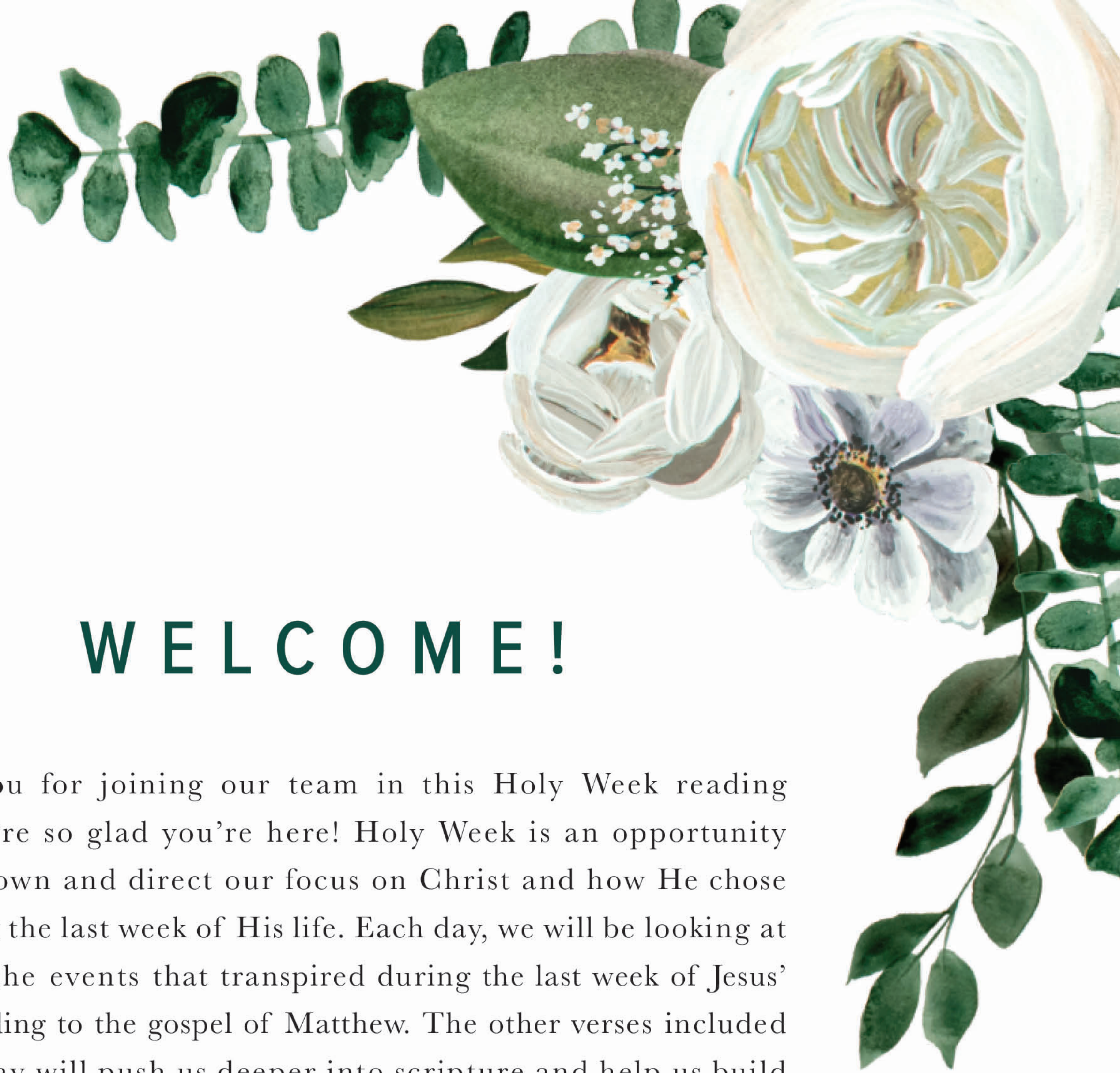


H O S A N N A R E V I V A L



H O L Y W E E K D E V O T I O N A L

By Malory Smith



W E L C O M E !

Thank you for joining our team in this Holy Week reading plan. We're so glad you're here! Holy Week is an opportunity to slow down and direct our focus on Christ and how He chose to live out the last week of His life. Each day, we will be looking at some of the events that transpired during the last week of Jesus' life according to the gospel of Matthew. The other verses included in each day will push us deeper into scripture and help us build a fuller picture of the glory of Christ.

At the end of each day, you will find a section labelled "Practice Gratitude". After reading the selected scripture and the meditation, we hope that you would respond with praise and adoration to our God. Our voices joining as one to praise Him for His son's great sacrifice will be the sweetest sound.

Our prayer is for all of us to grasp more tightly onto how deep, high, long, and wide is the love of Christ. We pray for chains to be broken as we read God's Word together. Let's get started!



PALM SUNDAY

Hosanna in the Highest

READ: MATTHEW 21:1-11 / ZECHARIAH 9:9 / REVELATION 7:9-12 / REVELATION 19:11-16

MEDITATION: In the days of Moses, the Lord commanded that all Jewish men were to travel to the place that He would choose three times every year at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths to worship and make sacrifices to the Lord (Deuteronomy 16:16). This is where Holy Week starts for us, with Jesus coming to Jerusalem (God's chosen place) to celebrate Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. On the way into the city, Jesus does something very strange. When passing the small town of Bethphage on their journey, Jesus sends two of His disciples into the village to retrieve a donkey and her colt. He then rides the donkey into the city and the reaction of the crowd is even more strange. What was the significance of Jesus' action here?

It had been Israel's tradition for their kings to ride into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey or a colt during their coronation. Riding into the city on a donkey indicated a peaceful rule, as opposed to horses, which were viewed as animals of war. What we see happening here, just one week before His crucifixion, is Jesus claiming the title of Israel's long-awaited and rightful king in a very public way. By now, most people have heard of or witnessed Jesus' miracles and teachings. When they saw Him at this moment, I believe it clicked for them that He was the promised Messiah. They would have been very familiar with the prophet Zechariah who said that their king would be coming to them "humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt" and "having salvation." Shouts of "Hosanna!" rang out, which means "save now" or "save us, we pray." Most people responded in absolute reverence of Him, throwing down their coats in recognition of His royalty and waving palm branches, which symbolize victory. In just one week's time, we will see the cries of "Hosanna" turn to shouts of "crucify him", but He knows this and He is not afraid of it.

Revelation tells us that when Jesus comes again, He will come in victory, on a white horse this time, ready to win the final battle against the enemy and against death. We will stand before Him, before His rightful throne, with palm branches in our hands. There will be no more shouts of "save us!", but rather shouts of "salvation is here!". Let us remember that salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.



HOLY MONDAY

A Jealous God

READ: MATTHEW 21:12-13 / ISAIAH 56:7 / JEREMIAH 7:8-11 / EXODUS 34:14 / 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17

MEDITATION: If you have ever been to a concert or sporting event in a large arena, you've probably noticed that food, drink, and souvenir prices inside the venue are almost double what they normally are. There are people on every surrounding street corner trying to sell bottles of water, bobble-heads, peanuts and whatever else they can at a cheaper price, because we all know if we wait until we get inside, we'll end up paying an arm and a leg for kids' size soda and a soft pretzel.

The people selling pigeons in the temple were doing something not so far off from this. Because of Passover and the increase of thousands in Jerusalem, the temple was overflowing with people. Every Jewish man who lived in or travelled to Jerusalem was required to make sacrifices at the temple (Deuteronomy 16:16-17). Seeing the opportunity for a major payday, vendors brought sacrificial animals inside the temple and sold them for high prices. When Jesus sees this happening, He becomes angry, flipping the tables and chairs of the sellers. He is even driving out the people buying the over-priced pigeons. This reaction from Jesus can be really confusing for us when Scripture is always trying to steer us away from anger. Where is His gentleness and grace at this moment?

What we see in this scene is Jesus displaying what is often called "righteous anger." This is anger that is a justified reaction toward something morally wrong, like the mistreatment of either yourself or another. The temple of God — His own house — was being disrespected at this moment, and Jesus saw that it was wrong. The pigeon vendors and money changers were taking something sacred — an opportunity for worship — and mocking God by using this time to make a profit. Ephesians 4:26 says "be angry, and do not sin." As Christians, we think that we aren't "allowed" to be angry. But when there is insult, abuse, neglect or anything that devalues humanity or our God, anger is a good and righteous reaction, as long as it does not lead us to sin.

Deuteronomy 4:24 says this - "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." Exodus 34:14 says His very name is "Jealous". I don't know about you, but that doesn't sound



HOLY TUESDAY

Be Fruitful

READ: MATTHEW 21:18-46 / MATTHEW 23:25-28 / JOHN 15:1-11 / GALATIANS 5:22-23

MEDITATION: Have you ever seen something from a distance and as you got closer discovered that it wasn't what you thought it would be? I do this all the time when my family is looking for Christmas trees. I'll look across the field of the tree farm and see the "PERFECT" tree. We'll walk all the way over to it and discover there are some gaps in the branches or that it isn't tall enough or even that it is completely brown in some places. I normally repeat this process for an hour or two until I decide to settle on one of the trees I passed on the way in. As Jesus returns to Jerusalem this morning, He sees a leafy fig tree and takes a small detour in hopes of picking something to eat from its branches. When He gets to the tree, He discovers there is not a single fig on this tree, so He curses it and it withers.

After this happens, Jesus moves on and some of the religious leaders come up to Him. They challenge His authority and question Him, leading into a couple parables (stories used to teach a lesson), and by the end of the chapter it is easy to forget that the fig tree even existed in the first place. But Jesus has a very clear message He is trying to get across, and ties it all together at the very end of the Parable of the Tenants.

"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits." - Matthew 21:43

The chief priests and the Pharisees knew that Jesus was talking about them when He said this. Being the religious leaders, these men looked like they had it all together and like they were righteous and holy, but Jesus said that they only outwardly appeared righteous, while inside they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. In the Parable of the Two Sons, the father asks them each to work in his vineyard. One says he will (very respectfully adding "sir" to his response), yet he doesn't. While the other son says no at first, he then changes his mind and goes and does it. Scripture tells us that the fig tree had nothing on it but leaves. A leafy fig tree would have indicated a fruitful tree, or at least a tree producing fig knops. Basically, this tree looked the part, but was totally useless. The tree symbolized a hypocrite. It conveyed a false appearance, made empty promises, and pretended to be something it wasn't — just like



SPY WEDNESDAY

Delivered Up

READ: MATTHEW 26:1-25 / ROMANS 1:24-25 / PHILLIPIANS 3:1-11

MEDITATION: Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to be handed over to be crucified in just two days, and that is exactly what happened. He was handed over by the Jews — His own people — to the Romans to be crucified. He was betrayed by Judas — one of His twelve disciples — for thirty pieces of silver. He was denied by Peter — one of His best friends — out of shame and for protection. The other disciples fled after His arrest. Pontius Pilate did nothing to stop Jesus' trial, out of fear of the crowd (even though he knew Jesus was innocent). Even in the story of the woman anointing Jesus' head with expensive ointment, the disciples show indignation toward her actions and believe the ointment could have been put to better use. Without a second thought, all of these people, no matter who they were or how well they knew Him, traded Jesus for something they thought would be better.

It is so easy to point fingers at these people and say, "They should have known better" or "I would never do that to my friend," but when we are honest with ourselves, we can all think of a time when we have done the same thing. Romans 1:25 says "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." Who of us has not at some point traded Jesus for even less than 30 pieces of silver? We have denied Him when it comes to our reputation. We have handed Him over in our jealousy and in our anger. We have traded His truth for the lie that our worldly desires are better than what He can give us.

And yet, while God knew that we would choose this world over Him, that we would reject and deny Him, He still chose us. He still chose to die for us. Acts 2:23 says that Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." While Judas and the religious leaders and everyone else delivered up Jesus for some kind of worldly gain or out of fear, God was delivering up Jesus, too. But God delivered up Jesus to death out of His great love for us so that we could gain Him. In two days we will get to study the cross and what it means for us, but for now, hold on tight to this: that even while we were still sinners, denying and rejecting Him, Christ chose to die for us.



MAUNDY THURSDAY

Cleansed With Blood

READ; MATTHEW 26:26-29 / JOHN 13:1-11 / EXODUS 12:1-28 / HEBREWS 9:11-22

MEDITATION: When the time for the Passover feast came, Jesus celebrated with His disciples. They were reclining at the table and eating together when Jesus got up, removed His outer garment, tied a towel around His waist, and began to wash their feet. Washing feet was a common thing to do before a meal, but was a job for the lowliest of servants. When Jesus got down on His hands and knees, this would have been a very confusing and concerning moment for the disciples. Not to mention, these men walked the dirt roads of Israel all day in their sandals — their feet would have been nasty! This was a great teaching moment about humility and serving others, but when we look back to the original night of Passover, does this moment hold even more significance?

Passover was a feast Israel celebrated to remember the day when God brought them out of slavery in Egypt. God told Moses He would go out into the midst of Egypt and that every firstborn in the land would die, but He gave Israel the option to avoid this. God commanded the Israelites through Moses to take the blood of a sacrificed lamb and put it on their doorposts. If they did this, He would pass over that house and not allow the “destroyer” to enter the house and strike them. Moses told the people in Exodus 12:22 to “take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood” and to use that to spread the blood on the doorposts. Hyssop is an herb that later in the Bible is used during cleansing ceremonies. Psalm 51:7 even says “Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.” This seems strange because hyssop has nothing to do with actual cleansing. In reality, every mention of hyssop being used from this point on is just in remembrance of what happened this night. Hebrews 9:22 says, “In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” The use of hyssop in cleansing ceremonies is only symbolic, remembering when the blood of the sacrificed lamb ceremonially cleansed and separated Israel from the godless Egyptians during the tenth and final plague.

Jesus, by cleaning the disciples’ feet, is foreshadowing the true cleansing that is about to take place. Jesus is the unblemished, sacrificial Lamb who will soon shed His blood and become the ultimate and final sacrifice needed for the forgiveness of sins for all those who would put



GOOD FRIDAY

A Criminal Freed

READ: MATTHEW 27:11-61 / GALATIANS 3:10-14 / DEUTERONOMY 21:22-23 / ROMANS 5:6-11

MEDITATION: After the Passover feast, Jesus went to pray in the garden with His disciples. Here in the garden, they were met by Judas and a group of religious leaders ready to arrest Jesus. They seized Him, and in the morning He found Himself in front of Pilate, the Roman governor. Luke 23 tells us that the chief priests were trying to accuse Jesus of being a revolutionary against the Romans. They said He claimed to be a king, stirring up people against the government and gaining followers to join His revolt, and was therefore dangerous. But Pilate didn't fall for this. He found no guilt in Jesus. Instead of freeing Jesus at this moment, however, he makes the passive decision to let the crowds decide Jesus' fate.

It was customary during the season of Passover for the governor to release any prisoner the crowds wanted. Thinking they would surely pick Jesus, Pilate gave them the option to free Jesus, or a man named Barabbas. The people picked Jesus to be crucified and Barabbas was set free. Barabbas was a murderer and a real rebel against the government. Jesus, without argument, took this man's place and died a criminal's death on the cross — a death Barabbas rightly deserved.

No matter what our story is, we all deserve to die a criminal's death. Whether or not we have committed murder physically, we have committed murder in our heart with hatred. Even if we have not committed adultery physically, we have committed adultery in our heart with lust (Matthew 5). These are just a few examples, but we have all broken the Law in some way. In Galatians 3, Paul reminds us of a curse that has been upon humanity since God gave Moses the Law back in Deuteronomy that says, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." None of us are capable of keeping and doing all of the Law, and because of this we were separated from God. He cannot be in the presence of sin. Isaiah 59:2 says, "but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." This is why a curtain hung in the temple, separating God's presence from the people.

But God *knew* we could never keep the Law in full. He planned all along for Jesus to die in



HOLY SATURDAY

Joy Comes With the Morning

READ: MATTHEW 27:57-66 / PSALM 30 / PSALM 130:5-6

MEDITATION: We don't see much about the day after Jesus' death in Scripture. We know a man named Joseph, a disciple of Jesus, wrapped his body in clean linen and we know that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary prepared spices to anoint Jesus' body for burial. What this tells us is that they did not really believe Jesus would raise from the dead. They had seen Him take His last breath and have His side pierced. It just wasn't possible.

What should have been a day of great anticipation turned into a day of mourning and silence. Every hour that Jesus was still dead sprouted doubt in the minds of His followers: "Is He really going to come back? Will He really do what He said? Was He really the Christ?"

God doesn't always act when we want Him to or in the way we would prefer, but He is always present and active in our waiting. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Psalm 50:3 says, "Our God comes; he does not keep silence." When we are staring into the face of the unknown, seemingly desperate, we can have faith that God is always there and acting; there is nothing that is unknown to Him. Nothing scares Him or surprises Him because He has supreme power and authority over all things. This includes our doubts, our confusion, our fears, and our trials. He is not stopped by any of it.

Psalm 30 is a beautiful Psalm that David wrote about the ways God had delivered him. He writes of how God did not let his foes take him down, how God healed him, how God restored his life from his lowest and darkest point... To me, this does not sound like a God who keeps silent in our suffering, but a God who is working out a plan that brings about His glory and our good simultaneously. When Jesus died, we saw His friends in unexpected mourning. When God seems silent in our life or in the world, we can react in one of two ways. We can look at what lies in front of us with trembling, fear and doubt, or we can cry out to Him and then watch and wait for Him to move, with great anticipation. Let us remember who it is that we are talking to in our prayers! We are talking to the Author of Life Himself, the one who turns our mourning to dancing.



EASTER SUNDAY

A Resurrection Like His

READ: MATTHEW 28:1-10 / LUKE 24:36-49 / ROMANS 6:1-14 / 1 PETER 1:3-5

MEDITATION: Today, kids everywhere are waking up to chocolate bunnies, colored eggs and baskets full of candy. But what we celebrate on Easter is immeasurably more than that. Today, we celebrate the day death was defeated. In the last chapter of Matthew, we see Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb with the spices they had prepared, but they did not find Jesus there. Instead they found an angel, dressed in white, who told them Jesus had risen from the dead. He reminded them that Jesus had foretold of His resurrection and that they had nothing to fear (Matthew 28:5-6, Luke 24:6-8). They ran to tell His disciples and on the way were met by Jesus, in the flesh! Imagine their joy in seeing Him after all hope seemed lost! The grave is empty! He is alive!

The good news of Jesus' resurrection holds so much significance for His followers because it finishes what He came to accomplish on the cross. While in Jesus' death we have forgiveness of sins and can therefore communicate with God, His resurrection makes a way for us to be with Him in eternity. Paul says the following:

“And if Christ had not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:17

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

ROMANS 6:5

If Jesus had remained dead and buried, our faith would be pointless. We would be worshiping a dead god. But this is not the case. Because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, we worship a living, active and present God — a God who is capable of bringing the dead to life. He does not leave us in our present sin, nor will He leave us in our future graves. We are promised a resurrection like His. We can bet this means a physical one as well as a spiritual one. We see Jesus return with a body — His disciples could touch Him and He ate with them! Heaven is not an empty space where we will float around on clouds, bored for all of eternity. It is a



CONCLUSION

God With Us

READ: MATTHEW 28:16-20 / JOHN 16:4-15 / 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21

MEDITATION: While the resurrection and ascension of Christ seems like the perfect, happy ending to the story, we can't just close the book here. Jesus has so much more to accomplish in this world. The night before He was delivered up to be crucified, Jesus made a promise to His disciples that He would send a "Helper" to them. He knew He could not be with us forever in the flesh, so He says that it is to our advantage that He should go away in order to send the Helper to us. The Helper that He speaks of is the Holy Spirit. By returning to the Father and sending His Spirit to us, Jesus — who is fully God but also fully human — is no longer limited to time and space. The Spirit can be with all of us at once. And not just with us, but in us!

When we proclaim Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and starts its home renovations: knocking down walls, fixing the cracks in our foundation, and giving us a fresh coat of paint, transforming us to look more and more like Christ from the inside out. The process can be messy and painful as this transformation calls for the sacrifice of our old lives, and when we do something ungodly, it can feel like we are too much of a mess to fix up. But be encouraged that God's grace is bigger than our failures, and He does not expect us to become perfect overnight. In fact, He doesn't expect us to become perfect at all in this life! We will enter into His perfection in eternity, but here on earth we are being transformed into His image from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18); one step at a time. Our doubts and failures are not setbacks, for in them the Father picks us back up and dusts us off. He sets us back on our feet and tells us, "You're doing great, good and faithful one! Let's keep going!"

In John 14:18, Jesus says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." He did not leave us to fend for ourselves on this broken planet, nor did He leave it up to us to fix our brokenness. He came to us in His Spirit, that guides us and speaks to us. Through the Holy Spirit, God declares His will to us and opens our eyes to the mysteries of the gospel. If you take anything away from this study, hear this: the Lord has been Immanuel — which means, "God with us" — since day one. When Adam and Eve turned against Him for the first time,

