

Making the Road: *Walking through Lent*

WEEK 6: WALKING THROUGH HOLY WEEK

written by TERI MCDOWELL OTT

Sunday, April 10 ☞ Luke 19:28-40

As we make this road into the holy city of Jerusalem, we walk alongside Jesus riding a colt, his disciples shouting praises, making a scene and drawing a crowd. Across the city, another powerful leader makes his entrance. In their book, *The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem*, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan describe, in vivid detail, the procession of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria. It was standard practice for governors to show up in cities during major festivals. Pilate wasn't coming to help celebrate Passover, though, but to maintain order and squash any rebellion that might arise among a crowd unhappy with their Roman oppressors.

Pilate's procession into Jerusalem was a showy parade of strength. Pilate led the way on a huge war horse, followed by his calvary, followed by his foot soldiers. According to Borg and Crossan, they'd be dressed in leather armor and helmets, carrying weapons, banners, and golden eagles mounted on poles. It was a display of both imperial power and imperial theology. The Roman emperor was not simply a political ruler. Augustus, the greatest of Roman emperors who ruled from 31 B.C.E. to 14 C.E., was believed to be the son of Apollo. Augustus was referred to as "son of God," "lord," and "savior," and his successors continued to bear these divine titles.

Given this context, Jesus' entry to Jerusalem appears more like a show of planned resistance than a humble parade. The danger and tension rise in this narrative as one "Son of God" enters Jerusalem from the east and another from the west. The road Jesus is making confronts and contradicts the power of the world. Jesus' way is the road of humility and peace, not intimidating strength and terrorizing power.

Son of the Living God, let us not be confused about who you are and the road you lead us down. Let us make our road humble and work for peace. Amen.

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Monday, April 11 ☞ Luke 23:1-25

Jesus has upset the powerful and been betrayed by those closest to him. Pilate's ready to let Jesus go, but the crowd is stoked against him. They want him crucified. Pilate asks, "Why? What evil has Jesus done?" But the crowd is too swept up to hear, think, or respond. They are not individuals, but a crowd with one objective: Kill Jesus.

When have you been swept up in a moment or a crowd that has steered you away from Jesus? Reflecting on how that experience felt, what options you had, what actions you could or should have taken, can help when you find yourself in a similar situation.

Jesus, forgive us when we abandon you for the crowd. Help us be clear-minded in following you. Amen.

Tuesday, April 12 ☞ Luke 23:26-31

The road Jesus walks turns from unassuming to humiliating as Jesus is led to crucifixion. He will be hung on a cross on a skull-shaped hill outside Jerusalem's walls, a warning for everyone entering the city — don't rebel against Rome or this will be you. Simon of Cyrene, a visitor for the Passover festival, is dragged out and made to carry Jesus's cross. If Simon refuses, he will likely be crucified too. In Mark 15:21, we learn Simon has two sons. Are they with him for Passover? Do they beg their dad to do as he was told to stay safe?

Lord, help those who get swept up in evil situations. Help us when we participate in oppressive systems. Save us and set us free. Amen.

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Wednesday, April 13 ☩ Luke 23:32-38

Who is the most powerful in this scene — those who violently and brutally crucify? Those who scoff and mock? Those who cast lots over a dying man's clothes? Or, does the power reside in the innocent man on the cross who forgives? The one who practices love in the face of hate, who wages peace, not violence? This story isn't over. The ripple effects of Jesus' love and forgiveness remain to this day.

God of glory, your ways are not the world's ways, your power, not the world's power. Help us stand strong in the face of persecution, turmoil, or grief. Help us do the hard thing that is the right thing. Empower us with Jesus' love and forgiveness, so we can faithfully face whatever life brings. Amen.

Thursday, April 14 ☩ Luke 23:39-43

"Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom." These words of Scripture have been arranged into my favorite Taizé hymn "Jesus, Remember Me." The words repeat like a mantra. Singing this hymn together at the end of a Good Friday service, as the last bit of light dies in the darkness, is a powerful experience. In this bleak space we want nothing more than for our Savior to remember us, call us by name, keep making this uncertain road with us. We need to remember this feeling – this longing for Jesus – and use it as fuel for our faith.

Jesus, we remember you and long for you. Remember us when you come into your kingdom.

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Friday, April 15 ☩ Luke 23:44-46

Jesus “breathed his last.” The breath that fills our lungs and sends oxygen to our body and brain means more to us now that we’ve experienced a deadly virus that attacks our respiratory system. Jesus’s human body relied on this life-giving breath. When his breath ceased, his body soon followed. Being fully human meant Jesus was to experience everything we experience, including death. But still, we are not left alone. The Holy Spirit follows Jesus. The word “spirit” in Greek is *pneuma*, which also means “breath.” We are never left without this life-giving support.

“Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love as Thou dost love and do as Thou wouldst do” (Glory to God, #286). Amen.

Saturday, April 16 ☩ Luke 23:50-56

Despite the bustle of Easter preparations, I’ve always felt that Holy Saturday should be slow and quiet — a day of respectful, hushed grieving as we wait and wonder before the tomb. I imagine Joseph of Arimathea tenderly taking Jesus’ broken body from that disgraceful cross, wrapping his nakedness in clean linen, laying him gently in the tomb. Perhaps we can walk through this Holy Saturday as Joseph handled Jesus’ body — gently, tenderly, in awe of all God is doing.

Father of Jesus, you grieve today too. Your heart as wounded as ours. We are in awe of your love for us, in awe of the lengths you will go to save us. Hear our whispered prayers of gratitude in the face of a gift we cannot begin to fathom. Amen.

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Sunday, April 17 ☞ **Luke 24:13-35**

The risen Christ meets two despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus, leaving the Holy City behind. When these disciples broke bread with the man, they thought was a stranger, their eyes were opened to the joy of this Easter Sunday. Jesus is alive! Our hearts burn with this good news! These two despairing disciples change course immediately and return to Jerusalem. They have work to do. A new road needs to be made. From this day forward, we walk with the resurrected Christ.

Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Amen!

