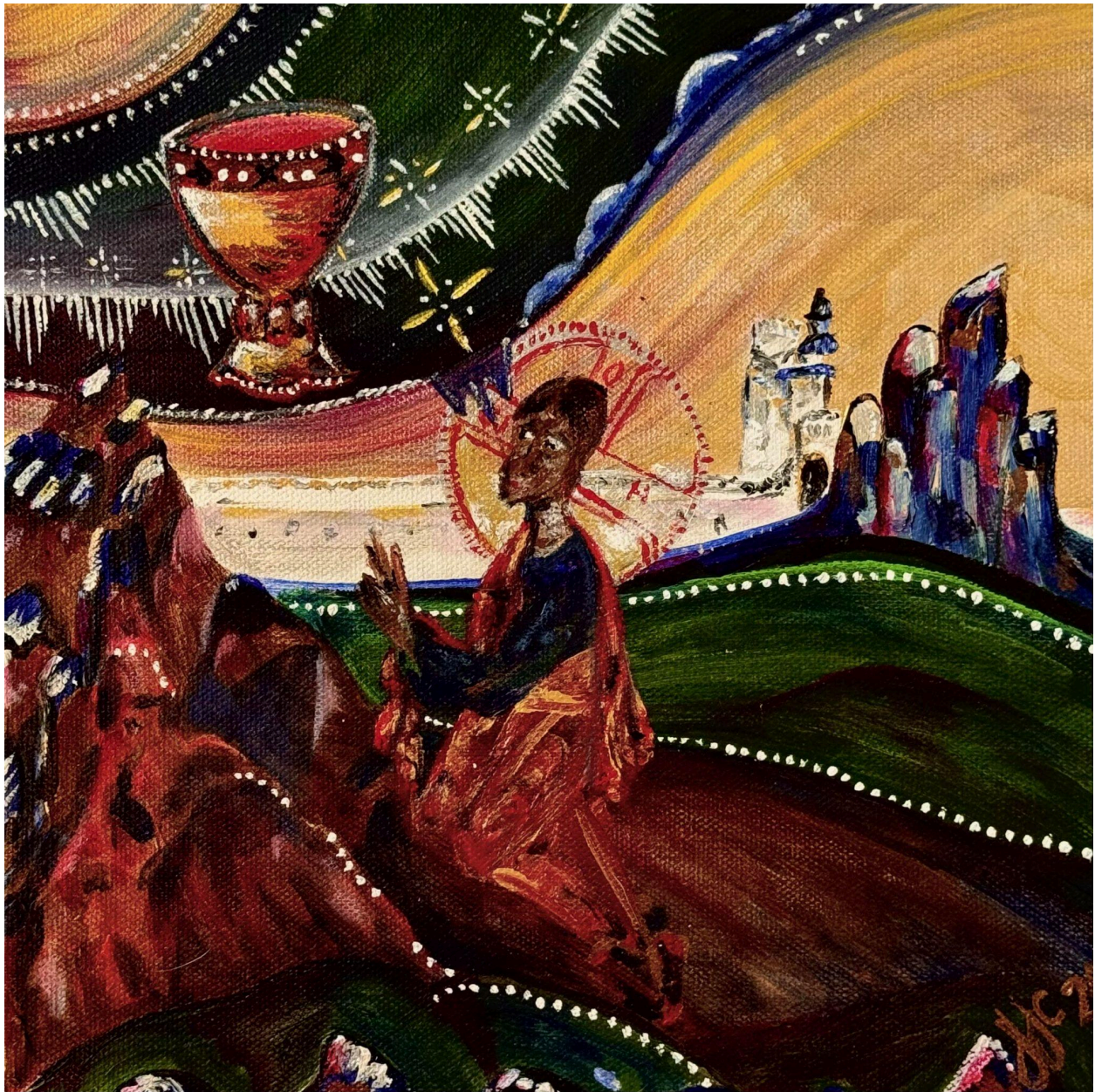


# Prayerful Reflections for Lent 2026



## Holy Week

March 29-April 5, 2026

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March 29-April 5, 2026

Edited by Julia L. Styles  
Atlanta, Georgia, USA  
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This is part 6 of a six-part Lent reflection series, divided by week. You can download other weeks at [www.prayerfulreflections.com](http://www.prayerfulreflections.com)

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## About Prayerful Reflections

*Prayerful Reflections* is a daily resource for connecting with God and the broader Christian community during the season of Lent, the 45 days leading up to Easter. Christians around the world practice Lent as a way to meditate/reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how Jesus influences our lives today.

Inspired by the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina*, or sacred listening, each daily reflection will be an opportunity to **Read** the Bible, **Reflect** on the message, **Respond** to what we have heard, and **Rest** in the love of God through prayer. This devotional could be read independently or with a community. If you would like to connect virtually, the reflections are posted daily at [www.prayerfulreflections.com](http://www.prayerfulreflections.com). Unlike past volumes, this Lent's *Prayerful Reflections* will be published each week as separate editions, emailed to subscribers, and found online at [www.prayerfulreflections.com](http://www.prayerfulreflections.com).

I publish Prayerful Reflections to share my thoughts about God and uplift female theologians. This devotional features women who are pastors, authors, teachers, and community leaders from diverse backgrounds across North America and Europe. What unites us is our devotion to Jesus and our call to share God's insights through scripture. Though written by women, this devotional is meant for everyone. I extend my gratitude to all the women whose contributions made this collection possible.

# I Shall Wear A Crown—It's Me, Lord!

## A Reflection for Palm Sunday by Gillie D. Abdiraxman-Issa

Lectionary reading for 03/29/2026: *Liturgy of the Palms*: [Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11](#)  
*Liturgy of the Passion*: [Isaiah 50:4-9a, Psalm 31:9-16, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 26:14-27:66](#)  
or [Matthew 27:11-54](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 46:10; Matthew 21:6-11 and Matthew 27:11-46

### Read

#### **Isaiah 46:10**

I make known the end from the beginning,  
from ancient times, what is still to come.  
I say, 'My purpose will stand,  
and I will do all that I please.'

#### **Matthew 21:6-11**

#### ***Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King***

**6** The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. **8** A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna<sup>[b]</sup> to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"<sup>[c]</sup>

"Hosanna<sup>[d]</sup> in the highest heaven!"

**10** When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

**11** The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

#### **Matthew 27:11-46**

#### ***Jesus before Pilate*** vs 27:11-14, 22-23

**11** Now Jesus stood before [Pilate] the governor, and the governor asked Him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" [In affirmation] Jesus said to him, "*It is as you say.*" **12** But when the charges were brought against Him by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. **13** Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they are testifying against You?" **14** But Jesus did not reply to him, not even to a single accusation, so that the governor was greatly astonished.

22 Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all replied, “Let Him be crucified!” 23 And he said, “Why, what has He done that is evil?” But they continued shouting all the louder, “Let Him be crucified!”

### ***Jesus Is Mocked vs 27:27-31***

27 Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and they gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on Him [as a king’s robe]. 29 And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and put a reed in His right hand [as a scepter]. Kneeling before Him, they ridiculed Him, saying, “Hail (rejoice), King of the Jews!” 30 They spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him *repeatedly* on the head. 31 After they finished ridiculing Him, they stripped Him of the *scarlet* robe and put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

### ***The Crucifixion vs 35-37, 41-46***

35 And when they had crucified Him, they divided His clothes among them by casting lots. 36 Then, sitting down there, they *began* to keep watch over Him [to guard against any rescue attempt]. 37 And above His head they put the accusation against Him which read, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

In the same way, the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, mocked Him, saying, 42 “He saved others [from death]; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him *and* acknowledge Him. 43 He trusts in God; let God rescue *Him* now, if He delights in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 44 The robbers who had been crucified with Him also began to insult Him in the same way.

45 Now from the sixth hour (noon) there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.). 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud [agonized] voice, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

## **Reflection**

Being sure is a valley—lonely, heavy, isolating. Being human is a balance—holding emotions and perspectives in tension.

Imagine listening to the governor or judge of that time—like Pontius Pilate—question your identity, all the while knowing full well the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10).

That took what you and I would call patience or humility. I ponder if our Lord would call it self-control.

God shows us in Scripture how we are to be still and know. As I read the Gospels, I see Jesus teaching in parables. Yet, in Matthew 27:11, I hear Him simply affirming Pilate: “It is as you say.” I understand Jesus’ silence before His accusers. Yet because He was human like us, I wonder if He was silently crying out to God:

- Don't you see this?
- Can you hear the voices, the ridicule, and the slander?
- I am only doing what is good and lovely and honorable.
- Why the persecution?
- Why have you forsaken me?

Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter and the start of Holy Week for Christians, is a feast day commemorating Jesus's entry into Jerusalem. We must remember, naturally, that when one is scheduled to die, their life and memories can play back like a tape. I can imagine how Jesus, even as a baby, already knew that He was going to conquer death, life, and the sins of the world.

As palms were laid at His feet along the path, in His last hours, people spat on Him, shouted for His death, hurled horrible accusations at Him, and He experienced excruciating pain and mockery. All because He loved us and came to defeat the sins of this world, death, and the devil. We, the humans of that time and even today, make a mockery of Him and all He endured for our good.

As we remember Palm Sunday, think about laying your sins at His feet with intention. Think about laying down evil thoughts and unforgiveness, too. Now, close your eyes and imagine yourself there, gazing at the image of Jesus that your consciousness agrees with.

- Is Jesus a baby—innocent, precious, with a warm, friendly smile that soothes your nervous system?
- Is Jesus a brother figure you can depend on, who protects you and hangs out with you?
- Is Jesus the face of a confidant and friend who knows every deep, dark secret, but would flip a table over if someone tried to harm your name?

Even if you're reading this and none of those visuals register, He came so you can have life and have it abundantly. He loves you, and He wants you to know that. Choose Him. Ask Him to come into your heart and make you new, so that when you think of Him again, you will feel His everlasting love and embrace.

## Respond

On Palm Sunday, churches often distribute palm fronds to congregants, who may wave them during the service or bring them home as a symbol of peace and victory. But what if you don't have one, or you're at someone else's home and there are no palms around? Whether you receive a palm, see one in the hands or homes of others, or are not physically able to obtain one, you can still participate. Take a piece of fabric, a cloth, or anything you can lift, and wave it in the air with power, strength, and belief. Then declare: "Jehovah Nissi—Lord, you are my banner. You are my symbol of spiritual and physical victory."

## Rest

*Lord, you conquered the grave.*

*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever.*

*You are my hiding place.*

*You are my deliverer whenever I'm afraid.*

*You said in your word...Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.*

*I will trust in you. In Jesus name, Amen.*

## About the Author



Gillie Abdiraxman-Issa is a trained Spiritual Director who walks alongside women through life transitions and mental health challenges, helping them listen for God's voice and respond with courage and clarity. She also works with families to strengthen relationships and communication, tending to the places where love and language have gotten tangled. A Life and Business Advisor, Gillie draws on her spiritual direction training to help people move toward the lives they aspire to build. She will soon add Licensed

Professional Counselor to her work after August of this year, deepening the clinical care she offers in sacred, everyday spaces. She enjoys traveling, laughing at comedy specials, taking nature walks, and cooking. She has been married to her hubby, T'Chaka, for 20 years, and they enjoy a full life with their four sons. **Follow Gillie on Substack and on IG@gillieissa**

# Our Artisan God

## A Reflection for Monday, March 30 by Reverend Charlene Rotvold

Lectionary reading for 03/20/2026: [Isaiah 42:1-9](#); [Psalm 36:5-11](#); [Hebrews 9:11-15](#); [John 12:1-11](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 36:5-11

### Read

#### **Psalm 36:5-11**

<sup>5</sup>Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens;  
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.

<sup>6</sup>Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,  
your justice like the ocean depths.

You care for people and animals alike, O LORD.

<sup>7</sup> How precious is your unfailing love, O God!

All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings.

<sup>8</sup>You feed them from the abundance of your own house,  
letting them drink from your river of delights.

<sup>9</sup>For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see.

<sup>10</sup>Pour out your unfailing love on those who love you;  
give justice to those with honest hearts.

<sup>11</sup>Don't let the proud trample me or the wicked push me around.

### Reflect

Music has long been a key venue where I meet with God. Learning His character, praising His name, and praying in the night are light and joyful tasks when put to music. Songs I learned as a child still come to mind, *often*, as I go about my day, and I'm grateful to carry His Word with me in such beautiful and creative ways.

Such is my response to Psalm 36. With a smile on my face I can hear the musicians play, and I find myself humming along (or singing out loud) as I read this passage.

*Your love, oh Lord*

*Reaches to the heavens*

*Your faithfulness stretches to the sky*

*Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains*

*Your justice flows like the ocean's tide.*

So goes the opening line of *Your Love O Lord*, by Third Day, mirroring verses 5 and 6. From the Psalmist's reed pen to the poet's mind to the musical arc to my welcoming heart.

God's Word provides a limitless abundance of lyrics just waiting for a tune, longing to be captured by poets and artists, inviting us to worship and remember with instrument or voice. I wonder how many songs have been written using God's Word as lyrical text or inspiration. Wouldn't that be an amazing research project? I love that our God is a God of music, devoting an entire book of Scripture to songs. Oh how I long to sing the Psalms as they were written to be sung. Can you even imagine? But the words, written or sung, aren't meant to be the end. They are *means* to an end, words meant to draw us to the Living Word. To the unfailing love of our God. To God's faithfulness, righteousness, and justice, all of which extend beyond what our senses can hold. We are reminded that our God cares for us (*and for my sweet puppy, v. 6*) and offers us the most intimate of shelters. He is food and drink, life and light, and He notices and values the raw honesty we bring to His loving presence. He is indeed:

*Worthy of every song we could ever sing  
Worthy of all the praise we could ever bring  
Worthy of every breath we could ever breathe  
We live for You, oh, we live for You.*

*Build My Life*, by Pat Barrett

## Respond

Each Lenten season we're invited to consider something new to reflect on as we respond to God's love for us, dust though we are - a word or thought or book or practice intended to draw us nearer to the presence of God. New may sound like silence. New may taste like fasting. New may act like time or sacrifice or prayer. And sometimes what is new involves the arts: music, painting, poetry, story. W. Phillip Keller, in his thoughtful little book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, refers to God the Son as God the artisan, the artist, who brought into being all that had been formulated in His Father's mind (p. 16). What a lovely image this is. While the Word of God certainly stands alone and is able to affect us deeply all by itself, my heart sometimes needs the work of an artisan to move me "further up and further in" (from *The Last Battle*, by C.S. Lewis).

In the case of today's text, a song does just that. My prayer is that God as artisan will lead you to connect with and live with His Word in fresh ways this Lenten season, and beyond.

## Rest

*Father God, author of all that exists, Lord Jesus, artisan and bringer into being, Holy Spirit, agent who brings understanding, you are everything. Food and drink, life and light and life, love and faithfulness, justice and righteousness. Draw us nearer to you in creative and unexpected ways. Surprise us with your goodness, your nearness, yourself. Amen.*

## About the Author



Char serves as the Care & Connect Pastor at Faith Covenant Church in Burnsville, MN. She's married to Kirk, mom to Kyle & Erika, and mom-in-law to Emma. Aside from pastoring, Char is a trained coach and spiritual director within the ECC. In her free time, she's often found with her nose in a book, outside running or cross country skiing, camping in the BWCA, or enjoying time with her family and friends.

# Where is the Wise Person?

## A Reflection for Tuesday, March 31 by Melanie Myatt

Lectionary reading for 03/31/2026 [Isaiah 49:1-7](#); [Psalm 71:1-14](#); [1 Corinthians 1:18-31](#); [John 12:20-36](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

### Read

#### **1 Corinthians 1.18-31** *New Testament for Everyone*

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the educated person? Where is the debater of this present age? Don't you see that God has turned the world's wisdom into folly? 21 This is how it's happened: in God's wisdom, the world didn't know God through wisdom, so it gave God pleasure, through the folly of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 Jews look for signs, you see, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we announce the crucified Messiah, a scandal to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, the Messiah—God's power and God's wisdom. 25 God's folly is wiser than humans, you see, and God's weakness is stronger than humans.

26 Think back to your own call, my brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise in human terms. Not many of you were powerful. Not many were nobly born. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose the insignificant and despised things of the world—yes, even things that don't exist!—to abolish the power of the things that do exist, 29 so that no creature could boast in God's presence. 30 Who and what you now are is a gift from God in Messiah Jesus, who has become for us God's wisdom—and righteousness, sanctification and redemption as well; 31 so that, as the Bible puts it, "Anyone who boasts should boast in the Lord."

### Reflect

This may be a funny thing to admit as a chaplain, but I feel a little embarrassed about being a person of faith. When people ask what I do for a job, I tell them, but I feel like I immediately have to qualify what I do. I feel like I have to point and say, "I'm not like *them*." (Also, you wouldn't believe how many people will immediately find a reason to swear after I tell them what I do.) Also, a lot of my job involves explaining to people that we don't have to limit ourselves to talking only about faith, religion, or spirituality. In fact, very little of my job involves doing that, but I *can* talk about it if that is what you want to talk about.

When I read this passage from Paul, I wonder how many of us identify with his observations about the gospel message today. For the Gentiles, Paul recognizes that the gospel sounds

ridiculous. For people who prided themselves on being intellectually and culturally elite, the message of a person who was crucified by the Romans, who was raised from the dead, and who now was the ruler of the world while asking people to join his movement with faithful obedience sounded...absurd.

I feel the same way. But not, like Paul, because no one has ever heard the ridiculous message, but because too many people have heard it, and probably heard it manipulated and twisted in such a way that now no matter how you try to phrase it, people think it is ridiculous. Not only that, but people know so much about *all* religions that trying to tell people Christianity is different, that Christianity has something else to offer rings flat.

When Paul preached to the Jews, on the other hand, he felt like the gospel message was scandalous. A “scandal” in Paul’s day was something that trips you up. I relate to this as well. Trying to explain to Christians that Jesus came not to demonstrate his power by overthrowing authorities and dominions was scandalous to the Jews and feels almost equally scandalous today. Jesus came to establish a kingdom “in which the weak and the foolish find themselves just as welcome as the strong and the wise, if not more so (NT Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, 13). This is not a popular message in our current culture and climate.

What do we do with this tension? I think we follow Paul’s advice, something I imagine he must have gone back to again and again...and again himself: “Think back to your own call.”

Think back to your own call. What is it that keeps you coming back to God our Father, Jesus our Savior, Spirit our comforter? What drew you to faith in this ridiculous and scandalous religion in the first place? As Jesus reminds [the church in Ephesus, remember your first love.](#)

When we ground ourselves in our first love, when we remember our own call to faith, we find the foundation of truth that is stronger than any foolishness masquerading as wisdom, any weakness masquerading as power that fills our social media feeds or makes headlines today.

## Respond

Spend some time today reflecting on your own call to faith. If you have an opportunity, tell someone your story today, just so you can rehear and remember for yourself. Consider “the love you showed at the beginning,” and think of one thing you can do today that is reflective of the love you had at the beginning.

## Rest

*Today, receive Paul's prayer for your own wisdom, hope, and faith, more powerful than anything else in our world today: "I pray that the God of Messiah Jesus our Lord, the father of glory, would give you, in your spirit, the gift of being wise, of seeing things people can't normally see, because you are coming to know him and to have the eyes of your inmost self opened to God's light. Then you will know exactly what the hope is that goes with God's call; you will know the wealth of the glory of his inheritance in his holy people; and you will know the outstanding greatness of his power towards us who are loyal to him in faith, according to the working of his strength and power." [Ephesians 1.15-19](#)*

## About the Author



Melanie Myatt is a spiritual director, writer, hospice chaplain and mom of four. When she isn't doing any of those things, you can probably find her curled up on the couch with a delicious novel and a belletristic snack. You can find more of Melanie's writing on [Substack](#).

# Drop the Baggage & Run Your Race!

A Reflection for Wednesday, April 1st by Jonalisa Worlitz

Lectionary reading for April 1, 2026: link from spreadsheet i.e. [Isaiah 50:4-9a](#), [Psalm 70](#), [Hebrews 12:1-3](#), [John 13:21-32](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Hebrews 12:1-3

## Read

### Hebrews 12:1-3 Common English Bible (CEB)

**12** So then, with endurance, let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, **2** and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne.**3** Think about the one who endured such opposition from sinners so that you won't be discouraged and you won't give up.



## Reflect

I remember running my first 10K years ago in Los Angeles' Chinatown with a close friend. I hadn't trained as much as I should have, but I felt good about finishing the race. My friend had been very consistent with her training schedule, running several times every week. At the start, she insisted on staying with me and running at my pace, but I encouraged her to go ahead and run her best race.

As I ran on my own, something clicked: I needed to run my own race at my own pace. Not hers. Not anyone else's. Just mine. That moment has stayed with me not just for running but for life.

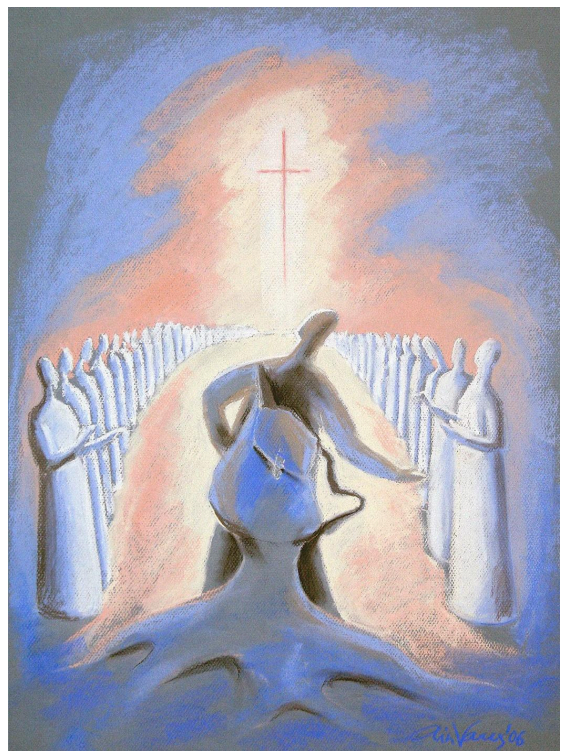
Each of us has a unique life story, with different experiences, gifts, and callings. Because of this uniqueness, comparing ourselves to anyone is unhelpful in most situations. When I think back to my 10K, I realize: if I had tried to keep up with my friend, I would have been exhausted and pushed my body past its limits. I definitely wouldn't have enjoyed the race as much. If she had stayed with me, she wouldn't have run to her full potential. She would've been holding back to accommodate me. We both needed to run our own race. The same is true in our walk with God.

Community is such a vital part of our lives as believers but we are also on very unique individual journeys where we are called to run the race God has laid out for us. My friend and I ran at different paces and had different experiences but both finished the race and celebrated together in the end.

Hebrews 12:1–3 uses the metaphor of a race to describe a life of faith. Just before this, in Hebrews 11, the writer presents a faith “hall of fame” highlighting Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Noah, Rahab, and others. Then the focus shifts to us, saying now it’s our turn to run the race God has laid out for us. These men and women were far from perfect. Their faith was tested, stretched, and refined through trials, long seasons of waiting, and deep uncertainty. Many did not even see the fullness of what God had promised in their lifetime. Yet they endured and we are called to do the same.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us to “throw off any extra baggage and get rid of the sin that trips us up.” We are to let go of anything that weighs us down and hinders us whether it’s sin, fear, doubt, comparison, old wounds, shame, or any other burdens we are carrying so we can run our best race. Sin wraps itself around our feet and trips us up. You can’t run freely while holding onto unnecessary weight or tripping over sin.

There may be moments in your race when you feel strong and confident, thinking, “I got this,” and other moments when you wonder, “Do I have what it takes to keep going?” Life comes in seasons and some seasons require more endurance than others. This passage doesn’t just tell us to push through but reminds us that we can draw strength from the great cloud of witnesses that came before us and by fixing our eyes on Jesus. In a world full of distractions, staying in the Word and keeping our eyes on the Lord is a daily battle but intimacy with God is worth fighting for.



Jesus is our greatest example of a life of faith. Many versions of Hebrews 12:2 say, “For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross.” He did not quit when it got hard. He endured unimaginable pain and humiliation knowing that the reward would far outweigh the temporary suffering. Because of His perseverance, we have salvation, eternal life, and a source of strength for our own life. Jesus completed his assignment from the and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God eternally. Finishing well requires that we understand our assignment and are faithful to complete it.

Hebrews 12:3 reminds us to remember the opposition Jesus endured from sinners so that we don’t get discouraged and give up. A life of faith is not easy. It requires perseverance through

trials and pain, trust in the unseen, and a willingness to keep going even when the finish line feels far away.

Run the unique race God has laid out for you, enduring the unique challenges you will face for the joy set before you, knowing that the Lord will be with you every step of the way.

## Respond

### **Pray and Listen:**

Lord, what am I holding onto that you never asked me to carry? Is there any weight or sin keeping me from running freely? Commit to releasing those things that are weighing you down, repent of sin, and keep your eyes on Jesus.

### **OR**

Lord, would you give me a glimpse (a word, an image, a scripture) of the joy set before me that makes enduring worthwhile?

## Rest

*God, we praise you and thank you for the life you have given us, the race you have laid out for each of us. Help us to understand our assignment and release any baggage we're carrying. Free us from sin. Give us the strength and comfort we need when life feels unbearable. Heal any wounds that are hindering us and help us to focus our eyes on you so that we can run our race with freedom and joy. Remind us that you are running with us every step of the way. We love you. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.*

## About the Author



Jonalisa Worlitz is a leader who is passionate about prayer, discernment, and helping others build healthy, fulfilling, lives. She is also a passionate advocate for youth in the foster care system and those at-risk for incarceration. She holds an M.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy and an M.A. in Theology and Ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary, as well as a B.A. in Social Work from San Francisco State University. She and her husband Harvey are both from Los Angeles, California but have lived in Atlanta for the last 5 years. They enjoy traveling and eating good food in their free time.

Art. <https://bible.art/p/Kwxy3jgB3SymSsYm8dBU>, and "Let Us Throw off Everything that Hinders" - Original Prophetic Painting by Estonian artist Ain Vares  
<https://ainvaresart.com/products/original-prophetic-painting-let-us-throw-off-everything-that-hinders-hebrews-12>

# You will later understand!

## A Reflection for Maundy Thursday by Rev. Dr. Cynthia P. Stewart

Lectionary Readings: [Psalm 116 and John 13](#)

Selected passage for today's reflection: Psalm 116

### Read

#### Psalm 116

- <sup>1</sup> I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;  
he heard my cry for mercy.
- <sup>2</sup> Because he turned his ear to me,  
I will call on him as long as I live.
- <sup>3</sup> The cords of death entangled me,  
the anguish of the grave came over me;  
I was overcome by distress and sorrow.
- <sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of the Lord:  
“Lord, save me!”
- <sup>5</sup> The Lord is gracious and righteous;  
our God is full of compassion.
- <sup>6</sup> The Lord protects the unwary;  
when I was brought low, he saved me.
- <sup>7</sup> Return to your rest, my soul,  
for the Lord has been good to you.
- <sup>8</sup> For you, Lord, have delivered me from  
death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling,
- <sup>9</sup> that I may walk before the Lord  
in the land of the living.
- <sup>10</sup> I trusted in the Lord when I said,  
“I am greatly afflicted”;
- <sup>11</sup> in my alarm I said,  
“Everyone is a liar.”
- <sup>12</sup> What shall I return to the Lord  
for all his goodness to me?
- <sup>13</sup> I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the Lord.
- <sup>14</sup> I will fulfill my vows to the Lord  
in the presence of all his people.
- <sup>15</sup> Precious in the sight of the Lord  
is the death of his faithful servants.
- <sup>16</sup> Truly I am your servant, Lord;  
I serve you just as my mother did;  
you have freed me from my chains.
- <sup>17</sup> I will sacrifice a thank offering to you  
and call on the name of the Lord.
- <sup>18</sup> I will fulfill my vows to the Lord  
in the presence of all his people,
- <sup>19</sup> in the courts of the house of the Lord—  
in your midst, Jerusalem.

Praise the Lord.<sup>[a]</sup>

## Reflection

We are in what is called the Holy Triduum (Three Days) as Lent is ending while many have fasted, prayed, meditated, came into close relationship with God and we are at the final stretch. Today is called Maudy Thursday or Holy Thursday depending on your tradition. Growing up and into my adulthood, Holy Thursday was always one of my favorite days during Holy Week. I was always fascinated by John 13 coming to life as I witnessed my Pastor walk around with a towel on his arm and a basin of water washing the feet of those he had chosen to represent the disciples. It reminded me that no matter what is going on in a person's life, we are called to be ministers of the towel. Well, in April 2000, my view of Maudy Thursday hit differently.

I had a doctor's appointment the day before, which only took an hour, made it back home and I felt fine. About three hours later, that changed. I immediately began to bleed and feel unbearable cramps. I was home alone and I had to call my then husband at the time to let him know what was going on. By the time he had gotten home, the pain had increased, called my doctor and was informed to wait until the next morning. Enduring the pain throughout the night, I went to the doctor's office early that morning (Holy Thursday) and was informed the baby did not have a heartbeat. The doctor informed me, "let God continue to do what has started." She knew I had a strong faith in God, but at that moment, I wondered why I was suffering through this. I was released to go home with some medication. But God was not finished. About five hours later, still in pain and bleeding, I went to the bathroom and delivered my baby. I was 4 months pregnant. I called the doctor again and told her what had happened, but by this time the clinic was closed, so I was informed to come back again the next morning. Three days (triduum) of pain and anguish during Holy Week.

But now 26 years later, I understand. It is John 13:7, which Jesus states to Simon Peter before washing his feet, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Psalms 116 has always been a scripture that brought me comfort. I know that when I cry out to God, He hears my voice and turns His ear towards me. After losing my son Samson, I felt verses 3-4, when suicidal thoughts came to my mind and questions still felt unanswered. But verses 5-19 gave me hope. God saved my life and delivered me from death. Through the pain I endured, God has opened the door for me to minister to other women.

So, what is your cry to God?

## Respond

Read through Psalm 116 again, then with your journal/laptop/tablet write your own version of Psalm 116. Let God take over the pen or keyboard as you write from your heart. Now, read John 13 and consider the life of Jesus and what he sacrificed as Lent ends. What will the next three days -- Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Resurrection Sunday bring for you?

## Rest

*God, I lift every woman who has lost a child, whether it was a miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death, or a child they raised and then lost. God, as you hear their cry, bring them comfort and peace as they remember. Even for those reflecting today who may not have lost a child, but are dealing with something else during this Lenten season, may you touch their hearts, bring wisdom, protection, and guidance. May we end this Lenten season feeling closer to you and knowing you are omnipresent. In Jesus Name, Amen*

## About the author



Rev. Dr. Cyntia P. Stewart is a minister at New Life Covenant Church Southeast in Chicago, IL. She has been leading a women's 5 am prayer call each Wednesday since 2018. She works at Illinois Institute of Technology and is adjunct faculty at Loyola University Chicago. She has a passion for seeing the healing power of God manifest in people's lives.

# My God, hear my cry

## A Reflection for Good Friday by Rev. Natasha Westerhoud

**Lectionary reading for Friday, April 03, 2026:** [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#) [Psalm 22](#) [Hebrews 10:16-25](#)  
[or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9](#) [John 18:1-19:42](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 22:1-2

### Read

#### Psalm 22

- <sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?  
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
- <sup>2</sup> Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.  
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.

### Reflect

Psalm 22 does not begin with calm faith but with a cry that is familiar and echoes through the ages: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** These powerful words express a deep sense of grief that can leave us feeling confused, isolated, and overwhelmed. On Good Friday, Jesus embraces this Psalm as his own, connecting with everyone whose pain has ever felt like abandonment, reminding us that we are never truly alone in our struggles.

I have often found myself crying out in desperation, “Where are you, God? Why don’t you take this away from me? I am left to feel angry, lonely, and scared. I try to find my way back, yet things seem impossible. Today I am reminded once again of the truth in Psalm 22: it does not dismiss pain; it dignifies it, giving voice to suffering that cannot be neatly packaged or soothed by promises of goodness. Some losses shake the soul so deeply that even God can seem impossibly distant. Have you ever had that moment when you cannot see, hear, or feel God? Have you ever fallen on your knees in utter despair, saying these words, **“I cry by day, but you do not answer.”** I have. The day my father passed away. The day we lost our child. The day I was rejected by friends. The day I received the devastating diagnosis. The day I felt unheard or unseen in spaces I thought were safe. The day I started to notice my child’s hidden suffering. I felt so abandoned that I could not bear to face another day. Deeply mourning a life that should have been, that I felt like my heart would rip out of my chest. Sometimes grief takes up all the space around you, and sometimes faith feels like shattered glass, and silence feels unbearable. If you find yourself in such a season, your experience is not that you lack faith; what you are feeling is human suffering and mourning. Something we try to avoid, yet most have lived it.

Yet today, on this dark day, I am reminded of hope. There is always hope. As we read Psalm 22, we see that the Psalm continues to speak to us. In our despair and isolation, we are drawn to the truth, catching a glimpse of how to connect our pain-filled hearts to the One who feels

distant. And here lies the invitation to trust as we cry out in hopes of being seen and heard. We all have this deep desire to be seen and understood.

And at this point, we are mindful and connect with the truth that we are in a relationship with the one who is holy, good, and faithful. He has never failed us, and we can trust Him. We remember His goodness. **“Yet you are holy... In you, our ancestors trusted.”** The devastating pain continues, and somehow our eyes are open to recognize that we are invited to re-remember the One who can offer us healing and peace. I have always believed that joy and suffering coexist, and it is in this coexistence that we need to learn how to live in hope, holding space for both. And as we understand this coexisting relationship, we see that He is near; indeed, **“You who fear the Lord, praise him... For he did not hide his face from the one who suffers.”** The pain is still there, but something is different about it. We are not alone in it, and we remember that God does not hide His face from the one who suffers, and He is indeed present in the hidden dark silence, holding us close, experiencing the co-existence of joy and suffering.

On Good Friday, Jesus speaks from the cross as He fully experiences human grief, abandonment, and the deepest shadows of the human heart. Because He entered that darkness, He understands the intensity of our own sorrow and pain, as there is no depth of suffering He has not already faced and understood. He IS there. His suffering and death call us into a life of freedom and redemption, embracing both joy and suffering.

## Respond

May this Psalm bring comfort in your grief. Allow yourself to cry out, knowing you will find strength and hope even in the darkest moments. May you believe and trust that Jesus understands your suffering and will not abandon you in your time of despair. I invite you to take a moment to be still and breathe in slowly, recognizing any heaviness you may be carrying. As you breathe out, breathe out this truth.” I praise you, Lord, you do not hide your face from the one who suffers. *“Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, for the Cross.*

## Rest

*Creator in Heaven, you know my heart and know my needs. I offer all that I am to you. In my brokenness, I praise you, as I know the truth. You love me, you died for me, and you will never leave me or abandon me. The world may fail me, but you will never fail me. On this dark day, I pause to question, wonder and mourn in my own weakness, yet I do not stay there, because I know that You did not leave me, and I know that Sunday IS coming. Praise the Lord, all who fear Him, Amen.*

## About the Author



Reverend Natasha Westerhoud follows Jesus' teachings by living with love, compassion, generosity, and radical hospitality. As an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada, she serves as a Chaplain, caring for residents and families. Deeply passionate about pastoral care, she founded Soul Care Ministries, offering inspiring workshops and mental health support worldwide. She is also a trauma and attachment counsellor, currently studying for a degree in Spiritual Care. Natasha leads annual mission trips through the ECCC, including family trips to Quito, Ecuador. Married to Mike for 30 years, they have two beautiful children, Hana and Eli, after a long journey of waiting and crossing oceans to adopt. She openly shared her adoption stories in 'The Mom Quilt,' with proceeds supporting The Mercy House in Kenya, helping pregnant girls in need. The book is available on Amazon.

# Sitting With Grief

## A Reflection for Holy Saturday by Ellie VerGowe Highlands

Lectionary Reading for 04/04/2026: [Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24, Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16, 1 Peter 4:1-8, Matthew 27:57-66](#)

Selected Passages for Reflection: Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24 and Matthew 27:57-66

### Read

#### Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24

I am one who has seen affliction  
under the rod of God's wrath;  
he has driven and brought me  
into darkness without any light;  
against me alone he turns his hand,  
again and again, all day long.  
He has made my flesh and my skin waste  
away;  
he has broken my bones;  
he has besieged and enveloped me  
with bitterness and tribulation;  
he has made me sit in darkness  
like the dead of long ago.  
He has walled me about so that I cannot  
escape;  
he has put heavy chains on me;  
though I call and cry for help,

he shuts out my prayer;  
he has blocked my ways with hewn stones;  
he has made my paths crooked.  
The thought of my affliction and my  
homelessness  
is wormwood and gall!  
My soul continually thinks of it  
and is bowed down within me.  
But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:  
The steadfast love of the Lord never  
ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.  
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,  
"therefore I will hope in him."

#### Matthew 27:57-66

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who also was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore, command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise, his disciples may go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can. So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

## Reflect

These texts are ours, aren't they? We, too, have felt like we are under the rod of God's wrath. We too, feel besieged and enveloped with bitterness and tribulation. We, too have lost loved ones and put them in the ground. We know in our bones the feeling of this abandonment and the ache of this grief.

This is holy Saturday. It would be easier (at first) to avoid the pain of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and move on quickly to the celebration of Easter Sunday. But one thing I know, as a chaplain and a griever, is that we cannot avoid difficult feelings or skip the grief. Today is the day we remember that the disciples put their friend in the ground after watching him die an awful death. We remember that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary vigiled with Jesus through the unfolding trauma, and they kept watch over his body.

We remember for Jesus and his loved ones, but we also remember for us. How often in religious spaces do we actually get to sit with our grief without being forced to move prematurely on to Christ's victory over death? Holy Saturday is an invitation to let ourselves grieve, to feel whatever we feel about God, even if we feel God has abandoned us. Anyone who grieves will tell you that grief isn't something that you get over or move through quickly. Grief is not linear. It can be loud, it makes others feel uncomfortable, and it can feel like being split in two. Grief is not a problem to fix... it simply IS, after all we have weathered. It doesn't leave us, and sometimes it becomes a companion that needs to be listened to.

The only way to the hope of the resurrection is *through* suffering and through grief. And the writer of Lamentations, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, our Savior Jesus, and so many other ancestors of our faith show us how. They express grief. They voice their feelings of abandonment by God. Their grief is witnessed, and they witness each other's grief. They weep and wail, and they move their bodies, rending their clothes. We know now that if we avoid our grief and sadness and refuse to express our gripes with God, those feelings stay in our bodies and we get stuck. The grief may manifest itself sideways in anxiety, exhaustion, inability to feel even the good feelings, and it might even make us feel physical pain. If we refuse to connect with our grief, we may find ourselves also disconnected from others, from God, and even from ourselves.

So today of all days, you are invited to sit in Holy Saturday where your suffering, loss, and grief are not all wrapped up in a bow. You are invited to stay with yourself as you hurt. The wildness of your grief does not make you weak. It simply means that you are human and that you have loved. You deserve space to feel what needs to be felt, to let that move through your body (however long that takes!), and to thrive. Letting yourself feel even the "negative" things and sit in the grief is the path to resurrection, both in the gospels and in our lives. It is only in sitting with our grief and blessing others as they sit in theirs for as long as it takes that we move forward with hope.

## Respond

Take a moment to sit alone or with someone else you love and trust. Place your hand on your heart and take a few breaths. You are invited to feel your hard feelings. What are you grieving today? What is your grief telling you? How might you gather the courage to stay with your grief? Show hospitality to whatever comes. If a wail builds up in your throat, let it free. If tears fall, let them. If words come, say them. If you need to move your body, move your body. If sitting in the stillness and desolation quietly feels right, do that. May you be witnessed by yourself, someone you trust, and certainly by God. You have loved, and you are loved. When you are finished today (for the need to express will come again!), go tell someone and receive some care. Today, you join with the ancestors of our faith as they waited at the tomb.

## Rest

*Loving God who grieved, suffered, and died, give me courage to sit with grief, suffering, and death too. Attend to me now as I feel abandoned, besieged, and enveloped by bitterness and tribulation. Wrap me in your arms, hold me close, and bless the tender and hurting places within me. Amen.*

## About the Author

Ellie VerGowe Highlands is an ICU and oncology hospital chaplain in Seattle, WA where she was born and raised. Ellie is married to Aaron, and together they have a wildly loving dog named Fiona. When she isn't at the hospital, Ellie is singing, reading, writing poetry, gardening, hiking, and always practicing wonder and awe in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. These practices help her find strength and hope in the collective work of making a world where all people can thrive.



# Who Tells Your Story?

## A Reflection for Easter Sunday, by Rev. Madison J. McAleese

**Lectionary Reading for 4/5/2026:** [Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10](#)

Selected Passage: John 20:1-18

### Read

#### John 20:1-18

##### The Empty Tomb

**20** Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. **2** So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

**3** So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. **4** Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, **7** as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. **8** Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. **9** (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) **10** Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

##### Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

**11** Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb **12** and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

**13** They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” **14** At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

**15** He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

**16** Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

**17** Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

**18** Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

## Reflect

Easter is the most important holiday in the Christian faith, because it is the day that Jesus defeated death, resisted the oppressive forces of Empire, and proved God’s reign by coming back to bodily life.

But a significant part of the story that we don’t always think about is the significance of Jesus revealing himself to Mary Magdalene. It is especially interesting, because the risen Christ didn’t actually need a messenger. He could have gone directly to his disciples from the get-go, revealing himself, and sharing his messaging of resurrection. He could have done the work himself.

But instead, he chose a messenger. A go-between. A vessel for his message. And it’s this precedent that we see throughout the Christian faith - God always chooses a messenger. From Moses, to John the Baptist, to Jesus, and then Mary Magdalene, and later to the disciples in the book of Acts, God works and speaks through his people.

God never wants to speak for himself. God wants us to tell his story. God wants us to co-create the New Heavens and New Earth with him, as partners, as vessels for his important healing work here on earth.

Jesus’s resurrection is not just a miracle of the body, but it is the first, inaugural step toward all of humanity sharing the good news.

And so, Easter reminds us not just of the glorious resurrection, but of the work of holy messengers. May we all be holy messengers.

## Respond

Where can you serve as a messenger for God's message this week, either through deed or word?

What other holy people and prophets are inspiring to you? What can you learn about the stories they tell of God?

## Rest

*God of the most glorious resurrection, we thank you for defeating death. We thank you for Jesus's ministry on earth and in heaven. Fill us with your Spirit so that we may serve as your holy messengers, sharing the good news of justice, peace, liberation, and love. Let us co-create your Kingdom by doing your work. Amen.*

## About the Author



Rev. Madison Jones McAleese is a priest, social impact leader, and nonprofit executive director. She is an ordained priest through the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America and presides at her local Dignity Chapter. She has a Master's in Christian Studies and is completing her dissertation for her Doctorate in Social Transformation. Rev. Madison is also the Executive Director of FCM (Federation of Christian Ministries). She lives with her wife and dog, Bubbles, in Burbank, CA. You can find her at [www.madisonjonesmcaleese.com](http://www.madisonjonesmcaleese.com).