

# HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

2026

*“O Sacred, Wondrous Love”*



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# THE HOLY SEASON: LENT / EASTER

In earlier days Lent was a time of preparation of candidates for baptism on Easter Sunday. During the season of Lent these candidates prepared for this initiation into Christian life. For us, Lent is not only a time of preparation; it is also a time of prayer, repentance, sacrifice, soul-searching, self-denial, and service. Sundays, which are days for commemorating the Resurrection, are omitted in counting the forty days of reflection and repentance. The color purple is used during this time to symbolize repentance and solemnity. The forty weekdays in the season of Lent symbolize the forty-day fasts of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Lent's focus is for Christians to imitate Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for forty days. The sacred season of Lent concludes with Holy Week. Holy Week is a time of reflection upon the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Holy Week leads into the joyous and glorious season of Easter.

These Holy Week devotionals, written by different generations of our church family members, are reflections of this year's theme, "*O Sacred, Wondrous Love*". There are two devotionals for each day – one for morning and one for evening. You will find it helpful to read the daily Bible readings included in this book which trace the events of Jesus' last week on earth.

We pray that you will find inspiration, encouragement, and renewal not only through the reading of these devotionals and daily Bible readings, but also by participating in our worship services this week. Let this devotional guide be part of your daily personal or family worship as you immerse yourself in God's Word.

Thanks to those of you who have received this devotional book as a gift from our church family. Thanks to those who compiled, edited, and proofed this devotional book. Thanks to all of you devotional writers for allowing God to use you to challenge and inspire us. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift of Jesus...His Son...the Risen Christ!



## CHURCH STAFF

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# HOLY WEEK SERVICES

## SUNDAY, MARCH 29: PALM SUNDAY

- 10:45 a.m.** We remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and into our lives. The children's processional will remind us of that day when the shouts of "Hosanna" rang through the streets. Join us for worship in our sanctuary or online by going to [www.ferncreekbaptist.org](http://www.ferncreekbaptist.org) and clicking the red Worship Livestream button.
- 7:00 p.m.** The Lenten Reflections will be led by readers and musicians who will present musical offerings that will focus on this season's theme, "O Sacred, Wondrous Love". The service will be livestreamed.

## THURSDAY, APRIL 2: MAUNDY THURSDAY

- 7:00 p.m.** The Youth Choir and Deacons will lead in "Remember His Love". We will partake in the Lord's Supper as we remember Christ's work on the cross and His salvation plan for us. We are reminded to share His love with others. The service will be livestreamed.

## FRIDAY, APRIL 3: GOOD FRIDAY

- 7:00 p.m.** The Adult Choir and Narrators will present "O Sacred, Wondrous Love", a Tenebrae Service which follows the tradition which began in the eighth century of the early church. In an atmosphere of darkness with scripture, music, and candles, we will remember Jesus' suffering and death of the cross. The service will be livestreamed.

## SUNDAY, APRIL 5: EASTER CELEBRATION

- 9:00 a.m.** We celebrate the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ! God's Word will be spoken through proclamation and music mainly from our church staff.
- 10:45 a.m.** We continue the celebration of Christ's resurrection as God's Word is spoken through proclamation and music by the Adult Choir. Come and fill His house as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection! This service will be livestreamed.



# DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These Bible readings correspond with events during the last week of Jesus' life on earth.

Sunday, March 29	Matthew 21:1-11 Mark 11:1-11 Luke 19:29-44 John 12:12-19
Monday, March 30	Matthew 21:12-20 Mark 11:12-19 Luke 19:45-46
Tuesday, March 31	Matthew 21:21 - 23:39 Mark 11:27 - 12:44 Luke 20:1 - 21:4 John 12:20-50
Wednesday, April 1	Matthew 24:1 - 26:16 Mark 13:1 - 14:11 Luke 21:5 - 22:6
Thursday, April 2	Matthew 26:17-56 Mark 14:12-52 Luke 22:7-53 John 13:1 - 18:13
Friday, April 3	Matthew 26:57 - 27:61 Mark 14:53 - 15:47 Luke 22:54 - 23:55 John 18:14 - 19:42
Saturday, April 4	Matthew 27:62-65 Luke 23:56
Sunday, April 5	Matthew 28:1-15 Mark 16:1-13 Luke 24:1-49 John 20:1-25



Palm Sunday Morning, March 29, 2026

## MEDITATE

*I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. Psalm 145:5*

This year's Holy Week Devotional Book theme is "O Sacred, Wondrous Love."

Most of the devotionals will be about the last days of Christ and the resurrection.

The Bible verses for today center around Christ's entry into *Jerusalem*.

### **John 12:12-15**

*The next day, the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,*

*"Hosanna!"*

*"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

*"Blessed is the King of Israel!"*

*Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written,*

*"Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."*

The crowds were full of love and enthusiasm about Christ's arrival. That love did not compare to the love He was going to pour out for them.

### **Romans 5:8**

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

What greater love can there be?

During this Holy Week, meditate on God's wondrous works and wondrous love. Is it sacred to you or do you take it for granted?

I leave this for you to consider.

### **I Corinthians 13:13**

*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

### **I Corinthians 14:1**

*Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.*

The Bible foretold of Christ's birth and death. It foretells His return. Are you ready?

Glenda Coddington



## PALM SUNDAY

As you are reading this, it is probably the evening of Palm Sunday. As we celebrate this Holy Week, evident all week will be the Sacred, Wonderous Love of our Savior, Jesus Christ! This morning in worship, we commemorated the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. We waved palm branches just as Jesus' followers did on that day. In ancient Jewish culture, palm branches were a widely recognized symbol of victory, triumph, and glory. Jesus' followers were declaring their King...but the victory was really not yet won.

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9 NIV*

Jesus could have come then as a conqueror, but that was not God's plan. From the foundations of the world, Jesus was anointed to be a Savior, the sacrificial Lamb of God. Meek and lowly, the events of the week to come demonstrated His amazing, His wondrous love for us. When He rode into town, He knew the events that were to transpire. He knew He would be betrayed, denied, mocked, scourged with a whip, nailed to a cross, and suffer a horrible death...all showing the ultimate love for us that only God could possess...**in order to save us.**

*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:5 KJV*

Jesus also knew He would rise again on the third day.

*But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. Romans 4:24-25*

So let us rejoice! Let us celebrate! Jesus is alive today!

Phil Shewmaker



Monday Morning, March 30, 2026

## TEMPLES

*When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be a house of prayer"; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" Luke 19:45-46 NIV2011*

When I think about this scripture, I can see Jesus entering the Temple expecting it to be a house of prayer but found it as a den of robbers by His own creation.

What is the sacred Temple?

Isaiah 56:7(paraphrasing) states the Temple was in Jerusalem and was designated as a center for worship and communion. God's dwelling place. A devoted place where God meets with His people. A place to seek God and His presence. A place of prayer for ALL nations.

What is our bodily temple?

*"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies."* I Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV2011

When I compare the sacred Temple and my bodily temple, my body was once a haven for destructive tendencies. When Jesus entered my sacred space, He transformed so many aspects of my being and continues to refine me today.

Think about when you first surrendered your life to Christ – imagine Him walking into your sacred sanctuary. What divine transformations did He initiate? What areas of your life did He redeem and continues to perfect today?

Our bodily temple should be a place where the Holy Spirit dwells; it should offer love, hope, peace, prayer, self-control, and numerous virtues embodied by Jesus Christ.

As we reflect this week on the Sacred and Wondrous Love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ may our temples be purified and increasingly Christ-like.

Michele Crider



## THE JUST LOVE OF JESUS

During this Holy Week we reflect on how Jesus shows us His *“O Sacred, Wondrous Love.”* The never-ending love of Christ is something that will always be with us, no matter what happens throughout our lives. While we typically think of God’s love that is always with us as being gentle and comforting, we often forget that His love can be shown to us in intense ways as well. Luke 19:45-46 talks about how people used the temple as a place to buy and sell goods, which was not what the space was supposed to be used for. Since people were using the house of the Lord to conduct business that was not honoring Him, He had to force them out of the temple. Verse 46 shows that Jesus said to them, *“My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.”* These words from Jesus show us that using His house for our own personal gain is dishonoring to Him.

As we see through the scriptures of today’s Bible readings, it is evident that Jesus did not approve of the buying and selling that was taking place in the temple, in fact we see that He overturned the tables and seats of those who were participating. While Jesus’ reaction to the people of Jerusalem trading in the temple may seem harsh to some, I would argue that His stern reaction was actually a way of showing His love to the people of Jerusalem. I believe that Jesus kicking out those who were trading in the temple was an act of love because He knew that they were not doing what was best for them, which was to honor Him in the temple.

During this Holy Week it is important to keep in mind that God shows His love to us in various ways, all of which may not be gentle. We must remember that God loves justice, and therefore He will love His people by being just towards us.

Lucas Seraphine



Tuesday Morning, March 31, 2026

## DISCIPLE, FOLLOW ME! BE MORE LIKE JESUS.

*“Follow me,”* said Jesus...

When I read Jesus' command, it always makes me ponder what He is asking us to do. The disciples were given this invitation though they often did not understand how it would change them. They followed Jesus around Galilee listening to the words He preached, and seeing the miracles He performed, but did not understand that Jesus was setting **the example**. Jesus was showing them how to love and live as His disciples. Ultimately, they would see His sacrifice on the cross.

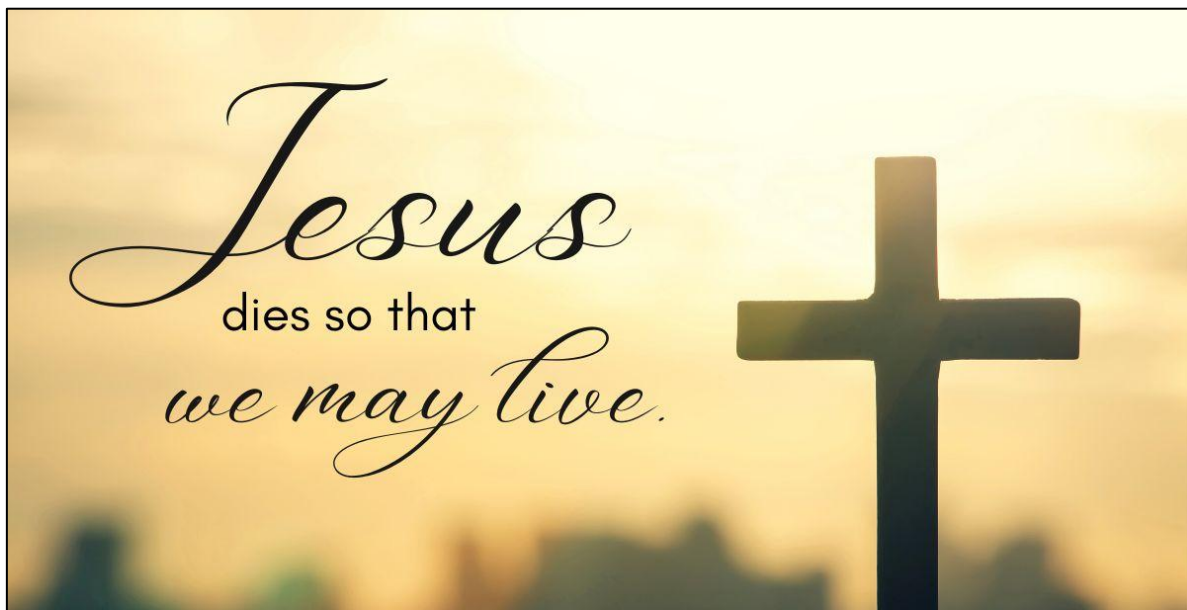
During His ministry, Jesus was looking for disciples. He was quoted over twenty times in the Gospels with this command. **“Follow me.”** Being a disciple of a rabbi meant starting an apprenticeship to become like the teacher. The student would literally follow the rabbi 24/7 working very closely with the rabbi. Everywhere the rabbi went, the student was right behind the rabbi. So much so that the disciple would be “covered in their dust.” The goal was not just to imitate the rabbi but to embody the rabbi’s character.

As a Christian, I want to always be more like Jesus because of what He did for us. I want to be more selfless and more like my Savior who was completely selfless. I want to be more giving because God gave us His only begotten Son. I want to be more loving even when I don’t feel it. I want to be more forgiving because Jesus loved us so much more that we are forgiven.

Being a follower of Jesus is not easy. It’s not just faith, but putting your faith to action. Take up your cross daily. Love others like Christ loved us. Deny your wants or comfort when others are in need. Surrender your will for God’s will to do what Father wants. Make yourself more like Jesus. Become a disciple of Jesus. Take His invitation. *“Follow me.”*

*Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. John 12:23-26*

Chris Towles



## WHAT DO YOU HOLD SACRED?

*“For He is not the GOD of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.” Luke 20:38*

The most astonishing thing about Love is that we can never get enough. A smile, a hug, some kind words – these are sorely needed by all in our world today. And yet, God’s Love, our Creator’s affection towards us is so much more wondrous. Have you ever experienced God’s Love ~ His feeling of eternal security, contentment, unwavering trust, and ever-present hope? It’s available to you ~ free from requirements, made just for you and granted when you humbly and simply ask Him. Ask God to reveal His Love to you.

Many world religions have sacred or holy items held up by faithful followers. The Egyptians held up Hamadryas baboons as special communicators with their god Thoth. Archaeologists have discovered mummified baboons in wealthy Egyptian tombs (pyramids). Buddhists and Hindus have reverence for the Bodhi “sacred fig” tree. Buddhists believe this is where Buddha first received his enlightenment – under this specific type of tree. Followers of Islam hold high esteem for the Quran, their established holy book, giving it a place of honor on a high shelf above all the other books in their homes. In our world today, what do we hold sacred: wealth, status, power connections, positions of authority, family? What does the world put its faith in? There is constant chatter about chaos, calamity, pain, suffering, economies ... it’s a great time to reflect on this, for both ourselves and for the world!

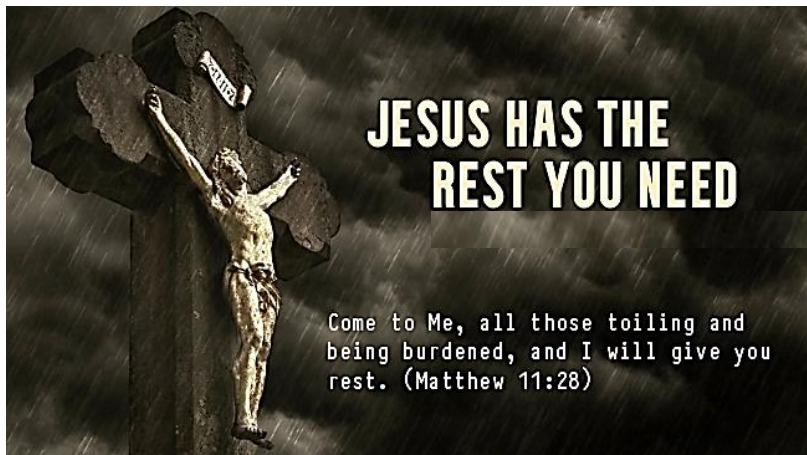
Christ followers hold sacred the Resurrection of Jesus. He lives! He is reigning. We cannot let our lives get distracted too much by decorations, sweets, or family events. We worship a wondrous God who is not in a grave. Read the Luke 20:38 passage in your Holy Bible. This is only one of many teaching moments Jesus had regarding “what happens in the resurrection”. The Sadducees (Jewish sect) Jesus is speaking with don’t even believe in the resurrection yet, they are asking.

God sent His only Son to earth to pay the debt of ALL sin. Jesus’ obedience to God’s will for the saving of Mankind means He overcame death, sin and Satan once and for all. In church and out of church people are lamenting the condition of the world ~ God’s got this! In Luke 20:23 Jesus says, *“Why do you test Me?”* and I hear *“Why don’t you believe in Me?”* We act like we have a better way. The world keeps thinking there might be a better, easier, faster way. I ask myself, what do you hold sacred in your Life? Does this line up with what Jesus teaches? Will you give Jesus reign over your entire Life?

God’s Love is astonishing! It is powerful, eternally secure, transforming, and beautifully hopeful. Do you have anything else that compares? Escapes, emptiness, anxieties, fears, distractions, and chaos – lay them down at Jesus’ feet. He is alive and waiting! Open your heart and mind to Jesus’ Words AND Actions, all written out in our Living God’s Holy Book. Humbly call on Him – He will answer. Give yourself over to His Loving embrace. You can have a relationship with God through Jesus as long as you are still living – Luke 20:38.

Seek Him!  
We’ve found Him.  
Just ask! You won’t be sorry.

Linda Adkins



Wednesday Morning, April 1, 2026

## O SACRED, WONDROUS LOVE

Based on Matthew 24:1 - 26:16, Mark 13:1 - 14:11, and Luke 21:5 - 22:6

Wow! What convicting passages we have just read today. Take a moment to absorb all that valuable material, sit with your feelings, and reflect.

Many people think of the gospels as the “mushy” side of Jesus, where we see Him open His arms wide to the outcasts of society. We see Him acknowledge people with low incomes. We see Him comfort the lost. We see Him heal the hurting. Fix the broken. Rejuvenate the weary. Protect the shameful. Cure the sick. You name it, Jesus can do it and has done it. The love of Jesus completely transcends the scope in which we humans live and comprehend.

But we see a different side of Jesus here, where his justice shines through. You will never find a coffee mug that says, “*And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” ~ Matthew 25:30. Yikes! You will find tough love alongside the cold, hard truth. During the end times, Jesus will desperately call people to come to Him. His love for His children will prompt Him to act with urgency.

And someday, the naive people will say during the Great White Throne Judgement, “Lord, please do not deny Heaven from me. Please let me live in Paradise with you forever. Don’t you love me? Remember, I attended the chili cook-off every year and even donated money to the ministries. Also, I attended Fellowship of Christian Athletes meetings as a child. And let me remind you, my parents took me to church most Sundays growing up. Better yet, my whole family is Christian. On top of that, my grandparents were even Sunday School teachers, and my uncles were deacons. And guess what? I have Bibles lying all around my house. See, I learned all about you my whole life.”

And Jesus will respond lovingly, but bluntly, “You knew me, but I never knew you.”

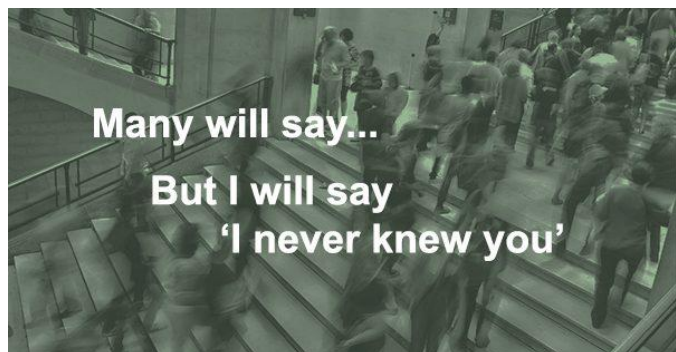
Some people want to stay at the surface level of Christianity, focusing on verses like John 3:16. We often eliminate the hard verses and cherry-pick the ones that sound appealing to us. And then we make a version of God that is soft, comfortable, and pretty. But true love goes deeper and gets real.

Yes, God is love, but is that His only character quality? It is probably His main one, but it is not the only dimension of God. Sometimes we need tough love. We do not need to know what we want to hear.

In life, we all prove our love through action.

God expresses His love for you by standing at the door and knocking, hoping for a personal relationship with you. Will you respond and reciprocate by opening the door? Accept the invitation to a personal relationship with the Savior today.

With love,  
Alexis St.Clair



## O THE DEEP, DEEP LOVE OF JESUS

On Sunday, March 8, we sang this song during our worship service. I thought about the words and how true they are.

*“Rolling as a mighty ocean in the fullness over me.”*

Like many I was raised in a Christian home. In fact, my father was a lay pastor of several small churches as I was growing up. I was at church just about every time the doors were open. Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday Prayer Meeting, revivals, Vacation Bible School, Royal Ambassadors, etc. Some would say that it was too much for a child, that it would turn them off to the church. I would disagree. You see this is where I first encountered the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus rolling over me. It was Miss Muddy, my blind preschool teacher, who introduced me to this love. It was Mrs. Thompson, who opened her home to a boy on Sunday afternoons so he could watch the Cleveland Browns play football on one of only two TVs in a small town. She also made delicious chocolate meringue pies that I got to sample.

*“Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love.”*

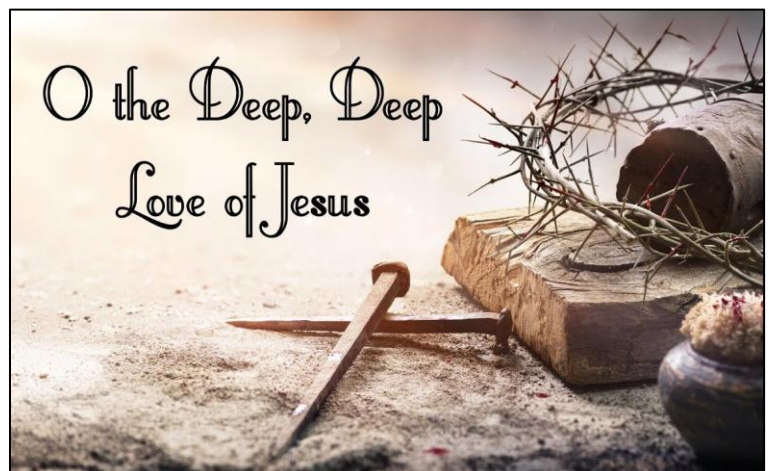
Nowhere was the love of Jesus more apparent than in my home when I was growing up. It was not perfect, but it was the beginning of my understanding of the love of Jesus. It was my mother praying in the kitchen of a small house on N. 38th Street in the early morning and a small preschool boy tiptoeing into the room and hearing her pour her heart out to a loving Savior. It was family devotions every night where a boy heard his mother and father pray. It was Mom singing “Precious Lord take my hand. Lead me on, help me stand. I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.” as she did housework. You see it was “All around me.”

*“Tis an ocean of vast blessing.”*

Sometimes I try very hard to thank God for all of His blessings by naming them. It is an impossible task. The love of God is in itself a blessing that is beyond our comprehension. Why would the God of the universe love me? He loves me because it is His nature to love. He does not love you or me for what we can do for Him. He does not love you or me because we are better than everyone else. He loves us because He chooses to love us. The love of God IS the vast blessing.

*“Leading onward, leading homeward, to thy glorious rest above.”*

The Easter season reminds all of us about the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus. He suffered and died because of that Deep, Deep Love for us. He left perfection with the Father to come to this corrupted planet to show us the full measure of the love of the Father. To redeem us, pay the penalty for our sins, and to break the power of sin over us. He came to defeat the last great weapon that Satan had over us, death. When He came out of that tomb, the grave had lost its victory, and death had lost its sting. The Deep, Deep Love of Jesus “Tis a heav’n of heav’ns to me.”



Maundy Thursday Morning, April 2, 2026

## DAYENU

The Dayenu, which means, “It would have been enough,” is a song that is traditionally sung during the Jewish Passover. Each Passover the story of the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery is retold and includes this song. Therefore, Jesus would have sung this song with His disciples at their Passover meal, known to Christians as “The Last Supper.”

The Dayenu recounts the many kindnesses that the Jewish people received from God during and after their miraculous escape from Egypt. Each line of the song concludes with the phrase, “It would have been enough.” It begins as follows:

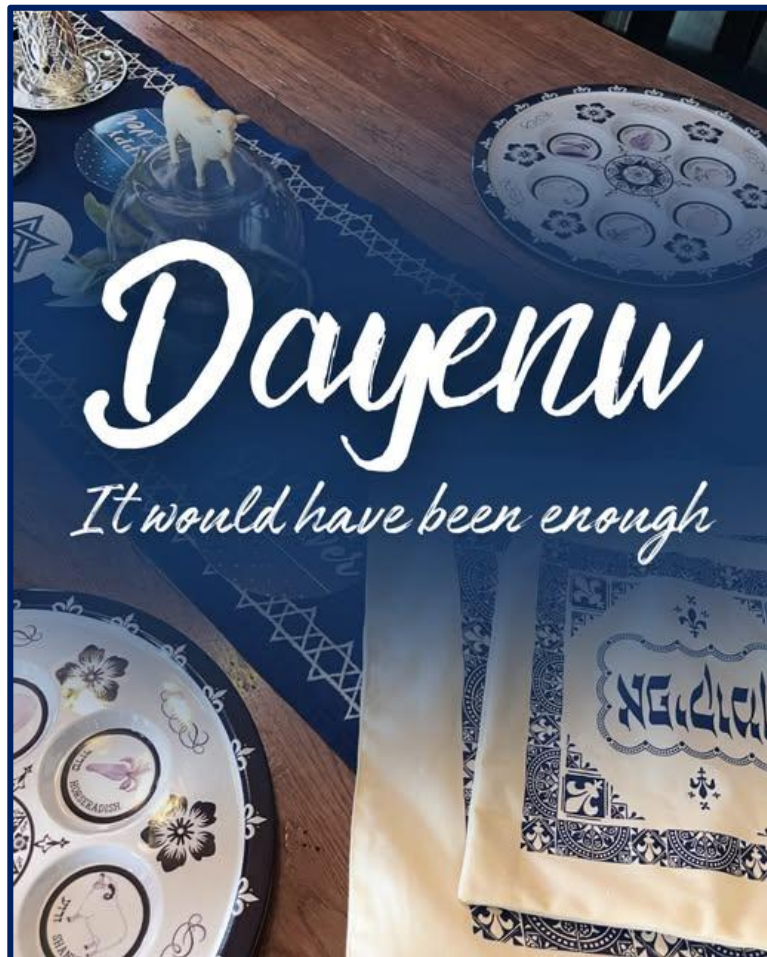
*If He had taken us out of Egypt and not made judgments on them [the Egyptians],  
it would have been enough.*

*If He had made judgments on them and had not made [them] on their gods,  
it would have been enough.*

*If He had destroyed their idols and had not given us their wealth,  
it would have been enough.*

It goes on to recount how God split the sea, lead them through on dry land, drowned their enemies, supplied their needs in the desert, gave them the Torah, brought them into the land of Israel, and concludes with:

*If He had brought us into the land of Israel and had not built us the Temple,  
it would have been enough.*



How often has God not only heard your prayers, but answered them tenfold more than what you asked? Even His “nos” or His “not yet’s” are generous. Paul obviously knew this about God as he declares in Ephesians 3:20-21, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

I know that in my life there have been innumerable times that He answered my prayers in ways that are far beyond what I was asking or hoping for. In gratitude and praise to Him, here is my Dayenu:

*If He had only entered my heart at age 12 and not given me Christian parents and grandparents to teach me,*

*it would have been enough.*

*If He had only given me Christian parents and grandparents and not moved us from Illinois to Franklin, IN, where I grew as a Christian in an awesome youth group,*

*it would have been enough.*

*If He had only moved me geographically so I could grow in an awesome youth group and not sent me to Taylor University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for higher education and more growth,*

*it would have been enough.*

*If He had only sent me to TU and SBTS and not called me to Harrods Creek Baptist Church,*

*it would have been enough.*

*If He had only called me to Harrods Creek and not arranged for me to meet Mark Gorbandt, the love of my life,*

*it would have been enough.*

*If He had only made Mark Gorbandt my husband of 40 years and not given us three exquisite daughters to raise,*

*it would have been enough.*

*If He had only given us three daughters and not given me ministry opportunities at FCBC (six years) and Westport Baptist (21 years),*

*it would have been enough.*

*If He had only given me ministry opportunities and not blessed us with five wonderful grandchildren to love,*

*it would have been enough.*

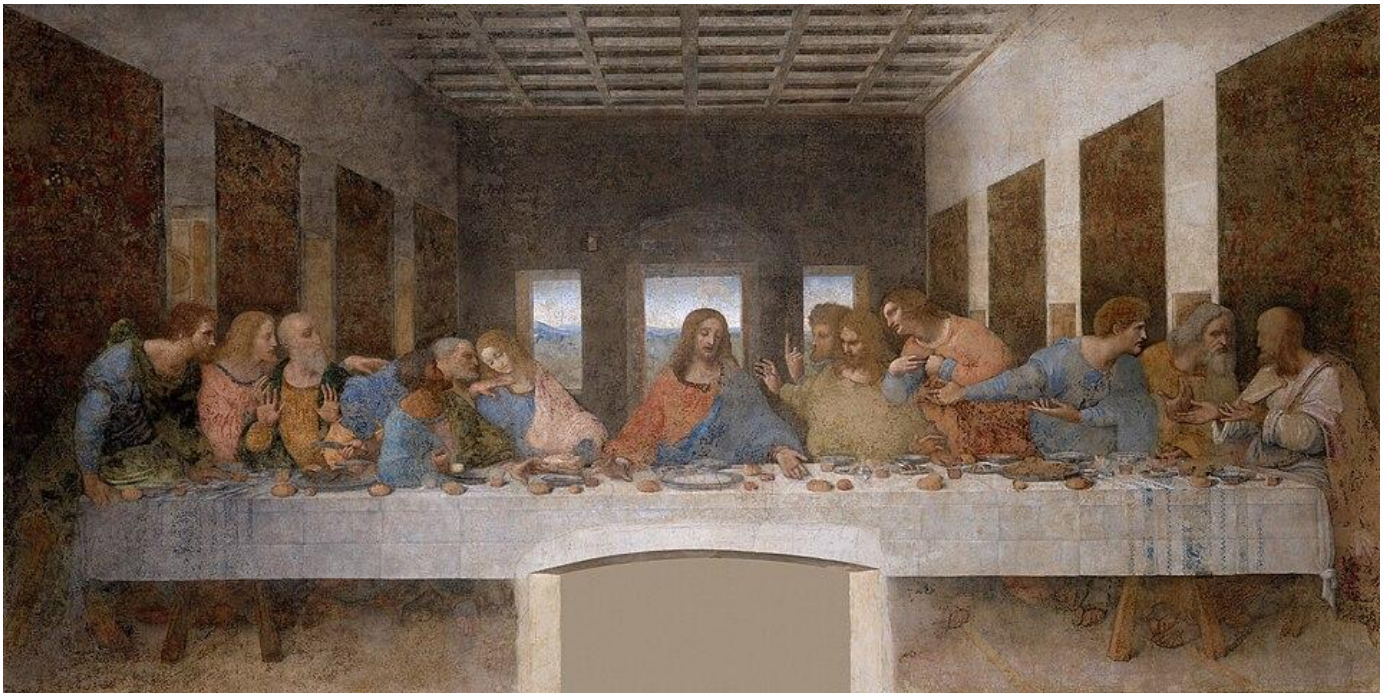
*If He had only given us five wonderful grandchildren to love and not led us full circle back to FCBC to be a part of an awesome church family,*

*it would have been enough.*

Jewish folks conclude the Dayenu with a blessing on the temple, the place where God’s presence dwelt. Through history the temple has been destroyed and rebuilt and destroyed a couple of times, leaving God with no dwelling place among His people. For the Jews, this is a tragic problem. For us, and for all people (including the Jews) the solution is found in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. As we contemplate the events of Holy Week, let us remember that what Christ did for us on the cross, providing for us redemption for our souls, restoration with God the Father, and the promise that He will, when we invite Him in, make our hearts His dwelling place.

*If He had only made it possible for my heart to be His home forever.... **THAT IS ENOUGH.***

Rev. Debbie Gorbandt



*The Last Supper*  
Leonardo da Vinci  
c. 1495-1498

Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy



*The Last Supper*  
Patrick Sheehan  
2023

Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky

## CONNECTIONS

*“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” John 15:9 ESV*

Jesus had a lot to say to His friends at supper on the night before He died. He knew that He was going to return to the Father a few weeks after He rose from the dead and wanted them to know how they could stay connected with Him after He went back to heaven.

Jesus didn't want His friends to think that they were going to be on their own after He left. They would still be connected to Him and He to them, only it would be in a way that was different from the way they were connected now.

What Jesus said to His friends He is saying to us. He told them to believe in Him<sup>1</sup> --- to put all that they were and had, their past, their present and their future into His hands and trust Him, because faith like that connects us to Jesus.

Jesus told His friends to connect with Him in prayer. When we ask the Father to do something in the name of Jesus, Jesus hears our prayer and if what we ask is in keeping with His will, He will grant our request<sup>2</sup>. Prayer connects us with Jesus, and answered prayer lets us know just how powerful our prayer connection with Jesus can be.

Obedience connects us to Jesus<sup>3</sup>. Jesus said that if we love Him, we will obey Him, and afterwards went on to demonstrate just how important obedience is. After supper that evening Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane about what the Father was asking Him to do. It would cost Jesus everything to obey God, but by being obedient Jesus saved us all<sup>4</sup>. Our obedience to God connects us to Jesus and His act of obedience, especially when obeying God costs us something, too.

We connect with Jesus when we love one other<sup>5</sup>. When we gather as a Church to worship together, learn together, and serve together Jesus is among us<sup>6</sup>.

Jesus told His friends that it was better for them that He went back to the Father because then the Holy Spirit would come to live inside them. Paul calls the Holy Spirit the *Spirit of Jesus*<sup>7</sup> which means that in the person of the Holy Spirit Jesus lives inside those who love Him --- and we can't be more securely and sweetly connected to Jesus than that.

Jesus told us to abide in His love. He said He was like a vine and we were His branches. If we stay connected to Him, He said, we will bear fruit<sup>8</sup> --- not the kind of fruit we eat, of course, but the fruit of His character which we display when we are loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and exercise self-control<sup>9</sup>. The only way to be like Jesus is to be connected to Jesus, so it matters that we stay close to Him and abide in His love.

Karen Purnell

<sup>1</sup> John 14:1

<sup>2</sup> John 14:13-14

<sup>3</sup> John 14:15 & 15:10

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:8 & Hebrews 5:8

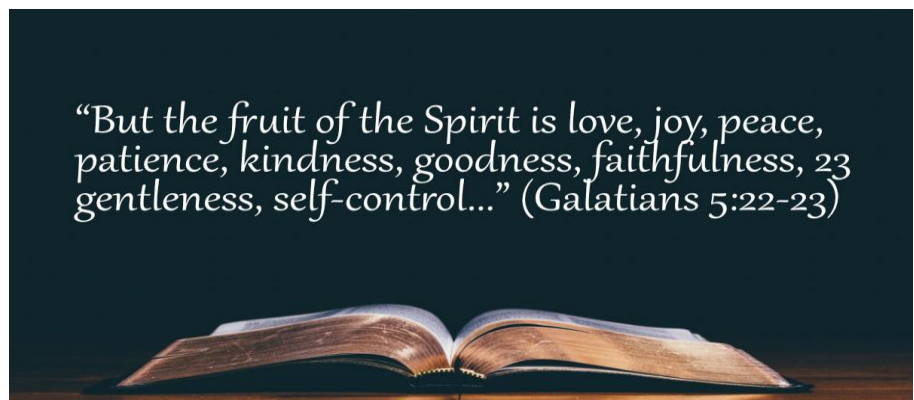
<sup>5</sup> John 13:34 & 15:12

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 18:20 & John 17:20-21

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 1:19, Romans 8:9 & Galatians 4:6

<sup>8</sup> John 15:5

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 5:22-23



Good Friday Morning, April 3, 2026

## ETERNITY

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16 KJV*

Good Friday is a day that feels both heavy and amazing. There's fullness in the air and a calm of anticipation for something powerful yet to happen. It's a daunting task to capture in a few words.

Good Friday invokes in each of us a feeling that we need to stop, slow down, and reflect on how much God loves us and the sacrifices His Son made for you and me. His sacrifice of allowing His body to be tormented, broken, and humiliated, all prove His sacred, wondrous LOVE for us. He did this not only to show His unequivocal love for us and all mankind, but that we will have abundant life wrapped in the gift of a covenant of eternal love, protection, devotion, and life.

I pray that on this day, all will sit in thought, allow your spirit to be broken and humbled, as we recognize and accept that no one, not one, deserves the devotion and sacrifice Jesus gave to the point of His agonizing death. Can we truly hope to know what true love is and how much God wants this relationship with us for all eternity? Perhaps not, but we don't have to fully understand but just accept His love and grace. By the grace of God that we are given, we are found worthy through the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior. Thanks be to God!

Will Ennis



## IT IS FINISHED

*"...It is finished..." John 19:30*

All these many years ago, God knew what was to be done. Through Adam and Eve's sin (and ours, as well), Jesus experienced the horrid death. In His love, Jesus did this so none of us would go to hell. His final words were *"It is finished."* It is finished that we humans would no longer suffer the consequences of our own actions by accepting Jesus Christ. In heaven, suffering, hunger, and pain are finished. This is all through Jesus' holy blood.

Jesus didn't have to die for us, but He did so that we could experience heaven. It's something I believe Christians take for granted. Why yes, everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one truly deserves it. We sin and disobey God's commands. In the Old Testament, so many times the Israelites strayed from God even after He had saved them. While they never deserved it, they still believed.

Today, our world is messed up beyond belief. There are many influences to sin, especially through social media. It's sometimes hard not to follow through with what the world is doing, but we all do. Even after we give in to our human desires, we have such a forgiving God that we can ask to forgive us. When He forgives, He forgets. He gives us unlimited chances when we mess up even on the same thing over and over again. Now that's the greatest gift God has given us. While we will mess up from time to time, our goal is to be better. During Lent, the point is to give up something (or limit) what you're attached to and spend more time in God's Word. If everyone did that for the rest of their lives, Christians would be unstoppable.

An unstoppable Christian is the scariest thing to Satan. That's the point; we want Satan to be afraid. Because of Christ's love and sacrifice, Christians get to go to heaven and be rewarded after a Christ-like life we seek to live on this earth. While Satan tries everything to stop us, being a Christian means we have the Holy Spirit who is protecting and helping us make the best choices. Through Jesus' blood, we gained the Holy Spirit and eternal life. When Jesus comes back, God's work will truly be finished, and He will reign on high. For Jesus already has told us His blood saved us, and His coming will be the final war. For it will be finished.

Emma Towles



Saturday Morning, April 4, 2026

## O SACRED, WONDROUS LOVE

I John 4:9-12

One of the deepest needs we experience as humans is to be loved. We long to feel cherished, cared for, comforted, and precious to someone. Our hearts long to feel this kind of love. As we read I John 4:9-12 we learn, *“This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.”* Oh, what a sacred, wondrous love is ours to experience! God gave His precious Son for each of us that we might never be separated from Him. We can know in joy and in sorrow that we are precious to Him and that He is with us always. I know He is my Savior, my comforter, my friend, my everything.

God’s precious Son willingly laid down His life for us. No one took His life from Him. He was arrested, beaten, spit upon, jeered, denied, deserted by His beloved disciples, and nailed to a cruel cross. He suffered and died an unimaginable agonizing death. He did this so that we might be forgiven of our sins and know that He will never leave us nor forsake us. His death assured our forgiveness and His resurrection guaranteed that our eternal life would be spent in Heaven with Him. There is no greater love we could ever receive than the one given to us by Jesus Christ. When He gave His life on the cross that day so many years ago, He was thinking of ME. He was thinking of YOU. My heart hurts with the cruelty of it all. His love is freely given because He loves and cherishes each one of us and wants to come into our hearts and share every moment of our lives, today, tomorrow, and always. We can’t buy this precious gift. We can’t earn it. I am not sure we can even fully comprehend all He went through on our behalf to purchase this priceless gift with His own blood, His own life. His love is perfect.

The day I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior my life was changed forever. Not one moment of my life have I spent alone since that day. Jesus did not promise we would never have trials or that we would never feel pain or shed tears. This world can be hard and very cruel. What He does promise is that He will be with us through it all. Jesus hears my every prayer. He is my Comforter, my friend, my Savior. His love is the greatest most precious gift I have ever been given. His love is greater than the love of our family or friends. It is greater than any earthly treasure we may ever possess. I know when I breathe my last breath on this earth, I will see His face and His outstretched arms of love. His love is perfect and I thank Him for Calvary.

God asks us to accept His precious gift of love and then to honor Him as we show love to one another. How the world would be transformed if we could truly love and care for each other as Jesus has asked us to do! We must try to be a reflection of His precious love and in doing so lead others to Him. It is difficult to even think about the cruelty of His death, the horrible pain He endured. His love covers all of my sins. I think of the wonder of the empty tomb and the fact death has no power over our Savior. Thank You God, for Your Son. Thank You Jesus, for giving Your life for me. Thank You that I know I will spend all of eternity in Heaven with You. Thank You for the greatest blessing, the greatest gift anyone could ever have. Thank You for the purest love anyone could ever know.

This Easter if you have never asked Jesus to come into your heart and forgive you of your sins, I pray with all my heart you will ask Him this moment to be your Lord and Savior. There is no more important decision you will ever make. You can KNOW your sins are forgiven and that because of His precious gift He will be with you every day of your life. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will never leave you comfortless. You can have the assurance you will spend eternity in Heaven with Him. It is really so simple. Tell God you know He sent His Son Jesus to give His life for your sins. Ask Him to forgive you and to come into your heart. Tell Jesus you know His death on the cross was for you. Tell Him you believe God raised Him from the dead and that He is seated at the right hand of God for all eternity. It is a gift freely given; we need only to ask. You never have to be alone or face life alone again. You can experience the perfect love of our Lord and Savior today. He is as close as your prayer.

Nancy Shewmaker

## SUNDAY IS COMING!

*“Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.” Luke 23:56*

Today is Saturday of Holy Week. The crucifixion is over, and the glorious resurrection is not yet here. We are stuck in the middle between tragedy and triumph as we wait for dawn’s new light. How do we live in such a place? Where do we go? What do we do? How do we endure?

Luke tells us that on Friday the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee had followed Joseph of Arimathea and had seen the tomb and how Jesus’ body was laid. That evening they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But on Saturday they rested in obedience to the Sabbath commandment.

Matthew’s gospel tells us that the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate on Saturday and reminded him that Jesus said that He would rise again in three days. (They were actually breaking the Sabbath Law – their own law – by doing this on the Sabbath.) The Pharisees said that they were afraid that the disciples may come and steal the body and say that Jesus had been raised from the dead. So, with Pilate’s permission the chief priests and the Pharisees went and sealed the tomb and posted a guard there.

Do you see the contrast? The women at the tomb were confident that Sunday would come! They knew that Jesus would rise again! The chief priests and the Pharisees were afraid that Sunday might really come and that the resurrection could possibly be a reality.

Where do you find yourself today? I hope that you find yourself like those women who were living in hope and grace as they waited expectantly for the Risen Lord! Yes, they were grieving! Yes, they were living through a difficult period in their lives! Yes, they were uncertain of exactly what the future would bring! But, they knew that Jesus would rise again! They lived with great hope and certainty in the reality of God’s sacred, wondrous love and His sufficient, amazing grace.

The Saturday between Good Friday and Easter only comes once a year; however, we often find ourselves living there. Sometimes Saturday seems to last for days; and sometimes it does last for months or years. No matter how dark, dreary, unsettling, confusing, difficult, or tragic your Saturday is, there is hope!

Saturday comes in many forms. Saturdays are those days that we sit by the death bed of a loved one or when we see the coffin slip into the ground. Saturdays are those days when we realize that we live in an increasingly evil world. Saturdays are those days when we notice how we are aging and cannot do what we used to do. Saturdays are those days when our minds are spinning, wondering how we will get through another day. Saturdays are those days when decisions are weighing heavily on our minds. On Saturdays we often walk through dark valleys, difficult circumstances, or horrific situations. On Saturdays we repeatedly deal with unreasonable people, self-centered personalities, and negative spirits. We can’t play leapfrog from Friday to Sunday because Saturday is real, and we must live in it. And it is accurate to say that Saturdays are intensely demanding, burdensome, and exhausting.

But, the good news is that tomorrow is Sunday!! Because of God’s love and grace, Sunday will come! God’s love is sacrificial and unconditional. His grace is free, as manifested in the salvation of sinners like you and me. Sunday only comes to those who have accepted His love and grace. If you have not done so, today is the day to do just that...to accept Him as your Lord and Savior! Because of His love and grace, we who are Christians know that Jesus is present and will never leave us or forsake us. His grace is sufficient for the dark days in the wilderness. His love is sacred and wondrous every moment. Jesus is with us on all these Saturdays of our life’s journey. Because of His love and grace, tomorrow is Sunday!

Hallelujah! Sunday is coming!  
Rev. Linda Barnes Popham

Easter Sunday Morning, April 5, 2026

## WHERE GOD CANNOT BE FOUND

*“He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay.” Matthew 28:6*

In our deepest desperation we sometimes cry, “Where are You, Lord?” This question echoes in the walls of the hospital’s ICU as we pray for a dying loved one; in the cells of prison when we visit with a lost soul; in the nursing homes where we are reminded of our inevitable future; and not rarely in fancy places where we reached the top, but feel loneliness and hollowness inside. But if we look around and see the medical professionals working tirelessly to save a patient or law enforcers and therapists who keep a level of order and sanity, we see goodness in the midst of chaos...there we see God.

There are also “God-forsaken places” filled with so much death, poverty, greed, hunger, injustice, and inequality. These are not necessarily the war-torn nations or the poor countries in Africa or cities in Asia. It is also found in our cities. When we see man’s depravity, our soul cries “Where are You, Lord?” But when we stay longer not to numb our soul, we find salts of the earth sprinkled in various places; we see lights of the world even in the dark alleys and dangerous places. God is present where His children live.

When we go to the house of mourning, we see the shell of a friend and loved one that was once full of life and vigor. As we take him to his resting place, the cemetery reminds us of the last enemy Jesus conquered. The graveyards are still not empty, but soon they will be. Because Jesus rose from the dead, everyone who believe in Him will also be resurrected. The Lord’s empty tomb is the picture of our certain future. Because Jesus lives to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Fret not, o my soul, for God is with you. In the midst of fear, desperation, and sorrow He is your hope, comfort, and consolation. Because Christ’s tomb was empty, He is close by you and will stay with you until the end of your journey.

Rev. George Payocong, Jr.



## THE SACRED, WONDROUS LOVE OF THE RISEN CHRIST

When I read the resurrection stories in the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, I'm always struck by how personal the love of Jesus is. On that first Easter morning, the people who encountered the risen Christ were not the powerful or the religious elite. They were grieving women, confused disciples, and people whose lives had once been broken.

Scripture tells us that Mary Magdalene stood outside the empty tomb weeping, believing the body of Jesus had been taken. Then Jesus appeared and spoke a single word: "Mary." (John 20:16) In that moment Mary recognized Him. What strikes me about that moment is how personal it is. Jesus didn't just rise from the dead to make a theological point. He rose to restore people, to meet them exactly where they were.

And in many ways, that has been my own experience of Christ's love. Over the past twenty years, I've walked through seasons of physical challenges that I never expected. There were times when I wondered why those struggles were part of my story. Like many believers, I wrestled with questions and uncertainty. But one moment in particular stands out to me. During a difficult time, I received a short note from someone I didn't know. It simply said:

**"God has not forgotten you."**

It may seem like a small thing, but in that moment, it felt like God Himself speaking into my life. It was like He was reminding me that even in suffering, He was present and still working. Looking back now, I see how those seasons shaped me in ways I couldn't understand at the time. God often uses the very places where we struggle to deepen our compassion and our calling.

In the resurrection accounts, we see that same pattern. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, a woman whose life He had already transformed. He appeared to the disciples who were frightened and unsure. Luke tells us that when Jesus stood among them, they were startled and filled with doubt. So, what did Jesus do? He showed them His hands and His feet. He showed them the scars of the cross. **"Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself."** (Luke 24:39) Those scars remind us that our risen Christ understands our suffering because He endured it Himself.

And that truth has shaped the way I see the work God has called me to do. I've learned that compassion grows out of experience. When you've walked through your own valleys, you begin to recognize the valleys others are walking through as well. And in those moments, I often think about how Jesus met people after the resurrection. He met them personally. He met them gently. He met them with patience and love. The resurrection is the ultimate reminder that God specializes in bringing life out of places that seem hopeless.

What looked like defeat on Friday became victory on Sunday. What looked like the end became the beginning of redemption. And that same sacred, wondrous love of Christ is still at work today. He is still restoring, healing, and renewing lives. That is the hope of Easter. Because Christ lives suffering does not define our story, brokenness can be restored, and we know that God has not forgotten us. Not in our struggles. Not in our doubts. Not in our waiting.

Just as Jesus called Mary by name outside that empty tomb, He still calls each of us today.

And His invitation remains the same: Come and experience the sacred, wondrous love of the risen Savior.

Blessings on this Easter,  
Danny Hass



Happy Easter