

Welcome

“Immediately [Bartimaeus] regained his sight and followed [Jesus] on the way.” (Mark 10:52)

The way: It’s not just a road, a direction, a trail, or a path. It’s God’s inbreaking into the world, first realized in Eden (Gen. 3:24) and proclaimed with hope across the generations (Isa. 35:8; Jer. 50:5; Mal. 3:1; Mark 1:3). It was “on the way” that God found Hagar in the wilderness (Gen. 16:7); it was “along the way” that God led the Israelites in fire and cloud (Exod. 13:21); it is “in the way” that God instructs God’s people in righteousness (Ps. 25:8). Jesus declared that he himself is “the way” (John 14:6), a name that the early church later adopted (Acts 9:1-2). On the way, we journey in faith and discipleship alongside all the people of God—including the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. It may not always be easy, comfortable, or safe, but we are never alone.

Throughout this season of Lent, we invite you to use these daily devotions for Ash Wednesday through Resurrection of Our Lord to follow Jesus in the Gospel of Mark “on the way” to Jerusalem, to Gethsemane, to Golgotha, to the tomb, and to the holy surprise of the resurrection. The writers bring their unique voices and pastoral wisdom to this journey, and they offer the voices of other witnesses in the quotations featured in the “To ponder” section.

May God comfort you, challenge you, bless you, and keep you on the way.



February 10 / Ash Wednesday

Mark 10:32-34

[Jesus and his disciples] were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. . . . He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, “Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over . . . they will mock him and spit upon him and flog him and kill him, and after three days he will rise again.”

To ponder

Then I will speak upon the ashes.—Sojourner Truth

Beyond ashes

In 1861, Sojourner Truth was scheduled to speak at the Steuben County Courthouse in Angola, Indiana, but rebel sympathizers threatened to burn the building if she attempted to speak in it. Fearless and frank, Truth responded with those famous words. Just like Jesus, Sojourner Truth had an unpopular message to proclaim. Yet both spoke their ashy truths.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a season marked by self-denial, fasting, prayer, repentance, and confession. Speaking of confession, I have one. Ever since I joined the ELCA, I've experienced a deep disconnect with the practice of Lent.

I remember witnessing my first hallelujah “burial.” The mere thought of withholding praise from the Creator of the universe seemed a presumptuous response to God’s mercies made “new every morning” (Lam. 3:23)—even in Lent.

Here’s my ashy truth. Instead of hallelujahs, let’s bury the likes of hunger, misogyny, and broken treaties with Indigenous peoples. Let’s bury some “-isms” and phobias too—ageism, ableism, racism, queerphobia, Islamophobia, negrophobia.

Let’s reimagine Lent as grounded in deep contemplation and renewed life. Our world needs more hallelujahs!

Prayer

God, teach me to walk faithfully in your wisdom as I grow in spiritual maturity. In your name I pray. Amen.



February 14 / Lent 1

Mark 11:1-3

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 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. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this: ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’”

To ponder

Transformation is often more about unlearning than learning, which is why religious traditions call it “conversion” or “repentance.”—Richard Rohr, “Awakening to Our True Self”

Something new

Jesus enters Jerusalem as the Anointed One—but he is not like other leaders. He isn't a dominating ruler of Rome. He doesn't favor the wealthy and powerful. He doesn't forget about the poor. Jesus is doing something entirely new.

The unriden colt does not know that it is an important symbol of the new thing Jesus is doing. It has not been broken into some other leader's way of walking or pacing. It doesn't have to unlearn old patterns. It is ready to be formed by the reign of Jesus and to carry him humbly up to the city.

At first, Jesus' disciples resisted his new way and were confused by it. As they slowly unlearned their old ways, they learned the new way of following Jesus as humility and servanthood, trusting God even when following Jesus was hard.

Sometimes, the hardest thing to unlearn is that we do not have to get it right all the time. Thanks be to God, we are always on the way with Jesus. We are constantly unlearning old ways and learning the new ways of Jesus and the reign of God he inaugurated through his life, death, and resurrection.

Prayer

Lord of new things, help me let go of my old ways that do not conform to the humble, loving way of Jesus. Amen.



February 15

Mark 11:7-11

Then [the two disciples] brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple . . . as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

To ponder

At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed.—Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”

How ironic

Jesus has been teaching that the way of God’s reign is not the way of domination and violence. God’s way is the way of peace, love, and humility. The triumph of Jesus is not accomplished by killing but by dying. This is the great irony of the good news.

Many rulers had entered Jerusalem in triumph with military parades and weapons. Everything they did showed their power and elevated them above everyone else. But Jesus enters Jerusalem on a colt. Instead of towering over the people, he rides at eye level with everyone else. Everything about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection embodies this ironic humility so he can reveal God’s true power and mercy to us and to all the world. Jesus embodies the way of the kingdom with scorching irony.

Prayer

God of love, help me encounter all people at eye level in the spirit of Jesus, the lowly one. Amen.



March 20

Mark 15:21-24

[The soldiers] compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

To ponder

Even though we are all likely to view an ending as the conclusion of the situation it terminates, it is also—and it is too bad that we don't have better ways of reminding ourselves

of this—the initiation of a process. We have it backward. Endings are the first, not the last, act of the play.
—William Bridges, *Transitions*

The beginning of the end

This is the only snippet we receive in Mark's gospel about Simon of Cyrene. Does he hear of the empty tomb once his aches and pains subside? And what does he make of his part of the story? Is carrying the cross an ending or a beginning for Simon?

All too often, we write off the possibility of a new chapter as we suffer grief and loss. But our stories turn and return. What feels like an ending in one moment is revealed to be a new beginning in the next moment.

Jesus' journey holds beginning and ending together. The crucifixion and the division of his earthly belongings signal the last act of the play. Yet we already know that this moment is actually the beginning of a new chapter, the forerunner to resurrection life that never ends. The end becomes the beginning in grace and hope.

Prayer

God of new life, as we witness the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, hold us in your love while we grieve the endings in our lives, and rejoice with us when we witness the grace of new beginnings. Amen.



March 21 / Sunday of the Passion

Mark 15:25-32

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified [Jesus]. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two rebels, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves. . . . Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

To ponder

Remember, though, what defies comprehension isn't the mysteries of the world, but the cruelties that humans are capable of inflicting upon each other.—Elif Shafak, *There Are Rivers in the Sky*

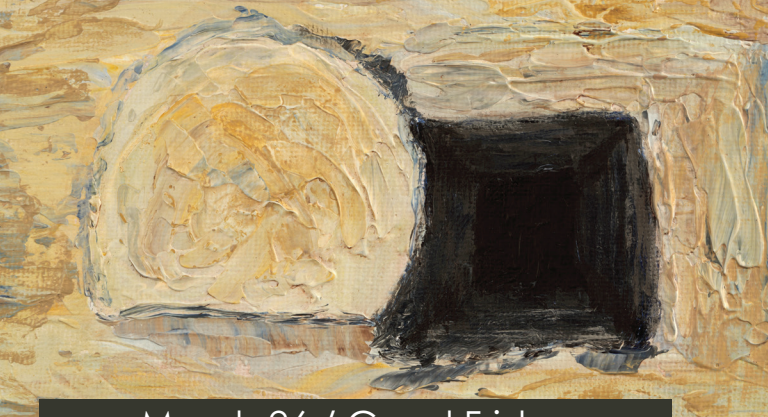
The mystery of cruelties

Today we enter into the holiest week on our Christian calendar. But any stranger watching the horrific way Jesus is treated would wonder why we would call this Holy Week. After Jesus' entrance into the capital with crowds shouting his praise, all the world comes crashing down on him. Can you hear the narrator's voice catch announcing Jesus was crucified? Then we hear how a title of honor, king, was twisted into a tightfisted taunt with voices on all sides degrading Jesus. The cruelty of humanity is on open display.

And yet . . . we also see the extent of what God was willing to suffer so that we might know that there are no limits to God's love. The mystery of cruelty is matched and then surpassed by the mystery of a God who, in Christ, makes the suffering of the world God's own.

Prayer

Holy God, may I see that the violence Jesus suffers is tolerated or even perpetrated from hearts very much like my own. Help me to remember that I am your own and to embody a love like yours. Amen.



March 26 / Good Friday

Mark 15:46-47

Then Joseph bought a linen cloth and, taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body was laid.

To ponder

Insist on going to the cremation, insist on going to the burial. Insist on being involved, even if it is just brushing your mother's hair as she lies in her casket. Insist on applying her favorite shade of lipstick, the one she wouldn't dream of going to the grave without. Insist on cutting a small lock of her hair to

place in a locket or a ring. Do not be afraid. These are human acts, acts of bravery and love in the face of death and loss.

—Caitlin Doughty, *From Here to Eternity*

Burying the beloved one

My wife Lori opened the bottle and took her mother Shirley's cold hand in her own. She lovingly painted pink nail polish on each fingernail as she had done when those hands were still warm. She wanted to commend Shirley into God's hands with the same beauty as she had in her life. Lori did this as a gift to the mother who had raised her; she did so knowing that intimacy with her mother's death would serve her well as she moved through her grief.

Each of us must find ways to both embrace and let go of our loved ones when time demands it. Joseph wrapped Jesus in linen. Two women named Mary witnessed his mercy and honored Jesus' life as his body was laid to rest. We, too, honor Jesus in his hour of death today. We watch and wait as witnesses.

Prayer

Lord who accompanies us in life and death, give us courage to face death and tenderly entrust all those whom you love into your hands. Amen.