



SERMONS
THAT WORK



SERMONS FOR *Holy Week and Easter 2024*

An offering of
Sermons That Work

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

Holy Week 2024

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One of the most moving aspects of Holy Week and Easter to me is the absolute inversion of all that one might think and expect regarding the entry of the Messiah into the Holy City. I have found that one of our traditional hymns, "Ride on! Ride on in majesty!" captures it particularly well—starting with

the very first line. What kind of people can, with a straight face, sing this line to our Lord as he rides a donkey, in a procession of one, through the dirty and dusty streets? How can someone swell the trumpets and horns, acknowledging that he goes not to earthly triumph, but "ride[s] on to die"? Whether this is our first Holy Week, our twentieth, our fiftieth, our eightieth, how can we instruct the one who "laid the foundation of the earth" (Job 38:4, NRSVue) to "bow [his] meek head to mortal pain"?

I would guess that there are two ways we can do these things; first, unseriously, and because we have not stopped to consider the words coming out of our mouths—or perhaps only because we like the music. Or secondly, seriously, because we know how this story ends and have committed, however imperfectly, to believing it. In this week, all our assumptions about power, about victory, about everything must change from what the world suggests. It is only by knowing the eventual defeat and destruction of death that we could be so bold to sing this song; it is only by knowing the power of the Resurrection that we could stand and sing with such resolve before the powers of sin and the grave. Even when it seems impossible, unlikely, just a nice story, let our prayer be, "I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

On behalf of Sermons That Work and The Episcopal Church's Office of Communication, I bid you a blessed Holy Week and a joyous Easter.

Your brother in Christ,
Christopher Sikkema
The Episcopal Church

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

COLLECT

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READINGS:

ISAIAH 50:4-9A; PSALM 31:9-16; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11; MARK 14:1-15:47 OR MARK 15:1-39, [40-47]

GOD SAVE THE PEOPLE

by the Rev. Anna Tew

*“When wilt thou save the people?
O God of mercy, when?
Not kings and lords, but nations,
Not thrones and crowns, but men...
God save the people.”*

Famous words, not from the Gospel of John, but from the Stephen Schwartz musical, *Godspell*.

Palm Sunday.

It is the moment of the church year most frequently documented in musical theatre, and with good reason.

It is flashy, it has its own special soundtrack, and everyone gets a prop: a branch to wave.

It would seem, however, that in the text claiming to describe Jesus’ actual ride into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, there were no musical numbers at all.

There was a lot of shouting. There were a lot of symbols. And there were people crowded around, demanding things, hoping for more, for better, for peace. A crowd invests their tired hope in this controversial rabbi riding into town on a donkey, and they show up for him with shouting, symbols, and loud support.

It was much less like a musical number and much more like a protest. The authorities might have even called it a riot.

Hosanna!

God save the people.

We find ourselves today in John 12, right after Mary anoints Jesus and some religious leaders plot to kill him. So much has already happened in John's Gospel, and yet, the true action has yet to take place. John 1 through John 12 is known to scholars as the "Book of Signs," when Jesus performs miracles and gives teachings and surprises everyone with what he does, culminating in his most rabble-rousing miracle of all: raising Lazarus from the dead. That miracle changed everything. From then on, Jesus was officially making too much of a ruckus. Word was spreading. Rome, the oppressing empire, was watching.

Something had to be done about this rebellious rabbi that everyone was following.

We are at a hinge point in every sense of the term. We are at a hinge point in the Gospel of John, between John's "Book of Signs" and what would become known as the "Book of Glory".

We are at a hinge point liturgically, teetering between Lent and Holy Week and ready to plunge into our yearly remembrance of Jesus' last days before his crucifixion.

We are also at a hinge point societally, as this leap year will take us through another presidential election cycle. But then, it always seems that we are at a hinge point societally, because we never quite know when we are on the verge of a day that changes everything.

This is also where the first observers of Palm Sunday found themselves. They lived in a land occupied by all of the oppressive power of Rome. Many of the occupants of the land were Jewish, a minority religion in the Roman Empire. Like human beings from ancient times right up until today, what they wanted most was to live their lives, observe their faith, care for their families, and make a living. But as often happens to humans, events beyond their control — like Rome conquering their land — affected their ability to do these things.

Some in Israel wanted to rebel against Rome, and they had, and they would do so again in the future. Others preferred to keep their heads down and try to live their lives as peacefully as possible. And most people were somewhere in between the extremes. They weren't satisfied with the way things were going at all, but they also weren't about to take up arms against the greatest military power in the world at the time.

Enter Jesus, the offbeat rabbi that they say brought a man back from the dead.

Could he be the one that would save them?

Word begins to spread that he's coming to Jerusalem. Someone spots him. They tell others. Soon, he's riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. A horse would have been a clear statement that he was a military leader. But a donkey? Humble. Peaceful.

Others assemble. John is the only Gospel to note that the crowd had palm branches. Palm branches are a Near Eastern symbol of many things, among them victory, eternal life, peace.

God save the people.

Soon, there is a huge crowd, with people pushing, craning to see the famous rabbi that they say brought a man back who had been dead for days.

Could he be the one to save us?

In the verses that follow today's Gospel text, the religious leaders shake their heads in despair and sigh, "See, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!" (John 12:19).

Two thousand years later, we still look for the one who will save the people. We put our hopes in all kinds of people, things, and programs. We yearn for the thing that will take us from difficulty to freedom, from sickness to health, and from death to life.

God, save the people.

Today, let us join the world in running after Jesus. Let us grip the palms in our hands and imagine what it must have been like to be there, to see him, to invest our tired hope in him.

At this hinge point in history in 2024, let us remember that we are not the first to fear, the first to suffer, the first to want better things for ourselves and our families. We are not the first to despair or the first to offer our tired hope up to the one who might save us.

Beloved, the story of Jesus is our story, and here, we get to live through it again together. Let us, just this once, forget that we know the ending. Let us invest our tired hope in the one who rides on a donkey. Let us dare to imagine that he might be the one to take us from death into life.

The story is being told once again. Let us lean into it, together.

Today, we grip our palms. From here, either individually or together, we will journey from this Jerusalem road to the upper room, where fears will be shared and feet will be washed and a meal will be broken and poured for us.

And then, as it always does, on Good Friday the worst will happen.

Hope is crushed. Love is laid quiet.

Beloved, forget for a moment that you know the ending. When love is laid quiet in our own lives, we allow ourselves to mourn that the worst has happened.

From the tomb, who knows where love and hope could take us?

God, save the people.

Love comes to us today riding on a donkey. Let us greet him with palms and songs. And then let us once again journey with him from death into life.

May we encounter the holy this week, and may we find our tired hope refreshed.

God, save the people.

Amen.

The Rev. Anna Tew is a Lutheran pastor based in South Hadley, Massachusetts. She has served a fantastic little parish called Our Savior's Lutheran Church for seven years. Anna was born and raised in Alabama and considers Atlanta her second home. She graduated from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in 2011 and has served in a variety of settings since then, including both parish ministry and hospital chaplaincy. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking, CrossFit, and music of all kinds.

*“Love comes to us today
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– THE REV. ANNA TEW

1. Can you relate to the concept of “tired hope”?

2. Put yourself in the place of those watching Jesus enter Jerusalem. What emotions do you feel?

Monday in Holy Week

COLLECT

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READINGS:

**ISAIAH 42:1-9; PSALM 36:5-11; HEBREWS 9:11-15;
JOHN 12:1-11**

TO THE END AND BEYOND

by the Rev. Canon Whitney Rice

We return, as we always do on Monday of Holy Week, to the little house in Bethany. Ears still ringing from the raucous crowds thronging the streets of Jerusalem yesterday on Palm Sunday,

perhaps our own voices are hoarse from shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Our unspoken hope was that if we proclaimed it loudly enough, maybe this year we wouldn’t hear our own voices a scant week later shouting, “Crucify him!”

Jesus knows what is coming, and he comes here to the house in Bethany for strength. Perhaps we can do the same. But, as always with Jesus, and especially during Holy Week, there is a dose of keen insight awaiting us, insight about ourselves and our motives that we might have been happier without.

Jesus draws strength from his dearest friends: Martha with her untiring service, practical and steadfast, Mary with her extravagant devotion, intense and demonstrative, and Lazarus, who loves with neither deeds nor words, but his simple, quiet presence. Martha speaks with her hands, Mary speaks with her tears, and Lazarus speaks with a small smile and the love shining out of his eyes as he sits at table with Jesus for the last time. The goodbye, unspoken in any direct terms, vibrates in the room with palpable intensity.

Is Jesus going to come to your house tonight? Are you his trusted confidante, someone who loves him not for the miracles and the prophecies of his kingship but for himself? Are you his companion at meals uncounted? Have you shared table fellowship with him, times of laughter and feasting, over weeks and months and years of friendship? Has he raised you from the dead?

The questions keep coming from some hidden corner of our troubled spirits. Will you be able to comfort him with the evidence of your walking, talking, breathing self that he brought back from death like Lazarus? Can he count on your service like he can with Martha? Does he know you’ll do anything for him like Mary will? Can you show him with your life that resurrection is real? These are the questions that haunt us tonight.

These remarkable siblings that Jesus so cherished have much to teach us. But let’s focus for a moment on one perhaps overlooked detail that will keep us asking ourselves the hard questions, the

questions that will move Holy Week from being a mere dramatic spectacle to a life-changing valley of shadow and spiritual growth.

After Mary pours her perfume on Jesus' feet and Judas scolds her for it, Jesus says this: "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial." Consider the implications of this statement. Mary, who loved Jesus, who found her life changed by his teaching and his healing presence, who knew she was his beloved friend, at some point went to the market and bought perfume to anoint Jesus' dead body. Have you ever thought about your best friend, a friend who is in very good health and doing great work in the world, at the peak of his strength and vibrancy, and then thought, "Well, I'd better go ahead and pick out what I'm going to wear to his funeral."?

Of course not. It's nonsensical. Or at least it seems to be. But it is actually a statement of profound loyalty and love that puts all Peter's blustering bravado and Judas' self-righteous moralizing to shame. First of all, Mary has heard Jesus say that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinners, killed, and on the third day rise again. And unlike the scribes and Pharisees, unlike even Jesus' chosen twelve, she believed him. She believed him, and rather than scolding him for it like Peter or hedging her bets for her future after Jesus like Judas, she quietly prepared for it.

What makes this act so selfless is that she did not try to dissuade him from going purposely to his death, nor did she try to influence the outside political situation in the world to prevent his arrest or conviction. This was where her Lord said he needed to go, and so she determined to go with him. Furthermore, she knew he would leave her behind, but rather than selfishly trying to stop it, she quietly, methodically prepared to continue loving and caring for him after he died.

She walked toward death herself in an incredibly selfless way, not a dramatic literal death, but the humble and exquisitely painful

death of being the one left behind, the one still alive, the one abandoned to a bitter, living grief. She privately bought perfume for the day of his burial and stored it away until it would be needed. From extravagant, demonstrative Mary, this is a hidden and humble act of deep loyalty that would probably never be seen or known by anyone, even Jesus, because he would be dead. It is a reminder of the glory hidden away in the corners of other people in unexpected ways that we never see. It is a reminder of the glory hidden away in you.

But Mary didn't wait. She didn't wait until he died. She poured the perfume on his feet before he died at what was, for her and her siblings, their Last Supper with Jesus. Why? It takes what was already a beautiful act of devotion, her private resolution to accompany him to death and beyond, to the next level. First, she shows him while he is still alive that she accepts that he will die. She will not try to prevent him from doing what he is determined to do, and by anointing him for burial while he is alive, she is pledging herself to him and showing that she trusts him enough to let him die without protesting.

Second, she does this in her own home. She says yes to death in her own private space, the place where she has had the most precious moments of her life with Jesus. This house in Bethany is a symbol of her heart, and she opens herself to the death of Jesus here.

This farewell dinner is the Last Supper for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. This is the sacramental moment for them, of fellowship with death approaching, and Mary pours herself and her offering out upon Jesus. She allows herself to be broken open, shedding tears, wiping his feet with her hair, saying a wholehearted "yes" to how Jesus will allow himself to be broken for her. This is love and grief and loyalty and hope all bound up in one transcendent act.

So, have you purchased perfume for the day of Jesus' burial? There is still time. It is a tremendous risk. It is a pledge to stay with Jesus to the end and beyond, to care for him when he can no longer care for himself, to say yes to his death, knowing it will mean your own death in a profound way.

But Jesus loves Mary so much for this simple act with its hidden depths of devotion. It strengthens him. It is a point of stability for him in a world rapidly flying apart, an act of steadfast and unbreakable loyalty among his friends who are running for the hills as he approaches the end.

The gospel says, "The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." She breaks the bottle and the fragile, ethereal, enchanting smell transforms the house into holy space, where death and life and love are mingled inextricably. This is what happens in our hearts when we allow that last hope of running away from the truth to break within us, just like that bottle of perfume. The smallest of sounds, the smallest of moments, with the deepest of meanings.

So let us go within. Let us explore the hidden corners of our own hearts. Let us search our spirits and ask: will we buy perfume for the day of Jesus' burial? No one will thank us for it. Judas will scold us for it, everyone else will simply think us dramatic and hysterical women. What a stupid and useless thing to do, they will all say.

But Jesus—Jesus will understand. And Jesus will cherish our gift of ourselves.

The Rev. Canon Whitney Rice (she/her/hers) is an Episcopal priest who serves as the Canon for Evangelism & Discipleship Development for the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri. She is a graduate of Yale Divinity School, where she won the Yale University Charles S. Mersick Prize for Public Address and Preaching and the Yale University E. William Muehl Award for Excellence in Preaching. She has taught undergraduate courses at the University of Indianapolis and has contributed to Lectionary Homiletics, the Young Clergy Women's Project journal Fidelia's Sisters, and other publications. She has served as a researcher and community ministry grant consultant for the Indianapolis Center for Congregations and is currently a member of The Episcopal Church's Evangelism Council of Advice. A communicator of the gospel at heart, she writes and teaches on a wide variety of topics, including rethinking evangelism, stewardship, leadership, women's theology of the body, mysticism, and spiritual development. When she's not thinking about theology, particularly the intersection of evangelism and justice work (which is all the time, seriously), you'll find her swing dancing. Find more of her work at her website Roof Crashers & Hem Grabbers (www.roofcrashersandhemgrabbers.com).

*“It is a pledge to stay with
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– THE REV. CANON WHITNEY RICE

1. How has your loyalty – to God or to others - been demonstrated or tested?

2. After reading this sermon, what actions or attitudes are you willing to undertake to deepen your loyalty and devotion to Christ?

Tuesday in Holy Week

COLLECT

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READINGS:

ISAIAH 49:1-7; PSALM 71:1-14; CORINTHIANS 1:18-31; JOHN 12:20-36

THE HERO REVEALED

by the Rev. Amy Richter, PhD, 2019

Sometimes our eyes deceive us. We think we know what we're looking at, but it turns out that reality is different than we thought, like our perceptions or expectations were off, there is more here than meets the eye. Sometimes, of course, we can't see something because it's hidden. Sometimes it's hidden in plain sight, and other times, it was waiting for the right time to be revealed.

Moviemakers know that the hidden hero can be a great character, a great type. You know, the person who turns out to be very different from our first expectations just when the plot demands it. Think of the bookworm whose quiet, nerdy nature could make her easily overlooked, but then it totally pays off when she knows the obscure fact that saves the day. Think of Hermione Granger (from the Harry Potter series) who is the brains of the bunch. You can tease her for being a know-it-all, but you want her recall

of spells when fighting the bad guys. Think of Dr. Henry Walton Jones, Jr., who, if you only knew him from archaeology class, you would think of as a harmless bespectacled professor; but we know him as Indiana Jones, whose vision somehow improves when he fights Nazis and Soviet agents. Think of Princess Leia in Star Wars—A New Hope (the first one)—who is in a bind. Luke and Han come to rescue her, but when the rescue doesn't go as planned, she grabs Luke's blaster, shoots at the stormtroopers and declares, "Somebody has to save our skins!" There are even examples of movies featuring preachers who are quite mild-mannered but, threaten their congregation, and they will kick in the door and look like they spend as much time practicing marksmanship as they do in Bible study. If Clint Eastwood in Pale Rider is an extreme example, think of salt-of-the-earth Father Barry in On the Waterfront, who advocates peaceful resistance to evil, but doesn't hesitate to punch Marlon Brando's character and send him flying across the room when he needs a little calming down.

We love the hidden hero, the person who becomes who we want them to be in the face of threat, danger, and the forces of evil. We love the moment when they are revealed as stronger, badder, braver, more durable than they looked, the person not to be trifled or messed with or taken for granted, or else, look out.

There's a lot about hiding and revealing in our lessons for today. In Isaiah, we hear about the servant of the Lord, "He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away." This hidden one would be revealed, and then "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Kings don't stand—other people stand in their presence. Princes don't prostrate themselves—people prostrate before them. But when the Lord reveals this servant "to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel," to be given "as a light to the nations," that God's "salvation may reach to the end of

the earth,” people will be amazed. Those who saw “one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers,” will know that this servant is no less than the chosen of the Lord.

We love the hidden hero. And we love the moment when their power is revealed in all its glory.

It could be tempting to imagine Jesus that way. It could be tempting to want Jesus to reveal himself that way, to want him—the unjustly condemned, tortured, and crucified man hanging on a cross—to lose his patience, his temper, his restraint, and tear himself down from the cross and exact revenge on his captors; to want Jesus to summon some super-human physical strength, blast the cross into toothpicks, and go after the whole legion of Roman soldiers who now tremble in shock and terror when they see who Jesus really is; to want Jesus to stop being the weak, wounded, defeated man on the cross he appears to be—and be instead the kind of hero we want him to be.

We’re not alone. Way before Hollywood, and in real life, people taunted Jesus to reveal his true self, or what they thought that would look like. Soldiers scoff, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” (Luke 23:37); a criminal calls out, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself, and us!” (Luke 23:39); passersby cry, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” (Matt 27:40); chief priests, along with the scribes and elders, mock, “He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him” (Matt 27:42). In other words, you don’t look like a king, a Messiah, a Son of God. Transform yourself into our version of a hero, and then we’ll believe.

But Jesus won’t do it. He won’t transform into our version, the hero we want him to be. He stays on the cross—the hero and savior we need.

When some Greeks come to Philip and say, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” we get all excited. What an evangelism opportunity! And people actually come asking, none of that messy going out to people where they are with the Good News! They just come!

Philip, along with Andrew, goes to Jesus to tell him about this great chance to impress. Jesus starts off in a promising way: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Excellent! We’ve been waiting for this moment! The hidden hero will peel off the outer layer, duck into the phone booth, find exactly the right words, cast the right spell, roll up his sleeves, pick up his weapon... But then Jesus starts talking about death: “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” His glorification comes on the cross, not in spite of it. On the cross—not escaping from it. On the cross—not smashing, avoiding, outwitting, or faking it.

Notice this. Keep this in mind as this week unfolds: Jesus’ glorification comes on Good Friday when he looks like—when he is exactly who he is—a victim of torture and injustice, not when he strides forth in glowing robes. Don’t rush to Easter and miss this truth.

Don’t miss it, because Jesus says this is our path to glorification too: “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” This is the type of hero Jesus wants us to be. No secret powers or arsenals or strength. No place for them or need for them in the plot. Just the grace of God, the wisdom of God, the strength of God.

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

This sermon, written by the Rev. Amy Richter, PhD, originally ran for Tuesday in Holy Week in 2019.

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– THE REV. AMY RICHTER, PHD, 2019

1. How does the message of the cross challenge conventional notions of power and glory and inspire a different understanding of heroism?

2. What is the significance of Jesus refusing to transform into the hero that people wanted him to be and instead remaining on the cross as the hero they needed?

Wednesday in Holy Week

COLLECT

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READINGS:

ISAIAH 50:4-9A; PSALM 70; HEBREWS 12:1-3;
JOHN 13:21-32

THE PARADOX OF JUDAS

by Susan Butterworth, 2020

The Paradox of Judas: ultimate betrayer or player in the cosmic drama of salvation?

Today's gospel passage begins, "After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.'" Looking back to what Jesus has just said, we hear these words, spoken after he has washed the disciples' feet: "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he" (John 13:17-19).

Jesus makes it clear that there is a betrayer among the inner circle of disciples, and that the betrayal was prophesied. He quotes Psalm 41, verse 9: "Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me." To increase the dramatic irony and tension, Jesus is at the table, sharing bread with his bosom friends: the beloved disciple, Simon Peter, and the others. To whom could Jesus be referring? The disciples are mystified. Who could it be? Then Jesus reveals the betrayer by dipping a piece of bread in oil and giving it to Judas Iscariot.

What do we know of Judas? The name Judas Iscariot, son of Simon Iscariot, identifies him, according to many scholars, as a man from the town of Kerioth in Judea. All four gospels include Judas among the twelve of Jesus' closest disciples. He seems to have played a faithful role along with the other eleven whom Jesus sent out with power over unclean spirits and a ministry of preaching and healing. Thus, two basic facts we know about Judas are that Jesus chose him as one of the twelve disciples and that Judas handed Jesus over to the Jerusalem authorities, leading to Jesus' execution.

Was Judas' call to discipleship genuine? It is unlikely that Judas was an imposter from the beginning. In addition to his ministry as a follower of Jesus, he was trusted with the common purse, though John the Evangelist portrays him as a thief. What happened to change Judas into a betrayer? John tells us that Satan entered into

him. Does this indicate a change of heart? Why did he betray Jesus? For money? In the Gospel of Matthew, Judas betrays Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. For political reasons? Some scholars suggest that Judas wanted Jesus to be arrested to precipitate an uprising against the authorities and that he didn't really think Jesus would be killed. Others suggest that Judas wanted Jesus arrested to end a dangerous armed rebellion before it began. Still others suggest that he was disillusioned with Jesus, having hoped he would overthrow Roman rule of Judea. Or perhaps Judas was a faithful follower who betrayed Jesus at Jesus' own request, to fulfill the prophecy of scripture and set the inevitable in motion, as suggested in the apocryphal Gospel of Judas.

The possible reasons for Judas' betrayal follow two interwoven patterns. Either Judas was a greedy, unfaithful man, led into sin by Satan to betray Jesus for money or political reasons, or Judas was a player in the cosmic drama of good and evil, playing an essential role in the salvation of mankind when he handed Jesus over to the authorities. If Jesus' crucifixion was inevitable and necessary for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind, then Judas' action in leading the authorities to Jesus was part of the divine plan.

The distinction rests in some measure on translation. Twentieth-century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar asserts that the New Testament Greek word *paradidonai*, often translated as "betrayed," actually means "handing over of self." Thus, Paul's description of the institution of the Lord's Supper in his First Letter to the Corinthians, "The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread" (1 Corinthians 11:23), take on a different theological meaning when translated "on the night he was handed over."

In the 1979 Book of Common Prayer alone, we find a variety of translations. Whether we read the traditional translation in the Rite I Eucharistic Prayer: "In the night in which he was betrayed," or the contemporary language of Rite II, Eucharistic Prayer A, "On the night he was handed over," or the language of Eucharistic Prayer D, "When the hour had come for him to be glorified," there is no doubt that the name Judas has become synonymous with betrayal.

Mark's gospel tells us that Judas led the authorities to Jesus as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and then betrayed Jesus with a kiss: "Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.' So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him" (Mark 14: 44-46).

From beloved, trusted disciple to betrayer, it's clear that love and betrayal go hand in hand. Matthew tells us that Judas immediately felt regret, tried to return the money he had taken in exchange for Jesus' life, and then hanged himself.

We really don't know why Judas turned Jesus over to the authorities. It is possible that Judas, like most of us, acted from complicated and unclear motives. It is possible that Jesus knew this. From the prayer of Jesus: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, and keep us from temptation." The sinner who has succumbed to temptation could be Judas. The sinner who has succumbed to temptation could be any of us.

Considering Judas' role in the events of Jesus' last days in Jerusalem, we ponder the nature of betrayal, of sin and redemption. We know that Jesus was troubled in spirit, that the knowledge that one of those he loved would betray him caused him distress. As human beings and as followers of Jesus, we are called to love. We strive not to betray that love. We know that it is never too late to change or repent, that God's love and capacity for forgiveness are infinite.

We are left with the paradox of Judas. Was he a faithful man who did what had to be done for the salvation of humankind, who made a difficult choice, even though his name would be synonymous with betrayal for millennia? It is possible. Was his decision to hand Jesus over to the authorities an act of politics, in hope of advancing a revolt and overthrowing an unjust power? Perhaps the outcome wasn't what he hoped it would be. Some of us may be very frustrated with our country's politics; would we do something as desperate as Judas' act? Was Judas truly called to ministry with Jesus, and later succumbed to a loss of faith? He could be any one of us. Did Judas hang himself out of regret or remorse? Did he repent before he died? Was he an evil tool of Satan or a flawed, doubting human being? Was Jesus betrayed, or was he handed over? Was Judas' act a result of one man's greed and sin, or obedience to God's purpose for our salvation? There are no easy answers.

Judas as a rebel, a man with a political agenda. Judas as a disciple called to ministry, coping with loss of faith. Judas as an agent in the cosmic drama of God versus Satan. Any of these faces of Judas could be you or I. May we be called to examine our hearts this Holy Week, to discern our motives, to struggle against Satan when the need arises. May we strive to keep faith with those we love.

Let us pray: Christ Jesus, when temptation urges us to abandon you, you pray within us. Even if we forget you, your love remains, and you send your Holy Spirit upon us. And when we come to know our weaknesses, unexpected resources appear within us. Amen.

This sermon, written by Susan Butterworth, originally ran for Wednesday in Holy Week in 2020.

*“May we be called to
examine our hearts this
Holy Week, to discern our
motives, to struggle against
Satan when the need arises.
May we strive to keep faith
with those we love.”*

– SUSAN BUTTERWORTH, 2020

1. What are your first thoughts when you hear the name of Judas?

2. Read the second verse of “Ah, holy Jesus” - #158 in The Hymnal 1982.
What insights do you glean from this text about the nature of betrayal?

Maundy Thursday

COLLECT

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

READINGS:

EXODUS 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; PSALM 116:1, 10-17; I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26; JOHN 13:1-17, 31B-35

ADAPTATION

by the Rev. Jazzy Bostock

There's a theory you may have heard about – hedonic adaptation. Basically, it means we get used to the circumstances of our lives – and return to our baseline happiness. Here's an example – You fantasize about buying a new car and save your money to be able to afford it. The day comes and you buy the car. Fabulous! You get a small happiness boost. But likely, by the next day, that dopamine hit has decreased. By the end of the week, even more so. And by the end of the month, you're used to it. This is just your car now. Your mind adjusts – hedonic adaptation.

Similarly, for something negative – some people express it by saying time heals. For example, when someone first dies, the grief seems almost unbearable. You can't imagine living without that

person. But as time passes, you get into a new rhythm – your baseline returns. Again, hedonic adaptation.

The theory says that each person has a happiness set point, which is basically your genetically determined predisposition towards happiness. No matter, then, what happens in your life – no matter what your circumstances might be – you will return, more or less, to that set point.

Now, what does this happiness theory have to do with Maundy Thursday and Holy Week and preparing ourselves for Easter?

These holy days – this Holy Week – sort of shake us out of our baseline – to remind us of the miracle of resurrection.

Most of the church year, we live in ordinary time. Green is on the altar and we hear the stories and teachings of Jesus – and work to put them into practice in our lives. Of course, Jesus' resurrection is a premise of our faith - and we affirm it weekly in the Nicene Creed – but by and large, for the most part, this crucifixion and resurrection business is skimmed over. We forget about the incredible miracle that Easter presents to us. We fall into our baseline. We practice hedonic adaptation.

Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday pull us out of our baselines - out of our hedonic adaptation – and point us first to the devastation of Jesus' death, and then to the joy of the miracle which is coming. The story of these holy days, of this Holy Week, gives us time to be shaken up. Time to be pulled out of our baselines, and out of our adaptation – time to hear these stories and hear the wonder in them, as if they were new to our ears.

Today, on Maundy Thursday, Jesus says to his followers that he is leaving them with a new commandment – that they love one

another. Now, this feels a bit like a baseline for Jesus, who is always teaching us about love and expansion and how much God has for us. But what may be different here is how close he is to the end. He knows that death is coming, and he suspects that it won't be a peaceful passing.

And yet, even in the face of this difficulty – even in the face of a cruel, brutal, undeserved death – he tells his disciples to leave the sword behind and to love one another. It's revolutionary.

No matter how many times we have heard this scripture, no matter how many Maundy Thursdays we have lived through, worshipped through, this teaching should catch us by surprise. It should make our breath catch in our throats.

We might be used to the stories we hear during Holy Week. We might have adapted to them. But if we are willing to hear them again and really listen, then we can't help but be shaken from our own hedonistic adaptation and be taken on an emotional journey toward the cross.

We have been coming to this point, traveling toward the cross, for all of the Lenten season – but in these three holy days, we really get the opportunity to experience the story of the cross. Even our worship looks different; many churches take today to practice the washing of feet or share an agape meal. Our liturgy clues us into the fact that all is not business as usual – that these days are set apart, meant to shake us awake and make us pay attention once more. The journey we take over these days will not end in death and darkness but in resurrection and new life. We will walk away with a deeper faith, a deeper love of God and of neighbor.

While hedonic adaptation is a theory proven over time, there is an antidote. Meditation or prayer, researchers noted, can elicit positive emotions. Specifically, becoming aware of what we have through mindfulness practices can refocus our energy and give us a bigger, longer-lasting boost to our baseline happiness.

Maybe these holy days function a bit like that. They ask us to practice mindfulness around Jesus' life and death so that we can hear his resurrection as the fresh miracle that it is. They shake us from our baseline, giving us time to really hear the amazing miracle that is coming as we approach Easter.

So, may this Maundy Thursday be a clarion call – a sign to wake from your slumber, and pay attention. An opportunity to hear Jesus' preaching about love as the revolutionary act that it is. And may we all be shaken from our own hedonistic adaptations. Amen.

The Rev. Jazzy Bostock is a strong, proud, kanaka maoli woman. She serves two small parishes on the west side of Oahu, one Episcopal and one Lutheran. She and her wife tend to a small garden together, delighting in the way food grows. She loves to laugh, walk barefoot, cook, and feel the sun on her skin.

“If we are willing to hear them again and really listen, then we can’t help but be shaken from our own hedonistic adaptation and be taken on an emotional journey toward the cross.”

– THE REV. JAZZY BOSTOCK

1. If you’ve marked Maundy Thursday before, what feelings went through your mind on those occasions? Do you anticipate feeling the same feelings or different ones this year?

2. If you attend worship tonight, try to completely empty yourself and giving your undivided attention to the liturgy and God’s presence.

Good Friday

COLLECT

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READINGS:

**ISAIAH 52:13-53:12; PSALM 22; HEBREWS 10:16-25
OR HEBREWS 4:14-16; 5:7-9; JOHN 18:1-19:42**

THE IDENTITY OF THE SLAIN

by Katerina Katsarka Whitley

After listening to the achingly beautiful words of Second Isaiah, to the despair of Psalm 22, and the mournful solemnity of St. John's remembrance of the saddest night in Jesus' and his disciples' lives, we wonder: What more can a sermon add?

The Old Testament lesson comes from the segment that is called Second Isaiah, and the verses from chapters 52 and 53 are known as the Fourth Servant Song. A litany of adjectives stays in the mind from this magnificent Servant Song:

"Wounded."

"Despised."

"Rejected."

"Bruised."

"Crushed."

"Oppressed."

And "afflicted," among many other descriptions of defeat. No matter who the Suffering Servant was in the mind of the writer/prophet, all of these apply to Jesus of Nazareth after his arrest. It was Jesus himself who took the mantle of the suffering servant upon himself, knowing who he was and knowing what was to come as a result of his being the incarnate Son.

St. John adds more qualities on the torn shoulders of the prisoner: Jesus' great courage when they come to arrest him, and he confronts them. "Whom are you looking for?" and when they answer, "Jesus of Nazareth," they can't believe him, because they are not used to persons who are hunted willing to tell the truth. Jesus answers with the great I AM of the eternal Christ. "I am he."

This courage is followed by his shining integrity that nothing can compromise; a frightened Pilate before such a defendant asks repeatedly, "Are you a king?" and Jesus answers, "You say that I am."

Add to that his fierce truth-telling. "Why do you ask?" he demands of Annas when the latter questions him about his teaching. "I have said nothing in secret."

And near the end of the torturous night when Pilate claims his own authority to have Jesus put to death, the prisoner reveals the terrible knowledge to which he has submitted with humility and utter obedience: "You would have no power over me had it not been given to you from above."

It is my beloved Father who is allowing this humiliation, he is saying; my God who lets these uncouth soldiers spit on me and strike me. It is the One who loves me who permits them to put the heavy cross on my bleeding shoulders, the means of my terrible death. Knowing all this, he never doubts that his Father loves him. We receive here only a glimpse of the true Suffering Servant—not an imaginary one.

Now let's look at the others: the ones who think they have power over him; and then at the ones who love him.

We have already seen a frightened Pilate who is worried that this innocent man may have some hidden agenda as a king of another realm. What would Caesar say? What would Caesar do to me if I did the wrong thing? We hear his brain asking questions that reflect on himself alone. Pilate was a Roman; we can say that he didn't know any better, that he didn't know of a God of justice and mercy. But Annas knew. He had been the high priest, as his son-in-law Caiaphas was the current high priest. They had been steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures. They claimed the God of Moses and the prophets as their own. They served as both clergy and politicians and, like many similar officials in our world, they had compromised everything they had known about their God in order to do the will of evil men. St. John writes this as an aside, to identify Caiaphas, but this has become throughout eternity the quality of the person who betrays God: "Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people." Even if they had recognized who Jesus was, they ignored the truth, in order to appease their pagan masters and to secure their own positions and power.

And what of the people, the mob who became inflamed by hatred, even though they had known the love of the one who cured the sick and blessed the poor? How could they have forgotten so soon? For answers, we can only turn to our own time; the supreme hypocrisy is revealed when the accusers bring

Jesus to Pilate: "They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover." Yes, of course. As long as we go to church and show the world that we are good people, we can do whatever we want to others, even put them to death...

Yes. We cringe at such a realization. We read the morning news and weep. But then we remember Peter. Peter who loved his teacher, Peter who had tried to defend him, Peter who had forbidden him from talking about death. Ah, Peter. We see ourselves in you. "One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed." It was the third time. Peter would never forget what he did because he, together with the other disciples, knew the identity of the arrested Jesus. And, afterward, he spent his life making up for his denial.

What of us? Where do we fall in all these categories of human strength and frailty? How can we approach this holy hour without remembering? The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews reassures us with these words: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." With our hearts heavy and our eyes filled with tears, we can only cry: **Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison. Amen.**

Katerina Katsarka Whitley, a native of Thessaloniki, Greece is a long-term writer for these pages. She worked as diocesan editor in the Diocese of East Carolina and as the PR & Communication associate for the then Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief during Bishop Edmond Browning's tenure. She is the author of seven books in circulation and an active public speaker and performer. She lives in Boone, N.C. where she teaches at Appalachian State University.

*“With our hearts heavy
and our eyes filled with
tears, we can only cry:
Kyrie eleison, Christe
eleison, Kyrie eleison.”*

– KATERINA KATSARKA WHITLEY

1. What qualities and attributes of Jesus are highlighted in the sermon as he faces his arrest, trial, and crucifixion?

2. Holy Week can rightfully be a time when we reflect on our own complicity in the betrayal and death of our Lord. But we must also remember that even the depths of humanity's worst sins cannot keep Jesus in the grave. How can you balance these two competing images?

The Great Vigil of Easter

COLLECT

O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS:

EXODUS 14:10-31; 15:20-21; PSALM 114; ROMANS 6:3-11; MARK 16:1-8

BRIGHT THREADS

by the Rev. D. Rebecca Hansen

A "dramatic" Easter sermon inspired by Mark 16:1-8, as told from the perspective of Mary Magdalene.

I want to tell you how I found new life in Jesus. I grew up in a small town called Magdala, a little village in Galilee. I didn't have any big dreams of being someone important in the scheme of history, but that was before I met him... Jesus. I know I am one of the privileged few to have actually known the rabbi personally while he walked the earth in the flesh. And, since that time, I have

gained something of a reputation. I'm known now simply as "Mary Magdalene," but people have often assumed I was a prostitute and the woman who wiped Jesus' feet with her own tears. It has also been assumed that I was the woman caught in adultery. I have been, for most of history, the example of the ultimate reformed sinner. Back then, I might have worried about my reputation, I might have wanted to correct the scholars, leaders, and theologians, but it's funny how little most things we now think are important really matter in the light of eternity.

Does it matter that people assume I was such a great sinner? No, it doesn't. Because we are all fallible and we all sin in some big ways in life, and that's why the Easter story is so powerful. That is why knowing Jesus is so powerful. Even back then, when I would look into his eyes, I knew it didn't matter what I had done or what sins I had committed, it didn't matter that I was a mere woman of lowly stature, it didn't matter that I needed to be healed from the demons that tormented me, it just didn't matter, none of it did. Jesus always looked at me, at every one of us, with eyes that saw beyond the things we judge ourselves on. He saw straight into my heart, knew everything about me, and loved me anyway.

How does one respond to such gracious and pure love? I think perhaps the songwriter in the musical "Jesus Christ Superstar" had it right in some sense when they put words into my mouth: "I don't know how to love him." How can any of us, limited as we are, respond to such powerful, unconditional love? I couldn't. I didn't know how. He had healed me completely and saved me utterly; there was no way to repay that. And the fantastical imagination of certain authors and movies aside, I really was given a very special role. I am one of the many bright threads in the seamless garment of people who make up God's salvation history. Anyone can and is called to be a thread in that most holy, beautiful, festal garment. You can too! You can play a role in salvation history with me. You only need to heed his call to follow him. And that is what I did. I followed him and loved him as best I could.

My most memorable moment, of course, occurred that first Easter morning. We had been so alone, so full of sorrow, grief, and confusion as Mary, Salome, and I walked silently to the Lord's tomb. Nothing could have prepared us for what happened when we arrived. It was so dramatic. And the tomb was empty! Can you believe that it was the women who were the first to be given the message of the good news of the Resurrection? It wasn't one of the men or one of the twelve disciples. It wasn't even Peter. It was the women! And it was me! I was commissioned to be not just a disciple, and not just an apostle. I was commissioned to be an apostle to the apostles. Jesus, in his mercy and grace, deemed me worthy of this role, even as God had deemed Mary of Nazareth worthy of her role to be the God-bearer and mother to God's Son. The fact that this was my role, my great commission, to go and tell the disciples the Good News about the Resurrection, says nothing of me in an ultimate sense, but it says everything about God. God chooses us, no matter what we may have done, for God's glory. Perhaps we think our mistakes or sins are too great, too much, or too frequent to be of any use to God. But that's just our pride, thinking we can somehow earn our own place in salvation history based on how good we are. We are given the honor, simply because God is gracious and loves us.

Of course, fear and doubt were our first responses to this shocking event, even in the midst of our intense amazement. And perhaps it was self-doubt most of all: Could I have really witnessed this miracle and been commissioned to preach the Good News that Jesus had risen from the dead? I didn't feel worthy of such a calling. But God was transforming me, just as God would transform the disciples and all of Jesus' followers, just as God transforms you. Soon my fear gave way to hope and faith, and then I was empowered for the next step of my calling as a follower of Jesus.

Easter is and will always be about new life. Death has been destroyed, the power of sin no longer enslaves us, and forgiveness is ours! The earth shook and God moved and raised up Jesus, the first fruits, the promise of our own resurrection.

The Resurrection is not only a promise to be redeemed after death, however. Resurrection and new life can happen here and now, today. Every time we struggle and manage to choose the good, or embrace healing rather than growing cold and bitter, every time we learn from our mistakes, forgive our enemies, forgive ourselves, seek out justice and mercy, and reach out to those in need, we are living out that promise of resurrection, of new beginnings, and of new life. Resurrection is ours!

I found new life the moment Jesus came into my life. I was never the same. I was a healed and changed woman. I found new life again when I was commissioned that Easter morning and realized that Jesus really was the One we had been waiting for, and that sin and death had been conquered in him. I found new life again when I passed from this life into the next. And I will find new life once more at the resurrection, when all God's saints, those bright threads of salvation history, arise together!

Blessed be God, the King of the Universe. May new life be yours this Easter because Christ is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

The Rev. D. Rebecca Hansen is the rector of St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church in San Diego and is the Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officer for the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego. She has served faith communities in Oregon, Missouri, Michigan, and Ohio. She discovered her call to ministry while serving as a missionary in Chiang Mai, Thailand, as a young adult. She shares her life with her husband, three children, and their multiple furbabies.

“Easter is and will always be about new life. Death has been destroyed, the power of sin no longer enslaves us, and forgiveness is ours! The earth shook and God moved and raised up Jesus, the first fruits, the promise of our own resurrection.”

– THE REV. D. REBECCA HANSEN

1. Resurrection and new life are not only future promises but can also be experienced in the present through transformative actions and choices. When have you experienced resurrection and new life?

2. What are some symbols or signs of new life around you?

Easter Day

COLLECT

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS:

ACTS 10:34-43 OR ISAIAH 25:6-9; PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11 OR ACTS 10:34-43; JOHN 20:1-18 OR MARK 16:1-8

WHAT IS LOVED IS RESURRECTED

by the Rev. Phil Hooper

What is loved is resurrected.

That is the proclamation of this singular, eternal day, when the dawn kisses the darkness and wipes away its tears. As sunlight pours itself out into the morning sky, so has the Son of God poured out his fullness, so that in the light of this impossible, wondrous moment, we might finally perceive his purpose.

For Jesus, who is Love Incarnate, has been resurrected, or rather, he *IS* the resurrection, as he once told a grieving Martha, and so now this Love enfleshed that is also the Resurrection of the flesh stands before us, not the finale of a single hero's journey but the reshaping of creation's shared journey: to discover that we are loved and that what is loved is resurrected.

It was not always evident to us that this would be so.

We have traveled a long way to get to this morning. Outward from the original, creative tension between chaos and genesis; outward from the garden of Eden; across a thousand wildernesses of yearning and temptation; traveling along the river and through the turbulent seas, as we have traveled, humanity has sought the one thing it could never satisfy in and of itself: a solution to the seemingly impermanent union of materiality and affection. That what we love...dies.

This has been the curse, the bitten, bitter fruit of inescapable insight: that even if our love—for God, for neighbor, for earth, for self—somehow manages to endure, our bodies and the work of our hands do not. We are burdened with the degeneration of even our purest efforts, our most precious bonds. The inescapable presence of death has driven the world mad with grief, desperate with the longing for something other than goodbye.

But today, in the strange light of Easter morning, a miracle takes place, and not just the one you are thinking of.

No, the first miracle is this: that a disciple, Mary Magdalene, carrying the vast pain of all creation in her heart, comes to the tomb of God, the graveside of all hope, and looks into the void... and yet refuses to yield her love to it. She refuses, there, despite

the death of Love itself, to give up the love she carries. She keeps that love alive in her broken heart. And so, on behalf of all of us, she comes to bear witness and to tend to God's broken body when no one else is able or willing to do so because she knows that bearing witness and tending to what is broken is what love looks like, both in life and in death.

And then, in this moment of miraculous tenderness and strength, she is given to behold a new miracle:

That what is loved is resurrected.

Mary did not resurrect Jesus, of course—the upwelling, earth-sustaining, heaven-rending power of the living God did that—but it is also true that this very same divine, undying love coursed through her veins and animated her soul and carried her to the tomb that day. It was God's love, it was God's own heart, in and with and through the heart of Mary Magdalene, who also wept beside the empty tomb, God weeping with her and with us for the senselessness of separation, weeping for that same long journey out of Eden, across the wilderness, through the seas, searching for a perfect union of materiality and affection—a journey that God made, too, right beside us, step by weary step.

And so, while Mary did not resurrect Jesus, we can say that she carried that resurrecting love within herself, that she was an agent of and a participant in its surprising, vivifying force, and that she partook, in that moment of the very power that will, indeed,

ultimately restore all life back to its source. And if she does, then so can we.

What you need to know is this: the Resurrection of Jesus is not a remote story of a bygone moment; it is a statement about what is true for you and for me and for everyone who is still navigating that long and often wearisome journey in search of something other than goodbye. For everyone who struggles to love; for everyone who has loved and lost; for everyone who feels confused about what love even is: Easter Day is the answer.

What is loved, however imperfectly, for however long, is resurrected.

This is what the risen body of Christ signifies and enacts: that what is loved is not lost to you, and it will live forever, not only as a memory but in its fullness.

And, as Mary discovered, what you choose to love in this world is imbued with eternity by the very act of loving it. Every time you have gently kissed a soft cheek or held a calloused hand. Every time you have refused to break a bruised reed or trample a fragile spirit. Every time you have preserved the hope of the poor, or sought beauty, or made peace. Every time you have done these things, you have partaken in the ultimate resurrection of the world, for what is loved—by you, by God, by God working through you—is resurrected.

Why and how is this so? How can Easter be what it is?

We cannot explain it. We need not explain it. Because neither can we really explain our compulsion to love, even in the face of loss and uncertainty, and yet we simply do. Love is its own answer to the questions we ask. And resurrection is the same. Jesus emerges from the fading night, calling Mary by name, calling you by name, to confirm what you already knew in your bones but dared not trust: that love is worth the cost, it is worth having to say goodbye, because there is indeed, something other than goodbye at the end of the story, something that will feel like the place where beginnings and endings meet, where, forever, the dawn kisses the darkness and wipes away its tears.

So, the good news of Easter, that what is loved is also resurrected, means that our task on this day and every day is like Mary's. We must go out into the world, to the gravesides and the gardens and those places where they collide, with the intention of finding miracles, and of being a miracle too—a miracle of love incarnate, the sort that refuses to yield to despair, even as it grieves. The sort of love that bears witness and tends to what is broken, even if we fear, sometimes, that all is lost. The sort of love that chooses to do so anyway.

And as we do so, it is possible that a strange thing will happen, that a strange new Easter light will bathe our vision. We will begin to notice others around us choosing to do the same thing—to love with persistence. We will notice all of the small gestures of care that keep the world going, all the hidden sacrifices that

have allowed generations to endure and flourish despite hardship and disappointment and violence. We will notice how there is, in fact, something deeper than just human longing that propels us across the wilderness and through the sea—that our daily choices to seek, to hope, to dream, and to try are not, in fact, futile endeavors—they are fertile ones. Like Mary in the garden, our determination to love is the embodiment of the very same mysterious force that compels life to spring forth from the earth.

For what is loved is resurrected.

Just like Jesus. And just like you.

The Rev. Phil Hooper serves as rector of Saint Anne Episcopal Church, West Chester, in the Diocese of Southern Ohio. He is a contributor to several Episcopal publications and a board member of the Center for Deep Green Faith. His sermons and other writings can be found at www.byanotherroad.com.

“This is what the risen body of Christ signifies and enacts: that what is loved is not lost to you, and it will live forever, not only as a memory but in its fullness.”

– THE REV. PHIL HOOPER

1. What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean for your life?

2. Hope is a theme throughout Holy Week. How can you live a more hopeful life starting now?

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