

## John 16:7-16

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. "I still have 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, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

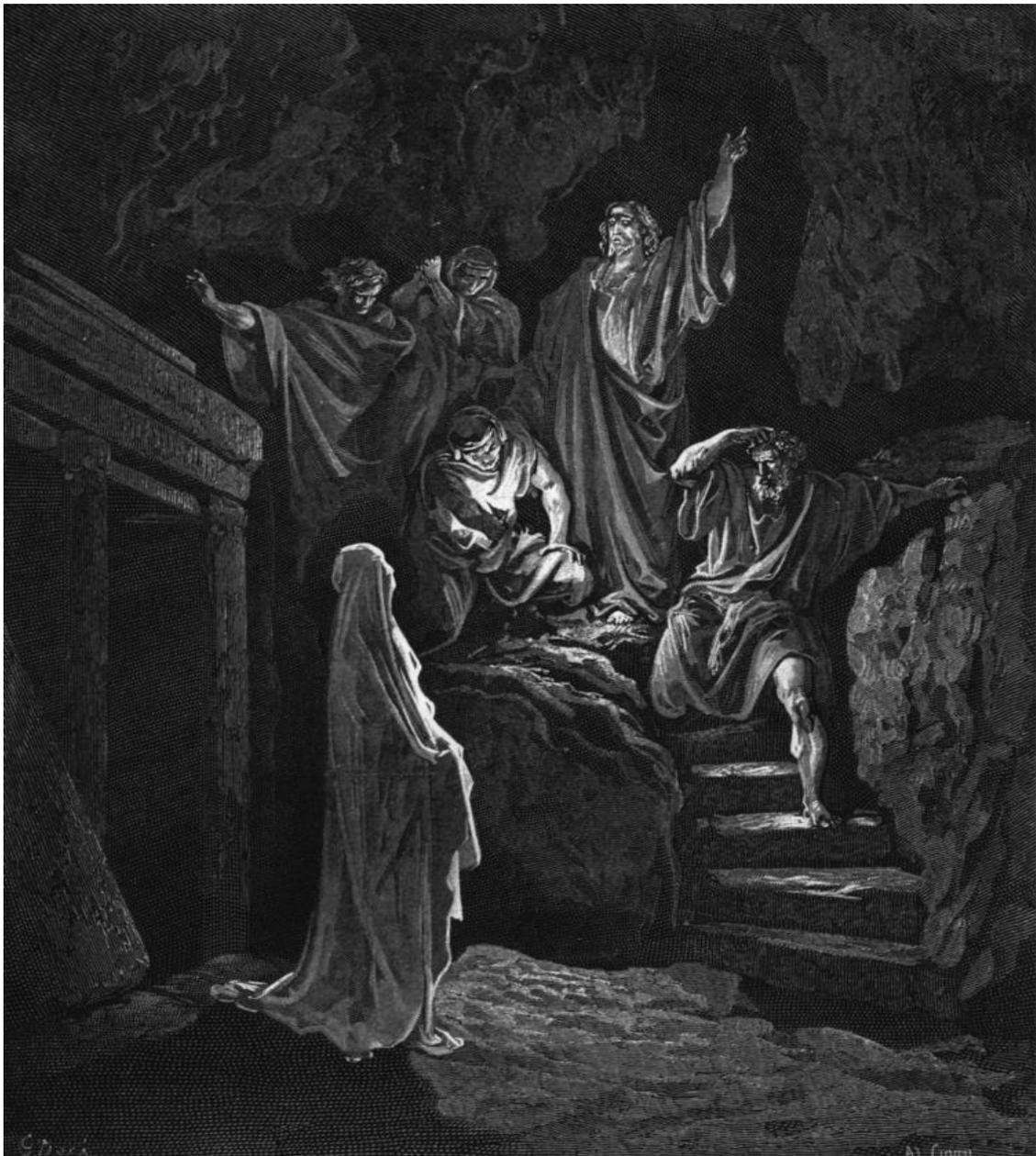
"A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me."

# Holy Week 2020

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**Instructions:** Watch daily on Facebook, or read with your family. Have your Bible, paper and pen, and an envelope with you. Take your time. Do not hurry. Give God room to speak to you.



## 1. The Foreshadowing: Lazarus Monday

John Chapter 11 (excerpt):

Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

If you read through the gospel of John in order (and I certainly recommend that you do sometime) you will find that the familiar story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is intimately connected to the story of Jesus on his way to the cross. We would say that it is a part of the "passion narrative" of John. The reason Jesus's earthly ministry comes to an end, and the scribes and elders finally determine he must be crucified, is because he raises Lazarus. After that, there is no hiding anymore, he has "gone public" with who he is and what he can do. And that surely leads to his death, but just as surely, it leads to his resurrection.

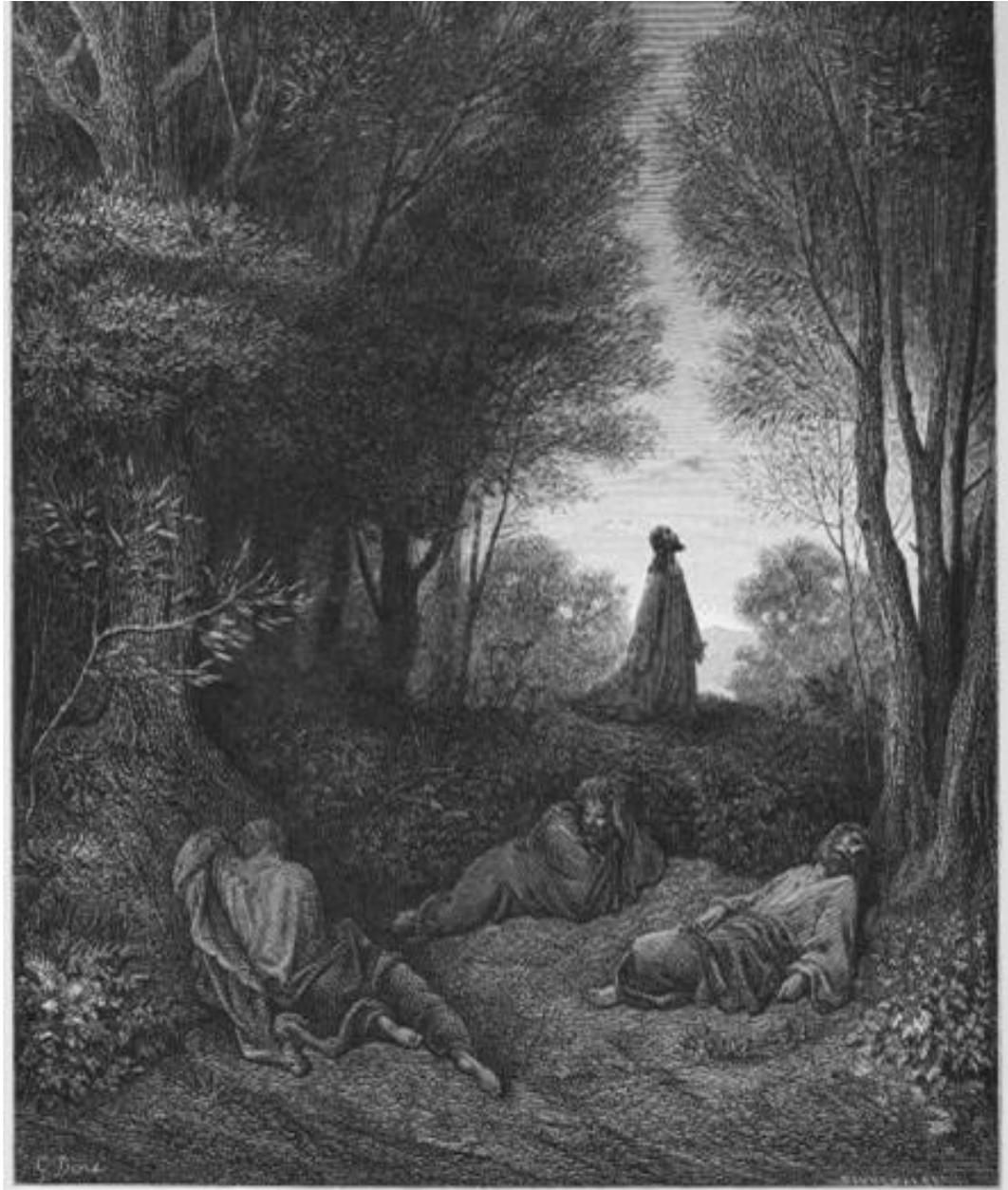
John is different than the other gospels. He wastes no time at all in telling us that this Jesus he writes about is God himself, the Messiah who was prophesied and who is to come, the one who rose from the dead. We see that in the Lazarus story. It is a story that is as much about Jesus, who he is and what he is going to do, as it is about Lazarus, probably even more so. So it's appropriate, if we get a chance, to begin our study of Jesus at the end of his life with Lazarus.

Christians for centuries have read John Chapter 11 at around this time of year. Sometimes we do it on the Sunday before Palm Sunday when we are gathered together, sometimes a special service is held on the Saturday right before Holy Week. I encourage you to have your own observation of this theme now by reading this important eleventh chapter of John now. Look at the foreshadowing in that passage. Look at the themes that Jesus identifies for Mary and Martha about what is going on. Notice the grief, the waiting, the faith, the miracle, the glory, and the danger.

- Do you relate with any of these themes especially in this year, that you did not in years past?
- Are there any other important themes you notice, that I didn't mention?
- Is there anything that sticks out to you in this chapter as you read it in this new context?

Truly the context is very different now, both reading the chapter

in light of the cross and the coming of Easter, and also in light of our own personal context of our lives. It's very likely that God has something new to show you now which you could never see before. Take a few moments now in prayer to reflect on what that might be for yourself, and do some private journaling if you feel so inclined. Then pray, and ask God whether some of this insight he has given you might be given to bless the church. If so, write something down, and put it in a special envelope. When the week is done, I'll challenge you to mail this envelope to the church, and we will use what you send as part of our resurrection celebration whenever we gather back together again.



## 2. The Emotion: Passion Tuesday

John 11 (excerpt):

Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?' Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

At most of our Presbyterian Churches we celebrate Palm/Passion Sunday. One Sunday, two holidays. And some years we may feel more Palmy while other years we feel more Passionate.

More realistically, some pastors are predisposed to lean into Passion Sunday observances, while others choose to emphasize Palm Sunday. I myself have always been biased towards the hands-on learning style of the Palm Sunday traditions, and I've felt the church preferred the more joyous focus. I allow the observance of Passion Sunday to happen throughout Holy Week, therefore we attend to them, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

But for many Christians throughout history, it wasn't like this. Until 1968 in the Roman Catholic Church, Passion Sunday was the beginning of Passion Week. A full week of somber observances that came prior to Holy Week, ending on Palm Sunday. I think of Passion Week as a sort of super-lent, when the last vestiges of joy and glory are removed from the church in final fulfillment of our Lenten self-deprivation and final preparation for the glory of Easter. They would even go so far as to cover up the crosses in the sanctuary and refuse to sing the Gloria Patri.

Many people have remarked that this Lent has felt especially profound and difficult, that they had not counted on "giving up quite this much for Lent". As a matter of fact, I've heard that some Catholic bishops have even said it would be okay to eat meat this year, because we have all suffered enough to get the message Lent is designed to send!

Still, just like listening to a sad song when you are sad can make you feel better, paying attention to super-lent during our own super lent might help us get through it. There is an important message to remember here. One which stands apart from the similar themes that arise on Good Friday: Jesus suffered. And most of Jesus's suffering happened before he died on the cross.

That fact would seem almost blasphemous if it wasn't also so obvious. Clearly, once we are dead, we suffer no more. It is the fear, the anticipation, and the worry about a thing when we do the majority of our suffering, not the thing itself. It is as the great stoic philosopher Seneca said "we suffer more from imagination than from reality."

And yet the teachings and example of Jesus take us beyond the teachings of the Stoics, because they would seem to imply by their teaching that we should just stop suffering so much since it's mostly in our imagination. Maybe that's true sometimes, but Jesus suffered, and he was perfect. Jesus suffered in imagination and anticipation and it was perfect that he did so. In fact, it was his Passion.

Jesus was passionate about us. He suffered for us because he cared for us, and he did it not just on the cross, but while he was alive too.

- What's your passion? Consider that Jesus's passion was you. What are you willing to suffer for?
- What are you suffering for now? Are those the things you're really passionate about?
- Have you ever thought about the passion this way before? When?

Spend some time privately journaling about these things and then, consider if God might want you to share some of what you are thinking with the church. Is there a song or a poem somewhere that resonates with you because it talks about something you love that you are willing to suffer for? That is something you are passionate about. Make a note of it and put it in your envelope. And then read John chapter 17 about Jesus's passionate prayer for you.



### **3. The Triumphal Entry: Palm Wednesday**

John 12 (excerpt):

The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord — the King of Israel!' Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!'

It's now the third day of our Holy Week journey together, and whatever day it is now that you are ready to read this devotional, it is time to engage with the themes and story that we normally talk about on Palm Sunday. If you've been able to join us on Facebook, you probably have already heard me talking about Palm Sunday and it

being a prelude to an empty tomb and an open future.

When we start our Holy Week with Palm Sunday, we begin with glory, honor, power, and praise, and most of the week is a gradual dimming until the dawn of the resurrection. What a difference it makes then, to consider this idea third instead of first. With this booklet, we have begun with foreshadowing and paid attention to the reality that Jesus knew everything that was going to happen afterwards before it began. That allows us to consider the shouts of hosanna, not as an emotional high point in Jesus ministry after which things began to fall apart, and more as an oasis, a much welcome drink of fresh water when you are very thirsty. Things were already falling apart, and in the middle of it all, was triumph and joy.

Your life is probably the same way. Your perspective on an event changes depending on where you start to tell the story. It's like that familiar poem "the Footprints in the Sand", sometimes the moments when we feel most alone, the most troublesome times, are the times where God is actually holding us closest. Sometimes in the midst of our most terrifying storms, we get the clearest glimpses of the heart of God.

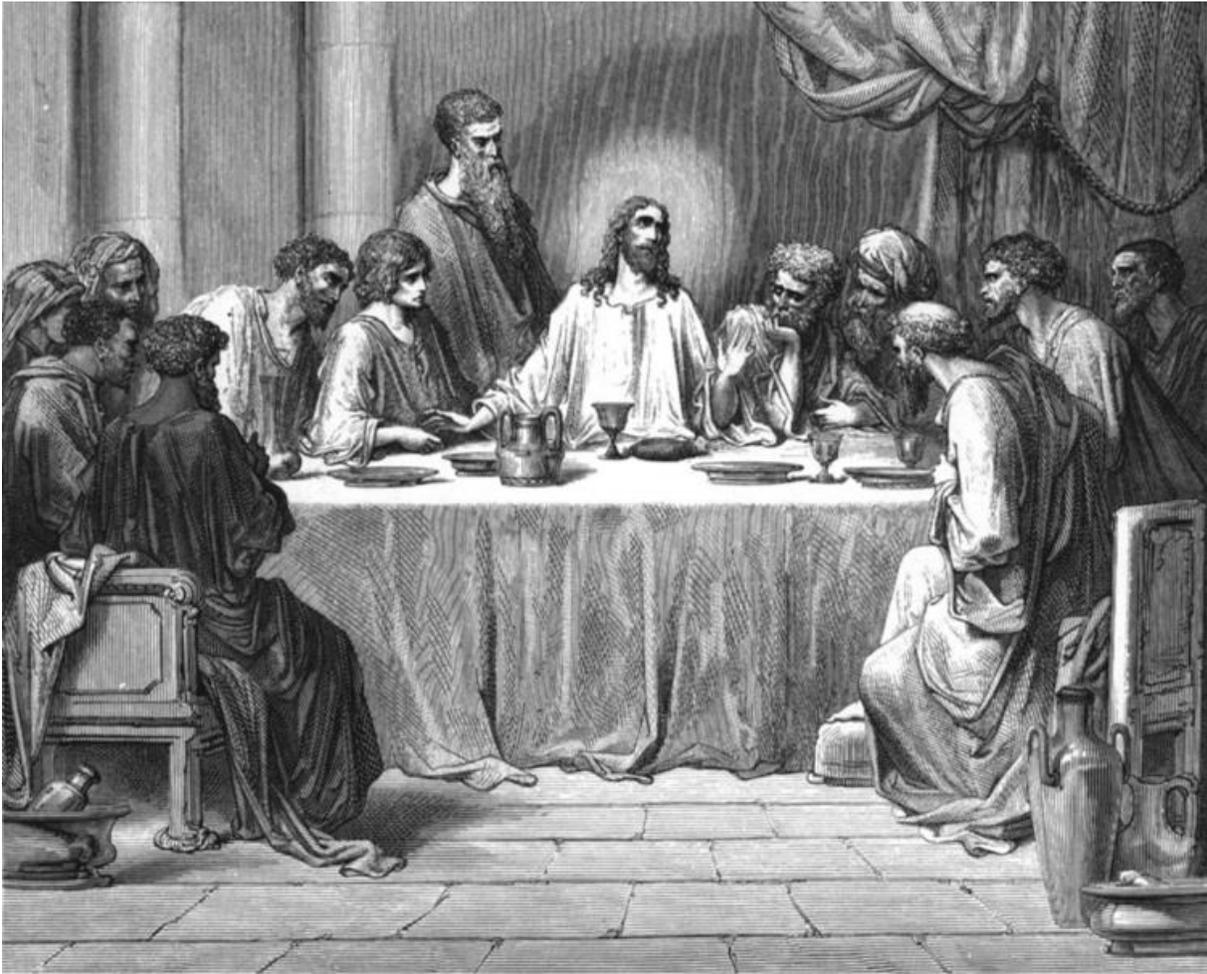
Take some time now to read John chapter 12, and notice how the good things and the bad things are woven together. See if you can identify and highlight as many happy or fortunate things as you can in the chapter, and then go through again and find all the difficult or troublesome things. I like to print the passages on a separate sheet of paper before I mark them up, but you are more than welcome to write right on the page if you're brave. I'll warn you though, you might be tempted to highlight certain phrases in both colors at once.

Then I want you to get a camera (any kind of camera you like will do, whether it's just a cell phone, or a dedicated device with a thousand features), and snap a few shots thoughtfully of things that represent the goodness of God to you in this time. Where do you find glory and triumph in the midst of this week? Where in your life is God trying to remind you that he loves you even now?

- A favorite view or favorite spot to sit?
- A pastime you suddenly have time for again?

- An abstract idea, that helps you through this time, represented symbolically in a creative photo

Take some of those pictures for yourself, you don't have to share everything, but consider giving some of them, or copies of some of them, to the church so that other people can see and be inspired by what you found.



#### **4. A New Commandment: Maundy Thursday**

John 13 (excerpt):

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

What would you do if you knew you had 24 hours to live? That was the question that Jesus was faced with the day before he would be crucified. By tradition, a Thursday, because his

crucifixion would be cut short by the Sabbath. He knew what was going to happen, and he knew he had only 24 hours left to live. It's a common question, but it bears repeating: "What Would Jesus Do?"

It turns out that Jesus, when put in that situation, would have one last dinner with his closest friends. He would get everyone together and have a little party. He would tell them how much he loves them, and remind them to love one another when he is gone.

Would you do something similar? Who would you invite? What would you eat? Would you cook each person their favorite dishes of yours, or, on your last night, would you order out and stay out of the kitchen?

During this lockdown, I certainly miss the opportunity to gather in person with friends, and I lament that we aren't able to have a service together to remember the Last Supper, wash each other's feet, and otherwise live out Jesus' mandate to "love one another," but at the same time it, once again, presents us with a unique vantage point for reflection.

"Love one another" is such an outward-focused command. "By this *everyone* will know you are my disciples." Do this thing that is for everyone. It's my command, Jesus says. And yet, Jesus did not spend his last hours healing one last sick person, or feeding one last hungry crowd, or feeling one last bout of compassion for people who were like sheep without a shepherd. He spent it with his inner circle, preparing them to go out.

Take a look at John 13 and spend some time reflecting on the things Jesus did. If you still have time and emotional energy leftover, go ahead and turn the page to chapter 14 and so on. John's depiction of Jesus's last 24 hours actually lasts all the way to chapter 19, a full fourth of the book. Then answer these questions for yourselves, but keep in mind there's not any one right answer.

- Why do you think that John takes so much time, space, and ink to cover such a small percentage of Jesus's life?
- What does it mean for us to slow down at this moment in our lives?
- What, in your opinion, was the very most important thing Jesus did that day, as recorded in John?

One beautiful way to slow down while engaging an idea is to draw something. It doesn't have to be a great work of art, that's not the reason we would be drawing here and now. Instead, it's a way to give your hands and your brain something to do that's not purely logical, in order to help your heart to open up experientially. So consider drawing a scene from one of the events described in this part of the Bible. It may be that what you draw will pale in comparison to the thoughts you have and the understanding you gain while you spend this creative time with God. It may also be that you create something unexpected, that you never knew you could. If you do, I certainly would love for you to share it with your church family, even if it's only a copy.



## 5. The Cross: Good Friday

John 19 (excerpt):

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Good Friday has got to be the third most important holiday in the Christian calendar, after Christmas and Easter. You may not have heard of the majority of these Holy Week celebrations I have been talking about, but you are sure to know Good Friday, for Good Friday is the day that we remember Jesus died.

Jesus, who is God, died. He died. They buried him. He didn't pretend to die, he didn't allow only part of himself to die while the other part (the divine part) was fine. He died. The Apostles' Creed even tells us through a reading of 1 Peter 1:18-19 that he went to hell, because he had taken on all of our sinfulness.

What an incredible thought! So incredible, in fact, that many Christians I know refuse to believe it. They will ask me "God dying, is that even possible?" to which I have been known to smile and reply "All things are possible with God." Because for me, if we are going to keep ourselves committed to the faith, and the belief that Jesus is 100% son of the one-and-only God of the universe, we need to prepare ourselves for the reality that God has died.

Now what does that mean? Certainly, that he suffered in our place, died so that we might live, saved us from our sins by taking them upon himself, and granted us eternal life that we might never see the face of death which he saw. Certainly, that despite all this forgiveness, we must remember that sin is deathly serious, and that the consequences for our actions are acutely felt, if not by us, then by someone else, and that we ought to be sober-minded about our morality. Certainly, that whatever we face, no matter how terrible, how frightening, how final, that God himself who walked among us has been there before.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote a story once, and put into the mouths of one of his fictional characters, a madman as it happens, the words "God Is Dead" which echoed throughout the philosophical world for a time. "God is dead, and we killed him". He intended this as a statement of doubt, as a rejection of Christianity. He meant to say that God was expired, outmoded, no longer needed in a modern world. He was wrong about that of course, but he was also poking at something real in his insistence that we all may have been

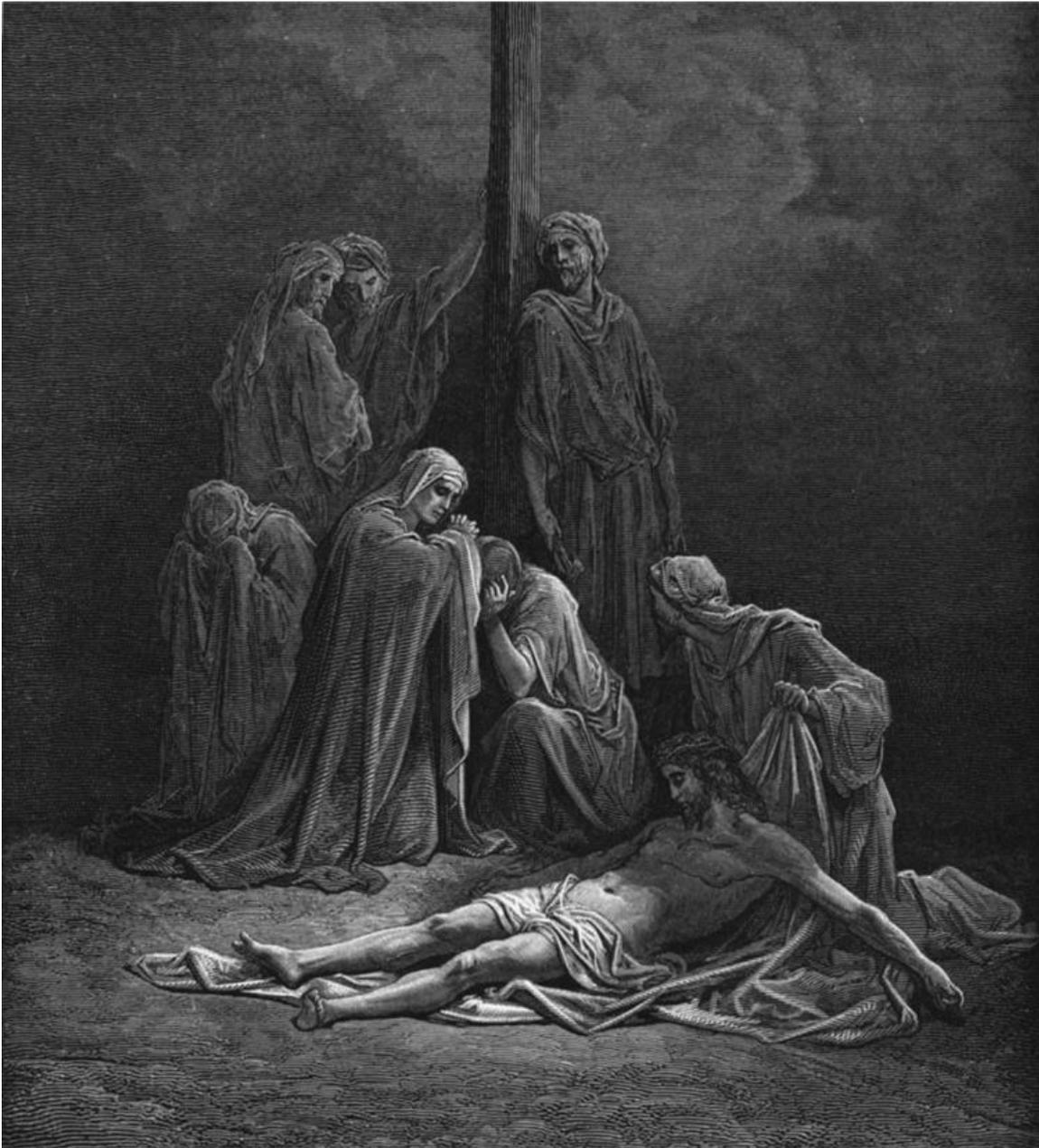
responsible for the death of God. And theologians have picked up the idea and run with it in faithful directions.

“It was my sin that held him there, until it was accomplished, his dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished”

Read John 19 and pay attention to all the figures surrounding Jesus as he is crucified. The Roman soldiers, the religious leaders, the politician, Jesus’s friends and followers, his mother Mary, and John, who wrote this book we are reading.

- Which person at the crucifixion sticks out to you the most? Who do you relate with?
- What do you think they were thinking or feeling as this happened? Go beyond “sadness” what else? What did they expect? What did they hope for?
- What times in your life, have you felt similar? What was it like?

Sometimes there are no words, nothing to say, nothing to do. And sometimes that is okay. There is a strong Biblical and Christian tradition of lament. Take a break from the envelope and take your thoughts directly to God.



## **6. Between the Cross and the Empty Tomb: Easter Vigil**

John 19 (excerpt):

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Seminary is a weird place. I've said this before. It's not bad, not at all, as a matter of fact I'm rather grateful to the PC(USA)

for providing an institution and grants that allowed me to spend my late twenties in Louisville, Kentucky alongside Christian scholars in close quarters. I did important work there in the classroom, and even more important work outside of it, serving the church, learning to preach, and figuring out my calling. But it's weird.

In a typical church, you have one or two people like me for every hundred normal-people. One or two church leaders, who have complicated ideas about the scriptures, a take-charge attitude, a keen interest in liturgy and worship structure, and a felt need to be publicly involved with Christian expressions. In a seminary that's everyone. If you field a soccer team at seminary, everyone tries to be team captain, it just happens.

So Easter at seminary became something of a puzzle, because on one hand, everyone was busy, many of us were youth ministers or otherwise obligated to local churches. Most of the professors would be conspicuous at their own places of worship, and all of us had differing thoughts and feelings and needs about Holy Week. On the other hand, we were all together, engaged in spiritual formation as a group for years, and like, kinda good at it and stuff. We could hardly fail to celebrate Easter together no matter the obstacles.

The solution was to celebrate "Easter Vigil" as the biggest blowout worship service of the year for the seminary. It was a night service held on Holy Saturday until midnight, the morning of Easter, waiting in darkness for the hope of new light that was sure to come in the morning. For all the Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday and Easter Sunrise services, almost nobody was doing something for Holy Saturday. Yet through that service, and that community, I developed a huge appreciation for this weird little day when Jesus was in the tomb.

The cross behind us, and the resurrection before us. Sure, definite, not something that might happen, something that is

going to happen, and yet something that we are not yet ready to celebrate. Doesn't that sound like us in a lot of ways? Doesn't that sound like us, especially this year in isolation for Covid-19?

The church, the whole work of the church, sits in many ways, between the cross and the resurrection. Jesus of course was raised in the past, but the best news of Easter is not that Jesus lives, but that because he lives we can be confident we will also live in him, that we will be resurrected and in fact the whole of creation will be given new life. It just hasn't happened yet. So our worship Easter morning on Facebook live will be more of an Easter vigil celebration. We will proclaim the truth of the resurrection, but we will also be waiting for the opportunity to celebrate the resurrection together, in person, sometime in the future.

John doesn't spend much time on the in-between. Friday ends and all of a sudden it's Sunday. But this is a great time to catch up on reading any chapters that you didn't get to previously, especially John chapters 14, 15, and 17 between the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. As you read, allow yourself to dream about what it is going to be like when we are together again. Make notes about hopes, dreams and ideas, and send them to us. When we are back together again, whichever Sunday that happens is going to be a celebration of the resurrection like no other, and we will need lots of help to throw an unforgettable blowout.



## 7. The Completion of All: Easter Sunday

John 20 (excerpt):

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven then; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

He is risen! The Lord is risen. Jesus is risen. And we, like the disciples, are locked up in our houses trying to stay safe. Or running on quick errands for the essentials like the women in the chapter.

What good news it is that Jesus can find us in those places. And that the message of the resurrection, the good news of Easter, does not rely upon good conditions in order to break into the world. Easter isn't canceled, the Lord is risen today in our hearts, in our minds, and among us all. Wherever we are, whatever the conditions may be, let us celebrate!

In our devotional that you are holding in your hands, this is the 7th day of the week. I am sure you know that 7 is a significant number in the Bible which comes up often. It is the number of completion, or perfection. There are 7 days in a complete week. Noah took 2 of every animal, but 7 of the edible ones, and many Biblical things happened for 7 years. In Revelation, there are all sorts of sevens, seven churches, seven lampstands, seven seals, etc. So it's appropriate for us to put this significant day in all of our lives seventh, representing it's perfection.

Six shows up on the Bible as an incomplete number. The number of things that aren't finished or aren't quite right. It's not always a bad thing, it's just "not quite seven" so people who notice the pattern with seven, also tend to notice sixes. But there is another number that is even more significant for Christians, and that's the number 8. One more than perfect.

You see, even though we are engaging our devotional this way, Jesus wasn't actually raised to life on the seventh day of the week (the Sabbath). On that day, Holy Saturday, he rested, appropriately enough he remained in the tomb. His tomb was found empty one day after the last day of the week, on the eighth day, Sunday.

Now, those of you who are real geniuses out there will notice that the "eighth" day of one week is also known as the first day of the next week. Of course that's true. But every Sunday as Christians we gather together because it's "The Lord's Day" the day Jesus rose, and the day that's one day more than the end. One day after the end of the week when God rested in the Jewish mindset, the day after the Sabbath.

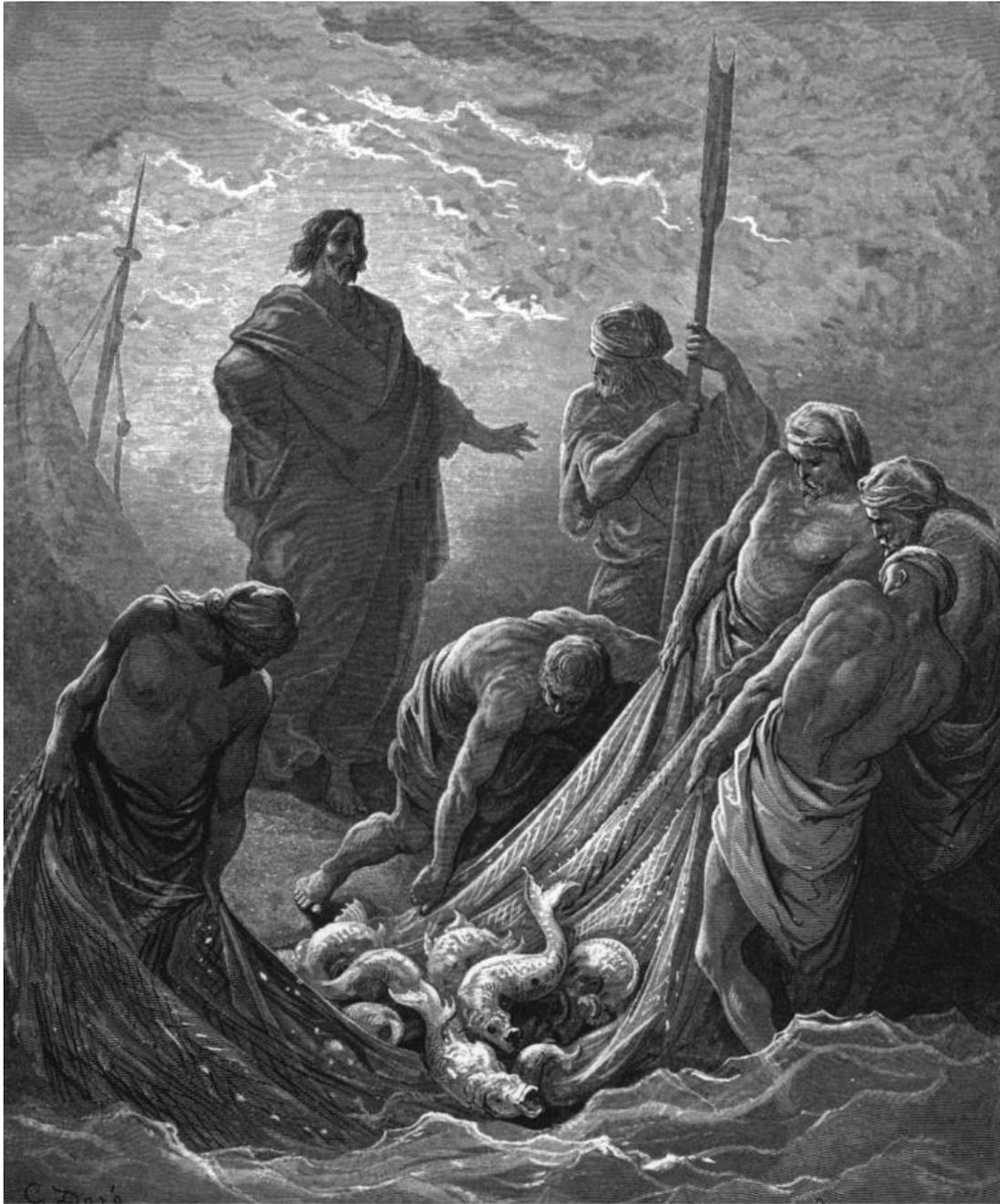
This "one day more-ness" is distinctive of Jesus and his people. You can see it in his recommendation to his disciples to turn the other cheek and walk the extra mile. You can see it in the apostles who not only persisted, but thrived under persecution. You can see it in us,

every time we give 110% to our God and Savior who lived his life and then came back for more.

Open up your Bible to John 20 and read the good news of Jesus's resurrection. Pay close attention to how you feel and to what it says, and then pick up your phone and call someone. Because just like the women this is not the sort of news anyone should keep to themselves no matter how socially isolated they are. Call up a friend and let them know that Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed.

- Notice how they responded, were they surprised? Or did they expect a call?
- What did you say to each other, what was the important part of the news to share.
- When the conversation moved past the initial greeting, where did it wander? What feelings and themes characterize the conversation that naturally flowed next?

Spend some time together in celebration of Easter discussing the truth of the resurrection and make notes. You probably have both heard and believed the story before, but it is good to tell it again today as an expression of fullness and completeness. Write down what you shared with one another, and put it in your envelope to share. When you hang up, you should both call someone else!



## 8. The Eighth Day: Bright Monday

John 21 (excerpt):

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

I have one more Holy Week celebration to share with you, and like all of the other seven, it is rooted in a holiday that has been a part

of the Christian tradition for centuries before I was even born. It's called Bright Monday, or Easter Monday, and in many countries it is still a national holiday to this day. It's the first day of bright week, the celebratory week after Easter, which lives in the bright light of the glorious reality that Jesus is risen, and that after he rose, things didn't just return to normal, but instead he kept on living and lives today.

What all this means is that if there were no coronavirus to worry about, and we were gathering in person at our church, and the worship committee had decided to celebrate every holy day it possibly could around Easter time this year, we would have had to plan services beginning perhaps as far back as March 29th, talking about Lazarus and acknowledging the foreshadowing there, then we would veil the sanctuary for Passion Week and have a series of somber morning gatherings around the reality that Jesus is passionate about us to the point of great personal suffering and anguish. Then we would dance around with Palm Branches and shout Hosanna, we'd acknowledge Holy Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. And then have a big event for Maundy Thursday with lots of food, Good Friday, Easter Vigil, a Sunrise service at 7 am, an Easter Service at 10 am, and then we would keep the candles burning for another entire week!

If we did all that in the same year, we'd probably get sick of each other. We start to feel like once a week is enough and we don't quite need so much church in our lives as all of that. Also, I might collapse under the work of trying to prepare all of that. That's why we've never paid attention to all of these observances at once before.

I'm glad therefore, that God gave us this opportunity, to gather in a simple way, in an easy chair or at a breakfast table, and celebrate these things in our homes. Because they are important, and they brighten one another, so that each is more special by its relationship to the others.

We're like that too, each of us is more special because of who we are to the people we love and who love us. None of us is good all by ourselves, but all of us together have the ability to show the world what a perfect God looks like.

Read John 21 and exercise the same skills you have been learning all week to read, interpret, and apply this passage for yourself

in your own life and context.

- What do you notice about the story? Be specific about what is printed there.
- What is the significance of the things you noticed? What does it mean to you?
- Finally, will you commit with God to doing something about it, the way Jesus made Peter commit?

After you've read, you may want to spend more time thinking and writing notes for yourself. In fact, nothing would make me happier than if this week became the first week of a new daily habit for you in prayer and Bible reading. You might want to start John over again from the beginning and read one chapter for every day of Bright Week, you might want to keep going after that. But for today, take a moment with your envelope. Look at the things you put inside it. Maybe there is only one thing you felt bold enough to put aside, maybe there aren't any, maybe there's way more than I asked for. Take some time and talk with God about other things he might want you to put in the envelope, to write or to make for inclusion to be used and shared with the wider church. Hold each item in your hand and ask God if there is something he would have you add, or take away. There is no deadline. If you need to hang on to it for another week, or send another one later, that is totally fine. But whenever you are done, seal it up with our address: 7 S. Howard St. Croswell, 48422 and send it away. Let it be an act of worship to you to save and seal these things for the glory of God and the benefit of your brothers and sisters. And I'll see you then.