



LENT

Week Six

W E E K S I X

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, we invite you to stir what needs to be stirred in us. We ask for grace to listen, hear, wrestle, and surrender. Use this time, O Lord. Prepare us for an encounter with you, the living God. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE***Mark 15:24a***

And they crucified him.

Psalms 22:1-8

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.

In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.

To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

"He trusts in the Lord," they say,
"let the Lord rescue him.

Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him." "

MEDITATION

And They Crucified Him

by Walter Wangerin Jr.

If death is the end of all we do, then all we do is futile. Ask Ozymandias, king of kings, if you can find that might man—or if you remember him at all.

We may deny death. Indeed, we may be able, for a while, to ignore our personal dyings altogether by attending to the present day: here we are and now we are, no need to think what we will (or will not) be. Or we may romanticize our grander passions into something timeless, pieces of ourselves that must last forever (as poets call their verses deathless, as lovers can't conceive such love as theirs to die). We may philosophize our immortality by the arrogant, god-like presumption that simply because we are—and because we are aware that we are—we cannot not be.

But if death waits at the ends of our lives to end them, it cancels not just the next day nor just the continuance of living: it swallows the whole life, even back to its beginning. Suddenly we are not, as though we never had been. There are those who console themselves that history, at least, will remember them. (Ozymandias was such a one.) But if death is the end of human endeavor—and so of humanity—then who will remember history?

Oh, people: if death defines us, so that we who come from nothing also go back to nothing, then death is a worm that curls inside our every act, like a parasite eating the lasting value out of it! Even in our dearest kissing is the parasite which shall, on our death day, prove that this act, too, was futile, and all our loving so much sound and fury, signifying nothing.

The planets, their civilizations and their loads of people, all need a central sun—to hold them together, to keep them wheeling in good order, to bequeath them shape and meaning. History needs a center. But if that center is empty death, strengthless death, it cannot hold. Things fly apart into absurdity. Finally, every deed is hollow, ourselves mere spasms in a mindless infinity, and all our glorious history remembered only so long as it is; forgotten, when it is not, forever: a nothing. A vanity. We are the dreams the comets can't recall. We were, for a while, a walking dust.

But the Creator God put a cross in the very center of human history—to be its center, ever.

The Son of God, the gift of God, the love of God, the endless light of the self-sufficient God filled the emptiness which was death at our core. People, here is eternal life in the very midst of us!

Now, therefore, it is the person and the passion of Jesus Christ which defines us; and because of him we go no longer down to nothing: our end is the beginning of a perfect union with God, the Beginner Of Everything.

Behold, this is the central event of the whole of history; behold, this is the sun that keeps the planets and bequeaths importance to the peoples and makes significant even me and all I do: *And they crucified him*. It happened. Eternity entered time. They crossed at the cross.

We are altogether meaningless, except God touch us. God touched us here.

We fly into an infinity of hell, separated from life and from each other and from divinity forever, except God hold us. God holds us here.

REFLECTION

1. Where have you been finding meaning in your life recently? Reflect on something meaningful in your life. How do you feel as you reflect on this thing - do you fear that it is temporary and will end?
 2. Confronting the *end* of seasons and things in our lives is difficult. Is there an area of your life that you are concerned about, and haven't talked to Jesus about it? Take some time to do that now.
 3. What do you make of the truth that God holds us in the midst of the *end*?
 4. Take a moment to express gratitude to God for being present in our questions and doubts. His perfect love casts out fear.
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OPENING PRAYER

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SCRIPTURE***Psalm 22:9-21***

Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.
From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.

Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.

My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.

All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.

They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

But you, Lord, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.

Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen."

MEDITATION

Seven Stanzas at Easter *by John Updike*

Make no mistake: if He rose at all
it was as His body;
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.

It was not as the flowers,
each soft Spring recurrent;
it was not as His Spirit in the mouths and fuddled
eyes of the eleven apostles;
it was as his flesh: ours.

The same hinged thumbs and toes,
the same valves heart
that—pierced—died, withered, paused, and then
regathered out of enduring Might
new strength to enclose.

Let us not mock God with metaphor,
analogy, sidestepping, transcendence;
making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the
faded credulity of earlier ages:
let us walk through the door.

The stone is rolled back, not papier-maché,
not a stone in a story, but the vast rock of materiality that in the slow
grinding of time will eclipse for each of us
the wide light of day.

And if we will have an angel at the tomb.
make it a real angel,
weighty with Max Plank's quanta, vivid with hair,
opaque in the dawn light, robed in real linen
spun on a definite loom.

Let us not seek to make it less monstrous,
for our own convenience, our own sense of beauty,
lest, awakened in one unthinkable hour, we are
embarrassed by the miracle,
and crushed by remonstrance.

REFLECTION

1. Read the poem once more. Which line or idea sticks out to you?
 2. Why do you think this line or idea is sticking out to you? Take a moment to reflect.
Consider what this line or idea might be showing you about Jesus' death and resurrection.
 3. Spend a moment expressing gratitude to God for speaking through words and being present in our questions and doubts.
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31 WEDNESDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, we invite you to stir what needs to be stirred in us. We ask for grace to listen, hear, wrestle, and surrender. Use this time, O Lord. Prepare us for an encounter with you, the living God. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 22:22-26

I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.
You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.

From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.
The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the Lord will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!

MEDITATION

The Strangest Story of All

by C.S. Lewis

We come to the strangest story of all, the story of the Resurrection. It is very necessary to get the story clear. I heard a man say, "The importance of the Resurrection is that it gives evidence of survival, evidence that the human personality survives death." On that view what happened to Christ would be what had always happened to all men, the difference being that in Christ's case we were privileged to see it happening.

This is certainly not what the earliest Christian writers thought. Something perfectly new in the history of the Universe had happened. Christ had defeated death. The door which had always been locked had for the very first time been forced open. This is something quite distinct from mere ghost-survival. On the contrary, they believed in it so firmly that, on more than one occasion, Christ had had to assure them that he was not a ghost. The point is that while believing in survival they yet regarded the Resurrection as something totally different and new.

The Resurrection narratives are not a picture of survival after death; they record how a totally new mode of being has arisen in the Universe. Something new had appeared in the Universe: as new as the first coming of organic life. This Man, after death, does not get divided into “ghost” and “corpse.” A new mode of being has arisen. That is the story. What are we going to make of it?

The question is, I suppose, whether any hypothesis covers the facts so well as the Christian hypothesis. That hypothesis is that God has come down into the created universe, down to manhood—and come up again, pulling it up with him. The alternative hypothesis is not legend, not exaggeration, nor the apparitions of a ghost. It is either lunacy or lies. Unless one can take the second alternative (and I can't) one turns to the Christian view.

“What are we going to make of Christ?” There is no question of what we can make of him, it is entirely a question of what he intends to make of us. You must accept or reject the story.

The things he says are very different from what any other teacher has said. Others say, “This is the truth about the Universe. This is the way you ought to go,” but he says, “I am the Truth, and the Way, and the Life.” He says, “No person can reach absolute reality, except through me. Try to retain your own life and you will be inevitably ruined. Give yourself away and you will be saved.” He says, “If you are ashamed of me, if, when you hear this call, you turn the other way, I also will look the other way when I come again as God without disguise. If anything whatever is keeping you from God and from me, whatever it is, throw it away. If it is your eye, pull it out. If it is your hand, cut it off. If you put yourself first you will be last. Come to me everyone is carrying a heavy load. I will set that right. Your sins, all of them, are wiped out, I can do that. I am Rebirth. I am Life. Eat me, drink me, I am your Food. And finally, do not be afraid, I have overcome the whole Universe.” That is the issue.

REFLECTION

1. Take a moment to reflect on your day, your week, or the season of life that you're in. Do you notice anything getting in the way of being with Jesus?
2. Read the last paragraph of the passage once more. What does it look like, practically speaking, to rid yourself of the thing/issue that is “keeping you from God?”
3. Close your time of reflection with a moment of prayer.

Jesus, you are the way and the truth and the life. In my brokenness, I choose to believe you will renew, heal, mend, and resurrect. I desire what you have for me, Lord. Strengthen me to face what I need to face within myself, that I may be more present to you.

OPENING PRAYER

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SCRIPTURE***Psalms 22:27-31***

All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
for dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations.

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.

Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.

They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

MEDITATION**Creation and Becoming**

by Eugene Peterson

The Genesis Week of creation is matched by the Gospel Week (or Holy Week) that describes our salvation. The seven days of genesis display the external environment in which we live—this amazing world of light and water, soil and plants, fish and birds, and animals and humans. The gospel days—the seven days between Palm and Easter Sundays—tell the story of events that get inside us, that shape our salvation. The genesis days provide a framework for our lives; the gospel days provide meaning and purpose for them. Both weeks are holy.

The splendor of the Christian way is its integration of these two weeks' energies. We see those energies harmonized and complete in Jesus, the Christ. As we remember and worship him, our lives are reformed around the basic patterns of our existence and we are renewed from the center. In Jesus, we become more our original genesis selves. At the same time, we become more than ourselves—we are being made gospel creatures in Jesus. Such attention sharpens our perceptions of where we have come from and where we are going, who we are, and who we are becoming.

REFLECTION

1. Can you imagine your "genesis self?" How is that different from your current self? Take a moment to reflect.
2. In and through Jesus, we become more of our original selves. Take a moment to think about the ways Jesus has changed your life. If you can't think of anything, invite the Spirit to speak to you in that space.
3. Spend a moment in prayer expressing gratitude to Jesus - gratitude for what he has done, gratitude for the ways he is continuing to make you more like him.

OPENING PRAYER

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SCRIPTURE***Isaiah 52:13-15***

See, my servant will act wisely;
 he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.
 Just as there were many who were appalled at him—
 his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
 and his form marred beyond human likeness—
 so he will sprinkle many nations,
 and kings will shut their mouths because of him.
 For what they were not told, they will see,
 and what they have not heard, they will understand.”

MEDITATION**The Stigmata of Francis***by Abigail Carroll*

After the nails, the hush
 of a seraph’s wings as you lay
 on the grass in the hold of those luminous

 arms—your eyes three quarters
 closed, your head turned slightly
 back. In the distance, a smooth and lonely moon-

 glossed pond. Caravaggio
 made a study of your hands,
 fingers curled in an open clutch around your

 unseen wounds: the right
 just below a tear in your frock
 where the sword-tip pierced your side, the left

 cupping a prayer, palm up—
 even as it dangles down in pain.
 Some say the love of God can cause a man

to faint, plow him down,
drive him mad, take him
wholly to the ground. That force that filled

the void with breath unhinged
a Hebrew's hip, struck a Roman blind,
but you had nothing left to lose that night the sky

called out your name—nothing
to lose but yourself to the wild of a love
the stars had never seen, the blazing hills could not

explain. Life held no claim
on you now, the artist knew, so
he rendered you half dead, laid out as Christ

in Mary's arms, only here
a seraph holds your wilted frame,
supports your tilted head above his angled knee.

His wings are close,
the feathers soft and real.
They ruffle in the late-night breeze.

REFLECTION

What does Jesus' death mean to you? The wounds, the pain he endured, the rejection... do you believe them to be true? And do you believe that they were endured for you?

Take a second to respond to this poem, and the death of Jesus, in prayer. Then, sit in silence for a moment and experience the feelings that come to the surface, if any do.

Invite the Spirit to speak to you.

OPENING PRAYER

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SCRIPTURE***Isaiah 52:13-15***

Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors."

MEDITATION

Palm Sunday

by Esau McCaulley

*All glory, laud, and honor
To thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.
Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest
The King and Blessed One.*

At many churches Palm Sunday begins outside. The members of the congregation receive palm branches and repeat the shout of "Hosanna to the Son of David!" This portion of the service links our refrain to the cries of those who celebrated his entry into the city. But the service also displays an awareness of things unknown to anyone in Jerusalem but Jesus himself. We praise God "for the acts of love by which you have redeemed us through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord." This act of love is the cross that awaits him on Golgotha. Both we and the crowds in Jerusalem laud him as the promised Son of David, but only those of us who follow him after his resurrection from the dead know the full shape of that Davidic kingship.

If discipleship is about following Jesus, then the invitation to walk with Jesus during his last week is a call to be formed by the journey. What do we learn through the Liturgy of the Palms? What do we discover that makes us better followers of Jesus?

We tend to focus on the palm branch as the central image because it's so easy to bring to life. We can buy palm branches in bulk. But the most important symbol of the day may have been the donkey. After all, it was the symbol Jesus chose.

In the biblical narrative the scene unfolds with Jesus on the outskirts of Jerusalem instructing his disciples to bring him a donkey to ride into the city. The Gospel enactment of Zechariah 9:9. The section quoted in the Gospel says,

*Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey's colt. (John 12:15)*

The sign of the king of the universe coming on a donkey's colt has been fodder for many hymns, possibly the most famous being these lines:

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain;
Then take, O God, thy power and reign.*

Palm Sunday reveals Jesus' humility. He is not like other kings who enter cities atop war horses in celebration of bloody victory. He is the humble king who saves by dying for the sins of the world. Jesus' care for the lowly has long been a source of solace for oppressed people. If we are going to follow Jesus, then we don't have to fight the way the world fights. We do not use their tools and means to get what we want. Palm Sunday challenges us to consider whether we have adopted the efficiency of force and cruelty instead of the way of Jesus. Stated differently, Jesus' life was not just a means of salvation; it was a way of being human.

Rejecting the way of violence extends beyond critiquing kings and war horses. It includes how we treat those we love and those we disdain. It extends to how we interact with our friends, family, children, and coworkers. Are we people of violence? Can we put aside that violence and follow Jesus into the city, knowing what love demands of us?

Palm Sunday is actually two events in one. Chronologically, it remembers Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. But during the service proper, it also recalls the crucifixion. It is customary to read Psalm 22, Isaiah 52:13-53, and one of the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' death on Palm Sunday. (John's account is usually reserved for Good Friday.) I have noticed that on this day it is not common to reflect extensively on atonement theories. In part this is logistics: the palm celebration at the beginning and the larger readings throughout tend to sap the energy of the congregation. There will also be an opportunity to discuss the meaning of Christ's death on Good Friday.

What are we to do, then, with the story of the crucifixion told on the same day we recall Jesus' entry into the city? I think this placement of the crucifixion story reminds us where all Christ's journeys eventually led. Every Christian now exists on the other side of the crucifixion and resurrection. The whole of Jesus' story, from the first cries

in the manger through the donkey ride into the city, had the cross in the background. These readings (without extensive commentary) also help us remember that the cross is not just something to discuss, interpret, and understand. It is a thing to behold. We must see the act of love set before us again and again. The crucifixion story bears repeating.

REFLECTION

Does the cross symbol challenge you? Close your eyes and imagine a cross. What about it stands out? What feelings does it evoke? What about it, if anything, is there to behold?

Jesus' humility stands in stark contrast to this world's demands on a leader. Reflecting of Jesus' choice of a donkey, and his recognition as the messianic king, what can you learn about God (and yourself)?

Spend a moment in prayer. Think about who Jesus has revealed himself to be to you. If you feel comfortable writing it out, also take a moment to write some of your questions, doubts, and fears about actually believing this revelation. Invite God to strengthen your faith and show you what this means for your life.

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy God. Precious Jesus. King of Kings. Hosanna! We stand in awe of who you are. We acknowledge our fears, anxieties, and worries and lay them at your feet. Help us, O Lord, to submit to your kingship, believe in your truth, and fully say "yes" to the story you are inviting us to.

