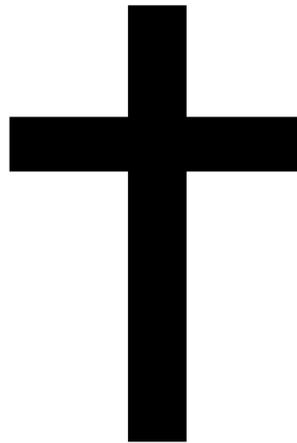


Meditations on
The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ



By The Rev. Noah Van Niel

These meditations grew out of a desire I had, after many years and many hearings, to slow down and spend some good, quality time with the story of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial. This narrative unit, known as "The Passion" (from the Latin *passio* : suffer) is usually heard in its totality on both Palm Sunday and Good Friday. It is by far the longest passage we hear within the context of a worship service, and it is the central story of our faith. And yet, even in hearing it year after year, one doesn't get to spend much time with it. It passes almost too quickly; a torrent of action and emotion.

In order to slow it down I set myself the Lenten discipline of taking the narrative line by line and writing a brief meditation on a few words at a time. This technique borrows heavily on the ancient practice of *lectio divina* or "holy reading" which is a practice of engaging scripture word by word and paying attention to what thoughts, feelings, images, or words jump out to you in that particular moment. That's basically what I did each day, and wrote down what came from it.

What I found, like with any great work of art, was that the Passion narrative bore the weight of such scrutiny. The words are so rich and the drama so powerful that one cannot help but find inspiration in them, if they just take the time to look, listen and pray. Each day I would start with a fear that there would be nothing to say, that the well would run dry and the words stop. And yet each day I was surprised, blessed to find that given the time and attention, the Spirit stirred up more than enough material.

My hope for these meditations is two-fold: that my brief expositions on these well-known verses will offer some new insights and inspiration for you in your relationship with Jesus Christ and that by forcing you to slow down and read this narrative line by line, you will be given your own insights and inspiration to work with as well.

May these words of mine, and more importantly the words of the story that stand at the heart of our faith make this a holy and good Lent for you all.

In Faith, Hope and Love,

Fr. Noah

p.s. For the purposes of narrative continuity, the following Passion text is taken from the synoptic Gospels, borrowing more or less equally from Matthew, Mark and Luke. John's passion narrative is similarly powerful and dramatic but different enough that it would have been hard to fit it into this framework. Perhaps next Lent I shall turn to his version for some good, quality time. No doubt it will be worth the effort.

Mark 14:43 Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.

We begin before you have finished—interrupted—and immediate. How often we cut you off before you are done speaking. We force the issue; write our own ending. Our impatience, our urgency leads us astray. You are still speaking, and we have finished you. Crowds gather at your words, with urgency, aggression. Not like those who sat on the plain to receive their fill of bread or waited for you on the seashore. These crowds come with swords and clubs, not with open hands and hearts. Led by one of your own, one of your twelve, swept along by the leaders of the community. This is not some impromptu gathering, this is a planned ambush, a coordinated assault, a communal crime. The wisdom of the crowd set against Wisdom itself, prepared for war.

Matthew 26:48 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.’

Plans had been made, signals and codes set. How strange that for all their hatred and fear of this Jesus of Nazareth, they couldn't pick him out of a crowd. How could he do so much, accomplish such great things and be unrecognizable? Being so bent on helping others, he had no time or inclination to glorify himself. So it is with a kiss—the most familiar, most intimate form of greeting, open only to the trusted—that he must be pointed out. Tender skin brushing tender skin. An act meant for love, not malice. The poets' muse and humankind's sweetest act. An act of love twisted by human sinfulness into a dark mark. Death occasioned by the universal signal of love. That is what is to be arrested: the love of this world is to be cuffed and dragged away so it can be expunged. Lest that love continue to bring light and life to all people.

Luke 22:48 He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?’

The wanderings across the countryside are through, and your face is turned toward Jerusalem. Your face, the face brushed with the most insidious kiss history has known. Judas, one of them, one of us, part of us, leading the way. From follower to leader, choosing infamy over glory. Cashing in the trust afforded to him to get close, cheek to cheek, breath thick with betrayal, cowardice and weakness touching up against the cheek of truth, loyalty and strength. The face of God, stained wet with our sin. How often they brush so close together, our lesser angels and our better. Fear and violence close enough to share a whisper with love and peace. Our sin and our redemption, surprisingly intimate, even to our Savior.

Luke 22:49-51 When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, ‘Lord, should we strike with the sword?’ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him.

We can see now, where this is going. The predictions and the prophecies, they are here, they are now. But surely this cannot be. We must fight back. Violence must be the answer, no? We must meet might with might, right? We can’t give ourselves over to those who hate us. He can’t have been serious when he told us to love them; to turn the other cheek. We are ready to fight. Give us the word. Better yet, we will strike without cause. And in our fear we will strike those who pose us no threat; we will maim those whom society has already maimed. This slave is not here of his own volition. But we are. And we have acted amiss. The one who has boundless compassion for those whom the world has forgotten acts once more in the name of peace. There is no place for this. No place for blood to be spilled. In the face of violence there will always be time and space for mercy and the possibility of healing. We are never too far gone for that.

Matthew 26:52-54 Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?'

There is no glory in the sword, only in the cross. One leads to death by promising a false life, the other leads to life by promising false death. To add violence on top of violence is to perpetuate a cycle that only peace can break. Power or defense is not the question. Jesus has recourse to power beyond their wildest imaginings: legions of angels ready for the call to swoop in and save. No, this is a choice: to embrace the cruelty that is coming his way; to take upon him the sins and wickedness that are boiling over; to meet the violence of the crowd with a peace and patience so incredible it swallows them whole and comes out victorious. It must be, so that Jesus can show us what it takes to build a peaceable Kingdom. It must be, so the truth of the scriptures may be shown in flesh and blood. It will not be easy, but it must be.

Luke 22:52-54 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!' Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house.

Only the best to arrest him. The highest ranking religious officials in the holiest of cities all in one place. All united in their fear of this one from Nazareth. Fear of the bandit: the one robbing them of their certainty; pilfering their self-righteous piety; cracking the safe where their self-understanding lies. He is the one who would take everything we hoard—our status, our power, our legalism, our self-righteousness—and burn it with the fires of truth. Too afraid to act in the house of the Lord; the embers of their faith casting the faintest shadow of disapproval from on high. Preferring the hour of darkness to extinguish the Light. They seize upon him, grabbing, pulling, yanking, dragging the one who would go willingly into the house of the one who stands to lose the most if God truly is who the One says He is. The high priest, who is trusted to enter into the holy of holies, now welcomes the holiest of holies into his home, with desecration on his mind.

Mark 14:50 All of them deserted him and fled.

“There is none righteous, no not one...” (Romans 3:10) The going has gotten tough and the tough have gotten going. Now, as the threats and dangers of discipleship become real, no one can withstand them. Now that they must face violence with peace and suffer for their faith, they flee. Their faith in Jesus blossomed under the warm comfort of the countryside with miraculous meals and happy healings. But now that the long, dark shadow of the cross beckons, no one can face it. Miracles are placed aside in the name of a larger, more important miracle to come. He is alone. Deserted and betrayed by his closest friends, those whom he loved. Did they love him? Did they still not understand what he meant when he said true love was being willing to lay down one’s life for one’s friends? Are there hearts still too small for such a love? They flee in cowardice and ignorance, fear and trembling. Leaving Jesus to face his fate, with no one to walk with him on his final steps. All of them. All of us, deserters and cowards; poor friends and false disciples.

Mark 14:51-52 A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

The Passion strips us naked. The last veil we have to hide our true selves from our God will be pulled away. There is no hiding from the searing truth on display: that our world is one often ruled by violence and fear; that we are quick to run from situations of difficulty or pain; that our sins do not only impact our own lives but compound into angry crowds and movements of violence. Jesus confronts us fully, unclothed by the gentilities of culture. He speaks directly into our souls and forces us to fixate on the ugly parts we like to keep hidden from view. He makes us vulnerable and insecure and since we hate to feel that way we run away. That is the power of the Passion. That is the power of the intense gaze under which Jesus places us all—a gaze of such profound and truthful love that we can more easily flee than embrace.

Mark 14:55 Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none.

Guilty until proven guilty. He must die, but they need testimony to achieve their ends. How ill thought out this plan, how backwards; lacking in logic or execution. No one is stopping to think about whether such extensive machinations were a perversion of divine justice rather than an execution of it. Jesus says ask and you shall be answered, seek and you shall find, but not if what you ask for is lies and what you seek is injustice. Then you will find none, because while truth is pure and mighty and shines forth like a beacon for all to see, lies are twisted and weak and hide in shadows. They compound and turn back on themselves, a sclerosis of reality, ten times harder to maintain than the truth. The truth shall set you free, which is precisely why they need to round up an abundance of lies to subdue the way, the truth and the life who stands before them.

Mark 14:56-59 For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 'We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands."' But even on this point their testimony did not agree.

The problem is not in participation. Many are eager to jump in to this orgy of injustice. There is no shortage of lies, nor people willing to tell them. Lies are easy but weak, they cannot bear the scrutiny of the light. Yet these followers of Moses are quick to do away with commandment number nine, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." The tablets were broken once they can be broken again, and again, and again. They try taking Jesus' words and turning them back on him. Where did they learn such easy treachery? Lest we think misquoting to our own ends to further our own agenda and build up propaganda to stir the masses is anything new, we can see it is at least 2000 years old. It is no more righteous today than it was then, and its effects are just as awful. Our hands and hearts can fashion great monuments to our God, but they can also fashion great moments of horror. That is why we need a Temple not made with hands, that it may not be sullied by our abuses or crumbled by our lies. On that we can all agree.

Luke 22:70-71 All of them asked, ‘Are you, then, the Son of God?’ He said to them, ‘You say that I am.’ Then they said, ‘What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!’

All of them, not one dissenter; not one conscience pricked by this bruised man of peace standing before their shouting crowd. Fear unites almost as well as love, maybe better. The mob mentality is persuasive and well-nigh impossible to fight. Like a tide it rises, swallowing us with it. Sin compounds; the collective is more evil than the sum of its parts. One more chance to incriminate yourself, Jesus; here the law affords no protection. How far ahead of them he is. His, a “no comment” that rings with deep ironic truth. They need him to say he is the Son of God for their plan to work. They need to twist a truth to their ends by claiming it to be a lie. He confesses nothing. They hear what they need to hear. They hear but they do not understand. Their whole case built on nothing, but worth everything. He says they say it. They say he said it. No one says it. Do you? Who do you say that he is? Jesus need not glorify himself. That is our work.

Matthew 26:63b-64 Then the high priest said to him, ‘I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’

This is the kangaroo court of kangaroo courts; the outcome is already decided in their minds. The only chance for survival is to recant, to deny, to refuse his identity. Only a lie will satisfy them; their mercy is only unlocked by falsehood. How often the easier path is to lie. How often we are pressed by those in power to deny a bit of our God-given identity in order not to make a fuss or cause trouble. This is the malignant seed of injustice: convincing others to accept less than their due. And it is not the way of the Cross. It is not the way of Jesus. He, who knew neither sin nor falsehood, claims his rightful place as the Son of Man and bids us follow as heirs of his eternal kingdom. To those who are forced by others to be less than they were created to be he promises a seat at the right hand of the power of God. He looks past his twisted judges, past their small-minded understandings, past their fear, past their titles and their authority. His eye is turned toward greater glory. They have made up their minds to diminish him. God has made up His mind to glorify him. *Do what you want me. I refuse to be less than I am.*

Matthew 26:65-66 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?' They answered, 'He deserves death.'

Anger tears us up. It rips us apart like a torn tunic. No one is immune from it, not even a high priest. When it consumes our soul it moves on to our clothes and our communities. Anger is impatient, eager to rush the occasion. Eager to consume others with that same fire of hatred. "Be done with this pretense of justice!" The high priest begs. The judge offering the sentence before he calls for the verdict. Sensing he is losing control of the situation, he manufactures an outcome. How easily the systems put in place to protect can be manipulated into a system that condemns and kills. How quickly anger spreads and becomes the rule of law. "Death, he *deserves* death." As though any living human being *deserves* to have that life snuffed out. As though we can play God and act as judge over the living and the dead. He wants death, and so he shall have it, but who dies when we mark another for execution?

Mark 14:65 Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophecy!' The guards also took him over and beat him.

How much easier it is to mock than to love, to belittle than to believe. How safe is sarcasm, how vulnerable is the Truth. But how destructive it is to ridicule! It wounds the heart, breaks the spirit. The body, beaten, suffers pain. The soul, mocked, suffers destruction. To break the spirit of others is to turn them into an object, to snuff out the divine spark within them and rob them of their humanity. It is easier to torture a thing than a person. To stand outside and heap insults, to laugh at another's pain, is evil. And we are the ones blindfolded by such sin, not our Lord. We are the ones dying from this poison in our hearts, not our Lord, though he be but hours from breathing his last. Far more glorious is the one who is tortured and endures. Far more holy, and far less common, is the one who will step in and share the suffering, and in so doing defeat the bullies. Far more righteous are those who can bear the lashes of insult and not suffer defeat, for their reward is in heaven.

Mark 14:54 Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire.

Follow me. Follow me closely, not at a distance. How often we follow only partially, afraid of what will be asked of us if we follow fully. *What good is it to follow from so far away? When you left your nets you didn't think we'd end here, I know. I tried to warn you. I told you this day would come. But trust me. Stay with me, remain here with me; not in the courtyard, but by my side. I will not leave you. Where are you? Trapped between panic and loyalty, curiosity and doubt. Sit with me, not with them. Claim your place by my side for I am all alone. I told you this would happen; when did I ever give you cause to doubt? Why are you not prepared? Why are you not stronger, oh you of zealous faith? Why has the terror robbed you of what you know to be true? Why has the glory that has been revealed to you been snuffed out? Peter, I know you love me. Peter, I know you will feed my sheep. But must you also deny me? Must you also abandon me? Must your faith be driven out by your fear? But let the Scriptures be fulfilled.* The fire crackles and pops like snapping sinew and bone.

Luke 22:56-57 Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, 'This man also was with him.' But he denied it, saying, 'Woman, I do not know him.'

The firelight affords just enough darkness to hide; just enough light to see. It provides a voyeuristic cover, without the full commitment of daylight. This is where you stand, on the border of light and dark. The shadows flicker across your face like a mind that has lost its bearings, unable to be still and know that He is God. You feel her eyes searching you. Is there any evidence to convict you of being the Rock whom Christ entrusted with his true identity, his future mission? Is there any residue of the years of revelation shining on your face? You, you also were with this man. You stood with him. What a glorious thought—to have stood next to Jesus the Christ, to have been close enough to him to be recognized as one of his followers. Billions of people in the thousands of years to come will long for just this same recognition, it will be their life's work. But no. You do not know him. You, who knew him better than anyone, have had that knowledge thrown into question in just a few short hours. So now you deny rather than glorify. You deny to save yourself. You deny and let Him die.

Luke 22:58 A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, 'You also are one of them.' But Peter said, 'Man, I am not!'

"I am not." I have lost who I am. Jesus, who am I? Not who you would have me be, apparently; just as you are not who I would have you be. I was a fisherman. I would drop nets and haul them in, working the early mornings and through the hot sun of midday, sustained by the briny smells and cool splashes of water. I was a husband. I was a son-in-law. But then this man who was causing a stir in the Temple came for refuge at my house. He healed my wife's mother. Then he got into my boat. He inserted himself into my life; I didn't ask for this. He chose me, I didn't chose him. I wanted him gone. I knew I was sinful. But he forgave me. So I left all that behind and followed him. Then I was an apostle. An apostle for this man I no longer know. Who am I now? I am no longer one of them. One of whom? We are all dispersed. There is no more "them." How far away seems the fellowship of that upper room. This is all happening too quickly. Jesus, you have brought me to a place where I do not want to be, and I am lost, a sheep without his shepherd. I am drowning, but there is no longer a Lord to save me. How I long for the shores of Gennesaret, of home.

Luke 22:59-60 Then about an hour later yet another kept insisting, 'Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about!'

How slowly the hours pass when each moment could be your last. There is no news. You thought you were clear, but the restless loiterers circle back, *insisting*. Your heritage has betrayed you. The home which you left, here, in the big city, marks you. That which was safe now endangers you. How did you know me: one who no longer even knows himself? Guilty by association, but guilty of what? Of following the Light and the Truth? Or guilty of desertion? I do not know. I am too lost. *I do not know what you are talking about*, just as I did not know what he was talking about. It doesn't make any sense. It never did. Why are we here? Why did we not fight? Why did he go so peacefully into their hands? Why did I follow him? We can never see the way he sees. The way always leads us to places we did not expect or want to go. I want to leave. I want to stay. I need my Lord, but he is gone from me. So instead, when understanding fades to black, we follow our oldest instinct: stay alive. Deny what will get you killed. Deny what will turn the crowd on you. Deny and live, even if that life is a lost one. Deny. Deny. Deny.

Luke 60b-62 At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

Another interruption. Never has the aria of daybreak sounded so sorrowful. The proud rooster does not know that this day his song shoots darts of shame into your heart. The sun is rising in the East and he knows only to praise it. He does not know that it throws your world into darkness. Jesus knew. Of course he knew. We never know ourselves as well as our Lord knows us. *"O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely"* (Psalm 139:1-4). We never know the depth of our sin until the light of his countenance shines upon it. With just the turn of a face, a glance, we are shown the error of our ways. *"Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?"* (Psalm 139:7). Nowhere. We can never escape your knowing glance, your saving help, even hidden in a dark corner of the outer court. Usually this is the best of news, but today, it calls forth bitter tears.

Mark 15:1 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away...

And there was evening, and there was morning... the last day. He through whom all things were made stands at the brink of destruction. The source of all creation is about to be uncreated by the very people He created. Day has broken and brings with it the hot, bright eye of heaven into the cloudless desert sky. The angry mob by night now adopts the façade of normality; a patina of respectability. No longer with clubs and swords but with the shackles of system and law they go about their work. For years Jesus has been bucking this very system of the inflexible religious order before which he now stands. They had no choice but to beat him into it, force him to exist within it, to choke him with their legalism. How often we seek to weave our nefarious purposes into structures of control, bending them to our predetermined will. How often our councils restrict life rather than release it. How often we gather together to pay tribute to the way things are, rather than the way things could be.

Matthew 27:3-4 When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.'

Oh, the pain of guilt that comes too late. Oh, the shame that comes from recognizing a mistake with no chance to make it right. It turns your stomach to lead. It quickens your pulse and makes your mind race. "I did this. How could I do this?" We must be able to live with the consequences of our actions, surprising though they may be. Blinded by our bias to believe we are right or justified, even actions we think we have planned and plotted carefully can lead to places we do not intend. But what is done cannot be undone. The money can be returned, the sin confessed but Jesus is still condemned. There is no going back, and that finality can be torturous. It is God alone who offers relief from our mistakes, forgiveness from our sins. The chief priests and the elders rebuff authentic repentance. They cast him aside carelessly; a pawn in their plan. They wash their hands of the innocent blood and the blood of the one who betrayed him. They got what they wanted, no matter the price. A price that is now two lives and 30 pieces of tarnished silver. But even a sinner as great as the one who betrayed our Lord with a kiss and set in motion his humiliation and destruction is not beyond the reach of the God, who delights in one who repents, even if that one be the cause of all His sorrow.

Matthew 27:5 Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.

There are few things more tragic than a life so broken by shame and guilt that it becomes unbearable. There are few things as tragic as a person who would rather end their life than live it. It is in those moments that we wish that person could have found the knowledge in their hearts that they were beloved; they were forgiven their misdeeds; they were accepted for their imperfections; they were valued; they were loved, by God, if no one else. What we long for is that they could have found some reason for hope in the midst of deep despair. There is no easy lesson from a suicide, even when that suicide was Judas'. But what it does bring home is just how precious and precarious life is. And if it is to have any value at all, it is in how it helps others to flourish, that they might learn in their hearts that their existence matters, that joy is their desert, and that an abundance of hope is possible.

Matthew 27:6-10 But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.' After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.'

There is no question what this money is, what it was for: blood. This was the price for the blood of the one, Jesus of Nazareth. They had found their source, the weak spot in his phalanx of followers and had exploited it. Even the money associated with such a scheme was too dirty to keep in with the "clean" money, though how clean it was is debatable. Taken through taxation and spiritual exploitation of those who came to buy sacrificial offerings, squeezed from those who had little so that they had nothing. The marketplace quickly devolves into a greed masked and manipulated by the spiritual power wielded by these chief priests. The hypocrisy reeks, but they are rich, so who cares. Who cares if they somehow are playing the villain in the very scriptures they are said to be experts in? Who cares where the foreigners are buried so long as they are not buried with them? Who cares what happens to Judas? Who cares how they spend this money so long as it is spent? They have plenty more where that came from, and no shortage of people to exploit.

Luke 23:1-2 Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, 'We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.'

They "rose as a body." This body rises intent on destruction. Not like the body which will soon rise for salvation. This body is sick with hate; wounded with unbelief. Not wounds of the flesh but of the soul. They accuse him of perversion; twist his words; insinuate insurrection. Lies are as good as truth when justice is no longer even a shadow. Integrity has long since left the building. This is a risen body too weak to even carry out their plan. They must appeal upward—no, not to God; He is not to be brought into this unholy work. But to Rome: to one, Pontius Pilate, destined for creedal infamy, entrusting an earthly power to execute divine justice. People of the system operate within the system; they trust in it, use it, and manipulate it to their ends. And instead of justice we get abuse and lies. This is how we treat the God who puts Himself into our hands. This is how we spoil all that is good and holy and true with our sin.

Matthew 27:11 Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You say so.'

"Enough with your noisy accusations. Let him speak. The only kings I know would boldly proclaim their lordship. So let him do so. The kings I know would boast of their right to rule even in the face of death. If he is bent on insurrection he has his stage, let him take up his part and speak. Let him say whether he is the king of these people we have so long kept under our control. The king they say they so eagerly await. You hardly look like a king. Where are your armies? Where are your chariots and your horses? You are no king. That's what I say. And you've done a poor job of convincing your people of it, if you are. They are the ones who brought you to me. So, tell me, are you the king of the Jews?" Again, a non-answer answer. Neither a yes, nor a no. Not a lie, not a confession, but a truth. *You say so.* You decide. You say whether he is or not. To Pilate he is not. But to those who say yes, he is the king of all the world.

Matthew 27: 12-14 But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

"For God alone my soul in silence waits, from him comes my salvation." (Psalm 62:1) Jesus takes the verbal abuse from his captors as he takes the physical abuse: absorbing it, not fighting back. Resisting the urge to defend himself, which is our default. But in silence we give our fate into the hands of God, we don't wrestle it into our own control. So many accusations, but no answers, not even to a single charge. Such strength of character, such commitment to the cause, the cause of our salvation, even the salvation of those who torment and accuse him. How foolish it seems to be resigned to such a gruesome fate. But the cross of Christ is foolishness. It relies on a faith so pure and steadfast that no one ever has and no one ever will match it. A faith that the God for whom his silent soul awaits would not let death be his end but use that death as an instrument of salvation for us all. "Greatly amazed," indeed.

Luke 23:4-5 Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, 'I find no basis for an accusation against this man.' But they were insistent and said, 'He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.'

His crime: teaching. Knowledge: the weapon that will bring down the empire and the religious *status quo*. Knowledge that God is not who they say he is. Knowledge of salvation, forgiveness, peace, healing. Sown in the soil of the countryside of Judea for the people living under an oppressive empire and corrupt leaders. With a religious class who are happier to stay in power, than to give their people the God for whom they hunger. Such knowledge stirs the spirit, which stirs the heart, which stirs the feet of the people to follow. They are told they are powerful. They are told they are beloved. They are told they are blessed. They are told they are heirs; heirs to a land far holier than Judea, heirs: to a kingdom far greater than Rome. They, who will inherit nothing from this life, will inherit everything. How dangerous such belief, such knowledge. How worrisome to have people believe they are worthy. They become hard to control. They become bold. They become children of God, with the power to change the world.

28—Luke 23:6-7 When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.

A welcome detail slips their lips: He is not from here. Therefore he is not my problem, he is 'other' thus not worth my time. He is from Galilee, that northern lakeside province from which so much trouble arises. I have met his kind before, and have mingled their blood with my sacrifices to send a message (Luke 13:1). But Herod is here for the Passover. That is his region. Best not to get involved, best to pass this enigmatic king on to him. Best to let someone else deal with the fallout. What a relief it is to pass off responsibility. How cowardly, but how good it feels not to be on the hook for big decisions. After all, we could be wrong. The poison fruit of injustice is watered by attitudes such as, "If it doesn't affect me, I can't be bothered." As if our hearts had only certain jurisdictions in which they could break. Let someone else make the call; let the blood be on their hands. Better to live with our head in the sand than on the block.

Luke 23:8-9 When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer.

Herod, did you know? Did you know that this man was the one your father wiped out a generation trying to kill? Was the story of the prophecy and the wise men who gave your father the slip recounted over and over as you grew up? Or was it never mentioned again; all those innocents slaughtered (*Matthew 2*), and never given another thought? Did you know that this meeting was thirty-some-odd years in the making? The sins of the father here to be finished by the sins of the son? Is that why you were so eager to meet him? Did you know all this Herod? Did you inherit your hatred? Did your family line destine you for violence against this silent man? Or is your desire to kill him (*Luke 13:31*) born afresh in you? What is it in this silent prophet you find so threatening and so fascinating? Are you so insecure in your power that you must eliminate any and all opposition? Are you, like your father, so cowardly that you stand by and let others carry out the deed you want done? So many questions, but no one gives any answers.

Luke 23:10-11 The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate.

Bystanders can help or hurt or do nothing. That is the power they hold in their hands. We are often the witnesses to injustice and choose either to let it continue or, regrettably, to fan the flame of hatred. How often do we help? Here, they fling accusations like stones and it draws Herod and his crew into this orgy of hatred. An angry mob is highly contagious. How quickly our curiosity can turn to contempt when we don't get what we want. Contempt for not bending to our will. How quickly we reject those who do not give us what we feel we deserve. What began as an interrogation turns to mockery when the answers are not to our liking. Adorned in a fine robe, heavy with sarcasm and vicious irony. Humiliation is the goal now. Humiliate him and hand him over. The bystanders are where the real power lies. Had they been set on saving him, they could have. But they were not. They wanted him dead. And they got their way.

Luke 23: 12 That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

“The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Jesus is the new enemy: a common target for their frustration, a common experience for them to share, common ground for them to meet on. Anger can unite just as easily as it can divide. All that is needed is a mutual scapegoat. They both would rather not deal with him—passing him back and forth like a bomb that is about to explode. They both know what it is to bear the burden of public office and have to run cost benefit analyses that will keep the most people happy. Kill one man and this angry mob will be sated? Pretty tempting, especially when this man will not say anything in his own defense. Guilty? Innocent? Those words mean nothing when it comes to keeping order, and order is what they need: it suits them both. They are the deciders, and they must decide which evils they can live with and which ones will make their lives too difficult. Nice to have a friend who understands. It’s hard work playing the villain, lonely work. “Heavy lies the head that wears the crown,” and all that. If only they knew the power of leadership through sacrifice; through doing the right thing even if it was the unpopular thing. For that is how Jesus would lead us, onward to a power far greater than any office in this world.

Luke 23:13-16 Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, ‘You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him.’

Not guilty. Independent parties agree, the accused is not guilty. Pilate calls the angry mob on their trumped-up charges. For one brief, shining moment: powerful leadership, rule of law. Rationality and justice reappear. So close to avoiding the cross and settling for a flogging instead. A reprieve dangled. Could it have gone differently? If they had not insisted, could you have lived out your days in peace, Jesus? But would we still have been reconciled to God? Did you need to die in this way in order for all of us to have eternal life? Should we thank the angry mob for saving us from a life without Resurrection? The whole of salvation history hangs in the balance. “He has done nothing to deserve death.” Well, nothing but to be born, to take our human nature, and its finitude upon himself. We all deserve our death if we have been given our birth. If we are to live on this earth, we must accept that death is part of it. Death always had him marked, from that stable in Bethlehem. The Cross was his destiny. And we are its beneficiaries.

Mark 15:6-8 Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom.

The danger we know is more welcome than the danger we do not know, yet fear. They do not understand who Jesus is and what he has been doing, but they know they do not like him. It is better to release one who has taken life than one who gives Life. The generative, fecund work of Jesus, spreading hope and healing and forgiveness throughout the countryside, is a bigger threat to this crowd than a man who is guilty of murder and rebellion. Perhaps that is because hope and love spread faster than death and violence. Perhaps it is because by those good things the world will actually be changed. That is the threat, and it must be locked away in a tomb so it can never accomplish its work. Lives traded like cards. One offered an unjust reprieve, one offered an unjust death, as the crowd's blood-lust begins to crest.

Mark 15:9-11 Then he answered them, 'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead.

What do they want? Do they know what they want? How do they know what they want? Are their motives even clear to their own mind, or are they blinded by jealousy, convinced that the evil thing is the right thing because the right thing strikes at their insecurities and causes them discomfort? Their motives are clear to us, clear even to Pontius Pilate—a man whose motives seem unclear throughout. They are ruled by jealousy, that fickle temptress that preys upon their weaknesses and pride. Jealousy, which jumps to attention at the first sign of another's success. When their supremacy, when their adoration, when their glory is shared, let alone diminished, they defend it, as do we. They are jealous of the attention he gets, the wisdom he has, the followers he attracts. They are jealous because they do not have what he has, though they claim to. They are jealous so they use all the tools they have left to stir up the crowd to execute their will and this Galilean rabbi who they believe might just be the Son of God. Give them the criminal—he may threaten their lives, but this other man's very existence threatens their twisted souls.

Mark 15:12-14 Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, ‘Crucify him!’ Pilate asked them, ‘Why, what evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Crucify him!’

We all want to know: what evil has he done? Why is it that you insist on this man’s death? How has he wronged you? Why are you so angry? What is it about him that so threatens you that you must be so vile in your shouting? What is the substance of your complaint? We can speculate; but we do not know, and you do not tell us. You are but hot, angry air. All we know is your voices, your vicious, brash voices. We listen to those who shout loudest and say the most outrageous and inhumane things. We publish their soundbites and yield to their barbarism, and in so doing let the majority in our hearts go silent. Our kindness, empathy and love, which make us human and make us blessed, are drowned out by the cacophony of anger, hatred and fear. We allow those willing to abandon their humanity to run the show. Their voices prevail over Christ, whose silence holds more truth and more power than all their shouts combined if we but listen for it.

Luke 23:20-21 Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, ‘Crucify, crucify him!’

“Take a nail, and drive it through his wrist. Take another one and do the same. Then do it to his feet. Lift him up on hard, splintering wood. Let him slowly suffocate. Let his life ooze out of him. We don’t just want him dead, we want him obliterated. We can’t allow even a shred of hope to linger after him. We can’t let even a sliver of his charisma and power live on.” Let’s be clear what they are asking for: torture. Let us be clear what that raging crowd is in favor of: the death penalty. How it is easy for us to judge them in their ignorance, to scoff at their fear and unbelief. How nice to think we have evolved in faith and civility far beyond such barbarism. Yet that which we condemn we still allow to live on. The complete and utter dehumanization and devastation of another human being. Proven guilty? That hardly matters to them? Hooded figures; towels soaked in water; syringes and straps; these are our nails and wood. Cruelty is always someone else’s sin.

Matthew 27: 19 While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.'

This is the seat of power; of heat and responsibility, where lives are judged and lost. So much authority in this throne of absolute and unquestioned rule that holds behind it the power of Roman legions. How many have been brought before this altar of condemnation to have their unjust sentences pronounced? How many have you judged with no judgment for yourself? But wait, one last word from an off-stage voice. A character never seen, but with a closeness, intimacy with the main players, the one who holds all earthly power in this moment. "Have nothing to do with this man, this innocent man..." what does she know of innocence? What has she heard and seen? A dream, a dream of anguish and suffering, but for whom? Does she hope for his release, or does she hope for his erasure? Is she worried about her own well-being or his? Does she care if he is innocent or does she care only that his presence, echoing as it has all the way into her subconscious mind, has caused her this perturbation? Is this a call to stand up for justice, or to wash one's hands of it?

Matthew 27:24-25 So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'

Enough. I am through with this dance. I am through being dragged in to your religious power squabbles. You want him to hang so badly, see to it yourselves. What does one peasant from the countryside matter to me? I am here to maintain order and this has caused too much disorder for one day. In the name of order I hand him over. But I want none of this on my head—I don't want to be remembered as having anything to do with this. I am innocent. Is he innocent? Who knows? So long as I am innocent, that's all that matters. Take upon yourselves the guilt of murder and execution, and let it trickle down your generations so that all may remember that you acted out of jealousy and fear and that his blood is on your hands, not mine. It will hardly matter. We'll be back here next week with the next guy who you all have turned against. And I will wash my hands of that as well. I wash and am clean, I have done nothing wrong. You, you are the evil ones, the sinners. But as for me, I bear no responsibility at all. So an innocent man may be dead. He won't be the first or the last. My job is not to stand up for the innocent, it is to maintain order, and that is what I intend to do, justice, be damned. That is my judgment.

Mark 15:15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Eventually, with enough pressure, even the sturdiest dam will break. Pilate acquiesces to the crowd. There is a release. The mob is moving again, enriched now by one more murderous member. How exhausting it is to stand up for right in the face of wrong. Here just a few hours is too much to bear. It's so much easier to let the waters flow than to hold them back. The more he placated them, the more forceful their cries became until it became too much. Just give them what they want and they will leave him in peace. How do we stay strong with the mounting pressure to abandon goodness and uprightness? Are peace and hope and love as good motivators as anger and fear? Will they sustain us in the eternal battle we are engaged in? The work is hard and never-ending and it is tempting to give up. But *lead us not into temptation...*lead us instead to the eternal day spring of your promised reign of justice which fortifies our willingness to hold back the evil forces of this world in the name of righteousness and truth.

Mark 15:16 Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort

The action moves center stage; from the fringes to the middle, into the courtyard of the palace. Jesus dragged into the heart of the government, the central seat of power. From a stable in a village to the center of the palace in the center of the city which is the center of Heaven and Earth. What a journey he has walked. This inner sanctum where Kings and Princes of this age are crowned and exercise their control. But his power is not their power. His power is not of this world. The whole cohort is called together to witness the continuation of his humiliation, the beginning of his demise. They have received their reward: a guilty verdict, a blasphemer in shackles that they can abuse with no fear of retribution. The eye of justice and civil order is nearsighted, it cannot see—or will not see—the misuses and abuses happening in its very center. Never has Jesus been closer to the worldly authorities who could prevent his suffering, and never has he suffered so much. The ironies and the crowd close in around him.

41—Matthew 27:28-29 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’

Now that they have gotten their wish, now that Jesus is theirs to torture and kill their psychopathic tendencies emerge. Like a cat toying with its prey before consuming it, they play and laugh and humiliate him before his execution. If he is a King, well why not make him into one. Stripping him naked, clothing him with a robe heavy with ironic symbolism, a crown of piercing thorns and a reed in his soon to be punctured hand. Like a doll they dress him up and mustering their full cruelty, mock, embarrass and belittle him. Their goal is not just to kill his body but to shame the soul right out of him. Sticks and stones they will use to break his bones. One wonders if the words can hurt him. As they kneel in mocking homage to him, dressed like a King, but not the King he is, does such derision pain him? Is not the human part of him made sick with these embarrassing displays? Being treated like an animal that is made into a plaything before it is slaughtered, does that not injure the human spirit that is so tender and kind within him? Again we see how we use people as things, hoping to eliminate all humanity from them so we can do things to them that free us from any guilt or remorse. Mockery snuffs out humanity so they can treat him, the one who is more than human, as less than.

Mark 15:19 They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him.

To go from mockery to abuse is a small step. It's never clear, since words don't leave wounds we can see, to measure our destruction. To ensure that the message of hate is etched into his body, one needs to strike and slap and scar. And if the reed whipping against him is not enough they must despicably spit to make sure he has no dignity left, not one shred. That same spit that Jesus used to restore sight to the blind, being thrown back in his face by those who kneel in mock homage to this ruler of heaven and earth. Frothing at the mouth they set upon him, rabid crowd that they are. They have been driven into a frenzy. The awful tide of cruelty drowns all voices of decency, conscience or compassion. It floods their bodies, overflowing from their foaming mouths. They runneth over not with goodness and mercy but with violence and hatred. Vile though they may be, we too can be victim of such sins when swept away by our crowd, our team, our tribe. The power of belonging, the power of hating the other, the power of mob rule makes us say and do things we never thought possible. For too often we are not acquainted with the wretchedness of our own hearts until it spits forth from our mouths, casting us into darkness.

Matthew 27:31 After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Eventually this orgy of mockery and abuse runs out of steam. The time has come to be rid of this troublesome man. He no longer interests them. They have spent themselves. The dark charade is ended and now the real work must be done. No more ironic robes, no more kneeling with sneers of laughter on their lips. This awful interlude, completely unnecessary and uncalled for, only included for their own cruel purposes gives way now to torturous, public death. Having eliminated his humanity through their mockery, they can now slaughter him. Dressed as a peasant not a king, his own clothes call no attention to him. *“He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account” (Isaiah 53:2-3).* They want to crucify him as a commoner, not a king. And there is nothing left to stop them.

Mark 15:21 They 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.

When you left your North African homeland, Simon, did you know you would be stepping into history? How quickly mundanity can explode into eternity. We never know when we might turn a corner and come face to face with the living God. We never know when we may be on our way in one direction and yanked into the divine drama unfolding all around us. You were coming from the country, oblivious to what you would find. And what you found was the savior of the world, deep in his hour of need. And to your credit you stepped right into his pain, his burden and helped shoulder it. You walked with him, whether you wanted to or not. You picked up his cross and followed after him. You are our prototype, you are our model. You are all we can ever hope to be. Simon of Cyrene, we salute you. You are history's greatest hero of circumstance.

Luke 23:27 A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him.

No matter where he goes, people follow. And among them, not just vindictive persecutors and curious onlookers, but mourners. Finally. Finally some acts of despair worthy of the occasion. These women get it. Instead of abandoning they follow and wail: wail for the loss of innocent life; wail for the death of God; wail for the child who is to die before his time. They are the ones with the strength and courage to face the angry mob and display their devotion to this man, their despair at injustice, in public. No bitter tears shed outside the city walls, like Peter, no fleeing like the other ten. These women, they are the ones who know what it is to love and follow. They are the ones who know what it means to be devoted. They are the ones who have the fortitude to walk right up to the foot of the cross, and to the grave, and the empty tomb. They are the ones we are to honor and emulate, if we can.

46—Luke 23: 28-31 But Jesus turned to them and said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.” Then they will begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on us”; and to the hills, “Cover us.” For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?’

Do not weep for me. Your grief is misplaced if it is for my misfortune, or my pain. My time is short, no doubt, but my glory awaits. I am going home. Weep not for me. Weep for what it is you will be left with. Weep for a people so rife with sin that they reject the messenger of peace, love and concord. Weep for a society that chooses fear over hope; hatred over compassion; death over life. Weep for the future your children will be born into where goodness is scarce, and happiness a memory. Weep for a time when darkness reigns and violence is rampant. Weep for the world. Weep for yourselves and for your children. They need your tears, not me.

Luke 23:32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.

“He was numbered with the transgressors...” (Isaiah 53:12). He remains with the outcasts and sinners until the end. His final moments to be spent with those whom society had condemned as deserving death for their misdeeds. Would he have had it any other way? A stable of sinners, it seems, they had on hand. Barabbas first, and now these two men. For one a reprieve, for these two, crucifixion. Never has justice been so fickle. But they are not alone. They are with him, and he with them. They will pass from this earth accompanied, the way he will accompany us all when we pass. Condemned, but never alone, not even at the end. No matter how far gone from the path, He will be with them. He will be with us. Even until the end of the age.

Mark 15:22 Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull).

They arrive at the butcher block. Upon the rock as smooth and round as the fragile case that holds our thoughts; the control center for our very self. For all our strength of mind and spirit, the human body is remarkably fragile, so easily broken. “The place that is called The Skull.” *Golgotha*, to those who spoke the local tongue. The nickname perhaps earned by the blood poured out there, by the shattered bones and spirits that litter this ground. Its very name evokes ghouls and ghosts, marks it as a haunted place to those who have seen what it can do. This is a place of death. A place familiar with the threshold of passing from this life into...who knows what. Jesus knows. Jesus who is brought, at the last, to this place stained by the blood of those who came before and is now hallowed by the blood of the one who will come again.

Mark 15:23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it.

One final temptation—to blunt the nerves and dull the pain. Myrrh laced wine was given to the crucified as a potion to dull their senses and make the excruciating pain of nails piercing flesh, tearing tendons and shattering bone more bearable. But he did not take it. Determined to feel every last ounce of the pain that could be inflicted on a human body while he was in it. Determined to sink into the depths of physical agony so as to redeem every last corner of the human experience.

Determined to die fully alive; to meet his end with full clarity. There would be no escape, no shortcuts. The only way is through: through the pain, through the misery, through death itself. Jesus went through, so we can too. No pain can overwhelm or overtake us if we face it, not with dullness, but with fullness; fullness of sense, fullness of truth, fullness of God.

Mark 15:24 And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

And just like that, in a few words, God is hung upon a tree, surrounded not by friends but strangers. The icon of our faith etched upon “The Skull.” There for us to gaze upon for millennia, and to contemplate the awesome love of God found here in the unlikeliest of places. The tender bones of his hands and feet punctured with rusty nails. The pain only exceeded by the exhaustion that sets in from a body so deprived. He has nothing left. His only earthly possessions, the protection for his flesh, torn from him and cast about casually, the prize in their game of cruelty played at the foot of the pierced, tortured, dying man who hangs just above them. How blind to suffering can we be? How ignorant of the prize on offer just over our heads? Jesus’ everything, every last thing, every last breath, every last drop of blood and sweat, given for us.

Mark 15:25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him.

Mark marks the time, notes the hour. He is clinical, precise. He makes sure history records this moment exactly: let this hour forever stand as a marker of the depth of human sin and brutality. As the sand slips from the hourglass, so Jesus' life slips from him. Time marked by labored breaths and drops of blood. A life oozing away slowly. The One from beyond time now subject to it. The day is young. Many hours of suffering remain. The cool dawn has ended, the heat of the day begins to rise, sizzling his skin and sapping his strength. Across the world, men and women are up and about their tasks of the day. Oblivious that in far off Jerusalem this hour marked the end of time and the beginning of a new age, unaware that the world was being touched by the heart of God and that change would be coming for them too, eventually. A change that brings hope, and love, that preaches peace and justice, a faith that would set the world on fire. For this morning the sun rise begets a more terrible Son rising which begets, thanks be to God, one final rising Son which begets the rising of a new day.

Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'

This is what seventy times seven looks like (*Matthew 18:22*). It looks like one who can, in labored breaths, with strength failing and body breaking, find nothing in his heart but forgiveness and compassion. To suffer so completely—the beatings, the betrayal, the mockery, the injustice, the hate—and hold on to none of it but instead be so full of the goodness of God that he has room, even now, minutes from death, to ask for pardon on the behalf of those who have so egregiously, so shamefully wronged him; to care more about those who, in their ignorance, have blighted the most precious gift humankind has ever been given, than about his own hurts and slights; to be willing to undergo the suffering of these past hours in the name of a love greater than all of it, of a life stronger than any of it; to let himself be the one on whom this lesson is taught, this is divine forgiveness. This is divine love. This is God the Son; whom we pray to and praise. And this is why.

Matthew 27:37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Is this the King of the Jews? The Messiah, the holy one of Israel? You, say so. Irony of ironies. Truth cloaked in falsehood. Ridicule that betrays reality. What begins as a cruel joke, becomes a confession of faith. He still has not given himself this title, but now it is inscribed for all to see; chiseled into posterity and left for us to make real. The inscription is true and it is not. He is not just King of the Jews, he is King of all the earth. His power vested in him by a lineage that reaches back much further than David. A righteousness and a strength that far outstrips all the prophets before. This is the King of the universe. But his power is made perfect in weakness; his coronation comes through his suffering. He sits on a cross not a throne, and in so doing, throws the whole notion of kingship out, and reveals to us the true nature of the God who is our King: one who loves to the point of death, and beyond.

Mark 15:27 And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.

Here now, an unholy trinity formed to punish and humiliate, not like the holy trinity meant to bring an overflowing of life into the world. This unholy trinity is an overflowing of death. The one who knew no sin and two whose sins are plain. Holiness and righteousness always seemingly outnumbered. Jesus in the middle, surrounded by sinners on every side. The one who broke bread with outcasts dies with them too. The one who went to those the world had forgotten or shut out with a message of redemption and new life, is ministering to the end. God's commitment to the least of these remains true until his final breath, as they all, regardless of their sin or their righteousness are brought to their physical breaking point together, forming a bond of suffering that exposes their common humanity and opens the door not just to forgiveness, but to everlasting life.

Matthew 27:39-40 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.'

Hanging from a cross, moments from death, people still feel the need to belittle and mock him with derision. You would hope, by this point the onlookers and passersby would have realized that they got their way, that they were winning this battle, but no, they need to pile it on, mercilessly. Perhaps it is that even in these final moments they still are afraid of him, still afraid of what he could do if he truly were who they say he says he is. If he truly is the Son of God, surely he could come down from the cross. But what then? What would he do to those who put him there? If he could destroy and rebuild the temple in three days, what would he do them? Their fear, still locked in a theological understanding of a vengeful God, has not yet been converted to the God of compassionate love and service who loves us enough to suffer our mistreatments and abuses. But that good news is still afar off. For now the threat looms larger than the promise, and thus the promise of life that hangs before them must be demeaned until the end, until he is dead and buried. For then he will be gone and they will have nothing to fear. And they would be wrong about the former, but not the latter: he is not gone, but they have nothing to fear.

Matthew 27:41-42 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.'

Their malice is not spent, apparently. No end to their capacity to ridicule. He is crucified. But it is not enough to sate their thirst for cruelty. Like Satan in the wilderness the temptation is to escape from the confines of this earthly existence; to forgo pain as a sign of divine power. "Save yourself." This is the voice of the serpent. But 40 days of hunger couldn't make him turn stones into bread. And now, when every fiber of his being must long to be free from this torture, he still will not absent himself from it. If he saved himself he would not save us. And he loves us too much for that. He loves us more than he loves himself. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The very thing that would prove his divinity in their minds is actually the thing that would betray it. They will see signs greater than pulling himself down off of the cross; signs they cannot even imagine, that have never been heard of in the history of the world: Resurrection. Death is about to be swallowed up in victory. But not yet. Because if he is to perform the miracle of miracles, he cannot save himself. He must die. And God will take it from there.

Matthew 27:43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." '

His trust in God—the very thing that distinguished Jesus through his whole life, the very thing that made him so unique and so special: a man with an unshakeable trust in God because he knew God as he knew himself, it was the substance of his power and authority—even that is now being called into question. If faith is reckoned as righteousness, and Jesus alone was the one who could be righteous, and he alone was the one who had true faith, faith that could move mountains and heal the sick and raise the dead, the most effective thing one could do to combat that faith would be to jam in the seed of doubt, introduce the idea of separation, make him question whether the identity around which his whole life and work has been constructed—"This is my Son, my beloved"—was a lie. How brilliantly insidious evil can be. As he hangs there, weak and wounded, would he have enough strength to fend off these doubts, could he resist the temptation to look at where God, his Father, had led him and see not the reality of death and pain, but the promise of life everlasting? Did he have enough faith left for that? Can his body be this broken and his spirit remain whole? Can he see through the darkness, even when the light of Resurrection has not yet been lit? Only if he walks by faith, and not by sight.

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'

Is this really how you want to go out? With derision on your tongue? Do you want fear to drive your last words? How much sweeter it would be to go in peace, with faith, not doubt. Difficult, for sure; but sweet. To hold conviction of the holy sort as your seat mate for the journey to the other world. Over and over, he kept deriding Jesus; that lesser angel on his shoulder continually pestering him to escape. Temptation whispering in his ear to the very last. Now not just the temptation to save himself, but to save these two men as well. Appealing to his unparalleled altruism and goodness. But to give in to this temptation would be to let the immediate good win out over the universal good. These men will be saved. And so too all the rest. Do not let fear or doubt have the last word. Do not abandon that which you know will lead you to the heavenly prize in the name of a more immediate, but lesser one. Do not go to your end with terror, but with the peace which passes all understanding. Jesus is right by your side.

Luke 23: 40-41 But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’

Instead of trying to escape, this criminal confesses. He admits to his misdeeds and accepts the consequences. God longs for nothing more than for a sinner to turn from their ways and live. Even on the cross it is not too late. Even the last breath can be one of contrition. As death encroaches it crystallizes our perception of the world; it reveals to us precisely how we have misused our time on earth. The promise is that in admitting your faults, in accepting the punishment you deserve, you are freed from both. God’s mercy is unfailing. Even to a criminal of enough infamy that he believes he deserves to die, mercy is proffered. There is blessing in such self-awareness; salvation in such repentance. So while there is still time, let us make haste to follow after this second criminal and bring our sinful selves to the foot of the cross, where we are sure to find reprieve.

Luke 23: 42-43 Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

The journey is short. There is no traffic on the commute to the Kingdom. By the end of the day they will have arrived in Paradise. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (*1 Corinthians 15:52*), there we are. There they are. There He is, waiting for us. Remembering us as we have sought to always remember him. Not just recalling but reconstituting. *Re-membering*. Our souls and bodies re-membered into something new, but not altogether so. The great mystery of our form in heaven left to our imagination. But not our place there. That is assured. Truly, he tells us, we will be with him in Paradise. The wait is not long. The destination is not far. Heaven is just around the corner. Back to the place from whence we came. Home, for all eternity.

Luke 23:44-45 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

This is too much grief for even the cosmos to contemplate. High noon is overshadowed with clouds of sorrow. The sun genuflecting to the Son—who was in the beginning, before the great lights in the heavens were even illumined. The natural world is keeping vigil, showing their respect for their creator. Darkness has won for the moment. The center of the universe and the king of the universe have both been overcome. Even the veil that separates our sin-stained world from the pure divinity of the holy of holies is ruptured. The curtain pulled back and God laid bare and naked before our eyes. And what do we see? Not a God of strength and might by our standards, but one whose power is made perfect in sacrifice and weakness; whose love is so deep He is willing to be destroyed that we might know the full fathom of his fondness for us. It is too much to bear. These holy, painful hours convict us of our continued crucifixion of God incarnate—in thought, word and deed. But don't look away; lest you forget. Sit in the darkness. Sit with the tattered shreds of holiness. Gaze upon his crucified body and know that the one who made the heavens and the earth hangs before you, for you.

Matthew 27:46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Six hours of hanging on the cross. Time, not an ever rolling stream but a trickle, measured in drops of blood and sweat, sorrow and love comingling and dropping to the earth. Life dripping away, marching, slowly towards death. The hour of darkness has come, the moments between each labored breath extended to the point they wonder if that one...no that one...no that one, might be the last. And from those labored breaths issues forth a scream of agony. A scream from the 22nd Psalm. A scream of doubt? Surely Jesus gives voice to all those who have felt God to be absent in times of extreme trial. But Psalm 22 is just as much a Psalm of faith from one who is suffering as it is a Psalm of doubt. For as surely as it begins in agony and darkness it ends in strength and faith: *"My soul shall live for [God], my descendants shall serve him; they shall be known as the Lord's forever. They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn the saving deeds that he has done"* (Psalm 22:29-31). Could this be the full message Jesus gives voice to by pointing us to this Psalm that speaks to his suffering and also to his unshakeable hope? For after all, it is this hope that proved true, truer than the fear of being forsaken.

Mark 15:35-36 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, ‘Listen, he is calling for Elijah.’ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.’

They listen, but they do not understand. Mistaking Jesus’ native tongue for their own; his message always getting lost in translation. Are these bystanders kind or vicious? It is unclear. Everyone seemed cruel before, but now, six hours on, have some brave souls inched to the front to take pity on this man of God? Sour wine—given to the one who could put new wine into old wineskins, whose blood would become the pure, sweet, unsullied and unsour wine of salvation—was not an uncommon drink. Are they trying to prolong his life to see if God may still act? Or do they simply want to prolong his agony for the sport of it? Are they waiting for God and his prophet to come and save the righteous, as Elijah was reputed to be able to do, or are they mocking his faith? They still misunderstand the message. There will be no escaping death, no miracle on this day. What they think they know about Elijah does not even begin to compare to what God will do. Because in a few short days, the rescue God has in store will answer all their questions, set right all their misconceptions, and ours.

Luke 23:46 Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last.

To be crucified is to die from suffocation. Breath gives way to empty air. So it matters greatly what that breath is spent on. To summon the force to cry with a loud voice is to offer a final charge against the darkness. And what to say with one’s last words? The Psalms, again. *Psalm 31:5*: “*Into your hands I commend my spirit...*” Here is one who has so ingested the words of the Scriptures that they are what he turns to in his most dire hour. Their words, His words, the Word, united. Here is one for whom every breath is a prayer, even his final one. But finish the verse. “*Into your hands I commend my spirit...for you have redeemed me O LORD, O God of truth.*” Of all the verses in all the psalms, this is the one. Not just a handing over of one’s soul, but a statement of assurance as to the redemption that is to come. Did he mean to finish it and could not? Or did he know that in only a matter of days God would finish the line in a way the world had ever seen, redefining for the Psalmist and for us, what redemption really is?

Matthew 27:51 The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

At his final breath, the earth itself issues forth a lamentation. A spasm of grief for its progenitor. The earth sobs, its heaving chest shakes the ground we always think so secure. It cries out in agony. We forget how our actions impact our planet. How when we kill the one through whom all things were made, those very things are effected. We forget that our lust to take life does not limit its victims once unleashed. We think our reality the only one that matters. We forget that we are but small, powerless specks of sand up against the magnificent power of nature. Earthquakes shock us back to our place of trusted guardian over a beast with the power to destroy us, to swallow us up should we mistreat it. As the breath that moved over the waters at the beginning of time, that brought order out of chaos puffs one final time from Jesus' lips, we are reminded that this is not our world, and it can and will swallow us up, should we continue in our sin.

Matthew 27:52-53 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

This is a rupture of the way things work; a breaking open of the established order of the world. Jesus not only will lift the barrier between life and death, but also the living and the dead. Worlds that all thought hopelessly separate, brought together; the portal we thought was only passed through once, in one direction, is flung open and the dead can move freely in our world. All those holy men and women who God placed on the continuum of time before the full revelation of His Son were never gone from God's mind. Their sleep was until the one who could conquer death would rouse them from their slumber and give them too the good news of salvation. Once Christ had led the way, they would appear to many, making the promise of eternal life personal and universal. His death was a tragedy but also good news, and not just for the living but also for the dead, for he is Lord of all.

Luke 23:47 When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.'

"Who is 'this man' who just expired? When they first dragged him up the hill, shouldering that beam, he seemed like just another of the many we have hung up around this troublesome city. The Pax Romana has its share of mortem. But then I heard him pray forgiveness on those soldiers who were ridiculing him. And then he promised paradise to the criminal. His final words, ones of surrender and prayer. And then it got dark, and people came fleeing out of the temple talking about the curtain being ripped. Strange happenings. He was different than the others we nail here. They are usually full of rage or fear. He was full of an ethereal peace. His demeanor was numinous despite the blood and dirt and sweat. I do not know if he is the King of the Jews; that title means nothing to me. But he certainly was a man of peace and innocent of any crime that brings about what we just did to him. I do not look for the "Messiah," but I know the presence of the divine when I see it. He had it. I do not know his God, but I will praise Him. I did not know you, Jesus, but I want to."

Luke 23:48 And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.

The crowds follow him wherever he goes, they have never left. He draws people to himself even in his death; even those people who are in search of spectacle, not miracle. But now the show is over. The ending, quite a dramatic climax. The whole sky was in on the act; the Temple too. Did they hear the Centurion's confession? Is that what makes them beat their breasts in grief and remorse? Or did they watch this man go quietly to the fate they insisted upon and let his words and deeds convict them of their sin. Do they wish to repent, now that their blind anger has subsided and they can see clearly once more? They have seen with their own eyes what their mob hath wrought. It hangs in front of them, lifeless. Their wish has been granted them. "Crucify, crucify him!" And so he was. Be careful what you wish for. Death is not something to be pursued lightly, for when it comes, it is final. And after the fact we are left to wrestle with what we have done. We are left to retreat to our homes, sick in our stomachs. Once the adrenaline crashes, shame creeps up into its place. There is no undoing it. Or is there?

Mark 15:40 There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.

The women are there through the end. Perhaps having been so close to birth they do not shy away from death. They know the way through which he is passing, that liminal space between nothing and something; that space between un-creation and creation; that passageway from one world to this one and back again. There is a spiritual toughness, born in awe and wonder that comes from that place and it allows them to know just how precious, and fragile life is and never to take it for granted. Death is not news—this death is surely disheartening for them, but they can look upon it, not flee from it. They are acquainted with it and they know the sacred ground it constitutes. Men were not allowed to be there when it happened, when life came into this world. And they can't find it within themselves to be there on the other end of the line, in a place where pain and love, fear and joy mingle so interchangeably. It is a fraught, frightening, fantastical place which no one should have to traverse alone, and none can forget for having walked there.

Mark 15:41 These [women] used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

These women were the ones who knew they had something they could offer Jesus; that they could provide for him and he didn't just provide for them. They knew they were needed, that their gift of nurture and care and provision was a necessary participation in his life. They followed because they believed, but also because they knew they had something to give. These women, who society had subjugated and made to feel second class, whose talents and opportunities were narrow, restricted, were empowered by him. He taught them that God valued and needed them even if the world taught them otherwise. Such dignity was a gift. And for such a gift they followed him to the end, further than any others. They provided for him through it all with their presence, letting him know, as he raised his head from the cross, that those who loved and believed in him had not all deserted him, that he was not alone, and that even from a distance he was held in their hearts. He needed them and they were there.

Luke 23:50-51 Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.

Joseph at the beginning, Joseph at the end, from manger to tomb. One cradles him into this world in swaddling clothes, one cradles him out in linen cloth. Both good and righteous men, who, in difficult positions, chose to do the right thing. But what is goodness and righteousness in the face of so much evil? It was not enough to stop the council from their nefarious purposes. That is why we are dependent on more than our own righteousness. But we are meant to do what we *can* do, control what we *can* control. We do the good, decent thing. If Joseph's insider status could not be leveraged to save Jesus' life, at least it could be used to give Jesus a burial worthy of his stature. No matter the odds, do the right thing. And then, in the meantime, wait expectantly for the kingdom of God. He thought it was close with Jesus. But now all he can do is gather his lifeless body, and lay him to rest. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Luke 23:52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven. How little this good and righteous man must have known about what would become of this Body, how much God had in store for it, how much confusion it would occasion across the ages, and how many souls it would nourish. He is the first to partake of this holy sacrament of God's real presence, unknowingly. We, who know what power lies in that body, are we willing to be as bold to claim it? Are we willing to put ourselves in danger for it? Are we strong enough to step forward and say, *"Give me Jesus. I don't care what it costs me. I don't care if you know that I follow him. I don't care if this puts me in danger with the powers of this world, political or religious. Give me Jesus,"* to the world? Can you say *"I want him, I need him, I believe in him, so give me Jesus, come what may?"*

Mark 15:44-45 Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.

“Dead? Already? How anti-climactic; he didn’t even put up much of a fight. No matter, I prefer it this way. The sooner I can be done with this whole matter, the better. I would have thought the King of the Jews wouldn’t go so easily. Wasn’t he afraid? How did it all transpire? Tell me the story, centurion—what did you see? He was peaceful? Suffered the abuse without responding in kind? Prayed for the forgiveness of his tormentors? Did he pray for me too? When he died it got dark and the earth shook? I felt that. I thought it was just a storm passing through, but you say it happened at the same time? Innocent you say? Son of God? Have you, a man of war, been converted by this troublemaker from the countryside, even as he was hanging above you on a cross, convicted of blasphemy and insurrection? Enough. This is all too strange, too many eerie coincidences. My own men proclaiming his innocence, the natural world mourning his death, take his body, get rid of it, let’s end this day once and for all so we can put this whole thing behind us and get back to ruling the world.” If only...

Matthew 27:59-60 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock.

Handled with care. Gently borne down from the cross. Clothed in soft linen. Laid in a tomb not his own. At least there is room for him now. When he was in the womb there was no room and now there is room in a tomb but a tomb not his own. There is only the room we make for him, that we grant him, only the room we make in our hearts. Cherished for the gift that he was. Honored for the King that he was. After so much violence and anger, such tenderness is refreshing. There is still some good in the world. Joseph must have had to wash off his blood-caked wounds. He must have had to scrub the dried sweat from his face and neck. Doubtless no one had ever been this close to the adult body of Jesus, the Christ. He kept himself at a remove from such physical familiarity. And yet now he is given over into our hands to wash and cradle, like an infant, before laying him down to sleep. In his death there is no longer anything held back. In dying for us, he is given over to us fully, he is wholly ours. Handle with care.

Matthew 27:60b He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.

Like a great period rolling in to place at the end of a very long sentence, the great stone punctuates the end of this very long, dark day. Sealing death in darkness, leaving his body behind, Joseph turns to face an uncertain future. While the tomb is full, his heart is empty. Only when the tomb is empty is his heart full. All the noise and shouting, all the blood and sweat, all the wood and dirt, all the stomach churning moments of anxiety, fear, and sadness of the past hours echo as unprocessed memories he will never forget. The one thing that is clear for him, the one thing alone, is that Jesus is dead and the tomb is sealed. A hollow silence reigns now. The one they loved and believed in, the one of wonders and wisdom is gone. What that means, who they are now, what they are to do, these are all questions for another day. For now, for today, he is dead, they are lost, and the tomb is closed.

Mark 15:47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

“Follow me.” The call has no expiration. It rings out beyond the voice of the one who issued it. There is no shaking these women; models of faith and devotion, all the way from Galilee to the end. Unafraid to obey Jesus, and follow, even though it must have been far easier to slip away. How heartbreaking to gaze upon this cold, pale body that once radiated such vibrant life that he drew all things to himself. Their love finds exercise in gazing upon him, even as a corpse, for it is all that is left. They are the witnesses to the final resting place, not just the location but precisely the way in which he was laid. Details that the next day would prove vital, but now were just a way for them to linger after their Lord, to delay leaving his side. May we prove as faithful.

Luke 23:54 It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.

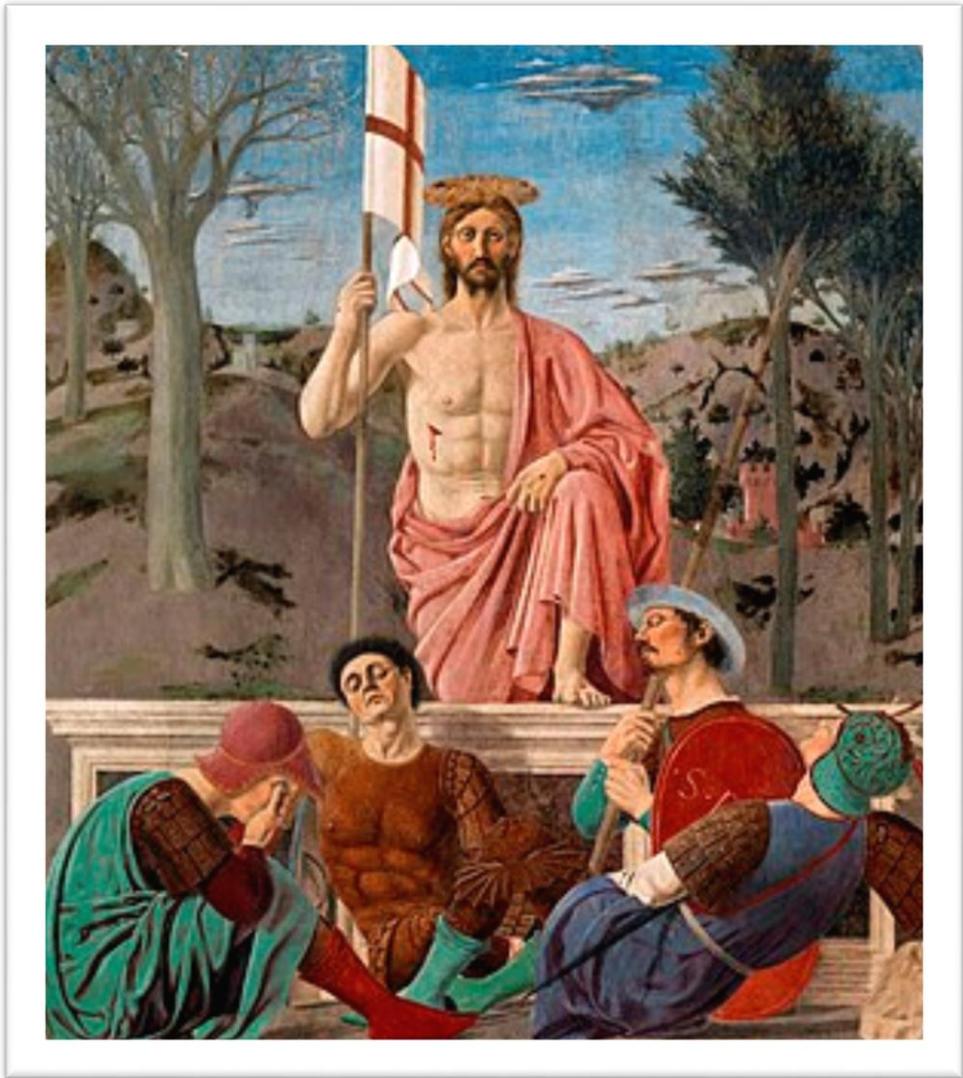
This long day is fading. Less than 24 hours ago Jesus was sitting with his friends, washing their feet, blessing bread and wine. And now he is gone; lying lifeless on a bed of stone. But the earth keeps spinning. The Sabbath sun sets. We prepare differently than they did. We see through the lens of the empty tomb and prepare with bridled excitement for what we know will come. For them, the tomb is still very much occupied. The day of preparation, the beginning of the day of rest, was a sign of time marching on, irrespective of the events of the day—but not oblivious to them. For the one who set time on its unalterable course was making preparations of a different sort. As day gave way to night, the way it had so many times before and would so many times again, God was preparing something special; an event that would change the course of history and rewrite the rules of reality. This Sabbath would be unlike any other. God was not resting on this day. There was work left to do.

Luke 23:56 Then they returned [home], and prepared spices and ointments.

They do not want it to be over. They are not finished with him, though they think he is finished. They are not ready to say goodbye. So they leave only to make ready for their return. Though he is gone he can still be honored, he can be marked as the king that he was for them. There is blessing in the lingering, in the return, in the going back to see. More blessing than they even know to expect. Spices and ointments brought to the manger, will now be brought to the tomb, but this time for a second birth, a re-birth that even those wise men from the east could not have seen written in the stars. They are replaced now by faithful women from nearby. Their journey is shorter in miles but the longer ordeal. They will bring with them spices to perfume the air, ointments to make his skin shine as if he were not dead but alive, as he soon shall be.

Luke 23: 57 On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment

God's Word still holds sway. The commandments have not been altered. They remain faithful and devoted even though their world has been shattered. Exhale. Rest. This is a day of nothingness; a day of melancholic peace after so much turmoil. The past hours have left their lives in tatters, but they cannot begin to stitch it back together, not yet. They are suspended in a void. The darkness, the emptiness weighs upon them. Stillness, shock; there is nothing else today. Nothing to do. Nothing to hope for. Nothing to come. He is dead. He is dead and gone. There is no hope, no joy, nothing. The rest of their lives must wait to begin until the next sundown. What the future holds is yet to be determined. They must soak in their abject loss and grief. There is no movement to be seen. Time itself seems to stand still. What new thing is about to break forth from the quiet? They have no idea. They sit, and rest, knowing nothing of what is to come. Everything is about to change, but you have to wait for it. We are left in a void. We are left at holy rest. Take a deep breath. Get ready to sing.



Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
The Lord is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!