

The Third Day, Living the Resurrection – 6. The Passion of Christ

Mark 11:1-11

March 24, 2024

Pastor Bethany Nelson

We've spent the last five weeks hearing the stories of early disciples and learning about their encounters with the Risen Christ, with the hope that their stories of transformation might help us experience the Risen Christ in our life, too.

And so - we've learned about Mary Magdalene, who knew a Risen Jesus that fully healed and restored her hope. And Simon Peter who was freed from his shame and guilt, by Jesus' forgiveness. Then, we spent time with Thomas who found hope amid his community. And with the disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, we learned how Christ is with us on all of our journeys. Then last week, through the story of Paul, we saw one whose entire life was changed because of Christ's redeeming work.

This Lent, we have celebrated "mini Easters" every Sunday, as we've learned how the resurrection of Jesus changes, transforms, and redeems us. Today, we begin Holy Week — which is a sacred time in the Christian calendar, where we walk with Jesus through the final week of his life, all the way to the cross. And though we know how the story ends — that Easter is coming, and Christ will be Risen. We pause now, to solemnly walk with Christ through each of his final days. And as we do, we will pause each day, answering the question: What kind of Savior is Jesus?

It's traditionally believed that Jesus' public ministry - from his baptism to his crucifixion - was a period of three years: 156 weeks. Or, roughly 1000 days. The Gospels attempt to summarize this period for us, but they spend an incredible amount of time detailing this last, holy week. Each Gospel varies a bit, but on average, they spend about 45% of their writings focused on the accounts of Holy Week. These are important days, that tell us something critical about *who* Jesus is and what it means to follow him.

It all begins today, on Palm Sunday. Jesus arrives in Jerusalem just as the festival of Passover is set to begin. More than 200,000 visitors would come to Jerusalem for this celebration marking Israel's defining story of how God delivered God's people from slavery in Egypt.

Now, Jesus and his disciples enter Jerusalem, too. They are not only celebrating the way that God delivered and redeemed God's people in Egypt, but are telling us a new story of God's delivering and redeeming work. Now, through Jesus, for all people.

As the story begins, the Gospel's tell us that as Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, he sent two ahead, saying: *"Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'Its master needs it, and he will send it back right away.'" - Mark 11:2-3*

The disciples go, and the scene plays out precisely as Jesus said. Now in all your memories of Jesus going from town to town preaching and teaching — do you ever remember him borrowing a donkey? No, Jesus walks. And walks and walks. So why, today, does Jesus ask for a donkey - especially so close to town?

It's not because he was tired, or his sandals were rubbing his feet the wrong way. No, a donkey was a symbol of peace. No soldier would ride a donkey into battle. You would be immediately at

a disadvantage against strong, fast, and trained war horse. Instead, you ride a donkey when you are preparing for a peaceful ride.

The prophet Zechariah, some five hundred years before Christ, promised this: *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey”* — Zechariah 9:9

And everyone who saw Jesus that day, would remember these words of scripture. Here was Jesus, our Redeemer and King, entering the city in peace. As he entered, he was met with crowds of people: laying their clothes and spreading branches upon the road, declaring Christ as King. “Hosanna!” They shouted, which means, *God saves*, and it is as much a declaration as it is a hope-filled prayer. *“Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

Jesus is met by a crowd of people rejoicing, their hope and prayers comes fast: *Hosanna! God Saves!* The one they trusted to deliver them, had arrived.

But this parade was not the only parade that day. No, actually it was more of an alternative parade, one standing directly opposed to the parades of the Roman army. And they are not riding donkeys. Instead they come with strong horses, heavy armor, and all the inspired fear of an empire. *You might be here, celebrating God’s deliverance of your ancestors - but remember you is in control today.* They too, say they are coming to keep the peace: as the city is filled with visitors and celebrations, they stand ready with military force to subdue them. Their “peace” is kept through power and threats. They are not afraid to kill to keep their power, and have already shown this through the beheading of John the Baptist and others.

Jesus rides in contrast to all they represent. He has no soldiers, but women and fishermen around him. He brings peace to the city, not through threats, but through love. He enters on a donkey, not to subdue the crowds, but to bring them signs of God’s presence among them. You see, Palm Sunday is a protest against the empire, that declares with hope: *God, not Rome, is the one who saves!* Some historians call this the first nonviolent demonstration, that would later inspire many others - including Civil Rights leaders in our own country.

Rev Dr Martin Luther King once said: “The aftermath of violence is always bitterness; the aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community so that... a new love, and a new understanding, and a new relationship comes into being.”

Jesus showed us what it meant to create beloved community. He entered Jerusalem on a symbol of peace, hearing the people declare: Hosanna! God saves! But he knew what was to come. He knew the cries of the crowd would change. He knew that leaders would reject his call to love even their enemies. He knew his nonviolent demonstrations of love would be met with violence. But he also knew, that violence does not bring freedom, because only love can do that.

So what kind of Savior is Jesus? A Savior who comes in peace, and proclaims always, that God saves.

The next day, Jesus comes to the temple. Remember now, that this was *the* high holy time and the temple was filled with people. Imagine our sanctuaries filled on Christmas or Easter, if every Methodist travelled and gathered here. Part of worship included an animal sacrifice, as people atoned for their sins. And since many travelled far distances, it was reasonable to expect that people would acquire these animals in Jerusalem.

But here, in the middle of the temple, Jesus found people selling birds and animals at inflated and unfair prices. They were not offering a good, or doing a generous act of faith. They were taking advantage of people, and doing so for their own selfish gain.

Jesus is angry. Really angry. He sees this as an act of hypocrisy, selfishness, and a misuse of power. And if you know anything about what Jesus has taught - you can sense that this is not okay. And so, Mark's gospel tells us: "He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. He didn't allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.

And this seals his fate. Mark tells us: "The chief priests and legal experts heard this and tried to find a way to destroy him. They regarded him as dangerous because the whole crowd was enthralled at his teaching."

So what kind of Savior is Jesus? A Savior who comes with strength, refusing to allow injustices done in God's name.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Jesus continues to confront religious leaders, spend time his disciples, and teach. Jesus become more pointed in his words, and does little to disguise the ways he is disappointed in the religious leaders.

Now, let's remember: Jesus is a Jewish Rabbi and leader. He is criticizing some of his own, very likely people who had been classmates with him, or even mentors. I don't know about you, but it makes me *really* uneasy to think about standing up to colleagues or mentors — even if I think they've done wrong. This alone gives a clue of how important this is to Jesus. And I think he stands up to them - not only because disagrees, but also because he loves.

Even as Jesus disagrees with the leaders, he is not unkind or rude. He is, I think, always hoping and praying they will see God anew. That they might encounter a God who is loving, generous, and good.

Throughout lent, we've heard stories of disciples who have encountered the Risen Christ and been changed. And we've reflected on the ways that *our* encounters with Jesus have changed our lives — making us a people who are more loving, more generous, and more welcoming. Even as we know our work is not yet done.

But even here, *before* his death, Jesus is inviting others — even those who disagree with him and are plotting his death — to know and be transformed by God.

So what kind of Savior is Jesus? A Savior who commands us to love, and desires our whole lives be transformed.

On Thursday of the week, the day before Jesus will carry his cross and take his final breath — he gathers with his disciples for the Passover Seder. This is the traditional Jewish meal commemorating God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery. Jesus would have told the story of Exodus, as is custom at passover. And normally, this would be a celebratory meal. Friends and family would be glad to be together, they would recount the stories of God will acclamations of praise, and lots of food and drink.

But this time? Jesus takes a more serious tone. As they are eating, and telling the stories of God delivering God's people. Of how God used manna — bread — as a sign of God's faithfulness. How God used the blood of a lamb to protect and deliver God's people.

In the middle of this meal and story, now: *Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. I assure you that I won't drink wine again until that day when I drink it in a new way in God's kingdom."* — Mark 11:22-25

He has taken the story of his people, his faith, his God... and is revealing something new to them. Now, it is not manna or the blood around a doorframe that are signs of God's deliverance.

Now, it is Jesus: who is, who was, and who will be — God's Son, the Redeemer and Messiah. Sitting around this table: is the one who will betray him, one who will deny him, one who will doubt him, and others who will run and cower in fear. But to them, and to us, Christ offers a meal of grace and a promise that we are God's.

We call the accounts of this day MAUNDY THURSDAY. Maundy, is Latin for *mandate*. And we mark this day as the one when Jesus mandates, or commands, us to love. This is expressed in two ways. Once, through the meal of communion, and secondly, through an act of foot washing.

It would have been common practice for people to wash their feet upon entry at a home. Walking along dirt paths in sandals, means lots of dirty feet. And often, someone would help wash your feet. Usually a servant, probably lots of women or even children. But never, would the host, the King, be the one to wash.

As he often does, Jesus does not act as we expect. And on this night, he washes the feet of his disciples, reminding us that Jesus has come to serve, and to care for us in tender and personal ways.

After the meal, Jesus goes to Gethsemane to pray. He asks his disciples to keep watch, as he prays late into the night. He pleads with God, asks for God to make another way to spare him from suffering. And asks for strength for what is ahead. And in the middle of his prayers. Jesus is arrested.

So what kind of Savior is Jesus? A Savior who leads by serving, and who loves us so much, he will suffer and die.

At daybreak, the chief priests, elders, and legal experts devise a plan. They send Jesus to Pilate, who is the Roman Governor. A trial begins, but Pilate finds nothing to count him guilty - so sends him back to Jewish leaders who sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion.

Angry and embarrassed, the leaders and soldiers look to make an example of Jesus. You do not enter Jerusalem with a parade for a King. You do not tip tables in the temple, or call out leaders for their hypocrisy. You do not eat with sinners, heal on the sabbath, or preach another way... not without consequences.

Mark's Gospel tells us: "The soldiers led Jesus away... They dressed him up in a purple robe and twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on him... They spit on him and knelt before him. When they finished mocking him, they stripped him of the purple robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him out to crucify him."

This kind of sacrificial love changes lives. Author Brennan Manning, tells a story of being a recipient of such sacrificial love that transformed his life. He was born and named Richard Manning, and served during the Korean War. He served alongside a soldier who was named Ray Brennan. Their assignment was to advance from one line of bunkers and move forward into enemy territory.

One day, Richard was in a bunker with Ray. They were passing a chocolate bar back and forth. Ray took the last bite when a grenade lobbed by an undetected North Korean landed in the center of the bunker. Ray was the first to spot it. He tossed aside the wrapper of the chocolate bar and fell on the grenade. It detonated immediately, his body absorbing the blast.

Richard said, "I was completely unharmed and untouched. Ray looked up at me. He winked, rolled over, and died." When Richard Manning came home, he kept thinking about how he could reconcile that he was alive because of Ray's sacrifice, and legally changed his name to Brennan Manning in honor of his friend. This way, anytime someone said his name, Manning would remember he was alive because of an act of sacrificial love.

I think this is how we are meant to look at the cross, as a sign of Christ's great and redeeming love. The whole story of Jesus: from his birth, his teachings, and even his death are all a sign of God's redeeming and saving love for us. Because of Jesus: we are given life.

Or as the words of the beloved hymn declares, *Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living, just because Christ lives.*

This is the final week of Jesus' life. The final week in the life of our Savior. It begins with the crowd shouting Hosanna: God saves! And ends with their shouting: Crucify him. But it is not the end of the story.

And through it all, even amid our weakness and sin, Jesus is faithfully calling us to love, to stand up against injustice, to lead by serving, and to know that he will give his life, again and again so that we might live.

Beloveds, like the first followers of Jesus, whose stories we have studied this season - we don't always know where the path of discipleship will lead us, nor do we know where we will meet and encounter Christ. But of this, we are sure: God will meet us where we are, but will not *leave* us as we are.

What kind of Savior is Jesus? A Savior who loves us so much, he gave his life for the many.

I invite you now, into a time of reflection and prayer, to consider the ways that this this week, this cross, are signs of God's limitless love for you. How is Christ inviting you to follow, to love, and to serve?

The Cross is Carried into the Sanctuary

Prayer at the Cross

Dear Jesus, our Savior and Lord, enter our hearts this day. Reveal to us the truth of who you are: one who loves, one who dies, one who redeems, and one who calls us to live. May the story of your final days challenge, encourage, and guide us as we seek to follow you. We commit ourselves to you, wholly and fully, so that your sacrificial and redeeming love may be made known in our lives and world. Hear our cries of Hosanna as the prayer of our hearts: Jesus, save us by your love. Amen.

Blessing

As you go forth into this most holy of weeks, may Jesus Christ, our Savior be your strength now and always. Go now, in peace, wrapped in Christ's love. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of March 24, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Loving God, speak to me, for I am listening. Through your Holy Word, convict, challenge, and comfort me. Open my mind to new insights and fresh perspectives. Open my heart to the moving of your Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Note: throughout our Holy Week journey, this GPS will share a devotional offered by the United Methodist Church. Each day is written by a different UMC pastor. Journey now with us toward a beautiful Easter morning.

Monday, March 25

Scripture: Mark 11:15-19

They came into Jerusalem. After entering the temple, he threw out those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. He didn't allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He taught them, "Hasn't it been written, *My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?* But you've turned it into a hideout for crooks." The chief priests and legal experts heard this and tried to find a way to destroy him. They regarded him as dangerous because the whole crowd was enthralled at his teaching. When it was evening, Jesus and his disciples went outside the city.

Devotion

Frequently, Jesus intentionally went out of his way to truly see those who were often invisible to the establishment. He saw people, like the Samaritan woman and the little child he invited us to be like. Christ made a point of welcoming those whose presence in the community was forbidden. The bleeding woman and the leper were among those he allowed to touch his divine essence.

In the Temple that day, Jesus again saw exclusion. A place of worship, holiness, and community-building had become "a hideout for crooks," because only some were welcomed while others were kept out - penalized for being foreigners, in transit, and poor.

Jesus reminds them, and us, that God calls us to include not exclude. He quotes scripture that says God's house is to be a house of prayer for *all*.

Jesus's intervention disrupted their order. His good news exposed the wickedness of their hearts and the sin hidden in their practices that kept people out.

Baptismal grace welcomes all to the waters. It demands that we examine our values and stop any action that kills the soul. We are not the ones with authority to determine who is ritually clean and worthy; that is defined by the eternal Love, the same One who turned over the tables. The One who sees all of us and declares: "It is very good!"

One has to wonder if the Church is still being a prophetic voice. Are we watching and claiming the Church as a house of prayer for all people? Because God certainly is!

Reflection

Who am I excluding today?

Why has acceptance become the exception and not the norm?

Am I willing to disrupt the status quo that perpetuates systemic oppression, even if that leads me to question my own value systems and traditions?

For whom is the Gospel good news?

Prayer

Loving Creator, as I welcome you into my life, I invite the presence of the Holy Spirit to reveal those spaces in my life where I need to be in solidarity with those who have been oppressed and marginalized. As you call me to repent, give me strength and humility to genuinely examine where, in the depths of my soul, my words and actions remain far from you. Show me your mercy, so I can stand before you and be safe. Grant me the courage, so I won't feel weak when you invite me to be a prophetic voice that denounces the wickedness of the powers to be but announce your Shalom and the hopes of a new and just system for all. In the name of the One who taught us how to love, Jesus the Christ... So be it!

Pastor VJ Cruz-Báez serves La Plaza United Methodist Church in Los Angeles, California.

Tuesday, March 26

Scripture: Mark 11:12-14; 20-25

The next day, after leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. From far away, he noticed a fig tree in leaf, so he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing except leaves, since it wasn't the season for figs. So he said to it, "No one will ever again eat your fruit!" His disciples heard this...

Early in the morning, as Jesus and his disciples were walking along, they saw the fig tree withered from the root up. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look how the fig tree you cursed has dried up."

Jesus responded to them, "Have faith in God! I assure you that whoever says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea'—and doesn't waver but believes that what is said will really happen—it will happen. Therefore I say to you, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you will receive it, and it will be so for you. And whenever you stand up to pray, if you have something against anyone, forgive so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your wrongdoings."

Devotion

Jesus' cursing the fig tree is a strange event which elicits questions about what Jesus intended to communicate after he entered Jerusalem. Mark likes to write using a sandwich approach to convey the passage of time, changing locations and overall meaning. Jesus saw the fig tree and cursed it for not bearing fruit. Then he went to the Temple and drove out the money changers. The following morning, Peter pointed to the fig tree again and noticed it had withered.

The barren and withered fig tree and the commerce-oriented Temple are meant to inform each other. In each instance, they were not living their purpose. Despite displaying lots of leaves, this

fig tree bore no fruit. And despite all the activity going on in the Temple courts, worship and prayer were not the primary focus. Jesus used both instances to teach how important it is to live on purpose.

Living on purpose strengthens faith and gives power to our words because they are linked to God's purpose for us. The lesson of the fig tree raises the question for us: What does it mean to live on purpose today?

Reflection

Living on purpose comes from following God's inner compass.

Prayer

Purposeful God, we seek to be true to your calling for us today. We want to be about what matters in the world. Guide us and give us courage to be the people you call us to be, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Rod Miller serves [Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church](#) in Baltimore, Maryland.

Wednesday, March 27

Scripture: Mark 14:3-9

Jesus was at Bethany visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. During dinner, a woman came in with a vase made of alabaster and containing very expensive perfume of pure nard. She broke open the vase and poured the perfume on his head. Some grew angry. They said to each other, "Why waste the perfume? This perfume could have been sold for almost a year's pay and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.

Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. You always have the poor with you; and whenever you want, you can do something good for them. But you won't always have me. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body ahead of time for burial. I tell you the truth that, wherever in the whole world the good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her."

Devotion

All four gospels speak of a woman anointing Jesus. Mark simply calls her "a woman" who owned a jar filled with costly perfume while Luke calls her a "sinner," implying sexual immorality. Was she someone of means who could easily afford to waste such a valuable substance with one extravagant gesture, or was she a woman whose financial situation was precarious but who nevertheless prodigally anointed Jesus? Either way, when the disciples scolded her, Jesus proclaimed that her act of generosity would be remembered whenever the gospel was proclaimed.

Sarah Ryan and Mary Bosanquet were early Methodist preachers who were very different from one another. Sarah was an uneducated servant who was "married" three times without being divorced; Mary was well-read and belonged to a well-to-do family. From the Methodists, Sarah discovered that Christ's grace was freely offered to her, too, and recognizing God at work in her, John Wesley appointed her housekeeper of the New Room.

Later she mentored the younger Mary Bosanquet, and they formed a household with other Methodist women to nurture and educate the poorest children of their area. Similar to the disciples, Mary's family felt her inheritance wasn't being used wisely, but with Sarah's help, Mary continued to pour out her resources freely on others, reflecting in her journal: "*I would be given up, both soul and body, to serve the members of Christ. My firm resolution was to be wholly given up to the church, in any way that he pleased.*"

Reflection

What treasure do I possess that I want to recklessly share with Christ and with others?
How can I honor Jesus with that which means most to me, despite objections or misunderstandings?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Lamb of God, you freely poured out your precious life for us after first joyfully accepting the extravagant offering of the woman who anointed you with expensive nard. Fill us with your Holy Spirit of generosity so that we, too, may give without counting the cost, being motivated by nothing but love of you and of neighbor. May it be so! Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Donna Fowler-Marchant is an elder in the North Carolina Conference currently serving a circuit just outside London in the Methodist Church in Britain.

Thursday, March 28

Scripture: Mark 14:66-72

Meanwhile, Peter was below in the courtyard. A woman, one of the high priest's servants, approached and saw Peter warming himself by the fire. She stared at him and said, "You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus."

But he denied it, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand what you're saying." And he went outside into the outer courtyard. A rooster crowed. The female servant saw him and began a second time to say to those standing around, "This man is one of them." But he denied it again. A short time later, those standing around again said to Peter, "You must be one of them, because you are also a Galilean."

But he cursed and swore, "I don't know this man you're talking about." At that very moment, a rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered what Jesus told him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down, sobbing.

Devotion

When we talk about Peter's denial of Jesus, the question that often comes up is "Why did Peter deny Jesus?" The simplest answer always seems to be that Peter was merely fulfilling the prediction that Jesus had pronounced over him at the last supper. Or, to say that Peter lacked faith. Though Peter was an apostle, we must remember that he was human and had human emotions such as fear. Let's also remember that Peter was dealing with the impending death of his friend and mentor, so he was also dealing with anger and grief. It might be easy to be dismissive of Peter's denial but we must remember that we might well react in the same way if we are honest with ourselves.

And what about Jesus? Would He be angry at Peter's denial? Think about this: When Jesus made this prediction, Peter was sitting at the table for the Passover meal and he fed Peter anyway. Perhaps it was this example of grace and mercy that kept Peter going, allowing him to continue the work he had been tasked with even after Jesus died on the cross. Peter's story does not end at the denial. Peter went on to be forgiven and to be the very foundation of the church. Likewise, our stories do not have to end when we deny Christ through our living. What joy, this wondrous mercy and grace brought! Thanks be to God.

Reflection

How can God redeem my denials?

Prayer

Good and loving God, thank you for stories like Peter's that remind us so much of ourselves. Give us strength to follow you, and overcome any fear. Holy Spirit, help us to follow the examples of both Peter and Jesus, in staying the course and in showing others the grace that we want shown to us. Amen.

The Rev. Jonathan Tullos is the pastor of [Salem UMC](#) and [Pleasant Hill UMC](#), in Lucedale, Mississippi.

Friday, March 29

Scripture: Mark 15:33-41

From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani*," which means, "My God, my God, why have you left me?"

After hearing him, some standing there said, "Look! He's calling Elijah!" Someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, and put it on a pole. He offered it to Jesus to drink, saying, "Let's see if Elijah will come to take him down." But Jesus let out a loud cry and died.

The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who stood facing Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "This man was certainly God's Son."

Some women were watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James (the younger one) and Joses, and Salome. When Jesus was in Galilee, these women had followed and supported him, along with many other women who had come to Jerusalem with him.

Devotion

A dimmed light in theater cues the ending of a scene. The darkness signals the curtain to close. A part of the story has ended. If the protagonist is dead at this end, then we know it is a tragedy. Jesus' death is a disappointment for those who hoped that he would rise as a new political leader to overthrow the oppressive colonial power of Rome and rebuild the nation that would protect them. For those who executed his death sentence, it is a clear victory against a rebel. This seemingly failed attempt closes the curtain on the story, at least for many human eyes.

From the wider viewpoint of faith, however, it is not. It signals something totally otherwise. At the moment of Jesus' loud cry and his last breath, there the curtain in the temple is torn in two. This is the curtain that the God-fearing and Law-abiding Jewish people had put up to keep some out. It is torn "from top to bottom" (v. 38) because God breaks the division between the holy and the ordinary and erases the line between what is acceptable and unacceptable.

The death of Jesus is an opening. God opens the closed curtains that we so often put up and walks into our lives. God is not only within our reach, but also reaches out to all humanity with the redeeming grace of the cross. God treasures our ordinary life as a part of eternity. God turns the ends of human tragedy into new beginnings because God's redemptive story always eradicates any human-made divisive binaries we put up on earth. God follows neither the Roman Empire nor the Jewish Law. God builds a new kin-dom on earth according to God's all-embracing love. God is... and God does.

Reflection

"New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings." by Lao Tzu.

Prayer

O God, help us feel your presence in our daily lives, in our pain and our despair. Open our eyes to see your new beginnings in our endings. Guide us to live as a part of your redemptive story. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Hannah Ka is Pastor of Discipleship at [First United Methodist Church](#) in San Diego, California.

Saturday, March 30**Scripture: Mark 15:47-16:3**

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James saw where he was buried. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus' dead body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. They were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?"

Devotion

There is a tradition in African American communities called tarrying. It is when friends, family, and church family gather around the body of someone who is sick and sometimes near death—and the community begins to sing and sometimes pray with the hopes that the one who is infirmed might be restored or received with open arms by a loving and redeeming God. Can you imagine Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome watching from afar as Jesus died on the cross and not really knowing what to do, not knowing if they could cry out, not knowing what song to sing to bring him comfort at his most painful hour?

Tarrying is not simply about bringing comfort to the one who is sick or dying; it is a willingness to enter into the pain of the community. These women dealt with their grief together. They probably wiped each other's tears and held each other's hands. They knew they could not change the fact that their Lord had died but, they could commit to not suffering alone. You see, many of us are suffering in silence because we are too afraid to be vulnerable, too afraid to let our images slip. But maybe in the sharing of our pain, we might find others who are grieving too, others who are singing our songs, and praying our prayers. And maybe as we find our collective voice of pain, we can discover our collective hope of resurrection.

Reflection

Sawubona is the Zulu greeting that means "I see you." How are you seeing, acknowledging, and responding to the grief around you?

Prayer

God in Heaven, tarry with us as we sing songs of lament, cry tears of grief and pain, and pray with expectation that weeping may endure for a night, but joy does come in the morning. Remind us, O God that Sunday is coming. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Tori C. Butler is Lead Pastor of Good Hope Union UMC in Silver Spring, Maryland.