

A DEVOTIONAL FROM CHRISTIANITY TODAY



APPROACHING

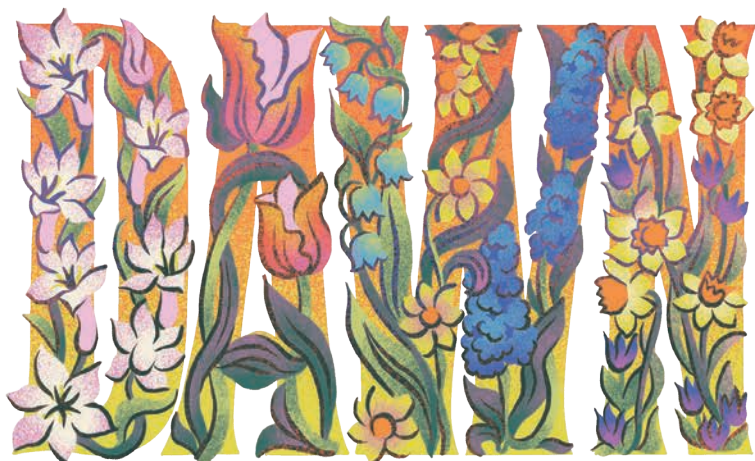


A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL
FOR THE SEASON OF EASTER

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APPROACHING



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EVER APPROACHING DAWN:

A Lenten Devotional for the Season of Easter

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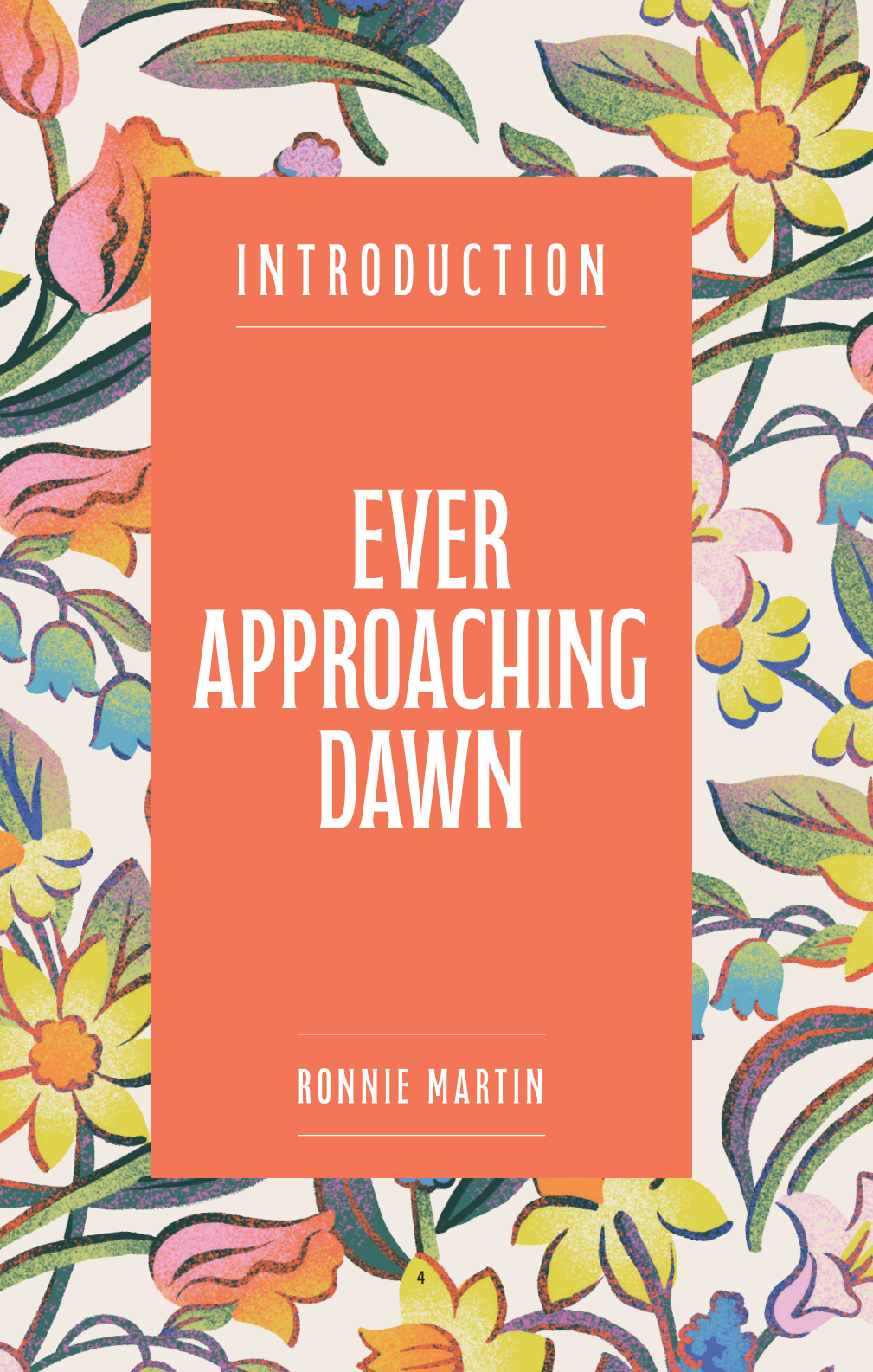
HOLY WEEK

THIS IS MY BODY; THIS IS MY BLOOD

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EASTER

HE IS NOT HERE



INTRODUCTION

EVER
APPROACHING
DAWN

RONNIE MARTIN

The Lenten season arrives before spring, just as old man winter begins his few remaining sweeps over the frigid landscape. Many of us enter this season with a heightened sense of our own internal barrenness. We pursue prayer and fasting as we prepare our hearts for the spiritual renewal that will unfold on Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Once again, we are made to wait.

We do well to remember the story of Lazarus, who died while his sisters, Mary and Martha, wondered why Jesus had waited until it was too late to heal him. It is not until we hear Jesus' words to Martha—"I am the resurrection and the life"—that we get an inkling of Jesus' purpose for their waiting. Lazarus would live again, but it was necessary that he die for Jesus to demonstrate his power over life and death.

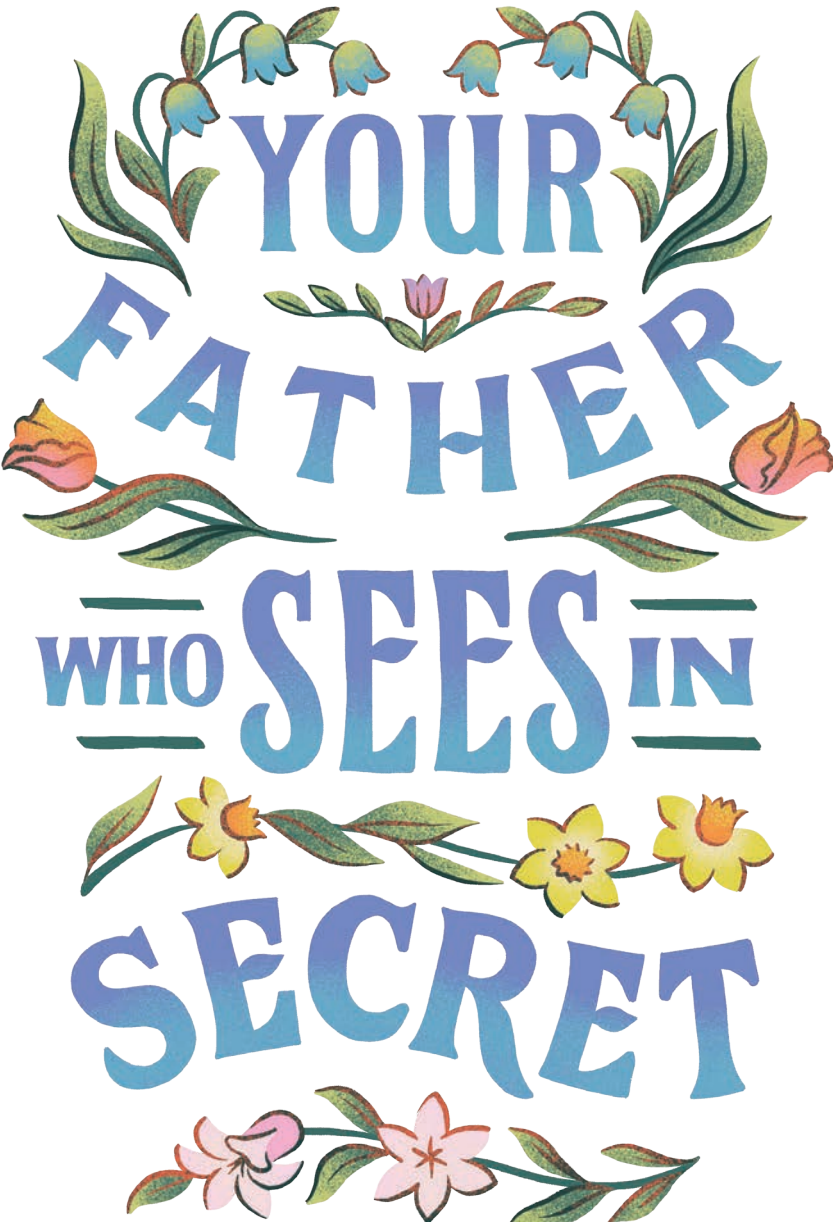
Is this not the hope we embrace as we enter the Easter season?

This is my hope for you as you immerse yourself in these timely devotionals—that even if you end another day feeling numb to the lingering effects of winter, you may remember that waiting through the night is the only way to experience the ever-approaching dawn. And not just any dawn. A past and future dawn that will make every dark night worth enduring for the hope that will be revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. ●

LENT

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

MATTHEW 6:16-18, ESV



YOUR
FATHER
WHO SEES IN
SECRET

LENT
ASH WEDNESDAY

SAFETY IN OUR WEAKNESS

RACHEL JOY WELCHER

is a poet, author, and book editor living in South Dakota with her husband, pastor Evan Welcher, and their two children, Hildegard and Richard.

What if there had only been two fish and one loaf of bread? Could Jesus still have fed the 5,000?

These are the questions my dusty flesh asks on days when I am rundown and out of breath.

We know that, yes, of course Jesus could have performed the same miracle with a smaller lunch basket. But so often, deep down, we assume that if the numbers change, there is no longer hope for bread.

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry” (Matt. 4:1-2).

I suppose it is only appropriate that, on a day like Ash Wednesday, we feel our weakness more than usual. My weakness often takes the shape of forgetfulness. I forget that God will sustain me, and so I reach for food as though it is my only source of strength. I check my phone for a brief hit of dopamine. I list off all my worries to my husband in a fit of anxiety, without stopping to take a breath. I assume, wrongly, that I am my own savior or that God’s grace has run out.

Then I remember the Red Sea.

I remember the feeding of the 5,000.

I recall those fluffy wafers that miraculously appeared in the wilderness each morning to sustain the Israelites.

And I think about that time, on the wooden steps outside my apartment, when I cried out for mercy and Jesus

met me there. My heart was breaking, but he was catching every tear in his bottle (Ps. 56:8, ESV).

“The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread’” (Matt. 4:3).

What happened to Jesus during those 40 days in the wilderness?

We know that Satan waited until Jesus was starving to pounce. But what happened before that? I have so many questions. Did Jesus spend time with the animals, talking to them instead of catching them for supper? Did he, perhaps, pray in the middle of the night, when hunger pains woke him? Did he bathe in rivers, letting the ice-cold water shock his system and distract him, at least momentarily, from his desire for food?

What did Jesus do with his tired, dusty feet on day 38?

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Were these stones bread, I would not cry out to you. I would feast. But in this fast, I see you are my lifeline. I am tempted in this wilderness, but I am not alone. You walked on dry sand, stumbled from fatigue, rumbled from hunger, and still you clung to the truth of your Father. Still you denied Satan the satisfaction of owning you. Surely, through your example and the power of the Holy Ghost, I can press on this day.

“For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14). ●

YOU...STUMBLED FROM FATIGUE,
RUMBLED FROM HUNGER,
AND STILL YOU CLUNG
TO THE TRUTH OF YOUR FATHER.

LENT
FIRST SUNDAY

FEASTS AMID FASTING

STEVE BEZNER

(PhD) is associate professor of pastoral ministry and theology at Truett Seminary at Baylor University and the author of *Your Jesus Is Too American*. He is heavily involved with GlocalNet and writes regularly on his Substack.

The Sundays of Lent have traditionally stood apart from other days of this season. While we spend the rest of the week fasting and pondering our mortality, Sunday is different. Sundays are usually feast days, highlighting the coming Resurrection—small flashes of worshipful hope along the darker 40-day Lenten road.

Sundays are miniature feasts among the weeks of prolonged fasting because they are the Lord's Days. As the people of God come into the house of God, they gather around the Word of God and the Lord's Table. And in the presence of the Bridegroom, the wedding guests cannot fast. But the rest of the week? They remember his death and their own impending demise and return to fasting, awaiting the glorious feast of Easter and the foreshadowed supper of the Lamb. (Yes, yes, Jesus is always with us. But you understand the larger point.)

Initially, this seems like a great deal of trouble. Why have miniature feasts in the midst of such a great fast?

In my estimation, the best answer is not in the church calendar but in our own lives. Life is rarely entirely a fast or a feast. It is instead something far more complex. Even in our darkest seasons, the light occasionally breaks through. Even in our deepest sadness, we experience deep breaths of grace. Life is layered. It is rarely all good or all bad at any given moment. Often, it is instead an

ill-distributed mixture of the good and the bad—blessing and stumbling, hurt and healing, profound loneliness and beautiful encounters.

Twenty-five years ago, I discovered I had heart failure caused by a virus. I was 24 years old at the time, a newlywed brimming with optimism. In one single doctor visit, it all seemed to vanish. I was given a grim prognosis—two years of life. My wife of just months was newly pregnant. I was a full-time student. We were poor, and I was dying.

Yet glimpses of hope—often on Sundays—refused to acknowledge my circumstances. We would attend worship, and the beauty of the music in our church would soar, creating something akin to rapturous delight in my soul. We would sit with friends, and I would still find myself laughing at stories and jokes. Family sent gifts, sometimes surprising me with their generosity. Everything within me wanted to retreat into an all-enveloping darkness, but glimmers of grace insisted on brightening things up, forcing me to resist despair.

This is what it means to live, to walk as a child of God in this world. We experience the deepest of pains and greatest of joys. And Jesus is there through it all. He never leaves us. He never forsakes us. He is with us, even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

This is why on the Sundays of Lent, as we prepare to worship the God who never leaves, we set the fasting aside, even if just for a day. How can we fast as we gather with the people of God, those living layered lives like us—a holy recipe of love and loss? How can we fast as we encounter

EVEN IN OUR DARKEST SEASONS,
THE LIGHT OCCASIONALLY BREAKS THROUGH.
EVEN IN OUR DEEPEST SADNESS,
WE EXPERIENCE DEEP BREATHS OF GRACE.

power through prayer, glory in song? How can we fast when we take the broken loaf and shimmering cup, remembering what our God has done? How can we fast as we celebrate the presence of the Bridegroom who never leaves?

We cannot. And so for these Sundays, as we return to the good truth of the gospel even in the midst of longing and hurt, the Bridegroom joins us, embraces us, receives us, and loves us.

And that is an occasion to feast. ●

LENT
SECOND SUNDAY

THE SWEET SERIOUSNESS OF LENT

STEPHEN WITMER

(PhD, University of Cambridge) is the lead pastor of Pepperell Christian Fellowship in Pepperell, Massachusetts, and a Council member of The Gospel Coalition. He is the author of *A Big Gospel in Small Places* and *In All Things Thee to See: A Devotional Guide to Selected Poems of George Herbert*.

While tackling a recent home repair project, I taught my son how to remove a screw. It's counterintuitive. You've got to push in hard so you don't strip the screw. You bear down to bring it up; you push in to bring it out. The downward pressure and upward rise are simultaneous and productive.

The Christian life is like that. According to Jesus, the way up is down (Luke 18:14), the path to comfort is mourning (Matt. 5:4), and the means of forgiveness is confession (Luke 11:4). There's a downward pressure and an upward rise.

When I lead my church family in receiving the Lord's Supper, I remind them that it's a paradoxical meal. We shed solemn tears as we confess our sins and grieve Christ's excruciating death. But because we know that his sacrifice was sufficient payment for our sin (Isa. 53:5), that he died out of love for us (Gal. 2:20), that he was raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:4), and that he is coming again (1 Cor. 11:26), we celebrate and give thanks. (The word *Eucharist* comes from the Greek word for "thanksgiving.") Our sorrow and joy are mingled. We smile through tears. We sob a glad "Hallelujah." There's a downward pressure and an upward rise.

Some years ago, my family visited Omaha Beach in Normandy, France. During the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944, German snipers rained bullets on Allied soldiers who

were wading ashore at several landing sites with nowhere to shelter. Thousands were killed amid terrible carnage. As my family walked along the beach seven decades later, we felt sober awe and earnest gratitude. We were on holy ground. Simultaneously, our time at the beach was sweeter than an ordinary beach day. The sun was brighter, the sky was bluer, and the laughter was more joyful because we knew these gifts were costly. The awesome sacrifice of those heroic soldiers produced in us a mingled sadness and gladness, a downward pressure and an upward rise.

Lent gathers and concentrates our Christian experience. We grieve our sin and Jesus' suffering. And paradoxically, the grief brings gladness because we know that the suffering Savior saves sinners and that confessed sin is forgiven (1 John 1:9). As Thomas Watson said, "Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet." There's a downward pressure and an upward rise.

How shall we express this paradoxical gladness and sadness of Lent? I've found some words from Henry Martyn especially helpful here. Martyn was a brilliant scholar at the University of Cambridge who, in 1805 at the age of 24, sailed from England to India as one of the earliest modern missionaries. He died in 1812, having accomplished a staggering amount of Bible translation work in his brief years on the mission field. Martyn once wrote in his journal about a day of prayer: "My soul was soon composed to that devout sobriety, which I knew by its sweetness, to be its proper frame." That's a powerful description of Lent, which is a time of sweet seriousness. John Piper expresses the same mingled reality with the phrase "serious joy."

OUR SORROW AND JOY ARE MINGLED.
WE SMILE THROUGH TEARS.
WE SOB A GLAD “HALLELUJAH.”

This Lent, let's not choose between being glad and being earnest. We were made for both—not sequentially (one, then the other) but simultaneously. Let's embrace sweet sobriety, holy joy, and glad gravity. God designed us to smile through tears, to weep with joy, to press down and be lifted up. ●

LENT
THIRD SUNDAY

BROKENNESS DOES NOT HAVE THE FINAL SAY

CORY WILSON

(PhD) is president of Emmaus Theological Seminary and associate professor of global Christianity and intercultural studies.

A childhood friend dies of cancer in his 40s, leaving behind a wife and three children. A minor shoots and kills an 18-year-old in a local library. A newborn of friends remains in the hospital, daily fighting for his life and unable to come home. A fellow pastor laments the weight of leaders in his church serving as first responders to teen gang violence in his small rural town due to insufficient police resources. A longtime friend and Indigenous Bible translator in West Africa grieves his nephews being kidnapped and shot at by jihadists. All of this happened over the course of a couple of weeks.

You have your stories as well. Despair constantly calls for us. Hopelessness is the easiest and most logical posture. The weight of surviving, much less flourishing, in a world where no realm is untouched by the rot and stench of the Fall is overwhelming. What are we to do?

Two responses are the most common to this reality of the human experience. We can either be crushed by the weight of sin and brokenness in the world or hope away despair by isolating and ignoring for fear of being crushed. Neither approach leads to flourishing.

Scripture points us toward a different path.

This path does not run from brokenness but calls it by name. As Christians, we know what was in Genesis 1–2. Our theology provides a depth to lament unavailable outside the Christian worldview. We know what was lost in

human sin and rebellion. We know what could have been. Our hearts long for it. To be a Christian is to name the devastating effects of the Fall. We do not call good what God calls evil. Death is evil. Distortion of every sphere of creation is a constant reminder of the reality of our ancestors' sin and rebellion and our willingness to follow in their footsteps. To ignore this truth is to place a cloak over the biblical story.

Yet we do not lament as those without hope. We traverse the brokenness of our lives and world with the knowledge of the cross and empty tomb 2,000 years ago. Christ was crushed so that we may not be. It is the evidence that God does not turn a blind eye to injustice, ours or others'. The Resurrection is the declaration that death did not hold Jesus because it could not hold Jesus. It is the reversal of the effects of the Fall—the promise of what could be and one day will be with God's creation.

The resurrection of Christ is the surety of our own future resurrection. This is the argument Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 15. The resurrection of Jesus is the assurance that whatever chapter of despair we may find ourselves in today, it is not the final word.

Paul ends this beautiful chapter with these words: "Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (v. 58).

What would I tell my kids Paul is saying? Do not fear tears. They are the evidence of knowing the world is not as it should be and the hope of what it shall one day be. Jesus' resurrection promises this. ●

THE RESURRECTION IS THE
DECLARATION THAT DEATH
DID NOT HOLD JESUS BECAUSE
IT COULD NOT HOLD JESUS.

LENT
FOURTH SUNDAY

LAETARE!

JONATHAN PENNINGTON

is a professor of New Testament at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and serves as a teaching pastor and elder at Sojourn East Church. He is the author of many books, including *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, *Come and See: The Journey of Knowing God Through Holy Scripture*, and *Jesus the Great Philosopher: Rediscovering the Wisdom Needed for the Good Life*.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad” (Matt. 5:11–12).

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (James 1:2).

“But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet. 4:13).

The command to practice joy in the midst of loss, grief, and hardship often feels impossible to do and heartless to hear. Yet it is found repeatedly throughout the Bible, including in these quotes from Jesus and two of his closest followers, James and Peter. If we found these words tucked away in some obscure place in the Scriptures, they would be easy to ignore.

But far from being a random idea, the theme of finding joy even in grief is arguably at the core of the Christian vision of life. It not only drives the content of much of Jesus’, James’s, and Peter’s teachings; Paul’s life and writings also constantly sing this same tune. Paul speaks of rejoicing in our sufferings (Rom. 5:3; Col. 1:24) and was known as a man of gentleness and joy (2 Cor. 7:4; 1 Thess. 2:7, ESV), though his life was peppered with hardship, loss, and anxiety (2 Cor. 11:23–28).

The paradoxical reality of rejoicing in suffering—an experience that must be felt to be fully understood—is

concentrated in the season of Lent. Lent, which the Eastern Orthodox tradition describes as “bright sadness,” leans into the unexpected and seemingly unnatural experience of joy in the midst of grief. Of all the days of Lent, this paradox is foremost on the fourth Sunday, traditionally called Laetare Sunday, based on the sung command “Rejoice!” Laetare Sunday sits exactly at the halfway point between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, and it intentionally punctuates this season of memorial suffering with required rejoicing.

Why? Far from being insensitive to our grief, God knows what he is doing with this Lenten command. In hearing and trying to obey it, we align our hearts to a profound truth: Grief and joy are sisters, not enemies. Loss and delight can live in harmony, and indeed, they give each other life and energy. As Francis Weller astutely notes, to be alive and to love means we will also experience sorrow and loss. “Acknowledging this reality enables us to find our way into the grace that lies hidden in sorrow. We are most alive at the threshold between loss and revelation.”

Jesus models for us a fully human life that denies neither the world’s joys nor its griefs. Jesus both laughed and wept. His teachings are very much concerned with what it means to thrive and flourish and, paradoxically, that flourishing often looks like loss. (See the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12.)

So here is the invitation of Laetare Sunday: Open yourself to the griefs and losses that Lent reminds us of. Yet just as much, lean into rejoicing at this mid-Lent point. There is a unique grace we can experience only when we honestly acknowledge our losses, needs, disappointments,

THE THEME OF FINDING JOY EVEN IN GRIEF IS ARGUABLY AT THE CORE OF THE CHRISTIAN VISION OF LIFE.

and unmet desires yet still look upward and forward to a time of full rejoicing to come. This extended period of Lent helps us pay attention to our griefs. Laetare Sunday reminds us that there is deep joy to be had even now *and* that these griefs are not the end of our story. Jesus' suffering will lead to his resurrection, which will lead to ours as well. "In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. . . . Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:6, 8-9). ●

LENT
FIFTH SUNDAY

SOMETIMES WE JUST DO THE NEXT THING

DAN STEEL

is a UK-based pastor and church planter. He is currently the principal and ministry program director at Yarnton Manor, just outside Oxford.

The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment” (Luke 23:55–56).

The cross of Jesus stands at the heart of history—the hinge on which the door of eternity swung wide for you and me. Yet on that Friday, as darkness cloaked the land and the temple curtain tore, it must have seemed to those watching that the world itself had fractured.

Luke’s account of the Cross and Resurrection portrays not only the cataclysmic events of Jesus’ death but also the varied human responses to it—responses that echo through time. In the midst of despair, the women simply did the next thing. And in doing so, they bore quiet witness to something greater than grief.

In his final hours, Jesus’ 12 disciples deserted and fled.

But the women remained. They stood at a distance, watching, waiting. Love held them there as their world unraveled. The one they followed, trusted, and hoped in now hung among criminals, bloody, naked, and dead.

They had walked with him from Galilee, heard his words, served him, and loved him. And now, in confusion and loss, they did not turn away. They did not desert or flee. Despite seeming futility, they marked the tomb. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. Strange

ingredients, echoes of an earlier life. Gifts of worship—fit for a royal child, now fit for a corpse.

It seems so small, so ordinary. But in their sorrow, they simply did what they could. They obeyed the Sabbath command, waiting when they must have longed to act. And when the time came, they returned to the tomb—not in anticipation of an empty grave but rather prepared to love their dead Lord.

Faithfulness in the dark is often quiet, unseen. Simple, daily obedience. Keeping the Sabbath. Tending to the small and the sacred. Preparing for what lies ahead, even when the road is shrouded.

It is easy to praise God in clarity, to act boldly when conviction burns bright. But what of the in between? The silence between Friday and Sunday? Between despair and resurrection? Between death and dawn? The women show us the quiet strength of obedience in uncertainty.

They were not strategizing for a resurrection. They were not waiting for an empty tomb. They simply loved Jesus, and so they did the next thing.

Our world too often feels like that space between the shroud of Good Friday and the dawn of Easter Sunday. Confusion. Uncertainty. Questions. Darkness falls, hope wavers, and the way forward is unclear. But the women remind us that faith does not demand we see the end from the beginning. Faith does not insist on a map. Faith asks only that we do the next thing.

Like the women, we remain faithful in the ordinary, trusting that Sunday morning will come.

FAITH DOES NOT INSIST ON A MAP. FAITH ASKS ONLY THAT WE DO THE NEXT THING.

Perhaps you are in a waiting season—in a lull, looking for clarity, uncertain of what comes next. Could it be that you are not meant to see too far ahead? Perhaps you are meant simply to trust, one step at a time. Perhaps you're meant simply to do the next thing.

Jesus committed his spirit to his Father, trusting beyond the veil of death. And so must we, in our own moments of darkness, in our own confusion and questions and waiting. The Cross is not the end of the story.

The darkness does not have the final word. We know this in a way the women who faithfully waited on the Sabbath rest did not.

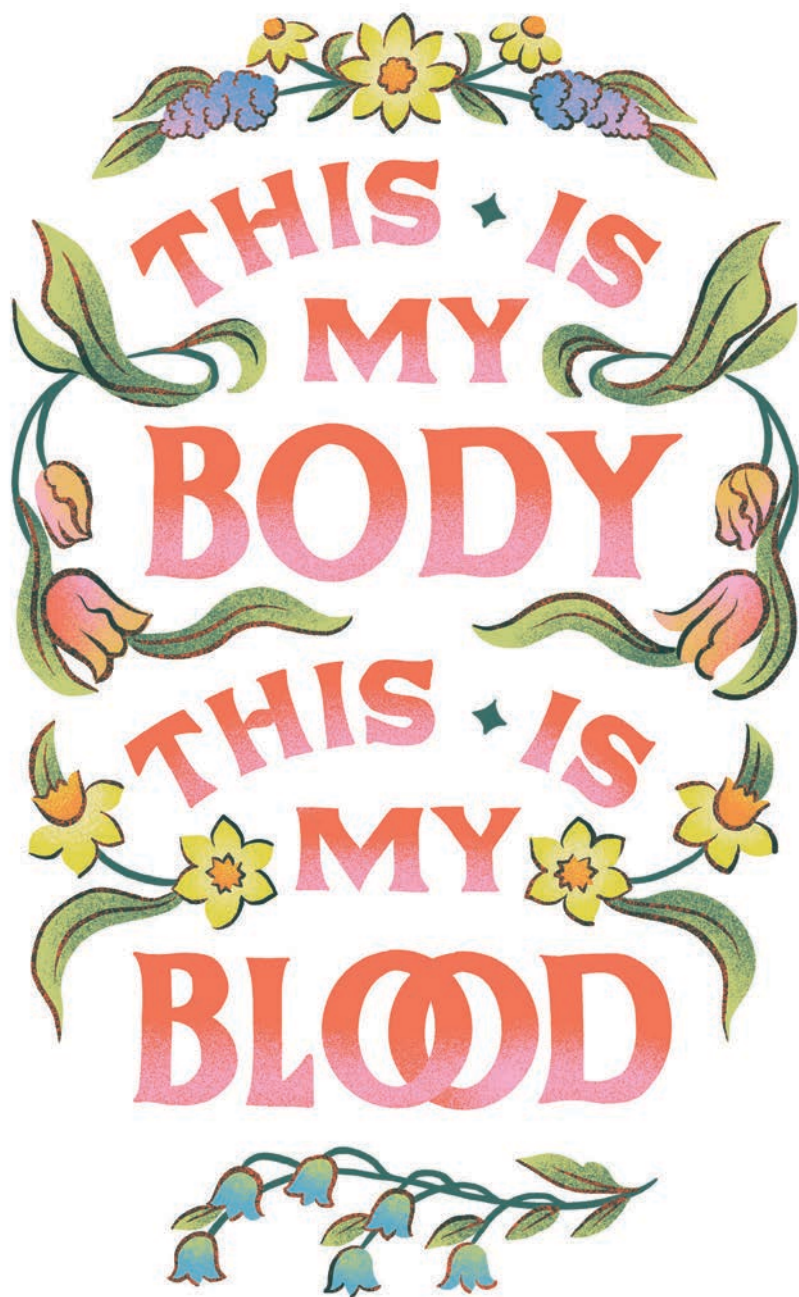
And so we do the next thing, and we wait for the dawn. ●

HOLY WEEK

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."

MARK 14:22-25





HOLY
WEEK
PALM SUNDAY

LET THERE BE LIGHT

GRETCHEN RONNEVIK

is an author and speaker living in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. She's the author of *Ragged: Spiritual Disciplines for the Spiritually Exhausted* and *The Story of Katie Luther*. She is also the cohost for the *Freely Given* podcast.

Palm Sunday holds memories for me, such as waving fern branches as my Sunday school class marched down the church aisle shouting “Hosanna! Hosanna!” Little boys would whack each other with them like swords, and the girls would turn them into fans. We’d hear the story about Jesus and the donkey that had never been ridden—the story of Jesus’ march into Jerusalem. I always wore my second-best dress on Palm Sunday, then my best dress on Easter. Palm Sunday and Easter were intrinsically paired in my mind.

As I study this story as an adult, I now realize how closely it connects to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead too. It’s the story that tells of Jesus going to the outskirts of Jerusalem, to a little town called Bethany, just before Palm Sunday. Of course, the disciples expressed their fears about getting that close to Jerusalem, where Jesus was nearly killed last time they were there. Jesus tried to calm their fears by saying the Light of the World doesn’t worry about the dark.

It’s the story where Jesus told Lazarus’s sisters, Mary and Martha, that he is the resurrection. He didn’t simply say that he could resurrect someone; he said he *is* the resurrection. Just like light overcomes darkness, the resurrection overcomes death.

After he raised Lazarus from the grave, Mary anointed Jesus’ feet, they feasted, and then Jesus got on a donkey

and rode into Jerusalem. This is the ramp-up. This is the Resurrector!

He was celebrated by the people while their leaders plotted to put this Resurrector to death. At the time, there was a peaceful equilibrium between the Jews and the Romans. What would the Zealots do if they knew someone who could raise the dead was coming to Jerusalem? Imagine how a Zealot could recruit for a revolution with a general who could make it so soldiers wouldn't stay dead!

I wonder whether the people cheering for Jesus were cheering for all the wrong reasons. Did they think he was coming to take over Jerusalem from the Romans? Were they excited to have one of their people finally in power? None of them suspected that the glory of God would be revealed through a cross. Did any of them suspect he was coming to save the Jews *and* the Romans?

I can't help but feel bittersweet when I see children waving branches and showing their excitement on Palm Sunday. It's like watching a movie I've seen many times before—I know the characters don't know what's coming next and I want to warn them. They're so blissfully happy. What comes next is betrayal, trial, torture, and death. Holy Week has so much destruction. Jesus curses a fig tree. He turns tables over and cleans out the temple. He says he'll tear it all down and rebuild it in three days.

This is the week of re-creation. Since Jesus was there, God at Creation, he walks in its path. The sun rose and the sun set each of those days of Holy Week, in Creation's footsteps.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD DOESN'T WORRY ABOUT THE DARK.

During Creation week, God separated the land from the seas, while during Holy Week, Jesus cleared out his temple.

The day when God created all the plants in the world correlates to Holy Week when Jesus examined the fig tree he condemned.

In harmony with the day God created all the animals, Jesus ate the slaughtered lamb of the Passover.

On the sixth day, in which God created humanity, Jesus himself died on the cross.

On the seventh day, God rested, and Jesus lay in the tomb.

And on the eighth day, Resurrection Day, there is new life. A new creation begins.

This timeline would make Palm Sunday the first day of re-creation. Now when I think of Jesus riding into Jerusalem, I can't help but think, *Let there be light*.

This Light of the World does not stumble in the dark.

He who has eyes, let him see. Jesus is about to remake the world. ●

HOLY
WEEK
HOLY TUESDAY

CONFRONTING CHRIST

RUSTY MCKIE

(MDiv) is the men's director of CrossPointe Church in Altamonte Springs, Florida, a trained spiritual director and somatic coach, and the author of *Sabbaticals* and *The Art of Stability*. He is also the founder of Steadfast Ministries and ManSchool.

Moonlit ribbons danced across eddies before being swallowed by raging waters. The river sounds—amplified by his solitude—filled his mind with sacred symbolism. Twenty years reflected in dark and restless waters. Twenty years of cheating, running, and dreading the brother he wronged.

Suddenly, a presence. Without a word, the confrontation began. Jacob strained every muscle in his body. Sweat and raw earth mixed to mud on his skin. As dawn broke, the Man put Jacob's hip out of socket. Jacob screamed in agony—but held fast.

The Man said, "Let me go." Jacob, who always cheated his way into blessings, wanted to get this one honestly. He cried, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Gen. 32:26).

In an instant, the wrestling God transformed Jacob into Israel.

HOLY TUESDAYS ARE FOR FIGHTING

A lot happens on Holy Tuesday in Matthew 21–26—including some feel-good classics like the greatest commandment and Jesus' heartfelt desire to gather Jerusalem under his wings like a mother hen (22:37–39; 23:37).

One theme won't let up, though: confrontation. Jesus had flipped some tables on Monday (21:12–17). Now the religious leaders try to entrap him with questions about his authority, politics, and the resurrection (21:23–22:33).

When confronting Christ in their rebellion, the religious leaders lose. With a brilliance and boldness that few could imagine wielding, Jesus stays the course, rebukes the proud, warns of judgment, and invites all who are humble to join the wedding feast. The religious leaders are unmoved, and digging in their heels, their hearts are moved to murder.

This Holy Tuesday, we would do well to let Jesus' warnings travel across space and time and move us to consider the following questions: What are we doing with our frustrations toward Jesus? Are we following the path of these blind guides? Are we digging in our heels at the invitations of Jesus?

Yet I have to ask—is it wrong to confront Jesus?

FOLLOWERS FIGHT TOO

We don't want to be like the religious leaders. So we sometimes struggle to be honest with Jesus about our resistance. But consider the following:

In their disappointment, Mary and Martha cried, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 32).

In his disillusionment, Peter rebuked Jesus, "This shall never happen to you" (Matt. 16:22).

In his doubts, Thomas pledged, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands . . . I will not believe" (John 20:25).

In their despair, the storm-stressed disciples screamed, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (Mark 4:38).

When confronting Christ in their confusion, followers of Jesus win. Correction may come, but Jesus never condemns, shames, or rejects. In some cases, he weeps (John

REPENT, SEEK FORGIVENESS, AND WALK WITH A LIMP—KNOWING IT IS THE MARK OF GOD’S RESURRECTING GRACE.

11:35). This Holy Tuesday, we would do well to consider whether Jesus is waiting for us to finally be honest about what confuses us.

THE STRUGGLE THAT SHAPES US

Moonlit shadows danced through an olive grove before being swallowed by agonizing prayers—sweat mixing to mud as Jesus pressed his forehead into the ground. The Son of God wrestled with the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Like Jacob, he wouldn’t escape without scars. Unlike Jacob, Jesus would take on a curse so that we could be blessed. Yet we’re getting ahead of ourselves.

Because in that moment, God struggled. And if Jesus struggled, then we can too.

In the confusion of this Lenten world as we await the Easter age to come, you will experience some resistance to God’s ways. Rather than expecting perfect surrender from yourself, confront Christ this Holy Tuesday.

Confront him with your confusion, frustration, and resistance. Speak honestly and with humility about what you don’t like. Allow him to correct and comfort you. Repent, seek forgiveness, and walk with a limp—knowing it is the mark of God’s resurrecting grace. ●

HOLY
WEEK
SPY WEDNESDAY

THE CALL BACK TO GOSPEL SANITY

ERIC SCHUMACHER

is a husband, father, author, and songwriter who lives in Iowa. He has written several books, including *The Good Gift of Weakness: God's Strength Made Perfect in the Story of Redemption*.

Spy Wednesday”—so named for the conspiracy against Jesus—is a hope-giving study in contrasts unfolding in three scenes.

The opening scene is set in the courtyard of Caiaphas, the high priest. Chief priests and elders gather in secret, conspiring to arrest Jesus treacherously and kill him. The closing scene returns to the chief priests, now joined by Judas Iscariot. He is eager to learn how he might profit from betraying Jesus. Thirty pieces of silver are paid, and he sets out to seek an opportunity.

As the chief priests conspired with the high priest in a courtyard, Jesus reclined in the home of a man who couldn't shake his reputation. Though Simon had been healed, he was known as “the leper.”

While the chief priests approached Caiaphas, a man whose name was well known, an unnamed woman approached Jesus. Whereas Judas would receive 30 pieces of silver, she brought a jar of perfume valued at a year's wages—likely her life savings. While men bargained over Jesus' life, this woman carried her life in her hands, broke it, and poured it over Jesus' head.

The disciples, outraged at the inefficiency, scolded the woman: “Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor” (Mark 14:4–5). But Jesus scolded them for bothering her. They would always be able to care for the

poor. But they would not always be able to care for him, especially in his final hour.

As the religious elite conspired to act treacherously, this unnamed woman did what Jesus called “a beautiful thing” (Matt. 26:10). While others maneuvered to promote self-interest at the cost of Jesus’ life, she sacrificed all she had to serve Jesus. Judas would forever be known as “the betrayer.” But “wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Mark 14:9).

The religious elite and those in power should have celebrated the King when he appeared. But they didn’t—and, too often, they still don’t.

His kingdom threatens those devoted to their own dynasties. That is why Jesus wasn’t found among them—and isn’t today.

The King was found among the poor, the despised, the rejected, and the nameless. Those with nothing in this world to lose stand ready to inherit the earth. They receive him because his presence is worth the world’s reproach. Jesus does not despise or reject such disciples—he loves them to death.

On Spy Wednesday, Jesus made his purpose plain: “As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified” (Matt. 26:2). He would drain the cup of God’s wrath, dying to save unknown, unnamed, despised sinners like you and me.

In the dark days of political upheaval, conspiracy theories, and financial uncertainty, Spy Wednesday offers resurrection

IN THE DARK DAYS OF POLITICAL UPHEAVAL, CONSPIRACY THEORIES, AND FINANCIAL UNCERTAINTY, SPY WEDNESDAY OFFERS RESURRECTION HOPE.

hope. It reminds us of the upside-down nature of Christ's kingdom—and the hope offered to the little people who enter it by faith.

These days tempt us to fix our eyes on the theatrics of politicians whose names are constant headlines. Self-serving leaders jockey for power, promising to fix everything in exchange for our loyalty. Sometimes, we imagine that their chambers of power must be where Christ's kingdom is found—and that it cannot flourish without them. We foolishly believe we can conspire with them and live.

Spy Wednesday calls us back to gospel sanity. The King did not need the partnership of the powerful to redeem the world—and he doesn't today. The conspiracies of the world did not thwart his saving reign—and they won't today. Self-righteous chiding did not keep a nameless woman's worship from being received and remembered—and nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

The nations rage and the people plot, but don't join them. Kiss the feet of Jesus—for “blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Ps. 2:12). ●

HOLY
WEEK
MAUNDY THURSDAY

FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

JARED KENNEDY

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Hamilton Grange sits in a park on West 141st Street in West Harlem. The National Park Service gives walking tours of the estate five days a week. If you take a tour, park rangers will tell you the story of Alexander Hamilton's Revolutionary War heroism, of his service as secretary of the US Treasury, and of his influence as author of most of the Federalist Papers. They'll show you the home's early American furnishings and tell you how it's been moved twice to accommodate New York City's growth. But what would the house say if its walls could talk? What would it tell us about Hamilton's conversations with his wife, Eliza?

Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* explores that question in the song "It's Quiet Uptown." After Hamilton's philandering and their son Philip's death in a duel, the couple struggles to rebuild trust. They walk together in their garden. They take their children to Trinity Church, but the words between them are few. Yet despite the pain they've experienced, their love persists. There's a moment in the song (maybe you know it) when Eliza takes her husband's hand, and the musical's cast begins to sing:

"Forgiveness. Can you imagine?"

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each report Jesus' Maundy Thursday institution of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20). Each records that Jesus took bread and the cup and that after he'd given thanks, he

gave them to his disciples to eat and drink. All three include the words “This is my body” and reference the blood of the new covenant being poured out. The accounts differ in minor details, but Matthew’s report stands out because it includes the phrase “for the forgiveness of sins.”

If you read straight through Matthew’s gospel, you’ll notice that before his Upper Room account, he includes extended sections on forgiveness. Perhaps the most well known is found in Matthew 18:21–35. There Jesus tells of a servant who owed his king more than he could repay in many lifetimes. To settle the deficit, the king ordered that “he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold” (v. 25). Then, the servant pleaded for mercy, and out of pity, the king forgave the man’s massive debt.

If you’ve heard the parable, you know what happens next. Instead of responding with joyful gratitude, the servant found a colleague who owed him a few months’ pay. He “grabbed him and began to choke him,” demanding he pay back what he owed (v. 28). When the second debtor pleaded for mercy, the first man showed none. Instead, he threw his colleague in prison. When the king heard about this, he was incensed. He’d hoped his forgiveness would be received and extended, not forgotten. So he summoned the first debtor and said, “You wicked servant, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” (vv. 32–33).

That’s the lesson: We’ve been forgiven much, so we can forgive. We all have griefs and failures that hang over

WHEN YOU TAKE COMMUNION WITH YOUR CHURCH, DOES IT REMIND YOU OF ALL THE KING HAS FORGIVEN? IF SO, THEN YOU CAN FORGIVE THOSE WHO'VE WRONGED YOU.

us. The debts we owe God and others because of our sin are far greater than we can repay. If the walls of our lives could talk, they'd reveal the regret and pain we often feel. But through the blood of the new covenant, our slate has been wiped clean. Can you imagine it? Can you feel the great weight taken from your shoulders? When you take Communion with your church, does it remind you of all the King has forgiven? If so, then you can forgive those who've wronged you.

We shouldn't gloss over abuse or abandon our passion for justice, but as D. A. Carson wrote, "[Christians] are called to abandon bitterness, to be forbearing, to have a forgiving stance even where the repentance of the offending party is conspicuous by its absence." Because Christ has forgiven us, we can take the hands of those who have wronged us. We can offer them the mercy we've received.

Whose hand will you take today? Whom do you need to forgive? ●

HOLY
WEEK
GOOD FRIDAY

WHY WE CALL DEATH ‘GOOD’

JOE THORN

is the lead pastor of Redeemer Fellowship in St. Charles, Illinois, and the author of several books, including *Note to Self: The Discipline of Preaching to Yourself*.

The world in which we live is beautiful and awe inspiring. It is also dark and dangerous. We don't have to wait until adulthood to recognize it or experience it, but the older we get, the more we see of the curse that has fallen on us all. Temptation, sin, failure, futility, disease, and death are not isolated afflictions for a few; they plague everyone. And underneath all of it is an ever-present evil. As Martin Luther wrote in his hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," "This world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us."

Yet this darkness is not just in the world but also in our very lives and inside each of us. We know tastes of glory but feasts of grief. The innocent are targeted, the vulnerable are oppressed, and it's not just the "bad guys" doing bad things. Even the good guys will disappoint, if not destroy, for "the heart is deceitful above all things. . . . Who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). We all wind up being victims or villains—or both.

And while brokenness and betrayal afflict us all, they are a much more heinous assault on God. The Lord is holy, just, and good. He is patient, kind, loving, and forgiving. This means the corruption of creation is not merely humanity's burden but a grievous affront to the one who made the world and called it "good."

"The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of

the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled” (Gen. 6:5–6).

Yet as we walk through this gloomy night of this fallen world, God shines a light. In fact, since the very moment sin cast its shadow over creation, God didn’t hesitate to pierce the darkness with the light of his promise—a promise that gives hope to the despairing and comfort to the afflicted, because it is a certainty of redemption. Victims will be vindicated, evil will be crushed, sins will be forgiven, joy will overcome sorrow, and Life will put an end to death.

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isa. 9:2). The light first dawned in the garden to our first parents after their sin brought a curse into creation. The Seed of the woman would arise to defeat the deceiver who led them into unbelief. And as years passed, God repeated his promise, progressively revealing more for every generation. The promise pointed to a Servant—born of a virgin, despised and rejected, yet bearing the sins of many—who would redeem his people from sin, guilt, and death (Isa. 53:3–5).

In the fullness of time, the Light was manifested in the birth of Jesus—the fulfillment of all the promises that had been carrying the weary through their years of waiting and wandering. He came not only to deliver us from the domain of darkness but also to dispel the darkness itself. But to accomplish this, he would not merely enter the valley of the shadow of death; he would bear its full weight in his suffering and death on the cross.

THE CORRUPTION OF CREATION IS NOT MERELY HUMANITY'S BURDEN BUT A GRIEVOUS AFFRONT TO THE ONE WHO MADE THE WORLD AND CALLED IT "GOOD."

His death, a willing sacrifice, was motivated by love for the undeserving, and by his death, he saves sinners and sufferers. This is why we call his death "good"—not because of the evil inflicted on him by wicked men but because of the divine purpose behind it and what he accomplished through it.

How do we live through the night while knowing that dawn is slowly approaching? We fix our eyes on Jesus, drawing near to him who drew near to us; and in him we find the beauty, awe, and purpose of the Creator in this corrupt creation. Good Friday is ultimately good because it doesn't end in darkness. The death of the Light of the World brought life and light to all who believe. And after the darkness of his death, the Son rises in triumph over the curse. By faith, the Morning Star rises in our hearts (2 Pet. 1:19), so we no longer walk in darkness but in the light of life.

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). ●

THE ACHE OF SILENCE

COURTNEY ELLIS

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The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment” (Luke 23:55–56).

Six or so years ago, I became a birder. Now, wherever I go, I am always on the lookout for birds. We birders like to keep lists—birds we’ve seen, birds we’d like to see, and birds that frequent our backyards or parks or beaches. The birding community uses apps and websites to communicate with one another, and I’m always proud to be the first to see a rarity and then invite others to view it too.

Professional ornithologists often use these lists for their research and planning. It’s useful to know just how many house finches or pin-tailed whydahs were in a local park, and since ornithologists can’t be everywhere, they rely on citizen scientists like myself to help gather information. But here’s something fun that I learned recently: They don’t just need lists of birds. They also want data on when we’ve seen no birds.

While overflowing lists of birds are by far the most fun, it turns out that not seeing any birds can teach us too. Absence is a clue. Perhaps pollution or predators have driven the birds away. Maybe foul weather has them quiet and hunkering down. It might be that migration has started early or late due to a change in the weather. Silence is its own type of information.

Holy Saturday is a time of silence. Jesus Christ has been crucified and laid in the tomb. All hope is lost. Between the despair and finality of death and the impossibility and miracle of the Resurrection lies one very long day.

It is significant that Jesus doesn't die and then rise again moments later, like a divine jack-in-the-box. He has work to do, of course—the harrowing of hell and the defeat of death—but then, God can work outside of time. Time exists for us.

So why are we given this day? Why this macabre, lonely Holy Saturday when we are invited to linger in what has been lost and commune with the disciples in their uncertainty, grief, and despair? Why must we exist within the pain of this pause?

Maybe it is because this pause is where we live our entire lives. Christ has died, and Christ will come again, but right now we exist in the ache—of war and cancer, discord and misinformation, violence and brutality and loneliness. We watch God's good creation wear out like a garment, sped along by our own lack of stewardship and care. We live between the “now and the not yet,” as N. T. Wright puts it—between being known fully and knowing fully.

T. S. Eliot put it this way in his poem “The Hollow Men”:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom.

TOGETHER WE TRUST THAT THE LIGHT WILL DAWN BECAUSE GOD PROMISES THAT IT WILL BE SO, EVEN IF ALL IS STILL DARKNESS HERE.

God invites us to linger in the ache of Holy Saturday. To sit beside the women who yesterday saw the dead body of their Lord and went home to prepare spices and perfumes for him. The women who today kept their Sabbath, refraining from work and waiting for the sun to rise on Sunday when they could once again attend to the broken body of their Savior. To watch the tomb that is not yet empty, the world that is not yet healed and whole. To acknowledge the deep, deep pain we feel and face, offering one another the tenderest possible care.

Together we trust that the light will dawn because God promises that it will be so, even if all is still darkness here.

May we live in light of this cosmic truth: that even when all is silent, the birds have flown away, and no hope is visible to us, the deep work of God goes on beneath and through and above it all.

And that same God will hold us fast. ●

EASTER

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay."

MATTHEW 28:5-6



EASTER
EASTER SUNDAY

SUPPOSING HIM TO BE THE GARDENER

ANDREA G. BURKE

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The sun has not yet risen above the eastern hill, and here in this dusty blue haze, I am taking the short walk from my porch to the garden gate. The morning air is damp, and the birds have just begun to sing. The true wonder of the garden happens when no one is here to witness it—while we're on vacation; during a thunderstorm; and in this case, overnight, while we all rested. Today the earth smells fresh and new, the roots have done their work, and the garden has grown without our involvement at all. Fruit has emerged, flowers have budded and are ready to open as soon as the sun breaks through the trees, and I feel as though I am the last one to arrive at the symphony as it rises in a morning crescendo.

Sometimes, the most victorious things happen in the dark.

Here, in this early morning dirt, I think of Mary Magdalene. I think of her, spices in hand, eyes swollen from shock and grief, heading toward the tombs before the sun has even risen. Before the hills are dusted with that vibrant light, she is looking for Jesus. The women have risen early to care for the body of the Man who knew them by name. The Man who looked them in the eye and welcomed them into his followers, who did not snub the lowly, who wasn't concerned with status and charm, but who instead tended to their hearts as the one who created them.

Anyone near her that morning would realize she is a woman in mourning, as the scent of the herbs would give

it away. She is exhausted, afraid, and carrying the heavy weight of grief all the way into that garden cemetery.

Yet, as her eyes begin to adjust to the predawn light, where she expects to find the body of Christ she is met with an empty tomb and a radiant stranger. The flurry brings an abrupt change of plans, and after the disciples have come and gone, she is once again alone in the garden, fumbling still in the wake of grief and confusion. The symphony has already begun, and she's just about to hear it rise.

It's here she turns to see a man and thinks he is the gardener (John 20:14–15).

And of course, the beautiful irony is that he was the gardener, and he still is, but not in the sense she imagined. Here, the Gardener himself, the one who tends to all those he has redeemed, is not simply wandering around looking for something to do. He is a man at work with a purpose. Where once a garden was a place of defeat and sorrow, where Eden was broken and couldn't save us, Christ has returned as the gardener to make all things new.

Christ—who knows Mary's heart, her eyes, her tears—calls her name.

“Mary.”

We know the voices of the ones who love us. We each know the sound of our name when it rings out in a familiar voice. For Mary, this is the same voice that called forth Lazarus, that spoke the words “*Talitha kum*” with power (Mark 5:41), that cried “*Tetelestai*” from the cross (John 19:30).

Mary enters the garden in fear and grief, and in Matthew 28:5, the angel says to her, “Do not be afraid.” This call echoes from Christ's conception (Luke 1:30) and birth (2:10)

WHERE EDEN WAS BROKEN AND COULDN'T SAVE US, CHRIST HAS RETURNED AS THE GARDENER TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW.

to here in the garden tombs, and Christ will announce this once and for all when he returns:

“Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev. 1:17–18).

Fear not, those of you who walk in the dark, who rise early and await the brilliance of the morning light, who long to be seen by a Redeemer who knows you by name. Fear not, you who walk amid the aroma of death; you do not need those spices to mask your pain. Here in our dirt, our grief-aroma-filled world, do not mistake him for just the gardener. He is indeed the Gardener, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the one who knows your name better than you know your own soul. Dawn has broken. The Gardener has faithfully brought life in the darkness. The symphony is rising, and we can join the chorus: Christ is risen, and he holds the keys forevermore! ●

EASTER
EASTER MONDAY

THE GLORY OF THE RESURRECTION

RECHAB GRAY

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Easter Monday, a day often overlooked in the US, holds profound meaning across the global church. It is a time for Christians to celebrate the ongoing impact of Christ's victory over sin and death.

In three distinct cultures that offer us a triad of symbols on Easter Monday, we see how the Resurrection not only transforms individuals but also redeems cultures with new meaning and purpose in Christ.

SCOTLAND: EGG ROLLING

Easter eggs are a big hit in the US, in part thanks to Scottish Christians who participate in egg-rolling contests on Easter Monday. Originally a pagan tradition meant to seek protection from hailstorms and plead for spring's fertility, the Scottish church later redeemed its meaning.

The egg retained its symbol of new birth, but the rolling egg came to represent more than just the dawning sun after a dark, wet winter. It now echoed the rolling stone and the dawning of the Son (Mark 16:4). At Christ's resurrection, the dark "hell storm" passed and the new creation hatched on the horizon.

As Scottish Christians joyfully see whose egg rolls the farthest down the hill each Easter Monday, they celebrate the rolled-away stone of Christ that ushered in an eternal springtime.

POLAND: WET MONDAY

For Polish people, Easter Monday is synonymous with Smigus-Dyngus (also known as Wet Monday), celebrating the baptism of Poland's first official ruler, Prince Mieszko, the day after Easter in AD 966. Professor and author Andrzej Buko calls Mieszko's conversion the "proverbial pebble that caused the avalanche" of Christianity in Poland and Europe.

Water rituals were originally pagan practices of fertility, cleansing, and luck. But Polish Christians found new meaning in them. Jesus' baptism into the waters of death, his submersion in the tomb, and his reemergence from the proverbial Dead Sea was the pebble that caused the avalanche that changed the entire cosmos forever (Ex. 14; Luke 12:50). Christ's ultimate baptism didn't just inaugurate his new life; it birthed a new people—the church, Christ's nation of nations (Eph. 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:9–10).

Now Polish Christians visit friends and family on Wet Monday to playfully splash each other with water, reflecting on the joy of new life in Christ.

EASTERN ORTHODOX: BRIGHT MONDAY

The Eastern Orthodox expression of Easter Monday, concentrated in Eastern Europe but practiced globally, focuses on the brightness of the week following Christ's resurrection. Unlike the usual solemnity of the Office for the Dead—a set of prayers and rituals for the deceased—this week is marked by joy, feasting, and communal celebration.

Genesis 1:1–2 says, "The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of

God was hovering over the waters.” How barren and bleak! Yet God’s command “Let there be light” (v. 3) brought his creativity and intellect into visible form. This light, still a mystery to scientists, both illuminates and fascinates us.

Jesus’ appearance was once “disfigured beyond that of any human being” (Isa. 52:14)—formless. He “made himself nothing [and] humbled himself by becoming obedient to . . . death on a cross” (Phil. 2:7–8)—empty. “Darkness came over the whole land” (Luke 23:44)—darkness. How barren and bleak! But on the first day of new creation, Jesus declared, “Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (Luke 24:26). In other words, the sufferings of Christ, the Light of the World (John 8:12), made way for him to enter the light of his exaltation (Phil. 2:9–11).

Bright Monday, the beginning of Bright Week, invites us not only to reflect on the Resurrection’s glory but also to live in its light—and let that Light live through us.

A COSMIC REDEMPTION

The resurrection of Christ has brought not just a personal redemption but a cosmic one too. The various cultural traditions of Easter Monday throughout the global church remind us that Christ’s resurrection redeems and transforms cultural customs, infusing them with new meaning.

The stone-rolling, nation-birthing, light-giving Messiah has won the cosmic championship, and his resurrection life is now in us. We’re on the winning team—all cultures, all tribes—and this alone should bring a little more brightness to our Monday! ●

EASTER
EASTER TUESDAY

EMBRACING A SACRED TENSION

BRIAN CROFT

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Easter Tuesday is an often-overlooked day in the Christian calendar, falling in the wake of the Easter celebration. The stone is rolled away, death is defeated, and hope is alive. Yet, just two days later, we often find ourselves back in the thick of the ordinary—emails, doctor visits, broken relationships, physical pain, personal doubts, financial struggles, and a deep longing for what is missing. Easter Tuesday invites us into a sacred tension: the paradox of resurrection joy mingled with the grief of life in a world not yet fully redeemed.

The apostle Peter was undeniably aware of this tension when he identified followers of Jesus in the first century as “elect exiles” (1 Pet. 1:1, ESV). An elect exile is promised to receive an eternal inheritance from an eternal kingdom but currently lives in a broken place that is not home. It is to these elect exiles that Peter wrote these words:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now

for a little while you may have had to suffer grief
in all kinds of trials. (vv. 3–6)

Peter knew this sacred tension. God’s mercy has provided a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus, bringing an eternal inheritance that is being kept for us (vv. 3–4). It is in this we rejoice (v. 6), and it is in this very hope that Easter Sunday is such a meaningful celebration. But this day of redemption has not yet come. So Peter also reminds us to grieve (v. 6). Sadly, joy and grief often get pitted against each other, especially in the church. But joy and grief should be seen as holy companions in a fallen world.

Easter Tuesday is not an afterthought. Rather, it is a powerful reminder that resurrection is not an escape from the world’s pain but a transformation of how we endure it. Jesus rose, but the wounds remained in his hands. So too, we carry wounds: griefs, losses, pains, betrayals, and unanswered questions. Easter doesn’t erase them; it reinterprets them through the lens of hope. Easter doesn’t solve them but provides a foundation to embrace the sorrow we rightly experience because of them.

On Easter Sunday, we stand in the light of the empty tomb. But by Easter Tuesday, we often find ourselves back in the shadows. The cancer is still there. That financial struggle is not resolved. The depression returns. That relationship is still broken. We might ask, “If Christ is risen, why does the world still feel so broken?” This is not a lack of faith; it’s the honest lament of believers who are learning to walk in the tension of the now and the not yet.

RESURRECTION IS NOT AN ESCAPE FROM THE WORLD'S PAIN BUT A TRANSFORMATION OF HOW WE ENDURE IT.

Peter reminds the elect exiles in the first century, as well as those of today, of this sacred tension—the same one Paul captured when writing to the Romans: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (12:15).

This sacred tension calls us to rejoice and weep on Easter Tuesday. Rejoice that Jesus is risen. We have a living hope. We are promised an eternal inheritance, which is being kept for us by the one who purchased it with his own life. But embrace the grief too. Sadness is the healing emotion of the soul. Sorrow is a gift from God that allows our souls to breathe and cope in a world that aches, longing for restoration. The risen Christ we celebrated on Sunday remains “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3, ESV). Jesus sweetly and powerfully meets us in this sacred tension, if we would stop, be still, and go to him today in our time of need (Heb. 4:14–16). ●

CHRISTIANITY
TODAY

