His own life—and rising again on the third day.

WE PRAY: *Lord, I know that You are God. Thank You for becoming my Savior. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Do you think any of the soldiers had nightmares afterward?
- Do you think they reported this to their superiors, the chief priests?
- Why do you think Jesus made such a point of letting them know whom they were dealing with?

GRIEVED

TEXT: *Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The One I will kiss is the Man; seize Him." (Matthew 26:48)*

TEXT: *Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48)*

It's hard for me to imagine how much this moment must have hurt Jesus. Judas is one of the closest disciples of Jesus, one of the Twelve. He has spent three years at Jesus' side, learning, serving, eating, sleeping, travelling. Jesus sent him out to preach and teach like the others; later He trusted him to be treasurer. And now what? Betrayal with a kiss.

Jesus had tried to save Judas. Again and again in the last few days we see Jesus warning Judas, showing him honor, serving him with His own hands, washing his feet. Jesus gave him one of the places of honor at the Last Supper next to him, so close they could whisper and not be heard (John 12:4-7, 13:26, 13:3-5; Matthew 26:25). None of it did any good. Judas made his own choice.

Jesus didn't stop loving Judas when he made that choice. And He doesn't stop loving us whenever we betray Him, no matter what we do to grieve Him and throw His love back in His face. Jesus always calls us back, because He loves us. He died on that cross and rose again to bring us back to Him—forgiven, clean, and restored.

WE PRAY: *Lord, forgive me for the times I grieve You, and draw me closer to You in love. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Do you think Jesus would have forgiven Judas, if he had waited for the Resurrection?
- Have you ever been betrayed?
- How does Jesus' love affect the way He deals with you when you betray Him?

LOVING HIS ENEMIES

TEXT: *And when those who were around Him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And He touched his ear and healed him. (Luke 22:49-51)*

This tiny detail in the story of Jesus' arrest always makes me feel like crying. It's the last miracle of healing we know of that Jesus ever performed on earth. He healed a man's ear—and that man was His enemy, someone sent to arrest Him.

I wonder what came of this later. As far as we know, nobody got out a warrant for Peter's arrest for wounding the high priest's servant. No doubt it would have been hard to prove, with the evidence gone! But that's not why Jesus did it.

He did it for love—because this man, whose name was Malchus, was precious to Him. He didn't want to see him in pain. Malchus was someone He came to save. Jesus would die for Malchus, and for all the rest of us, the very next day. But for now He reaches out to do this last little thing to help him, because He loves him.

I'm guessing Malchus had a sleepless night after that, wondering about Jesus. What kind of man does such a thing? Malchus almost certainly wound up in the baby Christian church, a believer in Jesus—which is why John mentions his name (see John 18:10). I suspect he told the story of Jesus' last healing for the rest of his life.

WE PRAY: *Dear Lord, thank You for loving Your enemies, including me—and making us into Your own dear family. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Do you think Malchus' family believed his story?
- What kinds of feelings do you think went through his mind as he lay awake that night?
- When has God showed you a kindness you desperately needed?

RESOLUTE

TEXT: *And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (Matthew 26:51-54)*

Jesus warns Peter—not just for his violence, but for interfering with the will of God. Because Jesus doesn't need Peter to defend Him from death. If He intended to escape, Jesus could do it with a snap of His fingers, or with a single prayer.

I can't imagine what it would be like to be facing death by crucifixion, and to know that at any moment, you could call 24,000 angels to rescue you—and not do it. Moment after moment after moment. What a temptation that must have been!

And yet for Jesus, maybe not. Because much as He wanted to avoid the pain and suffering, He wanted something else more. He wanted you—and me. He wanted to see us free from the power of sin, death, and the devil. He wanted to see us happy, forgiven, and blessed—living forever in God's kingdom, full of joy and peace. How could that happen? Only if Jesus went through with it—dying and rising again from the dead.

And so Jesus went through with it—because He had your face and mine before His eyes.

WE PRAY: *Lord, there is nothing I can say except "Thank You." Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- What would have happened to us if Jesus had rescued Himself?
- When did you go through something hard, to benefit someone you loved?
- Why does Jesus love you so?

CONCERNED FOR HIS ENEMIES

TEXT: *Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against Him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." (Luke 22:52-53)*

I don't think I'd ever realized before that it wasn't just ordinary guards and servants who came out to arrest Jesus—apparently the chief priests and temple officers themselves came out, at least a few. Maybe they wanted to make sure it went smoothly.

But that gave Jesus the chance to say right to their faces, "Why are you behaving in this ridiculous, illegal way? You are doing the work of the devil." Which is something they really needed to hear, because they were doing evil and putting their spiritual lives in great danger.

For their own sakes, Jesus had to warn them. It didn't change what happened that night, but who knows what they remembered in the years to come? Because Jesus was about to die and rise again to save sinful, broken human beings—and that included these people, His enemies.

Did it work? Well, the book of Acts tells us that "the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7b). So yes, it's totally possible that some of these people came to faith in Jesus. And no surprise, because we ourselves were once enemies of God, until His Holy Spirit planted faith in our hearts, and made us God's own.

WE PRAY: *Lord, Your words have power to save. Thank You for calling me to be Your own. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Have you ever had to warn someone they were on the wrong path?
- Did they take it well?
- Did it make a difference later, do you think?

BALANCED

TEXT: *The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them; they know what I said." When He had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how You answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike Me?" (John 18:19-23)*

It amazes me how balanced Jesus' responses are in court. The high priest is openly breaking the law by questioning the prisoner rather than calling witnesses. Jesus knows this is illegal, and He calls him on it. He does the same with the officer who hits Him. Jesus doesn't start throwing lightning bolts. Nor does He say nothing at all and allow both people to wade deeper and deeper into sin without warning. He says just what needs saying and then stops.

This comforts me because it tells me that Jesus will treat me the same way, too. When He needs to warn me against sin, He will. He won't overdo it and terrify me, but He won't ignore my situation, either. And when He truly needs to pull out all the stops and do everything in His power to save me, He'll do that. Because that's what He did for all of us, when He suffered, died, and rose again—to save us from evil and give us life.

WE PRAY: *Lord, let me listen to You with all my heart. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Do you find it easy to keep your cool under stress?
- How would you describe Jesus when it comes to His temper?
- Tell about a time when God protected you by warning you.

MERCIFUL LOVE

TEXT: *Then they seized Him [Jesus] and led Him away, bringing Him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ... Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light ... said, "This man also was with Him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And ... still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:54, 56-59b-62)*

It amazes me how much Jesus could get into a single look. Because that's what happened when Peter denied Jesus—the rooster crowed, and Jesus turned around and looked straight at Peter. And he broke down and wept.

What was in that look? Grief, I'm sure. It must have hurt to hear Peter deny Him. But there was also love—because Jesus knows our weakness, and when we fall into sin, His heart aches for us. Jesus was about to pay with His life for Peter's sin and for ours—willingly, because He loves us.

WE PRAY: *Lord, when I sin, look at me—and forgive me. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- When Jesus rose from the dead, one of the first people He came to was Peter, privately (see Luke 24:34). What do you think happened in that interview?
- Why does the Bible not tell us what happened, do you think?
- What does that tell you about how Jesus cares for repentant sinners?

REBUILDER

TEXT: *Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put Him to death ... At last two came forward and said, "This Man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" (Matthew 26:59, 60b-61)*

Have you ever wondered about the false testimony they dug up against Jesus? I mean, it's a really weird accusation. I suppose you could argue it was blasphemy, to threaten God's temple. But in fact, we know exactly what Jesus did say—and He never said a word about doing the destroying Himself. No, He was speaking to His enemies, and what He said to them was this: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19b). And John tells us Jesus was speaking about His own body.

What Jesus was saying was clear: "You do the destroying, and I will do the rebuilding. You destroy My body, where God Himself lives incarnate among human beings, and I will rise from the dead three days later."

Jesus is not a destroyer. Rather, He comes into the world to put an end to those who destroy, and to raise from the dead what has been destroyed. That's what He was doing when He surrendered His own body to death—and when He rose from the dead Easter morning. Jesus knows how we have been hurt, and what has been destroyed in our lives—and because He loves us, He is raising us up again with Him.

WE PRAY: *Lord, see where I have been destroyed, and raise me, too! Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- How is Jesus' body a temple?
- Jesus' resurrection destroyed the power of death. So in what ways could you say that He is a destroyer, after all?
- If you're willing to share, mention an area of your life Jesus has brought new life to.

WITNESS

TEXT: *So Pilate ... said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You over to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But My kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" (John 18:33-38)*

Sometimes Jesus shocks me. Because when He's talking to Pontius Pilate, the very man who is going to condemn Him to death, what is He doing? He's evangelizing him.

I mean, seriously! Look at the conversation. Pilate asks Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" and Jesus goes out of His way to make sure Pilate understands exactly what that phrase means. And then He dangles enticing statements about truth in front of Pilate, in the hopes that he will ask more.

It's so much like His conversation with Nicodemus, or with the woman at the well (see John 3-4). Jesus takes every chance He gets to draw people to Him in faith—because Pilate, too, is someone He will suffer, die, and rise again to save.

WE PRAY: *Lord, You have brought me to trust in You. Bring many more people to know You as Savior. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Why is it Jesus can't stop witnessing, even on the brink of death?
- Do you think Pilate ever came to faith?
- Why or why not?

NO REGRETS

TEXT: *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged Him. (John 19:1)*

I have the hardest time thinking of this scene. It was bloody, and it was brutal; people could die under this punishment. When Romans flogged a person, they used a whip with many lashes, with bits of bone and metal attached to the ends. Jewish law limited the number of strokes a person could receive—but not Roman law; the only guideline was basically, “Don’t kill the prisoner; keep him alive for the cross.”

Jesus bore this for me.

He bore this for you, too—and He thought it was well worthwhile. Because hard as it is to believe, we are His joy. We are the prize He thought it was worth suffering for—the people He desired to have with Him forever, as He said to God the Father on the night before His death (see Hebrews 12:2; John 17:24).

Jesus doesn’t regret the price He paid for us. Even though He still carries the scars of this flogging, they are His glory—for they testify to how much He loves us, how far He went to have us—and we know, absolutely, that He will get what He wants in the end.

And we will rejoice with Him forever.

WE PRAY: *Lord, I love You. Bring me safely home to You in the end. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Do you have trouble coping with the details of Jesus’ suffering?
- When have you suffered, even a little, for someone you loved?
- Was it worth it? Why?

WORSHIPPED

TEXT: *Then the soldiers ... gathered the whole battalion before [Jesus]. And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head and put a reed in His right hand. And kneeling before Him, they mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spit on Him and took the reed and struck Him on the head. (Matthew 27:27-30)*

I wonder what Jesus thought as the soldiers knelt before Him. It was the second time in His life that had happened. The first time was when He was tiny, only a year or two old, and the wise men came to visit Him in Bethlehem. Matthew tells us, "They saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him" (Matthew 2:11b).

These soldiers don't intend worship but mockery. And yet, this looks forward to a third time when people will kneel before Jesus, including us. Paul describes it this way: "Christ Jesus ... though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the Name that is above every name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5b-11).

WE PRAY: *I look forward to that day, dear Lord. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- What does the act of kneeling mean to you?
- Why did the soldiers choose this action to mock Jesus?
- Why do those who love Jesus choose it?

JUDGE

TEXT: *When Pilate heard [that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God,] he was even more afraid. He ... said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to Him, "You will not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You and authority to crucify You?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered Me over to you has the greater sin." (John 19:8-11)*

I'm not surprised Pilate was terrified. Jesus is speaking to him in the quiet, unemotional voice of a judge—the Man who will judge all humanity on the Last Day. And that Judge is a far greater authority than Pilate himself, for He is the Son of God.

Notice how Jesus compares Pilate and Judas. Both are handing Jesus over to death—but Pilate, at least, has his office as governor to hide behind. He is doing the work God gave him to do, though he is doing it wrongly. But Judas doesn't even have that much excuse.

And what about us? It was our sin, our rebellion against God, that sent Jesus to His death. And where can we hide from our guilt?

Only in that same Jesus—for to us He is not terrifying Judge, but forgiving, loving Savior. He gave up His life willingly to save us and to restore us to God as His own dear children. And now that Jesus has risen from the dead, we can be sure that He will raise us also, at the end of the world. We will be with Him in peace forever.

WE PRAY: *Lord, thank You for Your mercy to me. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Are judges frightening? Why or why not?
- Are you worried about standing before Jesus some day?
- If so, where can you find comfort and hope?

SACRIFICE

TEXT: *So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released for them Barabbas, and ... delivered [Jesus] to be crucified. (Matthew 27:24-26)*

It's a horrible thing the crowd shouted: "His blood be on us and on our children!" They meant it as a kind of curse—as if they were saying, "We want this Man dead so badly we are willing to accept the consequences, no matter what."

Could Jesus hear what they said? I think so. He seems to have been really close to the action, either standing next to Pilate or else somewhere nearby where Pilate could go back and forth to ask Him questions.

I wonder what Jesus was thinking.

Because of course, Jesus' blood is exactly what we need—on us *and* on our children. Jesus' blood, which He willingly shed for us, is what cleanses us from all sin, guilt, and shame, and makes us children of God with clean, new hearts. The crowd thought they were uttering a curse; but through His death and resurrection, Jesus our Savior turned it into a blessing.

WE PRAY: *Lord, let Your blood be on me and make me Your own forever. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Have you ever had a blood transfusion? How does that gift of blood, willingly given, save people?
- What does Jesus' blood save you from?
- Why does Jesus keep turning curses into blessings? What drives Him?

CARING

TEXT: *And as they led Him [Jesus] away ... there followed Him ... women who were mourning and lamenting for Him. But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23:26a. 27-31)*

It's so typical of Jesus. Here He is, walking toward His own execution—and He takes the time to feel sorry for the women who are following Him crying. He knows what they do not—that within 40 years, the city of Jerusalem will fall to the Roman army. It will be horrible—fire, famine, and rivers of blood. And many of these women will live to see it. Jesus' heart goes out to them.

At this point, all He can do is warn them. But Jesus is walking toward the cross, where He will do something much greater to save them—and us. For through His own suffering, He will set us free from the power of sin, death, and the devil. Jesus' death will save us from death; and His resurrection will give us real life, life that lasts forever. And we who trust in Jesus will be with Him always, in the kingdom of God where no war threatens and no death ever comes.

WE PRAY: *Lord Jesus, keep me safe in Your care, even when suffering comes to me. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Has God promised to protect us from all suffering? Why or why not?
- What has God promised to protect us from?
- Why were the early Christians content to die for Jesus? What greater gift were they looking forward to?

CENTER

TEXT: *And they brought Him [Jesus] to the place called Golgotha (which means 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 garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified Him. And the inscription of the charge against Him read, "The King of the Jews." And with Him they crucified two robbers, one on His right and one on His left. (Mark 15:22-27)*

This part of Mark reminds me of an altarpiece—the beautiful, detailed paintings that you sometimes see in a great church, right above the altar.

In the center of everything, we see Jesus—naked, suffering, hanging from a cross. This is the true King of Israel—God Himself, come to save His people with His own blood (see Isaiah 44:6). On either side of Him are His courtiers—two robbers, fit companions for the Savior of sinners. At His feet are His executioners, ignoring their Savior while they gamble for His clothes.

And where are we, in this picture? If we have any sense, on our knees. For this is Jesus, who loves us so much He willingly chooses to give His life for us—and never mind the shame, never mind the pain. He wants us for His own, and He will do whatever is necessary to bring us home with Him to God His Father. By His death He will set us free from death; and when He rises from the dead, He will raise us, too, and give us everlasting life—to everyone who trusts in Him.

WE PRAY: *Dear Jesus, thank You. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Why did Jesus do this for you?
- Do you think He regrets it?
- Why does Jesus call you His joy (see Hebrews 12:2)?

KING OF THE JEWS

TEXT: *Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." (John 19:19-22)*

Jesus must've made a strong impression on Pontius Pilate. It wasn't enough to stop the execution; but it was enough for Pilate to insist on giving Jesus His correct title. And the fact that it enraged Jesus' enemies was probably just an extra advantage in Pilate's eyes.

Pilate would've been thinking about their earlier conversation, where Jesus clarified what it meant for Him to be a king. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. ... You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:36b, 37b).

And what was that truth that Jesus came to bear witness to? It was simply this: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned" (John 3:16-18a).

WE PRAY: *Lord, You are my King who has saved me. Thank You. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Who is the true King of Israel? (See Isaiah 44:6.)
- What kind of a king serves his people, instead of them serving him?
- If Jesus is a King, what is His crown and His throne?

FORGIVING

TEXT: *And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on His right and one on His left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:33-34a)*

I wonder what they were thinking, the people who heard Jesus say this. Did they think He was out of His mind? It would be no surprise if He were. After all, He had just been flogged almost to death, and then nailed up to a cross. And you would almost have to be crazy to forgive your enemies for killing you.

At least, that's what the world would say. But we who belong to Jesus know better. Because we've watched Him do this sort of thing again and again. He washed the feet of Judas, His betrayer. He healed the ear of a man who came to arrest Him. He treated Pontius Pilate with courtesy and respect. After all that, it's no surprise to find Him forgiving the men who nailed Him to the cross.

And that's a good thing, because it means that He will forgive *us*—every human being who has ever rebelled against God and made it necessary for Jesus to rescue us in this loving and self-sacrificing way. Even now, His concern is for other people—not for Himself. His death is for us, His resurrection will be for us, and when He returns to heaven, He will plead for us before God the Father. With such a loving Savior, how could we not be forgiven?

WE PRAY: *Dear Jesus, my heart belongs to You. Let me be Yours forever. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Why does Jesus say the soldiers don't know what they're doing?
- How do you think God the Father answered Jesus' prayer—yes or no?
- Why do you think so?

CLOTHING

TEXT: *When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also His tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." (John 19:23-24a)*

You might think the fate of Jesus' clothing didn't matter. What need does a dead man have for clothes?

And yet, I can't help wondering what Jesus thought, watching from the cross. They would have been the ordinary clothes of any man from Galilee or Judea: a tunic, a mantle, sandals, a belt, perhaps a cloth to cover the head. They would have been made by His family, or possibly given as a gift. Making them took days of hard work. It would hurt to see them treated this way.

To Jesus, they were gifts of love. To the soldiers, what? Something to sell or to give to a servant. A rag, maybe. Not something to cherish.

For our sake, Jesus let them go—so He could provide a greater gift of love for us, the people God loves. Because of Jesus, none of us ever needs to be ashamed to stand before God. Through His suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus has covered our sin and shame. Indeed, Paul says that Jesus Himself has become our clothing: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

WE PRAY: *Lord, thank You for covering me with Yourself. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- When have you worked hard on a gift for someone you love?
- Why do we use white robes to symbolize forgiveness in Baptism?
- Now that Jesus has made Himself your clothing, what party are you ready to attend? (See Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:6-9.)

SAVIOR

TEXT: *And those who passed by derided Him, ... saying ... "Save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him, saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way. (Matthew 27:39a, 40-44)*

Notice the words that Jesus' enemies use: "If You are the Son of God," they say. These are the same words the devil used when he was tempting Jesus, back at the beginning of His ministry. And in both cases, the point is the same: to push Jesus into defending His identity by doing something He shouldn't.

And what are they pushing Him to do? They are tempting Him to give up His mission—to stop doing the work God the Father has given Him to do—to stop saving us, the people who need Him so much, and save Himself instead. They even offer to believe in Him if He will do that!

But Jesus loves us too well to fall for that trap. In just a few hours, He will complete His suffering and give up His life to rescue us. His death will break the power of sin and death over us; and when He rises from the dead, He will become the Source of everlasting life for all of us forever—everyone who trusts in Him.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Lord Jesus, for saving me. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- When do you have a hard time keeping silent?
- What would have happened to us if Jesus had listened?
- What will happen to us now?

VISITOR

TEXT: *[As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday,] the whole multitude of His disciples began to rejoice and praise God ... saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ... And when He drew near and saw the city, He wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will ... tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:37b-38, 41-43a, 44)*

That must have been something to see—Jesus weeping over Jerusalem as His disciples rejoiced and praised God. Did they fall silent, wondering what was wrong?

Jesus' own words tell us the problem: Jerusalem didn't recognize her visitor. The people of God's own capital city had no idea, most of them, that God Himself had come to visit. They let their last, best chance to welcome Him slip away.

And yet, all hope is not lost, for Jerusalem or for us. If God's people would not welcome Him as King and God, they would crucify Him as Savior. God took advantage of that. Jesus' willing death for us all means we have forgiveness, life, joy, and salvation. Jesus' resurrection means that hope is never lost, for now that He lives forever, He is always with us—no longer a visitor, but our dearly loved King and Savior. We don't suffer alone. And we will live with Him in His kingdom forever.

WE PRAY: *Thank You for coming to us, dear Lord!*

Reflection Questions

- If Jesus came to visit your house, how would you prepare?
- How do you prepare for Communion?
- How does it change your suffering, to know Jesus is with you?

ABANDONED

TEXT: *About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)*

This passage makes me want to shut my mouth and hide my face. How can the very Son of God feel abandoned by God, even on the cross?

And yet, He did. You can hear it in the words He chooses: "My God," He says, not "My Father." Jesus is speaking as a man like us—a man who feels utterly abandoned by God. And He reflects that distance in the Name He uses.

Jesus is quoting Psalm 22, which David wrote by the power of the Holy Spirit hundreds of years earlier. It's a terrifying description of what it was like for Jesus to be crucified, in Jesus' own words. So I suppose we could say David was quoting Jesus, and not the other way around. When the Holy Spirit gets involved, time and space can get mixed up that way.

But it doesn't really matter who said it first. What matters is that Jesus said it—and because He said it, we too can say it, whenever our lives are going so horribly wrong that we feel God has abandoned us. We too can cry out this way to God, with all the grief and fear and anger in our hearts, and never worry that God will be angry at us for speaking this way. Jesus, who is God Himself, said it before us. Through His suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus stands with humanity in all of our grief and desperation—and brings us back to God.

WE PRAY: *Lord Jesus, when I feel forsaken, be with me and uphold me! Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Have you ever felt forsaken by God?
- Is it a comfort, to know you don't have to police your language when you pray in desperation?
- Looking back on those times you felt forsaken—were you, really?

PROMISE MAKER

TEXT: *One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." (Luke 23:39-43)*

Even on the cross, Jesus got no peace from being abused. Both of the men He was dying with yelled at Him (see Matthew 27:44). But then one man had a change of heart. "Stop that," he says to the other man. "We deserve what's happening to us, but this Man hasn't done anything wrong." I'm not sure how he figured that out—had he met Jesus before, back in the days when both of them were free? Or was he just judging based on Jesus' behavior on the cross?

Whatever it was, he now looks at Jesus and says, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." I have no idea whether he actually believed in Jesus' kingdom, or whether he thought he was humoring a crazy man—pretending to believe in order to comfort Him. But it doesn't matter, because Jesus took His words very seriously: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise."

What a gift for Jesus to give a dying man—and one who had no reason to expect God's mercy! But because of Jesus, he would receive it. This man would be with Him in paradise, forgiven, saved, and full of joy—walking with Jesus in His triumph. Because Jesus was not returning home by Himself—He brought at least one man along with Him, the firstfruits of His victory over death and the devil. This man would be the first of countless others Jesus is bringing home to His Father as the fruit of His death and resurrection. And you and I will be among them, too.

WE PRAY: *Dear Savior, bring me home to You also, when the time is right. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Do you think the man had met Jesus before? If so, when?
- What might have impressed him about Jesus' words and actions on the cross?
- What do you look forward to the most, about the day Jesus brings you home to Him?

GIVER

TEXT: *Standing by 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 nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. (John 19:25-27)*

At this point Jesus has very little left that belongs to Him. His reputation, His freedom, and His safety are all gone. His disciples have scattered. Even His clothes have been taken from Him.

But one thing remains. At the foot of Jesus' cross stands His mother, along with His disciple John. Jesus doesn't want either of them to be alone with their grief. And so He gives them to each other.

It comforts me to see the care Jesus takes, to make sure both of them have a fellow believer to be with them. Jesus could have left John to find his own way—could have left Mary to the tender mercies of His unbelieving brothers. He does neither. Instead, He creates a new family of love out of the two of them.

This is so like Him, isn't it? It's not enough for Him to give us life, joy, salvation, forgiveness, and peace through His death and resurrection. No, He has to give us even more—the love and support of one another in the church, of which He is the Head. And He says, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Lord, for meeting our needs. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- When has the church been a comfort to you?
- What can we do when the church fails to be loving and supportive?
- Why is it not a good idea to try to live your whole life as an individual Christian apart from the church?

WITH US ALWAYS

TEXT: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28)*

It reassures me to see how carefully Jesus has planned for the comfort and strength of those who love Him. This is the night before His death, and how they will need His help to get through that time! And so He gives them one last gift of love—He gives them Himself. Here, in the broken bread and the cup of His blood poured out for many—here, we have Jesus Himself, to be our strength and our hope. Even death cannot take Him from us; He has promised to be with us forever (see Matthew 28:20). And in Communion, we have Him most intimately—in a form we can handle, taste, and touch. And He uses this gift to forgive and strengthen us.

I don't know what the disciples thought of it at the time. They had not yet seen Him nailed to a cross, giving up His life so that we might be forgiven, remade, and restored to God. They had not seen Him risen from the dead, standing with us alive and joyful, now the Source of life for all of us who trust in Him. But we have seen these things through the Gospel of the Lord; and so we treasure His gift of closeness and love.

WE PRAY: *Dear Jesus, thank You for giving us Yourself. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Does it help you to have something to touch and taste of Jesus?
- Why or why not?
- During the recent pandemic, what was your experience concerning Communion? How did it affect you?

FINISHED

TEXT: *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there ... When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished." (John 19:28-29a, 30a)*

TEXT: *It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!" And having said this He breathed His last. (Luke 23:44-46)*

Such short and simple words: "I thirst." "It is finished." Jesus was at the point of death, and He could barely breathe.

But He could say the important things. He could ask for the sour wine that would complete the final prophecy in Psalm 69:21. He could commit His spirit into the hands of the Father who loved and sent Him to be our Savior. And He could announce the good news to all of us standing at the foot of His cross, trusting Him: "It is finished."

Jesus' work of suffering and dying and saving and remaking us to be God's children—done, all done. The devil is defeated and his slaves set free. Even death itself is about to be destroyed—because next comes Jesus' resurrection.

And we will share in it. In His great love, Jesus has bound us so tightly to Himself that our death becomes His death, and His resurrection becomes our resurrection. We cannot be separated from Him. From now on, where He goes, we will go. Because He lives, we will live. He will be our life forever.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Father, for giving us Your Son as our Life. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- How closely has Jesus bound you to Himself?
- What has He done with your sin?
- How do you know?

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

TEXT: *After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission ... Nicodemus also ... came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So ... they laid Jesus there. (John 19:38a, 39-41, 42b)*

What a day this is! The Son of God is dead. How can that be? The Source of life, about to be laid in a tomb?

And by whom? Two respected members of the Jewish council, the very group that condemned Him! Pilate must have been amazed. And at Passover time, too, when handling a body guarantees they will not be able to participate in public worship for the rest of the week! But they don't care.

Normally caring for Jesus' body would have been a task for women. But Joseph and Nicodemus have taken this service on themselves, the last gift of love they can give Jesus. Who cares about gender roles?

Jesus whom they loved is dead, and their world has been turned upside down. Nothing else matters to them. At least, until their world gets turned right-side up, on Sunday morning—when the women in turn take over the men's job and preach Good News to the disciples.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, dear Lord, for turning my world right side up by Your death and resurrection. You have saved me and everyone who trusts in You. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- How does the death of someone you love turn your world upside down?
- At such a time, do you care if you're breaking social expectations?
- Were Jesus' followers expecting the resurrection? How do you know?

GOOD NEWS!

TEXT: *Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early ... And she saw two angels in white ... They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She ... turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" 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, ["Teacher!"] Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for 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.'" (John 20:1a, 12a 13a, 14b-17)*

Of course Mary is crying. She thinks she has lost Jesus forever, and she is heartbroken.

But then Jesus calls her name: "Mary." And she recognizes Him! Of course she grabs Him—hugs Him and won't let Him go! I would, too. But Jesus says to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I haven't ascended to the Father yet." There will be plenty of time for clinging to Jesus in the future. Right now, there is work to do. "Go to My brothers," Jesus says. Tell them the Good News!

And she does. And we do, too, every time we tell the story of Jesus to someone. We tell them how God loved us so much He became our Savior through His death and resurrection, setting us free to be God's own children.

WE PRAY: *Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for dying and rising to bring us home to God in peace. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- How would you have reacted, seeing Jesus alive again?
- Will the disciples believe Mary's story?
- When have you told others about Jesus?

JOYFUL

TEXT: *That very day two [believers] were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem ... Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. And He said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered Him, "Are You the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth" (Luke 24:13, 15b-19a)*

Picture these two believers, so earnestly explaining all about Jesus' suffering and death, to Jesus Himself, not recognizing Him at all. How did they miss the nail holes in His hands?

And what of Jesus? Why does He let the confusion go on for hours until He breaks the bread for dinner—and vanishes, as they finally know Him?

I think it was joy. I think it was love and happiness and a sense of humor, as Jesus enjoys an afternoon relaxing with two people He loves, who are stubbornly refusing to believe He's alive again. They won't trust the women's testimony. And so Jesus gets to exercise His sense of humor, hiding His identity, teaching them what the Bible says about Him—and waiting for the truth to dawn.

This is the kind of God we have, One who loves us so dearly that He dies and rises again for us—all so He can enjoy, not just an afternoon, but all eternity with us, His people. And it starts today—now—for all of us who trust in Him.

WE PRAY: *Lord, draw me closer to You every day, and bring me to know You indeed. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- Why do people joke and laugh when they are happy?
- What do you know about God's sense of humor?
- Are you glad to know that Jesus likes spending time with you?

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