

# *A Lenten Study*

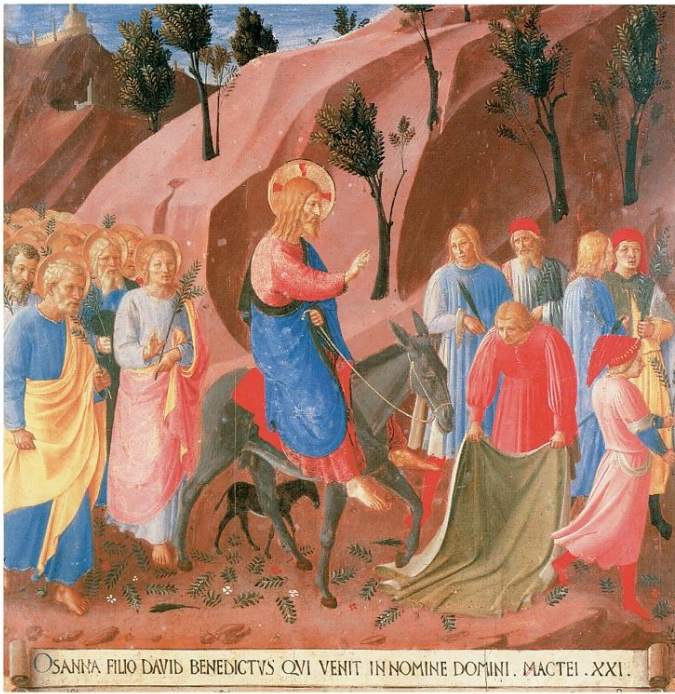
*February – March 2021*

*The Rev. Christopher Page*

*St. Philip Anglican Church*

*<http://www.stphilipvictoria.ca> // 250-592-6823 // [admin@stphilipvictoria.ca](mailto:admin@stphilipvictoria.ca)*





Four panels by Fra Angelico [1450] Vicchio, Italy:  
 3. Entry into Jerusalem; 4. Agony in the Garden; 5. Betrayal of Christ; 6. Christ Carrying the Cross

## *Living Lent*

Lent is not primarily about getting our theology right or our doctrine about Jesus correct. Lent is about living life in tune with the light and truth we see embodied in the person of Jesus. Jesus calls us into a living way today. He seeks to have an impact on every dimension of our lives. This process begins on the inside with our heart and moves out to shape all our choices and decisions and bring transformation to the world.

Lent calls us to take a moment to step aside from the routine busy distractions of our daily lives and ask serious and searching questions:

How am I living?

How does the way I am living impact my life and the life of the people around me and the life of this planet we all inhabit?

Are there changes in how I am living that might enable me to live more deeply in alignment with the life I see in Jesus?

What are the practices in my life that help me open more deeply to living in tune with the Spirit of Jesus?

Warning! These and the other questions we will face in this study are not easy or comfortable. But Lent is not intended to be a cheery time. Lent summons us to rigorous self-examination and the possibility that the well-being of our lives and the world we share may require occasionally painful decisions.

Each week on Monday, we will take the Gospel reading appointed for the following Sunday and walk slowly through it verse by verse a day at a time. I will provide a short reflection and a question or questions to ponder through the day.

I encourage you to read the entire passage at least once each day leading up to the Sunday for which it will provide the basis of the sermon time. On the preceding Thursday (10:00 to 11:00 a.m.) there will be an opportunity to discuss the passage on zoom before hearing a sermon based on it on the following Sunday. The sermon will be posted at: <https://www.stphilipvictoria.ca/podcasts/media>

For each of six Sundays (6:30 to 7:30 p.m.) starting 21 February, there will be an opportunity on zoom to discuss the passage studied for the previous week and



preached on that Sunday. Please feel welcome to join any of these studies whenever works for you. (contact info can be received by emailing: [admin@stphilipvictoria.ca](mailto:admin@stphilipvictoria.ca))

Despite the challenging nature of the questions we will confront in this study, pondering these passages and asking, “How Am I Living?” is not an invitation to indulge in self-recrimination, guilt or shame. It is an opportunity to engage in serious and honest self-examination with the intention of opening to the possibility of a deeper surrender to the force of truth and beauty embodied in Jesus.

Behind each of these meditations is the conviction that Jesus is what a truly and deeply human life is intended to be. When I look carefully at Jesus, I see my true identity. Looking at these Gospel readings is an invitation to look at Jesus in the confidence that I become more fully that which I behold.

The first meditation appears on the Monday before Lent (15 February), in preparation for the first Sunday of Lent which is 21 February.

These readings are enriched by a series of images curated by Gillian Fosdick to whom I am grateful for this fruitful collaboration. The inclusion of images recognizes that we learn and grow by engaging more of our faculties than merely the intellectual. We learn also by intuition, instinct, feeling, sensation and bodily patterning. As we open to deeper ways of knowing, our lives are more fully shaped by the Spirit that filled Jesus’ life and seeks to shape our lives into his likeness.

I invite you to join us in “Living Lent”, a journey of self-awareness and awakening in which we seek to live more fully in alignment with the Spirit of Jesus in whom we see our true nature.

*Christopher Page*  
*February 1, 2021*



Scripture Text for the week beginning  
Monday 15<sup>th</sup> February:  
Mark 1:9-15

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

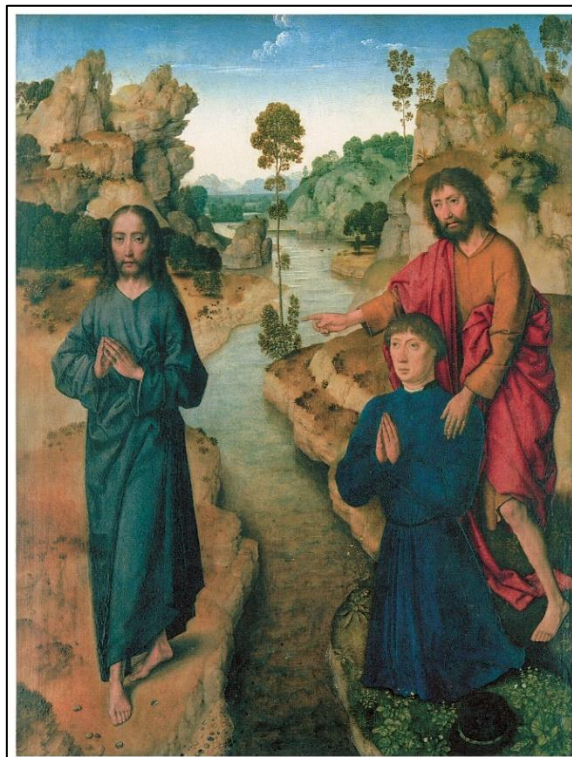
<sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

<sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

<sup>12</sup> And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

<sup>13</sup>He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'



7. Ecce Agnus Dei  
Dieric Bouts [1462] Netherlands

## Monday 15 February

**In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee  
and was baptized by John in the Jordan. [Mark 1:9]**

Everything is wrong in this verse. John should be coming to Jesus. But, instead, Jesus makes the journey in search of John and finds him out in the wilderness baptizing the crowds with a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

John’s baptism is a sign of the conflicted nature of the human condition with which I am all too familiar. John’s baptism is a sacred rite which acknowledges the unavoidable reality that I “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

But Jesus is the exception. He may have been tempted; he may have struggled. But, according to the testimony of Scripture, Jesus did *not* fall “short of the glory of God” (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus did not need a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”  
And yet, Marks says Jesus “was baptized by John in the Jordan.”

What is going on here?

In baptism we acknowledge the constricted, painful reality of life in this material timebound realm of the flesh. Jesus entered the fullness of the human condition. He chose to be present in the darkness as well as the light. Jesus allowed himself to be plunged beneath the surface of the water into the darkness, chaos and powerlessness that characterize the reality of the human condition.

In the midst of a global pandemic, it is tempting to try to flee the dark and difficult realities of life and to hide in the light. But Lent commits us to facing honestly and courageously the reality of darkness. Lent is a journey towards honesty. Be warned, it can be a painful trip.

But, have confidence that, by embracing the fullness of the human condition, Jesus demonstrates that in the midst of darkness, it is possible to live in the light.



**What happens inside me when, instead of fleeing the dark, I  
acknowledge that shadow reality and sit with the discomfort  
of my constricted human condition?**

## Tuesday 16 February

**1:10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.**

Living in this dense, physical, timebound, material realm it is hard sometimes to see “the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove.”

The dimension of the human condition that the New Testament refers to as “flesh” can make it difficult to see reality. I become so preoccupied with life on the horizontal plane. My fixation on the daily details and routines of life, dulls my senses. “The heavens” seem to be an impenetrable barrier separating me from the transcendent vastness and beauty we call “God”.

But, my problem is *not* separation. My problem is *perception*. In Jesus, I see that there is no force in life that can cut me off from the Presence of the mystery and beauty that permeate every dimension of life. (Psalm 139:7-12; Romans 8:38,39)

Jesus lived in constant awareness of the invisible dimension of the Spirit. For him there was no separation. With the possible exception of his last moments on the cross, Jesus experienced his oneness with God at all times. “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30) was Jesus’ creed.

The more I am able to detach from the things that so often clutter my life and the more I open to the Spirit of Jesus, the more I too will perceive the reality of the oneness he perceived.



**What practices in my life help me perceive my unity with God and the oneness of all life?**





8. Temptation of Christ on the Mountain  
Duccio Di Buoninsegna [1308]

## Wednesday 17 February

**1:11 And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’**

Darkness is real and darkness is hard. But the biggest problem with the darkness is that, it coaxes me to believe an illusion.

When I see my need for “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4), I am acknowledging the darkness. But then, it is tempting to go one step further and believe that the darkness of the disparity between the person I know I am called to be and what I experience as my dominant way of being in the world, makes me contemptible. The trick is to hold the luminous vision of what it means to be truly human, while at the same time, acknowledging the painful reality of my shortcomings.

It is one thing to acknowledge how far short I fall, but something else completely to wallow in my failures. Everything is to be gained by the former and everything is lost by the latter.

I contain within myself at the same time both angel and demon. When I deny one side of my nature, I either escape into the illusion of uninterrupted light, or sink into the depths of despondency and defeat.

My baptism reminds me that I am a beloved child. But, it also reminds me that there is a great deal to which I need to die if I am to live more fully as that luminous being I was created to be. Every moment of every day is an opportunity to let go of the darkness and be raised up in the light.



**As I make this journey through lent where do I see my demons being manifest and how do I hold on to the light in the midst of the dark?**

## Thursday 18 February

1:12 **And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.**

Why would “the Spirit” drive “out into the wilderness” one who is “the Beloved,” with whom God is “well pleased”?

I would be hesitant to drive my children “out into the wilderness.” Am I a better, more compassionate and kindly father to my children than God is to Jesus?

Or, perhaps is there a wisdom in the Spirit’s action driving Jesus “out into the wilderness”? Are there lessons to be learned in the wilderness that cannot be learned in the safety, comfort, security, and protection of home?

The wilderness is that place where all the artificial supports for my fragile identity are stripped away. There is no prestige or privilege in the wilderness. When I am driven out into the wilderness, I am forced to face my powerlessness and to seek a deeper source for my life and identity.

In the wilderness I hear the call from deep within that summons me to an identity that is no longer dependent upon my achievements or abilities. This is the place where I discover an identity that does not need to acquire, accomplish, or be announced as special.

The wilderness helps me see that I am “the Beloved” regardless of what anyone or anything else may suggest, regardless of what may be taking place on the surface of my life.

In the wilderness I learn to trust in my true and deep identity. This seems a worthwhile journey to take.



**What strategies do I use to avoid the wilderness?**

**What lessons do I fail to learn when I seek to avoid being in a wilderness place?**





9. Temptation of Christ in the Wilderness  
Juan De Flanders [1500] Flanders/ Belgium

## Friday 19 February

**1:13 He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.**

The wilderness is that place where I know that “the wild beasts” are with me. I can deny their existence. I can fight against them, try to control them, tame them, or destroy them. But they are always there.

Even Jesus was “with the wild beasts”.

I see these wild beasts raising their ugly heads and obscuring the light in my life. I know the sound of their snarling at the base of my brain. Their whining voices speak in tones of accusation and complaint. They use the language of blame, shame and guilt. They tell long involved stories about the sad state of my life. They never give me rest. They lurk always at the edge of my consciousness.

But, if I shut my ears to them and close my eyes in an attempt to deny their existence, I also stop hearing the other voices. I miss the sound of the “angels” who seek to “wait” upon me, bringing life and beauty and refreshing to my spirit.

There is no way to silence and reject the beastly voices that will not also cause me to fail to hear the angelic host who sing of my blessedness as a child of the light. When I take the beastly voices less seriously, I give them less space, less power in my life. I open a space for truth to emerge.

Those dark voices will never be completely silent. But, if I listen more deeply, I will hear the voices of the angels that speak of the truth and beauty in which I was created. The angel voices call me back to my true nature and empower me to live more fully in the light even in the midst of the dark.



**What gives me the courage to see the beasts that are with me and, at the same time, to hold the vision of angels who seek to wait on me?**

## Saturday 20 February

**1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'**

In the midst of horror, darkness and injustice “the good news of God” is proclaimed.

What “good news” can there possibly be in a world in which the innocent voice of truth and righteousness is arrested and silenced by the power of darkness and death?

It is a curious message Jesus is said to have brought – “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near”.

The “time is fulfilled” means that everything I need in order to walk the journey in the wilderness is present with me just as I am, right here, right now, no matter how much I may be struggling. The reality I need to see is that “the kingdom” (the rule, the power) of Love is close at hand. I need only to put down my determination to defeat the wilderness and allow my heart to open to the Presence of that Love that is with me even in the dark and difficult places.

This is what it means to “repent”. When I “repent” I reorient my life to the truth. I reaffirm my focus on the fact that there is always “good news”. The only question is whether I am listening.



**Where do I see “good news”?**

**What helps me to see this news and guide my life by the truth of God’s Presence that it announces?**





10. Christ Presented to the People  
Quentin Massys [1515] Louvain, Belgium

Scripture Text for the week beginning  
Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February:  
Mark 8:31-38

<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

<sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

<sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

<sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'



11. Christ with his Saints  
St. John the Baptist  
Russian Orthodox Church  
Little Falls, NY



## Monday 22 February

8:31a **Then Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed...**

It is unrelenting. Wherever you turn in the Gospels you come up against the same troubling reality. No matter who we are, even “the Son of Man”, we “must undergo great suffering.” Like Jesus, we will all experience “rejection.” And of course no one gets to escape the dark wings of death that brush against our lives, even before we ourselves die physically.

What compels Jesus to push upon his disciples the awareness of the painful future that lies ahead?

The answer to this troubling question is simply, because it is true.

No one makes it through the journey of physical life without encountering some degree of suffering. Existence in this constricted realm of manifestation is painful. The pain may come in the form of internal turmoil or external chaos. I may live with physical suffering, relational anguish, or the experience of crushing injustice. There is a place in the darkness for everyone.

Jesus wants us to live in the truth. He said of himself, “I am...the truth”. He then went on to say that “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). So the way to God is through “truth”. To live in the truth is to be willing first of all to see the truth about myself (Matthew 7:3) and then to be willing to live a truthful life, an authentic and sincere life. To live in the truth means acknowledging the dark realities from which Jesus never flinched.



**What truth might I be reluctant to see?**

**What environment helps me to live sincerely and honestly?**

**How can I nurture such an environment for myself and others?**



## Tuesday 23 February

8:31b **...and after three days rise again.**

What might Jesus' disciples have possibly understood Jesus to have meant here? Jesus has just spoken of his impending "great suffering" and rejection. He has announced in plain language that he is going to "be killed". What is this rising again he speaks of in this grim context?

It is of course impossible to know how Jesus' disciples heard his troubling words. Perhaps they were simply bewildered. At the very least, Jesus' statements must have raised questions in their minds.

With the benefit of hindsight, we might have a slight advantage over the disciples. We have some idea, even though the details remain shrouded in mystery, of what Jesus might have been pointing to when he told his followers that "after three days" he would "rise again."

At the very least, Jesus is pointing to the indomitable spirit of life. He is indicating that there is a force at the heart of all existence that no violence or evil can ever ultimately defeat. In the midst of chaos and suffering, it may be difficult to see the triumph of goodness and truth. But, as we ponder the realities of Jesus death and resurrection, our hearts begin to open to the deep truth that is more real and more lasting than all the suffering that has ever been inflicted upon the world.

Love does triumph. The good will prevail. Evil is defeated; the power of wrong does not ultimately carry the day. This is not a call to denial. Jesus was always clear about the suffering that lay ahead. But it is to affirm that there is always a way in the suffering. There is light in the darkness.



**What helps me to see the light in the darkness without denying the reality of all that seeks to obscure the light in the world and in my own life?**



12. Christ Carrying Cross  
Illustrated Manuscript - Latin 'Book of Hours'  
[1480]

## Wednesday 24 February

**8:32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’**

I love that statement: “He said all this quite openly”. Jesus does not play let’s pretend games. He lays everything on the table. He is determined to live clearly. He will hide nothing from his followers no matter how difficult and painful the truth may be.

I wonder what gives me the courage to live with this same willingness to see clearly and honestly the reality of my circumstances.

This is certainly not where Peter wanted to live. When Peter doesn’t like reality, he goes on the attack. He seeks to shut down the voice of uncomfortable truth, to side-line the light he can’t bear in favour of the lie that seems more tolerable.

It appears in these two verses that even Jesus may have been tempted by this strategy. Jesus responds to Peter saying, “Get behind me Satan!” Peter’s words evidently posed a temptation for Jesus. Like me, Jesus would have preferred the comforting lie to the difficult truth. But he also understands that denial is the “human” way, not the “divine” way.

Peter’s way is the way of self-protection, the way of defensiveness and illusion. Jesus is determined to launch out into the light and live boldly in the land of truth.



**How does it feel when I look away from what I know to be true?**

**What am I trying to protect by refusing to see?**



## Thursday 25 February

8:34 **Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.**

If I am going to live in the Jesus way, there are bits of my life I am going to have to “deny”.

To “deny” myself is something much more subtle and much more profound than just giving up coffee for Lent.

The “self” Jesus calls me to “deny” is the self that hopes to assert his will over life and that believes his identity resides in the impact he makes in the world. This self is petty and resentful when he doesn’t get his way. He believes that the world is unfair because he experiences some discomfort or inconvenience.

When I take up my cross and “follow” Jesus, I have no hands free left to carry this small self. I must put down the ego-me who seeks to build a fortress around myself and to construct an illusion of security by trying to control the external circumstances of life.

Whenever I seek to create the illusion of security in this timebound material realm, I lose my life. When I launch out in faith, trusting in the power that Jesus embodied and let go of all my little ego-projects and strategies, my life is “saved.”

To follow Jesus on the way of the cross is to come to that place where I am more whole. This is not a self-help strategy; it is not a make work project. This is the way of the cross, the strategy of surrender, dying to my small self and being raised in the light of my true self.



**Where do I see my little identity projects in which my small self seeks to build a fortress in a futile attempt to establish the illusion of safety and security in this life?**

## Friday 26 February

**8:36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup>Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?**

Who wouldn't want, if they had the chance and the power, "to gain the whole world"? What could be more appealing than gaining "the whole world"?

The problem is that, if I gain the whole world, I risk losing my "Life". The external, material, circumstances of life lived on this horizontal plane, which Jesus calls the "world", is not Life. It is just the surface of Life. It is nothing but the changing circumstances of day to day existence, the flotsam and jetsam bobbing up and down on the ocean of Life.

This "life" fails to reach the dimensions of full Life. I may have an avalanche of stuff or an endless CV of achievements and accomplishments. I may be powerful and famous. But, in the absence of the depth to which the Spirit calls, all my abilities, achievements and accomplishments mean nothing (Ecclesiastes 1:2-11). No matter how elaborate they may be, they are mere sandcastles built near the edge of the ocean.

My sandcastles may be tremendously impressive for a time; but the tide is coming in.

Jesus is reported in John's Gospel to have said, "I came that they may have Life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). It is possible to have "life" but fail to have "Life... abundantly." If I have "life" but lack Life, I have nothing.



**How do I see this distinction between "life" and Life?**

**What does it feel like to have "life" but lack "Life"?**

**What orients me towards Life?**





13. Last Judgement  
Viktor Vasnetsov [1904]



## Saturday 27 February

**8:38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'**

How might I be "ashamed" of Jesus and his words?

When I pull back from the loving option, when I refuse the gentle word and choose the harsh reply, I am refusing to stand boldly with the truth that Jesus embodied. My choices suggest I am "ashamed" of Jesus and his "words".

I have joined the "adulterous and sinful generation". I am a house divided against itself. I refuse the intimacy of Love and choose instead the sad superficiality of a world in which I seek to be in charge and refuse the gentle moving of God's Spirit in my life.

To be "ashamed" is to be embarrassed by the truth. It is a strange and troubling concept to think of Jesus being embarrassed by my life. But, when I fail to live truly and deeply, I bring shame upon that source of light and beauty that is my true identity. When I am unwilling to honour and trust the Life that lives in me, I bring shame upon the truth that Jesus embodied and that is my true nature.



**How do I live in such a way that I bring honour to the truth and light that are my true nature?**

Scripture Text for the week beginning  
Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March  
John 2:13-22

<sup>13</sup> The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

<sup>14</sup> In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables.

<sup>15</sup> Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

<sup>16</sup> He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'

<sup>18</sup> The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'

<sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' <sup>21</sup> But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.



14. Above: Christ expulses the money changers. Carvaggio [1610] Italy.

15. Below: Christ cleansing the temple - Pieter Aertsen [16thc] Dutch.





## Monday 1 March

**2:13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

Passover was an intense time for Jews in Jesus' day. Jerusalem would have been packed with pilgrims. They would have travelled over treacherous terrain to reach their holy city. Many of them would have come from great distances to celebrate the deliverance they believed God had brought to their people in the past and to pray for the freedom for which they longed in the present. For many, it would be a dream come true to spend Passover at worship in the crowded Temple in Jerusalem.

It is tempting to be drawn to the excitement and stimulation of the crowd. It is easy to become addicted to the adrenalin rush and energy of the grand event, the dazzling spectacle.

But, in these days of COVID, life comes more slowly, more gently. The stimulation of the crowd is no longer available. We must find other means of motivation.

Perhaps it is possible to allow Lent to draw us to that deeper place where we are less dependent upon the flash and dazzle of Jerusalem at Passover.

This season particularly calls us to go deeper, to listen more carefully, to find within ourselves a deeper sense of calling.



**What are the forces in my life from which my actions and words emerge?**

**What strategies do I need to implement in my life to help me open more deeply to the quiet subtle movements of God's Spirit who moves me to live in a more life-giving way?**

## Tuesday 2 March

<sup>2:14</sup> **In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables.**

I wonder what my temple is full of. What are the things, ambitions, stories, desires, needs, wants, and demands that clutter my interior space?

I give myself so readily to the detritus that fills the surface of life. I am attracted by anything that glitters or holds the promise of stimulation or distraction. The interesting tidbits and fancy bobbles I collect do little but fill the space of my life and make it less comfortable for me to live simply and peacefully on this earth.

What will it take for me to confront the “cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables” in my life?

Lent is a time for self-examination. It is an opportunity to take a moment, step aside from the jumble and make a little space for honesty and clarity. What aspects of my life, get in the way of my experience of Life?

How much of what I spend so much time striving for do I really need? Where does true fulfillment lie? How much is all that I accumulate, the enemy of that spaciousness and openness which is the true longing of my heart and the meaning of my humanity? How much energy do I expend on just passing time?



**How willing am I to really look at those forces that drive the exterior circumstances of my life?**

**How is my view of life altered when I look from a more spacious, steady and peaceful place of being?**

**What superficial distractions can I put aside in order to allow space for my spirit to expand?**

## Wednesday 3 March

<sup>15</sup> **Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.**

It sounds so violent, so unlike the vision of Jesus meek and mild we are often taught to imagine.

This incident is frequently cited as proof that Jesus at times got angry. I do not have any trouble with the idea of Jesus being angry. There are times when anger may be called for. There is no doubt anger would have been an appropriate emotion confronted by the desecration to which the sacred precinct of the Temple had been subjected.

But, anger is not mentioned in any of the Gospel accounts of Jesus “cleansing” the Temple.

Might it be possible to perform a strong forceful act without it necessarily being driven only by anger?

Jesus saw a real problem in the clutter of the temple. Worship had become obscured by a system of barter utilized to benefit the merchants in the temple and indirectly the priestly hierarchy whose pockets were filled with their portion of the profits from the system. The purpose of coming to worship was no longer to surrender before the ineffable mystery and beauty of the Divine. The Temple had been reduced to a self-serving system in which a deal was made to win God’s favour and benefit those in positions of privilege.

Self-interest and avidity will never lead to the place where I am able to take decisive forceful action without the sticky residue of self-interested ego complicating my behaviour. Living in tune with the truth and light of Jesus sets me free to act with strength and truth and, when necessary, with force and power.



**What does it feel like to take a stand and act with strength but without attachment?**

**What helps me to get to this place within myself where I am free act without the confusion of unacknowledged agendas?**





16. Above: Christ driving the Money changers out. Valentin de Boulogne [1618]

17. Below: Christ Cleansing the Temple. Luca Giordano [1634-1705]  
Bob Jones University Museum & Gallery. Greenville, South Carolina



## Thursday 4 March

<sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a market-place!’ <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’

Anger is not mentioned as motivating Jesus in his dramatic action in the Temple. Instead his dramatic behaviour reminds Jesus’ disciples of Psalm 69:9 in which the Psalmist says to God, “It is zeal for your house that has consumed me.” The Greek used to explain Jesus’ motivation is *zealos*. It is the source of the English word “zeal”; it also lies at the root of the English word “jealous.”

Jesus is consumed with a passion for the sacred space of God’s dwelling place. He is jealous for holiness.

This is not the jealousy of envy, resentment, self-pity or covetousness. The zeal/jealousy of Jesus is the single-minded focus of absolute devotion.

I am so often divided. I want to go in one direction but at the same time, there is something in me that seeks to go a different way. Part of me longs to be gentle, flexible, and compassionate; part of me is determined to get my way, prove my point, and protect my assets. My words and actions are seldom pure. They are too often mixed with self-interest and complicated motives.

It is worth asking: To what am I single-mindedly devoted? How often am I genuinely focused on one goal? What passion consumes and drives my life?



**What are the forces in my life that keep me from being single-minded?**

**What are the divisions I see within myself that make it hard for me to go in a consistent direction towards the good and the beautiful that I desire to embody?**

## Friday 5 March

<sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'

Frequently, when John refers to "the Jews", he is using the term as shorthand for the religious hierarchy of the day. This is the case here. It is those who benefit most from the status quo who are threatened by Jesus' action in the Temple.

Many times in the Gospels it is evident that the religious officials had the most trouble with this radical preacher from Galilee. They were the ones who benefited from the existing religious system. They were the ones who had vested interests to protect.

I wonder how I respond when my position of privilege and power is threatened. Confronted by uncomfortable truth, do I push away the truth that is unavoidable and seek to find some rational way of dismissing the speaker?

These religious leaders want to reduce Jesus to the size of their little religious box. They do not want a religion that is out of their control. They are determined to run the show so that the show will continue to serve their purposes.

But Jesus refuses to fit into their pinched paradigm. There is something greater than the Temple at work here. The Temple is intended to point to the Spirit in Jesus.

The Temple is designed to help me open to that Spirit and become more deeply conscious of the mystery the Temple serves. When the Temple becomes an end in itself, it is time to upset the furniture.



**What is there in my life that might need to be upset in order to enable my vision of God's Presence and work to expand?**



## Saturday 6 March

<sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

As happens so often in the Gospels, the religious leadership responds to Jesus’ spiritual words with the dense misunderstanding of the flesh. They are unable, or perhaps unwilling, to see the deep spiritual truth to which Jesus points. They fail to heed the call of the depths to which Jesus summons them. They have too much to protect on the surface of life to be willing to launch out and heed the deep call of trust and faith in every word Jesus speaks.

Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:23). The greater my riches, in whatever form, the more I have to protect and preserve. The more I am able to establish the illusion of security in this timebound material realm, the more difficult it is for me to let go of the edge and swim out into the depths.

I wonder what I am seeking to protect that keeps me from listening to the deep challenge of love that Jesus brings? What insecurity, uncertainty, or doubt hampers my ability, or my willingness, to open to the power of love that is my true nature?

When I cling to the safe familiarity of the known, I miss the power of the Spirit which is stronger than death and more lasting than all the scaffolding I have ever erected in an attempt to keep myself feeling safe.



**What am I clinging to that inhibits me from truly giving myself to the reckless adventure of love to which I am called?**

Scripture Text for the week beginning  
Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March  
John 3:14-21

<sup>14</sup>And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

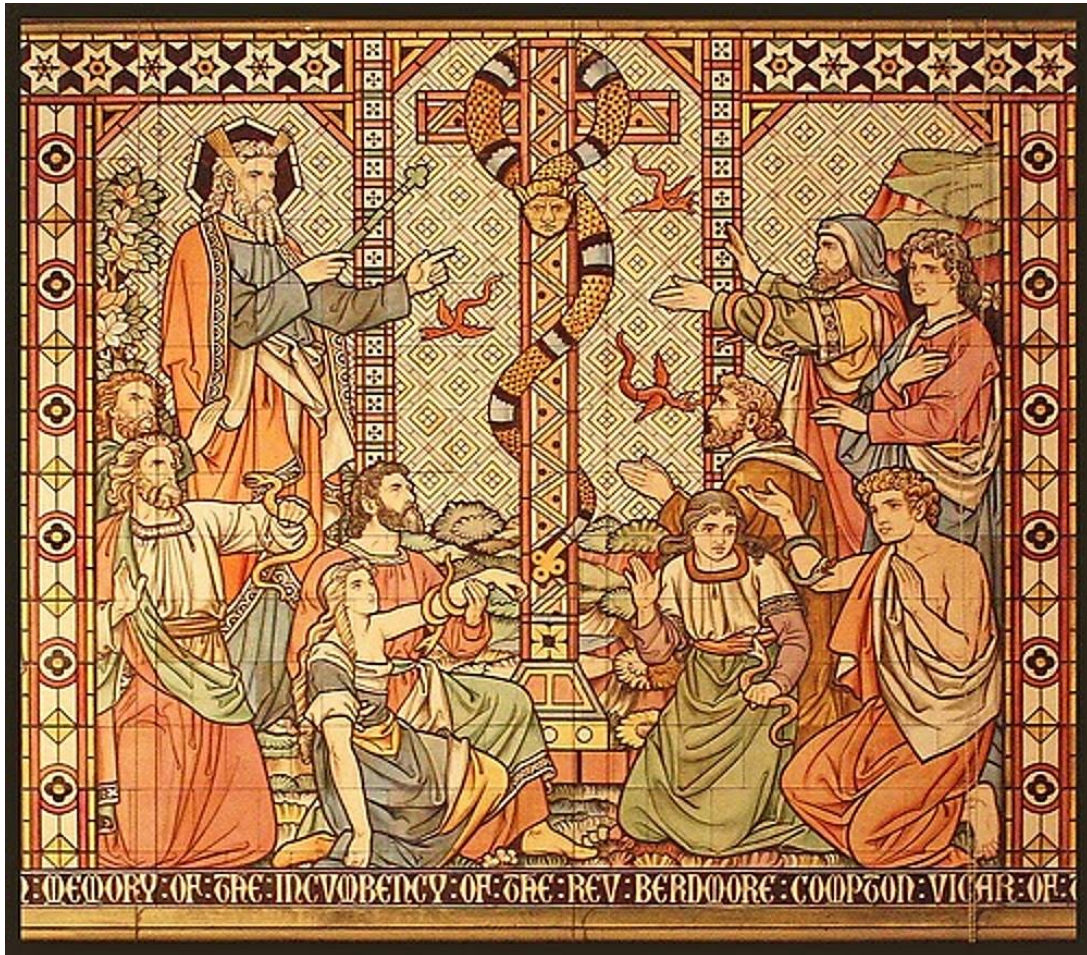
<sup>16</sup> 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup>'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

<sup>18</sup>Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

<sup>19</sup>And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

<sup>20</sup>For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'



18. Moses and the Bronze Serpent.  
All Saints, Margaret Street, London  
Tile Painting – West Wall – 1889  
William Butterfield / Alexander Gibbs



## Monday 8 March

<sup>14</sup>And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“Eternal life” is not life sometime later. It is a different quality of life lived now. It is life lived with an openness to the vertical depth dimension that transcends the merely horizontal plane of time and circumstance.

If I am going to open to the vertical, I am going to need to believe in some power, some force of life that transcends the narrow one-dimensional existence of the horizontal in which I so often choose to be confined. I am going to need to look beyond that usual familiar life which I navigate using my physical senses and in which I invest so much of my energy.

The vertical is the realm of faith. It is the Life dimension to which the Hebrew people opened in the wilderness. When they were bitten by a poisonous serpent; instead of giving up in despair, they looked up at “the serpent upon a pole” that Moses had fashioned from bronze. Seeing the serpent they were healed. (Numbers 21:9)

When I look upon “the Son of Man... lifted up”, I see that the vertical dimension of the spiritual realm is at work in life. I gaze upon those most profound values of love and light that Jesus embodied and I am made more whole. I become that which I behold.



**What do I gaze upon?**

**How is my life shaped by where I am looking?**

## Tuesday 9 March

<sup>16</sup> **'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'**

There is "perishing" life and there is "eternal" Life. The Greek word translated "perishing" is *apollymi*. It relates to death, destruction, ruin, and loss.

The truth is, there are times when I live a "perishing" life. I seek to assert my will over the world. I disregard the needs and sensitivities of others. I struggle to affirm my power and chase after privilege and prestige. I am living in the realm of death and destruction. This is a perishing life.

I feel "perishing" in my body. It is tight and constricted. My "perishing" voice is clipped and sharp. When I live from that "perishing" place, I sow the seeds of fragmentation, discord and pain. My words and actions tend towards ruin and loss in the world.

But, I also know what it feels like to live in "eternal Life". The "eternal Life" place is open and spacious. It has a freedom and gentleness that enables me to support the movement to Life and light in all my relations.

When I live in "eternal Life" I live in harmony with the way all of creation is designed to operate. I live lightly on this earth. My life contributes to the well-being of all life forms.

I wonder what it is about "perishing" that gives it so much power? Why would I choose "perishing" over "eternal Life"?



**What is it that draws me towards "perishing"?**

**What is it in me that so often resists "eternal Life"?**

## Wednesday 10 March

<sup>17</sup>**Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

To be “saved” is much more than dying and going to heaven. To be “saved” is to live today a life that is whole and fully and deeply human. The only path to wholeness is through the love, light, goodness, truth, and beauty that Jesus embodied. The world is “saved” when I live according to the qualities that characterized Jesus’ life.

As a Christian, I see this way of “wholeness” fully manifest in the historical person of Jesus. Others may not call this “way” by the name of Jesus. The name I choose to use to signify a life that is living towards wholeness is not the most important thing; it is the reality of the heart that is important. It is the direction in which I am manifesting that matters.

When I live a life that is contrary to the way of love, I suffer and the world around me suffers. To use Jesus’ word, the world is “condemned”. This is not an image of God sitting in judgement on high handing out punishment. It is a description of a reality I experience every day in my own life. To live apart from love is to live a “condemned” life.

When I live in tune with the spirit of Jesus, I am made more whole and, in some tiny way, the world around me is healed.



**What evidence do I see that my choices in life are moving more towards wholeness and away from “condemnation”?**



## Thursday 11 March

<sup>18</sup>**Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

In ancient tradition “name” is power. “The name of the only Son of God” is the power that informed and shaped the life of Jesus.

To “believe in the name of the only Son of God” is not an intellectual or rational exercise. It is an act of trust, of opening and surrendering to that power that informed Jesus’ earthly life.

To conform my life to any other power is to be “condemned already.” The natural consequence of a life lived apart from the opening and surrendering to that force of love we call Jesus, is always pain and suffering in the human community and in the physical world.

When I live apart from “the name of the only Son of God” I lose my awareness of that force which “so loved the world that he gave his only Son” for the well-being of the world.

There is a force of Life that is bent towards the flourishing of all life. I can place confidence in this force and trust that it is oriented towards the well-being of all life.



**What are the practices/habits in my life that help me to perceive the force of Life that is moving towards the flourishing of all life?**

**What helps me to align my life with this force?**

## Friday 12 March

<sup>19</sup> **And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.**

Why would I love “darkness rather than light”? What is it about “light” that makes “darkness” seem so appealing?

The problem with “light” is that, in the “light” I become visible; I am exposed. In the “light” I risk seeing things in myself that I am not sure I am going to like. Others may see things in me that I am pretty sure I do not want them to see. So, I seek to hide in the “darkness”.

Jesus sought always to draw in the midst of “darkness” to an awareness of the “light”. He sought to model a way of life that has nothing to hide, a way of integrity, truthfulness, and sincerity. He lived with honesty and transparency. Jesus appears to have had nothing to hide. I am not sure I would have the courage Jesus had in the face of his enemies to ask, "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (John 8:46 NIV)

The ability to live in the light, depends upon the steady conviction that what I am is essentially “good”. It is the experience Jesus had at the beginning of his public ministry. When he was baptized by John, as Jesus was coming up out of the water, the heavens broke open and a voice from heaven said, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Jesus needed to hear this voice of the Spirit. I need to hear this voice. It is this voice that enables me to walk in the light, even in the midst of darkness.



**How do I see in myself a temptation to seek the “darkness”?**

**What are the voices that call me to live in the light, to trust in my “belovedness.”**

## Saturday 13 March

**<sup>20</sup>For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'**

To live in the light is to live a life with nothing to hide. When I live in the light, I can afford to be "clearly seen". When I am willing to be seen I discover that freedom for which Christ has set me free (Galatians 5:1).

I glimpse this liberation at moments. I see the light on the horizon and move towards it. But, then I pull back. I withdraw from that open spacious place where I experience the light of God's Presence.

I retreat into the darkness in the hopes that my "deeds may not be exposed."

It can be so simple - an unnecessary and hurtful word, a tiny attempt to get even or to prove my superiority and assert my power, a harsh judgment or a wild overreaction. I do not want these acts or attitudes to be seen.

The challenge of living with Jesus is to bring the whole of myself into the light so that all that I am might be exposed. In the light I discover true freedom. There is nothing I need to hide, nothing I cannot afford to see or am unwilling to allow to be seen.

I can allow myself to be truly seen because I know that dark deeds or thoughts do not make me an "evil" person. They are just what is happening on the surface of my life. In the depths I remain a beam of light. Honesty opens me again to that awareness of light that is my true nature, enabling me to live more fully as the person I was created to be.



**What does it feel like to retreat into the dark?**

**Where do I experience light?**



19. Christ Carrying the Cross  
Titian [1560] Venice, Italy  
Museo del Prado



Scripture Text for the week beginning  
Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March  
John 12:20-33

<sup>20</sup>Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’

<sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

<sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

<sup>27</sup>‘Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—“Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’

<sup>29</sup>The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ <sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ <sup>33</sup>He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.



20. Above: Agony in the Garden  
Raphael [1505] Urbino, Italy

21. Right: Christ on the Mount of Olives  
Sandro Botticelli [1500] Florence, Italy



## Monday 15 March

<sup>20</sup>Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’

What do I “wish to see”?

To “wish to see Jesus” means wishing to see all that is most true, beautiful and loving in life.

Sadly, too often, I seem to “wish to see” those parts of life that are dark, tawdry and trite. My gaze is so easily drawn away from the rich depth and purity that is Jesus. It is so tempting to chase after the ephemeral distractions that are so readily available to fill my vision.

It is a terrible designation to refer to human beings as “consumers”. But the truth is, we do consume. And, what we consume, to some degree is what we become.

I understand that it matters to my body what I eat. But, what I consume in my mind and my heart is equally food for my spirit. Too often I feed my heart with junk food and suffer the enervating effects of my inadequate spiritual diet.

Eating resides at the heart of Jesus’ story and at the core of Christian practice. Jesus fed people. He fed their physical bodies in a most dramatic display of power. But, more importantly, Jesus fed their spiritual bodies with the food of “eternal Life.”

In the central act of Christian worship, we hold up bread and say, “This is Jesus; eat Jesus.” Consume love; Ingest compassion; be filled with light. Look at beauty, truth and love. Take goodness into your inner being. Nurture the Life of your spirit in the life of your body.

I need to pay attention to what I am looking at and be honest about the nourishment I am taking into my heart.



**What spiritual food am I consuming?**

**Where is my gaze most commonly focused?**





22. Eric Feather 2020  
Christ feeding the 5000 (detail)  
Pennsylvania artist – used with permission  
Ericfeather.com



## Tuesday 16 March

<sup>22</sup>**Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.**

I wonder what Andrew and Philip said to Jesus. They have come to tell Jesus about Greeks, that is Gentiles, non-Jews. What will Jesus' disciples have to say about non-Jews who are inquiring after Jesus? Why would they waste Jesus' time with Gentiles?

Is it possible Andrew and Philip have discerned something genuine in these Greeks who are asking about their teacher? Do they sense a sincere heart-opening in these inquirers, even though they are not of Jewish faith? Are they able to embrace the possibility that God might be at work beyond the parameters of their own community?

Jesus' disciples have not always been willing to look outside the box of their familiar perceptions of what God might do (cf. Luke 9:54). But I like to believe that, on this occasion, Andrew and Philip are open enough to the unexpected moving of God's Spirit that they are willing to entertain the possibility that these non-Jews are genuine seekers after truth.

It appeals to me to think that, already some of Jesus' followers might be able to see in Jesus that God cannot be confined to the narrow strictures of their humanly constructed religious system. Perhaps they have begun to open to the possibility that God is bigger than their tight little definitions and dogmas have led them to believe.

I wonder how open I am to the surprises of God and the unexpected ways love might be at work in the world.



**What habits, attitudes or ways of being in the world obscure my vision of the surprising things God might be doing?**

**How can I open more deeply to the unexpected ways of God's Spirit?**

## Wednesday 17 March

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

There is no question where Jesus stands on God’s surprising ways. Jesus is the master of the unexpected.

This passage occurs in the same chapter of John’s Gospel in which John tells the story of Mary anointing Jesus at Bethany. After, Judas complains about Mary wasting “a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard” to anoint Jesus’ feet, Jesus says, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.” (John 12:1-8) Then just sixteen verses later Jesus is saying of himself “the hour has come” for him “to be glorified.” This is surprising. Jesus it appears is going to be “glorified” in his death.

The unexpected message of the Gospel is that “glory” comes in exactly the way we least expect it. We look for glory in acquisition, affirmation, accomplishment and achievement. For Jesus, we are glorified in loss and letting go; we are glorified in daily death.

Every time I let go of my determination to force the world to conform to my wishes, I am “glorified.” When I give up my need to be right, or to be smart, or affirmed or supported, I am “glorified”. When I resist the temptation to strike back with a self-justifying word, I am “glorified”. When I give up trying to get even, I am “glorified”.

When I am glorified, Jesus is glorified in my life.



**What does “glory” look like?**

**What are the opportunities I am being presented to “fall into the earth and die” in order that I might “bear much fruit”?**

## Thursday 18 March

<sup>25</sup>**Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.** <sup>26</sup>**Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.**

The Greek in which the New Testament was originally written does not include any capital letters. Translators are left to guess when they should, or should not, use capitals in English. Most translators appear fairly comfortable introducing capital letters when they feel it is appropriate. So, for example, the English translators have just had Jesus say, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (John 12:23) In the Greek “Son of Man” is not capitalized.

It is helpful in reading much of the New Testament to think carefully about capital letters, especially when the text speaks about “life.” The Gospels speak of “life” at times as small “l” life and at other times in a way that a capital “L” might be more appropriate. Here we are dealing with small “l” “life”.

Small “l” “life” is that part of my existence that is committed to surfaces and appearances. Small “l” “life” is concerned to make a good impression; it is self-protective, small-minded and petty. Small “l” “life” is grasping and acquisitive. It always demands its own way. We are not supposed to live comfortably with small “l” “life”.

Small “l” “life” cannot serve the good and true and beautiful realities embodied in Jesus. Small “l” “life” is a poor shabby facsimile of the capital “L” “Life” we are designed to live. When I live in tune with capital “L” “Life”, I bring honour to that source of life by Whom I am created.



**How do I observe in myself the distinction between “life” and “Life”?**

**What happens when “life” is dominant?**

## Friday 19 March

<sup>27</sup>**“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—“Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’**

It appears that even Jesus was tempted on occasion by small “I” “life”? When he asks, “what should I say – ‘Father, save me from this hour?’” he is talking about small ‘I’ ‘life’. The attempt to save myself is always an attempt to save small ‘I’ ‘life’. Capital “L” “Life” does not need to be saved. Capital “L” “Life” is already whole, already healed, already “saved”.

When I live in tune with capital “L” “Life”, I embody beauty and truth. God is “glorified”.

When “my soul is troubled” it is more difficult to hold on to capital “L” “Life”. I begin to panic. It feels as if my job is to protect myself from harm, to keep myself safe and to preserve my small fragile identity. My “life” feels threatened.

“Life” is never be threatened. “Life” is strong and enduring. It is “eternal”. It cannot be destroyed or undermined. It is a steady “Life” force that no power on earth can ever defeat. Evidence of this force of “Life” is present everywhere for those who are able to see.

This “Life” can be trusted.



**When I am “troubled” do I scramble to preserve “life” or do stop clinging to “life” and open to “Life”?**

**How is my “life” different when I live with an awareness of “Life” and loosen my grip on “life”?**





23. What Our Lord Saw from the Cross  
James Tissot [1886-1894] France

## Saturday 20 March

<sup>29</sup>The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ <sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ <sup>33</sup>He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

I am better equipped to live in harmony with “Life” when I know that “the ruler of this world” has been “driven out”. When the voices of accusation and condemnation are silenced for a moment, I am free to live in tune with the unity of all being that Jesus came to reveal.

In Jesus’ death, “all people” whether they acknowledge it or not, have been drawn to the light and truth that he embodied (v. 32). Jesus bore testimony to the eternal light that lives at the heart of every human being.

It is undoubtedly one of the great tragedies of human history that the force of love which Jesus unleashed in the world has so often been used to harm and separate, rather than heal and reconcile.

The death and resurrection of Jesus aimed to bring all humankind to that place within ourselves where we are able to affirm “Life”. Jesus sought to embody the truth that we are all one because we all bear the gift of “Life”.

The gift that is “Life” cannot be earned; it does not depend upon merit or talent. It is a gratuitous gift, extravagantly sown (Matthew 13:1-9) bearing abundant fruit wherever it is received.

I wonder why I so often rush to separation and distinction rather than resting in the beautiful truth of that one gift of “Life” we all share.



**What helps me to see the “Life” that is manifest in all forms of “life”?**



Scripture Text for the week beginning  
Monday 22 March  
Mark 11:1-11

<sup>1</sup> When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, “Why are you doing this?” just say this, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.”’

<sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’ <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.

<sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.

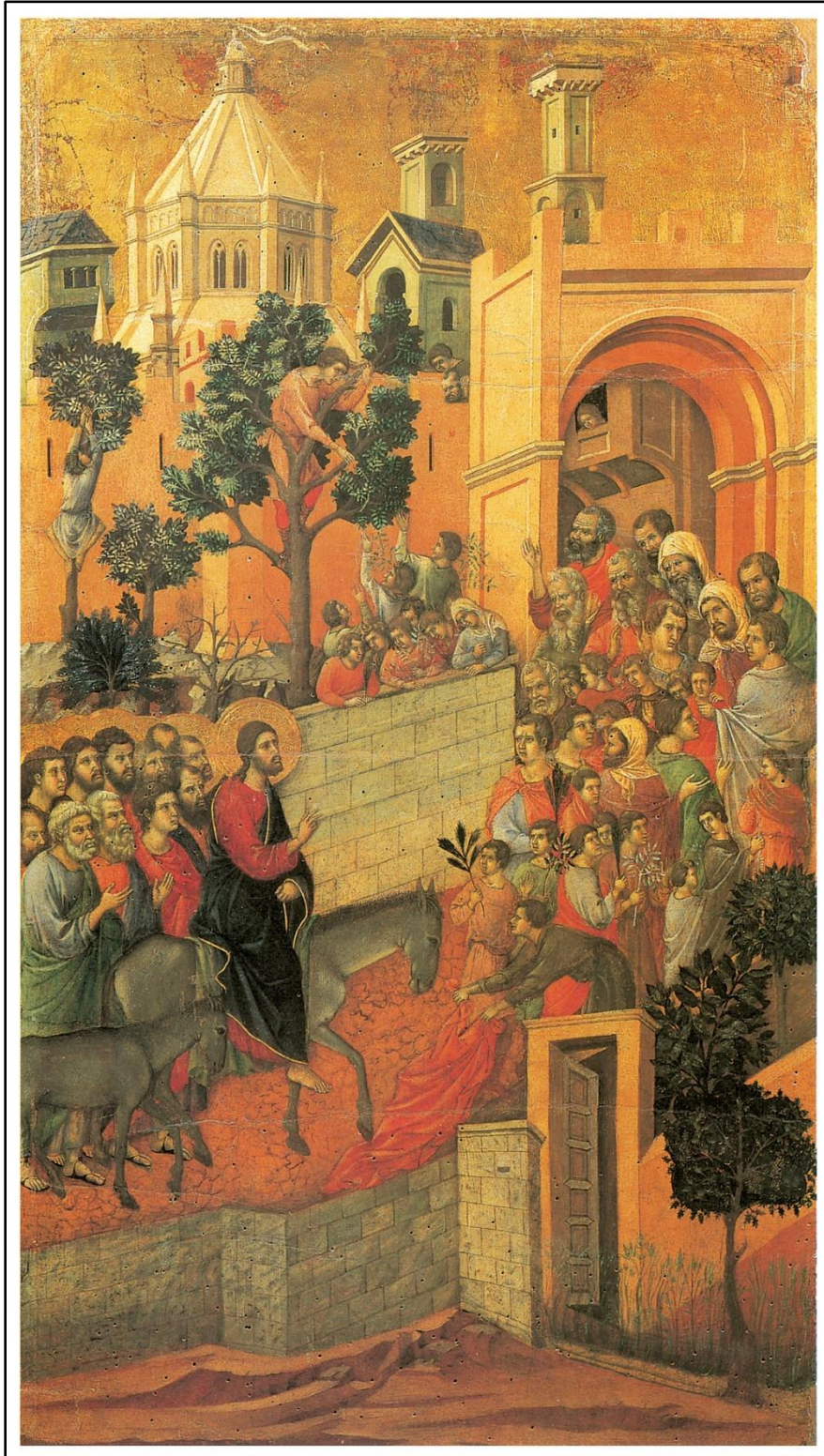
<sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’

<sup>10</sup>Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

<sup>11</sup>Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.



24. Historiated initial D depicting Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Medieval Manuscript [1350]



25. Entry into Jerusalem  
Duccio Di Buoninsegna [1260-1320] Italy



## Monday 22 March

<sup>1</sup>When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately."'"

Frequently, in the stories told about Jesus, we are faced with the question: "Who's in charge here?"

On the surface at the time of Jesus' life in Judea, it appears that the Romans are in charge. Or, in the religious sphere, the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law seem to wield all the power. But the power exercised by the Romans and the influence of the religious hierarchy of the day is not real power. These forces only able to manipulate situations and control certain circumstances. Real power works in a realm deeper than surface details.

When we look carefully at Jesus, we see that there is a greater power at work here. It is Jesus-power that actually carries the day. Jesus-power may not always look as if it is in control, but there are moments when it emerges on the surface and can be seen as the real power behind the circumstances of life.

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is one of those times when the veil is pulled back and we have the opportunity to see that it is the power of Love that is really in charge. Jesus is not a victim of powers greater than himself. Jesus is in control of what is going on and willingly submits to the illusory forces of violence and injustice that are mounted against him because he knows that true Life lies along the way of surrender (cf. Matthew 5:38,39).



**What are the illusions of power to which I cling?**

**What helps me to see the real power of Love at work in the world?**

## Tuesday 23 March

<sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’ <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.

It is not clear, at this point in the story, that Jesus’ disciples really had any idea what was going on. But, they demonstrated their trust in Jesus by walking forward in accordance with his word. Even when they failed to understand, they were willing to act in obedience.

I wonder how I respond when I don’t understand what is going on.

I am afraid, most often when confronted with my lack of ability to comprehend, I double-down on my determination to figure things out. I exert my effort to make sense of my circumstances and to find the most rational way forward. I am sure if I only think hard enough, I will understand.

The example of Jesus’ disciples suggests another possibility. Perhaps, faced with the incomprehensible realities of life, I might listen more deeply for the word of truth that speaks in my heart. Then, with whatever tiny instinct of insight I sense, I might move forward into the unknown, not so much to change the reality of what is as to live in tune with the truth that I find within the difficult circumstances of life. This is the journey of faith in which I risk everything for the power of Love. Jesus said faith “the size of a mustard seed” would suffice (Luke 17:6). I have everything I need to find my way in the face of the incomprehensible realities I face.



**What happens when I just pressure on through in the face of my lack of understanding?**

**How might things look different if I stopped and listened more deeply to discern the gentle voice of truth in the midst of my unknowing and then walked forward in faith?**



26. Entry into Jerusalem  
Anthony van Dyke – 1617  
Indianapolis Museum of Art

## Wednesday 24 March

**<sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.**

Who are these “many people”? What do they think is going on in this scene as an obscure man who is rumoured to be a great teacher rides into the city on a colt?

Perhaps these “many people” are pious Jews gathered in Jerusalem to observe Passover. Perhaps they are aware of the prophecy of Zechariah who said, “Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey” (Zechariah 1:9). But, remember, these “many people” do not have the advantage of hindsight. They do not have 2,000 years of theological reflection behind them to give them a sense of what is happening here.

Perhaps their enthusiasm is fuelled by expectation. Perhaps their hearts thrilled at the prospect of a king who “comes to you; triumphant and victorious.” Who wouldn’t want a “triumphant and victorious” king?

If triumph and victory are the expectation in the hearts of these “many people”, they are in for some serious disappointment. There does not appear to be any victory in this story. Jesus does not produce the kind of triumph for which most of us are hoping.

What kind of triumph and victory is won by a king who submits to injustice, violence, torture and death?

I am going to need to let go of a lot of my expectations if I am going to follow Jesus into Jerusalem through the horror of Holy Week.



**What is my vision of triumph and victory?**

**How do I respond when triumph and victory do not show up in the form I had hoped?**

**What helps me keep my heart open to the alternate vision of triumph and victory that Jesus brings?**



## Thursday 25 March

**<sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’**

There appears to be some semblance of unity here. There are no dissenting voices. “Those who went ahead and those who followed” are united in acclaiming Jesus as “the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Tragically, we will see as the story unfolds that this unity does not go very deep or last very long. The acclaim the crowds lavish on Jesus is fickle and changeable. As soon as their expectations are frustrated and events turn against Jesus, the crowd is divided and the majority appear to abandon this king they have acclaimed with such wild enthusiasm.

This is always the way with allegiances based on the appearance of success or the hope of triumph and victory. Acclaim turns quickly to attack when the expectations of the crowd are not fulfilled.

I wonder how often the acclaim I grant is motivated by the hope that I am lining up with the winning side. I wonder how fickle my feelings will prove in the face of opposition or disappointment. How do I respond when I feel let down?



**What habits of the heart help me to find a steady stable place from which to live that is not buffeted about by the vagaries of public opinion and fleeting success?**

## Friday 26 March

<sup>10</sup>**Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!**

What is this “coming kingdom” for which the crowds look with such anticipation and hope? Whatever it is, it is clear that the “kingdom” Jesus came to bring is not the “kingdom” the crowds were seeking.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is reported to have said of his kingdom, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’” (Luke 17:20, 21a). The crowds celebrating Jesus’ arrival are looking for a kingdom that comes “with things that *can* be observed.” They want to be able to say, “Look, here it is!” or “There it is!” They want a kingdom that proves itself with tangible benefits. This is not the Jesus kingdom.

The Jesus kingdom is invisible. It is not perceptible to our usual physical senses. There may not appear to be any immediate or tangible payoff to living in the Jesus kingdom.

If I am going to perceive the kingdom of Jesus, I am going to need to develop other skills. The skills of the Jesus kingdom are more subtle than the parades and loud Hosannas of the crowds welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem.

If I am going to discern the Jesus kingdom, I am going to need to withdraw from the crowd, to find space, quiet and stillness. If I am going to catch the hints of the Jesus kingdom I am going to need to silence the clamour of the kingdoms of the external world because, as Jesus went on to say, “in fact, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21b). When I cling to the kingdoms of the world, I fail to make the journey “within.”



**What are the subtle skills that give access to an awareness of the secret inner kingdom Jesus brings?**

**What is the cost of failing to perceive the subtle kingdom of Jesus?**

<sup>11</sup>**Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.**

It is such an odd anti-climax. All the hope and the energy of the moment suddenly drains away. There is no moment of triumph. The Romans are not overthrown. The Temple authorities are not chastised for their abuse of the religious system. There is nothing left but disappointment and perhaps a sense of betrayal. This person who had stirred such excitement and in whom so many had placed such hope and expectation, just turns and leaves the scene where all the action is supposed to take place.

Instead of announcing triumph and victory, Jesus turns away late in the day and walks an hour out of the holy city to the village of Bethany.

Could there be a more dramatic demonstration of the fact that Jesus did not come to put the world to rights in the external realm?

Later in Mark's Gospel, Jesus will offend some of his disciples, and perhaps some of us, by saying, "you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish" (Mark 14:7). This is not a callous lack of compassion. It is not a counsel for complacency in the face of suffering and injustice. Jesus is simply acknowledging reality.

There is not enough good will or unity of purpose in the human community, to eliminate every source of suffering. Life in this timebound material realm will always include some measure of struggle and tragedy. The question is how I choose to respond to the inevitable pain that emerges in the constricted form of physical existence.



**What is my response to the inevitability of pain in the face of the suffering that is always present to some degree in the human condition?**

## Saturday 27 March

**<sup>11</sup>Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.**

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**What is my response to the inevitability of pain in the face of the suffering that is always present to some degree in the human condition?**



Scripture Text for  
Monday 29<sup>th</sup> of March  
John 12:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

<sup>3</sup> Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

<sup>4</sup> But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup> 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' <sup>6</sup> (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

<sup>9</sup> When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, <sup>11</sup> since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.



It is such an extravagant gesture of pure devotion – “a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard.” For an average wage inner in Jesus' day, this represents nearly a year's earnings. How did Mary manage to have such wealth at her disposal? What would it cost her to offer her riches in such a reckless fashion?

I wonder what there might in life to which I would be so devoted that I might feel called to make such a sacrificial offering? What would it take to open my heart to the depth of giving that Mary demonstrated?

I fear that, in this story, I might find myself more aligned with Judas than Mary – “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?”



27. Mary Magdalen anointing Christ's feet.  
Illuminated Manuscript, c. 1500.  
National Library of Wales

It sounds so responsible, so reasonable, so charitable. But, John lets us know that Judas is motivated, not by compassion for the poor, but by self-interest and greed.

Or perhaps I find myself standing with the “chief priests”, who are determined to put an end to such irresponsible behaviour.

What security lay at the centre of Mary’s life that enabled her to stand against the disciples and to refuse the wisdom of the religious officials of her tradition? What inner strength made it possible for Mary to abandon the securities the world offers and live with such surrender and love?



**What will it take to bring me to the place of abandon from which Mary was able to live?**

**How might I find the strength to stand alone in the face of opposing forces and give myself to the power of love?**

Scripture Text for  
Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> of March  
John 12:30-36

<sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' <sup>33</sup>He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

<sup>34</sup>The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?'

<sup>35</sup>Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. <sup>36</sup>While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.



How tempting it is to listen to the "ruler of this world." The siren song of the flesh sings a dangerous tune somewhere in the shadow regions of my mind. It lures me to the darkness and destruction that Jesus came to defeat.

When I heed this deadly voice, I am "overtaken" by the darkness. I do not know where I am going (John 12:35). The voices of the world take me to a lost place of confusion, doubt, uncertainty and fear.

But, Jesus says that, in him, "the ruler of this world will be driven out." This is the truth to which I need to cling. Jesus has done his work. "The ruler of this world" has been defeated. Despite all appearances to the contrary, the reality is that the power of "this world" has been broken. When I heed the voice of "the ruler of this world", I am listening to an illusion. The only language this voice knows is the language of lies. I no longer need to "walk in the darkness" to which the lies lead. I "have the light" that I need. It resides within me. Whenever I abandon the call of the world, and surrender to the peace, beauty and love that Jesus embodied, I find that light that is my true and abiding nature.

**What is it that makes the call of "the world" so tempting?  
What are the consequences I see when I follow the voices of "the world"?**



For Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> of March  
John 13:21-32

<sup>21</sup>After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, ‘Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ <sup>22</sup>The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking.

<sup>23</sup>One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; <sup>24</sup>Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. <sup>25</sup>So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’

So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. <sup>27</sup>After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, ‘Do quickly what you are going to do.’

<sup>28</sup>Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. <sup>29</sup>Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the festival’; or, that he should give something to the poor.

<sup>30</sup>So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

<sup>31</sup>When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. <sup>32</sup>If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.



In four short words, John sums up the state of affairs at this point in the story – “And it was night.” (John 13:30b)

Darkness has settled over the land. It appears that betrayal, confusion and death are about to triumph over truth, light and Life.

Jesus loved Judas just as he loved all his disciples. He cannot have called Judas to be his betrayer. Jesus must have called Judas to be his follower with the same hope and expectation with which he summoned all his other disciples. Judas must have started out with the same good intentions and high ideals as the rest of Jesus’ most intimate circle. Judas did not intend at the beginning to turn upon his master and betray him to death at the hands of violent men.

To be fair to Judas, no one in this story, except Jesus, has any idea what is going on. John says, “no one at the table knew why Jesus said this...” Their vision is obscured; they are unable to see the whole picture. It is night. This is a scary place to be.

When I am groping in “the night” it is tempting to try to fight back against those forces that seem to be impeding my vision. But Jesus calls, not for resistance to what is, but to surrender to a power greater than the circumstances of the moment.

When I give up my determination to get my way and give myself to the power of love, then God is “glorified” in me. I live more fully and deeply as the person I was created to be. Tragically, this is a journey Judas was never able to make.



**What is it that causes us to change?**

**Why do I lose touch with my highest ideals and betray so readily those qualities of love and light I wish to serve?**

**What is the impact of fear in my life when I am uncertain and filled with doubt?**

**What might help me to trust in the power of Life even when it is “night”?**

Scripture Text for  
Maundy Thursday - April 1  
John 13:1-11

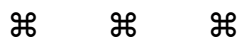
<sup>1</sup> Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

<sup>2</sup>The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him.

And during supper <sup>3</sup>Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup>got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. <sup>5</sup>Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

<sup>6</sup>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' <sup>7</sup>Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' <sup>8</sup>Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' <sup>9</sup>Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!'

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' <sup>11</sup>For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'



Jesus, "got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him." (John 13:4,5)

It is such an act of humility and vulnerability. Peter understands immediately how wrong this feels and announces to Jesus, "You will never wash my feet." (John 13:8) But Peter is not seeing the world through Jesus-eyes. He still believes in the perks of power and privilege. In the world Peter inhabits, the teacher, the leader, the master does not serve the student. The student lives to serve the master. Jesus turns this vision upside down.





28. Left: The Last Supper  
Dieric Bouts [1415-1475] Haarlem, Netherlands

29. Above: Washing the Apostles' Feet.  
Giovanni Agostino Da Lodi [1467-1525] Lodi, Italy



In the Jesus kingdom, the leader is the one who makes himself vulnerable to those he seeks to lead. The teacher teaches, not by dominating or demanding, but by living a life of love and sacrifice.

What made it possible for Jesus to take this lowly position in relationship to his disciples?

Jesus could take the role of servant because he had a strong and secure sense of identity. He knew the source of his power; he understood where he had come from and where he was going (John 13:3). Because he was secure in his true and deepest self, Jesus did not need the trappings of privilege and power to shore up his identity. With nothing to prove, Jesus was free to serve.



**What helps me stay connected to a true sense of my genuine identity?**

**What makes it possible for me to “take off my outer robe” and stop trying to protect myself?**

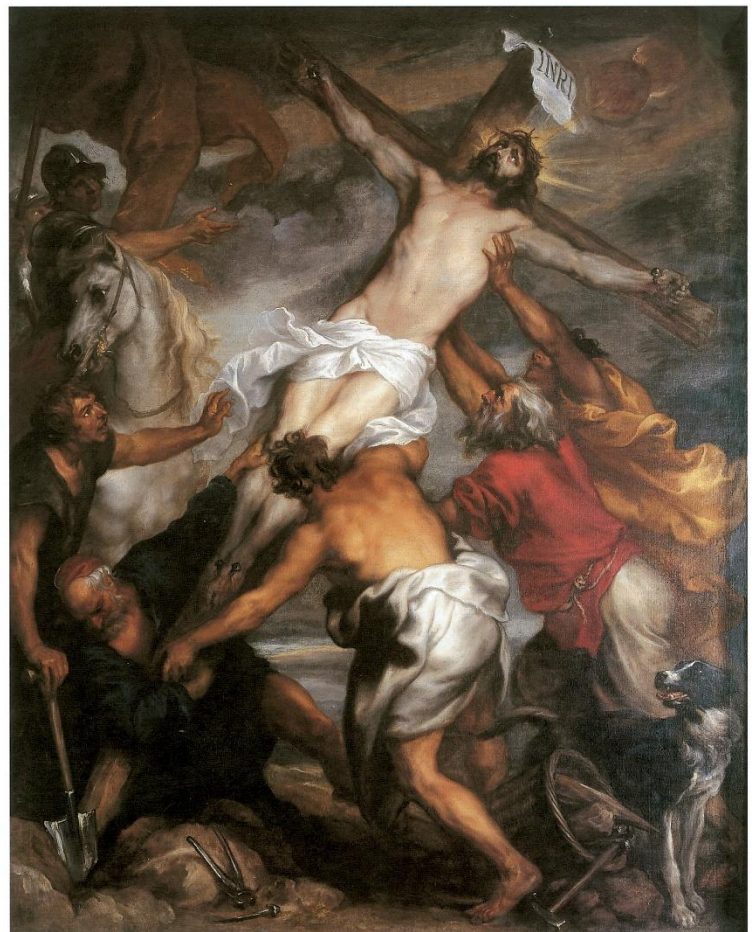


30. Arrest of Christ  
Hans Holbein the Elder  
[1460-1524] Germany

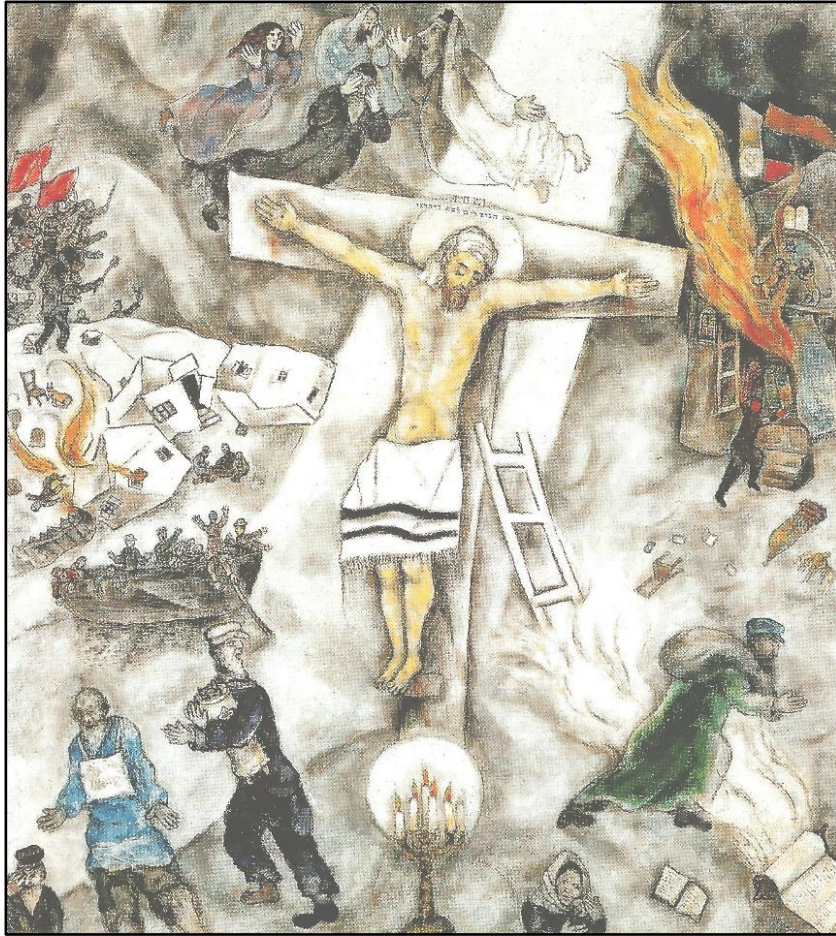


31. Crowning with Thorns  
Anthony van Dyke - 1620

32. Raising of the Cross  
Anthony van Dyke - 1631







33. Left. Crucifixion of Christ. Chagall. [1939]  
Art Institute of Chicago.

34. Below: Syriac Rabbula Gospels. [Completed in the year 586 at the Monastery of St. John of Zagba], Northern Syria





Scripture Text for  
Good Friday - 2 April  
John 18:33-38

<sup>33</sup> Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'

<sup>35</sup> Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?'

<sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.'

<sup>37</sup> Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' <sup>38</sup> Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'



I feel sympathy for Pilate. On one hand, he is the one with all the power. His decision is a matter of physical life or death for Jesus. Pilate does not need to bow to anyone's wishes or demands. He is answerable only to Caesar and, Caesar has no interest in the tiny back-water community of Judea as long as the appearance of peace is maintained.

But confronted by Jesus, Pilate has to navigate a world he does not understand. He is involved in a situation that makes no sense in his world; it hardly makes sense even for those who are sympathetic to Jesus. In the world of Jesus, Pilate is powerless. He lacks the tools to operate in the Jesus kingdom.

How could anyone expect Pilate to make a good decision? He has no idea how to answer his own question - "What is truth?" (John 18:38)

The tools Pilate has used up to now, are simply not adequate to the job of finding the light for which he longs. He has been accustomed to successfully finding his way in the kingdom of "this world." Pilate knows how to wield the world's power. He is accustomed to getting his way and exerting his authority.



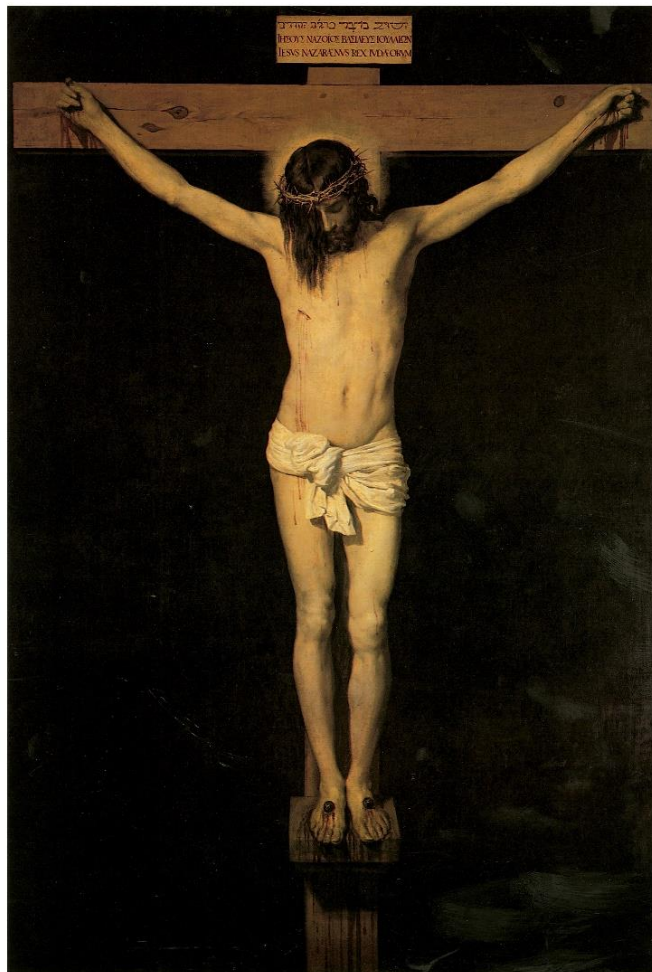
But suddenly, in Jesus, Pilate is confronted by a kingdom that “is not from here.” To find his way in Jesus’ kingdom, Pilate must soften and open. He must find his way to that place of gentleness and vulnerability to which Jesus called those who had ears to hear.

The kingdom Jesus embodied is not a kingdom most of us are eager to embrace. The cost of coming to life in the Jesus kingdom is dying to the Pilate kingdom.



**How do I find my way in the kingdom of this world while seeking to be open to that kingdom which “is not from here”?**

**How does the kingdom of this world feel different from the kingdom which “is not from here”?**



35. Christ on the Cross  
Diego Velazquez [1632]

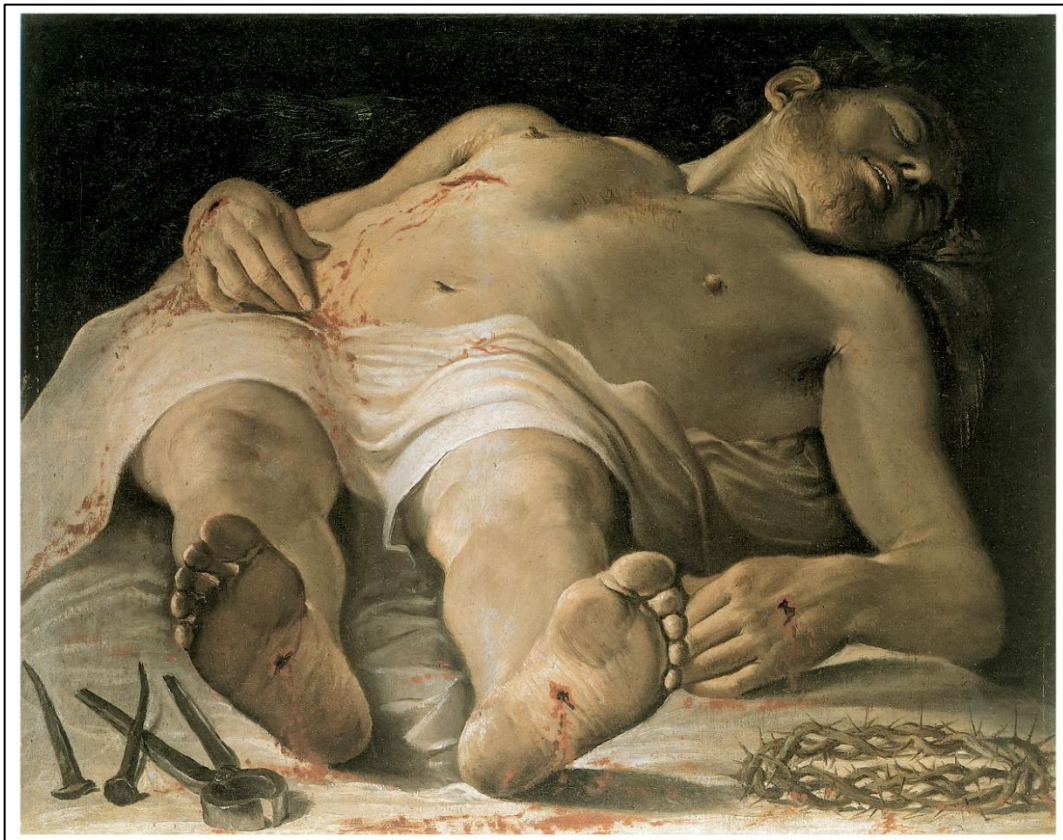
Scripture Text for  
Holy Saturday 3 April  
John 19:38-42

<sup>38</sup>After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.

<sup>39</sup>Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.

<sup>40</sup>They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

<sup>41</sup>Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. <sup>42</sup>And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.



36. The Dead Christ. Annibale Carracci. 1595

Pilate remains conflicted. Why would he give Joseph “permission” to “take away the body of Jesus”? He must have known of the dangerous rumours that something mysterious was going to happen after Jesus’ death. Surely, he knew that the body should be kept secure.

According to Matthew’s account, the chief priests and the Pharisees were so concerned about Jesus’ body that they came to Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead’, and the last deception would be worse than the first.” (Matthew 27:63, 64).

None of this would have made any sense to Pilate. It must have sounded like lunacy. But he needs to keep the peace and so, he accommodates the concerns of the religious officials. Pilate orders that the tomb be sealed and a guard placed at the entrance to ensure the safety of its contents.

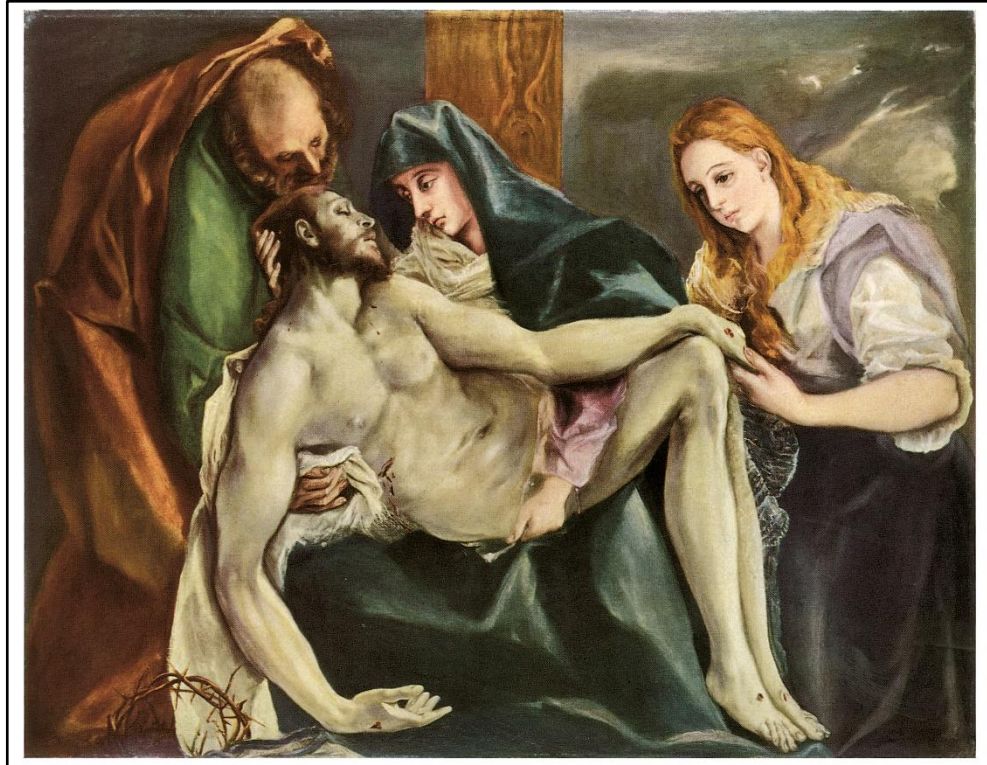
If we know the story, we know that the machinations of the religious authorities and the strategies of Pilate were inadequate to confine the power of the Life and light that Jesus embodied. The story does not end at the tomb. Death does not get to have the final word. Something entirely new and unexpected is coming.



**What are the strategies I use to try to keep life manageable?**

**How do I respond when the unexpected breaks through and something entirely new comes to birth?**



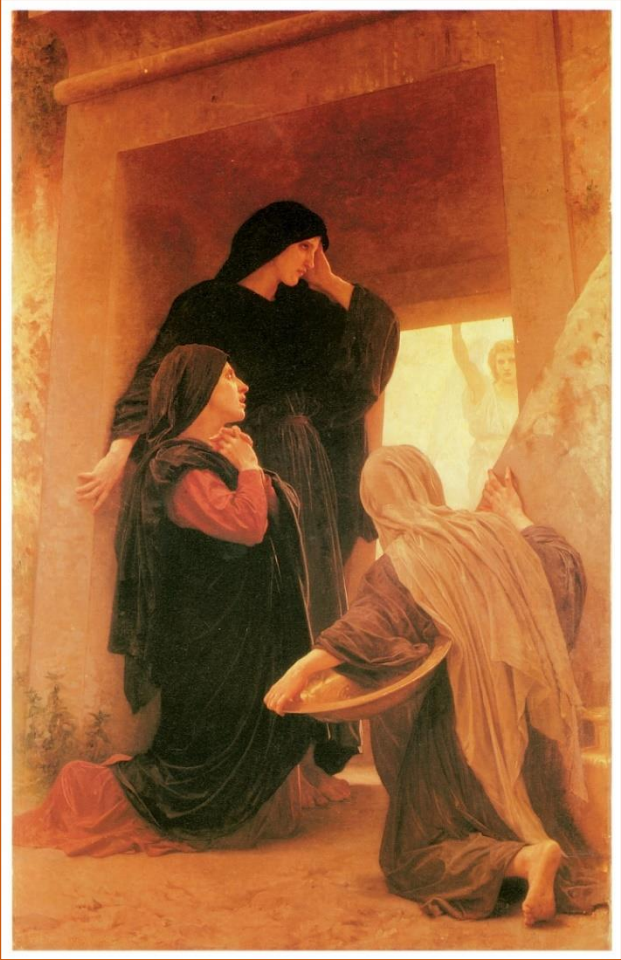


37. Above: Pieta. El Greco [1587-1597] Toledo, Spain.

38. Below: The Lamentation. Peter Paul Reubens [1577-1640] Flemish

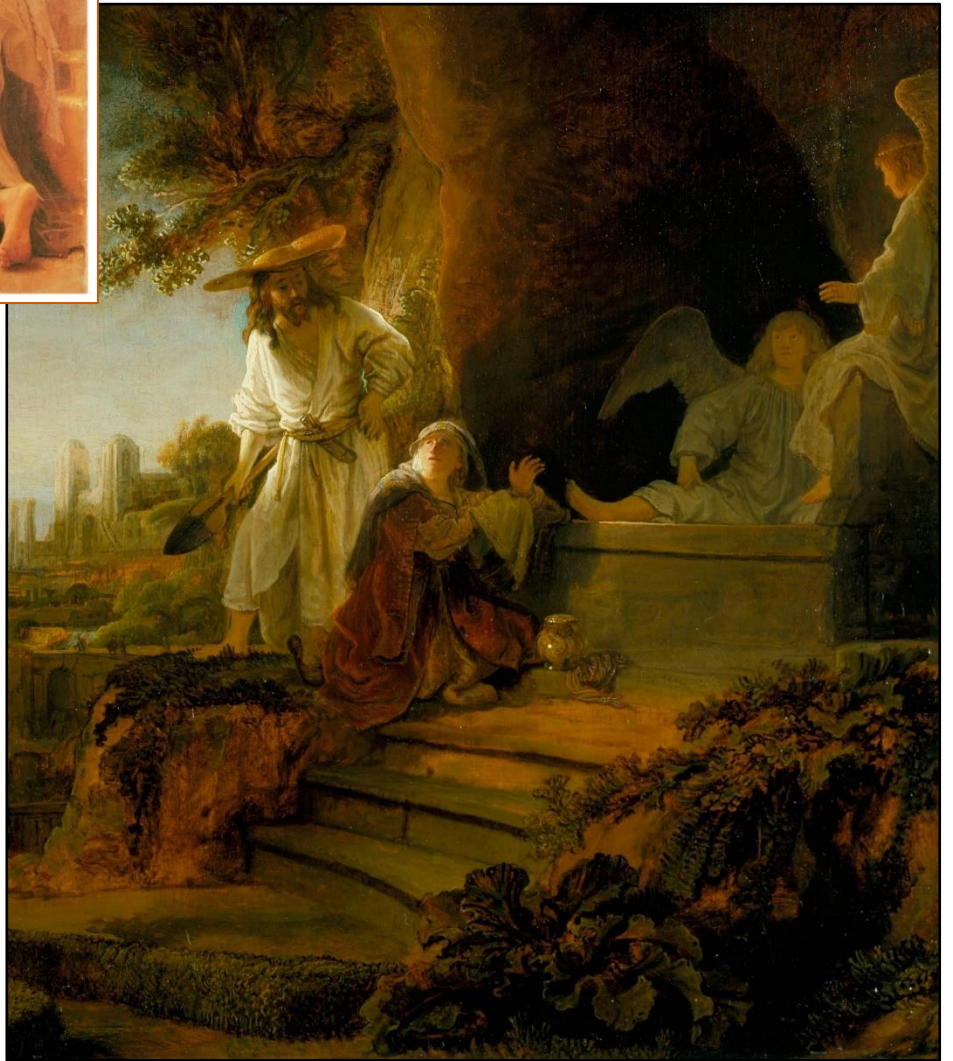






39. Left: The Three Marys at the Tomb.  
Adolphe William Bouguereau [1825-1905]

40. Below: Christ with St. Mary Magdalen in the  
Garden. Rembrandt [1638]



Scripture Text for  
Easter Sunday – 4 April  
**John 20:1-18**

<sup>1</sup>Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

<sup>2</sup>So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’

<sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

<sup>5</sup>He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

<sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

<sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

<sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes.

<sup>11</sup>But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

<sup>13</sup>They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’

<sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’

<sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher).

<sup>17</sup>Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’

<sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.



This passage is a lot like life. There is so much running around, so much chaos and confusion. No one really knows quite what is going on or what is really the right thing to do. There is a lot of sadness and “weeping”. There is mistaken identity, false accusation, and an aching sense of loss.

This is the world we inhabit. It is no wonder that at times this world feels an uncomfortable place to be.

But, it is in the midst of this chaos that a moment of clarity suddenly dawns. It comes from the utterance of a single word: “Mary”. Perhaps it was more the sound of the voice, or the look in the eye of the speaker, but that one word awakened in Mary an awareness of a deeper reality beneath the confusion on the surface.

It seems significant that it is in the speaking of her name that Mary suddenly comes to awareness. Her name conveyed a recognition of her true identity. The speaker knew her and, in the sound of Jesus’ voice and the presence of his spirit, she suddenly knows again who she truly is. She comes to herself and in that awakening she recognizes the power of love and light that transcends the grave.

For a moment, Mary attaches this awareness to the physical presence of Jesus. But, she will come to see that the truth of this encounter is an inner transformation the impact of which she will carry with her throughout her life. The presence she met in the garden lived in her heart. The resurrected life she saw in the Christ was the life she came to live in her journey through this world.

**What practices help me stay in touch with my true identity?**

**Where do I hear my true name uttered?**

**What supports my awareness of that presence that is the true meaning of my life?**



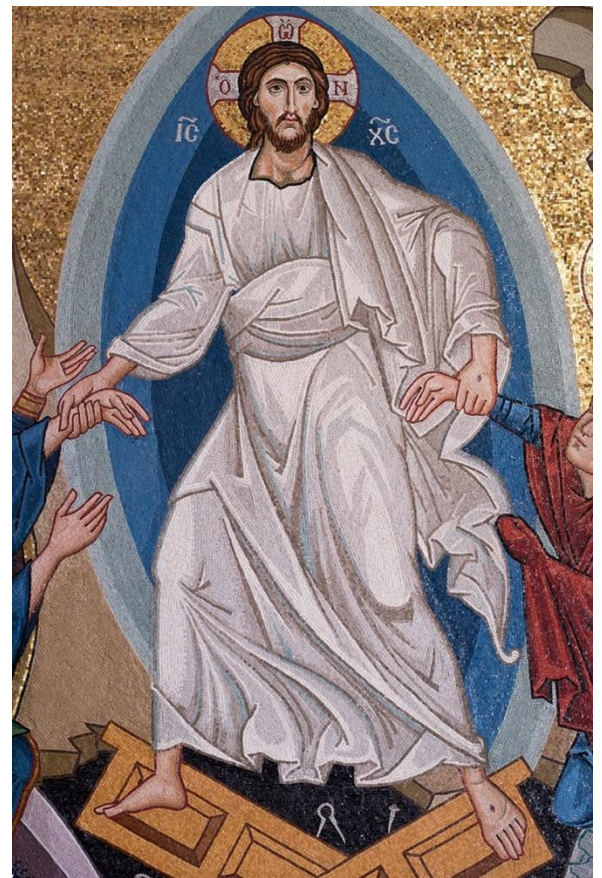


As we conclude this journey of “Living Lent”, I know that one of the answers to that last question is each of you. Your faithfulness, your openness, your desire to grow and learn all support “my awareness of that presence that is the true meaning of our lives.”

Thank you for walking with me through these days. Thank you for your faithfulness and desire to open to the gentle working of God’s Spirit.

God bless you and keep you, in the truth and beauty of Christ who is your true and radiant self,

*Christopher*



41. Above: Resurrection of Christ  
Raphael [1499-1502]  
42. Right: Resurrection Christ - Byzantine Mosaic



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