



LENT

Week Three

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, have mercy. May our time with you grow us deeper in the knowledge, truth, and hope that you are calling us to live in. Lord, have mercy, as we continue to journey into the depth of your Good News. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE***Mark 14:22-25***

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

MEDITATION**Grace**

an excerpt from "Reliving the Passion" by Walter Wangerin Jr.

The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed—

When is a mother more inclined to cuddle her children? When they're a nasty, insolent brood, disobedient and disrespectful of her motherhood? Or when they are cuddly?

When will a father likelier give good gifts to his children? When they've just ruined the previous gift, by negligence or by downright wickedness? When they are sullen and self-absorbed? Or when they manifest genuine goodness and self-responsibility?

But the love of Jesus is utterly unaccountable—except that he is God and God is love. It has no cause in us. It reacts to, or repays, or rewards just nothing in us. It is beyond human measure, beyond human comprehension. It takes my breath away.

For when did Jesus choose to give us the supernal, enduring gift of his presence, his cuddling, his dear communing with us? When we were worthy of the gift, good people indeed? Hardly. It was precisely when we were most unworthy. When our wickedness was directed particularly at him.

Listen, children: it was to the insolent and the hateful that he gave his gift of personal love.

"As they were eating, he took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them and said—"

With the apostle Paul the pastor repeats: The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread. Oh, let that pastor murmur those words, the same night, with awe. For who among us can hear them just before receiving the gift Christ's intimacy and not be overcome with wonder, stunned at such astonishing love? The contest qualifies that love. The time defines it. And ever and ever again, these words remind us of the times: *The same night in which he was betrayed—*

"While we were still weak," says Paul, "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Not for the godly and the good, but "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Then! Can we comprehend the joining of two such extremes, the good and the evil together? In the night of gravest human treachery he gave the gift of himself. And the giving has never ceased. The holy communion continues today.

But in that same night he remembered our need. In that same night he provided that sacrament which would forever contain his grace and touch his comfort into us. Oh, this is a love past human expectation. This is beyond all human deserving. This, therefore, is a love so celestial that it shall endure long and longer than we do.

This is grace.

REFLECTION

1. Is it easy for you to accept the knowledge that God's love, presence, and gifts are ever available and present to you? Is it difficult to accept? Reflect.
 2. Many belief systems and much of the culture we live in promotes a works-based mentality - "you must *do* to earn." Jesus demonstrates a different reality - God gives freely. How do you respond to this? Do you find it easy to accept gifts from others? What might be the reason for that? How does this impact your relationship with God? Take a moment to sit with these questions before Jesus.
 3. Take a moment to confess your posture towards God's gifts - starting with the gift of salvation. Do you have questions about God's gifts? Even if you do not fully understand why or how God is generous, take a moment to express gratitude.
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OPENING PRAYER

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SCRIPTURE***John 14:6***

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

MEDITATION**Followers, Not Admirers (part one)**

by Søren Kierkegaard

It is well known that Christ consistently used the expression "follower." He never asks for admirers, worshippers, or adherents. No, he calls disciples. It is not adherents of a teaching but followers of a life Christ is looking for.

Christ understood that being a "disciple" was in innermost and deepest harmony with what he said about himself. Christ claimed to be the way and the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6). For this reason, he could never be satisfied with adherents who accepted his teaching—especially with those who in their lives ignored it or let things take their usual course. His whole life on earth, from beginning to end, was destined solely to have followers and to make admirers impossible.

Christ came into the world with the purpose of saving, not instructing it. At the same time—as is implied in his saving work—he came to be the pattern, to leave footprints for the person who would join him, who would become a follower. This is why Christ was born and lived and died in lowliness. It is absolutely impossible for anyone to sneak away from the pattern with excuse and evasion on the basis that it, after all, possessed earthly and worldly advantages that he did not have. In that sense, to admire Christ is the false invention of a later age, aided by the presumption of "loftiness." No, there is absolutely nothing to admire in Jesus, unless you want to admire poverty, misery, and contempt.

What then, is the difference between an admirer and a follower? A follower is or strives to be what he admires. An admirer, however, keeps himself personally detached. He fails to see that what is admired involves a claim upon him, and thus he fails to be or strive to be what he admires.

To want to admire instead of to follow Christ is not necessarily an invention by bad people. No, it is more an invention by those who spinelessly keep themselves detached,

who keep themselves at a safe distance. Admirers are related to the admired only through the excitement of the imagination. To them he is like an actor on the stage except that, this being real life, the effect he produces is somewhat stronger. But for their part, admirers make the same demands that are made in the theater: to sit safe and calm. Admirers are only too willing to serve Christ as long as proper caution is exercised, least one personally come in contact with danger. They refuse to accept that Christ's life is a demand. In actual fact, they are offended by him. His radical, bizarre character so offends them that when they honestly see Christ for who is, they are no longer able to experience the tranquility they so much seek after. They know full well that to associate with him too closely amounts to being up for examination. Even though he says nothing against them personally, they know that his life tacitly judges theirs.

And Christ's life indeed makes it manifest, terrifyingly manifest, what dreadful untruth it is to admire the truth instead of following it. When there is no danger, when there is a dead calm, when everything is favorable to our Christianity, then it is all too easy to confuse an admirer with a follower. And this can happen very quietly. The admirer can be under the delusion that the position he takes is the true one, when all he is doing is playing it safe. Give heed, therefore, to the call of discipleship!

REFLECTION

1. Admiration - "distant," "detached," "cautious," - how do you react to this take on being an admirer? Do you agree? Why or why not?
 2. Does the idea of being an "admirer" of Jesus resonate with you? What would you consider yourself - an admirer or follower, or perhaps somewhere in between?
Take a moment to reflect.
 3. After reflecting, spend some time in confession before the Lord. If you long for a deeper connection with God, express that longing.
 4. End in a prayer of gratitude for where you are in your relationship with Jesus and the things He is revealing to you in this season.
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13 WEDNESDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, have mercy. May our time with you grow us deeper in the knowledge, truth, and hope that you are calling us to live in. Lord, have mercy, as we continue to journey into the depth of your Good News. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE

Romans 7:14-25

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

MEDITATION

Followers, Not Admirers (part two)

by Søren Kierkegaard

If you have any knowledge at all of human nature, who can doubt that Judas was an admirer of Christ! And we know that Christ at the beginning of his work had many admirers. Judas was precisely such an admirer and thus later became a traitor. It is not hard to imagine that those who only admire the truth will, when danger appears, become traitors. The admirer is infatuated with the false security of greatness; but if there is any inconvenience or trouble, he pulls back. Admiring the truth, instead of following it, is just as dubious a fire as the fire of erotic love, which at the turn of the hand can be changed into exactly the opposite, to hate, jealousy, and revenge.

There is a story of yet another admirer—Nicodemus. Despite the risk to his reputation, despite the effort on his part, Nicodemus was only an admirer; he never became a follower. It is as if he might have said to Christ, "If we are able to reach a compromise,

you and I, then I will accept your reaching in eternity. But here in this world, no, I cannot. Could you not make an exception for me? Would it not be enough if once in a while, at great risk to myself, I come to you during the night, but during the day (yes, I confess it, I feel how humiliating this is for me and how disgraceful, indeed also how very insulting it is toward you) I say 'I do not know you?'" See in what a web of untruth an admirer can entangle himself!

Nicodemus, I am quite sure, was well-meaning. I'm also sure he was ready in the strongest phrases to attest that he accepted the truth of Christ's teaching. Yet, is it not true that the more strongly someone makes assurances, while his life still remains unchanged, the more he is only making a fool of himself? If Christ had permitted a cheaper edition of follower—an admirer who swears by all that is high and holy that he is convinced—then Nicodemus might very well have been accepted. But he was not!

Now suppose that there is no longer any special danger, as it no doubt is in so many of our Christian countries, bound up with publicly confessing Christ. Suppose there is no longer need to journey in the night. The difference between following and admiring still remains. Forget about danger connected with confessing Christ and think rather of the real danger which is inescapably bound up with being a Christian. Does not the Way—Christ's requirement to die to the world and deny self—does this not contain enough danger?

The admirer never makes any true sacrifices. He always plays it safe. Though in word he is inexhaustible about how highly he prizes Christ, he renounces nothing, will not reconstruct his life, and will not let his life express what it is he supposedly admires. Not so for the follower. No, no. The follower aspires with all his strength to be what he admires. And then, remarkably enough, even though he is living amongst a "Christian people," he incurs the same peril as he did when it was dangerous to openly confess Christ. And because of the follower's life, it will become agitated with him. Even these words will disturb many—but then they must likewise belong to the admirers.

REFLECTION

1. Admirer or follower - can you define these terms based on what has been shared in this meditation?
 2. Yesterday, we considered if we see ourselves as an admirer or a follower of Jesus. Has anything changed as a result of today's reading and meditation? Take a moment to reflect.
 3. Are you satisfied with where you find yourself in relation to Jesus? Spend some time with Jesus in prayer, sharing some thoughts that came to mind as you read. Take a moment to express gratitude for the work He has done and is doing to draw you closer - and gratitude for his patience and his honoring of your choices.
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OPENING PRAYER

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SCRIPTURE***Mark 8:31-35***

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it."

MEDITATION**Discipleship and the Cross (part one)**

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

SUFFERING AND REJECTION are the summary expression of Jesus' cross. Death on the cross means to suffer and to die as someone rejected and expelled. That it is Peter, the rock of the church, who incurs guilt here immediately after his own confession to Jesus Christ and after his appointment by Jesus, means that from its very inception the church itself has taken offense at the suffering Christ. It neither wants such a Lord nor does it, as the Church of Christ, want its Lord to force upon it the law of suffering.

This makes it necessary for Jesus to relate clearly and unequivocally to his own disciples the "must" of suffering. Just as Christ is Christ only in suffering and rejection, so also they are his disciples only in suffering and rejection, in being crucified along with Christ. Discipleship as commitment to the person of Jesus Christ places the disciple under the law of Christ, that is, under the cross.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself." Just as Peter, in denying Christ, said, "I do not know the man," so also should each disciple say this to herself or himself. Self-denial can never be defined as some profusion - be it ever so great - of

individual acts of self-torment or of asceticism. It is not suicide, since there, too, a person's self-will can yet assert itself. Self-denial means knowing only Christ, and no longer oneself. It means seeing only Christ, who goes ahead of us, and no longer the path that is too difficult for us. Again, self-denial is saying only: He goes ahead of us; hold fast to him.

The cross is not adversity, nor the harshness of fate, but suffering coming solely from our commitment to Jesus Christ. The suffering of the cross is not fortuitous, but necessary. The cross is not the suffering tied to natural existence, but the suffering tied to being Christians. The cross is never simply a matter of suffering, but a matter of suffering and rejection, and even, strictly speaking, rejection for the sake of Jesus Christ, not for the sake of some other arbitrary behavior or confession. The cross always simultaneously means rejection, and that the disgrace of suffering is part of the cross. Being expelled, despised, and abandoned by people in one's suffering, as we find in the unending lament of the psalmist, is an essential feature of the suffering of the cross, yet one no longer comprehensible to a form of Christian life unable to distinguish between bourgeois and Christian existence.

The first suffering we must experience is the call surrendering our ties to this world. This is the death of the old human being in the encounter with Jesus Christ. Whoever enters discipleship enters Jesus' death, and puts his or her own life into death; this has been so from the beginning. The cross is not the horrible end of a pious, happy life, but stands rather at the beginning of community with Jesus Christ. Every call of Christ leads to death. Whether with the first disciples we leave home and occupation in order to follow him, or whether with Luther we leave the monastery to enter a secular profession, in either case, the one death awaits us, namely, death in Jesus Christ, the dying away of our old form of being human in Jesus' call.

But there is yet another suffering and yet another disgrace that no Christian escapes. Only Christ's own suffering is the suffering of reconciliation. Yet because Christ did suffer for the sake of the world's sins, because the entire burden of sin fell upon him, and because Jesus Christ bequeaths to the disciples the fruit of his suffering—because of all this, temptation and sin also fall upon the disciples. It covers them with pure shame, and expels them from the gates of the city like the scapegoat. Thus does the Christian come to bear sin and guilt for others.

Individual Christians would collapse under the weight of this, were they not themselves borne by him who bore all sins. In this way, however, they can, in the power of Christ's own suffering, overcome all the sins that fall upon them by forgiving them. Thus do Christians become the bearers of burdens: "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal 6:2). Just as Christ bears our burdens, so also are we to bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters. The law of Christ which must be fulfilled is the bearing of the cross. The burden of my brother or sister that I am to bear is not only that person's external fate, that person's character and personality, but is in a very real sense that person's sin. I cannot bear it except by forgiving it, in the power of the cross of Christ in which I, too, have a portion.

Those who are not prepared to take up the cross, those who are not prepared to give their life to suffering and rejection by others, lose community with Christ, and are not disciples. Discipleship is commitment to the suffering Christ.

REFLECTION

1. "The first suffering we must experience is the call surrendering our ties to this world." - Take a moment to consider what "ties to the world" come to mind. (For example: people pleasing tendencies, comfort seeking habits, an insatiable drive for recognition and success, a need to earn respect and love, etc.)
2. "Taking up the cross" - what does this mean for you, practically? What actions and behaviors are required of you in order to take up your cross?
3. Take a moment to reflect on your own journey of surrendering/taking up the cross. How is that going for you? How has it been in the past? Discuss this with Jesus in prayer.
4. Close with a simple expression of gratitude - gratitude that He desires you, He desires good things for you, and has a great love for you exactly where you find yourself right now. May that truth ring loud and true for you today.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, have mercy. May our time with you grow us deeper in the knowledge, truth, and hope that you are calling us to live in. Lord, have mercy, as we continue to journey into the depth of your Good News. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE***Galatians 6:2***

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Romans 5:3-5

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

MEDITATION**Discipleship and the Cross (part two)**

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

WHETHER WE REALLY have found God's peace will be shown by how we deal with the sufferings that will come upon us. There are many Christians who do, indeed, kneel before the cross of Jesus Christ, and yet reject the struggle against every tribulation in their own lives. They believe they love the cross of Christ, and yet they hate that cross in their own lives. And so in truth they hate the cross of Jesus Christ as well, and in truth despise that cross and try by any means possible to escape it.

Those who acknowledge that they view suffering and tribulation in their own lives only as something hostile and evil can see from this every fact that they have not all found peace with God. They have basically nearly sought peace with the world, believing possibly that by means of the cross of Jesus Christ they might best come to terms with themselves and with all their questions, and thus find inner peace of the soul. They have used the cross, but not loved it. They have sought peace for their own sake. But when tribulation comes, that peace quickly flees them. It was not peace with God, for they hated the tribulation God sends.

Thus those who nearly hate tribulation, renunciation, distress, defamation, imprisonment in their own lives, no matter how grandiosely they may otherwise speak about the cross, these people in reality hate the cross of Jesus and have not found peace with God. But those who love the cross of Jesus Christ, those who have genuinely found peace in it, now begin to love even the tribulations in their lives, and ultimately will be able to say with scripture, "We also boast in our sufferings."

REFLECTION

1. It's not easy to love trials and tribulations. Take a moment to be honest with yourself and with the Lord - where are you finding peace with God?
2. What trial or tribulation are you struggling with right now?
3. In our scripture reading today, we read that "Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Spend some time in reflective prayer, asking God where he might want to be doing a work in you as it relates to suffering and hope. Take a moment to express gratitude to God for challenges and for His faithfulness.

OPENING PRAYER

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SCRIPTURE***Mark 14:35-36***

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

MEDITATION**Teach us to Pray**

an excerpt from "Reliving the Passion" by Walter Wangerin Jr.

"Lord," the disciples had asked in an earlier, easier time, "teach us to pray." And Jesus had answered by teaching them certain words: "When you pray," he said, "say..."

The prayer he spoke then we call The Lord's prayer.

But Jesus teaches the same things twice. And the second lesson is not words only; deeds make up the prayer as well, and passion and experience—the whole person dramatically involved.

Words alone might be as hollow and irrelevant as ping pong balls. But now the Lord reveals how prayer can be the expression of an event already in progress; it is human experience finding its voice—and by that voice directing itself wholly (the whole experience, action, emotion, thought, desire, body, and spirit) straight to God.

Behold: what takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane is the Lord's Prayer actually *happening*, as though the earlier words were a script and this is the drama itself:

- Jesus cries his deepest and desperate desire: that the hour, by the power of his Father, pass away from him. This is the living substance of the sixth petition: *Save us from the time of trial.*
 - Jesus pleads three times, "Remove this cup from me," the plea of the seventh petition: *Deliver us from evil.*
 - But under every request of his own, he places an attitude of faithful obedience to his Father, saying, "Yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." Here is the third petition, which prepares us properly for any answer God may give all other petitions: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*
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- Implicit, hereafter, in his entering into “the hour” of trial after all is his personal conviction that “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” Jesus, now more than ever in this ministry, is the living embodiment of the second petition, *Thy kingdom come*. Right now, his acceptance of the Father’s will is the coming of that kingdom here!
 - And he begins both prayers the same. But whereas the first might have seemed a formal address to “Our Father,” this latter cry is a howl, a spontaneous, needful plea: “Abba, Father!” Here is a child who cannot survive apart from this relationship. By crying “Abba!” He hurls himself at the holy parent: he runs like a child; like a child he begs attention; but also like a perfect child he trusts his daddy to do right and well.

When Jesus teaches us to pray, he does not teach plain recitation. Rather, he calls us to a way of being. He makes of prayer a doing. And by his own extreme example, he shows that prayer is the active relationship between ourselves, dear little children, and the dear Father, *Abba*.

Who can pray The Lord’s Prayer now with words and not with the heart’s experience?

REFLECTION

1. *Our Father (Abba), who art in heaven - hallowed be Your name - Your kingdom come - Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven - Spend time reflecting on the first part of the Lord’s prayer. Say it two or three times out loud, allowing the Holy Spirit to highlight words or phrases in it. Write down what sticks out to you.*
2. *Give us today our daily bread - forgive us our sins/debts/trespasses as we forgive those who sin/trespass/owe debts against us. - Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. - Say this part of the Lord’s Prayer out loud two or three times, allowing the Holy Spirit to highlight words or phrases in it. Write down what sticks out to you.*
3. Pray for the things that came to mind or stuck out to you as you spoke the Lord’s prayer. Jesus prayed this prayer with His actions, as shared in the meditation - are there ways you can do the same?

CLOSING PRAYER

God, you are merciful. Slow to anger. Abounding in love. Gentle and kind. May your graciousness help us to know that you are for us. Thank you that because you are for us, nothing can stand against us. May the challenge to take up the cross and follow you be ever on our minds, and your love and joy ever on our hearts. May we engage in the relationship with you that you desire for us. We love you, Abba!

