The ANTICIPATION of HOPE

Contemplating the quiet moments of reflection. humility, and attentive listening during the time of Holy Week. HOLY WEEK PALM SUNDAY



A Power Made Possible Through Sacrifice

PALM SUNDAY'S MESSAGE OF THE DONKEY THE LION. AND THE LAMB.

BY MICK MURRAY

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o better understand Palm Sunday's stark contrast—Jesus the King riding through the streets of Jerusalem on a lowly donkey—we look to Revelation. In Revelation 5,

REVELATION 5:1-11

John dictates a dramatic scene where God presents a scroll that cannot be opened due to the fact that no one is found worthy. The apostle is overcome with emotion at the impossibility of the situation and the inability to break the seven seals. Then an elder instructs John to stop weeping: "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals" (v. 5, ESV). I picture the elder making this declaration with a booming voice and a sweeping gesture toward the throne—every eye in heaven expecting to see a roaring, flaming lion burst forth in a display of tremendous power. I imagine eyes scanning back and forth, bright and expectant, initially unaware of the creature that has stepped forward from the throne. Then they see him, the worthy one—not a lion, but a sacrificial lamb, whose throat has been slit, blood pouring down his chest, staining the pure white wool a deep crimson red.

It would have been accurate for Jesus to show himself as the lion of the tribe of Judah, in keeping with the way the elder announced his coming, but he doesn't. Instead, he appears as one of the most non-threatening creatures on earth. He is approachable. Humble. Meek.

This motif of power demonstrated through restraint and sacrifice spans the pages of Scripture. Jesus Christ continually reveals the majesty in humility: The King of Kings comes to the world not in a palace but in a barn reeking of animal waste. His glory is first made manifest not to Herod the Great but to lowly shepherds. He does not choose to mentor the academic elite but the commoner. He affixes himself not to the upper echelons of society but to the homeless, as he demonstrates the nature of an upside-down kingdom to his bewildered disciples. This is the Messiah who rides into Jerusalem on a donkey to the sight of palm fronds laid before him. He proceeds not to the halls of power to topple Rome and satisfy the crowd's expectation of military victory, but to the center of Jewish worship to confront misguided notions of what it means to serve God. Jesus did not succumb to the accolades of the crowd and seek an earthly throne. Rather, he was enthroned on a Roman instrument of torture and execution, in obedience to the Father, and that we might be forgiven, cleansed, and reconciled to God.

Jesus embodied God's original intent from Genesis chapters 1 and 2: that mankind would exercise a dominion of stewardship over the earth to bring about life, as a gardener endeavors to cultivate fruitfulness and beauty through their efforts. Adam and Eve failed in this task, so a new kind of human needed to emerge-one who would crush the head of the Serpent, but who would also be bruised in the process. Jesus was a suffering servant; a lion who was also a lamb. He is the God of unmatched authority who would don the garment of a servant and wash the very feet of those who would abandon him. One who would ride into Jerusalem on the week of his execution to the acclaim of one crowd, days later to face another that would demand his crucifixion. We see him weeping over the crowds immediately after the triumphal entry, concerned for those around him even as his own life became cloaked in peril (Luke 19:41). Jesus was completely secure in the affection and provision of the Father. He saw beyond the veil of death to the Resurrection, and was, therefore, able to endure betrayal, scourging, and the horror of the cross.

As imperfect humans who are drawn in by applause and fearful of pain, we often seek to embody the power of the lion—but we follow a lion who became a lamb. May we follow in the footsteps of our master this Palm Sunday, pursuing the sacrificial way of the cross so that others may encounter the life found in the blood of our Savior.

Though he was powerful, why did Jesus choose to lower himself to serve others?

Am I using my resources, abilities, and influence to serve others? If not, how can I take a practical step this week to use power to serve?

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

REVELATION 5:8

HOLY WEEK HOLY TUESDAY



Wasteful Worship

THE GRACE TO GIVE WHEN GENEROSLIV SEEMS ABSURD.

BY HANNAH WEIDMANN

OFFERIORY IN RUSING NAVATIR ROUTINE OF DERVAS 22 X 26

f there's one thing I love, it's an unexpected gift—whether given or received. Recently, I've found myself sending house guests on their way with things I've cherished: teapots, clothes, and even jewelry off my own person. I've felt the exhilaration and freedom found in the act of giving things away things with real value. But extravagant and unexpected giving like this rarely comes from a place of natural generosity. There's a supernatural grace at work, like the grace we see in the story of the woman with her alabaster jar (Mark 14:3–9).

MARK 14:3-9

I know this is grace because I've spent most of my life suffering from a scarcity mindset: the idea that there's not enough to go around, and I'd be better off socking away what little I have. When I read the account of the woman anointing Jesus in the days before his crucifixion, my spirit wells with a resounding, *Yes!* and I wipe away tears in awe of this momentous act of worship. But I confess—and cringe as I do so—that my flesh still has the same response as those who were in the room, and I start to scrutinize her extravagance.

Against the protests of wastefulness and impropriety, Christ defends the woman, explaining to his disciples that she has prepared him for burial (v. 8). Her act of devotion and sacrifice will forever point to the Good News, and she will be remembered whenever it is proclaimed in all the world (v. 9). The woman anointing Jesus emptied out what could have been her most precious possession, pouring out her treasure for the sake of God incarnate. She anointed the Word before his burial, bringing about a tangible reminder of Jesus as the Anointed One, the long-awaited Messiah (Isaiah 61:1–3).

I imagine Jesus would still have been faintly fragrant with that oil as he was taken before Pilate. I imagine he would still have the sweet woody aroma of the nard on his hair, his beard—the lingering anointing. As he carried his cross, I wonder if the bystanders caught the fragrance, beyond the smell of sweat and blood. Perhaps they smelled a sweetness in the air as Christ ascended Golgotha. I wonder if the men nailed to their own crosses on either side of him picked up the scent.

The sign of anointing was largely reserved for kings in ancient Judaism. This woman's bold act not only acknowledged Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, it also foreshadowed what Christ would do two days later as he poured himself out in a lavish, loving, and seemingly foolish way on the cross. By giving himself as an offering, Jesus accomplishes what we could never have done for ourselves. What can sometimes look like foolishness to us is faithfulness; what appears wasteful is worshipful.

My generosity is more a spiritual discipline than a virtue; I cannot boast in giving because it's against the will of my flesh. God, in his kindness, both invites me to give generously and empowers me by his Spirit to do so. I've come to realize that in teaching me to give things away he's healing the part of me that still believes there won't be enough. So I boast in this weakness, and I rejoice even though I still sometimes hear the voices directed at the woman at Bethany:

"How dare you do that?"

"This is irresponsible. You are irresponsible."

"You're giving away what you can't afford. And for what?"

Then comes Jesus, my defender: "She has done a beautiful thing....She did what she could." And the voices hush.

What is your honest response to the scandalous generosity of the woman anointing Jesus? Who would you most likely resemble in the room?

How does lavish generosity challenge our instincts for financial or social self-preservation?

She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.

MARK 14:8-9

HOLY WEEK Spy wednesday



The Fatal Fantasy

HOW JUDAS'S BETRAYAL REVEALS THE HEART OF MISCUIDED HOPE.

BY ENIOLA ABIOYE

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MAFTHEW 26:14-16

"We may note . . . that [Jesus] was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects— Hatred—Terror—Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval." C. S. LEWIS, GOD IN THE DOCK

> e don't get to pick the version of Jesus we will worship. We love him as he is. Anything else is idolatry. Anything else is fantasy. Anything else is less than what Jesus died for us to have.

A man once followed Jesus, counted as one of his disciples. He was released to do works only Jesus could empower, and tasked with guarding the resources of their assignment. However, at some point on his three-year journey with the Messiah, he succumbed to the sickness of disenchantment. His life, which ended at *Akeldama*, or "the field of blood" (Acts 1:19) reveals both the limitations of our human perspective and Jesus' invitation to complete trust.

But let's take a step back from the famous fatality of his story, and observe the climate that seemed to surround him. How could life in proximity to the Source of all hope, all beauty, all joy, end with such anguish and despair? Could the poison of comparison have embittered his heart? Was his imagination captivated by a fantasy of a heroic monarch who would topple an oppressive empire? Did he see a disorienting contradiction in Jesus' gracious response to Mary of Bethany pouring out precious oil to anoint his feet?

Fantasy tethers a person to a false vision. It takes up the space faith and hope should fill. When things don't go as expected, spirals of disillusionment and disappointment unfurl. Someone is to blame. Although it's tempting to blame God for not bringing about the good we imagined, if we catch a glimpse of reality in the mirror, it turns out we are the ones yielding to the seductive call of illusion.

When faced with the reality of Jesus, Judas's allegiance to his own aims ended up blinding him, and he missed the story that he could have lived. Jesus stays away from our pigeon holes and boxes. He continually shatters our expectations. His kingship is established in truth and grace, not in meeting our expectations. He has an intention, a goal, a gravity in his every step and every decision.

Grief, pain, confusion, unmet expectations, and unanswered prayers tend to reveal the depths of our hearts—do we love Jesus for who he truly is, or the fantasy we've created?

Jesus *was* the King who toppled an oppressive empire, but contrary to Judas's expectations that empire was not Rome, but sin, hatred, and, ultimately death. Jesus is not disappointing. He is the King who blasts our most exciting dreams to pieces and reveals a story rich with possibility, faith, and joy.

In the story of Judas, we grieve the false promise of the flesh and our desire for worldly gain. We also lift our eyes from the fantasy we built for ourselves, toward the One whose life provokes us to desire things that are more profound, more beautiful, more authentic, and more enduring than our minds can conceive.

When our fantasies shatter and we feel exposed, we can turn away in disappointment, or turn vulnerably toward Jesus and let his everlasting nature swallow up the make-believe and be our living, breathing, and resurrected hope.

Identify truths about Jesus that you've found challenging to agree with or accept. What aspects of his nature have you wrestled with?

Envision the impact on your life if you wholeheartedly loved Jesus for who he is. How would embracing and loving him authentically shape your daily experiences and overall perspective?

> Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver.

> > MATTHEW 26:14

HOLY WEEK MAUNDY THURSDAY



A Meal We Won't Soon Forget

THE BOPE AND ANXIETY INDERENT IN JESUS' LAST PASSOVER FEAST.

BY WALTER KIM

an you remember what you ate yesterday? Maybe you had a bagel for breakfast or a burrito for lunch; whatever it was, the food most likely served as a transition

to the next activity in your day. While most meals are uneventful obligations to fill our stomachs, some slow us down and feed our souls. The memory of a meal on November 20, 1993, still feeds my soul. It was a chilly, drizzly evening—typical for that time of year in Vancouver. At the end of a carefully choreographed day to optimize the conditions for my success, I asked Toni to marry me. After she said yes, we celebrated with a delectable salmon dish. The meal gave us the opportunity to remember why and how we fell in love. It was a moment of resolve, a time for making promises.

MARK 14:17-26

In the intimacy of an evening with beloved friends, Jesus hosted a meal with everlasting significance. Mark's account of the Lord's Supper sets the scene "on the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb" (Mark 14:12). The Passover meal commemorated God's great deliverance of Israel from its slavery in Egypt. As God's people practiced remembrance, it eventually became anticipation, whetting their appetite for deliverance from Roman oppression. The act of sacrificing the Passover lamb was freshly performed each year at the temple, and soon its meaning would be freshly presented in the Lord's Supper.

The story, however, moves from anticipation to anxiety. Jesus interrupted the dinner conversation by saying, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me" (v. 18). Whatever pleasantries shared at the table would have screeched to a halt. This stark proclamation subverted the peace that a meal together symbolized. Shared meals provided a time and place where covenants could be ratified, where friendships deepened, and where even enemies could lay their weapons aside. While all betrayal is bad, a betrayal in the context of such hospitality would have been appalling.

As the disciples digested his words, "Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them" (vv. 22–24).

Typically, the blessing and breaking of bread would have simply ushered in the next course of dinner—the equivalent of saying grace and passing the pita. However, Christ's words in the context of this Passover meal, full of redemptive anticipation and personal anxiety, ritualized something essential about God, both for the disciples at the table and for all who have followed since. The fruit of salvation came from an ugly tree, the old rugged cross upon which Christ's battered body would hang. And so, we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Yes, Jesus commanded the wind and waves to be still. He raised Lazarus from the grave. At his return every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Phil 2:10–11). Such visions of divine power inspire awe and adoration. But Jesus offers himself as a Savior broken and battered, memorialized in the hospitality of the table, and prone to betrayal even in the midst of blessing. We can come to him honest with and unafraid of our own brokenness. By his wounds we are healed, and through his blood we are made whole. In the Lord's Supper, whenever we take the bread and drink the cup, we slow down to savor the divine gift of joy that came through the sorrows of our Savior.

Share a memorable meal from your own life. What made it significant, and how did it impact you emotionally or spiritually?

How does the Lord's Supper symbolize the essential aspects of God and the redemptive nature of Christ's sacrifice?

When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said. "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me."

MARK 14:17-18

The PASSION of LOVE Delving into the emotions surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection with all its pain, sorrow, surprise, and awe.



As Bodies Grow Cold

THERE IS NO RESURRECTION WITHOUT DEATH.

BY HEATHER THOMPSON DAY

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t can be hard to hope and believe when everything you touch is cold. I've been praying about a certain situation for over three years. Recently, it has gotten to the point where I feel like I need to see movement. I haven't.

Movement brings heat. Movement keeps you warm. Jog in place for a few minutes and you'll feel your temperature increase. Your blood starts pumping. Your body activates. But how do you pray when your hands grow cold? How do you hold onto hope when everything around you goes still?

I don't know where you need to see movement. I don't know how anxious your heart feels. I don't know if you are waking up in the night because your body is processing what you didn't have time to confront during the day. I don't know if it's been three years of waiting, or ten. But I'll share with you what I keep saying to myself: surrender to the reality of Easter.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, the disciples had seen a lot of movement: the blind saw, the lame walked, the sick were healed. Jesus' teaching drew crowds and made converts. So much had happened in and around them over the span of three years, and they must have felt the heat of it everywhere. And then suddenly, everything went still. On Good Friday, everything went cold.

Good is an Old English term that means "holy." Good Friday is "Holy Friday," and on the day we remember the holiness in Christ's death that made a way for our salvation, there is awe even in stillness. God works even when the blood isn't pumping. God can move even when everything appears to be deathly still. Today, Good Friday is a symbol of hope for the entire world. But it was also the day before the disciples knew there would be a resurrection. We forget that sometimes: when they saw Jesus nailed to a cross, they did so without understanding the purpose of Calvary.

1 Peter 1:24–25 reads, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the

MARK 15:33-41

flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word that was preached to you." Right now, if all you can see is withered grass, ask yourself whether it's okay to sit and wait, as the disciples did. What if, today, we don't look away from the lament of the Lamb? What if, today, we submit to the silence of Saturday? What if, today, we don't jump to the joy that followers of God had no idea was coming on Sunday morning? What if, today, we surrender to the holy grief of Friday?

There is no resurrection without death; there is no Sunday morning without Friday night; there is no redemption without the One who redeemed. Trust the methods of heaven.

Maybe like me you are also watching sand pass through an hourglass; the sparse grains certainly don't look encouraging. Surrender your emotions to the truth of Easter. Let Good Friday be Good Friday. Let death feel like death. Let the air be uncomfortably cold.

And we'll see each other Sunday morning.

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How do you hold on to hope when everything around you goes still?

What does the symbolism in Easter remind you of and how can you apply it to your own life?

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi. lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")

MARK 15:33-34



The Glory of Weightiness

WHEN LIFE IS TOO MUCH TO BEAR. OUR NEED FOR A SAVIOR BECOMES CLEAR.

BY KAITLYN ROSE LEVENTHAL

RITCHEN BY GLATRE WATSENAN. GOUACHE ON PAPER, 2020.

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2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

ave you heard the cliché Christian saying that goes, "God won't give you more than you can handle"? It's not that there isn't some truth to this aphorism. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says that "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear." But it is misguided insofar as it places the emphasis on what *we* can manage through our own strength and sufficiency—rather than what God will provide when we inevitably fall short.

I remember the late nights on my cold kitchen floor—my body frail from months without an appetite, rivers of tears, burning cheeks, and the feeling of being alone late into the night, every night. Even at a time of life filled with unexpected breakages, Jesus met me repeatedly on that floor as I cried out for him to reconcile, redeem, and renew. He listened to every spoken and stuttered prayer, my weakness on full display. Each minute felt like a marathon. But with every breath in and out, Jesus invited me into his sufficient grace strengthening my weakness with his perfect power. As the Lord said to the apostle Paul, I felt in my life too: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Reaching the end of myself was exactly what created space within me for God to enter, and he washed me with his mercy and clothed me with *his* strength. My utter weakness became the dwelling place for his glory to reside. Yes, just as Paul declared, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (v. 9).

As a fallible human who has experienced suffering that many peers might not share, I know deep in my breath and bones that we are not meant to handle the weight of life's hardship on our own. If God did indeed give us only what we could handle, there would be no need for a savior beyond ourselves, and the blooddrenched death of Jesus would be needless. The weight of the world's brokenness would rest squarely on our shoulders as we struggled through the broken relationship that may never be mended, the ongoing illness we never imagined we'd have to bear, and every other unknown set before us.

And yet, if we experience hardships beyond what we can handle, the blood of Jesus is the greatest undeserved gift we could ever receive. Our absolute inability to save ourselves illuminates the reality of our absolute need for a savior.

With Jesus as our Savior, we can take great comfort in knowing his heart is tender toward our pain, as he too endured unimaginable sorrow. His innocence is evidence that he is the only one worthy of being the Sacrificial Lamb for our sins. It is a weighty truth that the one who is innocent must bear the weight and punishment of every sin, yet this is the very reason we must believe Christ when he says his grace is sufficient. The glory of God shines ever brighter when we allow our weaknesses to be a proclamation of his infinite grace, power, and strength.

Even with his sovereign strength, Christ did not reconcile, redeem, or renew the circumstances I once longingly prayed about on the kitchen floor. Instead, what I thought was solid eventually became dust. And yet, I found myself set free—free from the expectation of a life on my terms, where suffering was contained and relationships were guarded. On the other side of self-reliance, I found rest in relationship with Christ—in reconciliation, redemption, and renewal *in him*, not in my circumstances.

May our weakness—in the darkness of nights spent on the kitchen floor, and in all other places where our fallibility becomes undeniable—be a testament to the strength of Christ our Savior who dwells in the depths and heights. May we trust in his sufficiency, for when we are *weak*, then we are *strong*.

Is there a moment or season in your life when you felt at the end of yourself (physically, mentally, or spiritually), but Jesus met you in his grace, power, and strength? Share a bit about this experience, and what it taught you about Jesus' character.

In light of the gospel, how can you actively respond with honest delight in the midst of your weaknesses and hardships?

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9



To Be Met at the Garden Tomb

JESUS LINGERS WITH US IN OUR LOSS. BOTH DURING AND BEYOND EASTER.

BY RACHEL MARIE KANG

OOUBLE TAKE BY CHARTER LUNDIL, OIL OF PANEL, 14 X 207 BACH, 2017

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t's an eternal tension, a quintessential question Christians carry: *How do we hold on to joy though this world gives way to grief*? As believers, we hinge our hope on Christ's victory over death. We rejoice in our salvation—the gift of eternal life—yet grief grows wild, runs rampant in this life.

I wake each morning to new mercies, only to reckon with old wounds. I could read you my litany of losses, but I know you have yours too: The estranged daughter. The marriage in need of mending. The new diagnosis. The loved one lost too soon. The house that burned down. The pet that passed away. The love that betrayed you. The crowd that harmed you. When the resurrected Jesus appeared at the garden tomb, as yet unrecognizable to Mary, he asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" (John 20:15). Christ, even in his moment of victory, made space for her grief. In this way, is not the Resurrection reminiscent of the Incarnation? That unfathomable mystery that Christ came as a baby, forsaking all power for the sake of propitiation, *yes*, but also simply for the sake of proximity to us.

Jesus, with the simplicity of a question, makes space for Mary's sorrow. At the garden tomb—that place of both greenery and grave, of miracle and mourning—Christ's compassionate moment with Mary demonstrates that we are chosen to know *and* to be known by him. We are not merely a people to rescue; we are a people, *yes*, saved and sent out (Mark 3:13–14), but also invited simply to *be* with him.

On Easter Sunday, I remember the first thing Jesus did after his resurrection. Though the God-man had just been raised to life, he continued to stoop down and stay low. This is how Jesus has always been. He is the Word become flesh, taking on human form to dwell and dine, suffer and celebrate with us. His is our risen Lord, bending an ear to Mary, lingering in the first moments of their reunion at the garden tomb. He is God, standing beside man in the garden at the beginning of time.

This was Mary's joy when he spoke her name, and she finally recognized and reunited with her *Rabboni* (John 20:16). This is our joy, too. The risen Jesus brings salvation, and he brings himself. His victory will bring us from graves into glory, and he has come to be with us now, in the garden tomb of life on earth. He meets us, even as loss interlaces all we love and live by, both during the season of Easter and forever beyond. Hallelujah. **CT**

In this season, how are you holding on to joy though this world gives way to grief?

What would you say if Jesus asked you, "Why are you crying?"

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

OHN 20:14-15