

WEEK #7 – JOURNEY OF VICTORY THROUGH DEATH

April 6 – 12, 2009

MONDAY – April 6th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Teach me to serve...as you have served.

Holy Savior, as we begin this final week, this Holy Week, in which you lived out your final moments on this earth and suffered for my sake, teach me how to be the servant you modeled for me. Guide my journey with you this week and open my eyes to new avenues to live according to your will. Let me understand the purpose behind many of the last words you spoke and the actions you did on your way to the cross. Help me to see how I may also live out my life in accord with what I learn. In your very special name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 42:1-9

KEY VERSE: Isaiah 42:1:

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; and he will bring justice to the nations” (NIV).

Jesus came as God’s servant. In all things he was obedient to God. Even before his formal ministry began he knew his role of servant. You’ll remember a trip he and his parents took to Jerusalem when he was twelve. Everything was fine until they left for home and Jesus could not be found. Frantically, his parents searched for him, backtracking their journey from Jerusalem, only to find him in the temple questioning the teachers there and declaring to Mary and Joseph that he must be about his Father’s business (Luke 2:41-50). He didn’t declare that he just wanted to be in the temple, but that he was obeying his Heavenly Father. He was already serving God. We see him again at his baptism, instructing John to allow his baptism, even though John had understood that Jesus did not need to be baptized. God sent his Spirit to tell everyone who Jesus was and that God was well pleased with him (Matthew 3:13-17). His very presence on earth was done in obedience to God. And Jesus often reminded his disciples that he did only what the Father asked, nothing on his own to emphasize his obedience to God. In all things, Jesus was God’s servant.

Let’s look more carefully at where his obedience, his servanthood, if you will, intersects with ours. Jesus made no question about our need to be servants. It was stated, as well as shown, plainly in the upper room on that final night Jesus spent with his disciples. It is truly shocking that Jesus was not only God’s servant, but also ours, not to fetch and carry and to obey our every whim, but to set an example for us to be servants for one another (John 13:15). When Jesus washed his disciple’s feet, he was doing a chore done only by the lowest servant or slave. He made himself humble to teach us how to live. In actual fact, Jesus was being our servant when he left heaven and came to live a humble life as a human being. He was being our servant when he taught us, healed us, suffered and died for us. He didn’t need to do it for himself, and, although he was doing so out of obedience to God, he didn’t really need to do so for God. (God could have just thrown us all away and started over). He did so because he loved us. When Jesus gave his final command to love one another as he loved us (John 15:12), he was reminding us to be servants for one another.

When we started this Lenten journey together, when we began to explore the ideals of hope, promise, covenant, wisdom, restoration, passion and blessing as we traveled with gloom, uncertainty, the shadows, including those of the cross, betrayal and finally death itself, we were reminded to give up our selfish desires and place the needs of others before our own.

We have reached the final week when the gloom, uncertainty, the shadows, including those of the cross, betrayal and death will culminate in a triumphant song of great celebration on Resurrection Day. Yet, we still have the darkest hours of the life of Jesus to travel with him. Being God's servants means to be servants for one another. In order to proclaim the victory over death on Easter Sunday, we need to be willing to serve one another in the dark hours as well as in the sunrise. Let's serve one another in love as Jesus did, and still does for us. Let's be like Jesus and become humble enough to serve.

**ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Luke 2:41-50; Matthew 3:13-17; Psalm 36:5-11;
John 12:1-11**

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. In what ways do I recognize Jesus as God's servant?
2. In what ways do I recognize Jesus as my servant?
3. How am I empowered by Jesus' example to become a servant for others?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Do something today for someone that you don't really enjoy doing out of love for him or her.
2. Consider how you can become more involved with ministries in your church which serve other people.
3. Consider how you can become more involved with a service ministry in your community.

Loving and awesome God, how beautifully you gave us the ultimate example of love in your servant, Jesus. Teach me how to be more loving through serving your people. Thank you for sending Jesus, my redeemer and my Lord. Jesus, thank you for living among us and giving us example after example of obedience and love. Make me your servant and a servant of your people. In your precious name, I pray. Amen.

TUESDAY – April 7th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: As the road grows short ...may I travel carefully.

Patient and loving Lord, I study the words that you sent to us and look at the actions of the people that are described by those words. I ask for strength to overcome the sin that faces me every day and to serve you in the ways that you have planned for me. Guide me in your ways so that I can be helpful to others. In the name of Jesus, the Christ, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

KEY VERSES: 1 Corinthians 1:18-19, 25:

(18) “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (19) For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. (25) For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength” (NIV).

As has been said before in an earlier devotional, the Jewish people wanted signs and miracles and the Greeks wanted wisdom as a basis for their beliefs and neither, for the most part, were willing to accept Jesus as the Savior of the world. The Romans held the belief that anyone who had been crucified was a criminal and, therefore, could not be the Messiah that the Jewish people were expecting. While Jesus had provided the miracles and signs during his lifetime, his crucifixion was one of the stumbling blocks for many of the Jewish people. Another stumbling block was that they were expecting a Messiah that would immediately set up his kingdom on earth and lead them to victory against the Roman occupiers, as they thought his ancestor David would have done. Even some of the disciples expected this type of leadership, especially, in the beginning. For these and other reasons, the message of the cross was foolishness to the non-believers.

Not everyone was called to believe in Jesus. God chose the weak, the powerless, and the workers to be his followers; the rich and powerful were ignored. The Pharisees and other Church leaders had already twisted the Jewish beliefs and religious requirements to make themselves look religious, when they were not. They followed the letter of the law and found loopholes that allowed them to do what they wanted, even things that were actually forbidden by the Ten Commandments; thus, ignoring the intended purposes of the law. Therefore, God did not want anyone to be able to claim that their salvation was acquired by their own actions and knew that the rich and powerful, in most cases, would try to do just that; they were too proud to accept salvation as a gift. Actually, Jesus did have followers who were Sadducees and leaders of the Jewish religion, but they were too few to save him, nor was that their purpose. Jesus had to take on the sins of the world and serve as the sacrifice for them; to cleanse us all so that we could have fellowship with God. With the crucifixion of Jesus, the Jewish religious leadership and the Deceiver thought that they had won, but with Christ’s resurrection, a victory prevailed over death and over those who celebrated too soon. While the leaders tried to show that Jesus was not resurrected, too many knew different and they followed the Great Commission that Jesus left with his followers just before he ascended to Heaven; spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth. Even today, we continue to spread His Gospel to everyone. That victory is still alive and well, just as it was on the first Easter Sunday morning. Praise the Lord and tell of the wondrous things that He has done for us, as with the Lord’s Supper, do this as often as possible.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; John 12:1-11

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. Do I wait until the end of each day, stop and identify and thank God for the blessings that I have received that day or do I thank God for these blessings as they occur?
2. Have I refused to take problems to God because I thought that they were too insignificant to bother God?
3. Have I forgotten that salvation comes by grace and that works are our way of showing God that we appreciate what he has given us?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. See if you can identify things at church that need to be done, but are not being done. Consider doing them yourself if you are able.
2. Are there instances when you tend to live by the letter of the law, instead of the intended purposes? What do you need to do to change this?
3. How are you helping to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth? What more can you do?

Most Holy Lord, please see me safely through this day and night, help me to find new ways to use those skills that you gave to me to give your gospel to others near and far. Help me to serve as a role model for others and help me let your love shine through me so that others can share that love. Strengthen my faith in you. I pray in the name of your Holy son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

WEDNESDAY – April 8th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: May I seek you in joy...and say, “Let God be exalted!”

Dearest Lord, this has been a long journey. I have celebrated the tumultuous entry of your Son into Jerusalem and tomorrow evening he will sit down with the disciples for their Passover meal together. Thank you for giving me the blessing of making this walk with your Son. Friday I will witness the death of my Lord and Savior on a cross as a common criminal. The sun will go dark, the earth will shake, and the temple veil will be torn from top to bottom, forever changing the relationship with your Son. Help me to reflect on the meaning of all of these events and my salvation that was paid for on that day. In the name of your Son, the Christ, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 70

KEY VERSES: Psalm 70:4:

“But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, ‘Let God be exalted!’” (NIV).

This verse from Psalms may lead us to believe we are the ones who do the seeking in our relationship with God, but we would not know to seek him if he did not seek for us first. It is he who puts within us a desire to know him and to seek him. To know God and his attributes is to spend time in his Word. There we will find the way to the intimate relationship he desires with us, there is the place we will truly come to the saving grace of knowing him as he knows us.

What is required? Let us listen to the voice of Moses as he speaks to the people he has lead out of Egypt and who will soon cross the Jordan River and possess the land promised to them by God. *“Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God”* (Deuteronomy 4:23-24 NIV). Then Moses spends some time explaining to those gathered before him what will come to pass as they live a long time in the land God has given to them. One of the certainties Moses passes on to them is a scattering of the people which will come to pass after they have lived long in Canaan. Moses gives them a hope to hold on to in their scattered condition, *“But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul”* (Deuteronomy 4:29 NIV).

He puts within us the knowledge that on our own we can do nothing, that we are weak and helpless, that there is hope and strength available to us, but we must seek it out and when we do, we become convinced we cannot live our lives on our own, cannot prevail under our own power. Then we begin to look for a source of power greater than our own and we find that God has been looking for us all the time, biding his time and waiting for us to find him.

Some of us find him late and some find him early, it does not matter, as long as we do find him. Once we find him, he asks that we give ourselves over to him wholly and completely. Since we are pretty independent we may resist that “giving over” but, it is a necessary step into our new life. We can find supporting evidence that Jesus lived in the “given over” state. When validating who he is Jesus said, *“When you have lifted up the Son of Man (crucified him), then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him”* (John 8:28-29 NIV).

When we have sought the Father and given our lives to the one who seeks for us until he finds us, we can rejoice and be glad because we have found him and received the gift of salvation. The gift for which in just two short days Jesus allows himself to be lifted up upon a cross the Romans used to get rid of criminals and be crucified for our sake. It is a gift we are given that can be given by no other and by no other means, difficult to understand and yet glorious in its generosity because we do not deserve it, can do nothing to earn it and yet it is ours by the grace of God.

Does this mean we will live perfect lives from this day forward? No, it means we live forgiven lives from this day forward. We can and do make mistakes, say the wrong thing, engage in evil thoughts or action, find ourselves being the imperfect human beings that live in an imperfect world.

If you do not know if you have received this gift, I urge you to pray for it right now, so that you may rejoice and be glad, so that you may join all those who will gather on Easter Sunday at sunrise, and say, "He is risen!"

Let God be exalted!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Romans 3:11; Deuteronomy 4:23-31; 12-30

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. What does "in his Word" mean to you?
2. How is Holy Week different from the preceding days of Lent?
3. As a modern day Christian, did you give up something during the Lenten season? Why?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. If you did not give up anything for Lent this year, think about and write down a choice for the next year if this is something which you would like to do.
2. Read Exodus 26:31-33 and consider what the spiritual significance of the tearing of the curtain meant.
3. Use the key verse as part of your blessing for your Easter meal.

God who is from Everlasting to Everlasting, thank you for your promises and for the fulfillment of your promises. I can put my trust and my faith in you because you have proven to be a God of promise keeping. On the cross, at the end, your Son said, "It is finished." He had accomplished the work you sent him into the world to do. Give me a clear sense of the work you have for me and a taste of the satisfaction of knowing I have done your will. In all that I say and all that I do let God be exalted! Prayed in the name of the one who gave his all for me while I was still a sinner, my Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

MAUNDY THURSDAY – April 9th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Give me a servant's heart...for victory through your death.

Dear Lord and Savior, as I consider the "victory through death" begun on Maundy Thursday, I try to imagine your pain and agony as you moved through those trying days' realizing the physical and emotional pain that would come. Help me to meet my daily problems with a positive attitude and a feeling of victory in my successes. I know that my successes come through you and I ask that you help me to always know that you are with me, just as you died for me; so that my life can be lived in your service. In your loving and holy name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

KEY VERSES: John 13:3-8, 34-35

(3) "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; (4) so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. (5) After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (6) He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' (7) Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' (8) 'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.'"

(34) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (35) By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (NIV).

When I first heard the term, "Maundy Thursday" I did not understand what it meant because I had come from a denomination where it was not used. I soon realized that it referred to a specific Thursday. Later I realized that it was the Thursday when Jesus had the last Passover dinner with his disciples and close followers. It was at this dinner that Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, a task usually performed by the lowest of servants or slaves. Peter objected to having his feet washed by Jesus, possibly because of pride and maybe because he felt that he was not good enough for Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus recognized that Peter's sinful pride made spiritual cleansing a necessity, just as we Christians today also need spiritual cleansing at times. Jesus told the disciples that they should wash each other's feet, thus serving a lesson in the selfless service that Jesus had come to do and to teach that none of them were better than the others. The humility that Jesus was trying to teach to his disciples was not a positive concept in the world at that time; it was despised as a sign of weakness. As time has passed, selfless service and humility have become the virtues Jesus wanted his disciples to acquire; perhaps not to the degree that Jesus wanted, but progress has been made. It is up to us to see that the importance of selfless service and humility continue to grow in usage.

Since then I have learned that the word "Maundy" comes from a French word, "Mande" that came from two Latin words meaning "new commandment" (New Handbook of the Christian Year). This new commandment could be referring to the foot washing above, but is generally thought to refer to John 13:34. The use of "foot washing" is now frequently viewed as a teaching tool, rather than a commandment.

Later the followers of Jesus began to be recognized by the love that they shared with each other, all because of Jesus' last commandment. If we look at this commandment, we find

that it is different from the commandment in Matthew 22:39 “...love your neighbor as yourself.” Loving others as yourself is not nearly as strong as loving others as Jesus had loved his disciples. While both of the commandments were given by Jesus, and both were intended to bring more love into the world, neither have probably been as successful as Jesus would have liked. Neither has brought as much peace into the world as could have occurred if everyone had loved each other. This lack of love has been replaced with love of self and love of satisfying selfish desires, without consideration of others. Throughout history, we see where selfishness and ruthlessness have caused pain, suffering, atrocities, famine, and wars; regardless of the prayers that were lifted up to stop these disasters from occurring. We must remember that the prince of darkness has control of the earth and he is the one who wants the love of self and of worldly pleasures to be paramount; thus hoping to defeat or delay the affects of the teachings of Jesus. Each of us must guard against the efforts of Satan to cause us to stray from the teachings of Jesus and to fall under the influence of the ways of the world.

**ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10) 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19;
1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. What part does humility play in my life; does it exist at the level that Jesus wants?
2. How much of my time is spent in “selfless” service for the Lord?
3. “*Loving your neighbor as yourself*” is difficult for many, but as I consider Jesus’ commandment “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another,*” can I aim higher?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Make a plan to insure that “humility” plays a greater part in your life.
2. Review your personal stewardship plan to insure that your giving comes from all of your resources, in the appropriate amounts; money, time, skills, talents and love.

Dear Sovereign and loving Lord, as I journey through this Holy Week, and come to this special day, help me to assess my life and find those areas that are not up to your standards. Help me resolve to find ways to better meet your desires for me. In Christ’s name, I pray. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY – April 10th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Help me find the “good”...in this tragic day.

Heavenly Father, we have come to the day of your great sacrifice, the day in which your Son died for our sins. As we spend this precious time together, open my eyes to the reality of what you truly did out of your great love for me. Give me understanding so that my love can grow by your example. I am humbled and in great awe that you could really sacrifice your only Son for me. In humility and in the name of your Son, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 53:3-6

KEY VERSE: Isaiah 53:5:

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (NIV).

We have arrived at the cross and have come to the darkest day in history. How strange that we call this day “good” Friday! What can possibly be “good” about Jesus dying? Actually, when we really think about it we can find several, but let’s do a little exploring concerning this day first. Jesus was crucified. That is a fact which we take for granted now, but it was not a form of execution which the Jewish authorities could perform. It was a Roman form of execution and could only be ordered and carried out by the Romans. Yet, it was not the Romans who arrested Jesus and tried him for heresy and desired his death. The Jewish form of execution was stoning. We will see this later with Stephen, the first martyr of the church. When the Jewish authorities took Jesus to the Romans, they said that they did not have the authority to put a man to death, yet they really could have stoned him. What they meant was they could not crucify him. It was also Passover, a religious ceremony which precluded their participation in Jesus’ death. Why they were so meticulous about this when they broke every other law concerning his trial is beyond me, but it was according to God’s plan and I guess that is all we need to know.

His trials before the Sanhedrin, the high priests Annas and Caiaphas and Herod Antipas were highly illegal in Jewish law. First of all, they took place at night which was wrong. They were held privately which was also wrong. They were held during the Passover which was wrong. The testimonies were fabrications and patched together sayings of Jesus which were misunderstood. And, when they finally decided that they had enough “evidence” for a verdict of guilty of heresy, they had no penalty they were willing to use. So they took him to Pilate. Now Pilate found him innocent and did everything he could think of to release Jesus. But, God’s will was for Jesus to be crucified, so nothing that Pilate tried to do would work. Jesus told Pilate that he could do nothing to Jesus that was not allowed by God. Some of the suffering of Jesus was from the scourgings which were an attempt on Pilate’s part to appease the Jewish authorities so that he could release Jesus. Though they were very cruel punishments in themselves, these scourgings probably contributed to the shorter length of time Jesus had to endure on the cross itself. Crucifixion was a very long and painful process and often took as long as three days for the victim to die. Jesus was on the cross about six hours. This was the reason they pierced his side to see if he was really dead.

Jesus has been called the Lamb of God. Lambs were one of the primary sacrifices for sin offerings and were also the sacrificial offering for Passover. Jesus was dying as a sin offering and as the Lamb of the Passover when God spared the Hebrews on the night when

the first born of the Egyptians were slain. God replaced both the sin offerings forever by dying for our transgressions and became the Passover Lamb to save us from destruction and free us from all sin. This is the reason this awful Friday is called “good.” Nothing less than Jesus’ death on the cross could pay the penalty for our sins forever. So he gave his life willingly for us. I, like many of you, I’m sure, don’t truly understand why God required such a penalty, but our scriptures assure us over and over again that it was so. Whatever the reason God has, God, in the human person of Jesus paid that penalty in our place. Our key scripture today reminds us that Jesus’ sacrifice brought peace and healing. Peace that we can now have a loving and special relationship with our creator and healing of all our wounds, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual because of what Jesus did for us on “Good Friday.” The final victory is still to come with the resurrection, but the penalty for all our sins was paid on this day, this dark and terrible day which seemed to end in failure was actually a victory of infinite proportions. It truly is a “Good Friday.” Let us rejoice in this, even as we remember the suffering and pain with which it was bought.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Matthew 26:57-75, 27:11-50; Mark 14:53-65, 15:1-37; Luke 22:66-71, 23:1-46; John 18:12-14,19-24,28-40, 19:1-37

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. What “good” do I see in this terrible day?
2. What does it really mean to me that Jesus died for me?
3. Why do you think the Jewish authorities wanted the Romans to do the execution?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Spend some time reading the different accounts of the trials and crucifixion of Jesus. Compare them to find the composite whole of the day in all the scriptures.
2. Spend some extra time in prayer today thanking Jesus for what he did for you. Spend part of that prayer time in confession of the transgressions which you have committed which Jesus has forgiven through his sacrifice.

Dearest and most precious Lord, on this day in which we view your death, I grieve with you for the pain which you endured on my behalf. I know that I can never repay the debt I owe. As I go through this day, remind me often that I owe it. It is painful to relive this day with you, but I know that I need to be reminded often that you came to replace me and took the punishment which I deserve. Let me also be reminded that you brought me peace and healing through your wounds on that terrible day so long ago. Stay close by me today and hold me as I struggle with the meaning of your sacrifice. In your dying name, I pray. Amen.

HOLYSATURDAY – April 11th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: In this hour of despair...I look forward to my redemption.

Holy Jesus, as we sit together on this day when you lay in your tomb, I wait. Your love is so inconceivable. I am sad and empty, yet I know that you are not really dead anymore. Teach me today to wait patiently for your glory during this difficult day of mourning. Let us wait together and my faith will grow from your compassion. In your glorious name, held still for just this one day, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Lamentations 3:19-24

KEY VERSES: Lamentations 3:22-24:

(22) “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. (23) They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (24) I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him’” (NIV).

The tomb is sealed. The guards surround it and despair rules the day. How could this possibly happen? Jesus is the Christ! How could he die and leave us alone like this? How can anything good come from this moment? The disciples huddle together trying to make sense of it all. We, too, struggle to understand the need for your death. Death is such a stumbling block for us. It is a barrier to us which we cannot cross without an ending to this world’s existence. Even though we long to live with you in your heavenly kingdom, we are afraid to lay down the life we now live. So, when we see you locked in the tomb, we are desolate. We feel abandoned and alone. We know that you never leave us, yet, death seems so final, so absolute, that we fear you will not return. The disciples lived with the Lord for several years, and were told repeatedly that Jesus would die for them and then return, yet they could not believe in the possibility. They watched Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, yet they could not believe that Jesus would return. Yet, they did not leave Jerusalem. They stayed together, fearing for their own lives, yet waiting for they knew not what. Did they remember Jesus words yet? Their hesitancy to believe in the morning would suggest not. But, they could not leave. Even though they had all run away at the time of the arrest, they still gathered back together and waited for the Lord. But, on this day, they wait in vain.

The tomb is sealed. What transpires during this day of waiting when the Lord is locked away from the earth? 1 Peter 4:6 speaks of the gospel being preached even to the dead. Another reference can be found, though at the moment it eludes me, in which Christ descended to preach to the dead while he himself was in the grave. This is one of the mysteries with which I struggle on this day when Jesus is sealed in the tomb. While he is there, my heart is sad. It is as if he cannot reach me, or more accurately, I cannot reach him while he is sealed in the tomb. Sometimes, I think it is my own heart which is sealed against the Lord when I am lonely or sad or separated from God. I know in my heart that God never leaves me, because Jesus gave us that promise, yet there are times when I am unable to feel that presence and it is like having Jesus locked away in the tomb. Yet, like the key scripture passage reminds us, God’s love never fails us and we will not be consumed. We can wait through this empty day while the tomb is sealed and we cannot see the Lord. We can hold onto the Lord’s great compassions and know completely that God is faithful and God is our portion. We can wait with much more confidence than the disciples did, because we have seen the Resurrection Day before and know that it will come again in the morning. Today is

empty, but the great victory is coming. Only one more day to await its coming! Surely we can make it through one more day. The tomb is sealed, but the seal will soon be broken and the Risen Lord set free to bring us all with him in his victory through death. Hold fast, because the morning comes. And the glorious day will soon dawn.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: 1 Peter 4:1-6

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. How do I feel about the day Jesus was in the tomb?
2. What ways can I wait with the Lord during this day?
3. How do I deal with death, for myself, for loved ones, for the bereaved?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Spend some time with someone who is feeling desolate or lonely.
2. Send a card or spend some time with someone who has recently lost a loved one.
3. Spend some time journaling about your view of death and how it affects you. Give your feelings to the Lord and ask his comfort and understanding.

Dearest Lord, how can you be dead? My heart aches for your presence. Like the disciples, I am bereft and disconsolate that you are locked in a tomb. Today is a day of waiting. Unlike the disciples, I know that you will rise again in the morning, yet today is sad and empty. But, I will not be consumed for your compassions never fail. I will wait for the morrow because I know that joy comes in the morning. I will not ask that you be with me today, though I know in my heart that you really are. I will ask for strength to wait until the morning when we will welcome you back from the tomb. In your precious name, I pray. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY – April 12th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Lord of Light...bless me with peace.

Dear Lord, I enter your presence with joy and thanksgiving. Send the Holy Spirit to me this day that I may hear your words and feel your presence, now. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: John 30:1-18

KEY VERSES: John 20:11-18:

(11) “*Bur Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; (12) and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. (13) They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him; (14) Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. (15) Jesus said to her, ‘Woman why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?’ 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.’ (16) Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rab-bo’ni!’ (which means Teacher). (17) Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ (18) Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord;’ and she told them that he had said these things to her”* (RSV).

The road to the cross has been traveled and we found that the cross was not the end of the journey. This story is so powerful because the good news leads us beyond the cross and into the victory accomplished through death. He is risen from the dead. The one that Mary, and all the disciples, loved so much was gone from them forever, was gone from us forever, but he has returned. And he still loves us. We failed him. We did not stand up for him. Peter denied him. Judas betrayed him and helped them arrest him and he did not help himself. Pilate tried to free him, but the people would not have it so (neither would the Lord). The worst happened. He was put to death. He lay three days in the tomb. But he has returned. All our betrayals have been forgiven and we can join with him in the good news. Praise be to God, the Father, the Almighty One! He has not been vanquished, but His goodness continues. His love for us continues.

God is not angry but is kind and merciful. How strongly was this point driven home when Jesus rose from the dead and came back to the disciples, demonstrating love and mercy, not anger and condemnation! God did not strike them all dead. God did not destroy all of them and their cities and all that people had built. In that moment of resurrection, God demonstrated once and for all that God knew we understand God best when we see him as kind and loving and merciful. When God should have been most angry at us he did not destroy us but loved us and gave us what we needed most, God's own self. There is no greater good than a loving God who cares about us. This love goes beyond all understanding and all earthly wisdom. Praise be to God! Praise God for his love and His mercy!

There is no better story and there is no better news. The Son was dead but He is risen. The Father should be angry but He is loving. The Master was scorned and in response He has freed the slave. God is good. Praise be to God!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Acts 10:34-43; etc.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. How must Mary have felt that morning as she came to the tomb? How did she feel after finding Jesus missing and the tomb open, and finally, after Jesus appeared to her?
2. How can I tell the story of Jesus resurrection to someone else?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Read or tell the story of Jesus' resurrection to a family member or friend and try to explain how the story makes you feel.
2. Reread this story every day for the next week and then see if you can find someone who does not know the story and ask if you can tell it to them.

Dearest Lord, Creator and merciful Redeemer, praise your holy name. You have given so much to make it possible for me to know you and love you. Fill me with love for you and for those around me. Give me the words to tell your story, the story of Jesus and the story of you loving me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.