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H O L Y W E E K 2 0 2 1

These eight Holy Week devotions lead us deeper into the truths of Jesus' love for us through the poetry, imagery, and music of Lent and Easter hymns. Links are provided to audio/video recordings of each devotion and musical selection.

Devotions are read by the authors and hymns are performed by MLC College Choir, Chorale, Women's Choir, Männerchor, Wind Symphony, Hosanna Ringers, and Professor Craig Hirschmann on the organ. These video recordings may be integrated into your church services during Holy Week worship.



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Devotional Booklet

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Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)

From the beginning to the end of his earthly life, Jesus held back—almost completely dialed down—the splendor he owns as the Son of God. Yes, the Bible grants glimpses of grandeur: With shepherds we view “the glory of the Lord” over Bethlehem. With three ex-fishermen we gasp at Jesus’ lightning brilliance at his transfiguration. But mostly, our faith’s eye roams from a baby in a feed trough to a bright boy in earnest conversation to a carpenter rabbi without a home to a supposed criminal nailed to a cross.

And today, back a bit, we see a man on a donkey. The prophet Zechariah, writing five centuries before the event, settles our gaze there, as Jesus enters Jerusalem on his way to that cross. No heavenly glory here either. Even the earthly glory of a king’s parade is dimmed to apt irony: no rich robes, no crown, no chariots, no gleaming swords or glinting spears, no muscled, marching soldiers. Just one “lowly” man, “the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee,” as Matthew quoted the crowds’ buzz. (Can anything good come from there?) And no horse, no magnificent stallion bred for war and worthy of a royal saddle. Just a donkey draped in the cloaks of ordinary men.

How fitting this humble entrance is. How typical of the salvation story. After our first parents threw away Paradise and thus dragged all their children after them in sin and death, God in love vowed to restore what they had trashed. He pledged that Adam and Eve’s descendant would crush the serpent Satan’s head. God then kept his promise in ways exact, unexpected, and, yes, humble: a helpless baby who would rescue, a landless king who would reign forever, a sinless man judged guilty to pay for the sins of all, a deathless God who died to redeem, and an empty tomb full of the Good News that your sins are forgiven, because Jesus lived and died for you too. Jesus did not come to impose a royal to-do list. The gospel is a has-done list, the story of what King Jesus has done for you.

That story comes to you like that donkey, without glamor. The gospel reaches you in your mother’s voice and your father’s example; in a teacher’s lesson, a pastor’s sermon, or a child’s song; in plain water with powerful Word; in bread and wine with a forgiving promise.

As again this week you walk with Jesus to his cross, rejoice that your king came to you gentle, lowly, righteous, and soon victorious. Jesus came to save you. You have his forgiveness. It’s his greatest glory.

Holy Spirit, through your Word and by your power, help me this Holy Week to see my humble Savior-King ever more clearly. Amen.

Rev. Daniel Balge serves Martin Luther College as a professor of Greek and Latin, and as academic dean for preseminary studies.

1. Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark! All the tribes hosanna cry.
O Savior meek, pursue your road,
With palms and scattered garments strowed.

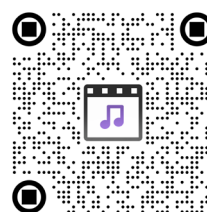
2. Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
O Christ, your triumphs now begin
O’er captive death and conquered sin.

3. Ride on, ride on in majesty!
The angel armies of the sky
Look down with sad and wondering eyes
To see the approaching sacrifice.

4. Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Your last and fiercest strife is nigh.
The Father on his sapphire throne
Awaits his own anointed Son.

5. 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.

SCAN CODE OR VISIT [MLC-WELS.EDU/HW-1](https://mlc-wels.edu/hw-1) FOR



DEVOTION AUDIO
read by Rev. Daniel Balge

& MUSIC
sung by College Choir

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. (Luke 18:34)

What is the right word for Holy Week?

Fill in the blank: "Jesus, I will _____ now." Pretty easy for us, because we know the whole story. We know the great hymn. But what about when we are confused and frustrated with what God is saying and doing?

Jesus' disciples did know the whole story beforehand. In the verses before the reading above (and before Passion Week started), Jesus reported to his followers the vivid and specific verbs people would choose for him: "mock . . . insult . . . spit . . . flog . . . and kill." He also gave the needed context, "everything . . . written . . . will be fulfilled" (Luke 18:31-33).

How did the disciples, then, over the next days fill in the blanks? "Jesus, I will . . . boast"?! Argue. Sleep. Start swinging a sword. Run away. Deny. Hide. They knew the story. They heard and saw the whole thing, but they didn't understand.

How do we fill in the blank? What's the verb we choose when the world collapses around us? When the diagnosis buckles our knees and hurts in places the technicians didn't scan. When the phone call or email doesn't fit in a life governed by an all-loving and all-powerful God. "Jesus, I will . . . rage . . . crash . . . weep now"?

Or perhaps we take a quieter approach. "Jesus, I will . . . observe . . . analyze . . . scrutinize your passion now." These words sound better, but they are distant, cold, and clinical.

What is the right word for Holy Week, when part of the world wants to spit on and flog the mystery of God dying? What's the right word when the other part would rather look away from the gross pit into which our sins have tossed the Savior? "Stricken, smitten, and afflicted" sound right, but those belong to Jesus.

What is the right word for us? We don't *observe* an earthquake, do we? We don't *analyze* the rhetoric of Jesus answering the authorities. We don't *study* samples of wine, spit, and blood. We don't *evaluate* an empty tomb. We can't *validate* or *prove* it either.

Mary (or Luke) chose the right word 30 years earlier, when the Savior's incredible, bloody, and transcendent earthly life began. "Jesus, I will *ponder* now on thy holy passion."

"Ponder" opens up the power and horror and glory of this week. Ponder the cross and the road leading up to it. And listen to the other actions in this great hymn: "meditate . . . cherish . . . crown . . . grieve . . . renew . . . learn . . . sing your praise forever."

Dear Lord, this Holy Week grant me the penetrating eyes of faith, so I will see my sins but thrill at what Jesus has done for me. Amen.

Rev. Brian Dose serves Martin Luther College as a professor of English.

1. Jesus, I will ponder now
On your holy passion;
With your Spirit me endow
For such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith
May the image cherish
Of your suffering, pain, and death
That I may not perish.

2. Make me see your great distress,
Anguish, and affliction,
Bonds and stripes and wretchedness
And your crucifixion;
Make me see how scourge and rod,
Spear and nails did wound you,
How for them you died, O God,
Who with thorns had crowned you.

3. Yet, O Lord, not thus alone
Make me see your passion,
But its cause to me make known
And its termination.
Ah! I also and my sin
Wrought your deep affliction;
This indeed the cause has been
Of your crucifixion.

4. If my sins give me alarm
And my conscience grieve me,
Let your cross my fear disarm;
Peace of conscience give me.
Help me see forgiveness won
By your holy passion.
If for me he slays his Son,
God must have compassion.

5. Grant that I your passion view
With repentant grieving.
Let me not bring shame to you
By unholy living.
How could I refuse to shun
Every sinful pleasure
Since for me God's only Son
Suffered without measure?

6. Graciously my faith renew;
Help me bear my crosses,
Learning humbleness from you,
Peace mid pain and losses.
May I give you love for love!
Hear me, O my Savior,
That I may in heaven above
Sing your praise forever.

SCAN CODE OR VISIT MLC-WELS.EDU/HW-2 FOR



DEVOTION AUDIO

read by Rev. Brian Dose

& MUSIC

performed by Hosanna Ringers

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)

When I served in the parish in Michigan, I always felt the pressure to make the Good Friday service a somber and subdued service.

But the 1 pm Good Friday service always had 40-50 Lutheran school children bustling into the sanctuary at the last minute. In addition, many of the congregational members came from work and were scurrying into the sanctuary, often during the opening hymn. Finally, the church was often packed. One could hear the clamor of metal chairs unfolding even as I began the liturgy.

All of this commotion made our Good Friday service seem a lot more like an Easter Sunday service! Thus, I began the custom of closing the service each year with the hymn "Christ, the Life of All the Living" (CW114). That hymn is not very somber or subdued! The congregation and all the school children grew louder and sang with even more gusto as at the end of every stanza we sang: "Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto thee!"

We should be subdued about the damning nature of our sin. Jesus was righteous. You and I are not righteous. Think of the harsh words you have spoken to your loved ones. Consider the times jealousy has gripped your heart. Contemplate the shameful thoughts in your mind. We should be the ones "the curse of God enduring" forever in hell.

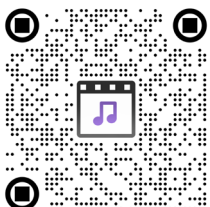
But Peter writes, "Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous" (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus was righteous, but you are unrighteous. Yet the righteous Jesus suffered the punishment you, the unrighteous, deserve. In hymn 114 we sing, *Thou, ah, thou hast taken on thee Bonds and stripes, a cruel rod; Pain and scorn were heaped upon thee, O thou sinless Son of God!* Jesus suffered your hell. Because he was God and man in one person, the Father accepted his suffering and his death as payment for your sin. The Father raised Jesus again to prove that very fact.

Do you still feel shame for past sins? Remember what the Holy Spirit has told you through Peter: "Christ died for sins once for all!" You are forgiven. You are righteous in God's sight. Heaven belongs to you. You don't need to keep beating yourself up to pay for your sin. Jesus already paid that debt. Now your heart can sing, "Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto thee!"

Dear Jesus, when I feel the weight of my sin, when regret overwhelms me, help me to remember that Christ died once for all time and that I do not need to pay a debt that Jesus has already paid. Teach me instead to sing each day, "Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto thee!"

Rev. Joel Thomford serves Martin Luther College as an admissions counselor.

SCAN CODE OR VISIT [MLC-WELS.EDU/HW-3](https://mlc-wels.edu/hw-3) FOR



DEVOTION AUDIO
read by Rev. Joel Thomford

& MUSIC
sung by Chorale

1. Christ, the Life of all the living,
Christ, the death of death, our foe,
Who, thyself for me once giving
To the darkest depths of woe—
Through thy sufferings, death, and merit
I eternal life inherit.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto thee.

2. Thou, ah, thou hast taken on thee
Bonds and stripes, a cruel rod;
Pain and scorn were heaped upon thee,
O thou sinless Son of God!
Thus didst thou my soul deliver
From the bonds of sin forever.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto thee.

3. Thou hast borne the smiting only
That my wounds might all be whole;
Thou hast suffered, sad and lonely,
Rest to give my weary soul;
Yea, the curse of God enduring,
Blessing unto me securing.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto thee.

4. Heartless scoffers did surround thee,
Treating thee with cruel scorn,
And with piercing thorns they crowned thee.
All disgrace thou, Lord, hast borne
That as thine thou mightest own me
And with heavenly glory crown me.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto thee.

5. Thou hast suffered men to bruise thee
That from pain I might be free;
Falsely did thy foes accuse thee—
Thence I gain security.
Comfortless thy soul did languish
Me to comfort in my anguish.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto thee.

6. Thou hast suffered great affliction
And hast borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion
Fully to atone for me.
Thou didst choose to be tormented
That my doom should be prevented.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto thee.

7. Then, for all that wrought my pardon,
For thy sorrows deep and sore,
For thine anguish in the garden,
I will thank thee evermore,
Thank thee for thy groaning, sighing,
For thy bleeding and thy dying,
For that last triumphant cry,
And shall praise thee, Lord, on high.

When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" (John 19:5)

There is a section of the Athanasian Creed that reads, "It is furthermore necessary for eternal salvation truly to believe that our Lord Jesus Christ also took on human flesh." Yes, Jesus was truly God; he was also truly a man. He was completely divine, and he was completely human. As he lived his years on this earth, he did not make full and constant use of his divine power. The apostle Paul explained it this way in his letter to the Philippian congregation: "And being found in appearance as a man, [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (2:8).

"Humbled." Wow, what an understatement! God himself allowed humans to curse him and flog him and mock him and spit on him and kill him. All of this was "necessary for salvation." Jesus had to be a human to redeem human beings. Jesus had to die—even though he had done nothing to deserve death—to be the perfect sacrifice for our sin.

Pilate said, "Here is the man!" What did they see? They saw a joke—a "fake king," with a pretend royal robe and a bogus crown made of spikey vines. They saw a sad and lonely man who was bruised and bloodied. What did they say when they saw him? "Crucify! Crucify!" That's how much they despised Jesus. Sadly, that's how much they hated the very Savior sent from heaven. They couldn't see him for who he really was.

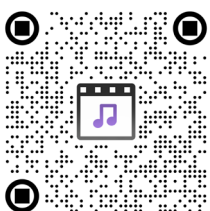
Shamefully, humans continue to curse and mock and spit on God every time we say we don't care about his Word. We would rather shape God to our desires than conform to his will. That is what makes the account of Jesus' suffering and death so incredible. He endured genuine emotional and physical torture in order to bear the punishment that we deserved. A "great exchange" indeed!

The hymn "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" creates an unforgettable picture of the Holy Week scene. How vividly it captures the injustice of it all! It was the intention of the writer to present the passion in all its perverse reality—the God-man Jesus being abused by his very creation. But these poignant verses are not the account of an excessively sentimental drama. The hymn looks behind and beyond what we see. Hear the expressions of glory despite the gore. Faith grasps the necessity of what happened. Penitent sinners confess that the suffering and the cross were indeed our "rightful lot." Then believers implore, "But take away my anguish by virtue of your own!" And, with the cross in sight, proclaim, "Who dies in faith dies well!"

Dearest Jesus, we are so very conscious of our own sin and shame. You endured suffering beyond imagination because of us. Forgive us in your mercy and strengthen us to live in faith and love. Amen.

Rev. Paul Koelpin serves Martin Luther College as a professor of history and theology.

SCAN CODE OR VISIT MLC-WELS.EDU/HW-4 FOR



DEVOTION AUDIO
read by Rev. Paul Koelpin

& MUSIC
performed by Wind Symphony

1. O sacred head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded,
With thorns your only crown,
O sacred head, no glory
Now from your face does shine;
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call you mine.

2. Men mock and taunt and jeer you,
They smite your countenance,
Though mighty worlds shall fear you
And flee before your glance.
How pale you are with anguish,
With sore abuse and scorn!
Your eyes with pain now languish
That once were bright as morn!

3. Now from your cheeks has vanished
Their color, once so fair;
From your red lips is banished
The splendor that was there.
Grim death with cruel rigor
Has robbed you of your life;
Thus you have lost your vigor,
Your strength, in this sad strife.

4. My burden in your passion,
Lord, you have borne for me,
For it was my transgression,
My shame, on Calvary.
I cast me down before you;
Wrath is my rightful lot.
Have mercy, I implore you;
Redeemer, spurn me not!

5. What language shall I borrow
To thank you, dearest Friend,
For this, your dying sorrow,
Your pity without end?
Oh, make me yours forever,
And keep me strong and true;
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love for you.

6. My Savior, then be near me
When death is at my door,
And let your presence cheer me;
Forsake me nevermore!
When soul and body languish,
Oh, leave me not alone,
But take away my anguish
By virtue of your own!

7. Lord, be my consolation,
My shield when I must die;
Remind me of your passion
When my last hour draws nigh.
My eyes will then behold you,
Upon your cross will dwell;
My heart will then enfold you—
Who dies in faith dies well!

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:21-24)

When we are hurting, the needs of others don't seem to reach us.

But remember Jesus. When his mind was filled with the death of John the Baptist and he only wanted to be alone, he saw the crowd. And though he knew the trivial concerns that had brought them, they still got to him like a kick in the stomach. So he went to them, taught them, fed them, healed them.

Think of who we become when confronted with things we dread.

But remember Jesus. Hear him praying for his friends the very night before the scourge and nails, desiring for them the highest conceivable good. "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24).

Then this. Think of when we are misunderstood or insulted, mistreated or wronged, and how all restraint is abandoned. We justify whatever comes into our hearts to do or say. "If people knew what I'm going through, they would not blame me."

But remember Jesus. When he was abused, he did not lash out. Not a word left his lips of which he needed to be ashamed. Nothing vulgar or even unkind. "He entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).

There is a goodness to Jesus that we can scarcely comprehend as it is revealed in the extremity of the cruelty he suffered. There is a "love unknown."

When Peter bids us follow in the footsteps of Christ, he certainly knows what he is doing to us. Those footprints are too far apart. We cannot keep up. To once take this seriously—to once try to follow the example Jesus left behind—is to sink beneath the ideal.

And it is Christ himself who lifts us up.

He is our example, yes. Yes, we are called to remain ever conscious of our God as the secret to how we may commend ourselves to him and suffer for doing good. But before that can even make sense—before we can ask in the right way what he would have us do—we must meet him again as Savior, as the innocent Sufferer, as the perfect Sacrifice.

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross." "By his wounds we are healed."

What would Jesus have you do? He would have you be glad. You have a gentle Savior who has gone on ahead. You saw him stride straight into his death on the cross for us all. You saw him come out the other side. He is turned toward us—always toward us—smiling like the sun. "Follow me."

Dear Father, pour your Spirit into our hearts as we meditate on your Word. Make us ever conscious of you and the gift you have made of your Son Jesus. Grant us the strength to be the imitations of him in this world as we strive to live a life of love and to honor the sacrifice he made. Let this be to your glory not ours. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Mark Paustian serves Martin Luther College as a professor of Hebrew and English.

1. My song is love unknown,
My Savior's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown
That they might lovely be.
Oh, who am I
That for my sake
My Lord should take
Frail flesh and die?

2. He came from his blest throne
Salvation to bestow,
But such disdain! So few
The longed-for Christ would know!
But oh, my friend,
My friend indeed,
Who at my need
His life did spend!

3. Sometimes they strew his way
And his sweet praises sing,
Resounding all the day
Hosannas to their King.
Then "Crucify!"
Is all their breath,
And for his death
They thirst and cry.

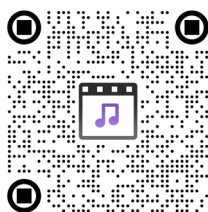
4. Why? What has my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run;
He gave the blind their sight.
Sweet injuries!
Yet they at these
Themselves displease
And 'gainst him rise.

5. They rise and needs will have
My dear Lord made away.
A murderer they save;
The Prince of life they slay.
Yet cheerful he
To suffering goes
That he his foes
From death might free.

6. In life no house, no home
My Lord on earth might have;
In death no friendly tomb
But what a stranger gave.
What may I say?
Heaven was his home
But mine the tomb
Wherein he lay.

7. Here might I stay and sing;
No story so divine,
Never was love, dear King,
Never was grief like thine.
This is my friend,
In whose sweet praise
I all my days
Could gladly spend.

SCAN CODE OR VISIT MLC-WELS.EDU/HW-5 FOR



DEVOTION AUDIO
read by Rev. Dr. Mark Paustian
& MUSIC
sung by Women's Choir

At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (John 19:41-42)

Their hearts were heavy as they buried Jesus on that dark Friday. They might have thought many things about that day, but as they laid him in the tomb, they almost certainly would not have called it “good.”

Johann Rist (1607-1667), a German Lutheran pastor, was a prolific writer. Two hundred of the approximately 680 hymns that he penned were in common use during his time. “Oh, Darkest Woe” is among those that continue to be used to this day.

Rist wrote “Oh, Darkest Woe” in 1641. When he published it, he included this heading: “A Mournful Graveside Song on the Sorrowful Burial of Our Savior Jesus Christ, to Be Sung on Good Friday.” He noted, “The first verse of this funeral hymn, along with its devotional melody, came accidentally into my hands. As I was greatly pleased with it, I added the other seven verses as they stand here, since I could not be a party to the other verses.” Rist objected to false teachings in those verses, so he took the first verse of what Friedrich Spee wrote in 1628 and added verses faithful to Scripture.

Christian Worship includes five of the original verses in Rist’s “mournful graveside song.” The first two lines of the second verse may reflect one of the thoughts swirling through the minds of those who laid Jesus in his tomb: “Oh, sorrow dread! God’s Son is dead!” The original German is forceful, even startling. “O grosse Not! Gott selbst liegt Tot”: “Oh, great distress! God himself lies dead.”

“God’s Son,” Jesus the Christ, was and is God and man in one person. He was and is “God himself.” Our jaws drop. “God himself lies dead”? How can this be? Why?

Why? The answer is the reason that we call this Friday “good”: on this day Jesus died for the sins of the world. As Rist put it in his hymn, “by his expiation of our guilt upon the cross,” Jesus “gained for us salvation.” “Expiation” refers to taking away guilt through the payment of a penalty. The Bible is clear: “The wages of sin is death.” Jesus paid those wages for the world. “God himself” took our place and shed his innocent blood on the cross. That changes everything. “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Satan and his demons celebrated when Jesus was laid in the tomb. Hell’s celebration continued Friday night, throughout Saturday, and into Sunday, but it ended early that morning. Jesus, who had been dead, rose to life and left that tomb empty. Jesus is alive, and death is defeated. Remember that while we wait for Sunday.

O Jesus blest, my Help and Rest, With tears I now entreat you: Make me love you to the last Till in heaven I greet you. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Lawrence Olson serves Martin Luther College as a professor of theology and as director of the Staff Ministry Program and Congregational Assistant Program.

1. Oh, darkest woe!
O tears, forth flow!
Has earth so sad a wonder?
God the Father’s only Son
Now is buried yonder.

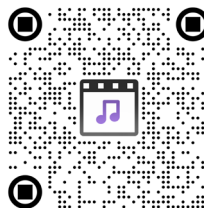
2. Oh, sorrow dread!
God’s Son is dead!
But by his expiation
Of our guilt upon the cross
Gained for us salvation.

3. Lo, stained with blood,
The Lamb of God,
The Bridegroom, lies before you,
Pouring out his life that he
May to life restore you.

4. How blest shall be
Eternally
Who oft in faith will ponder
Why the glorious Prince of life
Should be buried yonder.

5. O Jesus blest,
My Help and Rest,
With tears I now entreat you;
Make me love you to the last
Till in heaven I greet you.

SCAN CODE OR VISIT MLC-WELS.EDU/HW-6 FOR



DEVOTION AUDIO
read by Rev. Dr. Lawrence Olson

& MUSIC
sung by Männerchor

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

One can only wonder what kind of quiet talk and sober reflection went on inside Jerusalem homes on Saturday of Holy Week. For the Jewish people of that day it wasn’t, of course, “Holy Week”; it was the Sabbath day of Passover. Though the city had opened her arms to thousands of annual pilgrims, undoubtedly the streets and markets were quiet as people rested and again recounted for their families the events of the Exodus, the deliverance from bondage God had provided.

But how could there not also have been talk about the death of the preacher from Nazareth—the riotous crowds, the darkness and earthquake, the unusually quick death of Jesus, the hasty burial, etc. etc.? St. Luke tells us that eyewitnesses to the crucifixion “beat their breasts and went away” when they saw everything that had happened (Lk 23:48). The unnaturalness of the events at Golgotha even moved a shaken Roman soldier to stop and reflect upon the meaning of it all.

Our Lenten journey has again drawn to a close. Lent is a time for quiet and deep reflection upon the meaning of it all . . . and the marvel of it all. By God’s grace, the Holy Spirit has opened our minds to understand the Scriptures and what the death of Jesus truly means. The hymn writer says, “Jesus, grant that balm and healing in your sacred wounds I find.” Yes. God must *grant* such faith. God must *grant* insight and understanding. And, along with such things, our gracious God also *grants* healing to us through the blood of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

But that blood of the Lamb does more than cause us to pause and reflect upon the death of Jesus. That blood washed us in baptism. That blood, together with his body, still is given to us for the assurance of our forgiveness, and to increase our faith, hope, and love. That blood gives us courage and strength to plod forward through our broken world to our eternal home. Again, our hymn writer: “When I’m weak, your cross revives me, granting new life to my soul.”

The call to faith in Jesus is also the call to a new life—the life of struggling against sin and walking in the freedom Jesus won for us by his sacrifice. The Spirit has “transformed our minds” so that now, “in view of God’s mercy,” we also offer ourselves as “living sacrifices” to God in all we do. “This is our true and proper worship.” And in such worship, our heavenly Father takes great delight.

Lord Jesus, I thank you again for your sacrifice on the cross. Lead me by your Holy Spirit to sacrifice myself for you—a thank-offering to the God of my salvation. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Keith Wessel serves Martin Luther College as a professor of Greek, Latin, and philosophy.

1. Jesus, grant that balm and healing
In your holy wounds I find,
Every hour that I am feeling
Pains of body and of mind.
Should some evil thought within
Tempt my treacherous heart to sin,
Show the peril, and from sinning
Keep me from its first beginning.

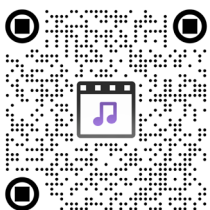
2. Should some lust or sharp temptation
Fascinate my sinful mind,
Let me think about your passion,
And new courage I shall find.
Or should Satan press me hard,
Let me then be on my guard,
Saying, “Christ for me was wounded,”
That the tempter flee confounded.

3. If the world my heart entices
With the broad and easy road,
With seductive, sinful vices,
Let me think about the load
You were willing to endure;
Then I’ll flee all thoughts impure,
Mastering each wild temptation,
Calm in prayer and meditation.

4. Every wound that pains or grieves me
By your wounds, Lord, is made whole;
When I’m weak, your cross revives me,
Granting new life to my soul.
Yes, your comfort renders sweet
Every bitter cup I meet;
For your all-atoning passion
Has procured my soul’s salvation.

5. O my God, my Rock and Tower,
Grant that in your death I trust,
Knowing death has lost his power
Since you crushed him in the dust.
Savior, let your agony
Ever help and comfort me;
When I die be my protection,
Light and life and resurrection.

SCAN CODE OR VISIT MLC-WELS.EDU/HW-7 FOR



DEVOTION AUDIO
read by Rev. Dr. Keith Wessel
& MUSIC
organ meditation
with Craig Hirschmann

Easter Sunday

“AT THE LAMB’S HIGH FEAST WE SING” (CW 141)

Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)

How will you celebrate Easter? How we celebrate can either make the most of this glorious day or squander all it means for us.

No, it’s not a matter of the right external celebration. What is critical this Easter Day—in fact, every day—is that our hearts celebrate Christ as our Passover Lamb, as Paul urges us.

That’s why Paul urgently cries out, “Let us keep the Festival,” and then proceeds to talk about leavened and unleavened bread. But what does that mean?

To understand Paul’s words, remember not only that Jesus’ death and resurrection happened during Passover. Remember also that Passover was connected to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days God commanded Israelites to rid their homes of all yeast. Yeast, with its ability for a tiny amount to permeate a whole batch of dough, is a biblical picture for how sin works in our hearts. Even a small sin allowed to grow in our hearts can wreak eternal havoc as it leads our hearts away from God.

So, “Let us keep the festival!” We remember that Christ has died and risen to free us from sin. But that freedom isn’t only from guilt for sins previously committed. Easter also proclaims freedom from sin’s power over us. So each day we “keep the Festival” as we “get rid of the old yeast.” We watch for the yeast of “malice and wickedness” that every day tries to grow anew in our hearts.

Each day we keep the feast as we seek not only the comfort of the Passover Lamb’s forgiveness but also its power to live with a sincere heart that finds strength in his saving truth. Each day we “keep the Festival” as we delight that in his death and resurrection Jesus has declared us to be a new, unleavened batch of dough and has given us the power to live who we are in him!

So how do we “keep the Festival”? Today, and every day, live as his new batch of unleavened bread. Today, and every day, clear out every remnant of that old yeast of malice and wickedness that clings to our hearts. Today, and every day, throw that old yeast of “malice and wickedness” at the foot of his cross. Today, and every day, find at the empty tomb of your Passover Lamb the power that is yours to live in “sincerity and truth.”

That’s why, and that’s also how, we sing today and every day, “At the Lamb’s high feast.” That’s why, and that’s also how, we “Praise our victorious King.” Such is our joy as this Easter day, and every day, we “keep the Festival.”

Easter triumph, Easter joy! This alone can sin destroy; From sin’s power, Lord, set us free, Newborn souls in you to be. Alleluia!

Rev. Dr. Richard Gurgel serves Martin Luther College as president.

1. At the Lamb’s high feast we sing
Praise to our victorious King,
Who has washed us in the tide
Flowing from his pierced side.
Alleluia!

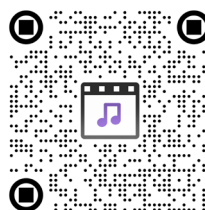
2. Mighty Victim from the sky,
Hell’s fierce powers beneath you lie.
You have conquered in the fight;
You have brought us life and light.
Alleluia!

3. Now no more can death appall,
Now no more the grave enthrall;
You have opened paradise,
And your saints with you shall rise.
Alleluia!

4. Easter triumph, Easter joy!
This alone can sin destroy;
From sin’s power, Lord, set us free,
Newborn souls in you to be.
Alleluia!

5. Father, who the crown shall give,
Savior, by whose death we live,
Spirit, guide through all our days,
Three in One, your name we praise.
Alleluia!

SCAN CODE OR VISIT [MLC-WELS.EDU/HW-8](https://mlc-wels.edu/hw-8) FOR



DEVOTION AUDIO
read by Rev. Dr. Richard Gurgel

& MUSIC
*sung by Combined Choirs
with brass and organ*