



HOLY WEEK 2016

*Searching  
Questions*  
from Christ's Passion





*Please receive this devotion booklet  
as a gift from the  
Martin Luther College campus family.  
We pray that our Lord would  
strengthen your faith  
through his holy Word.*



# Searching Questions

God asks a lot of questions in Scripture. Read these and see whether you can identify the person to whom God was speaking and the situation in which he asked the question.

- “*Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?*”
- “*Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD?*”
- “*Who gave man his mouth?*”
- “*Son of man, can these bones live?*”
- “*Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?*”

For what reason would an all-knowing God ask anybody questions? He knows everything, so we can be certain he isn’t looking for information. He asks questions for the benefit of those to whom he is speaking. Let’s look again:

- “*Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?*” (Genesis 4:6) The LORD addressed those words to Cain to lead him to repentance.
- “*Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD?*” (Genesis 18:14) This one’s a little easier. The Lord asked those questions of Abraham to reveal the doubts that lurked in his and Sarah’s minds at the thought of Sarah having a child in her old age.
- “*Who gave man his mouth?*” (Exodus 4:11) God was responding to Moses’ excuses about why he wouldn’t be any good as God’s spokesman.
- “*Son of man, can these bones live?*” (Ezekiel 37:3) The Lord was addressing Ezekiel in his vision of the valley of dry bones to lead the prophet to acknowledge God’s sovereign power.
- “*Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?*” (Jonah 4:9) God asked this of Jonah when the prophet was grumbling about the vine God had given him to use for shade outside the city of Nineveh. Again the question served as a call to repentance and faith.

In each example, God already knew the answer. He asked the question to lead someone to a particular truth he wanted them to understand.

In this devotional booklet for Holy Week, we’ll consider some “Searching Questions from Christ’s Passion.” In each case, Jesus asks the questions, but he already knows the answers. He asks them for the benefit of others—and ultimately for us.

May God the Holy Spirit bless our meditation on these questions from our Savior.

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# Palm Sunday



## Whose Son Is the Messiah?

*While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”*  
(Mark 12:35-37a)

Whose Son is the Messiah? It is fitting that we begin our Holy Week devotions with this as the first question. During Holy Week we focus on Jesus as he goes up to Jerusalem one last time. There we see him humble himself and become obedient to death—even death on a cross. We see him suffer terrible indignities, cruel torture, and bloody death.

How do we view these events? As sad and depressing, or edifying and uplifting? As irrelevant to the important issues of our present-day lives, or absolutely relevant? It all depends on what we mean when we confess that Jesus is the Messiah. Without a complete grasp of his identity we will be unable to truly grasp, appreciate—yes, celebrate—what he has done for us in his Passion.

And so Jesus asks, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?” Jesus wasn’t saying they were wrong to teach that. Certainly the promised Messiah was to be a human descendant of David as God had promised (2 Samuel 7:11-16). But Jesus’ point was that the teachers of the law had not gone far enough.

To prove his point Jesus quotes the first verse of Psalm 110, a psalm written by King David himself by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Concerning the promised Messiah (his own descendant), David wrote: “The Lord said to *my Lord*: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’” Jesus continues: “David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”





The only correct answer to that question is that not only is the Messiah the son of David, he is also *the Son of God*. The Messiah's purpose for coming was not to establish an earthly rule but a spiritual rule. He would come to save his people from their sins. As true man he would serve as a genuine substitute. As true God his sacrificial death would pay for the sins of all.

Jesus didn't ask this question until Tuesday of Holy Week. This was one of the last things he publicly spoke in the temple courts. He asked it for the sake of both his opponents and his followers: for his opponents—one last call for them to repent; for his followers—one more opportunity to help them grasp completely who he was and what he was about to do *for them*.

This is what enables you and me to appreciate—even celebrate—the events of Holy Week. This is Jesus, our Messiah, God for us! Here we see the full extent of his love for us and how precious we are to him.

**All glory, laud, and honor  
To you, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children  
Made sweet hosannas ring.  
As you received their praises,  
Accept the prayers we bring,  
O Source of every blessing,  
Our good and gracious King. (CW 131:5)**

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# Monday



## Do You Understand What

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (John 13:12-15)*

Jesus asked this question because he knew his disciples of all times would have trouble grasping this point about Holy Week—Christian leaders get down on the floor.

So Jesus made this lesson clear and direct. He is the master teacher; here he took the eternal truth and expressed it in a vivid, even uncomfortable, object lesson. He laid aside all the power and glory the Father had given him, got down on the floor, and washed the feet of his followers.

What makes this hard to understand? Our pride and sense of privilege. We think we have done well when we are patient and polite with other people, especially with people who seem below us. Jesus tells us we need to bend lower.

You may be the smartest one in the room. You may be the leader—gifted, appointed, and even called. But God has put you in that position to serve others, to serve in the lowest ways. “How many times do I have to . . . tell these people? clean up after these people? do what someone else should have done?” Well, one more time, at least.

**What I Have Done:** Jesus—the holy, anointed Teacher and Lord—got down on the floor and showed what Christian leaders do. He washed his disciples’ feet. This action echoed the greater washing Jesus was doing that week, purifying us by paying the wages of our sins. He





# I Have Done for You?

died for all the times I refused to lift a finger, lose a privilege, or forget a time when I was disrespected.

This washing was also a literal, practical, and daily job. The dirt sticks and collects along the miles, and a bowl of water with strong hands soothes and refreshes. This cleansing feels so good when you hire someone to do it, so think of what an absolute delight it is when the one who washes your feet is your lover and lord.

**For You:** Jesus during Holy Week “loved [us] to the end” (John 13:1). Our Lord and Teacher got down on the floor to wash our feet. And then he got up on the cross. He did this to be the humble servant we’ve never been, and he did this to inspire us to do what we find so hard.

Do we understand? As we watch Jesus on the floor with a towel around his waist and a basin, we better understand our sinful pride. We treasure Jesus’ love and gift. And we better understand what Christian leaders do. We get down on the floor to confess. We bow down to marvel at Jesus’ love. We kneel to serve—to be a delight to one another.

**Dear Jesus, washer of our feet and souls, forgive us for our pride and lack of love. Lead us in your grace to live new lives serving each other. Amen.**

## Author

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# Tuesday



## Couldn't You Men Keep for One Hour?

*Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:40-41)*

How are you at staying awake? Some of us probably wished for a do-over after nodding through crucial parts of the latest Star Wars movie.

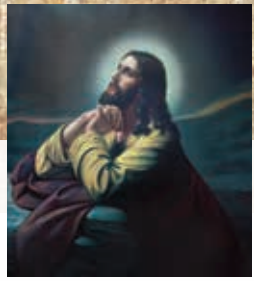
On the night Jesus was betrayed, his disciples could not keep their eyes open. Picture the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus led the Eleven to a quiet place to pray. Then he urged Peter, James, and John, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Upon his return from praying, even Jesus seemed surprised that his friends could not stay awake. Consider what he had told them. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Consider what he showed them. His peaceful countenance overwhelmed with sorrow. Sweat like great drops of blood falling off him after he prayed.

How could they sleep? The Spirit through Luke tells us they were exhausted from sorrow. So the burden of suffering that weighed down Jesus to the point of death crushed his disciples too. But notice that Jesus did not sleep. He prayed. For himself. For the successful completion of our salvation. And he woke them up. He alerted them to the dangers of sleeping. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Here is good news for you and me, the spiritually weak. Our Savior Jesus does not save us because of what we will do for him. He is not selling salvation to the ones who





## Watch with Me

can best avoid temptation. His demands are more exacting than can be met by adding a few prayers.

His demands have been met, only could be met, by him. His holy life lived in our place. His innocent death as payment for our sins. And his resurrection, God's ultimate wake up call.

So when he tells us to watch and pray, he is not laying out our way to earn his forgiveness. He is alerting us to the dangers of having his forgiveness through faith. Our enemies are around us. They are not sleeping. They are alert to our weaknesses and eager to use them against us. In our times of sorrow and distress, and in our times of accomplishment.

Thankfully we have a Savior who has defeated our enemies—sin, death, and the devil. In his amazing grace he is eager to help us in our time of need. Oh, how we need him. “Could you not keep watch with me one hour?” No, Lord, we cannot. But with your help and strength, empowered by your mercy, we will. Lord, help us to watch with you.

**Lord Jesus, you suffered the temptations of our spiritual enemies and defeated them for us. In our daily struggle against the spiritual forces of darkness and in our inner battle with our sinful nature, shield us with your protection and strengthen us with your grace, that we may stand firm in faith and obtain the victory. Amen.**

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# Wednesday



## Will You Really Lay

*Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!” (John 13:36-38)*

Sometimes a person needs a “reality check.” A reality check helps you see that the real situation is not the same as what you believe. For example, you may believe you are in perfect health, but then the doctor gives you a reality check. He helps you see the real situation through some test results.

Jesus once gave Peter a reality check by asking him a searching question: “Will you really lay down your life for me?” (John 13:38). Jesus asked this question to help Peter—and us—see the truth about our spiritual weakness and our need for a Savior.

Peter needed a reality check. Jesus warned him that he was not ready to follow him down the road of suffering and death. Nevertheless, Peter insisted, “Lord, I *will* lay down my life for you” (John 13:37). Peter ignored his spiritual weakness and underestimated sin’s great power. So Jesus gave him a reality check by asking him, “Will you *really* lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!” (John 13:38). Jesus wanted Peter to know the truth—that he would fail to fear, love, and trust in him above all things.

We also need a reality check. How easily we become complacent about the spiritual dangers in our lives. We too need to hear Jesus’ searching questions: “Will you really lay down your life for me? Do you really have the





# Down Your Life for Me?

strength to fear, love, and trust in me above all things? Do you really have the power to resist all temptation and to face suffering and death for my sake?”

To each of those questions we would have to confess that we don't have the strength to lay down our lives for Jesus. But, thanks be to God, Jesus could and would lay down his life for us and for all people! He boldly promised, “I am the Good Shepherd . . . I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:11,15). But unlike Peter and us, he made good on his bold promise. He truly laid down his life for us as he cried out, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Sometimes we need our eyes opened to the truth. Praise God that through his Word he opens our eyes to see the reality of our spiritual weakness. But more importantly, thank God that through his Word we can see the reality of Jesus' life-saving sacrifice. Through that good news alone, our gracious God will give us the desire and strength to lay down our lives each day for him.

**O Lord, how often we foolishly copy Peter and substitute spiritual overconfidence for humble faith. Through your dear Son forgive and restore us, even as you forgave and restored Peter. Grant us grace to trust your strength and not our own. Amen.**

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# Maunder Thursday



## But How Then Would the Fulfilled That Say It Must

*“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” (Matthew 26:52-54)*

December 21, 2012, was a date that not a small number of people looked forward to with fear. Not only was it the shortest day of the year, but according to one interpretation of the Mayan calendar it was the day the world would end. Some people lost their heads completely, doing everything from traveling to mountains in order to best experience the end to trying to overthrow communism around the world. Obviously, like every other apocalypse prediction, this one did not pan out.

During Holy Week, we know exactly what we are looking forward to. The Lamb of God will be led to the slaughter and will offer himself willingly in our place. His disciples didn't understand it. And while you and I can read exactly what happens, it's still so easy to lose our heads about it. I have found myself asking why it had to happen. Why did an all-powerful God have to die to complete his plan? I can think of ways that I think are better. Why couldn't God? Even when Jesus asks his question—“But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”—I still don't understand why God's plan had to include his own suffering and death.

We don't have answers to every “why” question. But we can answer with certainty why God chose the plan he did. Quite simply, there is not a better plan. The alternative plans we try to come up with may work in a perfect world. But this is not a perfect world. If it were,





# Scriptures Be Happen in This Way?

there wouldn't need to be a plan in the first place. So to remedy this imperfect world, God came up with a perfect plan.

In the days leading up to Good Friday, our Savior knew what was going to happen. There was no doomsday prediction or set date on the calendar that everyone knew about. But this date had indeed been on the calendar from eternity. Jesus knew what was going to happen in the Garden of Gethsemane—that he would be handed over to his death—but he was not going to lose his head.

Instead, he reminded his disciples of the plan they had been told about many times. He reminds us of the plan we also have been told about. And we have the joy of knowing that this plan is complete—that even as Jesus gives up his body to death, he likewise gives his body and blood for our life. Today, as we celebrate the institution of the Lord's Supper, we find in the true body and true blood the fulfillment of the plan put in place from the beginning of time: Christ's death means our life.

**Lamb of God, you are our perfect sacrifice. Lead us to confess our lack of appreciation for your perfect will and for your suffering. Open our hearts and fill us with your love and forgiveness, found only in you. In your name we pray. Amen.**

## Author

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# Good Friday



## For If People Do These Tree Is Green, *What Will*

*A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then “they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”” For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:27-31)*

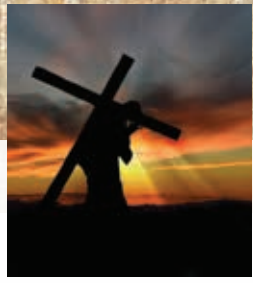
On Good Friday faith’s eyes (and ears) quickly and properly turn toward a hill, Calvary, to focus there on Jesus’ suffering, words, and death. But this Good Friday meet Jesus before he ever reaches the hill. From Pontius Pilate’s palace he carries his cross until Simon of Cyrene is forced—and privileged—to carry it for him. See Jesus and Simon, along with two criminals also sentenced to death by cross, being led by Roman soldiers who make their way to Calvary’s hill through large Passover crowds. Many people follow. Do some just gawk? Do others only jeer?

Some walk along to mourn. They are women shocked into wailing over Jesus’ blood, his bruises, and the wood on Simon’s shoulders. For them Jesus gathers strength enough to warn of what awaits them and their city, something far worse than the bad death of a good man.

Jesus asks the women, “If men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” He’s warning them that their mourning is misplaced. His question makes the point that, if the unjust cruelty of his tortured death can take place while the Messiah, the Lord of Love, lives on earth, when his words and works are fresh in the minds of all who know him, far more awful things will take place once he’s gone.

Jesus knows that soon, within just a generation, the armies of Rome will put Jerusalem under a siege so terrible that





# Things When the Happen When It Is Dry?

childless women—up to then considered most unfortunate—will be counted as truly blessed by God, because they will not have to watch their children sicken and starve.

And far worse than even the Roman siege and Jerusalem's eventual destruction is the eternal suffering that awaits all who in unbelief reject Jesus as their Savior. The first time God's people said to the mountains "Fall on us!", the frightful Assyrians were savagely destroying the northern kingdom, Israel (Hosea 10:18), because of its unbelief. The third and final time Scripture uses the phrase, it's in the mouths of unbelievers as the world reaches its end (Revelation 6:16).

The women weep over the unjust treatment of a just man. In his battered face and striped back, they read injustice and they wail. But Jesus needs to walk on to satisfy God the Father's justice, to die for the sins of the world, and to announce that task finished once and for all.

Jesus' words were a timely warning to these women who cried because of what his enemies were doing *with* him. Jesus question asks—still asks you and me—"What would we do *without* him? What would we do *without* faith in Jesus' slow, terrible walk to that horrible, holy hill?"

**Dear Jesus, by your Spirit's power deepen my appreciation for every step you took to earn my salvation. In the confidence of your finished work I pray. Amen.**

## Author

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# Saturday



## Did Not the Messiah These Things and Then

*He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)*

Everything was in the past tense. As the men from Emmaus walked back home from Jerusalem, they could only think of what might have been. They had anticipated more from Jesus of Nazareth. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people," they explained to their mysterious traveling companion. "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." Their words were measured with a tone of grief and, perhaps, even a tinge of resentment. We should not be too quick to judge them—we would have reacted in much the same way.

From a human perspective, what hope did they have? They were aware of how much help they needed, but Jesus cried, "It is finished" from the cross. Everything was over . . . done . . . finished . . . gone. Then their traveling companion posed a searching question that strangely piqued their interest. He asked, "Did not the Messiah *have to suffer* these things and then enter his glory?" In other words, wasn't this all part of God's plan?

Put in a modern analogy: They had seen the previews, but they didn't understand the plot. The resurrected Jesus, who had not yet revealed his identity to the men, filled them in. The Savior's suffering was necessary, and God's prophets had been clear all along. Jesus took them back to David's words in Psalm 22 where he prophesied: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Yes, in deepest agony, Jesus uttered these very words from the cross. The Savior's death had to be unjust. Sinless Jesus was not subject to death since he had done nothing in life





# Have to Suffer Enter His Glory?

to deserve it. He surrendered his life as a willing sacrifice—to fulfill God’s demands for righteousness.

Jesus reminded the two men that Zechariah prophesied about the Messiah’s betrayal and anguish. Human sin meant that Jesus had to suffer. His suffering brought deliverance. With earnest fervor, Jesus directed them to Isaiah’s powerful picture of the “suffering servant” (chapter 53):

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

God’s plan was becoming so much clearer. “Finished” did not mean that all hope was lost. It meant that the plan was completed to perfection. Jesus was not abandoned to the grave—God’s plan included rescue and life.

On this Holy Saturday we stand between the memory of the cross and the expectation of Easter’s empty tomb. This reading reveals the necessity and joy of searching the Scriptures and discovering the truth. How powerfully these past events affect our present . . . our future . . . our eternity.

**Lord God, forgive our slow and foolish ways.  
Forgive our weakness of faith. Help us to be  
students of your Word, and by your Spirit enlighten  
our minds to understand and believe your plans  
and promises. As we struggle in this sin-cursed  
world, keep us focused on the victory of the cross  
and the assurance of the empty tomb. Amen.**

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# Easter Sunday



## Why Are You Troubled, and Why Do Doubts

*While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." (Luke 24:36-39)*

Once before, the disciples thought they had seen a ghost. It was pre-dawn on the Sea of Galilee. The Savior's word was not enough for fearful hearts, hearts exhausted by a furious storm and the threat of dying. A brash disciple issued a brash demand to walk on water. And the gracious patience of a powerful Savior is revealed: "Why did you doubt?" That day Jesus calmed both troubled souls and the turbulent sea.

This time it is evening, behind locked doors. Once again, the Savior's word was not enough for fearful hearts, hearts exhausted by overwhelming grief and the threat of dying. The recent death of their Rabbi had crushed them, eroding any confidence they had in the promises he had spoken. And once more he revealed his perfect patience and gracious compassion. Jesus demonstrated convincingly that all God's promises are yes in Christ. The One who declared *I am the Life* vanquished death just as he had prophesied. Now he stood before them in the flesh.

Gently Jesus tended to fearful hearts and strengthened wavering faith. He fulfilled the prophet's promise that *a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.* The Shepherd of souls had each of the disciples examine their own soul. *Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?* Such questions pierced the paradox in those sinful hearts—a willingness to consider the supernatural idea of a ghost, yet hesitance in accepting that the Christ of God is the Savior. He is the One sent *to destroy the devil's work.* He





## Rise in Your Minds?

alone fulfilled God's plan *to destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations.*

And Jesus welcomed his friends to come close, to touch and see—touch the hands and feet pierced on their behalf, wounds now glorified as medals of grace gleaming with salvation accomplished. Jesus is alive, bodily and physically present. Faith is not based on an apparition. Jesus lives! Hold him close.

Friend, please confess with me how often we are like the disciples. Doubts frequently flood our hearts. Yet the promises of God stand forever. Our sinful doubts—and all our sins—have been buried in that empty tomb. *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.* Jesus still welcomes you to come close to him and receive resurrection joy. He lovingly invites you to *take and eat, take and drink.* Through the gospel in word and sacrament, hold him close.

**For the joy your advent gave me,  
For your gospel's great reward,  
For your baptism which has saved me,  
For your supper and your Word,  
For your death, the bitter scorn,  
For your resurrection morn:  
Lord, I thank you and extol you,  
And in heav'n I shall behold you. Amen.  
(CW 147:5)**

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*It is our prayer that the devotions in this booklet will assist you in focusing on the work of our Savior in the week leading up to his death and resurrection.*



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