

Devotionals for Holy Week

EASTER WEEKEND
AT COLLEGE PARK CHURCH



Devotionals for Holy Week

During this Holy week, you are invited to take a walk with Christ—to keep company with him as he journeys toward the cross. As you realize the weight of this week, how sacred it truly is, take a moment to ask the Lord to help you be fully present.

Ask him to help you engage in this time in a new and close way. The events of this week are like none other. They radically changed history and can change our lives now and for all eternity. **This changes everything.**

Worship the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Lamb who was slain on your behalf.

*Take this week and the remembrance of these events slowly and reverently. It is a somber time, but let us never forget: **Sunday is coming!***

*Note: Devotion resources:

Behold the King of Glory by Russ Ramsey

She Reads Truth website

An Easter Devotional: Trail to the Tree by Ann Voskamp

Sunday, April 5

Palm Sunday

On this day recorded in Luke 19, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and a chorus of praise erupted:

*Blessed is the King who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Peace in heaven
and glory in the highest! (v.38)*

Luke tells us “the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen” (v. 37). These people, who had been following Jesus, knew this was not just a man. This man was the **Son of God**. They had seen a glimpse of his glory, and it led them to worship.

As Jesus rode on toward the gates of Jerusalem that day—toward the death due every single human but him—he wept for its brokenness. He lamented the devastation that would come because the people did not recognize the Messiah in their midst.

Matthew 21:9

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

As we enter Holy Week, may we see Jesus for who he is. May we read with clear eyes and open hearts the gospel—accounts of these days and events are the foundation of our faith. May we worship the one at the center of it all. By God’s goodness and grace, let it never be said of us: “You did not recognize the time when God visited you.

Think about a palm branch. Pretend you are picking one up. Can you feel the green fronds in your hand? Place yourself in the crowd crying out to Jesus, “Hosanna, save us” as you wave your branch. In a prayerful expression, give glory to God and offer back to him all the gifts, talents, blessings, and graces he has given you.

Pray that the Lord would open your eyes as never before to see your need for Christ and to recognize his presence and power in your life. Thank this humble King for the grace and mercy he has given you.

The Last Supper

It began with John and Peter securing the upper room. There in that room, Jesus would wash his disciples' feet, explaining he had come to make them clean. As they began to eat, Jesus told them that one of them was about to betray him. Each disciple wondered if he meant them. Meanwhile, Jesus discreetly dispatched Judas to do what he intended.

During this last supper, Jesus set apart the Passover bread and cup and reassigned—or rather **perfected**—their meaning. The bread is his body. The cup is his blood. This meal would no longer primarily remind them of how God delivered their forefathers from the external tyranny of Pharaoh. Now it would remind them of how Christ delivered them from the internal tyranny of their own guilt and sin against God.

Then Jesus prayed for them, his friends, and for those who would come to know him through their testimony. He prayed that his Father would make them one. After praying, Jesus rose to his feet and asked his disciples to stand with him to sing a doxology over their suspended, unfinished Passover meal. Jesus led them in the traditional Passover song, Psalm 118.

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

*Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!*

² *Let Israel say,*

"His steadfast love endures forever."

³ *Let the house of Aaron say,*

"His steadfast love endures forever."

⁴ *Let those who fear the Lord say,*

"His steadfast love endures forever."

⁵ *Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me free.*

⁶ *The Lord is on my side; I will not fear.
What can man do to me?*

⁷ *The Lord is on my side as my helper;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate
me.*

⁸ *It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in man.*

⁹ *It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in princes.*

¹⁰ *All nations surrounded me;
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!*

¹¹ *They surrounded me, surrounded me on
every side;
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!*

¹² *They surrounded me like bees;
they went out like a fire among thorns;
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!*

¹³ *I was pushed hard] so that I was falling,
but the Lord helped me.*

¹⁴ *The Lord is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.*

¹⁵ *Glad songs of salvation
are in the tents of the righteous:
"The right hand of the Lord does valiantly,*

¹⁶ *the right hand of the Lord exalts,
the right hand of the Lord does valiantly!"*

¹⁷ *I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.*

¹⁸ *The Lord has disciplined me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.*

¹⁹ *Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.*

- ²⁰ *This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.*
- ²¹ *I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.*
- ²² *The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.*
- ²³ *This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*
- ²⁴ *This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*
- ²⁵ *Save us, we pray, O Lord!
O Lord, we pray, give us success!*
- ²⁶ *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the
Lord!
We bless you from the house of the Lord.*
- ²⁷ *The Lord is God,
and he has made his light to shine upon us.
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the altar!*
- ²⁸ *You are my God, and I will give thanks to
you;
you are my God; I will extol you.*
- ²⁹ *Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!*

*Pause in this moment and thank God for his
steadfast love. Consider picking up a hymnal or
song book and singing your own song of praise
to God. Thank him for being your strength, your
song, and your salvation! His steadfast love
endures forever! May the communion table ever
remind us of his great love and sacrifice.*

*When they finished singing, Jesus led his disciples
out to the Mount of Olives, to one of their regular
meeting places, the Garden of Gethsemane.
Jesus went there to pray and wait. Soon a line of
torches snaked their way toward him through the
darkness. This was what he had been waiting for.*

To pause and lead his disciples in a song like this, at this particular moment, shows the strength of Jesus's resolve to face his impending arrest and crucifixion. The gospel accounts tell us that at the beginning of the Last Supper he was overwhelmed with sorrow and that later at Gethsemane his sweat became like drops of blood. **In the middle of that tension, Jesus sang of the faithfulness of God.** Isn't it beautiful to imagine hearing the voice of our Savior lead us in a song of worship?

Garden of Gethsemane

It is here, with Jesus on his hands and knees, weeping and pleading with God, that we feel the fullness of his humanity and the depth of his sacrifice. It is in this garden that we feel the weight of his suffering.

He made his way into the garden, away from the disciples, and he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

It's hard for us to wrap our believing hearts around Jesus asking to be spared the cross—the very purpose of his incarnation. But even in the midst of this very human request, he makes clear his obedience at any cost.

Throughout the Old Testament, "the cup" is used as a metaphor for God's judgment and his wrath, as in Isaiah 51:17. So when Jesus prays about avoiding the cup, he's fully aware of what he is about to do by going to the cross: he is drinking the cup of God's wrath. **Yes, he's taking on the physical agony of the cross.** He is also taking on the spiritual agony of separation from his loving father. That separation is the pain that breaks his heart in the garden.

Yet he continues to pray.

"Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Pause and consider the weight of his suffering and obedience. Can we sit with Jesus in this hour, abide with him now for this time in the garden? Consider the realization Jesus had of the suffering he was about to endure. Realize anew that he laid down his life—it was not taken from him. Confess your sins and weaknesses to him in this moment. Thank him again and again for his willingness to drink every last drop of this cup of suffering on your behalf.

The Denial

Peter and (probably John) were following the arresting party from the Garden of Gethsemane at a distance. They stayed hidden in the shadows as they witnessed the mockery of Christ before Caiaphas and the council. Earlier, on the way to Gethsemane, Peter had told Jesus that he would never desert him.

Mark 14:29-31

Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.

It was a cold night. When the men who arrested Christ came to Annas's courtyard, they built a fire to keep warm while they waited for the trial to end. Peter quietly snuck up to the fire, hoping to blend in. One of the servants looked at him. "I know that man," she told the others. "I think he is one of Jesus's followers."

Peter dismissed her saying, "I don't know what you are talking about." In the distance, a rooster crowed.

Another man in the arresting party agreed. "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?"

Peter again replied, "No, sir, you did not." Peter tried to step away from the light of the fire. But it was too late.

Another man spoke up saying, "You most certainly are one of his followers. You speak with a Galilean accent."

Peter became angry. "May I be cursed if I am lying. I swear before God that I do not know the man." Before he finished his sentence, the rooster crowed again.

Peter then remembered Jesus had told him this would happen. He tried to hide, but reality set in. He could not hide from the one he feared the most—himself. Peter had abandoned Jesus, who was at that very moment taking the vicious blows of scoffers and false witnesses. And yet, Jesus never abandoned him. Peter had traded in all his courage, all his loyalty for the sinking reality that the cost of following Jesus was more than he could afford.

If all Jesus said was that Peter would deny him, Peter would have abandoned all hope, but Jesus had prepared him for this moment.

Luke 22:31-34

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me."

Jesus had warned Peter of his future failure and yet also comforted him with the assurance of forgiveness, that his Lord would never let go of him.

As you consider this text, in what areas of your life can you relate to Peter? Where are you struggling in your faith? Call out to Jesus. Ask for his forgiveness. Repent before him, asking him to restore your faith. Be assured of his grace and mercy in your weakness. Rejoice that his strength is made perfect in our weakness. Give thanks to the Lord that his love for you is unconditional and that your salvation is not based on works but on the grace of God alone.

The Trials and Suffering

The night of Jesus's arrest, he was brought before Annas, Caiaphas, and an assembly of religious leaders called the Sanhedrin. After this, he was taken before Pilate, the Roman governor; sent off to Herod; and returned to Pilate, who finally sentenced him to death.

There were six parts to Jesus's trial: three stages in a religious court and three stages before a Roman court. He was charged in these trials with blasphemy—claiming to be the Son of God, the Messiah.

The trials before the Roman authorities started with Pilate after Jesus was beaten. The charges brought against him were very different from the charges in his religious trials. He was charged with inciting people to riot, forbidding the people to pay their taxes, and claiming to be king. Pilate found no reason to kill Jesus, so he sent him to Herod. Herod had Jesus ridiculed, but wanting to avoid political liability, sent Jesus back to Pilate. This was the last trial as Pilate tried to appease the animosity of the Jews by having Jesus scourged. The Roman scourge was a terrible whipping designed to remove the flesh from the back of the one being punished. The Roman soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" While a crown of thorns would be exceedingly painful, it was more about mockery than it was about pain. Here was the "king of the Jews" being beaten, spit upon, and insulted by presumably low-ranking Roman soldiers. The crown of thorns was the peak of their mockery—taking a symbol of

royalty and majesty and turning it into something painful and degrading.

In a final effort to have Jesus released, Pilate offered the prisoner Barabbas to be crucified and Jesus released, but to no avail. The crowds called for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified. Pilate granted their demand and surrendered Jesus to the will of the crowd. The trials of Jesus represent the ultimate mockery of justice. **Jesus, the most innocent man in the history of the world, was found guilty of crimes and sentenced to death by crucifixion.**

Ponder the brutality that Jesus endured—the insults, the mocking, the accusations. Imagine picking up one of the thorns from his crown. Can you feel its razor-sharp tip? Thank Jesus again for his willingness to take your place before these accusers, for the pain he submitted himself to out of pure love. Humble your life before him once again and confess your complete inability to save yourself.

The Crucifixion

After a severe beating, Jesus was nailed to a cross where he remained for six hours until he died.

He was crucified between two thieves. As he hung there—weak, bloody, and exposed—people from the crowd taunted and mocked him, scoffing that if he really was the Son of God, then why didn't he come down from the cross?

They could not begin to fathom the irony of their logic. That cross was the reason the Son of God had come, and his place as our atoning sacrifice was one only he could occupy. **It was Jesus's presence on the cross, not his ability to come down from it, that would prove his divinity.**

They knew not what they did. One of the thieves spoke contemptuous words saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself. Save us!" But the gravity of the scene settled on the other thief as he watched Jesus take the brutality of his captors to God in the form of a prayer for mercy. The thief also watched Jesus give his own grieving mother to his treasured friend. Seeing the grace by which Jesus received this death, the second thief broke into sobs saying to him, "Forgive me. I am here for the wrongs I have done, but you have done nothing. Please remember me when you pass from this place into your waiting kingdom."

Never before or since has more been lost and gained at the same time as at Jesus's crucifixion. The world gained the atoning sacrifice of Christ. But for many of those present, their hearts broke because the one they believed to be the Savior of the world was dying at the hands of Rome. They couldn't stop it, and they didn't yet realize—he was dying for them. Many had put their

hope in Jesus, and though he had told them earlier that he would suffer many things and rise three days later, how could they possibly have known this was what he meant?

The reactions of the condemned men crucified on either side of Jesus and those gathered at the foot of the cross tell the story of every man and woman when it comes to what we make of Christ's crucifixion. The cross of Jesus confronts us all with the question of the true identity of Jesus Christ. Times of desperation can harden us or soften us, but the question of Easter remains: **Who do you say Jesus is?**

As you contemplate the cross, consider kneeling in humility before the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Lamb of God, the Light of the World, your advocate, your redeemer, your great shepherd, the lifter of your head, and the lover of your soul. Pour out your heart to him in reverence, awe, and thanksgiving. Sit quietly before him in holy wonder.

It was Friday when they took him from the cross, laid him in a borrowed tomb, and stationed a legion of soldiers to guard it. The disciples were saddened and distraught. The women were in mourning. The enemies were worried. It was Friday, but Sunday is coming. Now they wait...

The Day of Waiting (Holy Saturday)

On Friday at about three in the afternoon, as Jesus drew his last breath, an earthquake shook Jerusalem. Back inside the city, the slaughter of the Passover lambs was well underway by the priests near the Holy of Holies in the temple courts.

The earthquake shook the temple, from the outer courts to the Holy of Holies. The priests crouched in fear as they heard the ripping of a heavy cloth. They watched in terror as the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies tore from top to bottom.

Fear also gripped those at Golgotha as they instinctively looked at Jesus as though he may have been the source of the earthquake even as he was motionless upon the cross. One of the centurions began to beat his fist on his chest in sorrow saying, "Surely this man was innocent. Surely this man was the Son of God."

Jesus's body was removed from the cross, and a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea, asked to be given Jesus's body to bury. Nicodemus, also a member of the Sanhedrin, brought burial spices, and Joseph paid for a tomb. Together, these two men, members of the council and also secret disciples of Christ, prepared Jesus's precious body and laid it to rest in the garden tomb as night fell on Friday.

On Saturday, the chief priests and Pharisees came to Pilate in a panic—afraid that Jesus's disciples would attempt to steal his body in the night and claim he had risen. Resurrection from the grave would establish Jesus's divinity. In response, Pilate placed armed soldiers at the tomb and sealed the

stone that had been rolled over the mouth of the grave.

Imagine how the disciples and followers of Jesus must have felt, what they must have been thinking. Their hopes and dreams were crushed. Their beloved teacher and friend, the man they thought was their Savior, was put to death like a criminal. Jesus had told them he would rise again in three days. This promise struck fear into the hearts of the Pharisees, but it fills our hearts with hope. Even though the Pharisees and Pilate sealed the tomb and set guards at the entrance, they couldn't keep Christ from rising again. His power is greater than stones and soldiers and darkness and death.

In this moment, where is your heart? Are you in a moment of darkness? Do you feel abandoned and alone? Are you suffering? Are you fearful? On this dark day, open your heart to God. Cry out to him in your pain. Sit at the tomb and wait on the Lord. Trust when all is dark. Invite Jesus to enter in with the light of hope and the power of the resurrection. Hold on to hope, for the veil has been torn. Our high priest, by his death, has entered the Holy of Holies. A new and living way has been opened to us. Lift your eyes to Jesus. Sunday is on the way, friends.

He is Risen!

Early on Sunday morning, some of Jesus's friends went to his grave to anoint his body. But when they arrived, they were greeted by what one of the gospel writers called a man dressed in lightning. He told them Jesus was not there, as he said... **He had risen!**

Every instance in Scripture where an angel meets with people involves a human response of fear. This encounter was certainly no different. This meeting on Easter morning mirrors when the angel appeared to the shepherds outside Bethlehem to tell them that a Savior had been born. To the shepherds, the angel came to announce that the Messiah had come. To the women at the tomb, the angel came to announce Jesus had left but that he would appear again soon.

Jesus's resurrection opened a door between the fallen, groaning world into which he was born and the renewal of all things. That door was a stone rolled back by the very finger of God from the mouth of a grave outside of Jerusalem.

Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, present at creation, came in the flesh to be the mediator between God and man. He lived the life of perfect righteousness that all people have failed to live. He died as a lamb led to slaughter, offering himself up as the perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world, once for all. He rose from the grave defeating death itself. Bearing all authority in heaven and on earth, he lives as the appointed heir of all things. **Jesus rules over every corner of creation, putting every enemy under his feet, while making alive—by his grace through faith—those who were dead in their sins.**

If Jesus has not risen, those who trust in him are to be pitied because their hope extends no further than their wishful thinking. Their faith is futile, and

they remain in their sins. But if Jesus has risen, then his disciples are born into a new hope. Just as death entered the world through one man, Adam, now resurrection has done the same through the incarnate Son of God, who has prevailed over the power of the curse.

The last enemy, death itself, has been destroyed!

No one took Jesus's life from him. **He laid it down.** He laid his life down for his flock, his people. And he laid it down only to take it up again. **The point of the cross was not to die, but to die and rise again, defeating the prowling wolves of sin and death.**

Jesus said, "I have authority to lay my life down, and I have authority to take it up again." That is just what he did. Easter says of Jesus, he meant it. He meant to lay down his life for you! And as sure as he has taken it up again, he knows you. He is risen indeed!

As you sit in the quiet beauty of this glorious moment, worship your risen King. He is alive, and you are free now and forever! The curse of sin and death no longer has any hold on you. The light has shattered the darkness. Our wonder draws us to celebrate this linchpin event in history. We are the people of the resurrection who can declare forevermore that he is alive! Yes, we fall at his feet and worship a risen, living, and embracing God. Indeed, and hallelujah! This changes everything!



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