

Surely He Has Borne Our Grievs

“When (the Gospel of John) appeared, whether around A.D. 90-1—or much earlier as some now hold, it was accepted as an authentic and apostolic testimony to Jesus, written that men might ‘believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,’ and thus ‘have Life in his name.’”

As we approach Lent, the time for remembering the passion and death of our Lord, we invite you to meditate with us using the Passion as it is recorded in the Gospel of John.

Ash Wednesday – John 12:44-50

Chapter 12 of John starts with Jesus enjoying dinner at the home of Lazarus in Bethany. Martha served the dinner and Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with a costly perfume. A great crowd came to this home, not only to see Jesus, but to see Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. The next day Jesus entered Jerusalem sitting on a donkey as had been foretold in Zechariah. The crowd who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead followed Jesus on His entry into Jerusalem, testifying on the way. Others who heard their testimony swelled the crowd. Even gentiles of Greek descent joined in the worship procession; they told the disciples that they also wanted to see Jesus.

Jesus knew his hour had come. He knew he had to die – “be lifted up” – so he could draw all people to himself. He tried to share this with the disciples and with the crowd but they did not understand. We are told many in the crowd believed in Jesus but did not confess this because they were afraid of being put out of the synagogue. It was only after Jesus’ death and resurrection that the disciples could piece together prophecy with the events which had happened.

In the verses from John 12:44-50, John relates a number of striking pronouncements made by Jesus on the subject of faith and unbelief. Here Jesus again reviews why one of his names is “Emmanuel” which means “God is with us.” “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me.” “When you see me,” Jesus said, “you see God the Father.” Jesus reminds us that he is the light of the world so that we need not remain in darkness. Jesus does not judge anyone for unbelief because he came to save us. But he does say that on the last day the very words he has spoken will judge unbelievers because what he has spoken was given him by commandment of God. The believer has been given faith to know Jesus spoke as the Father has told him. With this faith comes the assurance of being able to walk in the light and the promise of eternal life.

Char Valvik

Thursday (day2) – John 13:1-11

I have often wondered if the disciples had any idea what they were in for when they agreed to attend the dinner Jesus had arranged. I'm sure if I had been one of them I would have thought primarily about the lefse, rollepølse, sardines, rommegrot and blodkage. Much was happening at this particular Passover, and a good meal has often been a means of pushing overwhelming events into the background and giving all attention to what is far more pleasant – taking time to relax, feast and regroup.

They did not know it but their world was coming to an end and none of them, even Judas, could foresee the climax. It is quite clear that Jesus knew about the double agent among them. While it was cause for some preoccupation, it did not keep him from giving them one more bit of advice: Unless they took the attitude of a servant, they would miss the purpose of the dramatic events now unfolding.

I know I have not really understood that attitude, though I've seen it displayed in many ways, by people throughout history and by many of my acquaintances. I've probably had Peter's approach: "Don't wash my feet; I'm clean enough, and you are so much greater than I." What a shattering thought to Peter (and to me) that unless Jesus is permitted to "wash our feet" – to do for us first what we are expected to do for others – the message of the Cross would not get through.

Tom Valvik

Friday (day3) – John 13:12-20

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (Vs. 14)

About one hundred score years ago God sent his Son to found the Christian church in the world and for the world. He sent his Son as a servant, who came to give himself to humanity. Jesus came to die that we might live – forever with him.

One hundred years ago God founded St. Luke’s Church. No doubt, he wanted to use our congregation, and specifically its members, to help make his kingdom come; right here, and wherever else the influence of St. Luke’s members has been felt as they have served their Lord.

God’s kingdom comes wherever his will is done. Washing another’s feet is a cleansing, refreshing act which is likely to make the recipient want to perform an act of kindness for someone else.

Washing someone’s feet also seems symbolic of helping someone bear his burdens. Jesus set a perfect example in this regard as he healed bodies, provided the daily necessities of life and nourished people’s hearts, minds, and souls. God wants us to become more and more like Jesus.

Lord, help us to love others as you have loved us. Show us each day how we can serve others in their needs. And enable us to be the good neighbor that you want us to be. May your kingdom come through us. Amen.

Doris Mikelson

Saturday (day4) – John 13:21-30

Betrayal

Jesus knew his betrayer.

I suppose the nature of betrayal means that it is someone close. He told his disciples who his betrayer was and then went on with what he had to do. In this passage, Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and completely identifies Judas.

I think that Jesus is teaching us how to cope when betrayed. He is not about to seek revenge or try to garner support for himself. He simply allows it to happen without intervention or retaliation.

We could say that he knew it was a part of the divine plan of salvation and that would override any human reaction. But I think it is more than that. To be perfectly human we can allow betrayal and forgive.

I have a hard time forgiving someone for talking against me or criticizing me. But, I know the one who can help me know that perfect love.

Lord, help us to forgive so that we can truly pray: “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Amen.

Jane Norman

Monday (day5) – John 13:31-35

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

Alright for Jesus to say...everybody will know we are disciples by the way we love one another. He didn't know how unlovable we can be here at St. Luke's. How we can irritate each other, get on each other's nerves. How some of our disagreements can reach to the very core of religious convictions.

Besides, it's impossible. We can never love each other the way Jesus loved us. We're not divine we're not perfect. Surely Jesus will make some allowance for the fact that we're human. (But isn't that just the point? Jesus was human too.)

And he told us to love each other. It's hard. It's hardly possible. But it's what we're called and commanded to do.

Jesus, teach us how to love. Amen.

Inez Schwarzkopf

Tuesday (day6) – John 13:36-38

“Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward.”

What a comfort this statement must have been to Peter, after Jesus died, after he was raised, after he ascended.

On this terrible night, Jesus seemed to know everything. He knew he faced death. He knew Judas would betray him. He knew Peter would deny him. He even knew about the rooster!

Peter was so cocky, so sure he would have the courage to stand by Jesus to the end. He failed so miserably. He must have burned with shame and embarrassment and remorse afterward! He must have longed for another chance.

And then he could remember: Jesus, who seemed to know everything that night, knew that Peter would follow him to heaven. And Jesus promises us that too.

Jesus, please prepare a place for us – and us for that place. Amen.

Inez Schwarzkopf

Wednesday (day7) – John 14:1-7

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

I asked someone the way to my friend’s house on Rose Lane and 54th Avenue. She told me to turn left at the first light, go two blocks and turn left again. I should go past a church, she said, and turn right at the second light; then go on-half block farther to Rose Lane. I became more confused than ever!

The disciples were confused about the way to the Father. However, Jesus didn’t leave them in their confused state, but said he would go before them to prepare the way and return for them later. They would not get lost if they followed him, for he is the way. He would go before them, and would advise direct, and counsel them each step of the way. They need only to follow in the steps of faith.

Jesus also claimed to be the truth. The disciples knew many people who usually told the truth, but Jesus did more than that. He was the truth. He embodied truth. When he told them to love one another, they could see what he meant by the way he practiced it among them and among all the people with whom he had contact. He was an example of the humility, patience, kindness, and mercy that he commanded them to practice. He was truth.

Jesus said, “I am the life.” Life with the father is life indeed. It was the life they longed for. Now they learned that Jesus himself is the abundant life he had spoken of and as such would forgive, love, and keep them in the presence of God for all eternity.

Jesus is “the way, and the truth, and the life” for all believers. Through the Holy Spirit he goes before us and leads us safely through the many crooks, curves, and dangers that we encounter along the way to life in the presence of God, forgiven and without fear and shame to live for all eternity. He is the one to follow. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Vivian E Thoreson

Thursday (day8) – John 14:8-11

We often hear quotes such as “Your work is just like your Dad’s,” or “Doesn’t he talk just like his father,” or “There’s a little of her mother in her.” Sometimes we refer to a person as “achip off the old block.” These quotes and many more are often heard amongst us and in our own families. Our children do take on our traits and mannerisms – whether we like it or not. Take a look at your children. Do you see yourself in the many things they do or say? These likenesses should become more evident the older they get the longer they are with you. Now look at yourself. Can you see similarities that remind you of your parents? I’m sure you do. I know I do.

Then again, there are times when we who are closest to our loved ones, fail to see these likenesses. Sometimes we see them in other families before we notice it in our own.

So it was with Philip and the other disciples. They had a close relationship with Jesus and yet they are asking Jesus to show them the Father. All the while Jesus’ words and actions had been pointing them to his heavenly Father. Not even the miracles Jesus performed had opened their eyes.

How about our own lives? Do people see Jesus in us? Are we reflecting or Heavenly Father?

Lord, help me to live my life so that others may see you in me and be drawn to a closer relationship with you. Amen.

Coral Anderson

Friday (day9) – John 14:12-14

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

I have drawn a blank here. I do not fully understand what I believe to be true here. I do not fully believe what I think I understand here. An old friend and mentor used to teach me with stories that I sometimes couldn't understand. He would tell me that the meaning would come to me when I was ready for it; I would understand when it was time. Evidently the time for me to understand these verses has not come yet. I am not ready yet.

Guy Evers

Saturday (day10) – John 14:15-17

“...and I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper to be with you forever, I mean the Spirit of Truth.”

What a wonderful promise!

The word helper, in Greek, is parakletos, and there is a comparable word in English. The authorized version uses the word comforter, but this word does not carry all the meaning that can be found in the Greek word. The actual meaning is “someone who is called in”.

Why would someone be called in? The Greeks might have used this word to refer to someone asked to be a witness in law court, or perhaps an expert asked for advice on a specific problem. It could also be used to refer to someone who is called to inspire soldiers when they are down.

The term always refers to someone called by a person who needs help because he is faced with doubt or trouble of any kind. A good word is cope. The Spirit helps us cope with our problems of daily living.

One of the memory verses we had last fall also refers to the Holy Spirit, the verse of September 30, where Jesus says the Spirit will teach us everything, and remind us of all that he has said. This, too, is the Spirit helping us to cope, much as a parent helps a child, by teaching and reminding.

Finally, we can be certain the Spirit is truly there, whenever and wherever we need him. We are assured of this by Jesus himself.

Bev Jensen

Monday (day11) – John 14:18-24

To me Christ lives in love. Christ is Love, God is Love, Love is God, Love is Christ, etc. When I love, I am as close to knowing God (knowing Christ) as I'll probably ever be. When I am keeping the commandments to love God and my neighbor, I know God and I am living in Christ. When I am not loving, I cannot see God and don't know Christ. Love, God and Christ are one.

Guy Evers

Tuesday (day12) – John 14:25-31

Let me tell you, my dear friend, that I can see some very hard times ahead for you and those you love. And when you are going through those times, I won't be around to come and talk things over with, because I have to leave soon.

But I want you to know, right now, with all the earnestness I have, that you will not be left alone. You will have a new Counselor who will remind you of our times together and the wisdom I have shared with you.

Don't fret! When you are really under fire, you will still remember, and you will know, deep in your soul that our Father is completely in control. No one else will be able to quiet your heart like that!

And when all these hard and evil things come about that I've warned you about, be comforted to know that I have already walked that path ahead of you – I've scouted it out – and I know the way.

Trust me, dear friend; the Father is in charge.

Sandra Olmsted

Wednesday (day13) – John 15:1-11

Among the seven great “I am...” statements of Jesus in John, this one expresses most clearly the intimate union between the believer and Jesus. Elsewhere Jesus speaks of the Son being one with the Father, and the believers being one with the Son, so that all are one unity (John 17). Here he gives a vivid picture of that unity. It reminds me of the unity between the fetus and the mother – they are distinct yet united.

The connection between a vine and its branches is organic, not intellectual. There is a unity not only of structure but of function: the sap flows between them, giving life to the branch and sustenance to the vine. We are just as dependent on Jesus as the branch is to the vine, and we are also organically connected to one another.

The central word in this passage, repeated ten times, is “abide.” It is the hub of the four main sections of the paragraph on “bearing fruit,” “asking,” “loving,” and “rejoicing.” Is abiding automatic, to be taken for granted by baptized Christians? It seems not. The passage states that it is possible to separate oneself; yet the connection is clearly not based on the efforts of the branch. The branch just does what comes naturally: bearing fruit.

We are called to be whole persons related totally to our whole God. Our inner life is sustained by God’s care and nourishing of us; our outer life is the natural expression of our inner union with the Vine.

Brad Holt

Thursday (day14) – John 15:12-17

Jesus commanded us to “Love one another as I have loved you.”

How can we love our neighbors as Christ loved us? It sounds like a big request of us. Does that mean we shouldn't love our neighbors at all because we can't do it perfectly? No! We need to look at small ways to demonstrate our love for other people. He did not expect us to be perfect.

How many of us reach out to people less fortunate than ourselves to help them or show some compassion or understanding?

How do we treat people we don't like? Do we respect them as human beings with different opinions/lifestyles than us or do we show scorn towards them? Are we indifferent to people we don't like? To do so is the opposite of the love Christ commanded us to show our neighbor.

Father we pray for your guidance in being more Christ-like in our love for all people.

Jean Evers

Friday (day15) – John 15:18-27

To be a Christian is to be the object of the world's hatred and scorn. That's what Jesus said. The hatred those untouched by God's grace have for Jesus is extended to his followers. Christians will be hated as he was hated, Jesus said.

The Bible tells us that Stephen, James and Peter all were put to death because they believed in Jesus. One tradition declares that every disciple of Jesus with the exception of the Apostle John experienced a martyr's death. And the history books tell many stories of the cruel deaths of Christians in the early days of the church at the hands of the Roman emperors.

We live in a time and place when persecution of Christians is minimal. Why is there so little persecution and hatred of Christians today? Christianity in the United States has become institutionalized, which may account for the minimal rejection we experience. The institutionalization of the Christian faith has, however, rendered the Christian faith innocuous. Society's response in our time has been one not of rejection but of indifference. When we do not live out our faith in Christ we are a threat to no one.

When Castro's communist government took over Cuba 30 years ago, most of the Christian pastors left Cuba rather than remain and stand for the values and teachings of Christianity against the atheism of that government. Castro, consequently, dismissed the Christian church as impotent and no threat to his government. It could be ignored.

Jesus was a force in his world and challenged the status quo. Because of that he was put to death. He expects his followers to also be a force in the world. He has appointed us as the world's salt, the world's light, the burr, the goad that proclaims God's vision for his world that will necessarily be at odds with the goals of our human institutions.

As we follow Jesus and proclaim his values, we will disturb the world and experience its rejection, hatred and persecution.

Carl Jensen

Saturday (day16) – John 16:1-4A

In this passage Jesus seeks to strengthen us against challenges to our faith by bluntly telling us to expect challenges from people claiming to be acting in the name of God. Jesus informs his disciples that they should expect to be expelled from their places of worship and maybe even killed by people claiming to be acting in the name of God. But Jesus reminds his disciples and us that those people who seek to harm others in the name of God do not truly know or act on behalf of God and his son Jesus Christ.

In our world today religious conflict continues to rage: the war in the Middle East, clashes in India, and Northern Ireland, to name a few. These are often the most difficult conflicts for me to understand. How can people claiming to be acting in the name of god or religion be so bent on destroying their fellow human beings? It does challenge one's faith.

But Jesus does not want these so-called religious conflicts to surprise us and cause our faith to weaken. Rather we must prepare ourselves and realize that actions which are claimed to be in the name of God must be consistent with the teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who taught us to love our enemies and the peacemakers shall inherit the earth.

Kurt Schwarzkopf

Monday (day17) – John 16:4B-11

In this passage Jesus continues to instruct us on how to cope with challenges to our faith. Jesus informs his disciples and us that although he must leave the earth, he will send the Holy Spirit to abide with us.

My version of the Bible uses the word “counselor” to identify the Holy Spirit. In my profession, I am often referred to as a counselor. It is my job to counsel or advise my clients in matters relating to the law. I find it interesting that the term “counselor” is used here rather than the term “comforter” which is used in other passages of the Bible. I believe this choice of terms is deliberate in the context of this passage.

The function of the Holy Spirit is to act through us to advise the world so that it is convinced of sin, righteousness and judgment. Acting with the strength of the Holy Spirit, we are to be the advisors to those who do not know Christ, so that they might know that all people are sinners and it is only by the grace of God and belief in his sacrificed and risen son Jesus Christ that we can avoid his judgment and find eternal life.

Kurt Schwarzkopf

Tuesday (day18) – John 16:12-15

“I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Here, the master teacher of all time tells his best loved students, his apostles, that there are things which he cannot teach them because they are not yet ready to hear them. It is hardly surprising that different commentators see rather different things in these few verses. C. K. Barrett, in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, sees mostly an exposition of the work of the Holy Spirit, “the Paraclete.” W. Lock, in *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, sees little beyond the promise that the Spirit will lead the apostles to understand the events they are soon to experience during Christ's Passion.

The author of the chapter on the Gospel of John in L. R. Dummelow's *The One Volume Bible Commentary*, sees perhaps the most in the verses. First, he sees the exposition of the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. “One of the leading Trinitarian passages in the NT,” in which “(1) the three persons are clearly distinguished; (2) their relative subordination is clearly taught, the Father giving His all to the Son, and the Son communicating His all to the Spirit; (3) their equality of nature is distinctly affirmed, for the Son receives from the Father ‘all things whatsoever the Father hath’...and communicates them to the Spirit.”

Far more exhilarating, he sees the specific promise that the Holy Spirit will guide the Church in a progressive search for the truth. Therefore, Rejoice! The search is dynamic, exciting evolving, never complete and never ending. It is a search for all of the truth, a search in which we are fully free to engage because we may be confident of the Holy Spirit's guidance if we but pray, and retain an open mind and a sincere desire to see the truth. We need not fear to look beyond old, time-worn sanctimony. Let theologizing continue, let there be controversy, let there be questioning of old assumptions. If we seek the truth in sincerity; keep our humility, knowing that we will never have all of the truth; remember to pray both for the courage to face the truth when we find it, and for guidance as we seek it; and above all, if we seek to do all that we do in love, we may be confident that the Spirit will lead us, if not all the way to the truth, then always toward it.

Hank Dinter

Wednesday (day19) – John 16:16-24

In a conversation with his disciples in the Upper Room, Jesus told them, “in a little while you will no longer see me,” and then “again in a little while you will see me.” He also stated, “because I go to the Father.” The disciples discussed among themselves what Jesus could possibly mean by all this, and Jesus, sensing their confusion, attempted (in verses 21-24) to explain his words to them.

His departure probably refers to Christ’s death on the Cross, and his resurrection three days later – an event which would take place soon after the above-mentioned dialogue. But it can be interpreted, and probably should be, according to several Biblical scholars (Peake, for one) as a reference to the removal of Jesus on Ascension Day, and his “coming again” on the last day.

It is the latter interpretation which seems to speak to us in our present day. Our lives are filled with many difficulties and often we are sorrowful. All of us know of broken relationships – if not in our own families, certainly among our friends or acquaintances. We’re concerned with the social and moral corruption which seems so rampant in our world. In the past few weeks we have been caught up in a war which seems to make so little sense. We are grieved by daily reports of destruction and death. The evil forces of the world seem to be overtaking the forces of good.

But we are reminded in these verses, as we are reminded in so many verses of the New Testament, that despite the sorrow and the anguish of the present time, the church of Christ will prevail, and great joy will return.

This joy will come not because of anything we can do by ourselves. It will be effected by Jesus, through his reconciliation between God and man. It is through our faith in this promise, and through prayer, that we are sustained in these dark days of our lives.

Vonnie Dinter

Thursday (day20) – John 16:25-28

Here Jesus is telling the disciples he plans to talk straight to them. He is predicting his death and resurrection.

He is also telling them of his relationship with God, and their relationship with God through him.

Father help us to take time this season to meditate on our own relationship with God through Jesus.

Jean Evers

Friday (day21) – John 16:29-33

“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Like some heavenly messenger announcing God’s favor to Mary, his mother, or the shepherds near Bethlehem, Jesus tells his disciples not to be afraid. God is about to act. Jesus is about to be glorified. His glorification shall be by being raised on the cross. They shall all abandon him. But he shall not be alone, for the Father is with him. Fear not.

He speaks plainly; he is going to the Father. They say they believe. “Do you believe?” he asks. He speaks plainly: The hour has come when you will be scattered.

They are his witnesses. Some witnesses! They scatter after Jesus is arrested. Peter follows to the trial. Yet, he denies knowing Jesus three times when called to give witness. “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

There is more going on here than a deadly serious contest between human beings. The cosmic forces of darkness are making war on the forces of light. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (JN 1:5) Have peace; be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

The powers of darkness attack in deadly earnest. “If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you.” (JN 15:18) We also are called to be Christ’s witnesses to his crucifixion and resurrection. Yet, like Peter, our witness fails under pressure from the forces of darkness. We deny our Lord; we bicker among ourselves, we covet places of honor and power, we want grace far too cheap to be any saving good. Too often, we testify on behalf of the darkness rather than on behalf of the light.

Nevertheless, for failed witnesses who repent, there is this word of grace: “in me you may have peace...be of cheer, I have overcome the world.” You are my witnesses. The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father sends in my name, he will teach you all things. (JN 14:26) And your witness shall be true. “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Lord Jesus Christ, Fill us with good cheer that you have overcome the world, even our own sin, through your death and resurrection, and that this was for us. Empower us by the Holy Spirit to be bold and true witnesses to this fact that your light may shine even brighter in our darkness.

Ron Duty

Saturday (day22) – John 17:1-5

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you...” (JN 17:1)

Jesus’ discourse to his disciples is finished. Now he is no longer speaking to them but is addressing his Father. Twice in this passage he asks his Father to glorify him, “that you Son also may glorify you.” He acknowledges that his work is finished. Yet the most important part of his earthly work lay just ahead of him. He had not come to earth merely to become known as a great teacher or to be renowned for his healing and his good works. He had come here to die as Jesus Christ – God in the flesh – so that the death sentence for sin would be lifted. From this time on, death would still touch us physically but it no longer had any spiritual hold. By his death, Jesus Christ glorified his Father in a way none of us could ever hope to.

This Lent, meditate on your personal relationship to Jesus Christ. What does that relationship mean to you? Has it lost some of its meaning for you? Most importantly, remember that Jesus’ life – and death – glorified his Father. Let’s thank him for what he has done and seek to glorify him through our lives.

Larry A Anderson

Monday (day23) –John 17:6-19

Jesus prays for us

Here the setting is in the garden, shortly before Jesus' arrest.

How awesome it is to read this prayer – and to realize that the prayer is for us! Our Lord Jesus is so unselfish, so “other-centered”! Even as he faces impending death, he prays for us – you and I – that we will be protected, be sanctified; that is, set apart, made holy. And he even tells us how that will happen. We are sanctified in the truth of God's word. Jesus also adds that we will have his joy made full in us!

How precious is Jesus' love for each of us!

And he not only gives God's holy protection, he also gives us a mission – a purpose to fulfill – just as Christ had his own purpose here on earth. Let us ask ourselves in this season of reflection: What is my mission in this short time I have on this earth?

Precious Lord, help us as we struggle on life's journey. Remind us, Lord, that we have your word to guide us and give us joy. Keep our eyes focused on you for direction. Amen.

Sue Mesaras

Tuesday (day24) – John 17:20-26

Jesus prays for his church, that all may live in unity with each other, even as Jesus lives in unity with God. It is a noble aim for the church but, organically speaking, far from reality. The words of one of our hymns declare the situation that prevails regarding the church that bears the name of Jesus:

“...with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed.”

There are innumerable church denominations and Christian groups in the world that all confess faith in Jesus Christ, claim to teach the truth of God and even sometimes glory in their separateness from other Christians. Where is the unity that Christ prays that his followers will experience? Certainly not in organic unity.

Where then? In the experience of personal relationships. People who revere God can, in turn, respect each other. Christians who love the Gospel of Jesus Christ can, in turn, learn to love each other regardless of their respective denominational affiliations. I have worshipped with Presbyterians, participated in services of baptism with Baptists, communed with Roman Catholics and prayed with Pentecostals. The richness of our interpersonal experiences in the name of Jesus negated our personal religious preferences. So it has always been and ever shall be.

Jesus' pray for his followers becomes reality when we find our common ground in or relationship to Him, and through Him with each other.

Carl Jensen

Wednesday (day25) – John 18:1-11

Jesus' fate is self chosen. He, not Judas or the soldiers, determines his death.

God is in control of our lives, too. This is our wish and each day we must remember to let go and let God be in command. It is not easy to let ourselves be guided by God. We are tempted to set our own guidelines, but God calls us to use our hearts and minds in loving service. It is a wonderful gift to be in tune with God and find ourselves serving others as we are aware of needs.

An acquaintance from a church in northern Minnesota was listed in the church bulletin as being seriously ill in Veteran's Hospital. His wife was with him most of the time. Friends in Minneapolis wrote to Mary and Bill and invited Mary to stay with them as she spent her time back and forth to the hospital. Mary had been really concerned about where she would sleep, especially if the driving was bad. To her the invitation was an answer to prayer.

That's an example of how to do God's will on earth. If we continue to do God's will, God will continue to take care of us. Like the song says, "This is my Father's World". He is in control.

Don and Myrt Brude

Thursday (day26) – John 18:12-14

Jesus was bound and began his trek through the religious and legal systems in Jerusalem. When he was brought to Annas he was not brought to an impartial leader. His son-in-law was the one who said that it was “expedient that one man should die for the people.”

In II Samuel 20 we find the first case of a man dying for the sake of a group of people. Sheba had rebelled against David and when David began to deal with him he fled to the city of Abel, which was besieged by David’s forces. As they were battering in the gates, a wise old woman asked why a whole city should suffer because of this outsider. David’s general replied, “Give up him alone, and I will withdraw from the city.”

Perhaps Caiaphas was thinking about this incident when he said that it was “profitable, beneficial, and useful” for one man to die for the sake of Israel. What a pragmatist! This was only a calculated answer given without any regard to the deeper implications of Jesus’ ministry. But God had other reasons for the death of Jesus. Throughout the whole Old Testament, God was preparing his people so they would understand the significance of the death of Jesus. And it was not to save Israel from the Romans.

Consider these: It took the shedding of blood for Adam and Eve to be properly clothed in God’s presence. Now through Jesus we can wear the “robe of righteousness”. The Passover meal was eaten after a lamb, in the prime of life and without spot or blemish, was put to death. Thus the first born were spared and Israel was released from bondage. We eat the same meal, but with new reality. On the Day of Atonement, a lamb was slain and its blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies so that Israel could be forgiven. A red heifer was killed and burned and its ashes mixed with water so that the water could then be sprinkled on people who were unclean and thus be made clean. A picture of some of what God does in Baptism. There was the shedding of blood to establish a covenant. Jesus referred to this when he said, “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

There are many more reasons why the death of Jesus was important to Israel (and the Romans for that matter), but not for physical safety in the way envisioned Caiaphas.

Do we also make trivial the death of Jesus by thinking of a season, or a service, or new clothes for spring, and not thinking of the personal and significant reasons for his death?

Holt Walker

Friday (day27) – John 18:15-18

Peter was a disciple of Jesus, yet when he was faced with an opportunity to speak up, to witness of his belief in Jesus, he miserably failed his Lord.

The story is told of a young man from a Christian home who went off to college. His parents wondered how he would manage in a secular environment. When the young man came home on weekend his parents were anxious to find out how their son had fared. His parents asked, “How did your friends react when they found out that you are a Christian?” He sheepishly replied, “They haven’t found out yet.”

Are we any better than Peter or the college student? How many times have we denied Christ when we had the opportunity to speak up for our Lord, but remained silent? We have heard Christ’s name taken in vain, yet said nothing. Perhaps we didn’t speak up because of feared embarrassment as to how the person might react. There are times, many times I must confess, that I have denied my Lord in this manner. I must say that on one occasion when I did speak up, I felt good about it. Rarely is the person offended. Most likely there will be an apology stating it is just a habit; but that doesn’t make it less sinful. Do our co-workers know we are Christian? If not, why not?

Forgive us, Oh Lord, for the many times we have denied you. Give us the courage to speak up for Christ in everyday situations which arise, whether they be at home, in our work place, our neighborhood, or in the marketplace. Amen.

Wally Hanson

Saturday (day28) – John 18:19-24

Jesus before Annas

Annas was appointed high priest when Quirinius was governor of Syria about 4 A.D. Even though he had been deposed in 15 A.D. he remained one of the most influential priests and he still retained the title. His name is mentioned in Luke 3:2 when the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist was noted. I am reminded of Hebrews 4:15-16:

“For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sinning.”

Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Amen.

Jane Norman

Monday (day29) – John 18:25-27

The obvious theme of this passage is that Jesus' warning to Peter was fulfilled; Peter denied that he was one of Jesus' followers. Peter was one of Jesus' most loyal disciples. That is why it is hard for me to read about how he denied he even knew Jesus.

I thought about this passage for a while and began to look at it from a different perspective. Peter could have denied his relationship with Jesus to protect himself, in order to carry on Jesus' ministry elsewhere. Initially he probably thought he had failed Jesus though. But Jesus told Peter that this would happen to him, and I think it was his way of protecting him and allowing him to continue the ministry mission.

The Lord knows our every weakness. When we fail him, he hurts. But, if we are sorry for our wrongdoings and confess them, he will forgive us.

Chris Anderson

Tuesday (day30) – John 18:28-32

How typical of me were these Jews taking Jesus to Pilate! I also get concerned about the outward conventions. I too am often concerned about the appearance of things. They were worried that they would be defiled by taking Jesus into a Gentile building.

I think of Jesus' teaching at this point about what really defiles a person. It is not the food we eat which enters and passes out of the body, but rather the things that come out of the heart. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

I know I am tempted to dwell on the surface, the superficial issues of life. But Jesus makes it clear that our life style is first an expression of our heart. Moments before I steal, I covet. Moments before I commit an act of adultery, I lust. And at least moments before I commit murder, I am filled with hatred.

It amazes me that these men could not see that out of their hearts was coming, which defiled them!

Dear Lord Jesus, search my heart and see if there be any wicked way in me. Try the thoughts and intentions of my heart. Examine my motives. And Lord, forgive these my secret offenses, which are all known to you. Thank you for the forgiveness which is made available in you and cleanse these things out of my heart. I don't want them there. Replace these with your desires and thoughts. Fill me with your love. In your name I pray. Amen.

Holt Walker

Wednesday (day31) – John 18:33-38A

In today's scripture we have a continuation of Jesus' trial by Pilate, the Roman governor of Palestine. Pilate asks, "Are you King of the Jews?" Jesus' answer speaks volumes.

It tells about his kingdom. All along there has been a misunderstanding, as even those closest to Jesus think his kingdom is an earthly kingdom. Here Jesus clearly states once again that his kingdom is not of this world. It is a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom of the heart. It comes to bear witness to the truth.

The way Jesus answers assures us again that he goes to his death on our behalf of his own accord. We see evidence of his amazing love for us. Here was another chance to escape and as in the garden of Gethsemane he stands firm in his answers, willingly incriminating himself. Notice how he once again is in charge of a situation where he should be the victim. Notice how Pilate looks to him for answers to his own questions.

Lastly, Jesus' answer tells us how his kingdom comes. When Pilate asks, "Are you the King of the Jews?" we want Jesus to proclaim "Yes! Yes, I am King of the Jews!" But he doesn't. He asks, "Do you say this of your own accord..?" And when Pilate repeats his question, Jesus answers, "You say that I am a king." He allows Pilate (and each of us!) to decide for ourselves if he is King.

Is Jesus King of our hearts? We decide. We decide if Jesus' love is going to rule our lives. We decide if we are going to accept the many gifts he offers. He stands ready to destroy the many forces of evil seeking the throne of our hearts. He will replace hate, deceit, immorality and all of the rest with love, joy, peace, patience... We decide.

Dear Lord Jesus, Our hearts are open. Come in to rule. Amen.

Eileen Nelson

Thursday (day32) – John 18:38B-40

What a scene it must have been! Not one, but two men were being offered to the crowd as choices for the annual Passover prisoner release. Yet they could hardly have been more different. On one side stood Barabbas, a robber, murderer, and insurrectionist – the bringer of death. On the other side stood Jesus Christ – the man from Galilee who had said, “The thief comes to destroy and kill and steal. I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.” One would suppose the choice to have been an obvious one. Yet the crowd asked for the release of Barabbas, the man of death, and sent Jesus, the man of life, to be crucified.

How often do we make that same decision – reject Jesus and choose Barabbas? Sometimes we do it through choices we make, not because they are God’s best for us, but because we want our own way. Sometimes our actions – unkindness to someone, indifference to the problems of others – betray which way we are choosing. Sometimes it is a refusal to give of ourselves and a selfish desire to put our own interests first.

Barabbas was a man of selfish desires and interests. By contrast, Jesus Christ’s love for all humanity extended to the giving of his own life for our salvation. This Lent, ask yourself, in your times of difficulty, what Christ would do, and seek to follow, not Barabbas’ way of death, but Jesus’ way of life.

Larry A Anderson

Friday (day33) – John 19:1-11

When you read this passage, you are impressed with several things. One is the tenacity of the people. They would not be put off by any argument that Pilate advanced.

Another is the tenacity of Jesus. He would not be forced into a compromise. He was clear about who he was, and who was ultimately in charge of the situation.

Finally, we see Pilate caught between these two factors. We see him frightened, frustrated, capitulating, and ultimately losing. His feeble attempt at peacemaking was not focused on defusing the mob's anger or on maintaining justice in not sentencing an innocent man, but on saving his skin and his job.

There are many lessons for us in Lent. Lent is traditionally a time of self-examination. Especially at this time, and especially during these tumultuous times, let us examine ourselves, as Peace-makers, and ask ourselves what motivates us.

Sandra Olmsted

Saturday (day34) – John 19:12-16

“Are you asking for trouble?” Pilate didn’t want anyone to confront him with such a question, and neither did the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders, led by Caiaphas the High Priest, had already decided that Jesus was a threat to national survival. (John 11:49-50) Surely, to allow him to live was to ask for trouble. And Pilate? Pilate wanted to release him, because he knew he was an innocent man. But Pilate was warned that he would be in great political trouble if he released Jesus. Pilate didn’t want to ask for trouble.

This is an unsettling passage. It is unsettling because it says that making right choices can be very dangerous. For the Jewish leaders and for Pilate, the choices appeared to be clear: either risk personal survival, or get rid of Jesus.

In my own life, if I were confronted with a choice between doing what is right (and risking my life), or allowing a wrong to happen, which would I choose? Am I confronted with such choices, but choose not to see them?

I think I would rather not be one the Jewish leaders. I think I would rather not be Pilate. I think I would rather stay home and pretend to know nothing about what was happening. I, too, would rather not ask for trouble.

Lord Jesus, it is very hard to do what is right if I think that I will get myself in trouble when I stick my neck out. I would rather not get involved. Please help me to see the places where I must take a stand. And then, please help me not to run away from trouble. Amen.

Linda Holt

Monday (day35) – John 19:17-22

Jesus walked down the road. He was holding the cross on his back while hundreds of people stared at him. When Jesus had reached the place of the skull they crucified him and two other with him, one person on each side.

The inscription on Jesus' cross was "King of the Jews". Many people read it because it was near the city, so they walked by there. It was written in Hebrew, in Latin and in Greek. The chief priests said, "This man isn't the king of the Jews; he said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I won't change."

Kirsten Rokke and Benjamin Schnickel

Tuesday (day36) – John 19:23-24

Through my life I have never felt that I have been delivered into the hands of my enemies. Even in the darkest hour, I have not felt alone; there has always been an open heart to turn to. So it is very hard for me to relate to Jesus Christ's position when Pilate gave him to accusers, the chief priests of the Jewish church, to be crucified.

Christ's own people refused to believe him because their fear of the Roman emperor was greater than their faith in a man who claimed to be their savior. Christ did not come to the men and women on earth as they expected him to come; and therefore they refused to accept him as the Messiah. If Christ came today I am not sure that I would recognize him as the Messiah.

The Roman soldiers who were assigned to carry out Christ's execution on the cross were ignorant of his power and authority over them. To them he was just another criminal whom they were assigned to crucify; so they divided up his only earthly possessions amongst themselves.

Pilate, on the other hand, knew he was committing a crime; crucifying an innocent man was not to his liking. He could have set Jesus free, but instead chose to duck responsibility out of fear of displeasing the Jewish religious leaders, and creating a state of unrest in his sphere of political power. So Pilate declared him innocent of the crimes he had been accused of, but gave him over to his accusers to be crucified.

Jack Norman

Wednesday (day37) – John 19:25-27

“Woman, behold your son.”

“Behold your mother.”

On the cross Jesus spoke to his mother and his disciple, John. He asked them to care for each other as if they were mother and son.

Families are a precious gift from God and he wants us to care for them no matter what obstacles get in the way. If arguments divide us, we must find ways to forgive and be reconciled. If we neglect one another, we must restore the closeness we once had.

It is important for me to understand that part of my walk of faith requires me to spend whatever time and energy is necessary to build all of the relationships in my family. I need to spend time with my spouse, children and parents making sure each one understands I love them. I need to ask for forgiveness from those I have neglected. I need to understand and be reconciled with those I have a broken relationship with. If it is important to God, it needs to be most important to me.

Gracious God, guide us in our thoughts and ways. Thank you for the forgiveness given to us through your son, Jesus. Amen.

Maxine and Gary Olson

Thursday (day38) – John 19:28-30

The two last statements of our Lord: “**I thirst**”; “**It is finished**”.

During the two thousand years that separates us from the death of Christ, many different movements have sprung up claiming or implying Christ’s deity to the exclusion of his humanity.

Somehow even for a Christian, faithful to Lutheran doctrine it can be difficult to imagine Jesus as truly human and subject to the same impediments as we are.

This passage gives us a look at Christ’s humanity. Point of fact: He was thirsty and he died. He died after long suffering.

When we have difficulties and times of suffering, we can look to Christ not only as one who died in our stead, but as one who understands our limitations and mortality. We find comfort in the fact that he was “one with us”.

Jane Norman

Friday (day39) – John 19:31-37

Jesus hanging on the cross. Jesus suffering. Jesus dying.

It's a harsh story, and a tragic story. But it's the story in which we see the love of God exhibited most powerfully. In fact, if we want to see who God really is, then we must contemplate this dark story. We will see the great paradox that God's power is proven in weakness. We will see that redemption is only possible in the presence of suffering and that new life can only be found in death.

Here we see that God's greatest act of love and compassion was spawned on the seedbed of hatred and cruelty. We cannot have the light of Easter Sunday without the darkness of Good Friday. This truth is particularly important in our Lutheran heritage. It's what Martin Luther called the Theology of the Cross.

And if we turn our eyes to the world, and view the world through the filter of this story and through the Theology of the Cross, we can see the power of God present in those quite ordinary people who suffer.

And if we turn our eyes to the world, and view the world through the filter of this story and through the Theology of the Cross, we can see the power of God present in those quite ordinary people who suffer.

We see the power of redemptive suffering among the followers of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These individuals non-violently put their bodies on the line for the truth that all people were created in the image of God. The acts of violence done against them spoke to the conscience of our nation and called us to repent of our sins of racism. We see the power of the cross in the base communities of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. In those places small groups of people gather to read the Bible and apply its principles to their daily lives. Their discussions often reach a depth and relevance which can only be approximated by more academic Bible scholars. Yet war, violence and poverty continue as a normal state of affairs around these peaceful gatherings. And the authorities label them as "communist" or "subversive" because their faith gives them strength to face the powers that could otherwise crush them. We also see the power of cross in the single mother who faithfully struggles to balance housekeeping, parenthood, career and church. We see it in the courage of a young man or woman with AIDS who battles day by day to maintain a good level of health. And we see the power of the cross in those rare souls, whether young or old, who can accept death gracefully and peacefully when it comes as a natural cycle of life.

In all these things, and in all of life's sufferings and pains, that Jesus who hung on the cross and died gives us the power to live.

Peter Wemeier

Saturday (day40) – John 19:38-42

Help comes from unexpected sources! Who is Joseph of Arimathea? A secret disciple. We've never heard of him before. And Nicodemus. A thoughtful man, but also somebody who has stayed in the background. Here they come, at a time when Jesus' dearest friends have scattered, and are numb with shock and grief. Joseph and Nicodemus step in to help. Joseph and Nicodemus make the needed arrangements, by (at great expense) the needed supplies, give the immediate care. The necessary things are done, but by people who have hardly been noticed, who have never before, until this moment, been named as disciples.

Has this sort of thing happened to you? At a time when you were in trouble, when your usual sources of help have not been available, has help come from another place, a place you had never thought to look? Has God brought you help from places, from people that were quite unexpected?

God is like that! Thanks be to God! Thanks be to God for the people that he weaves into our lives just when he knows that we need them. Whoever would have guessed just who they might be?

Linda Holt

Easter Sunday – John 20:1-18

“I have seen the Lord. . .”

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark; Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbowni!” (which means teacher). “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.