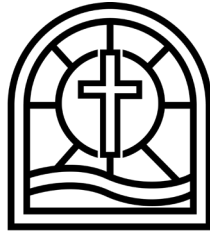


FAITH TO GO



40 DAYS - 40 REFLECTIONS ON SCRIPTURE



EDSD

COURAGEOUS LOVE

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THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF SAN DIEGO

Faith to Go in Lent

Preface

Lent is a sacred journey—forty days set apart for reflection, repentance, and renewal as we prepare our hearts and lives for the joyful mystery of Easter.

Each year, we are invited into this holy season, a time and space to slow down, look inward, and walk more intentionally with Christ. In the stillness of prayer, in the discipline of study, and in the practice of acts of love and justice, we come face to face with both our human limitations and God’s boundless grace.

In this Year of Discipleship within the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego, we are called to engage Lent as a transformative invitation. Lent gives us the chance to recommit to our desired path, to listen for God’s voice, and to be reshaped by the Spirit.

This book is a companion for that journey. Within these pages, you will find daily reflections written by faithful people from across our diocese—clergy and lay, young and old, from diverse communities and walks of life. Each voice offers a unique perspective, drawing from scripture, personal experience, and the depth of our shared Episcopal tradition.

As you move through these reflections day by day, we pray that you will find encouragement, challenge, and hope. Let them be a prompt to pause and pray, to examine your own walk of faith, and

to take a next step—however small—in the direction of deeper love and discipleship.

May this holy season draw you nearer to the heart of Christ. May you discover in these forty days not only the gravity of the cross, but also the radiant promise of resurrection. And may you find that God’s transforming love is not only waiting for us at Easter, but walking beside us every step of the way.

Let us journey together—faithfully, courageously, and with hearts open to renewal.

Charlette Preslar
EDSD Director of Formation
Faith to Go Co-host

Chris Tumilty
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Day 31: Wednesday, April 9

John 8:31-42

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham, yet you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one Father, God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God, and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.

Too bad we don’t have a short-cut for referring to words in our speech that take on a different meaning when they’re capitalized. For example, sometimes I refer to the-Church-with-a-big-C as opposed to the-church-with-a-little-c in my sermons. It’s just awkward having to use all those words when the idea is evident when we see it in print. The same thing goes for a word in our reading today, the word father. The Jews listening to Jesus were getting hung up on father-with-a-little-f, namely Abraham, while Jesus was referring to Father-with-a-big-F, God. Again, we see Jesus’ listeners trying to narrow down what Jesus is telling them and

completely missing the point. But Jesus turns it back on them. They're NOT following Abraham for Abraham didn't kill someone telling the truth. What they're doing is following their biological fathers. The listeners clarify what they meant; they have one Father, who is God. Jesus said, "OK then, God is the one who sent me, so if you really say God is your Father, you'd love me. This is God's doing, not mine."

This whole exchange is centered around the concept of truth, which has gotten bashed around lately. My truth might not be the same as your truth. On the one hand, I can see that. My experiences have been different from yours, and I see things through my own lens based on those experiences. An off-color joke might be cast off by one person, while another person is deeply offended. To function as a society, though, we must have some things that we all agree are true. For Christians, we might argue about the "right" way to do liturgy until we're blue in the face, but we can all agree that Jesus is the Son of God, and he came to teach us the truth about the Good News of God's love. Once we know this truth in our souls, we experience true freedom. Now that's something that deserves a capital F.



Kirby was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles in 2009 and began serving at St. David's in August 2023. A former counterintelligence officer in the U.S. Army, he lived in Japan and Germany before earning an MBA from the University of San Diego. He then spent 15 years in banking and 15 years in the nonprofit sector. In 2018, he was called to the Diocese of San

Diego as Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer. Reflecting on his call to ordained ministry, which began in 1999, Kirby said, "The more I opened my eyes, ears, and heart, the more I became aware of God's presence in my life. Each step I took felt as though it was the right step; all I can do now is put one foot in front of the other and trust in the God who made me."

Day 32: Thursday, April 10

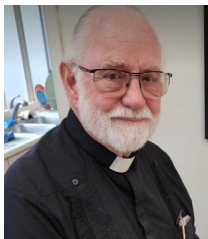
John 8:51-59

Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets, yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

When I was assigned this scripture for this Lent’s Faith To Go, it came with an apology of sorts, “this is definitely (one of) the more challenging readings for a reflection”. The primary message that broke through in this scripture passage was that of the threat to stone Jesus. After a bit of perusing, it became clear that Jesus was regularly faced by enemies and threatened on a number of occasions during his brief ministry. The first was early in Luke (4:16-30) when Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah in his hometown of Nazareth and then told his fellow synagogue worshipers that, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” After a few more pronouncements, and no healings offered, they threatened to throw him off a cliff. The Pharisees plotted to destroy him after he healed on the Sabbath. Same, after he raised Lazarus from death. Again, after he purged the Temple of money-changers and cheating merchants. And in John 8:48-59, Jesus called himself by God’s name in saying, “Before Abraham was, I AM, and he was again threatened by stoning. There are eight distinct times that we hear of imminent threats to Jesus physical well-being.

During the Sermon on the Mount, in the Beatitudes, Jesus says, “Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.” (Luke 6:22) In Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer” in John’s 15th chapter, Jesus, on his last night with them, tells his disciples “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first..... if they persecuted me they will persecute you.” It seems like we need to know that the path following Christ is not an easy one. Doing the Christian, caring, loving things does not always meet with a loving response. In her poem, “Do It Anyway”, Mother Teresa (look it up on the internet) reminds us of this and encourages us to do the loving things, even in the face of reprisals, threats and challenges.

Is there anything more difficult than to meet threats with compassion and love when our first reaction is that of flight, fight or fantasy? Jesus never “puts up his dukes”, he always loves anyway. And that is what we must strive to do!



Leland was born and raised in Yuma, Az and in St. Paul’s Episcopal Church there.

Married to Sheila in 1969, with whom he helped raise four children. Serving churches in the Dioceses of Arizona Los Angeles and San Diego, since his ordination in 1973, he retired in 2008, yet has been serving as Rector of St. John’s, Fallbrook since 2011. He enjoys time with his family and dog, reading, baffling magical ephemera and cruising.²

Day 33: Friday, April 11

John 10:31-42

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” The Jews answered, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human, are making yourself God.” Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law,[a] ‘I said, you are gods’? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled— can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand[b] that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. 41 Many came to him, and they were saying, “John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” And many believed in him there.

My 11-year-old son Alex and I were visiting my dad and stepmom in Madison, Wisconsin, in mid-February and we sat in the sunroom on a cold morning as the wind outside whipped the fresh snow. I was stumped on this Gospel reading and so I read it aloud to Dad and Alex, then handed my laptop to Dad, a visual learner like myself, so he could see the words we were trying to understand.

We began to talk through it. What it made us think about. What we didn’t quite understand. Alex liked how Jesus slipped through their clutches. We talked about how the people wanted to stone Jesus not for the miracles he had performed, but because of what he had said. Why were they so hung up on Jesus’s words and not his actions? Then a line from a movie popped into my head and I blurted it out to make my dad laugh: You can’t

handle the truth!

Remember that line from Jack Nicholson's character in *A Few Good Men*? It came out as a joke, but once I said it, we both knew I was onto something. The people couldn't handle the truth of who Jesus was. They were scared, they were angry, they were totally flipped out. If Jesus really was the Son of God, that just turned everything they knew upside down. They couldn't handle the truth. So, they attacked it.

Have you ever resisted the truth? Raged against it, even? What was driving it? Fear, shame, anger, grief? When I resisted the truth, I looked for evidence to counter it, or I questioned the messenger.

Our country at this moment is wrestling with truths. Who we are, what we value, who we want to be. I know that nothing ever will change, within our own hearts, our relationships, our community, and country, unless we have the courage to accept what we resist.



Elizabeth Fitzsimons is CEO of Episcopal Community Services, and a Commissioner on the City of San Diego's Human Relations Commission. Elizabeth is a member of St. Paul's Cathedral where she volunteers as a lector. She lives with her husband and three children in the Del Cerro neighborhood of San Diego.

Day 34: Saturday, April 12

John 11:45-53

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

When I was a high school Social Studies teacher, I taught about the Constitution's Establishment Clause, what we call "separation of church and state."

This passage reminds me that the Gospel—"the good news of the kingdom of God"—is actually political. We're uncomfortable seeing it that way. We don't like mixing religion and politics. But in today's readings there are councils, nations, kingdoms, and the one political superpower of their time: Rome.

Why do the local leaders see Jesus as a threat? Jesus was not a military conqueror, or powerfully wealthy, or appointed by Caesar to rule. He's a homeless, wandering teacher. They're afraid because Jesus' message and the good things he is doing are signs pointing to a new nation. They are afraid of the kingdom, power, and glory of Rome. Caesar might hear about it and destroy them all! But Jesus teaches that the kingdom, the power, and the glory are God's, now and forever. Crucifixion was not the

way they killed religious heretics. Crucifixion was a political assassination!

The Collect for today prays for people preparing for baptism. The Apostle Paul calls us citizens of heaven and resident aliens in this world. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, and baptism is how we become citizens of his kingdom. We do not have the same struggles for power or wealth, the same laws, the same borders of the United States or any other nation. Our fellow citizens are residents of every nation on earth, and our law is love—even loving our enemies! Loving enemies might get in the way of how the nations of this world want us to treat others.

Are the politicians, political parties, military rulers, and economic powerhouses of this world afraid of me like they were afraid of Jesus? If not, my life might be a sign pointing to their power and glory instead of the power and glory of God.



Joey Aszterbaum is a music minister for St. Brigid's in Oceanside and excited about what the Holy Spirit is doing in his city. Joey has worked as a rock musician, recording artist, author, social services worker, and high school teacher. He's passionate about social and economic justice, theology, and helping build communities of care. He and his wife Keisha love taking visitors downtown for coffee and a walk on the pier. He might be a little obsessed with movies and sloths.

Day 35: Monday, April 14

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

In the summer of my senior year of high school, I worked at a Boy Scout summer camp, a place bustling with the activity and energy of young scouts learning new skills and making memories. The days were long, starting before sunrise and often stretching late into the evening, with tasks ranging from leading merit badge classes to doing the dishes to ensure the campers had a fun and safe experience. Reading this verse reminded me of these experiences at camp, particularly Mary's act of anointing Jesus.

At camp, there were moments when the work was thankless or overwhelming. Whether cleaning up after scouts after messy meals or scrubbing pots and pans in the kitchen. But just as Mary poured out her costly Nard without hesitation, I began to see each task as an

offering, no matter how mundane. Whether it was teaching a scout to tie a knot or encouraging them to finish a difficult hike, these small acts carried profound meaning to each individual I encountered—the same opportunities to serve with the same spirit of generosity and love that Mary showed.

There were also times when I felt the voice of Judas’ voice—wondering if my efforts mattered or if I should be doing something “more important.” But I found that God often revealed Himself in the small, quiet moments: in a scout’s smile after mastering a skill, in the camaraderie around the campfire, or in how my fellow staff members supported each other after a long hard day. These moments reminded me that what I was doing here really mattered, to me it seemed small but to each person I connected with, it meant the world.

This summer, I learned that service, like Mary’s act, doesn't have to be grand to be meaningful. When we fully commit to making the world a better place, even just a little at a time, we create space for God’s presence to shine. Today I carry that same lesson: to serve wholeheartedly, trust in the value of small acts, and remember that God is with us in every moment of devotion.



Andrew Marvin is a member of St. Dunstan’s Episcopal Church in San Carlos and serves on the EDSO Youth Leadership Council. At church, he leads media ministry, managing livestreams and sound, and also serves as an acolyte, youth group member, and musician (drums and cello). He represented the youth at the 2024 diocesan convention and participated in the summer trip to Comunidad de Luz in Tijuana. Andrew is passionate about growing in faith and leadership.

Day 36: Tuesday, April 15

John 12:20-36

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say: ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus said to them, “The light is in you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Upon reading the passage, the first phrase that caught my attention was “Now my soul is troubled.” That phrase could cover a myriad of issues in my world today. My concerns for the current state of our country, a few

snags in my health lately, or my upcoming retirement in June. But also, the phases immediately following, “And what should I say– ”Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.” combined with the previous phrase struck a chord. It reminded me of the situations in our lives where we are required to do or be where we would rather not be. Several years ago I had to walk into a room with approximately 50 high school students and tell them that their teacher and coach had been placed on hospice and he would not be getting better. I definitely didn’t want to be the person who brought this bad news to these young people, but at that moment, I was the only one who could.

While in this passage Jesus is speaking about his upcoming crucifixion, I found that there was much more information in the story than simply a prediction of death. The allusions of the grain of wheat and the light show that although Jesus will soon be leaving, greater things are coming as long as we believe. The voice from heaven showed that not everyone in the crowd was on the same path as the others. Some heard thunder while others heard the words illustrating the need to listen intentionally. I find it interesting at the end of the passage after everything was said and done, Jesus “departed and hid from them.” What an amazing way to remind us that at this point, Jesus was still human and needed to separate himself from the throng.



I have been a member of St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church in Palm Desert, Ca since I was a child. While I have participated in several ministries over the years, currently I serve as the Lead Verger, the chair of the Daily Office Team, and just started my studies to become a Deacon.

Day 37: Wednesday, April 16

John 13:21-32

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining close to his heart; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” Now no one knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival,” or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

My first reaction when I read this passage was to think of the times I have been betrayed, disappointed, used by others... and the feelings that result from that situation: anger, frustration, desire for revenge and more, which are not exactly something to be proud of as a Christian. But if I compare myself to what happened to Jesus, nothing that could have happened to me can compare to what Jesus did for me and for all of humanity. He gave us salvation and nothing he experienced being part of this world could make him change his mind. Jesus knew he would be betrayed, and worse yet, he knew who would betray him.

And what can we say about Judas? We cannot know his reasons, we can only guess: did he do it out of envy, because he thought he was better than

others, even better than Jesus? We know that Jesus chose Judas as an apostle, not to betray him, but to live a few years with the other disciples and learn what the life of a follower of Christ should be like.

Thinking about it, whenever we talk about betrayal we refer to Judas, to his lack of holiness despite the teachings of Jesus. But countless people do things against God that frankly distance us from the holiness that we should practice. However, if there is something to be thankful to Judas, it is that from that moment on, Jesus clearly explains to us that he has been glorified by God, and that the only thing we can do in our lives as Christians is to accept that salvation comes from Jesus Christ. Everything he did, he did so that we would accept his grace and declare him our Lord and Savior. Amen



My name is Carlos Garcia, and I am the Priest in Charge of St. Philip the Apostle, Lemon Grove.

Day 38: Thursday, April 17

John 13:1-17, 31-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the

Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The main theme is The Command to love one another through humble service.

Jesus washing his disciples' feet demonstrates that true leadership involves serving others, even those who may betray you; this passage emphasizes the importance of putting others first and acting with humility in the Christian community.

KEY POINTS ABOUT THIS PASSAGE

1. **ACT OF HUMILITY:** Jesus's act of washing the disciples' feet is a powerful symbol of humility and service.
2. **NEW COMMANDMENT:** Jesus gave a new commandment to love one another as he loved them.
3. **COMMUNITY BUILDING:** This act of service is meant to build unity and love within the Christian community.
4. **UNIVERSAL APPLICATION:** the call to serve is not limited to a select few but applies to all Christians.

Another reason for this is evident: it supplies the characteristic action of a faithful community.

Jesus said, "If you do what I have commanded you, then you will be blessed." Jesus set a profound example of servant leadership by washing his disciple's feet, an act typically reserved for the lowest servant. Through

Day 38: Thursday, April 17

John 13:1-17, 31-35

his humble action, Jesus teaches us that greatness in God's kingdom is found in serving others, no matter our position or title. I am encouraging the Diocese of San Diego and the whole Episcopal Church around the globe to put the service of others first through love and humility.

What made Jesus a true servant? Jesus was prepared to serve everyone, even the one who would ultimately betray him by giving himself sacrificially and with love in washing his disciples' feet, he did not diminish but rather enhanced his position and influence as a teacher.

Jesus's demonstration of love and servanthood lives on as a reminder to believers that nothing we could do for another person is beneath something Jesus would do. No matter what we feel we deserve from others, we can't bend too low in caring for them. Services don't demean one's dignity. Rather, as Jesus shows it defines it.



Rev'd Isaiah Dau, 26, is a South Sudanese Episcopal priest currently serving at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in San Diego. Born during the Sudanese civil war, he lost both his father and older brother to the conflict. Introduced to the Christian faith as an infant, he began serving the church at age 11 as a Sunday school leader. In 2014, he became a youth leader at St. Luke's in Alere Refugee Camp and was

later commissioned as an evangelist. Ordained as a deacon in 2019, he became the youngest priest in the history of South Sudan. Isaiah holds a Bachelor of Ministry from Jesus Seminary of the Himalayas in Nepal. He is married to Nyandeng Majak Akol, and they have a son, Michael. Since arriving in the U.S. in 2023, he has been grateful for the mentorship of Mother Laurel and Father Colin Mathewson at St. Luke's, San Diego.

FAITH TO GO



Day 39: Friday, April 18

John 18:1-19:42

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus replied, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he.[f] So if you are looking for me, let these people go.” This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.” Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold,

and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this

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on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” They shouted in reply, “Not this man but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a rebel.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak

to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against Caesar."

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover, and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross by himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth,[k] the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

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“They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, especially because that Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth, so that you also may continue to believe.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

On Good Friday, we commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus. And every year on this day of the liturgical calendar, we hear or read this Gospel passage from John. Jesus and his death at the hands of state and society are at the center of this Gospel. And, woven into this passage are the stories of many, many others.

There's Simon Peter, who really struggles in this reading. He lashes out in the garden as Jesus is arrested, and ends up cutting off the ear of Malchus, the high priests' slave. How many of us can relate to Simon Peter, letting our emotions, passions, defensiveness or protectiveness get the better of us, potentially causing hurt or harm in the process?

There's Malchus, who probably had the least amount of choice in being in the garden that day, and yet, from what we're told, at least, is the only one to lose a body part. How many of us have been Malchus at different points in our lives – collateral damage in a series of events caused by those with more power or privilege or authority?

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There's also Judas, and Pilate and Barabbas, three names we may be familiar with from remembering the crucifixion year after year.

There are the soldiers, who weave the crown of thorns for Jesus, dress him up and mock him. We don't get to know any of these soldiers' names, but, they did have names. What were their names, and why were their names given to them? What life circumstances led them to become soldiers? Did they like being soldiers? What led them to be the types of people who mocked Jesus? Was it societal conditioning, or a coping mechanism? Who were they outside of their duty as soldiers?

There are the many people in the crowd that demanded Jesus' crucifixion. Again, we don't get to hear their names, but I imagine the crowd was full of sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, children, parents, brothers and sisters, friends. People who probably had others they loved and cared for. People who had things in this world to live for and things in this world to lose. What did they see when they saw Jesus? What were they so afraid of that they would cry for his death?

There is also Jesus' mother, Mary, Jesus' aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, and the disciple whom Jesus loved. There's Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus.

There are so many different people intertwined in this story of Jesus' crucifixion. They all had different relationships to Jesus, and all had different roles to play in this story. They were all so different, and they also had several things in common:

They were all human beings.

They were all people beholden, in some way, to the same social and political systems of empire.

They were all, I believe, people who did their best trying to live in the conditions life gave them; in the narratives of who the world sometimes tells us we must be; in the shadow of what we can be taught to fear, or control, or dominate.

And.

These are all people loved by Jesus.

These are all people whom Jesus sought to liberate from the oppressive systems of sins making.

These are all people for whom Jesus died.

As followers of Jesus, each of our various calls to ministry center on Christ. And, just as woven into our ministry, particularly in the shadow of the crucifixion, is the need for us to seek each other's humanity. to connect with one another, just as Jesus connected his mother and the disciple whom he loved. To courageously step out of our comfort into just action like Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus.



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Day 40: Saturday, April 19

Matthew 27:57-66

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

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

Last year, we made the challenging decision to euthanize our dog, Jetta. My experience as a chaplain in the hospital with human death would, I thought, prepare me for the experience of sitting with Jetta when she died. It did not.

What I recall most about it was that as she was sedated, her tongue slipped just outside her lips, just as it did when she would lay on the floor on a hot summer day. As she died, it was her tongue peeking out of her mouth that made me grieve her the most. It made her look so... alive, but she was dead. The veterinary staff left us to sit with her for all the time we needed to process that disconnection; this weird, thin space that bridged life and death.

Holy Saturday is just such a thin space. It's not that hope is dead, but hope has no meaning without experience of the pain of loss. Amid that pain, hope does seem out of place—just like the image of Jetta's little tongue hanging out seemed incongruent with her death.

There are those who like to talk about Jesus' presence on Holy Saturday. For me, Holy Saturday is, instead, a time to sit with death, a time to sit with Jesus' absence. Just as Joseph and Mary and Mary Magdalene sat with Jesus' body in our text, we are invited to sit with Christ's death and remember what it feels like without hope.

I will say that, paradoxically, that Holy Saturday is also the time I start getting excited about the Great Vigil of Easter. It's hard to sit in the dark very long.

How has your experience of death and loss fed your faith? Your hope? I invite you to join me this Holy Saturday by lingering in the darkness just a little longer before welcoming the light.



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