

The Crucifixion

Note to readers: If you are reading through the gospel of Luke, read Luke 23:1-56 this week.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you really died on the cross. You were God in the flesh—I struggle to grasp what it meant for you to submit to that. What your death offers me fills me with wonder—release from my fear of death, freedom from my guilt, power to live a more truly human life than I have ever lived. In your divine creativity, you took the worst we could do, and brought from it the best gift I could ever receive. I submit myself to you. I praise your name. Amen.

Today You Will Be With Me in Paradise

MONDAY **Luke 23:39-43**

Two men were crucified with Jesus. Matthew 27:38 uses a word for them that could mean “criminal” or “rebel.” Some scholars think they were Barabbas’ allies, that the Romans had planned to crucify them with their leader in rebellion. One of them chose to turn from his past, whatever crime or violence it held, and Jesus gave him grace and welcome.

- Have you ever felt that it’s too late for you to change the direction of your life? We usually use the term “deathbed conversion” to describe an insincere effort to avoid eternal judgment. What does Jesus’ response to the thief tell you about God’s heart toward anyone who turns homeward, at any time?
- Christianity’s critics at times mock Paradise as “pie in the sky by and by.” Pastor Hamilton’s day 35 reading, though, notes that the Bible begins (Genesis 1-2) and ends (Revelation 22) in Paradise. How does the hope of Paradise affect you? Is it an escape or a reason to join actively in building God’s Kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven”?

Why Have You Forsaken Me?

TUESDAY **Mark 15:33-34; Luke 23:46**

Jesus resisted temptation with the words of the Hebrew scriptures. On the cross, he voiced even his anguish and loneliness in the words of Psalm 22:1. The psalmist pressed on, through grief and fear, to arrive at renewed trust in God. Jesus, too, held on through the darkness of the cross to commit himself into God’s keeping.

- Psalm 22 is a classic “lament.” These personal hymns fully honored and expressed the psalmist’s pain and fear, while holding onto trust and faith in God’s goodness. How do those two aspects of the lament cast light on what Jesus went through on the cross? Who have you known who was an example of “triumphant suffering”?
- In Luke 23:46, Jesus quoted another psalm—Psalm 31:5. First century Jewish parents seem to have used that verse as a bedtime prayer with their children. What would it mean to put your life fully in God’s hands, not only at times of great pain, but every day? How have you deepened your trust in God this Lent?

I Thirst

WEDNESDAY **John 19:28-29**

John, more than the other gospel writers, wrote Jesus’ story using layers of symbols to convey meaning. Jesus’ cry of thirst showed his humanity. It recalled Jesus’ saying that he was the source of “living water” in John 4 and 7. The hyssop branch was a traditional symbol of God’s salvation, a salvation Jesus was making a reality on the cross.

- In Exodus 12:22, God had Israel use a hyssop branch to put blood on their doors, so the angel of death would “pass over” their houses. Leviticus 14 used hyssop in cleansing rituals. Psalm 51:7 made hyssop an image of how God pardons and purifies. From what has Jesus cleansed you? What parts of your life need his cleansing today?
- Jesus' thirst also reminds us that he identified with our basic human needs. We can bless Jesus by helping to meet the needs of his children who are poor, hungry and thirsty. Are you planning to join in the Easter “Offering of Hope” this coming weekend? For more information, see www.cor.org/easteroffering.

It Is Finished

THURSDAY

John 19:30

In verse 28, John summed up Jesus' state of mind by saying, “knowing that everything had now been finished.” Two verses later, Jesus told all who were listening, “It is finished.” The cross was not an accident, a situation in which Jesus found himself trapped. It was the endpoint of his chosen mission. It fulfilled his purpose in coming to earth.

- What was “finished”? As Pastor Hamilton notes, many lengthy volumes have offered answers to that question. One aspect of Jesus' mission was to show how much God loves the human family. On the cross, Jesus had showed us that definitively. How does the story of the cross touch your heart? How do you respond to God's great love?
- Another part of Jesus' saving work was that he faced evil and death at their very worst, and defeated them. Hebrews 2:14-15 says that Jesus “set free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” In what ways does fear of death affect your choices in life? How can Jesus' death help to free you from that fear?

The Curtain...Torn in Two

FRIDAY

Mark 15:37-39 (Good Friday)

Like Mark, Matthew 27:51 and Luke 23:45 report that the Temple's curtain was torn in two. The curtain veiled the Most Holy Place. Only the High Priest could enter there, and only once a year on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. Jesus' death, the gospel writers were saying, tore down all the barriers between God and us.

- Hebrews 6:19-20 and 10:19-22 say that Jesus, the great High Priest, opened the way for us to come “behind the curtain.” We can go directly to God for mercy and grace. Be sure you make use of that privilege on this Good Friday. One way to do that is to pray at the Wesley Chapel on the Leawood campus, open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- Think back over the scenes we've examined during this study of the 24 hours that changed the world. What would the Roman centurion have seen and heard that moved him to the confession he made as Jesus died? How can your life bear witness that the one you worship and serve “surely was the Son of God”?

The Burial

SATURDAY

John 19:38-41

It took boldness for Joseph of Arimathea to ask to bury Jesus' body. He had the tomb, and Nicodemus the funds to provide lots of spices. They gave Jesus a decent burial. Note how final it all felt. No one said, “Let's save the spices. After all, he'll be alive again by Sunday.” What we call “Good Friday” didn't seem good to Jesus' followers at all. It felt like the day when evil won and good lost, when death (as always) triumphed over life.

- What have been the darkest times in your life, moments when hope seemed gone and despair held you in its grip? Are you facing problems that seem

insoluble or an awful situation right now? On this Saturday, allow yourself to join Jesus' followers in feeling deeply how dark this world can be. Do so, however, with the trust that, in God's world, despair and darkness never have the last word. Tomorrow is Easter.

Family Activity: Tomorrow is Easter! Prepare a simple breakfast treat for Easter morning. You will need crescent roll dough, large marshmallows, melted butter, cinnamon and sugar. Wrap a crescent roll triangle around a marshmallow. Dip the roll in melted butter, then in the cinnamon and sugar. Bake the rolls according to package directions. The marshmallow will disappear and leave an empty, sweet surprise. At breakfast on Easter morning, read Luke 24:1-12. Invite each family member to take one bite out of his or her roll. Celebrate that the tomb (like the roll) is empty, Jesus is risen and Jesus is alive! Consider baking an extra batch and sharing with your neighbors along with the good news of Easter!