

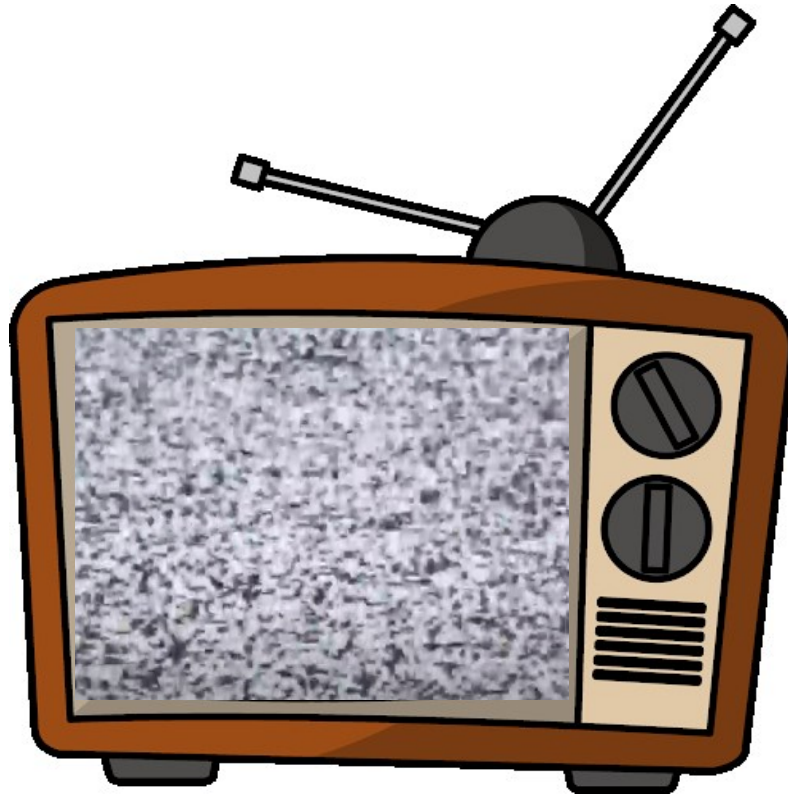
A Lenten Meditation





Meditating on the events of Jesus' final days and his resurrection can be profound. The challenge for most of us is shutting out the noise and distractions of everyday life long enough to quiet our souls and listen to the Spirit of God. You are invited to set aside an hour in your busy life to quiet your soul and participate in this series of 13 meditations that follow Jesus as he makes his way to the Cross. Each reflection includes a period of quiet at the end for you to pray, meditate, journal, draw...whatever your heart leads you to do. Simply hit pause if you need more time or slide ahead if you want to move on. It is our prayer that this experience will draw you closer to Jesus this Lent.

Reflection 1: Outer Noise



Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

The screen represents the noise and distractions of our lives. Sometimes we're so caught up with the busyness of life that we tune out God. Even today when you entered into this Journey, you had many thoughts going through your mind. Take a moment to acknowledge the static in your mind.

Look at the covered cross or close your eyes. Use the stillness as a reminder to quiet your spirit before God. Take a moment to be still and know that He is God. Ask God to quiet your thoughts and put aside distractions so you can focus on Him and hear His voice through this journey.

Reflection 2: God in the Flesh



The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

John 1:14

Today you're invited on a journey through the last days and hours of Jesus' life. In front of you is a pair of sandals, the kind that any ordinary man would wear. As you begin this journey, focus on what it means for the eternal God to become a man. Think about what it means that Jesus once stood in sandals like these, just like any of us might. The God who created the world stepped into an ordinary human body. Take time to meditate on the mystery, majesty, and humility of Jesus, the Son of God.

Reflection 3: Mary Anoints Jesus



Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the moneybag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

John 12:1-8

Mary poured out expensive perfume onto Jesus' feet as an act of worship. If you were to take a cotton ball, sprinkle it with essential oil and smell its fragrance, it may not be strong at first, but you will smell it for hours. It is long-lasting. Mary's act of worship was pure...passionate...real... expensive...extravagant. And it touched the heart of Jesus. Jesus knew he was headed to the cross, and Mary's act of worship was a blessing to him.

How can you pour out your love to Jesus, extravagantly, in a way that will spread the beautiful fragrance of Jesus where you are?

Keep the image of the cotton ball with you in your heart. Let the thought of its fragrance remind you that we are called to live every moment of our lives in fragrant worship of Jesus.

Reflection 4: Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus



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 hand him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Matthew 26:14-16

Judas was one of Jesus’ closest friends, one of the twelve disciples who had been with him for three years. He agreed to betray Jesus for just thirty silver coins.

Look at the coins. How could Judas betray Jesus, his friend, for money? How do you think Judas felt when he looked at the coins in his hand and realized what he had traded for them?

Is your own heart tempted to betray Jesus over material things? Take this time to talk with him about it.

Reflection 5: The Last Supper



After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.” His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.” Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. “What you are about to do, do quickly,” Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

John 13:21-30

Jesus was celebrating the Passover feast with his disciples. As I dip this bread into the nutty olive oil, and eat it as Jesus did, think of the heartbreak Jesus must have been feeling at the betrayal of one of his own disciples.

He knew his disciples would soon face confusion and fear. Contemplate his sorrow and compassion for them.

Reflection 6: Gethsemane



Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Matthew 26:36-46

This scene reveals the sorrow in Jesus’ heart that night. He prayed to his Father that he would not have to go to the cross if there were any other way. Yet he prayed the hardest prayer any of us can pray: “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” When Jesus said, “May this cup be taken from me,” he was referring to the difficult thing his Father was asking him to bear. Yet he chose to drink the cup, even though it was painful. As I drink this cup of grape juice, remember that Jesus chose to bear the agony of the cross—to drink the cup—to save you. Is there a cup that the Father is asking you to drink—something about which you need to pray the prayer of Gethsemane: “Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Reflection 7: Jesus' Arrest



When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

John 18:1-11

Even though Jesus could have given the word and overpowered all the guards, he let himself be bound and led away.

Look at the rope and imagine what it feels like. Remember that Jesus was bound with a rope like this one. He chose to submit to the difficult way of the cross with every step that he took.

Reflection 8: Jesus' Trial



Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Matthew 26:57-60 & 27:27-31

Imagine yourself in Peter's shoes. You are looking out over the courtyard where Jesus is being tried and mocked. You know that he is being unjustly accused. As you stand here, you see men telling lies about him. You watch him being beaten and mocked. Here is the man you have followed for three years, the man you had put all your hope in, being sentenced to death. In your heart you have believed he is God, the promised Messiah of the Jewish people. Your whole world is crashing around you, and worst of all, you have denied that you even know him. Look at the purple robe and the crown of thorns used by angry soldiers to wound and humiliate Jesus. What do you want to tell Jesus right now?

Reflection 9: The Crucifixion



As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ “ In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Matthew 27:32-44

Here is Jesus, dying a brutal death on a Roman cross, an instrument of torture. Imagine yourself there at the scene. What is going through your mind? The sin of all human beings made Jesus go to the cross, not the Roman soldiers who arrested and beat him. His love for sinful human beings held him there. He could have answered the taunts by calling the angels of heaven to bring him down, but he didn’t. He chose to stay. Think of a sin in your life, possibly something terrible you have done in the past or something you should have done but did not, possibly an attitude your heart tells you is disappointing to God. Think about how your sins were nailed to the cross that day in history. Imagine each stroke of the hammer and remember Jesus’ words: “It is finished.” He bore the pain of the cross so you could be forgiven and set free from slavery to your sin.

Reflection 10: Jesus' Death



From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

Matthew 27:45-54

When Jesus died that day, so many people watching must have thought that their hopes had died as well. Darkness came over all the land that day.

As I extinguish these candles remember the darkness that the whole world—and heaven itself—must have felt that day.

Reflection 11: Jesus' Burial



As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

Matthew 27:57-61

The rock you see here is a fraction of the size of the rock that sealed Jesus' tomb. Imagine the heaviness of it.

Can you sense the heavy weight the disciples and those who loved Jesus must have felt as Jesus' tomb was sealed? In their eyes, death had won. This was a stone that no one could move. It was final. Jesus was gone and buried.

Reflection 12: Jesus' Resurrection



After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:1-10

Imagine the cold, heavy, anxious fear and sorrow that these women must have felt as they journeyed to the tomb that day. Imagine them arriving at the tomb and finding the stone rolled away, the empty grave clothes in the place where Jesus' body was supposed to be. Imagine the shock and the overwhelming joy they felt as they met the risen Jesus in the garden. Their Lord was alive! Imagine how these women were transformed in that one moment.

How do you think the risen Jesus wants to transform you today?

Reflection 13: Crossroads: What will you do with Jesus?

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Matthew 16:24

You are at a crossroads. Reflect on the Journey you have just taken through the final days of Jesus to the cross and beyond. His was no accidental journey. Every step Jesus took was purposeful, deliberate, by plan. Every moment of pain, betrayal, and agony was borne by Him out of love for you. You were—and still are—a part of his journey.

What will you do with Jesus?

You can, in your heart, choose to hold on to your sin, bear the guilt yourself, and take it with you as you sign off today. Or you can leave clinging to the extravagant love and forgiveness of the One who died for you. You can leave knowing that all is forgiven.

It’s your choice. You choose by asking His forgiveness and receiving it.

You have experienced some of the emotions that Jesus, the Son of God, experienced for you. You can leave the same as you were. Or you can leave having chosen to pursue Jesus Christ, the God who pursued you all the way to the cross.

It’s your choice. You choose by telling Him that your life is His.

You experienced the agony of surrender and obedience that Jesus Christ experienced. You can leave still holding on to parts of your life, the parts you don’t want to surrender. Or you can leave choosing to surrender everything to Him.

It’s your choice. You choose by praying the prayer of Gethsemane: “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” What is Jesus saying to you today?