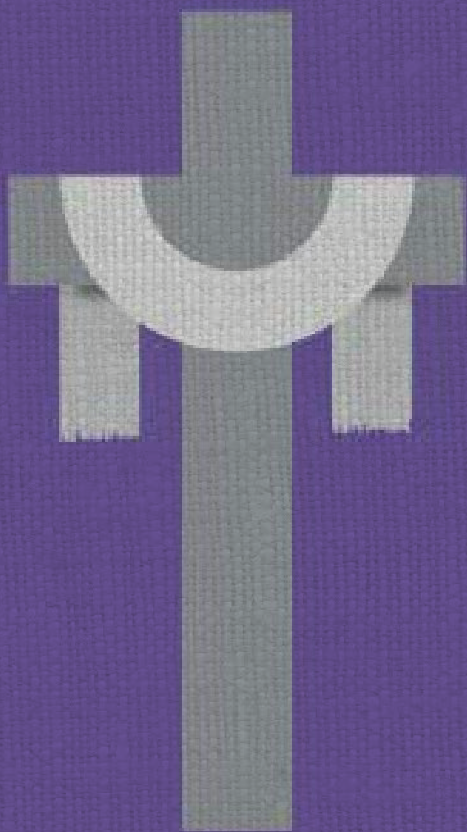


*Poems,
& Prayers,
& Meditations
for
Holy Week*



AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



Holy Week: A Thin Place

Over the last twenty or thirty years, I've heard folk who value what they call "Celtic spirituality"—mostly folk who have spent time in places like Iona—talk about "thin places." In their parlance, a thin place is where the realm of the divine and the realm of the human seem in particularly close proximity, where the boundary between our reality and God's seems especially porous and permeable. As a Calvinist, I'm suspicious of any theology that suggests that God is more accessible in some places than in others, because it leads too easily to the notion that God is not equally sovereign in all times and all places.

That said, I do think of the notion of a "thin place" as a lovely metaphor for what happens when we allow ourselves to be taken by poetry, music, or visual art to places unthought of. I also think it can stand for what we experience in contemplating the high and holy occasions we celebrate in the cycle of the liturgical calendar. Perhaps nowhere is this truer than Holy Week, the procession of days and hours leading from triumphal entry to empty tomb, and along the way through Maundy Thursday's table, Good Friday's agonizing death, and the awkward silence of Holy Saturday. Each of these occasions is in its own way pregnant with the immanence of God. Each invites us to consider how God is peculiarly present within it and to offer our awareness of that presence in prayer.

That is what this booklet is intended to do. In these pages are creative, insightful meditations on each day, written by students in Austin Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program. Framing these meditations are poems that explore Palm Sunday and Easter with poetic eyes; each of these is accompanied by my comments. Read them, together or serially each day, and think with us what it means to seek God where God may be found, here in the heart of the gospel. May the God of Holy Week draw you near.

– The Reverend Dr. Paul Hooker
*Associate Dean for Ministerial Formation
and Advanced Studies
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary*

In Medias Res

“If these were silent, the stones would shout out.” – Luke 19:40

You who enter the city in the midst of things,
come to find a place to love and die,
though we are busy keeping feasts, keeping kosher
keeping our heads down, keeping a low profile
ducked behind stone walls of practiced custom
where no hope or change or grace can reach us.

You who come to upset our assumptions
take away the illusion that we are the center of things
that we can cushion the stumbling stones in our paths
with pretentious fronds and conceited cloaks
though we cry Save us, Save us
without acknowledging that we need saving.

You who come to tear down temples
overturn the tables of our sacred things
scatter the coinage of our sacerdotal commerce
release the doves we sacrifice to self deception
though we apprehend you without understanding
and install you in the harsher sanctuary of our
stony hill.

You who dwell in the midst of things:
for a moment, for an instant, for a heartbeat
slow the processional of things
still the noise of things
until we hear the one thing whispered
in the silence of the stones.

– Paul Hooker

Meditation

This year, when the calendar summons us comparatively early to this central week in the liturgical year, Christ comes very much “in the midst of things”—sandwiched in between the awards shows and the athletic spectacles, the political posturing and income tax preparation. But then, when does he not so come? Is it ever the case that we stand at the roadside ready to receive him and all that his coming means? Is it ever the case that our frenzied hosannas are set aside for a moment, while we contemplate what it might mean to be saved? Is it not rather always the case that we spread our cloaks in a vain effort to cover the potholes in our pathways, that we wave our palm fronds in hopes of hiding our failures?

In Luke’s Palm Sunday narrative, Jesus responds to the Pharisees’ command to silence his disciples by saying that, “If these were silent, the stones would shout out.” I admit to a fascination with the question, What would they say? I cannot help wondering whether the din of our daily activity does not drown out a witness from the foundations of the earth, from the rocks in the basement of time. Do not those stones bear the very fingerprint of God? Do they not have a story to tell? What would we hear if we were still long enough to listen?

“Jesus Is Our King!”

“If these were silent, the stones would shout out.” – Luke 19:40

It was Sunday, the start of the week. Jewish families had been traveling from around the world. They arrived in Jerusalem to stay with relatives or fill the inns. Faithfully they gathered, preparing to celebrate the Passover festival in obedience to God’s commands. Singing psalms, they approached the Temple. Praying devotedly, they offered a sacrifice pleasing to God: a pure, spotless lamb. Family and friends of all ages shared the joyful Passover feast. During this ritual meal, they talked together about the meaning of each element. Passover is the Jewish people’s annual commemoration of God’s decisive victory over worldly power, when the Lord rescued them from the Egyptian Pharaoh who oppressed them in slavery long ago. Now longing filled their hearts for freedom from their pagan occupiers, the Roman Empire. They wondered, “When will God send our King to bring lasting freedom?”

Jesus knew the time had come to reveal himself as king in the line of David whose kingdom is paradoxically not (yet) of this world. His ministry of teaching, healing, and working miracles culminated there and then. Refreshed from keeping the Sabbath, Jesus was sustained by God. He told his disciples in Bethphage that all was ready. They found and got permission to use a young donkey, symbolic of peace. Located at the crest of the Mount of Olives, pilgrims could look to the Temple mount across the Kidron Valley.

How often people had marveled at this mysterious Jesus! Could he be the Messiah? Rejoicing, Jesus’ disciples threw their outer garments on the donkey. They joyfully shouted, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” (See Psalm 118:25-26.) Eagerly joining in, people pulled off their cloaks to line the way like a carpet. Others pulled off palm branches to wave and throw around like confetti in a victory

parade. Visible above the crowds, Jesus processed to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah. Yes, here is our King! We love him! Praise God! Shouts of delight rang out as people welcomed Jesus. Gaining momentum, the parade passed by the Garden of Gethsemane and went into Jerusalem.

When Jesus' procession reached the Temple, some Pharisees told Jesus to silence the celebration. But Jesus held steady. You can't stop God's praises. Even from seemingly lifeless rocks, God can bring forth powerful witnesses to cry out the Lord's majesty!

Holy God, thank you for Jesus our King. Open our eyes to recognize your sovereignty in the world and in our lives. Give us patience and courage to serve you with faith and joy until Christ returns and your reign is established forever. Amen.

– The Reverend Rosanna Anderson
*Associate Director of Stewardship Ministries
Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church,
Nashville, Tennessee*

The Truth of Our Dirty Feet

“Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” – John 13:1-11

As we reflect on the sacred scenes of the Last Supper, our memories most easily hover on the actions of familiar application for our modern context. We imagine the bread, its sweet and crusty texture in the hands of disciples. We visualize the cup, embraced as life-giving blood poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. We imagine the hungering embrace of these rituals by the disciples in much the same way that we hunger for their presence in our lives today. However, sometimes when we rush to the table we overlook the basin; we're in danger of missing deeply meaningful reflections from that same upper room.

Before the disciples had drunk the cup that washed their souls, they had entered the room as unwashed, greasy, filthy travelers. It was common for a washing to take place, usually done by a lowly servant. However, it wasn't a servant but a Savior that took the towel and knelt before the dirty disciples to begin washing their feet. When the disciples realized that the One they honored and adored was crouched in humiliated posture to rinse the grime from their feet, they recoiled in embarrassment. Peter declared, “You shall never wash my feet!” The same disciples who were only moments earlier vying for title of Greatest were now receiving the treatment of masters and dignitaries. Why recoil now?

It's the practice in my community to observe the ancient rite of foot washing before we celebrate the Lord's Supper. As a pastor, I often hear people occasionally express reasons for why they don't want anybody to touch or see their feet on that particular day. There can be a real fear and even shame in letting others become familiar with intimate parts of our self. Our idealized exteriors can be betrayed by the truth of our dirty feet.

The disciples realized in that moment that a relationship with God involves being known for who we actually are. But they would also learn the joy that comes after we grant access to our truest selves and then experience the cleansing redemption Jesus gives in return. There's no greater freedom than to be fully known and fully loved.

Dearest Jesus, today we pray for the courage to be fully known, we pray for the courage to enter unreserved fellowship with you. We pray today that we would embrace the intimacy you desire. We ask forgiveness for the times we kept you at arm's length, for all the times we reserved the right to keep our secrets. We accept the cleansing you offer. We therefore pray that you'd wash not only our feet but our hands, our head, and our hearts. Amen.

– The Reverend Albert Handal
Pastor for Young Adults
Keene Seventh-day Adventist Church
Burleson, Texas

What Moves Us

“And when all the crowds who had gathered there for the spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.” – Luke 22:66-23:56

Every Lent begins the same way: as young and old come forward in worship, I smear the cross in ashes on their foreheads, saying: “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” With the young in their innocence I think, who am I to be warning you of death? With the old I wonder, will you be one I must bury this year?

Every Lent ends the same way: with the agonizing death of Jesus and then the silent tomb. We watch the slow inevitable tragedy, feel the visceral contempt, see the terrible suffering, and hear the tenderness of Jesus, even from the cross. We stand with his acquaintances, at a distance, not knowing what to say or do. We are silent.

What do we feel as we see him crucified? Is it anger, for all the unjust deaths, for the senseless tragedy of this world? Is it helplessness, like we feel when we watch the suffering of those we love? Is it guilt for what we could have done, but didn't? Is it simply sadness that death is always, always a part of life? That it will end in ashes?

Or is it, simply, love?

Each Good Friday I read a poem by St. John of the Cross, “No me mueve, mi Dios.” I first read it in Madeleine L'Engle's book *Two-Part Invention* where she reflects on this poem as her husband Hugh is dying. She is wrestling with deep questions of life and death. A friend translated the poem for her this way:

I am not moved, my God, to love you
By the heaven you have promised me.
Neither does hell, so feared, move me
To keep me from offending you.

You move me, Lord, I am moved seeing you
Scoffed at and nailed on a cross.
I am moved seeing your body so wounded.
Your injuries and your death move me.

It is your love that moves me, and in such a way
That even though there were no heaven,
I would love you,
And even though there were no hell,
I would fear you.

You do not have to give me anything
So that I love you,
For even if I didn't hope for what I hope,
As I love you now, so would I love you.

Holy Jesus: you have promised
that in life, and in death, and
in life beyond death, we belong
to you. As we meditate on your
suffering, we are moved by your
love; as we watch your dying, we
are filled with love for you, our
Savior. Deeply, gratefully, we
receive your great sacrifice of love.
Amen.

–The Reverend Karen Chakoian
*First Presbyterian Church
Granville, Ohio*

Dancing in Black

“On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.” – Luke 23:56b

The courtyard is a mass of children, older ones in soccer uniforms, younger ones toddling about, all with one thing on their minds: Easter eggs. They carry their baskets with the care of a waiter balancing a tray heavy with food, careful not to let the nourishing fare of chocolate kisses, peanut butter cups, and various assortments of colorful candies fall to the ground, where they might be scooped up by a fellow hunter. Their joy radiates out from the courtyard in squeals as they find yet another, and another, colorful egg. To see them from afar, it looks like an intricate dance.

In the center of the courtyard is a white metal Celtic cross, rising from the ground, the clear focal point around which the entire facility was built, the place where the eye is automatically drawn.

It is draped in black.

When I first arrived to serve this congregation, I was horrified at what I referred to as the Annual Holy Saturday Sacrilege. I tried to use my new pastor honeymoon period to get the egg hunt moved. I remember taking a wise and influential, as well as liturgically sensitive, ruling elder out to the courtyard to witness the spectacle. “Do you see that cross, and all those children, hunting eggs on Holy Saturday? I feel there’s incongruence here, a mixed message.”

She turned to me and said, “I agree. I think Holy Saturday is one big mixed message. Let the children hunt. It seems fitting.” And she turned and walked back inside, leaving a confused pastor in her wake.

What do we do with this strange day, after the torments of Good Friday, the failures of courage, the startling wail of Jesus about the abandonment of God? What do we do when we sense in the

closed tomb encasing the body of the Anointed One not a thin place, but a chasm so large it hints at nothingness?

This may be the most honest day of Holy Week. It dares to say that the darkness of the chaotic Good Friday lingered into the quiet desperation and grief of Saturday in such a way that the church called it “Holy.” And therefore we can dare to say in the midst of the darkneses that consume our lives and the life of our world that even there, in that place, in whatever tombs encase us, even there, hidden from our sight, a presence abides, and makes even Saturday holy.

The children seem to sense it, this holiness hidden like an egg in the tall grass, a splash of color hinting at joy to come. And so they dance around the cross draped in black, acknowledging the Holy, anticipating ... what exactly?

It is too soon for us to say. After all, it is Holy Saturday. There’s incongruence, some mixed messages, a fair amount of confusion, dancing in black. In other words, the place most of us live a good bit of the time. That place—dare we say it? —is holy.

Lord of holy places, teach us to dance—even if draped in mourning—in anticipation of the day when the whole creation will join in the celebration. Amen.

– The Reverend Christopher Joiner
*Pastor, First Presbyterian Church
Franklin, Tennessee*

Descending Theology: The Resurrection

From the far star points of his pinned extremities,
cold inched in—black ice and squid ink—
till the hung flesh was empty.

Lonely in that void even for pain,
he missed his splintered feet,
the human stare buried in his face.

He ached for two hands made of meat
he could reach to the end of.

In the corpse's core, the stone fist
of his heart began to bang
on the stiff chest's door, and breath spilled
back into that battered shape. Now

it's your limbs he comes to fill, as warm water
shatters at birth, rivering every way.

– Mary Karr

“Descending Theology: The Resurrection” from *Sinners Welcome: Poems by Mary Karr*, © 2006 by Mary Karr. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

Meditation

Protestants are not accustomed to contemplations of the death of Jesus, but Mary Karr, noted poet and memoirist, gives us exactly that: Jesus dying on the cross, dead in the tomb, and in the most intimate imagery. We see the “pinned extremities” and the “splintered feet”; we experience the inky blackening of death and the absence of sensation.

The poem begins to change, though, in the final four lines of the first stanza, where Jesus’ heart—even though a “stone fist”—begins “to bang/ on the stiff chest’s door.” The reader almost cannot avoid the thought of Jesus, slowly reviving, banging the tomb door, battering down the barrier between death and life. And as if to complete the moment, we see the “breath spilled / back into that battered shape,” an almost Genesis-like encounter with God’s lifegiving *ruach*.

Karr’s poem takes the form of an English sonnet, in which the final two lines (the “volta”) suddenly and dramatically alter our expectations. Through the twelve lines of the first stanza, we have come to expect a vision of the risen Christ emerging from the tomb, but when the moment arrives, “it’s your arms he comes to fill,” surprising us with the notion that ours is the body inhabited by the risen one, that the life he lives is our life. And in a masterfully dense phrase, we experience this infilling of our arms as “warm water” that “shatters at birth, rivering every way.” Is the water amniotic fluid at birth, or baptismal water at rebirth, or both? And is the “rivering”—a gorgeous neologism—a reference to the river that flows from Eden through the heart of the City of God?

Paul reminded the Galatians that “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:19-20). Karr gives those ancient words flesh and bone and in the process transforms our expectations of Easter.

Too Many Alleluias

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord.”

– Romans 8:38-39

Often during Easter Sunday worship, I invite the children of the church to count the number of “Alleluias.” Easter worship resounds with Alleluias, so the task can be daunting. From my seat on the chancel, I can see children furiously counting on their fingers, resorting to their parents’ fingers, and finally adding tick-marks on their bulletins to keep up with the number of Alleluias coming their way in prayer and song. After worship one year, a young boy came to me with wide eyes and said, “Pastor Sarah, I’ll never be able to do it—God gives us too many Alleluias to count.”

I think of this child’s wisdom as I prepare for Easter’s song of unending Alleluias. These Alleluias, these songs of praise, come out of the stories of Lent, of Christ’s life, death, and finally his resurrection. These Alleluias aren’t empty; they are sung and spoken as those who know the despair of Holy Week, the sting of betrayal, the cruelty of denial, the finality of seeing a loved one die. We know this despair, in the life of Jesus, and in our own lives. Easter morning begins in quiet darkness with an empty tomb and scared disciples, but it ends with shouts of “I have seen the Lord!” and “Go and tell the others that he is risen just as he said.” These are hard-won Alleluias. Our songs of praise come out of lived faith, of fear and doubt that’s transformed by Christ calling our name and sending us out to tell others of his love. Perhaps that’s why we sing these Alleluias with such fanfare at Easter. God gives us mercy, hope, forgiveness, and new life in the face of darkness and despair, and our only response, unending Alleluias. Alleluia becomes our word, our prayer, our song. What else could it be? As we sing all the Alleluias God gives us, The unspoken words may be these ...

I walk now in sorrow but I know
you walk beside me, Alleluia!

Even in our darkest night, God
promises that darkness will never
overcome the light, Alleluia!

God's love is fiercer than death,
Alleluia!

Our lives are made new in the new
life of Christ, Alleluia!

God's claim on us as children of
God is eternal, Alleluia!

There is nothing, neither death
nor life, that could ever separate
us from God's love in Jesus Christ,
Alleluia!

God gives us “too many Alleluias to count” on Easter
Sunday as we meet the risen Lord, and then God sends us
out to share these Alleluias with a world that needs to know
of God's promised hope, nearness, and mercy so great it
too could never be counted.

Christ is risen, Alleluia!

– The Reverend Sarah Demarest Allen (MDiv'07)
Associate Pastor for Children, Youth, and Families
First Presbyterian Church, Austin, Texas

An Idle Tale

“But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

– Luke 24:11

Watching a skink skitter off the porch
where its night-slowed blood was licked
to life by hot tongues of morning sun,
so that at the sound of my toes in the grass
he shot into the shadows, forsaking his tail—
that living sliver of lapis left with necessary
detachment like the too-heavy child on the
refugee road or an offering to a hungry god,
I wondered aloud to the abandoned tail
how long it planned to wiggle
and did it think that I thought that it was all?
Right about then, my thoughts twitched back
to Peter, sitting cold with the thick-blooded
ten in a shuttered room when Mary came
running with a tale they called idle,
lacking the curiosity to come close and see
the quivering piece of truth she carried,
while back in the garden where the sun shone
on a heaved over stone, the part without the tale,
warmed and quickened, and moved on.

– DLS Hughes

From Furthermore (dlshughes.wordpress.com). Used by permission of the author.

Meditation

I have a friend who, in preaching on Easter Sunday, likes to—as he puts it—“fly low.” I think that’s what Dana Hughes does with this lyrical little interlude. There is none of Easter Sunday’s bombast here—no trumpet fanfares, no organ thundering in rafter-shaking triumph. There is rather a kind of quiet: a garden and a back porch, a skink soundlessly fleeing the whisper of toes in the grass. But beneath this placid surface is all the pain in the world: a “too heavy child [left] / on the refugee road” an “offering to a hungry god.” And there is human pathos, and the human pathetic: Peter and the “thick blooded ten” who cannot stir themselves enough to think that something so completely new and transformative as resurrection might be possible in a new and quivering world. And meanwhile, back in the garden ...

I think that Hughes and my friend are right: the truest proclamation of Easter is not triumphalist but understated, not ponderous but quietly quickened. We are not privileged with a direct view of the resurrection for a reason: there are things too wonderful to be met full in the face. These things—and often they are the very things that lie at the center of our faith—can only be seen fleetingly, out of the corner of the eye, at a distance, and perhaps best through the eyes of poets.



Growth—spiritual, intellectual, and vocational—is the goal of the **The Doctor of Ministry program at Austin Seminary**. The program is designed for ordained church leaders with five or more years of pastoral experience. Students in the program:

- Experience spiritual growth and intellectual challenge
- Strengthen, refresh, and refine pastoral gifts
- Expand theological knowledge and renew pastoral creativity
- Improve sense of pastoral awareness, identity, and leadership

As part of the program, students design, conduct, and evaluate a project that addresses a pastoral need or concern in their ministry setting, so that the benefit of the program is not merely to the student, but also to the context (congregation, hospital) in which the student does ministry.

Graduates of the program often say that the best part of the degree program is the collegial fellowship and the relationships which endure long after graduation.

For more information about the program or curriculum, contact the Reverend Dr. Paul Hooker, Associate Dean for Ministerial Formation and Advanced Studies, 512-404-4880 or email phooker@austinseminary.edu

Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Theodore J. Wardlaw, *President*

Board of Trustees

G. Archer Frierson II, *Chair*

James Allison
Whit Bodman
Janice Bryant (MDiv'01, DMin'11)
Claudia D. Carroll
Elizabeth Christian
Joseph J. Clifford
Katherine B. Cummings (MDiv'05)
Thomas Christian Currie
Consuelo Donahue (MDiv'96)
Jackson Farrow Jr.
Beth Blanton Flowers, MD
Jesús Juan González (MDiv'92)
John Hartman
Ann Herlin (MDiv'01)
Rhashell D. Hunter
Steve LeBlanc
James H. Lee (MDiv'00)
Sue B. McCoy
Matthew Miller (MDiv'03)
Lyndon L. Olson Jr.
B. W. Payne
David Peoples
Jeffrey Kyle Richard
Conrad Rocha
Lana Russell
Lita Simpson
Anne Vickery Stevenson
Martha Crawley Tracey
Karl Brian Travis
Carlton Wilde Jr.
Elizabeth Currie Williams
Michael G. Wright

Trustees Emeriti

Stephen A. Matthews
Max Sherman
Louis H. Zbinden Jr.

For the glory of God, and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary is a seminary in the Presbyterian-Reformed tradition whose mission is to educate and equip individuals for the ordained Christian ministry and other forms of Christian service and leadership; to employ its resources in the service of the church; to promote and engage in critical theological thought and research; and to be a winsome and exemplary community of God's people.



**Our mission depends upon
your generosity.**

Please make a gift online:

<https://giving.austinseminary.edu/joy>



AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

100 E. 27th Street, Austin, Texas 78705 | 512-404-4886
advancement@austinseminary.edu | austinseminary.edu