

Week Six

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DEATH

Call to Worship

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

[ISAIAH 25:6-9]

Confession

O Lord, we confess our hands are not clean, our hearts are not pure. Forgive our capricious discipleship and keep our faith constant, O Lord. Lead us always to a deeper experience of your love. Enliven us by the familiar but always new story of shame and triumph, suffering and hope, that this week reveals. Mold us to the ways of the Servant whose life we honor. In the name of Christ, our Lord, Amen.

[WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

[MARK 14:66-72]

DEVOTIONAL

Few things are more negative than "death." Death is seen as the end of something—the end of life, bringing with it much defeat and bitterness. Death is to be avoided at all costs.

But the Bible, at times, tells a different story:

“You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Cor. 15:36).

“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” (John 12:24).

Musician Jon Foreman echoes this same upside-down thinking when he sings, “For a seed to give birth to life, first it must die.” We see this every year, all around us as the season of autumn approaches. The leaves change and the flowers fade as the cold grip of death takes hold of them yet again. Old things are dying to bring about new life. It is a strange cycle of mourning and rejoicing that makes up our days. Death brings life, or it at least has that potential.

In many ways, this is the very journey of Lent: death to life. Just as the food we eat must first die in order to sustain our life, so the old self (apart from Christ) must die daily to give birth to the new self. We put to death our self-centeredness and we are raised to life in Jesus. We deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. Death brings life.

Death is a looming and scary thing. But the love of God toward us in Christ compels us not to be afraid of death and what it will cost us. God held nothing back, but rather, gave up his own Son for us. Surely he will also return to us life abundantly. And that abundant life is this: gaining Jesus, being with and following him. The process of dying to ourselves and our own agenda helps us to locate our treasure (life, joy, purpose) in Jesus. Lent reminds us that true life is found in Jesus.

When the seed of God – Jesus – fell into the ground and died, he became not just our creator but our redeemer and our seed of life. As we die to ourselves we get more of him and in turn more of who we are created to be. When you truly grasp the death of Jesus, when the truth and beauty of all that Jesus gave up for you sinks into your life, you will joyfully give up all you have and are to follow him.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

[ISAAC WATTS]

REFLECTION

1. *What attitudes, desires, and tendencies toward self-centeredness are present in your life that you need to put to death?*
2. *In what areas of your life are you unwilling to give up control in order to follow Jesus?*

3. *What would God have you do this passion week in order to prepare the way for the joy of resurrection that awaits you on Sunday?*

Closing Prayer

You are holy, O God of majesty, and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. As one of us, he knew our joys and sorrows and our struggles with temptation. He was like us in every way except sin. In him we see what you created us to be. Though blameless, he suffered willingly for our sin. Though innocent, he accepted death for the guilty. On the cross he offered himself, a perfect sacrifice, for the life of the world. By his suffering and death, he freed us from sin and death. Risen from the grave, he leads us to the joy of new life. Through Christ, all glory and honor are yours, almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit in the holy church, now and forever. Amen.

[WSB]

Call to Worship

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

[COLOSSIANS 1:15-20]

Confession

Like the people who greeted Jesus as he entered Jerusalem and then later pronounced “Crucify him,” we are fickle people who often deny Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Remembering the events of Jesus’ last week helps us see ourselves for what we are: sinners in need of a Savior, a Savior—praise God—we have in Christ. In honesty and hope, we confess now our sins to God.

[WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.” But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” And they cried out again, “Crucify him.” And Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him.” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

[MARK 15:1-15]

DEVOTIONAL

The aim during the Lenten season is to identify with Jesus in the wilderness, and to follow him, in some way, through his suffering and persecution and sacrifice. The difficulty in following Jesus, of course, is that the path leads to the cross.

Nevertheless, we try—try to meditate and pray, try to give up certain comforts and pleasures to focus our attention, try to add other things to live more wisely, try to repent of consumerism and take in more of the Bible, more of our relationships, more of serving others ... we press on and try.

But even in our best efforts, failure is there to greet us. Even in moments of success, failure lurks.

Six weeks is a long time to pay attention to something. Losing steam comes easily. There are moments when Lent is forgotten altogether, and thoughts begin to creep in, “Lent is just an observance. Jesus doesn’t really care if I slack here or there, does he? I don’t want to be legalistic, you know.” We drift toward the kind of carefree attitude that is not about enjoying freedom, but about indulging the flesh.

Then there are other moments – usually when feelings of guilt sink in for indulging the flesh – when more of a performance driven attitude takes over. We recommit ourselves to our goals, which is not a bad thing, but it often is not about identifying with Jesus. It becomes about our righteousness. We have to do this right.

The constant threat of these two things – license and legalism – is always present in our lives, devilishly waiting to get us off course. Neither of these produces the kind of repentance and humility that gets to the heart of Jesus. Repentance, humility, suffering, lament, and sacrifice do not come naturally. Indulgence and self-righteousness do.

Lent is not hard because we are forgetful or because six weeks is a long time. Lent is hard because we do not want to die. Lent is about death, and we tend to avoid death. But the way of Jesus leads to the cross. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

All of our shortcomings related to Lent are but a microcosm of our ragged and duplicitous selves. We are far more sinful than anything we are willing to admit here. Indeed, far worse than we know or could even imagine. But the grace of God in Christ Jesus is far more lovely and powerful than we have ever dreamed.

Lent is pushing us toward Easter, cultivating a longing for it deep in our hearts. Not a longing to go back to our old ways, but a longing for a Savior—one who lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.

REFLECTION

1. *How have you drifted into license and/or legalism during this season of Lent?*
2. *Where have feelings of guilt and/or self-righteousness crept in?*

Closing Prayer

Holy God, you have opened our ears to hear your Word and our lips to proclaim your truth: open our eyes this day to see in the cross the revelation of your love; through Jesus the crucified, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, be honor and praise, now and forever. Amen.

[WSB]

Call to Worship

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

[HEBREWS 1:1-4]

Confession

Eternal God, whose covenant with us is never broken: We confess that we have failed to fulfill your will for us. We betray our neighbors, desert our friends, and run in fear when we should be loyal. Though you have bound yourself to us, we have not bound ourselves to you. God, have mercy on us weak and willful people. Lead us once again to your table, and unite us to Christ, who is the bread of life and the vine from which we grow in grace. To Christ be praise forever. Amen.

[WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

[MARK 15:16-20]

DEVOTIONAL

Meditating on death, at its very core, is morbid and depressing. We mourn, weep, and lament death, sure—but what is the point of taking a week (at some level six weeks) to meditate and reflect deeply on it? Is that necessary or helpful? Wouldn't it be better to keep things positive?

For the Christian, death is not exclusively negative or bad news because we have a much bigger view of the grand story. Death isn't the end; it is a subplot that gives way to glory of resurrection. Death is no longer a bitter pill to swallow; it has been swallowed up in the victory, it has lost its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death is the harbinger of good news

for the person who is shaped by God's story. **Meditating on death should always be a means toward understanding the grander story of the gospel.**

Amid this grander story, the reality of death confronts and challenges us—it reminds us that life is frail and fleeting, and it beckons us to examine our daily life.

To be a Christian means to have located your identity, your worth, your value in Jesus—he has become your treasure. A life well lived is one that treasures Christ above all (Philippians 3:7-8). Death, therefore, must serve as a constant reminder of where to place our treasure:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).

A life well lived is one that keeps the impending nature and finality of death in view because death causes us to examine what we are treasuring. **Meditating on death should always be a means toward gaining an eternal perspective that results in treasuring Christ more deeply.**

Above all, though, **meditating on death should always be a means toward understanding and receiving the grace of God through Christ.** Death is a direct result of the fall, as sin entered into our reality. Our world – and our own lives – are filled with death and decay because of the power and presence of sin.

We are nearing the end of this Lenten journey. And for this journey to become truly real to you, you must come face to face with the depth of sin that is present in your heart and life. You have to see yourself for who you really are: a sinner fully deserving of God's just and holy wrath (Romans 3). We have to see ourselves how God sees us because it is only as we believe what God says about us that we will be able to believe what God has done for us. God has given you his only begotten Son, our true Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. God has given you his best to redeem you. That is what God has done for us!

God does not ignore our sin, he atones for it. He does not look past who we are, he redeems us. And it is his great love for us that empowers our redemption: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10). Because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, we are accepted by God, we are saints in the kingdom of God.

It is only as we believe in the depth of our sin that we can truly understand and believe in the overwhelming grace, mercy, and love of God. And this is the gospel: God's grace and mercy through the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is so much deeper and greater than what we see in our own hearts. Praise Jesus!

REFLECTION

1. *Think back on the past seven days and spend some time confessing your specific sin before God.*
2. *Now reflect on the truth that Jesus went to the cross and died for those very sins. Receive God's forgiveness in Christ, worshiping him for his grace and mercy.*

Closing Prayer

Lead us, O God, in the way of Christ. Give us courage to take up our cross and, in full reliance upon your grace, to follow him. Help us to love you above all else and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, demonstrating that love in deed and word by the power of your Spirit. Give us strength to serve you faithfully until the promised day of resurrection, when, with the redeemed of all the ages, we will feast with you at your table in glory. Through Christ, all glory and honor are yours, almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit in the holy church, now and forever. Amen.

[WSB]

* Apr 9: Maundy Thursday

Call to Worship

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

[PSALM 34:1-4, 8]

Confession

Lord Jesus, like Judas, we have betrayed you; like Peter, we have denied you; and like the other disciples, we have forsaken you. Yet you remain faithful to us unto death, even death on a cross. We plead for your forgiveness and mercy. And we ask that you strengthen us so that we do not turn aside but follow you to the very end—for the final victory belongs to you.

[WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. And they brought him 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. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

[MARK 15:21-32]

DEVOTIONAL

On Maundy Thursday we remember the last evening Jesus shared with his disciples in the upper room before his arrest and crucifixion. The name “Maundy Thursday” comes from the Latin *mandatum novum*, referring to the “new commandment” Jesus taught his disciples. In John 13, Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (13:34-35). But the

disciples do not fully comprehend how deeply Jesus has loved them.

In these last words to his disciples, Jesus is defining what it means to love him. Five times Jesus said that love for him was connected to obeying his commands. And five times he said that his command is that we love each other as he has loved us. The point is unmistakable: our commitment to and love for Jesus is expressed by our love for one another. We are not only united with God in Christ; we are also bound together in Christ, for better or for worse. We married into a family—the family of God. But like the disciples, we do not fully comprehend how deeply Jesus has loved us.

Take in the deep love of God for you through the person of Jesus:

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 3:1, 4:9-10).

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died, so that God can adopt us into his family. He sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6) God gives us the thing we most desperately need—himself.

God’s love for us is most powerfully displayed in the death of Jesus on the cross. Love is defined at the cross of Jesus. To the degree that you are able to comprehend and soak in the love of Jesus for you, to the degree that it sinks deep into your fabric—this is the degree to which you will be empowered to carry out the new commandment that Jesus gave to us.

REFLECTION

1. Ask God to reveal to you the ways in which you do not fully comprehend his love for you. Where are you plagued by unbelief?
2. Spend a few minutes meditating on the three verses above.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you, for the honor of your name. Amen.

[WSB]

* April 10: Good Friday

Call to Worship

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[ISAIAH 53:1-6]

Confession

Gracious God, having heard your Word, we thankfully remember the life of our Lord Jesus Christ on this earth. Yet we also acknowledge our failure to respond earnestly and faithfully to his witness. We often mistake Jesus for a mere earthly king, friendly companion, or problem-solver, failing to see him as the ruler of all creation. We do not appreciate the depth of his passion and sacrifice on the cross, failing to acknowledge him as our way of salvation. Even in this Lenten season, we have not walked faithfully in the way of Jesus Christ. Forgive us, we pray, and bring us ever more fully into the joy of union with Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

[WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “Behold, he is calling Elijah.” And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

[MARK 15:33-41]

DEVOTIONAL

Today is called Good Friday, which is not really good because “good” is too neutral a term. The events of Good Friday are the ultimate paradox—at once atrocious and wonderful, scandalous and beautiful, the worst kind of hate and the best kind of love. On this day we were convicted and pardoned, condemned and freed, cursed and blessed.

It was the darkest day. Many who had followed Jesus up to now fled from the events of Friday. And those who stayed to watch wept in horror: the phony trial, the mob that cried out for the blood of the man who was unbending in the weight of their demands and expectations. The brutal beating, the savagery of the soldiers, the grueling walk through the city he had entered to cheers just five days before. Finally, the nails pounded into flesh, the tortured body slouched over, the naked man died as his enemies jeered.

To his disciples – those that had forsaken everything in order to follow Jesus – this day was anything but good. This man, in whom they had put all of their hopes, was hanging dead on a tree. This was the death of their faith, the crushing of all their hopes for a new kingdom, and the end of all they believed in. Or so it seemed.

As his followers laid Jesus in the tomb on that same dark day, Easter Sunday lied in wait for them, but on Friday they couldn’t see it. They couldn’t see the defeat of death, the glory of the resurrection, or the advancement of God’s kingdom. They couldn’t see the whole story. There was no way around Good Friday, only the way through—through pain and death and burial.

It is the same for us; we cannot get around this day. We must go through the pain and death and burial to get to the resurrection. We must go through the darkness of Good Friday to get to the light of Easter.

God is a God of light: darkness cannot survive in his presence. We, who have dark hearts full of sin, should tremble at this fact. But Jesus, who was completely good, cloaked himself in the darkness of our sin and stood under the wrath of God for us. On the cross, he was destroyed and cut off from his Father. It was to have been our fate. On the first Good Friday, in the midst of our darkest hour, God did not cut us off. Jesus Christ, our true light, plunged himself into the darkness so that we might live in the light.

We can go through the darkness of this day because Jesus went through it before us. He is saving us and bringing about our everlasting joy, in a way only God could have chosen. Easter is not far away!

REFLECTION

1. *Take some time to reflect on the darkness of that first Good Friday. Think about what the disciples must have been experiencing that day.*
2. *Read back over Isaiah 53:1-6, reflecting on Jesus suffering and death.*

Closing Prayer

Holy God, you have opened our ears to hear your Word and our lips to proclaim your truth: open our eyes this day to see in the cross the revelation of your love; through Jesus the crucified, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, be honor and praise, now and forever. Amen.

[WSB]

Call to Worship

King Jesus comes, King Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah. Hail! King Jesus, King of all! Recall the words of the Scriptures: "A great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'" In praise we adore you, King Jesus. Enter our hearts today as you entered Jerusalem long ago, and lead us by faith in the way everlasting. Amen.

[BASED ON JOHN 12:13]

Confession

Loving God, you rode a donkey and came in peace, humbled yourself and gave yourself for us. We confess our lack of humility. As you entered Jerusalem, the crowds shouted "Hosanna: 'Save us now!'" On Good Friday they shouted "Crucify!" We confess our praise is often empty. We sing "Hosanna," but cry "Crucify." As the crowd laid their palms in front of you, you took no glory for yourself. We confess that we want to be accepted and take the easy way. We do not stay true to your will. Forgive us, Lord, and help us to follow in the way of obedience. Amen.

[WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

[MARK 15:42-47]

DEVOTIONAL

Tomorrow is a celebration. Tomorrow is also the acknowledgement of the "already, but not yet" tension of the gospel. "Already, but not yet" is a phrase that theologians often use to describe the reality of the current age we live in.

On the one hand, the kingdom of God has already come in the person of Jesus. This is

Good News! As the incarnate God-man, he died on the cross so that through his death and resurrection he might destroy Satan, sin, and death (Heb. 2:14).

On the other hand, the perfect kingdom toward which he pointed awaits his personal return to earth. Until then, we experience the tension of living between the “already, but not yet” aspects of the kingdom of God.

Easter is a celebration of this beautiful tension:

There is real life right now for those who trust in Christ.

- » We have new hearts (2 Cor. 5:17)
- » We have been made alive with Christ (Eph. 2:5)
- » We have received a spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15-16)

But there is more to come that has not yet been fully realized.

- » We will have transformed bodies, not just hearts (2 Cor. 15:50-55)
- » We will be resurrected like Christ (Rom. 6:5)
- » We will experience the fullness of being adopted by God (Rom. 8:23)

[LISTS ABOVE FROM JUSTIN HOLCOMB]

The salvation that God brings is here! It is finished, and it is coming. Our hope is in Jesus who accomplished for us the “already, and yet to come.” Jesus, through his death, has already delivered his people from slavery to sin. Jesus, through his resurrection, has already conquered death, our worst enemy. But Jesus has not yet allowed us to experience a world without sin, death, and brokenness. He has not yet established his kingdom in full. His promise is to come back and do so.

Until then, we walk by faith in him. We look in hope to his coming, knowing that God does not fail to deliver on his promises. Because he was faithful in the already, we can trust that he will be faithful in the not yet. Jesus has inaugurated the reign of God so that the age to come has invaded the present age. One day, however, at the appointed time, the present age will finally give way to the fullness and completeness of the rule of God in Christ. He will usher in his kingdom in full—a new earth where only righteousness dwells. A land of promise—where there is life, abundance, satisfaction, delight, and rest.

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).

REFLECTION

1. *How have you seen God work in your heart and mind through this journey of Lent?*
2. *In what areas of your life do you most long to experience greater transformation through the victory of Easter?*

Closing Prayer

Giver of life, we wait with you to offer the hope that comes from the cross to earth's darkest places. Where pain is deep and affection is denied: let love break through. Where justice is destroyed, let sensitivity to right spring up. Where hope is crucified, let faith persist. Where peace has no chance, let passion live on. Where truth is trampled underfoot, let the struggle continue. Where fear paralyzes, let forgiveness break through. Eternal God, reach into the silent darkness of our souls with the radiance of the cross. O you who are the bearer of all pain, have mercy on us. Giver of life, have mercy on us. Merciful God, have mercy on us. Amen.

[WSB]

EASTER SUNDAY

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

[MARK 16:1-8]



Christ, the Lord, is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heav'ns, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died, our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Hail, the Lord of earth and heav'n, Alleluia!
Praise to Thee by both be giv'n, Alleluia!
Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia!
Hail, the Resurrection Thou, Alleluia!

[CHARLES WESLEY]