



Lent Reflections



Dear HCC,

Lent is a six-week journey that takes us to a place where we recognize the depth of our sins and cry out to God about the brokenness around us—and within us (Job 42:6). It provides space to grieve how this world currently operates and to long for a renewed relationship with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (John 13:34).

When Lent comes around each year, we get to enter something like a wilderness that allows us to examine ourselves and see our true need for Jesus. It helps us prepare our hearts for the joyful celebration of Easter. Lent is a place of heart examination, lament, confession, prayer, scripture reading, reflection, silence and solitude. And so, Lent invites us to escape from the life of flesh and into the life of the Spirit (1 Peter 1:17-21).

With that in mind we have prepared a guide to accompany you on this six-week journey. It comes with prayers, scripture readings, and thoughts from different authors. Our hope is that you will use it in some way each week. It can be picking one scripture to read each week or it can be using it each day to the fullest. We would ask that you take a step, any step, and open up your Bible. Sometimes God does his greatest work in our baby steps of faith. Those steps can be daily or weekly, done individually or with a group or with your family. A next step will look different for each person.

It is our prayer that you will experience God this season in a deep and abiding way, where he would use his word to draw you closer to himself!

Scripture Reflection Questions:

When you read a scripture using this guide we would like you to reflect on that scripture using these questions:

1. What does this passage tell me about God?

- a. The first question steers us to the heart of every Bible study. It is the reason that we come to the Bible in the first place. Having the question as a focus directs our attention, even in passages where on the surface they do not seem to say much about Him. Once you start looking, however, God's character is deeply stamped there.

2. What does this story tell me about people?

- a. The Bible is, largely speaking, the story of God and his interaction with his creation. When we ask this question it acts as a mirror, it shows us who we are and why it is we desperately need God. For many, this question becomes intensely personal. What does this story reveal about myself? It shows us all the ways in which we fall - but often, also all the ways God pulls us back up again.

3. If this is really God's word, what changes would I have to make in my life?

- a. So many times, we go straight to behavior changes. Yes, we are called to change our behaviors, but think about heart changes first. How does my heart need to change in response to this passage? Heart changes are what lead to true behavior change. How can I obediently live out what the Holy Spirit is calling me to do through this passage?

4. Who am I going to tell?

- a. This will turn into a joy. Tell someone what you have learned and how God is working on you.

Ash Wednesday-First Week of Lent: 2/18-2/28

We Shall All Be Changed:

- **Affirmation:** All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).
- **Psalm 30**
- **Psalm Prayer:** Gracious God, ever-present helper, we thank you that in the night of desperation and sadness over our separation from you, your steady hand is not far from us. As you lead us toward the dawn of new beginnings, may we join you and gather others in the bright dance that celebrates your desire to renew the face of the earth. Amen.

Daily Scripture Readings:

Ash Wednesday: Genesis 3

Thursday: Genesis 1

Friday: Genesis 9:1-17

Saturday: Genesis 12:1-9, further reading Genesis 15

Sunday: Genesis 32:22-32

Monday: Exodus 34:27-35

Tuesday: Matthew 4:1-11

Wednesday: Luke 19:1-10, further reading Romans 5 (well worth it)

Thursday: 1 Peter 3:18-22

Friday: 2 Corinthians 3:7-17

Saturday: Psalm 32

Silent Reflection (see intro for reflection questions on scriptures)

Prayer for the world, for others, for myself:

Into your hands, O Lord, we place our whole selves, trusting that your vision for our lives and the life of the world is far richer than we could ever ask or imagine. Renew in us daily the choice to love and serve you without reservation. Amen.

Question of the week: What change is God calling you to make in your life? What will you do?

Further Readings for Reflection:

* We begin the Lenten season with our face pressed hard against the reality of our sin and our death. If We did not know how the story ends, this would be a dark and depressing journey. But we do know how the story ends and therefore in the midst of austerity and fasting we remember our faithful Savior and the Easter declaration that life is always victorious over death, always! A season that begins with ashes pressed upon our heads ends with the fragrance, sight, and touch of flowers racing through our senses and inviting us to join the triumphant song "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today!" Now we know as never before that our mortality will put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:53). Death and resurrection are now claimed as our own. Fear has given way to inexpressible joy, and doubt has given way to triumphant hope. Christ is risen!

– *Norman Shawchuck and Rueben P. Job*

* Christians see grace most clearly in God's act of self-giving through the person of Jesus Christ. In the suffering love and forgiveness of the cross, we perceive grace in all its fullness. Faith in Christ becomes the way we discover and apprehend this incredible gift (Rom. 5:1-2). From the beginning of creation we were meant to know ourselves as God's children, enjoying all of the benefits of our full inheritance (Eph. 1:5). Having lost our native inheritance through sin, we now receive these benefits through Jesus Christ. God's love and favor in Christ bestow them upon us.

– *Rueben P. Job and Marjorie J. Thompson, Companions in Christ*

* Fully immersed in this world, Christians belong to no world. Instead, while teased by each hope and every vision, they know them to be

only hints of the new heaven and new earth rooted in divine promises. And our yearning to become lost in God only intensifies our tears over the thought of leaving this life. Christian existence is joyful nonsense. In a culture of self-realization, the Christian's call is to renounce self; in the face of noise, silence is the preference; in a world of competition, the Christian's declaration is that the winners will be the losers and the losers winners; in a culture whose economy is intent on consumption, the Christian insists on simplicity; in a culture structured by possessions, the insistence is upon detachment; in a culture intent on a high standard of living, the Christian insists upon a high standard of life; and at every point, the Christian exposes the emptiness of fullness for the sake of the gospel's fullness of emptiness.

– *W. Paul Jones, The Art of Spiritual Direction*

Second Week of Lent-Sunday, 3/1-Saturday, 3/7

Put a New and Right Spirit within Me:

- **Affirmation:** I'm weak and needy. Let my Lord think of me. You are my help and my rescuer (Psalm 40:17).
- **Psalm 31**
- **Psalm Prayer:** Lord of all, may we honor you by remembering the great deeds of compassion through which you have released us from the weight of our sin and strengthened us to bless you with our whole being. Let our lives reflect your mercy toward all who are fragile and your justice for all who suffer oppression. Amen.

Daily Scripture Readings:

Sunday: Psalm 51

Monday: John 3:1-21

Tuesday: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Wednesday: Joel 2:12-13

Thursday: Luke 15

Friday: 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2

Saturday: Romans 6:1-14, further reading Romans 6:15-23

Silent Reflection (see intro for reflection questions on scriptures)

Prayer for the world, for others, for myself:

Lord of lords and King of kings, even in the beginning dark deep waters awaited the form your Spirit would give them, so today our souls wait for the freshening breeze of your love that will reanimate the dry bones of our faith. Amen.

Question of the week: What would you love to see God do in your life?

Further Readings for Reflection:

* Salvation is free, but the cost of discipleship is enormous. I try to hide from the truth, but when I read the Gospels and seek to live in communion with God, I discover both parts of the statement are dead-center truth. I can do nothing to earn my salvation. My redemption is a pure gift of grace, a gift offered to me without qualification or reservation. I am God's child, and no one or nothing can change that fact. Jesus Christ lived, died, and lives again to bring this gift of salvation to me in all its fullness. My faith can appropriate this gift, but even my greatest doubt cannot change its reality. I am God's beloved, embraced in God's love for now and eternity. All words are inadequate to describe the extravagance and grandeur of the gift of salvation. Our hymns of praise and gratitude fall lifeless before the immensity of this gift. We simply and humbly offer all that we are to the One who offers us the option of becoming more than we are. In offering ourselves as fully as we can, we discover the cost of discipleship. For to bind our lives to Jesus Christ requires that we try to walk with him into the sorrows and suffering of the world. Being bound to Jesus Christ, we see barrier broken down; we are led to places we have never been before and to carry loads we have not even seen before. Having offered ourselves to Jesus Christ, we may expect to become the eyes, ears, voice, and hands of Jesus Christ in the world and in the church. The cost of salvation? It is completely free and without cost. The cost of discipleship? Only our lives—nothing more and nothing less.

—*Rueben P. Job*

* Here, O God, I pray for a realization of my condition in your eyes. Help me to see and know myself as you see and know me. Give me clear insight into my relationship with you. Let me know myself as you know me. Give me assurance that I belong to you. Remove from me those nagging doubts and needless fears that I may not be good enough to be numbered with the great company of heaven. On the

other hand, if I am living in separation from you, if I am more a creature of evil than a child of God, O Great Physician, use your convicting scalpel on me.

Perform within me the surgery necessary to heal me of all soul-sickness. Christ, I abandon myself to you. Do with me every necessary thing to assure my entrance into eternal life-and the heaven already prepared for me.

—*Norman Shawchuck*

* Many conceive of the will of God as a track laid out before them which, if they will get on it and stay on it, will assure that their lives run smoothly, but, if they jump off the track, will bring only sadness and despair and lead to wreck and ruin. Others think of the will of God as a blueprint which, if properly read and followed, will help them build a sturdy house in which they may live safely and happily. The Apostle to the Gentiles gave a different twist to this concept. In his letters, the will of God, what pleases God, or what is acceptable to God has to do with what kind of persons we are, with attitude and outlook. God wants us to be persons who live our lives from the vantage point of a covenant with God through and in Jesus Christ, conscientized and sensitized and tenderized by love, making the very best decisions we can make in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

—*E. Glenn Hinson, "Horizontal Persons," Weavings*

* Really, there are no words to express the experience of the Holy Spirit. I have felt such religious joy several times, and I have had the joy of being immersed in light; there are no words to describe that joy. I have felt an absolute joy that cannot be tasted in such pleasures as fame or gain or the pleasures of the physical nature.

Christ said, "Receive the Holy Spirit": and at once he added, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." That means the same as when he said, "Abide in my love." That is, the Holy Spirit, as the truth, gives the content of consciousness. As the Sanctifier, he gives a guarantee of our perfection. But that again is not separate from his atoning love. The realization of this Love is altogether by the power of

the Holy Spirit. Paul, who experienced this love received the power to overcome all things with the joy of love.

Really the Holy Spirit and love cannot be separated. Christ came into the world to show the human race the love of God. All the teachings of Christ have relation to this love. Salvation means that God is love. Providence also means that we are kept by the love of God. Judgment means that God will weed out those who do not believe in the love of God. God is love. Christ is the crystal of God's love. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who reveals the atoning love of Christ.

This love is not the love that the world gives. It is the love that God gives. The love of the world is semiconscious. It only loves those whom it likes. But the love that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit is the full, conscious, atoning love that loves even those whom it dislikes.

When we thus think, all the teaching of Christ is love. Through the consciousness of the joy of this love, it flows out eternally like never-ceasing oil from a vessel. It is at this point the evangelist John says that the Holy Spirit and love are not to be separated. The mystical experience of the Holy Spirit is the intuitive recognition of the love of God. For that reason, those who have had a deep experience of the Holy Spirit, however poor they may be, whatever sickness they may suffer, however much they may be persecuted, rejoice in the unceasing love of God. Truly, in this meaning, the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and we may say he is our Helper. The religion of the love of Christ is not a religion of fear. It is the fountain of love and joy and life. We must live forever in his love.

—*Toyohiko Kagawa, Living Out Christ's Love*

Third Week of Lent-Sunday, 3/8-Saturday, 3/14

Vulnerability:

- **Affirmation:** Listen to my prayer, Lord! Because of your faithfulness, hear my requests for mercy! Because of your righteousness, answer me! (Psalm 143:1).
- **Psalm 125**
- **Psalm Prayer:** Like the mountains that surround Jerusalem, surround us, O Lord, in moments of weakness and vulnerability. Be with us always that we may never be shaken. Protect and comfort us with the assurance of your presence in times of deepest need. Amen.

Daily Scripture Readings:

Sunday: Psalm 19

Monday: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Tuesday: Isaiah 55:1-11

Wednesday: Luke 13:1-9

Thursday: Ruth 1:1-22

Friday: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Saturday: James 5:13-16

Silent Reflection (see intro for reflection questions on scriptures)

Prayer for the world, for others, for myself:

In times of weakness and strength we will place our trust in you, O God. Amen.

Question of the week: How can you be vulnerable before the Lord?
How can you be vulnerable before others?

Further Readings for Reflection:

* Look at Jesus on the cross. Totally bound, weak, and broken, yet whispering God's forgiveness to those around him. What a picture of both vulnerability and power. The most transforming power we see in the Gospels is the power of crucified, vulnerable, suffering love. God's power is revealed in vulnerability.

— *Trevor Hudson and Stephen D. Bryant, Transforming*

* Jesus' intimate relationship with God flowed forth from prayer into his works of compassion. His life of healing can be summarized in his simple words to the centurion whose servant lay near death, "I will come and cure him" (Matt. 8:7). It was his will to be interrupted by the needs of others and to meet those needs with his healing, forgiving love. Constantly welcoming outcasts, Jesus declared, "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Matt. 9:13). Such obedience to God led Jesus into conflict. He said of the laws of Moses, "I have come not to abolish but to fulfill [them]" (Matt. 5:17). Yet Jesus' healing on the Sabbath and overturning the money table in the Temple scandalized the religious leaders. Although they sought his life, Jesus continued his ministry of love.

Jesus' willing obedience continued even though betrayal and death lay ahead. Several times, we read that he predicted his death. And praying in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus acknowledged the end he was facing. In his true humanity, he hoped to avoid the suffering; but as Immanuel, God with us in radical availability, he gave himself to God: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (Matt. 26:39). The essence of abandonment followed as Jesus gave his life on the cross.

— *Gerrit Scott Dawson, Companions in Christ*

* In God's life with us vulnerability is the fount of healing. In our life with God this is true as well. We are hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3), our wounds swathed in the darkness of God's vulnerability, our hearts gently prepared to offer others the silent sanctuary of a

spacious vulnerability. Vulnerability as a healing gift offered to others—this is not usually the first thing that comes to mind in our culture. Recently a workshop leader invited participants to voice their associations with the word vulnerability. Responses included adjectives such as meek, intimidated, naive, inferior, ugly, and foolish. Vulnerability is not seen as a gift to be given but a weakness to be overcome. Not vulnerability but security is the ideal that most often governs our national, communal, and personal decisions. Perhaps one of the greatest sources of loneliness in contemporary life is that our vulnerability, which unites us in a common humanity and enables us to be woven together in love, now is cause for our isolation in fear-filled cells of spiritual solitary confinement.

—John S. Mogabgab, "Editor's Introduction," *Weavings*

* The next reading reminds me of Jesus. It is why I have included it. Jesus always looked and saw people. Their condition never kept him from coming near. Stories like the man with leprosy (Mark 1:39-45), the woman at the well (John 4:1-26), even the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22) demonstrate this seeing of others driven by great love and compassion for them. Where did that great love and compassion take him? It took him to the cross! Jesus calls us to see, love, and draw near to others just like him. Where might that lead us? (Walter)

French philosopher and Talmudic scholar Emmanuel Levinas offers a perspective into the art of loving in the face of suffering. He writes about "the face" of "the other." In seeing the face of the other, especially the face of one who is vulnerable and in pain, Levinas maintains that a moral claim is made on us. In the face-to-face encounter the face of the other pleads, "Do not hurt me. Do not kill me. Let me live!"

While pondering, indeed playing with, Levinas's use of the word face I have come to recognize that there are three movements or moments in the art of loving, especially loving those who are wounded and weak, vulnerable and suffering.

The first movement in this art of loving is to look long enough into the face of another in order that we might read their pain and suffering. This entails lingering long enough to let the other; in all her

brokenness and weakness, show forth in the light. This is the moment in which there is an epiphany of the face, a showing forth of the face of the other person in all its otherness. Often the other feels like nothing, reduced to invisibility by pain and diminishment. This first movement allows the face to speak, as if to say "I am here," so that the suffering person is given the chance to sense life possibilities that might be born beyond the nothingness that is felt beneath the suffering.

The second movement is to allow the other to look upon me as well, letting the nakedness of her face and my own be revealed. We must be willing to go face to face with the other. In this encounter we savor the earthly "enjoyment" as we forget ourselves in gazing upon the other.

The third movement in this art of loving is born out of our face-to-face encounter. It is a new way of looking together toward the horizon of what is beyond us both, a turning toward what will be, even if this does not mean a restoration to the state of well-being the other once enjoyed. In this posture, the art of loving calls us both to face up to whatever lies ahead, to face up to what is yet to come, to imagine how we will live in the face of what is not yet but will be, even and especially in the face of diminishment and death.

To risk face-to-face encounter with the other, to risk getting close enough to attend to the suffering, vulnerability, and pain we will see there and then to face up to what is yet to come in a shared future, is the dynamic of this art of loving. To look at each other in these ways involves more than just feeling the pain of the other and it prevents us from the knee-jerk reaction of offering shallow reassurances of improved well-being, and then going our way unchanged by the encounter. By looking long and lovingly into the face of suffering, we might learn to really see by a love that knows how to really look. And at the same time, by the same love, the suffering one the other-might be fortified to endure the truth of the present and anticipate the possibility of what is yet to be.

–Michael Downey, *"On Learning How to Look," Weavings*

Fourth Week of Lent-Sunday, 3/15-Saturday, 3/21

The Gift of Tears:

- **Affirmation:** There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance (Eccl. 3:1,4)
- **Psalm 38**
- **Psalm Prayer:** Gracious God, you know the sighs confined and hidden within the depths of our hearts, sighs for which there are often no words. Do not be far from us, O God, when we cry out unto you. Hear our prayers today. Amen.

Daily Scripture Readings:

Sunday: John 11:1-44

Monday: Psalm 13

Tuesday: 2 Corinthians 7:2-11

Wednesday: Hebrews 4:14-16

Thursday: John 16:16-24

Friday: Jeremiah 31:1-17, further reading-the rest of the chapter.

Saturday: Philippians 3:12-21, Revelation 21:1-7

Silent Reflection (see intro for reflection questions on scriptures)

Prayer for the world, for others, for myself:

O God, we give ourselves over to your care, trusting only in your infinite mercy and love. We will continue to give thanks to you, O Lord, for all that we have and all that we are. We will rest assured in the knowledge that when we cry to you, in sadness or in joy, you will hear our cry and make reply. Amen.

Question of the week: Is there something I need to lament/grieve?

Further Readings for Reflection:

* Just because Jesus loves us and knows how to fix our problems doesn't mean he takes a shortcut through our grief. The same one who raises the dead first stops to linger with us in our sorrow — to climb down into our valley of tears and walk alongside us. To be sure, not all tears awaken our Lord's compassion. God has little patience when we weep in misery over the idols he removes from us, as when Israel preferred Egypt's meat to God's presence (Numbers 11:4–10). But every tear you shed in faith — shattered but trusting, gutted but believing — has this banner hanging over it: "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted" (Psalm 34:18).

—*Scott Hubbard, Desiring God website*

* The sky was clear, Kentucky blue,
You led me high up the mountain to show me the view,
And said "Wherever this journey takes you,
Just trust me, I'm already there,"
I had no way of knowin' then,
just how hard the rain would fall
and how fierce would be the wind,
it's been beautiful and terrible, more painful, more wonderful,
than I ever could have known, but even so

Still, I'm gonna sing, About the One who's given life to me
Oh, His love is unchanging, His grace is amazing
Still, I'm gonna praise, The only One who always stays the same
Oh, I know He is good, I know He is Faithful, Still

Don't get me wrong, I'm still a mess
And I've still got a heart with doubts
And fears pounding in my chest
And I've wrestled and I've rested
And I've trusted, then I've tested
God's patience like a foolish man

When I surrender once again
And I come like a little child reachin' out my hands
He lifts me every time and He tells me He Loves me

Still, I'm gonna sing, About the One who's given life to me
Oh, His love is unchanging, His grace is amazing
Still, I'm gonna praise, The only One who always stays the same
Oh, I know He is good, I know He is Faithful, Still
–Lyrics from the song "Still" by Stephen Curtis Chapman

* Tears are deemed a gift by many ancient masters of the spiritual tradition, a gift not merely in the sense of something given, but in the biblical sense of a charism, a gift of the Spirit, belonging on the list that Paul enunciates in his first letter to the Corinthians. Tears were, for the ancient church, given to some along with wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, and the like, for the life of the entire community.

It seems to have been Athanasius, the great fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, who first spoke of tears as such a gift. But other notable early Eastern Christian writers expounded on them as well. Assuming that inner dispositions had a corresponding outer expression, the Eastern church writers most often saw tears as the outward manifestation of the spiritual experience of *penthos*, a term we might translate as "compunction." Compunction literally means "to puncture with" and refers to the spiritual pain due not only to a shocked recognition of sin and human weakness, but the simultaneous awakening dissatisfaction with sin and longing for God. To have our hearts thus "punctured" is both the beginning and the dynamic of the journey.

–Wendy M. Wright, *"Tears of a Greening Heart," Weavings*

Fifth Week of Lent-Sunday, 3/22-Saturday, 3/28

Letting Go:

- **Affirmation:** Lord, you are my God. I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, planned long ago, faithful and sure (Isaiah 25:1).
- **Psalm 55**
- **Psalm Prayer:** Sometimes life seems unbearable. Our hearts and minds are weighed heavily, and we struggle to let go of all that burdens us for fear of losing the illusion of control we have over our lives. We call upon your name today, O God, that you may free us from worry and all that troubles our minds, bodies, and spirits. We put our trust in you, O God, this day and always. Amen.

Daily Scripture Readings:

Sunday: Matthew 11:25-30

Monday: Isaiah 43:16-21

Tuesday: 1 Peter 5:6-11

Wednesday: Philippians 3:4-14

Thursday: Matthew 16: 24-28

Friday: Hebrews 12:1-2

Saturday: Romans 8:31-39

Silent Reflection (see intro for reflection questions on scriptures)

Prayer for the world, for others, for myself:

O Lord, we all have things we need to release. With your help we will lay aside all in life that burdens us, leaving behind those things that do not matter, and clinging only to the things that do. Amen.

Question of the week: What may God be calling me to let go of?

Further Readings for Reflection:

* There is a necessary *metanoia* in each breakthrough into further spiritual growth, a necessary change of heart that will lead to a new conversion of one's attitudes and behaviors. There must be a "letting go" of something in our lives in order to make room for the "laying hold" of a new and higher consciousness of the presence and claims of God.

At this point the necessary change of heart is to become willing to accept the wonder that God already loves us just as we are and to surrender to the consequences of that love --both to God and to ourselves.

God's love flows like a river into our life situations and, like a river, its benefits can be dammed up behind the human tendency to resist unconditional love and the very idea that we are lovable.

The change of heart at this stage involves a willingness to let go of the very things that cause us most hurt—our sin and the psychic prisons in which we have locked away our most cherished dreams, potentialities, and spontaneities, as well as the darkness that causes us to stumble in our efforts toward new dimensions in life.

We cling to our resistances simply because it seems too good to be true that we are being invited through God's love to surrender our sin for salvation, our prisons for freedom, and our darkness for light. But when we are able finally to break through our resistance we find ourselves in a new dimension of life and relationship (John 10:10).
—Norman Shawchuck, Rueben P. Job, and Robert G. Doherty, *How to Conduct a Spiritual Life Retreat*

* Don't grit your teeth and clench your fists and say, "I will! I will!" Relax. Take hands off. Submit yourself to God. Learn to live in the passive voice—a hard saying for Americans—and let life be willed through you. For "I will" spells not obedience.

—Thomas Kelly, *The Sanctuary of the Soul*

* One of the myths of our culture is that control of ourselves and others is what gives us freedom. If we are in control, then obviously we can make decisions, and that leaves us free. But that is a myth. The paradox is that as we give up control to God, we actually live in a deeper freedom. The freedom of God may call us to turn all of our most precious definitions of faithfulness on their heads. It may be that the most difficult call for us to respond to is not a call that demands of us great sacrifices but a call that offers to us great gifts.

—*Judith E. Smith, The One Thing Necessary, "Weavings"*

* The spiritual life is a journey out of Egypt into the Promised Land, by way of the wilderness. There is nothing in the desert. I am alone with my thoughts in the desert. I am alone with my sin in the desert. The desert is also a place of quiet and rest. It is a place to get away. It is the place to know how much God cares for me—that God wants me to rest in and be attended by God. The desert is a place of devotion to God with no distractions, the place where all is forsaken for the love of God.

Poverty and detachment have their value as they are prompted by God's love for me and are expressions of my love in return. God has brought me into this desert so I can know of the love God has for me. I thought it was to hurt me, to make me feel bad, to teach me self-control, but it has been so that I can hear and feel how much God loves me. It is not a question of how much I must depend on God, but how much I can depend on God.... God has taken me into the desert not to separate me but to love me. The desert is being alone with God.

I can let go of everything because I am held by God. I claim nothing because I am claimed by God.

—*Fred B. Cunningham, "Excerpts from a Pastor's Journal, "Weavings"*

Sixth Week of Lent-Palm Sunday, 3/29-Easter Sunday, 4/5

Holy Week:

- **Affirmation:** O Lord, this week we ask that you open our hearts to respond to the great gift of your life, death, and resurrection. Give us a Godly sorrow for our sin. Let us repent, turning to you alone for our salvation and hope (Isaiah 45:22). Lead us into the freedom and life that you have prepared for us before the world began (Ephesians 1:3-6).
- **Psalm 22**
- **Psalm Prayer:** Dear Jesus, you cried these words for a wretched sinner like me (Psalm 22:1). Your great love led you to the cross. Thank you for taking my sin, my shame, and my place. Because of you, I am forgiven, saved, loved, and made new. Help me live today in gratitude, obedience, and joy. May my life glorify you. Amen.

Daily Scripture Readings:

Sunday: Matthew 21:1-11, Zechariah 9:9

Monday: Matthew 21:12-17, Isaiah 56:1-8

Tuesday: Mark 14:1-21

Wednesday: Mark 14:22-41

Thursday: Mark 14:42-72

Friday: Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 22, John 19

Saturday: Isaiah 53

Easter Sunday: Matthew 28, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24, John 20-21

Silent Reflection (see intro for reflection questions on scriptures)

Prayer for the world, for others, for myself:

O God, you have freed your people from exile. Give us the faith to receive that freedom achieved by your Son, our Lord, who humbly

rode into Jerusalem on a road paved with palm branches to finish your work of salvation. Amen.

Question of the week: What is the response of your heart as you travel from the Triumphal Entry to Good Friday to Easter?

Further Readings for Reflection:

* The risen Christ doesn't float ethereally above his tomb, clean and neat and unscarred. His resurrection has been a struggle. Something happened. Something fierce and world-altering. Something costly. He smiles for he has conquered, really conquered, finally and definitively conquered the last enemy, death. It never fails that every year following the Palm/ Passion Sunday service in the church I serve, at least one person will remark to me or to some member of the staff that the service moved too quickly from a high moment of Palms to the agony of the Cross. The observation is of how disconcerting it can be to move from "Hosanna, loud hosanna" to "Beneath the cross of Jesus." The move, however, is intentional. Jesus suffered. Jesus died. He really did. It was a ferocious death with all the powers of hell amassed against the one good and loving person who ever lived. But without that struggle on Friday, without the pain of his loving us to death, there is nothing to celebrate today. It's simply a warm blanket. "Dear Teacher." No struggle. Nothing happened. Nothing has changed.

If there is no death, then God's got nothing to do on Easter. But if there is a death, then Easter morning is a ferocious moment when life triumphs over death, and what God did on Easter for Jesus and for us is the most radical and important truth that any of us can know or believe. Carlyle Marney, in one of his greatest sermons, says of Judas that the ultimate tragedy of his life was not his betrayal of Jesus but that he did not hold on until Sunday to see what God would do with his betrayal and despair. What a tragedy that Judas wasn't at the tomb on Sunday to see that there is forgiveness even for his sin and relief even from his deep despair. He then would have known that we are not on our own, not in this life alone. He would have known what Mary was discovering, that there is One who is with us in death

and in life. Not just anyone, but the very One who raised Jesus from the dead and who has the power to do that for you and me as well.

It is not warm faith we celebrate. It is not "Dear Teacher" who greets us on Easter morn. It is the risen Christ. Easter Sunday we celebrate that ferocious moment when, by the grace and power of God, the agony and the death of Friday is overcome. Good is stronger than evil. Love triumphs over hate. Life conquers death. Easter is that ferocious moment when Christ tramples down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestows life.

– K. C. Ptomey, *"This Ferocious Moment," Weavings*

* Yet for Christ to become our light, we must do one thing: "Repent." Repentance always requires us to turn around, change directions, quit walking away from God and begin walking the walk of faith toward him who is God-with-us. Our continued efforts to stay on God's side and to go in God's direction encourage us in our living until that way of life becomes as natural as breathing. Our life in Christ takes a lifetime both to learn and to live out.

– Bonifacio B. Mequi Jr., *"Faith in the Balance," The Upper Room Disciplines 1999*

* Why is this word joy, so frequent in scripture, so absent in our modern vocabulary? Probably because the experience itself is so strange. Joy is not at all synonymous with familiar words such as cheerfulness, enjoyment, pleasure, satisfaction, fun, or even happiness. So strange is it that scripture tries to plumb joy's depths by linking it with apparently antithetical words. Thus at Jesus' birth, the shepherds were "terrified" when they heard the "great joy" (Luke 2:9-10). At Jesus' death, Mary Magdalene departed quickly from the tomb with "fear and great joy" (Matt. 28:8). In confronting the resurrection, the disciples disbelieved for joy (Luke 24:41). It is not surprising, then, that early Christians experienced their mission similarly. When Paul and Barnabas were persecuted and expelled, they shook the dust from their feet while being "filled with joy" (Acts 13:50-52). Thus the writer of James insisted that every Christian should "count it all joy ... when you meet various trials" (James 1:2, RSV). Paul agreed, "I find joy in my

sufferings" (Col. 1:24, AT). Puzzling as this life of joy appears to be, we dare not dismiss it as peculiar to the early church. Jesus himself modeled this strangeness. Jesus, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2, RSV). This linking of joy with negative experiences such as fear, persecution, and suffering connects the Good News deeply with the Hebrew scriptures. The prophets understood well that joy is for those who mourn (Isa. 66:10). The psalmists likewise insisted that morning joy is for those who mourn in the night (Ps. 30:5). In fact, so linked are sorrow and joy that the psalmists insisted that both are the doings of God: "Fill me with joy and gladness; let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice" (Ps. 51:8, RSV).

– *W. Paul Jones, "Joy and Religious Motivation," Weavings*

* The prayers and many of the further readings were pulled from "A Guide To Prayer For All Who Walk With God" published by The Upper Room.



HACKBERRY CREEK CHURCH

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