



2020 Holy Week Devotions

West Hills Church - Omaha, Nebraska

LORD
i Want
to BE a
CHRISTIAN
in a my heart
LORD in a my heart i Want to BE
LIKE
JESUS
in a my
heart

Have you thought about what it means that God took human form? God never had physical form, yet He chose to take not just the form of a man, but of a baby! I recently held a two-hour old new-born baby girl! What a priceless moment! She was dependent, needy, and ever so beautiful and precious. Jesus willingly became those same things. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords couldn't feed himself, talk, or walk. What an amazing truth that we follow a God who humbled Himself.

Why did Jesus humble Himself when He had every right to be served as the Sovereign Lord? He loved us and He wanted to save us! That is why He emptied Himself of His divine nature to serve us and ransom us (Mark 10:45). That is why He was slaughtered on a bloody cross. That is why He didn't call down angels from heaven to save him (Matt 26:53). I want to implore you this Holy Week to ponder Jesus' sacrificial love. He wanted us to be part of His family and paid the ultimate price to redeem us!

You may know that I live in South Asia. I want to love and serve like Jesus as I live among my South Asian friends. To do this, I have to willingly choose to lay aside my native language, home culture, and many interests in this land! That is why I have spent well over a thousand hours trying to learn a new language here. I want to tell my friends about Jesus humbling Himself for their sake in their heart language!

What does it look like for us to be like Jesus and become a servant in the neighborhood God has placed us in? What 'perceived rights' are we holding onto that Jesus is asking us to surrender to Him, so His name will be glorified among all nations? Jesus radically loves us and when we experience this love, we have the same attitude as Christ Jesus! I pray that we serve and love like Jesus so that others meet Jesus living in us! We are incarnational witnesses because He is the **ONLY** hope of the world. May the nations experience this hope and love!

During this Holy Week Mary shows us how important it is to serve with not only actions, but also to share our treasures. Mary gave her whole self to Jesus as she wiped his feet, washed his feet with her hair, and used her precious perfume on his feet. Can you give your whole self to Jesus this week?

Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover to eat dinner in Lazarus' home. (John 12:1-4) During dinner Mary took an extremely expensive twelve-ounce jar of perfume and rubbed it on Jesus's feet. (v.3) She even wiped his feet with her hair. I think about my most important possessions and how difficult they would be to give up. Mary willingly and lavishly used her perfume to serve Jesus and also eagerly cared for him by rubbing his feet. We should all strive to be giving and humble like Mary.

While Mary was serving, Judas Iscariot tried to tell her that the expensive perfume should have been sold to raise money for the poor (vs. 5-6). Have you ever been told you are serving the Lord in the wrong way? I can imagine it would be difficult to hear. Jesus rebuked Judas and stood up for Mary. Jesus knew Judas' intentions were not holy and Mary was serving Jesus with her mind, body and actions. It is a good reminder to stay focused on serving Jesus when others try and distract us with worldly intentions.

Throughout this week we should try and serve Jesus humbly and whole heartedly with our possessions and actions to others. We are entering a strange and new time in our lives and we will have so many extra opportunities to help our neighbors and those around us as our routines have been altered. Let's remember to give, serve and love like Mary and Jesus have so beautifully illustrated.

You imagine going to the beach. You can almost feel the warmth of the sun on your skin, the smell of the ocean, the taste of the salty air, and the feeling of the sand on your feet. You just think of how amazing the beach will be! Only now there is one more vital piece of information: your death. It's inevitable. You aren't able to tell others, at least not the way you would like to. So, would you still go? Would you let this knowledge deter you?

Jesus knew his death was coming.

At this time, everyone was celebrating Lazarus' rising from death. The crowds were joyous, waving palm branches – indicating triumph and victory. During these festivities, some Greeks wanted to see Jesus. Knowing that these men were a sign that the cross was near, Jesus continued to preach.

He explained how a stalk of wheat is “one seed” that becomes many, spreading where the wind takes them. Like the wind, God sends us where we are needed. Just as the seeds are genetically engineered to grow into more wheat, we are also changed by the Holy Spirit; it is in our DNA!! Without Him we are incomplete. We are created to spread God's love! Sadly, those that don't know this do not serve and do not grow. Jesus said **“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”** (v.26)

Even though Jesus knew His time was near, He never gave up on us. He knew that every moment was a teachable moment. He continued to show love for us and saved us by His own death.

As Jesus was, let us be seeds that shower God's love to those around us. Let us give joy, compassion, and mercy that our God gives us even when we don't deserve it. Let our travels, whether across the street or across country, be directed by God.

Yes, Lord, plant me where you want me. Let me bloom in your light as I spread your love and word.

Servant leadership is a buzz word used all the time in American churches, but how often do we see true leaders taking on the role of a servant? Servant leadership is a wonderful term and tickles the ears of many churchgoers, but there is a problem. Nobody seems to talk about how hard it is to be a servant leader. Leading by serving is counter-cultural and goes against our human instinct. Personally, I have to continually realign my thoughts in prayer to behave in this way. It doesn't come naturally to me. It didn't come naturally to Peter in John 13:8 either.

In our passage of scripture today, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. Feet, in the ancient world, were disgusting. During the time of Jesus, people wore sandals, not closed-toe shoes. Anything — dust, dirt, and excrement on the roads — could get on the feet of travelers. When Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He wasn't washing clean feet. He was washing incredibly dirty feet. This task was usually reserved for a lowly servant or even a slave.

Peter clearly didn't understand what Jesus was trying to do and teach at first. Peter said to Jesus, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus responded with something that shocked Peter. Jesus said, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." In this passage Peter realizes that being a follower of Jesus means not only being a servant of Christ, but letting Christ be a servant to you. It's mutual servitude and mutual majesty. All are slaves and all are kings. Jesus is showing Peter true servant leadership.

In John 13:10, Jesus takes this earthly example of cleanliness and applies it spiritually to His disciples. It's a good idea to be clean physically, but we must be clean spiritually as well. This passage ends with a gesture by Jesus to Judas, foreshadowing his betrayal, setting the stage for the passion narrative.

During Holy Week, may we remember three things: First, servant leadership isn't always easy, but our beautiful Savior has shown us how to do it. Second, let us remember that Jesus serves us, just as we serve Him. God took on flesh in the person of Jesus to show us humility, grace, and mercy. Third, we must respond to this good news with gratitude and love for God, for our neighbor, and even for our enemies.



For She Loved Much created by Gena Deeds-Page



Baptized in the Roman Catholic church shortly after I was born before Christmas in 1958, I made my first communion in the second grade. It's a moment that marks my life in many ways. My mom had died a few months earlier leaving seven children with my dad, ages nine to fifteen months. I was seven. On such an important occasion in the life of a young Catholic girl, I was enveloped in the love of the Servants of Mary, teachers at Christ the King School. Three wonderful sisters took me to get my hair done, followed by lunch. They hustled me out of Mass later that evening as the gravity of approaching the altar to receive the body of Christ caused me to get nauseous. Those same three women brought me back to the rail after Mass was over so I could receive communion for the first time. One of those nuns was my first grade teacher, Sr. Mary Amy, with whom I have since become reacquainted through my blog. Joyce Rupp is quite a leader for those seeking a deeper walk of faith. The first word I remember learning from her was SURPRISE. It was a lesson that stuck with me, and in our correspondence, she said she remembered it, too.

I tell you that story because it was a marker in my life. Surprise. Communion. Remember. And I think those three things are a big part of this passage that I am reflecting on during this holy week of Lent.

Surprise: on the night before his death, Jesus invites us to the table. You and me. Saints and sinners. The beloved. The betrayer. All are welcome.

Communion: We are gathered in one body to share the broken body and the cup of blood spilled for our salvation and the salvation of the world. We share communion together, in community. The body gathered and soon to be scattered, but in this moment of communion, we are community.

Remember: In this moment of communion and surprise, there is a new commandment. He has shown us how to love, now we must love each other in the same way.

Let us share the surprise of love poured into us at the communion table so that the love of Jesus Christ is remembered and proclaimed this week and all weeks. Let this be what marks us as disciples.

This passage is one of several passages in Isaiah that refer to a mysterious Suffering Servant. These passages are perplexing. Scholars have generated theories as to the identity of the one who suffers. From the vantage point of the New Testament, it seems clear that Jesus is the one whom Isaiah prophesied to the people of Israel.

Tender. Unattractive. Undesirable. Despised. Rejected. Familiar with pain. Held in low esteem. This is not a description of a hero, a great ruler, a vanquishing king, or a triumphant Messiah. We are not talking Time magazine's "Person of the Year." Although Jesus enjoyed a brief period of popularity, he died an ignominious death.

Isaiah points to what this man of suffering would do for God's people in the future. He would be punished, stricken and afflicted by God. Pierced and crushed for our sins. He would take up our pain and bare our sufferings. How can this be? What is God doing and why?

Somehow this one who would be wounded, oppressed, and led like a lamb to the slaughter would bring us peace and healing. We are the ones who go astray and turn to our own way, yet we do not receive the punishment that is due to us. God lays our iniquity upon Jesus.

And Jesus is silent. Does not say a word. Does not open his mouth.

In contrast to Jesus' silence, we live in a word-filled world. A world of complaints. Protests. Lists of Demands. Strikes. Everyone has something to say it seems. Tweets. Texts. Talk shows. Many of the words are loud. Many are angry. Inflammatory. Indignant. Polarizing. Self-proclaiming. Boastful. Arrogant. Self-righteous. Not much humility.

Jesus does not open his mouth. Jesus' silence stands in stark contrast to the torrent of words that floods the airways and print media in our culture. Jesus did not have a publicist or a spokesperson or a press secretary. He did not write an op-ed piece for the *Jerusalem Times*. He did not have a spin doctor to protect his public image.

I don't think Christians are called to stand silent before the injustice we see in the world. We are called to speak and act on behalf of the vulnerable, the disenfranchised and the suffering. However, when we are unjustly accused, mistreated or rejected, we have the example of Christ to guide us in what to do with our mouths.

Thinking through what was happening during Jesus' day, one ponders the thought-process of the Jews with their "religious laws" requiring the burying of a dead person before sundown (Deut. 21:23). Burying the dead was a crucial and pious duty in Judaism and an important act of love. Therefore, Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of Jesus, asked Herod Agrippa for Jesus' body for burial. Joseph interceded for Jesus' body despite the fear of death that was prevalent among all the disciples.

Has anyone ever interceded for you? Were there any reasons for that person or others to come between you and another party to reconcile differences? Joseph interceded between Herod and Jewish leaders who wanted to dump Jesus' body in a common grave. Joseph's request was an act of courage especially since he was not a family member. He showed more courage than any other disciple.

Think of the person or people who have interceded for you and came to your aid or defense because they love you and want the best for you. Also think of what is going through Joseph's mind as he asks Herod for Jesus' body. The fear of repercussions and possible death. Yet he had the faith and courage to intercede for Jesus in a difficult period of time.

Our times are difficult now with the present religious and political factions and differences. Where can we find our faith and our friends with such vast differences in our religious lives? What will God do to get our lives back in sync with His will so we will worship Him and not our distractions? How can we help others with their walk with Christ when we have so many distractions and so many different religions that want our attention?

During Holy Week help others with their faith to try to be more immersed in God's word and help us be more in line with His love for us no matter where we are in our walk with Christ. Help us love Him more like He loves us: unconditionally.

I imagine they were in shock. The week had started out so well, with a triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the cries of, "Hosanna!" Then Jesus told them so many things; they were still trying to process them. Over dinner he said that one of them would betray him and another would deny him. Then, he was arrested. Mary, Peter and the rest agonized during the long night of the trial only to see Jesus condemned and crucified. They were filled with regret, fear, grief and disappointment. There was a hasty burial and another sleepless night. No one talked much; there were no words. They waited out the Passover. Then Mary, who had probably slept little, went to do the only thing she could think to do. She would go to be near Jesus, to sit by the tomb.

I imagine she was shocked upon arriving to see that the stone covering the mouth of the tomb had been removed. It had taken several strong men to put the stone in place after they laid Jesus' lifeless body inside. Thieves! Someone had moved the stone and taken his body away! She needed to tell the others.

I imagine they were shocked when they heard a breathless Mary exclaim what she had seen. I imagine Peter thought, "How dare they? Was the Lord not to be left a shred of dignity? They took his life; can't they leave us alone? Where's my sword when I need it!" I imagine the other disciple, who was less impulsive than Peter and more contemplative, thought, "Could this be what Jesus was trying to tell us? He said so many things... He said he had overcome the world. But how could that be?"

Then, they stood together, in the cold, empty tomb. Burial cloths lay intact as if the body they had contained had simply evaporated. I imagine they were shocked. No one had taken the body of Jesus; it was just gone! And the thoughtful disciple believed. Resurrection!



West Hills Church Worship Online

Palm Sunday Worship - April 5

Good Friday Worship - April 10

Our service includes a moving interpretation of the Passion of Jesus with an artist painting live, along with vocal and instrumental music, and the reading of the Passion narrative account from the gospel of Matthew. This service will last around 45 minutes.

Easter Worship - April 12

Hallelujah, He has Risen! Join us as we celebrate the glory of our risen King!

Please join us online at either of these two links to view our Holy Week worship services. The prerecorded services will be available as the date shown above to watch at your convenience. To experience all of our video messages and worship services, please visit our Vimeo page anytime by going to the West Hills Church websites below.

WHC website: **whcomaha.org/worship-online**

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