

GOD'S *Suffering Servant*



A Gift to You from Martin Luther College

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

Devotions

MLC faculty members:

Daniel Balge

John Boeder

Richard Gurgel

Paul Koelpin

Mark Paustian

Nicolas Schmoller

Jeffrey Schone

Luke Thompson

Editor

Laurie Gauger

Copy Editor

Heidi Schoof

Photographs

Bill Pekrul

Digital Media

Leah Matzke

Project Facilitator

Beth Scharf

Bible translation

*New International
Version*

Hymns

Christian Worship 2021



MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

mlc-wels.edu

Watch and Pray

Jesus urges us to “watch and pray,” to slow down our hectic pace and turn off our preoccupation with things mundane. He urges us to step out of the ruts of our comfortable routines and sit . . . ponder . . . meditate on the sufferings of our Savior.

The prophet Isaiah introduces the Messiah as God’s Suffering Servant. In four different Servant Songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-7; 52:13—53:12), Isaiah explains that God’s Chosen One “will bring justice to the nations” through his suffering and death. “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. . . he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.”

This Holy Week, we ponder the sufferings of the Suffering Servant—the antagonism of enemies, the faithlessness of friends, and the physical and spiritual suffering that paid the price for our sins. And then we rejoice as the Suffering Servant rises from the dead to become the King Victorious.

Sharing the story of Christ, the Suffering Servant, is the mission of Martin Luther College—and the focus of our worship. Our campus family worships twice a day in the aptly named Chapel of the Christ (*pictured left*), a beautiful worship space built with gifts from our college’s supporters and friends, and dedicated in 2010.

We thought it appropriate to share with you images from our chapel as accompaniments to each day’s devotional thought.



If you’d like to learn more about Chapel of the Christ, go to mlc-wels.edu/chapel



If you’d like a virtual tour of the chapel, go to mlc-wels.edu/virtual-tour

CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant, is the heart of Lutheran theology—and the focus of worship at Martin Luther College's Chapel of the Christ. The dominant visual feature in the chapel is the crucified Christ suspended above the altar. When the somber repentance of Lent changes to the joy of Easter, the corpus of Christ is taken down, and the resurrected Christ is hung in front of the cross.



Palm Sunday

The Suffering Servant

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
(Matthew 21:9)

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:3a, 4)

If you look at the gospel accounts of Palm Sunday, the headings describe this day as the *Triumphal Entry*. Jesus’ march into Jerusalem was marked with a chorus of praise and adoration from the crowds that was fit for a king’s victory parade. They shouted praises to the Lord. “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” They cut down palm branches, waved them in the air, and placed them at the feet of the donkey Jesus rode on. They took off their cloaks and lined the road with them. Jesus was recognized as the true King that he was—the King of all creation.

But even in the midst of this triumphal entry, the shadow of the cross was looming for this King, who was also the Suffering Servant. Some wondered, “Who is this?” (*Matthew 21:10*) Even his disciples did not understand all that was happening (*John 12:16*). Still worse, Jesus’ enemies rebuked him, “Tell your disciples to be quiet!” They hated how the crowds adored him, while they plotted to kill him.

Even on Palm Sunday, the words of the prophet Isaiah rang true. “He was despised and rejected by mankind.” Jesus, the one who knew where a donkey would be and what the owners of the donkey would say before his disciples went to get it, also knew the suffering that was before him. And he didn’t back away. Because that’s what a king, a true king, does for his people. He doesn’t back away from doing what needs to be done to keep them safe, to bring them peace and salvation.

This Holy Week, as the shadow of Jesus’ cross looms, remember why Jesus rode into Jerusalem. “He took up our pain and bore our suffering.” Jesus went there for you. Jesus bore the punishment for your sin. He became sin for you (*2 Corinthians 5:21*), so that you could be called a child of God and an heir of heaven.

Praise the King—because he was willing to be a Suffering Servant.

**Dear Jesus, thank you for humbling yourself to be a Suffering Servant for us.
Lead us to hail you as the true King in all we do. Amen.**

Rev. Nicolas Schmoller serves Martin Luther College as a professor of theology and Greek.



CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST

Though the disciples all abandoned Jesus in the Garden, they became bold witnesses for him after the Resurrection. Matthew and John wrote two of the four biblical gospels. They and the other two evangelists, Mark and Luke, are represented on the four corners of the cross: the angel for St. Matthew, the lion for St. Mark, the ox for St. Luke, and the eagle for St. John.



They Forsake Him

Monday

The men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. . . . Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. (Matthew 26:50, 56)

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. (Isaiah 53:3)

Are we in an epidemic of loneliness? Recent surveys reveal that about three in ten Americans feel lonely at least once a day. The rate is only slightly better for practicing Christians.

What is going on here? Pandemic. Social media. Fractured families. People are longing for connection, understanding, and fellowship.

What about you? Loneliness can make you feel like no one understands; no one has your back.

Jesus understands loneliness. “All the disciples deserted him and fled.”

These same disciples, prompted by Peter, promised in the Upper Room, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” Once they realized that Jesus was not going to fight his arrest, that the crowds that cheered for him on Palm Sunday were not going to intervene for him, they fled. Not even the Father would intervene to stop the innocent Son of God’s suffering.

And so Jesus was alone. That aloneness pains us when we hear Jesus say on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” We often forget the brutal suffering he endured without even a look of compassion from a friend, without even a nod of understanding from a faithful follower. The looks he saw contained anger, hatred, violence, and murder.

Heartbreaking, isn’t it, friends? Because Jesus suffered for sinners. He suffered for the proud disciples who abandoned him. He suffered for proud disciples, like us, who still struggle to admit we know him or need him.

Good news. The pain of loneliness could not keep Jesus from going to the cross to suffer the pain of hell for your sins. His suffering and death is your peace with God, today and forever.

Forgiven child of God, this Lenten season, take some time to be alone with your Savior in prayer. Confess your foolish pride. Confess your longing for fellowship with him. Rejoice in his eternal presence in Word and sacrament. Then go out and gather with a body of believers, family, friends, even fellow Christians you hardly know. Praise your Savior together. Treat them as your dearest friends in Christ.

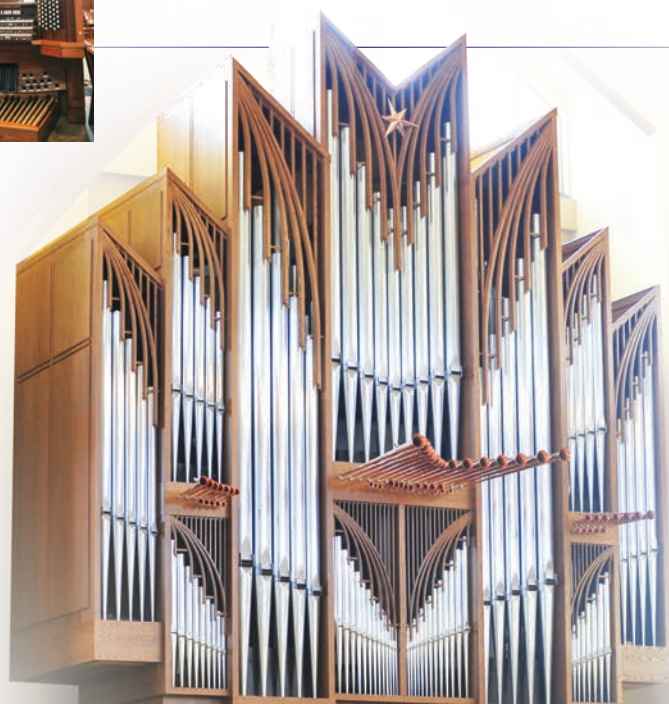
Lord Jesus, you were willing to be deserted, to be brutally mistreated, and to die on the cross. Keep us always faithful to you, that we may receive forgiveness and eternal life. Amen.

Rev. Dr. John Boeder serves Martin Luther College as campus pastor and professor of theology.



CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST

By the power of the Spirit, the Peter who denied his Lord became an influential preacher and leader of the early church. Only two months after this fateful night, Peter preached the Pentecost sermon that brought 3,000 people into the new church. Just as those first believers met regularly to pray and praise their Savior, so the campus family of MLC joins in worship every day. Our praises are often supported by the powerful tones of a Schantz pipe organ built specifically for our chapel.



Peter Denies Him

After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.” Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” (Matthew 26:73-74)

***Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised,
and we held him in low esteem. (Isaiah 53:3)***

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” Paul’s warning to the Christians in Corinth is a Spirit-inspired caution we all need to hear. Peter’s denial is a commentary on that verse.

You know what he claimed: “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” Peter could handle the heat. So he thought. Yet the instinct for self-preservation—for saving face—is strong. So he denied his Lord. And afterwards: “But it was just a quick reaction—unthinking, careless!” No, there is no excuse.

Life’s an ongoing struggle against sin. “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God” . . . but I desperately want to fit in and talk like everyone else. “You shall not commit adultery” . . . but I have intense physical desires. “You shall not cover” . . . but I crave what the world offers. At its core, sin is denial. It is denial and defiance against God, whose will is good and holy.

To ponder the Passion History of Jesus Christ is to consider the depth of what it means to be human—in nearly every sense of that phrase. There is human depravity: what humans are capable of doing. There is human drama: how humans deal with the difficulties of life. Then there is human sorrow: the broken-heartedness of strained relationships. And there is human suffering: palpable pain and anguish.

Jesus, God from eternity, became a human to live among humans. He was sinless, yet he felt the sting of sin deeply. Even though he knew what Peter was about to do, it still hurt. Peter was a dear friend! “I don’t know the man” was crass and cutting.

But Jesus, the Suffering Servant, turned his gaze. That look. Disappointment—yes. Love—absolutely! As if to say, “Soon you will understand why all of this is happening.”

Later, the resurrected Jesus asked: “Simon [Peter], son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord, you know.” Peter was forgiven and restored. And by Jesus’ death, so are we.

Dearest Jesus, we are so very conscious of our own sin and shame. Thank you for enduring our punishment. 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 theology and history.



CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST

On the lintel above the front door of the chapel are the words *Solus Christus*: “through Christ alone.” It is through Christ, the Suffering Servant, alone that we are forgiven and saved. On the other three sides of the chapel, the other chief principles of the Reformation are proclaimed: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, and *Sola Fide*: by Scripture alone, by grace alone, and by faith alone.



They Flog Him

Wednesday

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. (John 19:1)

I offered my back to those who beat me. (Isaiah 50:6)

***The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.
(Isaiah 53:5)***

All four New Testament gospels tell us about the punishment—the flogging—that Pilate ordered for Jesus. John, however, gives the more detailed account, not about the physical flogging itself, but about Pilate’s reasoning and purpose in having Jesus flogged.

Pilate held audience with Jesus, he spoke with Jesus and questioned him, and he came away believing that the charges against Jesus were baseless. He wanted to release Jesus, but the crowds shouted “No! Crucify him!” He offered the crowds a choice between releasing Jesus or Barabbas, a known criminal who had healed nobody, fed nobody, and shared God’s wisdom with nobody. But the crowds shouted, “Give us Barabbas!” It’s at this point that our text reads, “Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.”

The question is, Why? Why did Pilate have his soldiers whip Jesus and tear up his flesh? Why fashion a crown of thorns and push those spikes into Jesus’ skull? Why mock Jesus by draping a robe of royal purple over his bleeding shoulders? Why bring Jesus back to Pilate in this wounded and awful condition?

Clearly, Pilate wanted to make a spectacle of Jesus—not a spectacle of derision, but a spectacle of pity. Pilate brought Jesus before the Jews one more time—now beaten, bloodied and humiliated—because he wanted the Jews to feel sorry for Jesus. He wanted the Jews to wring their hands in pity and cry out, “Oh, poor Jesus . . . please release him!” As you know, this was not the response of the crowds.

It cannot be our response to Jesus’ suffering either. Should we pity Jesus as he suffers for our sins? Should we feel sorry for him as he shoulders the curse of sin? Should we look at the Suffering Servant God sent to accomplish our redemption and say, “Oh, poor Jesus!”?

No, our response to Jesus’ suffering is horror, because we see with clarity God’s holy, powerful hatred against sin and sinners like us. At the same time, our response to Jesus’ suffering is also joy, because we see with clarity God’s gracious, powerful love for sinners like us. The realities of law and gospel, sin and grace, punishment and pardon, death and life—they become crystal-clear for us in Jesus’ vicarious suffering and death as our Savior. So, do we pity Jesus in his suffering? No, we praise him.

I don’t pity you, Jesus, but praise you for your mercy, grace, and power as you gave your life for my salvation. Amen.

Rev. Jeffrey Schone serves Martin Luther College as vice president for student life.



CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST

During the season of Lent, the worshipers in Chapel of the Christ see another symbol of the Suffering Servant. The doors of the altarpiece are adorned with a large wooden mosaic of the crown of thorns. In the other seasons of the church year, the doors are opened to display a trio of paintings—a triptych—that portrays Jesus as Teacher. Topping the altarpiece are Jesus' words about himself: "I am the way and the truth and the life."



Mundy Thursday

They Mock Him

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. (Matthew 27:28-30)

I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. (Isaiah 50:6)

He was oppressed and afflicted . . . he was led like a lamb to the slaughter . . . he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

When I was in fifth grade, one of the older boys was standing over me with his foot on my chest, holding me down. I don't remember why I was down there or what happened next. I just remember the bully saying, "And stay down!" Actually, I remember one more thing. My anger. My hatred. How I just wanted to lash out at him and make him hurt the way he hurt me.

Those feelings swell in me every time I read about how the guards bullied Jesus, spitting on him and striking him on his head again and again, driving a thorny crown into his head, inevitably piercing his brow. And there, that Good Friday blood maybe started to flow for the first time. Why? Why would God subject his Son to this mob of bullies?

The secret lies in the way Jesus responded to those thuggish soldiers and the way we respond to the thugs in our lives. All I could feel was anger and hatred. But Jesus? Centuries earlier, God predicted how his Son would respond: "He was oppressed and afflicted . . . he was led like a lamb to the slaughter . . . he did not open his mouth" (*Isaiah 53:7*). Instead of responding with hatred, he responded with quiet, loving determination. Because when he looked at the guards, he didn't see thugs. He saw his lost children separated from him *because* of their hatred and anger, children he loved so much the very blood they shed he would use to save them.

And so again our Savior empathizes with our weaknesses, tempted in every way as we are, yet not sinning (*Hebrews 4:15*). And this love that forgives our sins also transforms our hearts. For every victim of a bully, for every fifth-grader with a foot on his chest, for every person oppressed, this is for you. See your Savior who knows that pain, yet transforms it into hope that pierces the darkness, hope for those precious in his sight.

Dear Jesus, thank you for responding to the sin and evil of this world with perfect love. Kindle in me a heart that responds as you do. Amen.

Rev. Luke Thompson serves Martin Luther College as a professor of theology and history.



CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST

In the center of the altar is a wood mosaic of a lamb, a symbol of our Suffering Servant who “was led like a lamb to the slaughter” (*Isaiah 53:7*). It’s framed by an almond-shaped mandorla made of South American bloodwood. The two intersecting circles that form the mandorla represent the human and divine natures of Christ. Around the outside of the mandorla is the word “Finished” in Greek, Latin, German, and English, all of which are taught at MLC.



Good Friday

They Crucify Him

Carrying his own cross, [Jesus] went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. (John 19:17-18)

But he was pierced for our transgressions . . . and was numbered with the transgressors.
(Isaiah 53:5, 12)

We cannot know whether Jesus' executioners gave much thought to planting his cross between the crosses of two robbers on Good Friday. But right in the middle was just the right spot. Even if it was just one more humiliation on that horrible, blessed day—demotion to status as a common criminal or an ironic place of honor, more mocking homage to a pretend king, just more cruel humor added to the slow, public torture—Jesus would die where he belonged, among sinners.

Not that Pontius Pilate's verdict had been right. Roman justice had failed utterly. On that cross hung a sinless man who had never done anything wrong, let alone anything criminal.

Yet Jesus was where he belonged, exactly where seven centuries earlier Isaiah had prophesied he would be: "pierced for our transgressions" and "numbered with the transgressors." Decades beyond the place of the Skull, the apostle Paul wrote that God had "made him who had no sin to be sin for us." The sinless God-man became sin itself. Appalling human injustice would bring divine justice. Jesus would be punished for all humanity's sins, so that—Paul's words again—"in him we might become the righteousness of God." Our sins, our guilt—yours and mine—for Jesus' perfect righteousness. God was making his great exchange.

How that must have hurt both Father and Son. As darkness swallowed a midday sun, God put awful distance, infinite separation, between himself and Jesus. He withdrew his love. As he did, Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That's hell distilled into a question.

Its answer is at the cross in the middle. Why? Law. Because God punishes sin and sinners with hell, that total separation, and Jesus had become sin itself, all sin of all people of all time. Why? Love. Because God so loved the world that he sent his Son to that cross. Because it wasn't the soldiers' nails that kept Jesus pinned to that tree. It was his love for you.

On Good Friday we see Jesus, our Savior, alongside sinners, on that cross in the middle. We see him right where we needed him to be.

Dear Jesus, thank you for giving yourself to be "numbered with the transgressors" so that I, redeemed and forgiven, can be numbered with the children of God. Amen.

Rev. Daniel Balge serves Martin Luther College as a professor of Greek and German.



CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST

The forgiveness of our sins won by the Suffering Servant is offered and given through the means of grace—the gospel in Word and sacrament. In the chapel, the Word is preached from the ambo (lectern/pulpit). Holy Communion is celebrated at the altar. And the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is administered at the font. The font lies at the entrance to the chapel to symbolize that baptism is how we enter God's church. It's octagonal (as is the chapel itself) because the number 8 represents resurrection and eternity.



Holy Saturday

He Forgives Them All

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

[He] made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)

A popular Christian writer accepted an invitation to dinner at the home of a new acquaintance. He found himself disarmed by the boy with Down syndrome who met him at his car, the sweet-natured child who took him by the hand and led him inside. As they sat side by side at the cozy table, the man turned suddenly at the sound of a crash in the kitchen, not realizing that the boy was leaning in for a hug. His elbow caught the child square in the mouth.

The boy howled in pain. Not anger. Just pain. Then an astonishing thing. With tears in his eyes and blood on his teeth, he crawled right up into the man's lap and kissed him full on the mouth. At forgiveness so open-hearted, so sudden, and so free, the man was, in a word, undone.

Why? One reason. The boy was an "imitator of God" (*Ephesians 5:1*).

We can only imagine the things the Roman centurion had heard at the crucifixions over which he had presided: pathetic begging and whimpering, screams of rage and profanity.

But this? With back flayed and arms pulled out of joint, with punctured brow, with pierced hands and feet, yes, with tears in his eyes and blood on his teeth, humanity's lone innocent cried to the sky, "Father, forgive them!"

"Surely, this was the Son of God!" (*Matthew 27:54*)

Yesterday was Good Friday. With eyes of faith, we saw our Savior die the death we owe. But we lit a candle in hope, like lighting a fuse three days long.

Tomorrow is Easter Sunday. We the baptized, the reconciled to God, will see our Jesus rise. We will release our pent-up "Alleluias" in a bright explosion of praise.

Today, on Holy Saturday, Father, disarm us and undo us by the heights of your Son's innocence and by the depths of his love. By your Spirit and by the words that reveal the Savior to his core, may we be led by the hand into warmest mystery—that the Mighty Maker of Worlds should be so "gentle and humble in heart" (*Matthew 11:29*), his forgiveness so open-hearted, so sudden, so free.

**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. (428:3)**

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



CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST

At Easter time in Chapel of the Christ, the large crucified Christ is removed from the suspended cross, and the risen Christ, Christ the King, takes its place. Now his hands, once nailed to the cross, are raised in blessing. And along with his blessing comes his command: "Go and make disciples of all nations." The students of Martin Luther College have dedicated their lives to that command—and to the Suffering Servant who gives it.



Easter Sunday

He Rises to Win the Victory

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.” (Matthew 28:5-6)

After he has suffered, he will see the light of life. (Isaiah 53:11)

Before moving to New Ulm, for 25 years I cared for my parents’ grave. I was the closest of six siblings to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Year after year—often on Easter—I’d visit the cemetery to put flowers on their grave.

And year after year, when I arrived at the grave, they were still dead. My doubting heart often whispered to me that it would always be that way.

Of course, death should be the end of hope. Such is the curse God laid upon fallen humanity: “Dust you are and to dust you will return” (*Genesis 3:19*). And that dusty grave leads to a fiery hell. So, as I made my visits to my parents’ silent grave, such thoughts often troubled me.

That helps me ponder the mindset of the women that first Easter morning as they approached Joseph’s tomb. The weight of the spices was nothing compared to the burden on their hearts.

But the scene at the tomb was neither somber nor silent. The tomb was empty, and the Lord’s angel proclaimed: “Do not be afraid, for I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said” (*Matthew 28:5-6*).

Just as Jesus had promised, his grave was empty. His resurrection proved that death had been swallowed up by his victory. That’s why his grave was empty!

And so too, one day, the graves of our loved ones who’ve fallen asleep in Jesus will be empty! And if we do not live until the Last Day, our graves will one day be empty—just as he has promised!

Twenty-three years ago, as my four brothers, my brother-in-law, and I carried my father’s casket to his grave, we weren’t silent. My father had planned that all who gathered around his and our mother’s grave would be singing as we carried his lifeless body. Among the words he planned for us to sing were these:

I am flesh and must return
Unto dust, whence I am taken;
But by faith I now discern
That from death I shall awaken
With my Savior to abide
In His glory, at His side. (TLH 206:4)

Such is the Easter certainty that comforts our hearts. Those who visit our graves will one day find them empty!

Risen Lord, fill us this day and every day with the confidence that because you live, we too shall live. You are risen, Lord. You are risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!

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



*All of us at Martin Luther College wish
you the richest of Easter blessings!
He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

A Gift to You from Martin Luther College