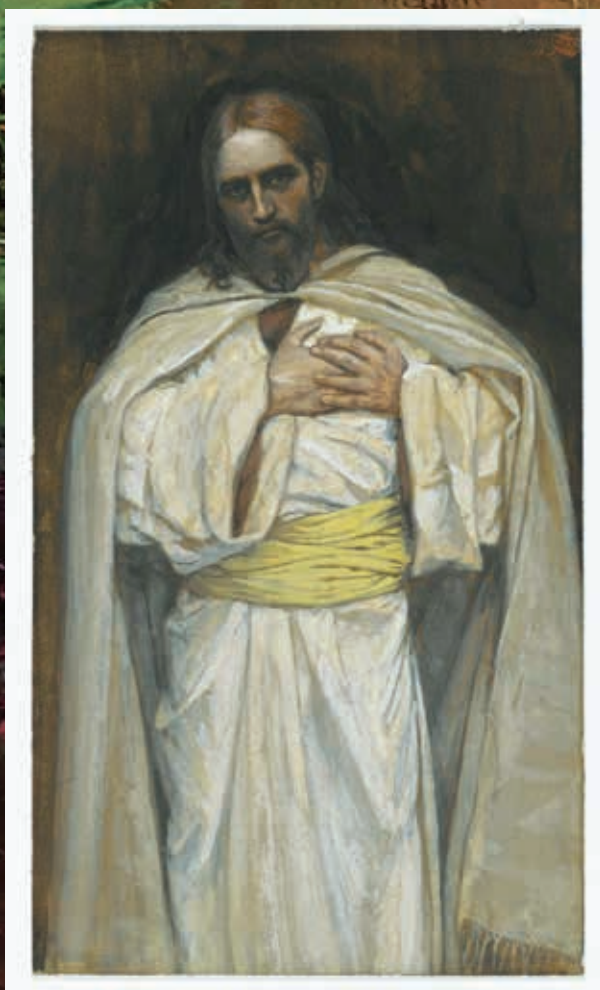




HOLY WEEK

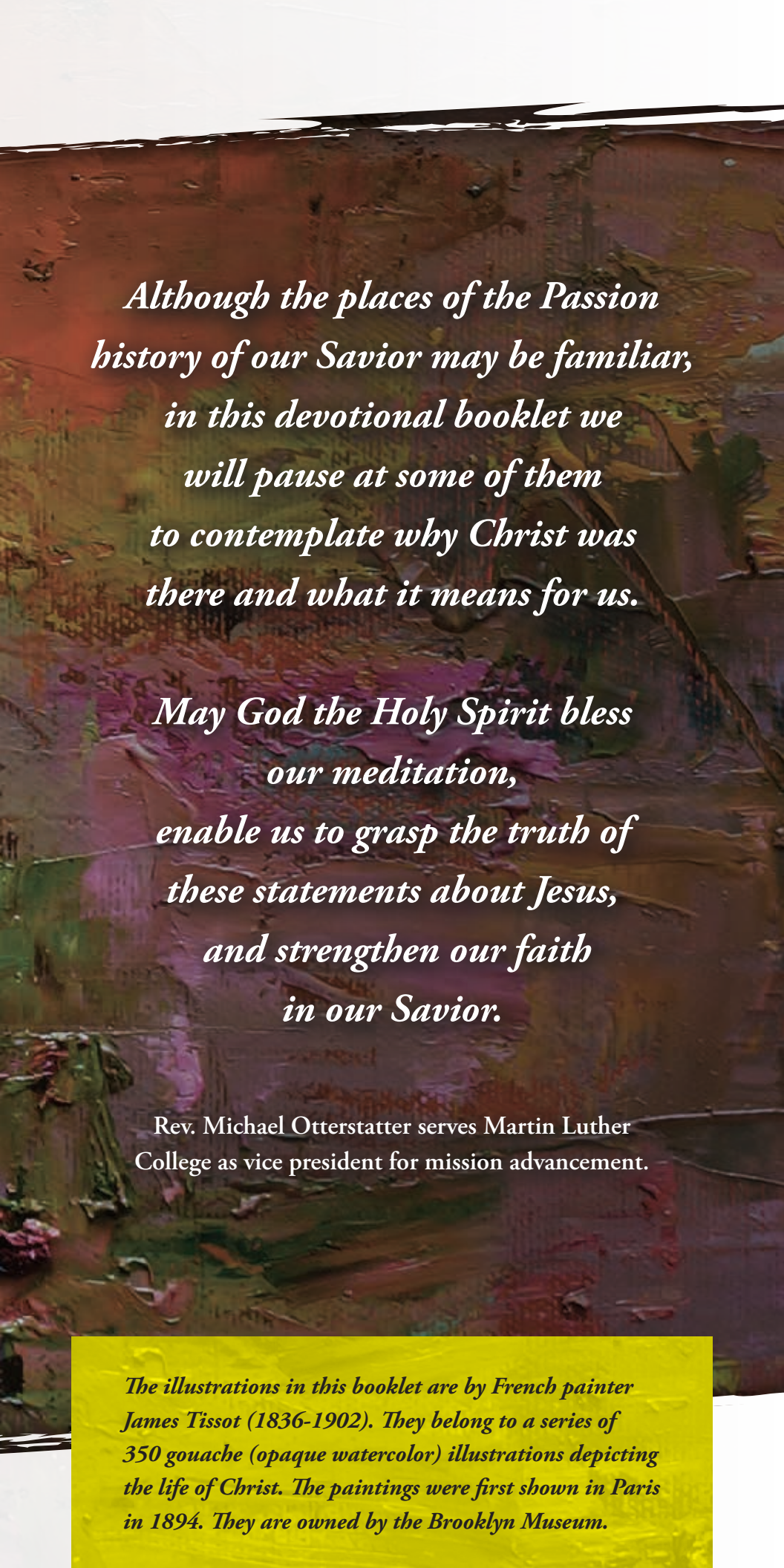
Places of Christ's Passion



A gift to you from
MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE



*Please receive this
devotion booklet
as a gift from the
Martin Luther College
campus family.*



*Although the places of the Passion
history of our Savior may be familiar,
in this devotional booklet we
will pause at some of them
to contemplate why Christ was
there and what it means for us.*

*May God the Holy Spirit bless
our meditation,
enable us to grasp the truth of
these statements about Jesus,
and strengthen our faith
in our Savior.*

Rev. Michael Otterstatter serves Martin Luther
College as vice president for mission advancement.

*The illustrations in this booklet are by French painter
James Tissot (1836-1902). They belong to a series of
350 gouache (opaque watercolor) illustrations depicting
the life of Christ. The paintings were first shown in Paris
in 1894. They are owned by the Brooklyn Museum.*

+ Palm Sunday

The Road Down the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:37-38)

Picture this Palm Sunday scene, because the topography is significant. The Mount of Olives stands as the highest mountain in the area. Jerusalem lies a little below and to the west, across the Kidron Valley. The panoramic view of the city and its temple is stunning. The path from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem descends a steep slope about 400 feet into the valley below, followed by an ascent of a few hundred feet up the other side into the city.

Jesus is about to follow that path, riding on a donkey. The physical terrain reflects what he is about to experience in the coming days.

He's going to "go down." He's going to descend into the depths of humiliation and suffering, treated as the worst of sinners by both his enemies and his loving Father. Within five short days he will cry out in the midday darkness, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" By Friday night his cold, dead body will be laid in a tomb. And all of this for you and for me, to save us from our sins.

But that's not the end. Then he will "rise up" as our exalted Savior. He will rise up alive and victorious from his tomb. Forty days later he will ascend all the way into heaven itself to sit at the right hand of his Father. Again, all of this for you and for me, to open the gates of heaven for us.

As Jesus heads down the Mount of Olives, large crowds of followers join the procession with joyful songs of praise. It's a strange scene full of seeming contradictions. As he rides a lowly donkey, they welcome him as their exalted King. As he descends into violence and humiliation, they sing of peace and glory. Yet, wonderfully, everything about this strange scene fits. This is exactly the kind of Savior the prophets had foretold. This is our beautiful Savior.

What is bringing you down in your life? Health issues? A recent bereavement? Political forces out of your control?



Forces of nature out of your control? How about that frustrating, daily battle with your sinful flesh and the overwhelming feelings of guilt and worthlessness that go with it? Look to Jesus your King. His path to glory went down first. As you follow him, your path may well do the same. Yet in the end, because of him, things are looking up. “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die. Bow your meek head to mortal pain, Then take, O Christ, your power and reign. Amen. (CW 132:5)

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+ Monday



The Temple in Jerusalem

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’” (Matthew 21:12-13)

It’s a favorite quote from C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The children who have found themselves in the strange land of Narnia are first learning from Mr. Beaver about Lewis’s familiar Christ-figure, Aslan.

Susan said, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a *lion*”. . . “Safe?” said Mr. Beaver . . . “Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

How that captures the character of Jesus in the account of the cleansing of the temple! And what a critical corrective it is for people who think of the Christ as a tame, flannel-graph figure meant only for Sunday school children and “little old ladies.” Yes, he characterizes himself in this same gospel as “gentle and humble of heart” (Matthew 11:29). Not to be missed, however, is the way the *Lion of Judah* perfectly combines in one magnificent heart that tender kindness with the table-flipping fierceness of which he is well capable.

“Safe” turns out not to be the right word. Unspeakably good? Yes. With a goodness that could not tolerate the desecrating of his Father’s house, so that for all who had ears to hear, another prophecy of Messiah achieved its inevitable fulfillment: “Zeal for the Lord’s house consumes me” (Psalm 69:9).

Think for a moment about the image “den of robbers.” Rather than being the place where thieves do their worst against the poor and vulnerable, the “*den* of robbers” is the place where they imagine they are *safe*. What surely aroused the righteous anger of Jesus was the fact that the money changers had moved their noisy wares and their money-gouging prices from the Mount of Olives into the only part of the temple where the Gentile proselytes were allowed to gather and adore the God of Israel. *This* was a safe thing to do, with the Lord



himself prowling those holy courts?! Think again. Indeed, look again, and you see beneath this very wrath of Jesus a passionate, bursting grace for the outsider, those who could only watch from a distance. What he did that day he did for them, that they too should have “a house of prayer.”

Is Jesus “safe?” If by that we mean, “Is he tolerant of sin?” or “Is he mild in the face of the abuse heaped upon his own?”, then the answer is: Absolutely not!

Is Jesus “safe?” If by that we mean, “Would he flip a table *for me*? Will he fight *for me*? Will he be my Rock and Refuge, no matter the cost to himself? Can I confess my sin and run to him and know that I am secure beyond what words can ever say?”

Yes, yes, and yes.

Dear Lord Jesus, this Holy Week we ask you, by your Spirit, by your Word, to let both the painful awareness of our sin and the abiding knowledge of you grow side by side. We poor sinners cling to you with the strength you provide. It is this that keeps us safe for today and for eternity. And it is you who makes us glad. Amen.

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+ Tuesday

The Mount of Olives Overlooking Jerusalem

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?" (Mark 13:3-4)

We want to get a good seat for Jesus' passion. Does that mean we sit in a front pew or a back one?

A good seat or vantage point depends on what we're watching. In a stadium or theater, we usually want to be up close. The drama is better when we can hear the thud and see the tears. But in a classroom or church, people often choose to learn or worship from the back.

Jesus and his disciples on Holy Tuesday evening joined those in the back pew. After another day in the thick of the battle and debate, Jesus led his followers down from the temple in Jerusalem and then up the Mt. of Olives, about a half a mile away. This was far and high enough to give a great view of all that was happening. Luke tells us that Jesus went back here each evening during this tumultuous week (21:37).

After all the close conflict, Jesus wanted to teach his disciples from a distance. What we see close up can be distracting. One of the disciples stood next to the impressive temple and pointed, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" (Mark 13:10). The disciples seemed to think, "Our religion is a great and wonderful thing! Notice the skill, the piety, the resources of your people!" We also may think of Holy Week as an impressive display of our faith, when we get nose to nose with the drama, close enough to hear the hammer and see the tears.

From the back Jesus gives a different perspective. He tells the disciples that all they see and feel will be torn apart, not one stone left on another. They see what is there in front of them; Jesus sees what will be there, the cross and the empty tomb.





Jesus did not stay in the back, of course. And Scripture's account of the passion brings us to a front-row seat. We hear and feel the blows when the holy Son of God is betrayed, disowned, and slaughtered by those he came to rescue. Our sin is brutal, too close. But so we will not get lost in the particulars and understand only this dirty world and our corrupt hearts, Jesus has us sit down each evening on the mountainside. All this will soon be gone. From a distance he shows us what alone will be left standing in the end—his power and grace.

We can learn and worship well from the back pew during Holy Week. We see the lesson of sin and worship the grace. But don't stay in the back. On Thursday Jesus also invites us to get incredibly close, to taste and see his great love for us.

Dear Lord, this Holy Week help me see both the deep lesson of sin and the bigger picture of your grace. Amen.

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+ Wednesday



The Upper Room

He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there." (Luke 22:10-12)

The fifty-second installment of the Super Bowl was played on February 4, 2018, in Minneapolis. For more than a year, the city prepared for the game and an influx of more than a million people. Two months before the game, hotel rooms downtown were completely booked. The closest ones were in St. Paul. A two-star hotel room cost \$900. Each year people pilgrimage from all over the country to the Super Bowl. They plan many months in advance.

Each year the law required Israelites to pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover. This was the climax of the liturgical year. The Passover celebrated God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Once, King Agrippa had the priests in the temple tally the total number of offerings made. That number was over 1.2 million! Those pilgrimaging to the Holy City made plans for where they would celebrate the Passover in advance. Rooms and space were at a premium.

On the day of the Passover Feast, Jesus and the disciples had not yet procured a place to celebrate. Imagine trying to find a place to stay the night of the Super Bowl! It wasn't a lack of planning; Jesus knew where they would eat this holy meal. He gives Peter and John specific enough instructions about where to find the place to eat the feast. Jesus had everything under control.

So Peter and John do precisely as Jesus instructed them. They find everything exactly as Jesus said they would. The Savior provided the perfect place for one of the most significant parts of his ministry. There in that upper room, Jesus gave his final testament: the blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion. The next day Jesus would make the ultimate sacrifice: his life for the sins of the world. His one perfect sacrifice accomplished everything the Old Testament sacrifices never could.



Ever since that Maundy Thursday, Christians have celebrated the Lord's Supper. In that sacred meal with the bread and wine, Jesus gives his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and everlasting life. It is rightfully called the Lord's Supper, because in it Jesus does so much for his believers. He unites them to himself and each other. Jesus provides peace, pardon, and comfort. He proclaims his love for fallen humankind. Jesus delivers a beautiful testament to the grace and love of God!

Two thousand years ago, in that crowded city of Jerusalem, the Israelites followed the Law of Moses. They rightfully made their sacrifices to God. The next day though, they would see something far more significant. God made his sacrifice to them and the world. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember that sacrifice. We firmly grasp the words and promise of our Savior, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

I come, O Savior, to your table, for weak and weary is my soul; O Jesus, you alone are able to satisfy and make me whole. With you, Lord, I am now united; I live in you and you in me. No sorrow fills my soul; delighted, it finds its peace on Calvary. Lord, may your body and your blood be for my soul the highest good! (CW 310)

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+ Maundy Thursday

The Stone Pavement— Gabbatha

When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" (John 19:13-15a)

We really aren't sure exactly where the "Stone Pavement" was in Jerusalem. It had to be in a place disconnected from the holy areas of the temple complex, where Gentiles were forbidden to go. It also had to be connected in some way with the Roman administration building in the city, the most natural place for Pilate to give his decisions in the exercise of his duty. *Gabbatha* is an Aramaic word, and John rendered the Greek as *Lithostrotos*. It may indicate a special type of stone or even a mosaic tile pattern, perhaps representative of Roman authority. Tour guides in modern Jerusalem will take sightseers to a place they label *Lithostrotos* and point to the game board carvings in the stone floor where Roman soldiers used to shoot dice to pass the time. But whether or not this is the actual place where Jesus of Nazareth stood before Pontius Pilate is anyone's guess. What is certain, however, is that on the morning after Maundy Thursday, no game was taking place at the Stone Pavement. The hostile crowd had turned fiercely on the preacher from Galilee, and was clamoring for his death and pledging their allegiance to an earthly king.

How can we even begin to account for this utter hatred of Jesus of Nazareth? What had he done, besides heal the sick, cure the blind, make the lame walk, drive out demons, feed thousands, raise a couple dead people, and—most important—teach the Word of God the correct way so that many, many came to have a clear understanding of what the prophets were saying and what God's will for their lives truly was? What evil is in any of that? There is none. In the final analysis, what Jesus told his disciples the night before was dead-on: "They hated me without reason" (John 15:25).

Underneath Pilate's judgment seat was the Stone Pavement. But, more important, standing on Gabbatha was the stone which the builders rejected (Psalm 118). Earlier that week, not far from





this awful scene, Jesus had warned the crowd of the futility of their unbelief: They would reject him, tossing him aside as worthless.

Yet God would do something marvelous in everyone's sight: He would take that rejected stone and make it the chief cornerstone. Yes, Jesus would go to the cross unjustly, but he would also go willingly. And by his death and resurrection, God himself established a firm, unshakable foundation for faith, for life, and for eternity. As the Holy Spirit himself promised through Peter: "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him . . . For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame'" (1 Peter 2:4,6).

O Triune God of our salvation: I praise you, Father, for making your Son, the rejected Stone, into the sure foundation for faith and life. I thank you, Holy Spirit, for building me, by your grace and power, as a living stone into your holy church. I pray you, Lord Jesus, that you would keep me and all believers with you, that we may see and share in your glory forever. Amen.

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+ Good Friday

Golgotha—The Place of the Skull

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. (Mark 15:22-24)

Think of it: *The place of the skull*. If we turn that phrase over slowly in our minds, it likely puts a chill in our bones.

All four gospel writers refer to the place where Jesus was crucified as *the place of the skull*. They each use the same Greek word, the word that we get “cranium” from, to describe how it was like a skull. That word did not refer to the skull that comes to mind when we think of the dreaded “skull and crossbones.” That skull, with full face and eye sockets, emerged as a symbol of death some 800 years ago, was later flown as a flag of piracy, and is still used today to mark deadly poisons. The name attached to the place of death outside of Jerusalem, however, indicates that the hill on which our Savior died was shaped like a skullcap; it was a rounded hill that reminded those who looked at it of the top of a person’s head.

More important than exactly what Skull Hill looked like, of course, is what happened there: “And they crucified him.” The Romans did not invent crucifixion, but they perfected it as a brutal way to execute slaves, low-status criminals, and enemies of the state, shaming and disgracing them as a warning for others. “This will happen to you, too, if you dare to defy the might of Rome.”

Jesus’ enemies managed to pull political strings in order to get him condemned. However, as Peter declared to his fellow Israelites in his Pentecost sermon, “This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:23).

Jesus experienced fully the physical horrors of that death on the cross, going so far as to decline the wine mixed with myrrh that seems to have been designed to provide a narcotic effect, slightly deadening the agonizing pain. Infinitely worse than that horrific pain, however, was the unimaginable spiritual suffering that our Savior willingly



endured as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He embraced the deepest agonies of hell on that cross for us and for all people. In his unimaginable grace, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus had lived a perfect, sinless life, so he alone could be the Lamb who was the perfect sacrifice, the only one who could take the sins of the world away. On the cross, he did. “It is finished” (John 19:30), finally and completely. That is what makes Good Friday good.

As we stand at the foot of your cross, Jesus, we again see the costliness of our sin. Remind us that our forgiveness came at the highest price. Fill us with sorrow for your death, reverence for your holiness, gratitude for your grace, and joy for your victory. Amen.

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+ Saturday

Joseph of Arimathea's Tomb

Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.
(Matthew 27:59-60)

When the devil lies, he speaks his native language. I wonder if he speaks most fluently at funerals. At the few funerals I have been to in my young life, I have seen him speak. At one, I walked past the casket of my high school math teacher. At another, I watched the hearse carry my grandpa out of my life. At one more, I looked down at Olga, who did not greet me with her regular Sunday smile. At each, I heard the devil speak. "He will never speak wisdom again." "You will never visit him again." "She will not greet you anymore." The devil makes it easy to believe each lie.

On this Saturday before Easter, the devil lies and speaks his native language. He says, "You will not see the body again; it is wrapped in death cloths." "That body will not walk again; it is confined to a rock tomb." "That body's power is gone; a stone blocks its way." Do you believe these lies? Based on the words of Matthew 27, it is likely. Like Joseph of Arimathea, you are likely to stand at the entrance of the tomb, believe the lies, and walk away.

When Christ acts, he confronts the devil's lies. On this Saturday before Easter, Christ is in the tomb to destroy the devil's work. Christ lies in the tomb today so that on Easter Sunday he will shed the death cloths, exit the tomb, and walk the earth again. On that day, he will expose the devil for what he is: a liar. On that day, he will expose death for what it is: deceit.

On this day, Christ lies in the tomb only to take his life up again. On this day, Christ endures a wound to crush the liar's head. On this day, Christ lies in death's strong bands to soon stand at God's right hand. The devil's lies cannot entrap anymore; they cannot trick anymore; they cannot hold power anymore.

When the devil speaks, do not believe the lies. Whether your life be young or old, the deceit of death will enter it. You will walk by caskets. You will lie in a hospital bed. You will hear the devil speak



in his native language. His lies will come to you just as they did to me. See through his faulty speech. Recognize his broken narrative. Deny every phony word. Christ calls you a Christian, and the devil's language holds no truth. When the deceit of death enters your life, listen to the truth Christ speaks on this day, the Saturday before Easter, "He *will* speak again. You *will* visit family again. She *will* greet you again. Christ *will* rise again."

**Dear risen Christ, set us apart in the truth.
Your word is truth. Amen.**

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Easter Sunday

With the Disciples Behind Locked Doors

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. (John 20:19-20)

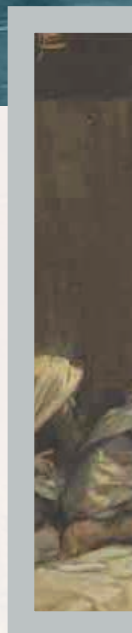
If you had asked Peter on Saturday of Holy Week if he would be willing to die for the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I doubt he would have said, "Yes." He certainly hadn't on Maundy Thursday, as he fled from Jesus in the garden and denied him three times in the courtyard.

Now it's Sunday and he is huddled away with the other disciples in a house locked up tight so that no one can enter, because they figure that if the Jews killed Jesus, his followers will be next. *That* promise of Jesus they remember: "If they hated me, they will hate you." But what about his other promises? Didn't Jesus tell them that he would rise? Yes, but they are not convinced.

Scripture does not spare any ink in describing the slow faith of the ones we call heroes. We miss the point if we simply read this account and conclude, "Man, how did they not get it?"

Are we any different? The resurrection proves that every promise of God is true. But do we always live with that Easter confidence? It is so easy to revert to being "Saturday after Good Friday" Christians. By the way we live our lives, sometimes you might just think that Jesus is still in the grave! We live our lives with the doors of our hearts locked for fear of the unknown, just like the disciples. As though Jesus doesn't have what it takes to keep his promises.

What changes our hearts? "Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." The only thing that can give you the joy of Easter is the peace of seeing Jesus.





Jesus comes to his scared disciples still today and shows us the peace we have. He shows us his heart when he shows us his hands and side—the hands and side that bore the marks of his sacrifice for us. But no longer are those marks of death. They are now the battle scars of the Victorious One! There is only one response that can flow from seeing that: Easter confidence!

What did the disciples do next? They opened the door, and no one has ever stopped us since. Peter marched all the way to his own cross in Rome because of his Easter confidence. Can you see him smile through the pain, knowing he was minutes from seeing the risen Jesus again? Friend, look at Jesus' hands. Look at Jesus' side. Now march forward with that same Easter confidence. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Dear Jesus, you are risen indeed! Show me your hands and side through your Word today. Show me the peace you won for me by your cross and empty tomb. Inspire me to live with Easter confidence today and every day. Amen.

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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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