

Practicing Jesus' Seven Last Words



A Devotional for Lent



Introduction

What we call “the seven last words” of Jesus are based on the final seven phrases drawn from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that record what Jesus said before his death. This devotional reflects on the seven last words of Jesus through devotional and practical material that groups, families and individuals can embody during each week. Often used in worship services or contemplative disciplines during Lent, the words remind us of Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent. It is the 40 days (excluding Sundays) leading up to Easter—a time when we recognize the many ways we have strayed from God and find ways to practice faith that lean in to God. Some people give up something they enjoy or enjoy doing for the 40 days of Lent, to instead focus that time, energy or money on God. Some people may give up screentime to make time for spiritual discipline or practice. Other people take up a practice during Lent, such as reading the Bible every day, spending time in prayer daily or practicing a devotional. Whatever you decide to do during Lent, may it help reorient your life toward the God we know and worship, as the Creator, Redeemer and Spirit.

Unlike the season of Advent that leads to Christmas, which tends to evoke positive feelings of warmth (like hope, peace, joy, and love), Lent tends to cover a broad spectrum of human emotions. Lent is also a longer season and helps us prepare our hearts and minds for the resurrection of Christ at Easter. But Easter does not happen without first walking through a series of harrowing events: the torment and crucifixion of Jesus. This devotional covers diverse topics, including forgiveness, relationships, suffering, need, fulfillment, surrender, humility, grief, and resurrection. As such, you may find yourself experiencing a broad range of emotions as you move between very challenging but also positive topics. This is part of the season of Lent—a time when we celebrate the amazing things that Jesus has done and recognize the immense sacrifice of God in Jesus’ death on the cross.

This devotional can be used in group studies, worship, church school, or at home. Although it is geared toward groups, it can be done with individuals of any age and may be particularly beneficial in intergenerational environments. Most weeks, there are five activities listed which can be done on the five weekdays in addition to doing the rest of the devotional on Sunday, or you can simply choose an activity to do along with the devotion that best suits your household. The Ash Wednesday module has only three activities as there are only three weekdays that week. And the Holy Week modules (Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday) have fewer activities according to the number of days.

We have intentionally left one day a week open to practice Sabbath. The Sabbath is a time when work ceases, extra activity ceases, and people can be worshipful before God and rest their bodies and souls. In many ways, the Sabbath is a time to celebrate God. On Friday afternoon each week, many people in the Jewish tradition will make extra preparations (like cleaning the house, making food ahead, etc.) to honour the Sabbath on Saturday. Consider what this might look like for yourself, your household and your community during Lent.

This resource is meant to be adaptive, so please use it in whichever way best fits your context.

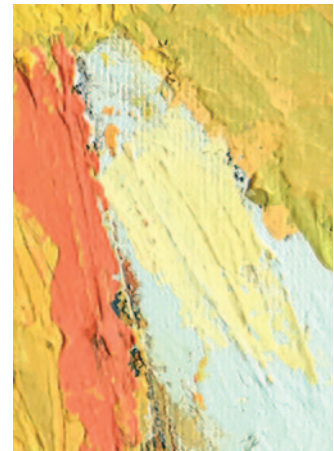
A note to families with very young children: you may want to adapt some of the readings slightly or use a children's Bible to convey the messages around the crucifixion. The death of the Saviour is, by its very nature, traumatic material. The goal of this resource is to help point people toward Jesus, deepen their relationships with God, and enliven individuals with the Spirit by engaging in activities which might cultivate a greater sense of awe around Christ and God's amazing love for us. For some, reading fewer verses about Jesus' death and paraphrasing the content toward age-appropriateness may be beneficial. You know your family best! This resource relies on parents to help in the spiritual education of their children.

Thank you for coming along this journey together, practising the seven last words of Jesus as we approach Easter.

Prayer

Show me during these Lenten days
how to take the daily things of life
and by submerging them in the sacred,
to infuse them with a great love
for you, O God, and for others.
Guide me to perform simple acts of love and prayer,
the real works of reform and renewal ...
help me not to waste
these precious Lenten days
of my soul's spiritual springtime.

— From *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim* by Edward Hays
(Easton, Kans.: Forest of Peace Books, 1989)



We are grateful to the author the Rev. Konnie Vissers for her work writing *Practicing Jesus' Last Seven Words*. Konnie is currently completing a Ph.D. at the University of Toronto in the field of children's spirituality. In the past, she has served as an Associate Pastor and as Clerk of The Presbytery of Hamilton. She lives in Hamilton with her husband and two children.

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Forgiveness

*"... forgive them;
for they know not what they do."*

Luke 23:34

Opening Prayer (based on Psalm 51)

God, of grace,
generous in love,
filled with mercy,
I am aware of my sins;
erase them and wash away my guilt.
And God, start in me a new way. Amen

Thoughts to Ponder...

When was the last time you needed to ask for forgiveness? What happened? What was that experience like? When were you last asked to forgive someone? What was that like? What did you struggle with about forgiving someone?

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a difficult topic. Some people are challenged by forgiving others; some do not believe they themselves deserve forgiveness. But God, who is rich in mercy, forgives all ... yes, ALL. The Bible teaches that forgiveness can happen not because we make amends or attain goodness ourselves but because Jesus did that for us so that we can be reconciled to God. But in the Christian calendar, Ash Wednesday precedes Easter, a reminder of our brokenness before Jesus' coming, life, death, and resurrection.

On Ash Wednesday, we celebrate the ritual of ashes. Many people attend services where they receive the sign of the cross on their forehead with ashes, and they leave it there all day. Ashes have been used for thousands of years to represent grief and sorrow, but the sign of the cross is a relatively recent ritual which reminds us of the funeral passage "ashes to ashes and dust to dust." We come from ash and dust and will return to that ... we are mortal, fallible humans capable of both good and evil. But the cross represents Christ Jesus, who took on humanity so that we may be reconciled



with God. But a person is not only a sinner. A person is also someone who has been sinned against and in need of reconciliation, peace and grace. The ashen cross represents both our brokenness and God's grace.

You may also consider attending an Ash Wednesday service if this devotion is not used as part of the service at your congregation.

Read the Story: Luke 23:32-34

Questions for Reflection

1. What does it mean to forgive?
2. What feelings surface when you think of forgiving someone who has hurt you?
3. How can we forgive and still see that justice is done?
4. What does it mean to be forgiven by God? How does this make you feel?
5. Are there any particular areas of your life where you need to seek out God's forgiveness?

Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider forgiveness.

Confession: Confession is a term that means admitting to wrongdoing. Sometimes we need to confess the ways we have done something wrong, and sometimes we need to confess the ways we failed to do something right. Spend some time alone or with your household praying prayers of confession to God.

Hand washing: We wash our hands to protect against germs, but hand washing can also be a ritual (or spiritual practice) where we remember how God has cleansed us of our sins and made us white as snow. Fill a bowl with warm water and take turns washing each other's hands. While you do, you can read Psalm 51:7. Then, dry each other's hands with a clean white towel.

Meditative music: Listen to the song "Refiner's Fire"¹ or "Create in Me a Clean Heart."² While you listen, sit somewhere comfortable, close your eyes, and let the music be a prayer from your heart.

Closing Prayer (from Psalm 51:10-12)

Holy God, create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence or
take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.



1 Purify My Heart (Refiner's Fire), Jeremy Riddle Version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayH5iV5zmrI>

2 Create in Me a Clean Heart, God's Amazing Grace Christian Fellowship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7Hk3WFUMvo>

First Sunday of Lent



A new heaven and a new earth

“Today you shall be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:43

Opening Prayer

Lord, give me the grace to labor with you
without seeking myself—
to live the Kingdom
in its full reality.

Amen

(John Futrell, SJ)³

Thoughts to Ponder...

What do you currently believe about heaven? What do you picture when you hear words like “Heaven”? How do you get there? How do you feel about heaven (hopeful, anxious, worried, confused, etc.)? What is the difference in your mind between “Heaven” and the “Kingdom of Heaven”?

Heaven

We often think of heaven as an escape from reality or as the bliss that can be realized only after death—a glittery realm located in the clouds. Yet that is not what scripture teaches us. The promise of eternity with God is an earthly proposition. In the Book of Revelation, the prophecy of John describes a new heaven and a new earth, where people do not ascend into the clouds to be with God. Rather, God comes to the new Earth, the holy city, to be in and amongst the people. This new earth is, in part, a fulfillment of the biblical vision of *shalom*—peace and justice—a state of personal and societal integrity where all things work together harmoniously for the good of the whole.

The writer, C.S. Lewis, known for his imagination, conveys the concept of heaven through story in the last book of the Narnia series, called, *The Last Battle*. As the children approach heaven, they see

³ Hearts on Fire, 91. Harter, Michael SJ, ed. *Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004.



this sparkling light, and a scene of mountains, waterfalls, orchards, and the face of Aslan (the God character). Lewis writes, “And as [God] spoke ... the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them.”⁴

Heaven is not imaginary. It is real—perhaps more real than the realities we experience today. But heaven is an exercise of the imagination. When Jesus says, “Today you shall be with me in paradise,” we cannot even begin to wrap our minds around the goodness and love and warmth which we will experience on the other side of eternity.

Yet, that does not mean it is otherworldly ... it is a perfect manifestation of the world we live in, so great that we cannot even begin to imagine it. As we get older, we lose our ability to imagine worlds beyond our own. One of my favourite authors says, “Children are made of awe,”⁵ and that is the kind of approach to life we must live into if we are to experience even a glimpse of paradise in the here-and-now. Jesus calls us to experience the eternal now, today, and to live lives which point heavenward. When we wrap our minds up in the Spirit of God, we might glimpse paradise. And when we open our lives to the work of Jesus, he can enable us to live into the realities of the kingdom of God here and now.

Read the Story: Luke 23:39-43 and Revelation 21:1-5 (optional)⁶

Questions for Reflection

1. Does reading this change any of your thoughts about heaven? Why or why not?
2. What might it look like to experience awe and wonder this week? What might you need to change in your life (your schedule, activities, etc) to make space for wonder?
3. What do you think Jesus meant when he talked about paradise? How might you live in a way that helps others experience God’s kingdom on Earth now?
4. Discuss moments of shalom or experiences of the Kingdom of God that you have experienced this week or in your life.

Practicing Jesus’ 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider the topic of heaven. Cole Arthur Riley writes, “Awe is not a lens through which to see the world but our sole path to seeing. Any other lens is not a lens but a veil. And I’ve come to believe that our beholding—seeing the veils of this world peeled back again and again, if only for a moment—is no small form of salvation.”⁷ As you practice these activities, embrace AWE.

4 Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 228. Lewis, C. S. *The Last Battle*, New York: HarperTrophy, 1956.

5 Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh*, 29. Riley, Cole Arthur. *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories that Make Us*. New York: Convergent, 2022.

6 Revelation is a prophetic text, written in a genre which is closer to poetry than prose. As you read it, try to open your imagination to the possibilities of God’s Spirit, rather than trying to examine the text literally.

7 Riley, *This Here Flesh*, 31. Riley, Cole Arthur. *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories that Make Us*. New York: Convergent, 2022.





Worship: Sing a song of praise like the Doxology (“Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”) As you sing, make harmonies, add instruments, or simply listen to the words fall off of your lips. Grab some pots and pans, boxed food, or coffee bean containers to add percussion! Sing it multiple times or in rounds and see how your voices come together and trail apart until it comes to a natural close.

Wonder walk: Go for a walk in your neighbourhood or a local park. It does not need to be a new place but try to see things as if for the very first time. What do you notice? What can you hear and smell? What do you see that you have never seen before? What sparks curiosity for you on this walk?

Taste and see: Scripture says, “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Bake a loaf of bread alone or in a group. As you add the ingredients and take turns kneading the dough, comment on the smell, the sight of bread rising, and the feel of the dough. After it has baked, eat it warm with melted butter and read Psalm 34:8.

Art: Spend some time engaging in creating some art. This can be drawing, painting, sculpting, or another medium. Some may opt to do this work outdoors. As you create, allow the environment around you to shape your artwork. What inspires your art? How do you see the Spirit at work in the world? What makes you pause in wonderment or takes your breath away?

Reading allegory: Read a chapter in a children’s book out loud together. Imagine yourself in the story, picturing the other characters, examining the world through the wonder only allegory can provide. Consider reading *The Secret Garden*, by Frances Hodgson Burnett, chapter 26, “It’s Mother,” or *The Last Battle*, by C.S. Lewis, chapter 16, “Farewell to Shadowlands.”

Closing Prayer

“Earth’s crammed with heaven.
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.”
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

Creator God,
Incarnate One,
Spirit of Life,
stir in us the awareness of you,
in everything and everyone we encounter.
May the veil that divides heaven and Earth
be torn open so that we might experience your grace and joy
in abundance here in this life. Amen.



Second Sunday of Lent



The bonds of family, friends and community

“Woman, behold, your son! Behold, your mother.”

John 19: 26-27

Opening Prayer (from Psalm 68)

Sing to God,
sing in praise of God’s name,
extol the One who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before God—his name is the LORD.
A father to the fatherless,
a defender of widows,
God dwells in holiness.
God sets the lonely in families.
God gives strength to the people;
Blessed be the name of God.
Amen

And/Or

O God, who loves us as a mother loves her children,
hear our prayer for all homes and families.
Bless those whom we love;
may our dwellings be fit places for your presence.
Help us to live in peace with our dear ones,
that we may encourage one another in common tasks,
and enjoy our common pleasures.
Come amongst us with your love and enliven us with your Holy Spirit.

(From “Common Order: A Canadian Book of Service of Worship” compiled and edited by Ian S. Wishart)



Thoughts to Ponder...

What do you feel when you think about family? Perhaps you feel grief because of the loss of a loved one, happiness because of the joy your family brings, sadness because you have been longing for a family of your own, or brokenness amid abandonment or lost relationships. Consider how many different family systems and groups you are part of and all the different feelings you have when you hear the word “family.”

Family

For some, the idea of family stirs joy at the thought of meals around a table, laughter, love, support and love. For others, the idea of family brings reminders of broken relationships, loved ones who have died, or a longing for something that does not seem attainable. There are children waiting for families to adopt or foster them. And there are parents waiting to have children either because of infertility or the delays of adoption. And there are people who have been abandoned by their families. Family can stir up the best and worst feelings in us.

Jesus’ own relationship and teaching about family was complex. On the one hand, his mother is said to have been among those who were with him throughout his life. At the same time, we hear very little about his other family bonds. And in places in the New Testament, such as in Luke 14:25-27, Jesus places the community of those seeking the reign of God above family bonds. (Many people were traveling with Jesus. He said to them, *“If you come to me but will not leave your family, you cannot be my follower. You must love me more than your father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters—even more than your own life!”* Luke 14:25-26.)

In the process of Jesus’ death on the cross, he recognized what the death of her eldest son would cause his mother. He saw one of his closest friends standing in horror at the crucifixion, knowing John’s loss and grief. And even in the midst of Jesus’ own pain, he took care to consider the needs of his family and to provide ongoing family for his mother and for John. In the Gospel of John, Chapter 19, verses 26-27, it is written that *“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”* This meant that John had the financial and moral responsibility to take care of Mary as a widow who had lost her eldest son.

God’s provision of family does not always happen through biology and genetics, but through the gift of the family of God—those called God’s children. In our baptism, we are made part of the household of faith and are reminded that in God’s family, “water is thicker than blood.” Sometimes the Church becomes the greatest place to enact our love for one another in family. This can be through a child involved in a couple’s life who is struggling to have children, or an elderly person who is cared for by younger “relatives” in the faith. It can be by a widow inviting a college student to live with her, or homeowners inviting a person to live in their spare room through a time of transition. Being as family in the church is a radical act of hospitality and a reordering of social relationships with broad implications.

Read the Story: John 19:25-27



Questions for Reflection

1. Are there parts of your family that you feel are missing (a loved one who has died, etc)? Who are they, and how does this affect your family?
2. How have you found a family in the church? Are there any special individuals who act as a grandparent, siblings or an aunt or uncle who have provided special wisdom and care in your life?
3. How might you provide family for someone else who needs it right now?

Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider the idea of family.

Sharing a meal: Invite someone from your church into your home for a meal. This should not be someone you meet with regularly but someone new, who may particularly benefit from an invitation.

Make a card: Spend some time handwriting and decorating a card for someone in your congregation who has recently lost a family member.

Food delivery: Deliver a meal (homemade or takeout) to someone in your congregation who is sick or homebound. When you deliver the meal, stay for a visit with the person, and pray together.

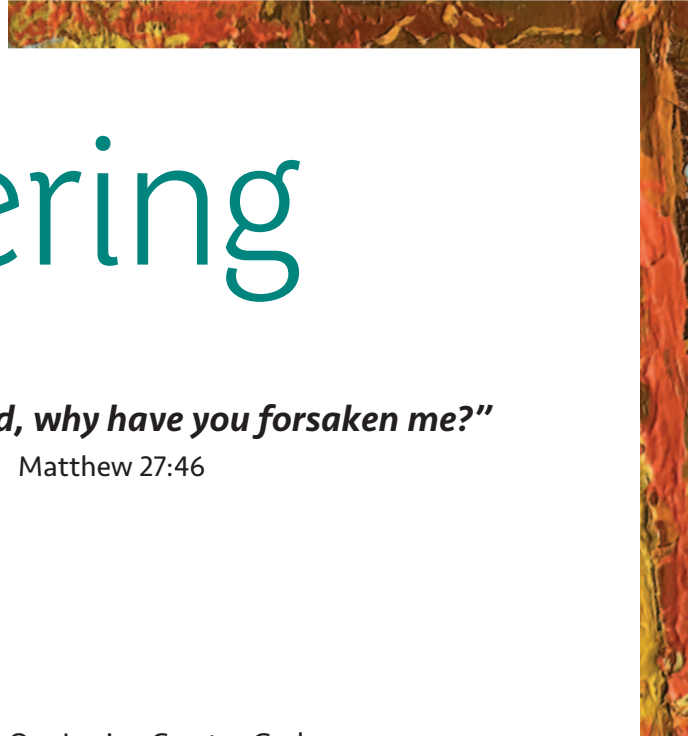
Look up the "Dimension's of Poverty" at <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/topics-start/poverty> or the United Nation's "Ending Poverty" page at <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ending-poverty> to read about poverty in the world.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God,
giver of life and all that is good,
thank you for providing for us and blessing us
with communities and relationships that reflect your love.
Summon us and bless us to respond to your call
to live in love and community with one another.
Amen.



Third Sunday of Lent



Suffering

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Matthew 27:46

Opening Prayer (based on Psalm 13)

How long, O LORD?
Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart? All day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Answer me, O LORD, my God!
Let me understand
I trust in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

And/Or

Our Loving Creator God,
we bring before you this day
the burden the whole world carries
as it endures extreme poverty and hunger
in every land.

Stretch out your loving arms, we pray,
to embrace the suffering adults and children
whose bodies, minds and spirits are shrinking
before our very eyes.

Help us to look, really look,
with clear eyes and open hearts,
to see the pain and hopelessness
in their bewildered eyes.

Kindle within each one of us
a flame of love and purpose,
and then

Enable us to channel our love into action
in every way possible
and impossible.

For this we pray. Amen.

(From Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Adapted from Mimi A. Simson, “Lifting Women’s Voices: Prayers to Change the World,” quoted in “Overflowing: Prayers for a More Sustainable, Compassionate and Just World,” Presbyterian World Service & Development.)



Thoughts to Ponder...

What does it mean to suffer? How have you experienced suffering in your own life?

Suffering

When Jesus said the words on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” he uttered not only the pain of the present moment, but the suffering of experiencing forsakenness. The words he is quoting are from Psalm 22 would have been well known at the time as a Psalm of Lament.

Lament is the form of prayer that was common in the old testament practice in moments of suffering. The Old Testament is filled with laments to God from God’s people—raw cries of anxiety and turmoil in the midst of suffering. They are not tidy, polite prayers, but real emotional pleas with God. Cole Arthur Riley, author and creator of *Black Liturgies* writes, “Lament is not anti-hope [...] Lament itself is a form of hope. It’s an innate awareness that what is should not be. As if something is written on our hearts that tells us exactly what we are meant for, and whenever confronted with something contrary to this, we experience a crumbling. And in the rubble, we say, *God, you promised.*”⁸

When Jesus says the words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” he is in great pain. This is not only the pain of the cross, the torture, the betrayal by friends and alienation from followers. Jesus’ pain was in part about feeling a sense of abandonment and forlornness—the ultimate form of suffering. And then at the end of Psalm 22, there is a turn at the end toward finding hope in God. Because Jesus knew human suffering we can turn to God in the midst of our own sufferings in confidence of God’s care, understanding and love.

Read the Story: Matthew 27:45-46 and Psalm 22 (optional)

Questions for Reflection

1. Has there been a time in life where you have suffered in some way? How were you able to overcome that suffering? What tools did you use to cope with the suffering?
2. What insights have you learned in times of suffering?
3. What is something you can do that would lessen suffering and show love in action?

Practicing Jesus’ 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider the topic of suffering.

A lament for today: write a psalm of lament using psalms like Psalm 5-7, 13, 22, 25-28, 39, 42, 54-57 and 140-143 as a guide. Lay out all of the grievances, plead your case to God, and follow up with a statement of trust in God’s goodness. What might Psalm 13 sound like if David or someone else wrote it today? Put it in your own words, and relate it to current events/sufferings (whether personal or global).

⁸ “This Here Flesh,” 101



Finger painting: Try making a painting with your hands that allows you to express something that you are presently struggling with. Use different colours for different emotions. Do not try to create a masterpiece, rather, allow your fingers to portray your own suffering.

Clay: Use clay to push, smash and rework the clay and form it into a shape of your grief and then reform it again and again in new shapes after rolling and flattening the clay.

Visit the sick: Sometimes people find it difficult to spend time with people who are suffering in some way or another. But God asks us to be with those who are sick or hurting, just as God is with us in our pain. Think of someone who is sick, in the hospital, or a long-term care home to visit. Spend some time talking with them and trying to be present for them in the midst of their pain.

Donate a toy: Many children's hospitals use toys or stuffed animals to hand out to children who are sick. As a family, look up an organization that takes children's toys to kids at hospitals. Then, either choose one of yours to share with someone who is sick, or go shopping to buy a stuffed animal for a child who is in the hospital.

Solitude: Spend some time alone in silence and contemplate what it feels like to be alone or lonely. Write down your thoughts, write a poem or draw a picture based on what you feel. What might Jesus have felt on the cross when he was separated from God? (The amount of time should be age-appropriate and dependent on individual choice.)

Closing Prayer

Pray out loud the prayer you wrote together—a lament for today.



Fourth Sunday of Lent



Need

"I thirst."

John 19:28

Opening Meditation (a poem written from the perspective of the Trinity)

Incarnation

We tried in so many ways
To communicate our love.
If communication is not
What you say but
What people hear,
Then what we said
Was warped and wrenched
Into distancing prescriptions
That had no heart.

You asked for food.
We sent manna.
You asked for drink.
Water flowed from the rock.
You asked for directions.
Moses brought the law.
And on and on.
Still you grew
More distant,
More deaf,
More blind.
Memories dulled.
Speech slurred.
Dreams dissolved
Into wander dust.

And so we did
What families do
When confronted with
calamity.
We drew straws.
Shorty lost.
He came to share
Your plight,
Your fight,
Your night,
And point you
Toward tomorrow.

(Michael Moynihan, SJ)⁹

⁹ "Hearts on Fire" 76-77



Thought to Ponder...

What does it mean that God chose to become human, to have our same needs, desires, and temptations?

Need

For those of us with a more controlling nature, this is perhaps the most difficult limit of being human—having needs. In God choosing to become a person, living, walking, breathing among us, God chose to have needs—all human needs (food, water, shelter, physical activity, etc.). It is a humbling and radical act that God made this choice. In the book *Mere Christianity*,¹⁰ C. S. Lewis writes, “The Eternal Being, who knows everything and who created the whole universe, became not only a man but (before that) a baby, and before that a foetus inside a woman’s body. If you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to become a slug or a crab.”

In one of Jesus’ final statements on Earth, he said simply, “I thirst,” or in other translations, “I am thirsty.” This points to the full humanity of Jesus, the suffering that God underwent in human form. The implications of this are huge for our theology—believing in the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus. Yet the implications are also significant for our humanity. What does it mean to have needs and live into that reality? It should affect every area of life: how we purchase things, how we consume, how we take, how we eat, and how we share. We should also remember that we have much to share with those who lack much.

As Christians living in an affluent nation like Canada, our stewardship of resources has an impact not only on our families but on systems all around us. Food and water (especially drinkable water) are finite resources globally. Energy is not only finite but has implications for climate change. Even within Canada, food is not a resource that is shared equitably. And there are many communities, especially Indigenous communities that do not have drinkable water. Food bank usage has skyrocketed over the course of the pandemic and throughout the period of inflation we have seen recently. The way we live out our needs in the world matters to our faith. And following a God who gave up God’s own needs for our sake matters to the way we live out our needs.

Read the Story: John 19:28-29

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever been in need of something? What was that experience like?
2. How are needs and wants different?
3. What are some major areas of need in the world today? Try to be specific.

10 Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: HarperOne, 1952.



Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider human needs.

Needs inventory: Come up with a list of needs. In the most basic form that would only include food, water, and shelter. But also consider the other *necessities* for daily life today in Canada—access to the internet, phone, transportation, etc. How much of your money is spent on needs versus wants? This is a great opportunity for kids to see how money is used. Think about an area that you spend a lot of extra money on that is not a need. How necessary is this in your life?

Bike ride: Take a bike ride (or walk) around your town or city and try to notice the needs in your geographic area. Does your area have a large population without housing? Are kids in need of food? Are those who are houseless in need of warm clothes? Are businesses closing because of rent changes or supply chain issues? Or do you live in a neighbourhood that has no apparent needs? Perhaps there are spiritual needs not being met? Talk about what you notice as a family.

Movie night: Find a documentary that talks about need. It could be a movie that talks about how much food we waste in North America, for instance *Just Eat It*, or one about the climate crisis' affect on water, for example *The Last Drop*, by National Geographic. Or choose one on a topic you are interested in that relates to need. Then spend some time discussing your thoughts around need after watching the movie together.

Plan of action: Brainstorm some ideas on what you could do in your community to help meet a present need. Then decide on one need in your community that you want to help support and develop a plan of action to meet that need as a household or community. Sometimes children have great ideas on this; let them take the lead!

Closing Prayer

We pray for those people who are in poverty;
Help us to learn how to share what we have,
Until they sense your abundant supply.

We pray for those people who are thirsty;
Send us to be messengers to share your living words,
Until they find the source of life, never to be thirsty again.

We appeal for those people who are in hunger;
Make us to be your bread, broken for others,
To share and be shared until all are fed.

Amen.

(From *Liturgies from Below*,¹¹ Make us to be your bread)



¹¹ Carvalhaes, Claudio, ed. *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the End of the World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020. *This book has dozens of participants from different organizations globally, but the individual prayers are not credited to particular people, they are collective from individuals associated through the Council for World Mission.

Fifth Sunday of Lent



Fulfillment

"It is finished."

John 19:30

Opening Prayer

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
To reach the end without delay.
We would like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
Unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
That it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
And that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
Your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
Let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
As though you could be today what time
(That is to say, grace and circumstances
Acting on your own good will)
Will make you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
Gradually forming within you will be.
Give our Lord the benefit of believing
That his hand is leading you,
And accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
In suspense and incomplete.

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ)



Thought to Ponder...

Imagine what it would look like for all things to be made right.

Fulfillment

In the Old Testament, God used prophets to foretell of a coming Messiah (saviour). For hundreds of years, various prophets (Micah, Jonah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, to name a few) told people about God, about God's plans, and about a Saviour who would fulfill God's plan. These prophets said some broad things, (the Saviour would be a bearer of peace), and some really specific things (the Messiah would be a distant relative from the tribe of Jesse). They also talked about how God's people needed to act as they waited for the Messiah to right the world and bring peace and justice.

Jesus came into the world as God's self-incarnate. The Saviour of the world came in a way that nobody expected, lived a beautiful life of pointing people toward God, died a horrific death, and as he did, he uttered, "It is finished." God's plan has been fulfilled. We have not yet seen the full fruition of God's plan, but we have seen the glory of God in God's triumph over sin and death—the prophecies fulfilled.

Read the Story: John 19:30

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever left something incomplete? Why didn't you complete it? What does it feel like when you don't finish something?
2. What is it like to wait? Are you a very patient person? Why or why not?
3. Imagine that you are one of God's people who is a follower of Jesus, and you hear him say, "It is finished." What might be going through your mind?


Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider fulfillment.

Re-creating Eden: Gather some arts and crafts supplies together and let the group or yourself go wild, each creating their own version of what it might look like when all things are made right. This can be an interpretation of heaven, earth, fulfillment, salvation, etc. Let everyone be as creative as they can be on this one. Then share your creations with one another.

Movie night: Watch a good versus evil movie (Narnia, The Lord of the Rings, Marvel, etc). After watching, talk about the tension you feel when things are not right in the movie and how different you feel once good wins! How does this relate to the story of Easter and the fulfillment of prophecy?

Worship: Read Revelation 4 together, part of John's vision of what it is like to meet God when all things are fulfilled. Then listen to Revelation Song by Kari Jobe (it is available on YouTube) and think and talk about your thoughts about worship. Why do we worship God? How might worship be part of this life and the next? Is worship only music?



Reunion: Think of someone that you haven't seen in a long time, and then visit them or contact them in another way. What was it like to reunite? What feelings did you have? Talk about how fulfillment is kind of like being reunited with a loved one after a long time.

Song stop: Listen to a popular children's song (like "The Wheels on the Bus," "Mary Had a Little Lamb" or "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star"), but stop the song halfway through the chorus. See if people can sit with it uncomfortably for a minute without trying to finish the song. Then talk about what it is like not to have a song resolved. Why do we long to reach the end? Why is fulfillment important? Now consider what it might have been like for God's people to be waiting for hundreds of years for God to fulfill God's plans and for Jesus to utter the words, "It is finished."

Closing Prayer

Merciful God,
You hear the cries of your people
Put an end to all that divides us
For you call us to be one
End gang violence
Mend the broken hearts of mothers whose children have been killed
Bring quality education and good jobs
Fill the bellies of the hungry by empowering us to share what we have
Heal our world: physical, spiritual, and soul
Make us signs of your grace to our neighbours
Amen.

(From *Liturgies from Below*,¹² Heal our world)



¹² Carvalhaes, Claudio, ed. *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the End of the World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020. *This book has dozens of participants from different organizations globally, but the individual prayers are not credited to particular people, they are collective from individuals associated through the Council for World Mission.



Surrender

"... into your hands I commit my spirit."

Luke 23:46

Opening Prayer

God,

Teach us your ways.

Teach us not to grasp so tightly the things we think are important
but to cling to what you hold dear.

Teach us to release our plans and thoughts and things to you.

Teach us to follow your pathways.

For you know the plans you have for us, plans to give hope and a future.

Amen

Thought to Ponder...

What things do you hold most dear in life, that is, what things do you spend the most time and money on or give the most of your attention to?

Surrender

Surrender is a difficult topic to describe and even more challenging to practice. As humans, we think we have the right plans and ways to pursue them. Surrender is not in any way a coercive technique of God. Rather, surrender is an act of our will—to lay aside our own plans, dreams, and desires, and submit them to God.

If you have ever been kayaking or white water rafting, surrender is what they teach you to do if you get stuck in an eddy (a cyclical current that can hold you underwater). If you become trapped in an eddy and fight it, it is like being stuck in an underwater tornado, where you cannot break free. The only way to get unstuck is to relax your body and surrender to the current. The eddy will swirl you a few times and then shoot you out farther downstream. Surrender is counter to the impulse of trying to fight against a current pulling you under. But freedom happens in surrender.



Usually, on Palm Sunday, people read a passage from one of the Gospels about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where his followers laid cloaks down on the road and waved palm branches, shouting "Hosanna! Hosanna!" worshipping Jesus as he entered the city on the back of a donkey. However, today is also the final of the seven last words of Jesus, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." It may seem like a very different Palm Sunday passage, but they illustrate the same point—Jesus' faithful surrender to God's plan.

In the triumphal entry, Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem for a festival, knowing what lies ahead. Jesus surrenders to God's plan throughout his life. Still, it can be seen again and again during Holy Week (the week of Easter) as Jesus takes the final journey into Jerusalem, celebrates Passover with his disciples, and walks his final steps to the cross. It is fitting that this week begins and ends in the act of surrender, culminating in the words, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," when Jesus breathes his last breath.

Read the Story: Luke 23:44-49

Questions for Reflection

1. Can you recall a time in your life when you let go of something? What was that like? What was lost, and what was gained in that experience?
2. Are there things in your life that you feel called to surrender (an old dream, a plan you can't quite let go of, a situation that keeps you stuck, etc.)?
3. What are some actions you can take to help you surrender the situations or thoughts that prevent you from moving forward?
4. What is one thing you can name today that you are ready to surrender?

Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider surrender.

Songs of surrender: To surrender is an act of worship when you relinquish something you hold very dear (an item, a decision, a dream, a plan, etc.) to God. Listen to the words of the song "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,"¹³ and consider what it means to surrender yourself to God.

Skipping stones: Find enough rocks for each person in your household or devotional group to have at least one. Write down something on the rock that you need to surrender to God (a plan, a hope, your time, etc.). Go to the nearest body of water and skip the rocks out into the lake, ocean, or river. As you do, pray about surrender.

13 The Wondrous Cross, Chris Tomlin and Matt Redman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qC1lllwX4w>.





Closing Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.





Humility

***“He did not consider equality with God
as something to be grasped...”***

Philippians 2:6

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, who did empty Yourself of Your eternal glory and become a little child for love of us, empty us wholly of ourselves; that we may love you truly, as you love us infinitely, and serve You faithfully, for Your love and mercies' sake.

Amen

(Evelyn Underhill)¹⁴

Thought to Ponder...

In what ways is it hard to put others before yourself? In what ways does this come easily?

Humility

Sometimes people get the wrong impression of humility and have a false humility that is neither honest nor allows you to fully live into God's gifts. True humility is about position, choosing a different position than you are warranted. It is not about downplaying your talents and gifts. It is a common saying that "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less." Humility is about an orientation toward God and others.

God's choice to become one of us is the ultimate act of humility. Jesus continues to think of others rather than only of himself. On the night before he died, he washed his disciples' feet as one last act of humble love, stooping beneath his friends, touching the dirtiest part of them to show love. When Jesus shows humility in washing the feet of his disciples, he is choosing the position that servants take rather than his position of honour as Rabbi (or his position as God's self).

Jesus calls us into this active humility in consistently putting others before ourselves.

Read the Story: John 13:1-17 and Philippians 2:5-11

¹⁴ Underhill 33 Robyn Wrigley-Carr, ed. *Evelyn Underhill's Prayer Book*. London: SPCK, 2018.



Questions for Reflection

1. What steps can you take in your life to orient yourself toward God more?
2. What steps can you take to orient your life toward others more?
3. What is one thing you can do *today* to show humility and put others first?

Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Foot washing: Fill a bowl with warm, soapy water. Take turns in your household washing one another's feet and drying them with a towel. After you are done, talk about what this experience is like for you and your household.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,
Let me have too deep a sense of humour to be proud.
Let me know my absurdity before I act absurdly.
Let me realize that when I am humble, I am most human,
Most truthful,
And most worthy of your serious consideration.
Amen

(Daniel A. Lord, SJ)

And/Or O God, when I have food,
 help me to remember the hungry;

 When I have work,
 help me to remember the jobless;

 When I have a home,
 help me to remember those who have no home at all;

 When I am without pain,
 help me to remember those who suffer,

 And remembering,
 help me to destroy my complacency;
 bestir my compassion,
 and be concerned enough to help;

 By word and deed,
 those who cry out for what we take for granted.
 Amen.

(From Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Written by Samuel F Pugh (1850-1922),
quoted in "Overflowing: Prayers for a More Sustainable, Compassionate
and Just World," Presbyterian World Service & Development.)





Grief

“Surely he was the Son of God!”

Matthew 27:54

Opening Prayer

Let our mourning be:

For the earth that is blasted and burned.

For the olive trees that are bare and for the vines that do not bear fruit.

For the children who are lost and for the parents whose arms are empty.

For those who seek refuge and do not find peace.

Jesus said, “Stay with me. Watch and Pray.”

Let our mourning be:

Like an ocean that cannot be emptied.

Like a river that cannot be stopped.

Like the strong summer rain that puts an end to drought.

Jesus said, “Share my baptism. Drink my cup.”

Amen

(From *Liturgies from Below*,¹⁵ 216)

Thoughts to Ponder...

Have you ever lost someone special in your life? What were some of the things you felt?

And what were some of the things you did to work through that mourning?

¹⁵ Carvalhaes, Claudio, ed. *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the End of the World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020. *This book has dozens of participants from different organizations globally, but the individual prayers are not credited to particular people, they are collective from individuals associated through the Council for World Mission.



Grief

Grief is the sorrowful emotion (or “process that includes many emotions”¹⁶) of missing something or someone. In her recent book on emotion, connection, and meaning, Brené Brown concludes that grief has three components: loss, longing, and feeling lost.¹⁷ This pretty much sums up the experience of the disciples on Good Friday. On the Friday before Easter, at the death of Jesus, the disciples and other followers of Jesus lost their best friend, confidante, teacher, leader, and Rabbi. The loss they experience is immense because following Jesus was not just a job but a vocation, a lifestyle, and a belief system.

The people present at Jesus’ death who were crying out in anguish at the loss of their loved one, did so, fully believing that Jesus was the Messiah (saviour). What made this complicated for Jesus’ family and friends was the loss and longing they felt for their beloved and the complete confusion about what to do next. If the Messiah was dead, what now?

Though Jesus said on numerous occasions that he was going to die and rise to life, you have to remember that we are viewing the story in hindsight. Imagine being in the story, knowing that the Messiah had been killed on a cross, and waiting in the sadness, longing, and loss that entailed. The disciples felt lost in their vocation of spreading God’s word, and it went so far beyond only personal loss—it was a loss of hope, of deliverance, of salvation.

Today we call it Good Friday because we look backward in history through the lens of Easter resurrection. But try to place yourself in the shoes of Jesus’ followers. What immense grief!

Read the Story: Matthew 27:45-54

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think the Centurion reflected, “Surely he was the Son of God!”?
2. What is hard about grief for you? Why do we naturally try to jump to Easter?
3. What might it have felt like to celebrate the Sabbath the day after Jesus’ death?


Practicing Jesus’ 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this weekend as you consider grief.

Write a “eulogy”: A eulogy is literally a “good word” that someone speaks about a loved one. Spend some time writing about what Jesus’ life and teaching mean in your life and what you are grateful for from the reconciling Good News of the Gospel that Jesus gives and lives.

16 Brené Brown, 110 Brown, Brené. *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*. New York: Random House, 2021.

17 110-111



Sabbath: The day that Jesus died was the day before the Sabbath, which he and his followers all celebrated. This meant that the followers of Jesus could not prepare his body for burial and would have to wait until Sunday. Spend some time Friday night preparing for a Sabbath. And take time on Saturday to consciously rest and wait, in the reality of the death of Jesus, for new life.

Closing Prayer

Let our mourning be:

A vigil in the darkness.

A light that searches out the lost.

A hand that reaches out to save and hold.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the ones who mourn. They shall be comforted."

Amen

(From *Liturgies from Below*,¹⁸ 216)



¹⁸ Carvalhaes, Claudio, ed. *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the End of the World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020. *This book has dozens of participants from different organizations globally, but the individual prayers are not credited to particular people, they are collective from individuals associated through the Council for World Mission.



Resurrection

"He has risen!"

Luke 24:6

Opening Prayer

Dear God,
Thank you for your goodness and mercy.
You are a mighty God and death could not hold you.
You took away the sting of death.
Help us to live in the grace of your resurrection.
Your resurrection has brought us hope that one day we will be with you.
Amen.

(From *Liturgies from Below*,¹⁹ Easter #2)

And/Or

Christ is risen from the dead,
trampling down death by death,
and on those in the tombs bestowing life!

(The Paschal Troparion, a hymn from the Byzantine rite of the Orthodox Tradition)

Thought to Ponder...

What does it mean to live in the hope of the resurrection?

¹⁹ Carvalhaes, Claudio, ed. *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the End of the World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020. *This book has dozens of participants from different organizations globally, but the individual prayers are not credited to particular people, they are collective from individuals associated through the Council for World Mission.



Resurrection

Easter is the quintessential holy day in the Christian calendar, where God seals the deal with God's people, triumphing over sin and death so that we might be reconciled to God in this life and the next. As Christians, we often celebrate the holidays in the liturgical calendar each year, knowing full well what comes next. We do this ritually as we remember each important step in God's story coming into fulfillment. But Easter is a day which should not just be celebrated for 24 hours. Instead, it should change the way we live each day, 365 days a year.

In Jewish practice, when someone dies, they gather friends and family together around the next-of-kin to "sit shiva," a practice which involves seven days of community mourning. The beauty of the practice is both in recognition of the grief someone has experienced and in the collective, communal outpouring of emotion. This practice would have taken place around Mary, the mother of Jesus, after his death. Instead, we witness the miraculous story of the resurrection and its power over death. It seems inconsequential to spend only one day in celebration after the extravagance of God's plan is fulfilled.

So, this year, when believers would have spent seven days mourning the loss of a dear friend, let us spend seven days celebrating the resurrection of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world!

Read the Story: Matthew 28:1-10

Questions for Reflection


1. What was the most memorable experience for you during Lent this year? What made it memorable?
2. What practice(s) would you like to continue in your life as you move beyond Lent into Easter?
3. How has your life changed because of the resurrection of Jesus? If it hasn't affected the way you live today, why not? What things might you change in how you live to reflect the gift of the resurrection?

Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider the resurrection.

Easter sunrise: Wake up before dawn and go somewhere where you can see the sunrise. Bring hot drinks, warm coats, and blankets along. Go somewhere beautiful where you can sit and watch the sunrise. As it crests over the horizon, read together out loud the passage from John 20:1-8.

Party favours: Invite some neighbours, family, or friends for an after-Easter celebration at the end of the week. Make party favour bags of things to help you celebrate the good news that Jesus is risen! Don't go out and buy plastic chicks, ducks, and bunnies. Think about what you can make around your house that points to the excitement of the resurrection.



Eucharist: Participate in a celebration of Holy Communion. As you do, celebrate the words of Jesus, as if for the first time, knowing that new life has arisen out of the broken body of Christ.

Fish for breakfast: Gather around the table for a fish breakfast. Alternatively, you can cook the fish another way—tuna fish sandwiches, bagels and lox, fish cakes, or some other creative fish breakfast. Read John 21:1-14 as you eat.

Broken creations: Gather together things from your house that are going to be thrown out (broken pieces of something, recycled containers, toilet paper tubes, old dried-up play dough, puzzles missing pieces, etc.). As a household, use the items to create something new and entirely different from the pieces. It can be artistic or practical. Just be as creative as possible. Talk about what it is like to see new life come from the broken pieces.

Sabbath practice: Talk with someone or as a household or group about something you can do together to honour the Sabbath moving forward. What might it be like to incorporate a household or group Sabbath practice into your weekly lives? Think of some of the things that have benefited you during Lent. Could any of these things be incorporated into a weekly Sabbath routine?

Celebration!

Closing Prayer (based on Psalm 117)

Praise the LORD!

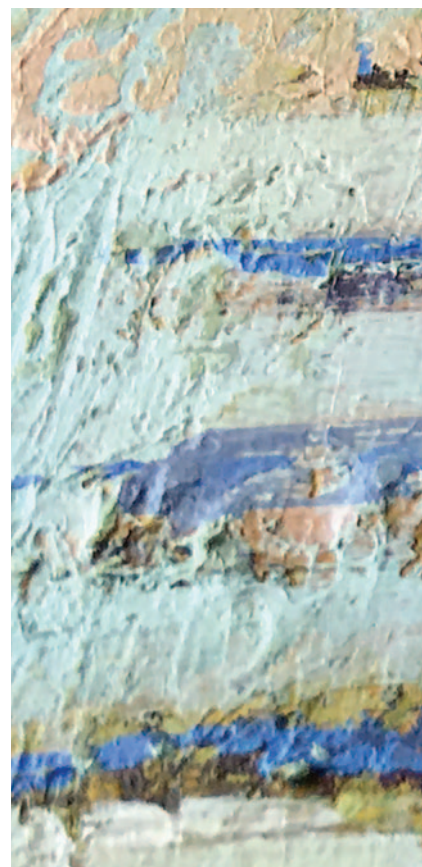
Extol him, all you peoples!

Great is God's enduring love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

Praise the LORD!

Christ is risen!

Amen.





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