

Beloved

Easter Devotional



*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

John 3:16

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Palm Sunday

**THE DOVE DONKEY
OF PEACE**

- Todd Lester

Monday

**WHEN OUR DREAMS FAIL
~ GOD OUR COMFORT**

- Alex Nicholls

Tuesday

**KEEPING OUR EYES
ON JESUS**

- Sheryl Roberts

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**LOVING OUR ENEMIES
~ WASHING FEET**

- Justin Brix

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- Darrell Winger

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THE RESURRECTION

~ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

- Charlie Mashinter

Day 1 - Palm Sunday

THE ~~DOVE~~ DONKEY OF PEACE

Read **Luke 19:28-44; Zechariah 9:9-10**

³⁵They brought (the donkey) to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

Reflect As we begin Holy Week on Palm Sunday we are reminded of the symbolism present as Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. A significant point of symbolism is the donkey on which Jesus rides as described in Luke 19:28-44 and prophesied in Zechariah 9:9-10. Jesus enters the holy city riding on a donkey and people bow their palm branches in response to his Kingship. He didn't arrive on a white stallion or in a great regal royal chariot like a Caesar or an Emperor. Rather, he arrived on a beast of burden to reinforce that the nature of his kingdom was fundamentally different. For an arriving emissary, a horse was a symbol of power but a donkey was a symbol of peace. The donkey symbolizes that Jesus' kingdom was one of peace in contrast to the violence the people hoped for.

The dove in our BIC logo, which represents our value of peace, could be replaced by a donkey on this Palm Sunday.

Act This call to peace brings us to a decision. Will we follow Jesus and fully embrace his kingdom values? Just as it was true in Jesus' time, people find peace a difficult option against aggression and injustice.

What are the ways we can tell a new narrative of love and peace in our world of conflict?

Pray *Father in heaven, may your kingdom of peace come to me so that I can extend it to others. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, may we extend the peace of Jesus to our families, neighbours, workplaces, cities, country and world. Amen*

Day 2 - Holy Week (Monday)

WHEN OUR DREAMS FAIL

~ GOD OUR COMFORT

Read **Luke 19:28-44**

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.

Reflect I wonder how Jesus' followers felt in the week leading up to his death? It must have seemed to them like they were on the verge of heaven itself - God's kingdom, a time of victory and the fulfilment of all their wildest dreams. Surely Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem meant the fixing of all things, a "happily ever after," time for the end credits to roll... and yet...

What do we do when our own happily ever after doesn't arrive, when our own promises, hopes and dreams seem to go unfulfilled or drastically shift away from what we had expected? Where do we find ourselves? Do we still consider ourselves 'Beloved'? Do we focus on the dream more than the giver of our dreams?

Act Are there dreams that we are holding on to more tightly than the giver the dream - our faithful God? When our dreams fail do we turn to the lover of our souls - our God who *knows us*? Remember and pray to the God who sees our hearts and journeys with us in both our heartbreak (as our comforter and strength), and in the way he has prepared before us. A way that will ultimately bring us into new and eternal life.

Pray *Lord, I thank you that you love me, even in the times that I feel alone, confused or my dreams fail and fall away. Help me to remember that you are my comforter and my strength even in seasons of sorrow and lament. Amen.*

Day 3 - Holy Week (Tuesday)

KEEPING OUR EYES ON JESUS

Read **Hebrews 12:1-3**

²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Reflect As Jesus braced himself for immeasurable suffering, he made the choice to endure the cross. As he did, this passage tells us he had his sights set on “the joy set before him”.

What was that joy? The joy of offering a free gift of radical love to us, to make a way for us to have deep, eternal relationship with him. This shows us his heart of love.

We were already his Beloved, his focus.

This week in particular, we pause to reflect on this sacrifice of love. We are encouraged to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Why? So we do not grow weary or lose heart.

In difficult times, or in our struggle against sin, it can be a challenge to not grow weary and lose heart. Sometimes resentment, anger, even self-pity, creeps in. We start comparing with others. This passage doesn't say we should just focus on Jesus when life is good. We are to make this a choice, an act of our will. We can turn our thoughts toward him. In the midst of the dark, messy places of our lives, Jesus calls out to us in love - to be strong and take heart.

Act Take a moment to consider what you dwell on.

In what difficult time, or struggle with sin, could you use a shift in focus?

Pray *Lord, in dark days of struggle or temptation, I never walk alone. Thank you for your faithful, loving presence. Help me to fix my eyes on you. Amen*

Day 4 - Holy Week (Wednesday)

LOVING OUR ENEMIES

~ WASHING FEET

Read **John 13:1-16**

⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Reflect Have you ever had to do something nice for someone who may not have deserved it?

In John 13:1-16, we read an eyewitness account of the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. In the ancient near east, roads were dusty and when sandals were the footwear of choice, it's not hard to imagine how dirty feet would get. Jesus performs this act as an example of the way his disciples should love and treat one another.

In verse 11, however, we read that Jesus already knows which one of his disciples was going to betray him, yet there is no mention of Judas the betrayer being excluded from this act of love. As he reaches Judas, he takes his foot and begins an act that only servants typically would have performed. What do you think was running through Jesus' head? I can't even begin to imagine.

In this Easter season we are reminded of the radical ways that Jesus loved and served even those who persecuted him. This act of foot washing points us towards the cross, the ultimate display of enemy love.

Act Who do we consider to be our enemies? Who are those that we believe have wronged us or we will never see eye to eye with? Can we follow Jesus' example and love even these?

Pray *God, we thank you for your incredible love for us. Jesus, through the power of your Holy Spirit, give us the courage, grace and patience to "love well" - even our enemies.
In your holy name, Amen.*

Day 5 - Maundy Thursday

SHOW ME THE LOVE!

Read **John 13:34**

³⁴ "A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Reflect Maundy Thursday is the Thursday before Easter when Jesus celebrated his final Passover with his disciples. It was at this "Last Supper", when Jesus washed the disciples' feet in love and then commanded them to do the same. We remember Jesus' "mandate" each Maundy Thursday – "maundy" being a shortened form of the Latin word "mandatum", which means "command."

"A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34) were the words of Jesus that night.

Several years ago, the movie, "Jerry Maguire", introduced the phrase: Show me the money! Jesus' command is much harder: Show me the love! Seems so simple – as we experience God's amazing love we are to turn around and show others this same love. In fact, we are told this is the way the world will know we are truly Jesus followers. Not how smart I am, how hard I work for the church, or even how long I have been a church member. No, it is whether or not we are "showing the love" of Jesus in real life. It is easy to show love towards some people. For others, it can be quite difficult.

Act This Easter, my challenge is in deciding that I will show love to all those in my life in whatever circumstances I find them.

Pray *Jesus, in this Easter season, I need your help to love others as you loved. I confess I often fail to speak and act in loving ways. Help me show others that I have experienced your love by reaching out to them in love and compassion, just as you loved me. Amen.*

Day 6 - Good Friday

PRINCE OF PEACE

Read **Isaiah 62:10-12; Matt 27:38-44**
*¹⁰ Go through, go through the gates!
Make the way ready for the people.
Build up, build up the road!
Move all the stones off the road.
Raise the banner as a sign for the people.*

Reflect Good Friday is the day of our Lord's sacrificial and willing giving of his life. On Maundy Thursday he surrendered himself to the will of the Father by praying, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." It is my observation that we live in a world that is more comfortable responding to people who exact violence or do wrong. We are not as comfortable or don't know what to do with the prince of peace.

As I write this I read today's headlines – Russia has a new cruise missile that is undetectable, NATO has said we can and will defeat it, war is threatened again on the Korean peninsula, neighbourhoods in the outskirts of Damascus, Syria are being bombed. And today we remember an innocent God-man who willingly went to a cross for our salvation and eternal hope. It may be true we are more comfortable with raw power that rides on a stallion than we are with the one who comes on a donkey with the weapons of love, patience, suffering and peace.

Act Jesus asked us as his followers to be a people of peace. How do we live that out? What does it mean for our lives? For our relationships?

Pray *O Lord, I trust you to be present with me, to deliver me in the midst of conflict and teach me how to be an instrument of peace. Guard my being and help me to take refuge in you. Amen.*

Day 7 - Holy Saturday

THE IN-BETWEEN

Read Psalm 18:28

28 You light a lamp for me.

The Lord, my God, lights up my darkness.

Reflect Imagine for a moment what Saturday felt like for the disciples. The fear, the questions, the disillusionment. It must have all felt surreal. What will life look like now? How can there be a positive future ahead?

We all experience Saturdays at some point in our lives. A Saturday can come from an unexpected diagnosis, the loss of a loved one, or the death of a dream. In our Saturdays life as we have known it is done, and usually not by our own choice. The future feels gray, foggy, and full of unknowns.

So how do we live in Saturday?

God is able to grow us in our Saturdays, perhaps more than in any other season. Saturdays provide great opportunities if we will embrace them.

An opportunity to deepen our faith in the character of God, regardless of circumstances. An opportunity to experience that being a beloved child of God is the best thing we could ever hope for. An opportunity to hide ourselves in the care of God, and trust him with an unknown future.

And in the end, Psalm 30:5 becomes a significant part of our personal experience: "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning."

Act Think of a Saturday season in your life. Thank God for how he carried you to Sunday. If you are in a Saturday season right now, choose to trust that the "God who can do immeasurably more than we could think or ask" will bring joy and beauty to your future.

Pray *Father, thank you for walking with us through every season of life. Thank you for the beauty you bring out of darkness. Amen.*

Day 8 - Easter Sunday

THE RESURRECTION

~ ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Read **Luke 24:4-6a**

⁴ As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. ⁵ The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? ⁶ He isn't here! He is risen from the dead!

Reflect Sometimes life takes a surprising turn. A few years ago I remember a miraculous comeback by the Los Angeles Dodgers when Kirk Gibson, who was severely hobbled by a leg injury at the time, stepped to the plate and hit a pinch hit home run to help them win the World Series.

Nobody saw it coming.

As Gibson came to the plate, the camera had pointed to a solitary sign of hope held by a fan which read "You Gotta Believe!" As the women in Luke's account of the resurrection became the custodians of the good news that Jesus had risen, they must have wondered "who is going to believe us?" I wonder how much of it all had really sunk in, even with them. Perhaps it is best in trying to tell good news to others if it is first good news to us!

Act Maybe the completion of your Easter journey this year is to simply "believe" all over again. Believe that Jesus has arisen. Believe that you are the object of His grace and His affection. Believe that, if Jesus rose from the dead, then anything is possible! Let it all sink in.

Pray *Lord Jesus, help me to live my life with an Easter faith - full of hope, loving you more every day, optimistic, and willing to work with you to see your kingdom break into this world in surprising ways. Amen.*



*Alleluia,
Christ is Risen!*



AN EASTER GIFT TO THE WORLD HUNGER FUND

In recent months, our brothers and sisters in the **BIC Church of Venezuela have been suffering extreme economic hardship.** They have experienced disruptions in the banking system and seen uncontrolled inflation.



Photo Credit: Juan Arredondo
for The New York Times Feb 2018

The **Be In Christ Church of Canada World Hunger Fund** is designed to provide immediate assistance in response to crises and disasters that affect our fellow National BIC Churches and the communities where they are involved.

But it is long-term partnerships that make this support so important and impactful.

Our ongoing and mutual investment in each other, as national denominations, goes far beyond the financial contributions we make to each other. Instead, we invest in one another through leadership development, prayer support, strategic visioning and reciprocal community education.

Please prayerfully consider making a donation to the World Hunger Fund. In this season, your gift will provide immediate support in response to crises and disasters that affect our national partners in countries such as Venezuela.

To give your Easter gift to the World Hunger Fund
or to see more online giving options visit:
www.canadianbic.ca/worldhungerfund