

WEEK OF ASH WEDNESDAY: LEADER
WEEK 1: WEEK OF MARCH 3
A PLACE AT THE TABLE FOR YOU
Luke 22:1–23

OPENING

Jesus, I will ponder now
 On your holy passion;
With your Spirit me endow
 For such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith
 May the image cherish
Of your suff'ring, pain, and death
 That I may not perish.

—“Jesus, I Will Ponder Now” (*LSB* 440, v. 1)

SERIES INTRODUCTION

“Places of the Passion” is a Lenten series that meditates on the Passion Narrative of St. Luke. Each portion of the series focuses on a different place in the Passion of our Lord and discovers in that place the gracious work of God.

What is important in these places is not the physical surroundings but the spiritual dispositions of the people who gather there. Again and again, we will see God’s people, from the religious and political leaders to the disciples, revealing the sinful ways of the human heart. Yet, again and again, Jesus will reveal how He enters these physical places to bring about salvation and spiritual change. The most troubling places of our lives become the most amazing places of God’s grace when Jesus visits them.

As you read through these studies, you will be invited to see a stark contrast between the ways of sin, manifested in all the variety of human life, and the way of salvation, made known in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By listening closely to these texts, by meditating on the work of God revealed in and through them, we will learn to bring our sins to Jesus that He might save us with his powerful and passionate love.

INTRODUCTION

In Exodus 12:1–14, God offers Israel directions for keeping the Passover. The first portion of the text (vv. 1–11a) describes Israel’s actions: from selecting the lamb, slaughtering it, and placing its blood on the doorposts, to preparing the lamb and eating the meal. The second portion of the text (vv. 11b–14) describes God’s actions. God will pass through Egypt, striking down the firstborn, but He will pass over His people because of the blood on their doorposts.

Thus, in Exodus, when the Passover is introduced, we are asked to contemplate two actions: the action of the people and the action of God.

Luke uses a similar technique when he retells the story of our Lord's celebration of Passover with His disciples (Luke 22:1–13). The first section of the text (vv. 1–6) focuses on the actions of the people, and the second section of the text (vv. 7–13) focuses on the actions of Jesus. In this way, Luke presents us with two vastly different Passover preparations.

By contrasting these two different Passover preparations, Luke invites us to see that Jesus graciously works through His Word even in the face of evil.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(Note: Participant guide includes only the questions for this section.)

1. When we think of the Lord's Supper, we remember Jesus and "the night when He was betrayed." Our thoughts turn to how Jesus graciously gives us His body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of our sins. For the disciples, however, Passover meant something different. What was the meaning of Passover? How did God's people celebrate it? (See Exodus 12:1–14.)

Passover celebrated God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. It was celebrated at the beginning of each year, when God's people remembered God's deliverance. The way in which they were to celebrate the event highlighted the haste with which they ate the Passover, awaiting their departure from Egypt by the power of God. At the heart of Passover was an event of judgment and salvation. God revealed His judgment upon all of Egypt, including its gods, by passing through Egypt and striking all of the firstborn. God revealed His salvation of His people, delivering them from their enemies, and doing so vicariously, as the blood of the lamb placed upon the doorposts was a sign for the people that God would pass over their homes.

2. Scripture offers explicit directions on how to prepare for Passover physically. Knowing what Passover celebrated, how do you think God's people would prepare for it spiritually?

The celebration of Passover was a grateful response to God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt and, thus, would involve giving God thanks. Israel might confess her powerlessness to deliver herself, remembering her call upon God from the depths of her suffering and the fact that God graciously heard her cry and intervened to save (Exodus 3:7–9). As the Israelites slaughtered the Passover lamb for sacrifice, they would remember how the firstborn of Egypt were killed but they, the firstborn of God (Exodus 4:22), were saved by the blood of the lamb. In addition, since Passover was part of a larger narrative of God leading his people to the Promised Land, Israel would look forward to the work of God, fulfilling His promises to restore His people.

3. In the beginning of the text (22:1–7), Luke records how people were preparing for Passover. What are people doing? What do these details tell you about the spiritual state of God’s people?

Luke focuses our attention upon the interaction between Judas and the religious leaders. Instead of giving thanks for the work of God and looking to the future in hope, we see God’s people engaging in sinful rebellion. Murder and the deceit of betrayal are prominent. Murder and deceit are the works of Satan, a murderer and liar from the beginning (John 8:44), so it not surprising that Luke turns our attention to Satan.

At the first Passover, Israel was delivered from the power of Egypt; with the appearance of Satan in Luke’s Passion Narrative, the question arises whether God’s people can be delivered from his power.

*In discussing the threat of Satan in the text, the leader may want to help the participants remember how Jesus fought against Satan through the proclamation of God’s Word, both in the temptations in the wilderness and then throughout His ministry. This will prepare the participants for the next section of Luke’s Passion Narrative, where Luke focuses our attention upon the power of Jesus’ Word.

4. How does Luke’s description of Jesus preparing for Passover (22:7–13) contrast with the description of the preparations of others?

In this section, Luke focuses upon the words of Jesus in contrast to action. Whereas the previous section records no dialogue, this section is almost all dialogue. Jesus converses with the disciples, giving them directions on what to do, and then Luke ends the section by stating, “they went and found it just as He had told them” (v. 13). In the midst of human acts of evil, Jesus speaks a word that comes true and prepares a place for His disciples to celebrate the Passover with Him.

5. Luke reveals that Jesus works through His Word in the midst of evil to graciously provide a place to celebrate the Passover. Why is this of great comfort to us today?

It is a great comfort to know that God does not abandon His people in the midst of evil but comes and graciously works through His Word to bring about their salvation. In the midst of the evil that surrounds us in the world and the evil that arises from within us, we have a gracious God who promises to come and work through His Word. He comes now and forgives us our sins according to His promise. He prepares a table for us to celebrate with Him the great Passover of God, where the Father offered His only Son that we might be forgiven and claimed as the people of God.

CONCLUSION

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, a time when God's people engage in repentant preparation for the celebration of Easter. There are many different activities, spiritual disciplines that God's people do in repentant preparation. In the midst of all of those activities, Luke turns our eyes to Jesus, to His Word and His work for us. In Him, we see how God has worked in the midst of evil, to prepare a place for us to gather at His table and be fed with the bread of life.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, when Your people suffered from slavery, You brought them a great deliverance and, when Your disciples were caught in deadly conflicts, You prepared for them the Passover.

Be with us now, as we begin the season of Lent. Teach us to repent of our acts of evil and open our eyes to see Your Son's acts of love, our ears to hear His words of grace, and our hearts to trust that, in all places, He has prepared a table for us.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

MIDWEEK OF LENT 1: LEADER
 WEEK 2: WEEK OF MARCH 10
THE UPPER ROOM
Luke 22:24–38

OPENING

- L In the name of Jesus, our humble Savior.
 C **Amen.**
 L To You, I lift up my eyes,
 C **O You who are enthroned in the heavens!**
 L Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,
 C **as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress,**
 L so our eyes look to the LORD our God,
 C **till He has mercy upon us.**
 L Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,
 C **for we have more than enough of contempt.**
 L Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease,
 C **of the contempt of the proud.**
**All: Glory be the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning,
 is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

—Psalm 123

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative, Luke takes us to the Upper Room, where Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples. The Upper Room is filled with powerful memories. In John's Passion Narrative, we remember that moment in the Upper Room when Jesus stripped Himself for service and washed His disciples' feet (John 13:1–20). There, we see Jesus kneeling and washing the feet of disciples who would desert Him and of one who would betray Him.

Luke does not include that event in his account of the Upper Room. He does, however, offer us the teaching that Jesus embodies in that act of selfless service.

After Jesus had celebrated the Passover with His disciples, an argument arose among them about which of them was the greatest. Faced with the prediction that one of them would betray Jesus (22:21–22), the disciples responded by arguing about their greatness (vv. 23–24). How easily we turn to our own good works as a way of defending ourselves from any accusation of sin!

Our truest defense, however, lies in Jesus. He is the one who gave His sinless life that we might be forgiven. So, we stand before God and the world in His righteousness rather than our own.

In this passage, Jesus invites us to follow Him in lives of self-sacrificial service. Jesus uses this strife about glory to teach the glory of service. He invites His disciples then and now to live in humble, self-sacrificial service as they stand in His righteousness and serve in His love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has taught His disciples about greatness (Luke 9:46–48; 14:7–14; and 18:9–14). In doing so, He gave them a radically different view from the world. In this text (22:24–30), how does the radical greatness of God differ from the ways of the world?

According to Jesus, the ways of the world involve systems of comparison, power, and exchange. The disciples are arguing about which one is to be regarded as greatest, certainly in comparison with one another and possibly in contrast to the one who would betray Him (v. 22). For the Gentiles, greatness is linked to power (v. 25) and to a system of exchange. Individuals gained the title “benefactor” by using their wealth and power to do civic good for the purpose of receiving public honor and praise.

The greatness of God, however, is different. It involves being regarded as the youngest (recalling the example of the child in Luke 9:46–48), and choosing to fulfill the role of the servant (recalling the radical renunciation of any claim to greatness in 14:7–14 and 18:9–14). Such radical humility defies the ways of the world and trusts in the judgment of God. Even though one does not see it now, God honors those who serve Him (22:28–29, recalling 14:11 and 18:14).

2. How does this teaching prepare the disciples to understand what Jesus is about to do? (cf. Philippians 2:5–11).

Jesus is about to pursue His Father’s mission of saving, self-sacrificial service. Putting His own interests aside (Philippians 2:5–7), Jesus will offer His life for the world. Crucifixion will bring dishonor upon Jesus, degrading and dehumanizing Him in the eyes of this world, so that it would be impossible for Him to be considered a leader in any of the social systems of that day.

This radical renunciation of any claim to greatness in the eyes of the world, however, demonstrates a radical trust in the work of God. Through this act of self-sacrifice, Jesus will redeem the fallen world, and God the Father will exalt Him, giving Him the name which is above every name, as Jesus rises from the dead and ascends into heaven to rule over all (Philippians 2:8–11).

3. How does this teaching prepare the disciples for their future service? (See Luke 22:35–37 and compare with Romans 8:16–25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7–18.)

Jesus prepares His disciples for lives of self-sacrifice and humble service, trusting that the ways of God are different from the ways of the world and that those who remain with Him in His trials will reign with Him in His glory (Luke 22:28–30).

Whereas before, when the disciples went out in mission, they were received with hospitality because they bore Jesus' name, now they will be rejected because Jesus was numbered with transgressors (22:35–37). Those who follow Jesus will suffer like Jesus, be rejected, and need even the basic necessities of life (v. 36). Yet, sharing His sufferings now, they live in hope of His future glory (Romans 8:17).

4. How does this teaching prepare us for service in God's kingdom?

Living in a world that measures greatness by accomplishment and public praise (even for acts that are not praiseworthy), it is easy to begin to look at our lives to measure our value. Such measuring pits us against one another and leads to arguments about greatness rather than to lives of self-sacrificial service.

Jesus turns our eyes from ourselves to Him. He is among us "as one who serves" (Luke 22:27), being obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Because of His dying service, we are forgiven of our sins. We no longer need to look to ourselves or to the praise of others to find value before God. Instead, we stand before God in the righteousness of Christ.

Confident that we are God's children because of Jesus' gracious work, we are free to follow Jesus in lives of hope and humble service. We do the things of God, sure of our Father's blessing, even when we suffer the rejection of our world.

CONCLUSION

Every age has its ways of glory. For us, magazines anoint men and women of the year with the glory of fame, and markets crown new rulers with the glory of wealth.

Jesus, however, comes into a world filled with arguments about greatness and reveals the true glory of God. God's glory is found in self-sacrificial love for the least. By humbling Himself as a servant, offering His life for the forgiveness of sin, Jesus revealed the glory of God.

Forgiven by Him, we now live in Him. He calls us, His disciples, to follow the servant's way, walking with God in self-sacrificial love for the least.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, You rule the heavens and the earth, and earthly temples made with human hands cannot contain Your glory. Yet, on that night when He was betrayed, Your Son stretched forth His hands and brought Your saving glory to our world, revealing Your love in His suffering service for the least.

Visit us now, we humbly pray, that we might repent of our vain attempts at glory. Forgive us our sins and renew our humble service, that we might live as Your children, brought by grace into Your glorious kingdom and sharing Your gifts in self-sacrificial love with the world.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

MIDWEEK OF LENT 2: LEADER
 WEEK 3: WEEK OF MARCH 17
GETHSEMANE
Luke 22:39–46

OPENING

Go to dark Gethsemane,
 All who feel the tempter's power;
 Your Redeemer's conflict see,
 Watch with Him one bitter hour;
 Turn not from His griefs away;
 Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.

—“Go to Dark Gethsemane” (*LSB* 436, v. 1)

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative (Luke 22:39–46), Luke takes us to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prays to His heavenly Father and submits Himself to His Father's will. At the heart of this scene is the humble obedience of Christ to His Father's will for our salvation.

Surrounding this scene, however, is a picture of disciples who are struggling to pray and in need of encouragement from their Lord. Their sorrow overwhelms them, and Jesus not only encourages them to take solace in prayer, but He also gives Himself to suffering for our salvation that He might open to us the gift of prayer.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Luke's Passion Narrative simplifies the story of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Read the Passion accounts of Matthew (26:36–46) and Mark (14:32–42) and identify the ways in which Luke's account differs from theirs. What does Luke accomplish by relating the event in this way?

Whereas Matthew and Mark relate Jesus praying and returning to His disciples three times, Luke creates a very simple frame of the event: the disciples are instructed to pray (22:39–40); Jesus prays (vv. 41–44); and then the disciples are awakened and instructed to pray (vv. 45–46). Within this frame, Luke offers a fuller and richer description of the sorrow of Jesus.

Luke also simplifies the words of Jesus to the disciples. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus engages in a progression of dialogue with three of His disciples: He reveals to them His sorrow and encourages them to watch with Him, He highlights the human struggle of flesh and spirit and encourages them to pray, and He identifies for them that the time is now at hand. In Luke,

Jesus speaks the same words to the disciples before and after His prayer, encouraging them to pray that they not fall into temptation.

The framing device and the simplification of the dialogue highlight the contrast between the struggles the disciples have in prayer and the struggle that Jesus has. Whereas the disciples fall asleep in sorrow under the burden of the night (v. 45), Jesus endures His sorrow for them (vv. 43–44).

2. Jesus encourages His disciples to “pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40, 46). What are possible temptations that could have assaulted the disciples?

If one reads this account in light of the accounts in Matthew and Mark, the temptation would be to fall asleep rather than watch with Jesus. Since Luke does not record the command that they watch, however, we might look to the larger narrative to see other temptations to which they could have fallen.

In reading the larger narrative, we recognize a great many temptations that surround the disciples. Judas was tempted to betray Jesus (Luke 22:21), the disciples were tempted to argue about their greatness (v. 24), the disciples may have been tempted to abandon Jesus in His trials (v. 28), Satan demanded to have all of the disciples that he might sift them like wheat (v. 31, note the use of the plural “you”) and thus they could fall under his sifting, Peter would be tempted to deny Jesus (vv. 31–34), and the disciples may have been tempted to defend themselves and Jesus against attack (v. 38). In addition, Luke tells us that the disciples slept “for sorrow” (v. 45), and therefore the predictions of the Passion and fear of losing Jesus may have been tempting them to despair.

3. Why is prayer a good response to temptation?

In prayer, we turn away from ourselves and our strength and turn to God and His strength. By ourselves, we will not be able to overcome temptation, so we turn from ourselves to God and entrust ourselves to His care. Also, we have received many great and precious promises from God, and prayer arises from these promises and lives in relationship to God in light of them. For example, the promise that God will hear us and answer us in time of prayer (Luke 11:5–13) and the promise that God will provide us a way of escape in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

4. Though the disciples fall asleep in the midst of their suffering, Jesus prays in the midst of His suffering. What does Jesus mean when He asks His Father to “remove this cup from Me”? (cf. Isaiah 51:17–23; Jeremiah 25:15–29).

In prophetic language, the cup was a metaphor for the cup of God’s wrath. As noted in the passages from Isaiah and Jeremiah, God’s cup of wrath could be poured out on His own people (as in Isaiah) or upon the nations (as in Jeremiah), for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Jesus, however, was without sin and therefore did not deserve to drink the cup of God’s wrath. God’s will, however, was to provide a Savior for His people, one who would rescue them from His wrath; Jesus becomes that Savior by willingly bearing the wrath of God for all people. He takes God’s wrath upon Himself in order that all people might experience God’s mercy and the cup of His blessing. In asking His Father to take this cup from Him, Jesus is expressing the deeply human struggle of bearing the eternal wrath of God for the sins of the world.

5. Why is the fact that Jesus submits to His Father’s will good news for the disciples and for us?

In this prayer, Jesus humbly submits Himself to His Father’s will of salvation for all nations and opens the kingdom of heaven to His disciples and to us.

Because Jesus submits to His Father’s will, we have a Savior from sin. He is the one who takes all of God’s judgment for our sins upon Himself that we might be forgiven and declared to be the children of God. This moment takes us back to the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Luke’s Gospel: Jesus proclaims “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:19) because He has taken the day of God’s vengeance (Isaiah 61:2) upon Himself.

This prayer, then, offers encouragement to the disciples and to God’s people. In the midst of our temptations, it reminds us of the power and the grace of God in Jesus. The good news that Jesus has opened the kingdom of heaven to us by suffering the wrath of God for us encourages us to pray to our heavenly Father, who desires to hear and delights to answer our prayers.

CONCLUSION

Luke places the willing obedience of Jesus to His Father's will in the context of the disciples, who are struggling to pray in the midst of temptation. This stark contrast reveals the wonder of God sending us a Savior from sin. Although we are weak and unable to pray in the midst of temptation, there is one who is strong and endures the wrath of God for us. By grace through Him and faith in Him, we are encouraged to pray.

As the writer to the Hebrews reminded the early Christians, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15–16).

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, You sent Your Son to accomplish Your desire for our salvation. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He humbly submitted to Your will and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Send us Your Holy Spirit and inspire our prayers. In times of temptation, turn us to You. Teach us to see Jesus, who accomplished Your will for us, that by His grace and through His Spirit, we might accomplish Your will in the world.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

MIDWEEK OF LENT 3: LEADER

Week 4: Week of March 24

THE BETRAYAL

Luke 22:47–53

OPENING

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heav'n, to earth come down!
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter ev'ry trembling heart.

—“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (*LSB* 700, v. 1)

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative (Luke 22:47–53), Luke relates the betrayal of Jesus by Judas and His arrest by the religious leaders. At the heart of this scene is the contrast between the powers of darkness and the eternal love of God.

Jesus summarizes the events at hand when He tells the religious leaders, “this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (v. 53). Yet, even in the darkness, we see the gracious light of Christ. Throughout the betrayal and arrest, Jesus demonstrates the love of God. He willingly bears this suffering as part of God’s work of salvation, and He acts in the midst of this suffering to teach, to protect, and to heal.

Though we see the hour and the power of darkness in this moment, Luke also reveals to us the eternal love of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. In Luke 6:16, Judas is introduced into the narrative as the one “who became a traitor.” Here, Luke records that Jesus asks Judas if he “would betray the Son of Man with a kiss” (22:48). Luke invites the reader to see Judas’s betrayal as one of a series of events, each offering its own form of betrayal to the powers of darkness. Consider each of the scenes in this section of the Passion Narrative and identify the betrayals. Who are the individuals, what has God called them to do in relationship to Christ and His Word, and what are they doing that betrays this calling?

Luke offers us three sections of this narrative based upon different individuals interacting with Jesus. The story begins with Judas handing over Jesus (vv. 47–48), then moves to the disciples’ resisting Jesus’ arrest (vv. 49–51), and then concludes with the opposition of the religious leaders (vv. 52–53).

In each section of the narrative, Luke reveals a form of betrayal as individuals not only fail to do what God has called them to do in their vocations but also work against the ways of God, and thus betray or become a traitor to Jesus and to what God has called them to be in relationship to Him.

With Judas, the irony is sharp and clear. Rather than be a follower, Judas becomes a leader (v. 47) and uses the customary relations of a disciple with his teacher to hand Jesus over to those who desire to kill Him (v. 48).

With the disciples, Luke reveals how they have fundamentally misunderstood Jesus and His mission. His teaching of humble service (22:26), His call to bear the cross and stay with Him in His trials (22:28), His forewarning to be prepared for persecution (22:36–37), and His repeated encouragement to pray (22:40, 46) are all forgotten as the disciples ask a question but fail to wait for an answer and instead define discipleship by a reliance upon force rather than faith (v. 50).

With the religious leaders, Luke highlights their displacement from the things of God. Rather than being found within the temple, attending to the Word and works of God (v. 53), they are in the garden at night, with swords and clubs as their weapons (v. 52).

2. In 2 Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy that “if we are faithless, [Christ] remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself” (2:13). At His birth, the angels revealed Jesus to be the Savior (Luke 2:13), and in His ministry Jesus repeatedly highlighted saving the lost as His mission both in parables (15:1–32) and in direct teaching (19:10).

In this section of the Passion Narrative, how does Jesus demonstrate in word and deed His faithfulness to God’s mission to save those who are lost?

The most important way in which Jesus demonstrates His faithfulness to God’s mission is by willingly suffering this experience of being handed over to the religious leaders for trial and ultimately crucifixion. Jesus has predicted this event throughout Luke (9:21–22, 43–45; 18:31–33), and Jesus could resist this event through His miraculous power (22:51) (as He had passed through such rejection earlier in His ministry, cf. 4:30). Jesus, however, chooses to submit to the will of His Father (22:42) and to suffer to bring about salvation.

In smaller ways, however, we can see the love of God at work in this section. Notice how with Judas and the religious leaders, Jesus seeks to engage them with questions (vv. 48 and 52). While the questions clearly reveal the sins of these people, they also invite self-reflection and the opportunity for repentance. Such is the way Jesus has taught throughout the Gospel, asking questions as a way of leading sinners to repentance.

With the disciples, Jesus acts more directly. Rather than teach through questions, He acts in protection. Jesus prevents further violence (v. 51), lest their actions substantiate claims that He was leading a rebellion (23:1) and bring them under arrest. In addition, Jesus miraculously heals the servant of the high priest whose ear had been cut off by the sword (22:51). To the end, Jesus demonstrates His love, using His power to teach, to protect, and even to heal others rather than Himself.

3. Lent is a time for repentant reflection. As we meditate on this text, Luke invites us to consider the powers of darkness in our own lives. What tempts you to betray the work God has called you in vocation to do?

Vocation: any role in which you can serve God and love His children. This can be as a parent loving your children, a child respecting elders, an employee working to feed the family, a farmer working God’s Earth and preparing food for humans to eat, or any other type or job or relationship.

In Baptism, God has made us His children and brought us into His kingdom. As members of His household, we have various vocations in which we can manifest our love toward Him and faithful service toward others. Unfortunately, the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh fight against such service. In this Lenten exercise, we can name the ways in which we struggle with the powers of darkness. (continued on next page)

In leading the group through this section, you might consider reading through the Table of Duties in the catechism and naming the ways in which these actions are a struggle for Christians today.

4. In the face of such sin, Luke reminds us of the mission of Jesus: to seek and to save the lost. How is Jesus still engaged in that mission in this place?

In this text, Luke helps us see how, in the face of the powers of darkness, Jesus continues to love with an eternal love, teaching, protecting, and healing. This work of Jesus continues in our midst through the public proclamation of His Word, through the Sacraments, through private Confession and Absolution, and through the mutual consolation of the saints.

CONCLUSION

In Psalm 136, Israel learned to sing of God's enduring love in a responsive song. The first voice declared a work of God and then the second voice responded with the refrain, "for His steadfast love endures forever." So Israel praised God for the wonder of creation, remembering His steadfast love.

In this text, Luke helps Christians continue to sing that song. Faced with the powers of darkness, Christ responded with an eternal love. In repentance, we come before God confessing the ways we have betrayed His calling in our lives, and yet, even now, because of the willing suffering and death of Jesus Christ, God proclaims us forgiven, "for His steadfast love endures forever."

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, in Your eternal love for us, You sent Your Son into this world, to save us from our sin. In Him, you made us Your children, heirs of Your heavenly kingdom and partakers of Your heavenly grace.

Forgive us, we pray, for those times when we have not lived as Your children and, in Your eternal love, renew us, that we might grow in faith and love toward You.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

MIDWEEK OF LENT 4: LEADER

Week 5: Week of March 31

THE COURTYARD

Luke 22:54–62

OPENING

O God of light, Your word, a lamp unfailing,
 Shall pierce the darkness of our earthbound way
 And show Your grace, Your plan for us unveiling,
 And guide our footsteps to the perfect day.

From days of old, through blind and willful ages,
 Though we rebelled, You gently sought again
 And spoke through saints, apostles, prophets, sages,
 Who wrote with eager or reluctant pen.

Undimmed by time, those words are still revealing
 To sinful hearts Your justice and Your grace;
 And questing spirits, longing for Your healing,
 See Your compassion in the Savior's face.

—“O God of Light” (LSB 836, vv. 1–3)¹

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative (Luke 22:54–62), Luke relates Peter's denial of Jesus in the courtyard. At the heart of this scene is the contrast between losing one's life and saving it.

Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus taught His disciples, “whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (9:24). That teaching becomes concrete in this text.

Peter looks like he is willing to lose his life. He follows Jesus to the high priest's courtyard. Yet, when questioned about his relationship with Jesus, Peter denies Jesus in order to save his life. By seeking to save his life, he loses it. His denial of Jesus is the way of death.

Jesus, however, is literally losing His life. Here, He is taken to trial and, from there, to His crucifixion. By losing His sinless life, however, Jesus rises to save the lives of sinners. The way of death for Jesus becomes the way of life for all.

Luke surrounds Peter's denial (22:55–60) with the story of Jesus' faithfulness (vv. 54, 61). He wants us to read both of these together. When we look at Peter's denial and reflect on our sin,

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Luke wants us to see Jesus, looking at sinners and willingly dying for their sin. This vision of Jesus comforts all sinners. Jesus lost His life for sinners that sinners might be forgiven and find their true life in Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. At the heart of this text is Peter's denial of Jesus (vv. 55–60). Luke records three conversations with Peter in the courtyard and, with each conversation, the stakes are raised and Peter's denial becomes more fervent. Read through the three conversations and identify how the challenges become broader and Peter's denial grows greater with each one.

In the first conversation, Peter is questioned about a relationship with Jesus (v. 56) and he denies knowing Him (v. 57). In the second conversation, Peter is associated with the disciples, not just Jesus (v. 58), and Peter denies being part of this community of faith. In the third conversation, Peter is associated not just with Jesus and not just with the disciples but with the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (v. 59): Jesus was known as the prophet from Galilee (Luke 23:5), and it was there that Peter himself received his call (Luke 5:1–11). Peter now denies association not only with Jesus and the disciples but also with his call to follow Jesus as He taught and worked miracles in Galilee (22:60).

2. When the rooster crows, Peter remembers the words of Jesus predicting his denial (v. 61). These words bring about repentant sorrow for Peter. For Luke's reader, however, they offer something more. Read Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial in Luke (22:31–34) and reflect on how this prediction shapes our meditation on this event.

All the Gospel writers include Jesus foretelling Peter's denial (Matthew 26:30–35; Mark 14:28–31; and John 13:36–38). Only Luke, however, includes the role of Peter in the larger drama of Satan's attack upon the reign and rule of God (Luke 22:31–32). Here, Jesus highlights how Satan will attack all of the disciples, not just Peter (i.e., the plural "you" in v. 31). In response to that attack, Jesus has prayed for Peter (i.e., the singular "you" in v. 32a), foretold that he will repent (v. 32b), and encourages him to strengthen his fellow disciples (v. 32c).

Thus, when Peter remembers the words of Jesus at the end of this event (22:61), the reader remembers something more. Jesus not only foretold Peter's denial, but Jesus also foretold Peter's repentance. Jesus has prayed for Peter that his faith will not fail, Jesus has foretold that Peter will return, and He has given him the future task of strengthening his fellow disciples.

As we read and meditate on this text, then, our vision is not focused solely on Peter, seeing the story through his eyes, but also on Jesus, who has prayed for Peter and foretold the Spirit's future work in Peter's life.

3. While all Gospel writers include the rooster's crow, Luke is the only Gospel writer to include the moment when Jesus looks at Peter (v. 61). What is the importance of that glance?

On the one hand, the glance of Jesus catches Peter in his sin. Peter has just denied knowing Jesus and now, when Jesus looks at him, Peter remembers how well Jesus knew him. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him.

On the other hand, for the careful reader of Luke, this glance of Jesus invites one to contemplate this event from the viewpoint of Jesus. As the story begins (v. 54) and as the story ends (v. 61), Luke focuses on Jesus. This framing device asks the reader to consider Peter's denial in light of the larger story of Jesus' Passion. Jesus is going to trial and to the cross for the forgiveness of all sins, even the sin of Peter's denial. This Jesus has prayed for Peter, this Jesus is now going to die for Peter, and this Jesus will rise and appear to Peter (24:34) and then in Luke's continuation of the Gospel in the Book of Acts, this Jesus will send His Spirit upon Peter to preach at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–41).

4. The verses from our opening hymn (LSB 836, "O God of Light") turn our attention to the watchfulness of God and His work through His Word. Identify how the hymn describes God working through His Word. Then meditate on how God works that way for Peter in the larger Passion Narrative and how God works that way for you.

The first verse of "O God of Light" emphasizes the power of God's Word to reveal our sin (e.g., "pierce the darkness of our earthbound way"), to proclaim our salvation (e.g., "show Your grace"), and to guide us in lives of faithful discipleship (e.g., "guide our footsteps"). As the verses continue, God's persistence in speaking His Word reveals His patience with His sinful creatures until ultimately we see God's compassion in our Savior's face.

In Luke's account of Peter's denial, you can see God's watchful word and His unflinching compassion for His creatures. Jesus offers Peter a word that reveals his sin, a Passion prediction that points to his salvation, and a word of guidance for his work with the disciples. For Luke's reader, the glance of Jesus in this text is a moment of great compassion: Jesus sees His disciple denying Him and yet continues in His mission to save not only this disciple but also the world.

God's Word functions in a similar way in our lives. Through His Word, God calls us to see our sin, God reveals to us His Son, our Savior, and God calls us into faithful discipleship following Him.

CONCLUSION

In this text, Luke reveals how the word of Jesus was fulfilled. Jesus predicted Peter's denial and it came to pass. Jesus also, however, predicted Peter's repentance and called him to strengthen his brothers in the faith, and that happened as well.

When our eyes are focused only on our sin, we can be led into despair. For that reason, it is good to remember the words of Jesus. Jesus turns our eyes away from our sin to see His work of salvation. He offers us the comfort that, even when we fall into sin, He is praying for us, watching over us, and offering us His Word and work that forgive and bring new life.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, You watch over our coming and going and are acquainted with all our ways. Seeing our sin, You sent Your Son to be our Savior and have laid on Him the just penalty of our sin that He might bring us the joys of Your salvation.

Receive our thanks for Your watchful care. Open our ears to hear Your Word and open our eyes to see Your work, so that with our lives opened by Your Holy Spirit we might share Your life with a fallen world.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

MIDWEEK OF LENT 5: LEADER

Week 6: Week of April 7

THE TRIAL

Luke 22:63–23:25

OPENING

O dearest Jesus, what law hast Thou broken
 That such sharp sentence should on Thee be spoken?
 Of what great crime hast Thou to make confession,
 What dark transgression?

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder!
 The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander;
 The Master pays the debt His servants owe Him,
 Who would not know Him.

—“O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken” (*LSB* 439, vv. 1, 4)

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative (Luke 22:63–23:25), Luke relates the trial and condemnation of Jesus. At the heart of this scene is the contrast between the changing will of humans, seen in the condemnation of Jesus, and God’s eternal will, seen in the fulfillment of prophecy.

As we meditate on this section of the Passion Narrative, Luke reveals how, in the midst of our changing, sinful human will, God’s eternal saving will is done.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Luke’s account of the trial directly follows Peter’s denial of Jesus. In Peter, we see the sinful power of a changing will. Peter desired to follow Jesus “to prison and to death” (22:33), and yet he ended up denying Jesus to save his own life.

This theme of the sinful changing human will continues throughout the trial. Identify the ways in which different people manifest a sinful changing human will.

At the start of the trial, one sees how the charges of the religious leaders change. As they gather together, they condemn Jesus for claiming to be the “Son of God” (22:70). When they come before Pilate, however, they do not speak of this claim. Instead, they charge Jesus with misleading the people, forbidding taxes, and claiming to be a king (23:2). The irony, of course, is that the religious leaders were not ardent supporters of the Roman government, but now they found the government useful if it could be persuaded to kill Jesus. Religious leaders, concerned

about truth and the ways of God that bring life, were using lies and the ways of the world to bring death.

As the trial continues, one sees how the wills of political leaders change in relationship to Jesus. Pilate repeatedly resists the will of the people by declaring Jesus innocent and attempting to release Him (23:4, 14–16, 22). In the end, however, Pilate hands Jesus over to their will and condemns Him to crucifixion (23:24–25). Herod also manifests a changing will as he desires to see Jesus (23:8) and yet ends up treating Him with contempt and mocking Him (23:11).

Finally, as the trial concludes, Luke highlights the changing will of the people by having a threefold denial of Jesus that parallels the threefold denial by Peter. Three times Pilate declares Jesus innocent and worthy to be set free (23:13–16, 20, 22) and three times the people deny that judgment and call for His death (23:18, 21, 23). Ironically, in this denial, the people who claim to be concerned about peaceful governance (23:2, 14) call for the release of an insurrectionist (23:18).

2. In this midst of such changing human wills, God’s eternal will is done. Luke opens with the guards mocking Jesus as a prophet. How is this theme of Jesus as a prophet significant to discerning God’s eternal will in these events?

Luke records how Jesus is mocked by being blindfolded and told to prophesy who hit Him (22:64). This event mocks Jesus in two ways. First, it seeks to demonstrate that Jesus was not a prophet because He could not identify His attacker. Second, it ridicules the whole act of prophecy by reducing God’s prophetic Word to simple declarations of who hit whom. Ironically, however, Jesus has already revealed Himself to be a prophet by prophesying Peter’s denial, which just occurred (22:61), and He has also already identified who hit Him, by prophesying this very mocking (18:31–33).

In recalling Jesus’ prophecy of this mocking, the reader is drawn into the Passion predictions of Jesus (9:21–22, 43–45; 18:31–33) and the way in which this one event is part of God’s greater story of salvation revealed there.

Israel has always persecuted the prophets whom God sends her (Luke 13:31–35; 20:9–18) and yet, in patient love, God continues to reach out to His people. Now, God has sent the promised Prophet who will be greater than Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18; 34:10–12; Acts 3:22–26). As foretold by the prophets (Luke 24:25–27; Acts 3:17–18), Jesus will be rejected and yet, in that rejection, fulfill God’s will for the salvation of all people.

For this reason, Jesus utters a prophecy in this very text. He reveals to the religious leaders (and the reader) that God will raise His Suffering Servant and enthrone Him at His right hand (22:69; cf. Acts 2:32–33; 3:13–16). With this prophecy, Luke invites the reader to see and to trust in God’s greater story.

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By opening the trial with this small glance at Jesus being mocked as a prophet, Luke opens for his reader the greater saving work of God. Jesus, the promised Prophet, greater than Moses, will be rejected by all people and yet be raised by God for the salvation of all nations (Luke 24:44–47; Acts 2:22–24).

3. To all of the changing wills in this text, Luke gives us a hint of one more change that will occur—the repentance of God’s people. How does the threefold denial that occurs at the end of this section (Luke 23:13–23), when read in light of Jesus’ prophecy of Peter’s denial (22:31–34), offer hope for the repentance of God’s people and offer hope for us today?

Luke frames the trial of Jesus with pictures of denial, both individual at the beginning (Peter) and corporate at the end (the people). All people are caught in a changing, sinful human will.

Yet, Jesus has prophesied not only that Peter will be restored (22:32a) but also that Peter will be His servant to bring about the restoration of others (22:32b). This prophecy of Jesus comes true with the event of Pentecost.

When Jesus appears to His disciples at the end of Luke, He tells them that it is written that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (24:47). Thus, after His resurrection, Jesus does not abandon the people who denied Him in Jerusalem but seeks to bring about their repentance, forgiveness, and growth in the faith. This prophecy is fulfilled at Pentecost, as Peter preaches in Jerusalem and people repent and are saved (Acts 2:36–41).

Thus, the eternal will of God works through the death and resurrection of Jesus to bring salvation to sinners. The proclamation which began in Jerusalem continues in our midst today. When we are confronted by our changing human will, the ways in which we fail to follow Jesus as we should, God continues to come to us through His Word, calling us to repentance and bringing the message of salvation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Earlier in Luke, Jesus wept over Jerusalem (19:41–44). He lamented that they were blind to “the things that make for peace” and did not know “the time of your visitation.” The hopes of Israel were being fulfilled in Jesus, even though no one in Israel could see the reign and rule of God that had come in Him.

By grace, we now see the wonderful patience and mercy of God, working for the salvation of people who had turned away from Him. That patience is still present among us today, gathering us as His people around His Word, whereby He reveals His work of salvation until He comes again (2 Peter 3:1–9).

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, Your faithfulness endures throughout all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or the sea was formed or the earth was filled with Your creatures, from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

In grace, You sent Your Son to a people of changing wills that He might accomplish Your eternal will and bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

Comfort us now with Your eternal love. Forgive us our sin and fill us with Your Holy Spirit that we might live in unchanging love of You and willing obedience to Your commands, bringing Your message of salvation to the ends of the earth.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

HOLY WEEK: LEADER
WEEK 7: WEEK OF APRIL 14
GOLGOTHA
Luke 23:26–56

OPENING

Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning,
Was there ever grief like His?
Friends through fear His cause disowning,
Foes insulting His distress
Many hands were raised to wound Him,
None would intervene to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him
Was the stroke that justice gave.

—“Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted” (*LSB* 451, v.21)

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative (Luke 23:26-56), Luke relates the journey to Golgotha and the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. Golgotha (translated as “The Place of a Skull” was a place named either for the shape of a rock there or for how much death happened there. It was hard to miss this place of shame as you exited the city of Jerusalem so all could see the penalty for being a criminal in the Roman world.

As Luke details the response of the crowds that followed throughout the day to see Jesus die, the differences between the sinful human actions and Jesus’ final act of true love are shown in stark opposition. Yet despite the vile acts of the human heart, Jesus’ death is a pure sacrifice of atonement made for them and for us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As Jesus is being led to the cross, and a crowd of curious onlookers and mourners follow after Him, He prophesied by speaking to the “Daughters of Jerusalem”. What is He foretelling of here and how does it show His love shining through these intense moments leading up to His death?

This prophecy is spoken to the women around Him who are crying. There was weeping on both Jesus’ entry to and exit from Jerusalem. Jesus had pity on Jerusalem because He knew the destruction of Jerusalem was coming soon. He is foretelling of Jerusalem’s destruction by the Romans that would happen in 70AD. Even in comparison to the great shame it was for a woman to be barren, Jesus is saying it would be better to be barren than to go through this coming suffering which would make the people in Jerusalem call for the mountains to fall on them to end their suffering more quickly. Despite all of this upcoming suffering that is God’s judgment acted out on the city, Jesus still had sympathy for the city and love for those who were mocking Him and cheering on His painful walk to Golgotha.

2. The sinful people at Jesus’ crucifixion, both onlookers and soldiers, scoffed at Jesus. In what ways do verses 34-38 tell that they mocked him? Ironically, how is Jesus responding to their mocking?

The people who are looking on scoffed at Him saying “He saved others, let Him save Himself if He really is God”. Then the soldiers mocked him with their offer of cheap, sour wine that the soldiers would drink and by telling Him, like the onlookers did, to save Himself if He really is the King of the Jews. The inscription over a criminal being crucified normally labeled that person’s crime. Above Jesus on the cross, “This is the King of the Jews” was inscribed. To the mockers this would have been another joke but Pilate had Jesus’ true title inscribed there as a fact to mock the Jews who called for Jesus’ death.

Ironically, Jesus did not respond to their mocking or to their misunderstanding of His role as King of the Jews. As king he was saving His people rather than saving Himself from the suffering. Also, rather than give in to the mockers, Jesus prayed for them. His petition to God “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” was more loving than anyone present realized since He was asking they be forgiven for their mocking but also for all other trespasses. By His sacrifice on the cross all their sins and wicked words against Jesus would be paid for so that, as Jesus petitioned, they would be forgiven and holy in God’s eyes.

3. The moment of Jesus' death was known by many. Compare verses 44-47 with Matthew 27:45-54. What image of the city develops in your mind? What are some physical events that took place at the death of Jesus?

From the sixth hour to the ninth hour, noon to 3p.m., when Jesus was in His final moments, there was darkness as if it were night. This was not an eclipse because the Passover occurs during a full moon. While we don't know what blocked out the sun, we know that God's timing of the darkness is what's important.

The timing of the earthquake is another physical occurrence that is not random. Earthquakes were often associated with manifestations of God and a sign of the end or final judgment. The resurrection of the dead also pointed to the end times. These resurrections also demonstrated the purpose of Christ's death: to bring eternal life to those doomed to die. Just as those people were raised from the dead so those who believe in Jesus will be raised to eternal life with Him. (Scripture does not tell us any more about what happened to those who were raised or how much longer they lived before returning to the grave but resurrections surely brought more notice to the importance of the man Jesus that died at the moment of the Earthquake.)

The curtain that tore was the divider in the temple that separated the Holy Place in the Temple from the Most Holy Place where God dwelled. This symbolized the opened fellowship between God and people through Christ's payment on the cross. By the final sacrifice fulfilling all human transgressions, people now can go directly to God with their petitions rather than through priests or through sacrifices to atone for sins.

4. What irony do we see in the change of the people's actions at Golgotha after the death of Jesus?

These sinful people who called for Jesus' death and mocked Him are now remorseful (in verse 48 Luke says they beat their breasts, a sign of sorrow and repentance), the centurion who had watch all of the mocking turned instead to praising God (verse 47), and the darkness that covered that area turned back to daylight (it was around 3pm). Jesus dies bearing the darkness of God's judgment on the world's sins. Out of the darkness of judgment, Jesus ushers in the bright day of grace.

5. Read Deuteronomy 21:22-23. How is this good news for us and how does Luke 23:50-56 fulfill that passage from Deuteronomy.

The passage in Deuteronomy is a law to be followed by God's people but also tells of the curse that is on Jesus, on our behalf. It is good news that Jesus took on that curse and the curses of all sins of humanity so that they can be paid off for us. Jesus' death is simultaneously a harsh word, that our actions caused that pain for Him, but also is the best possible news since it means freedom from death for us.

Luke details how that passage is fulfilled because through Joseph of Arimathea's high position he is able to ask Pilate for the body so it doesn't remain on the hill all night and Jesus is buried on the same day as His death. Furthermore, just like Jesus rode an un-ridden donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he is laid in a tomb that has not yet been used so it was fitting for the King of the Jews.

Because the sun was setting and Sabbath was about to begin with nightfall the women could not properly anoint Jesus' body for His burial. Instead, they saw where He was laid so they could prepare the spices and ointments to correctly anoint Him in three days.

CONCLUSION

As sinful people Holy Week is a time of reflection and repentance. It is uncomfortable to be aware of how much suffering our sins caused Christ on the cross. Christ's payment on the cross was the one act in history strong enough that the temple curtain could be torn in two. Because of that sacrifice of the innocent lamb we now have a direct line to go to God with our petitions. Christ's death and rest in the tomb fulfilled the words of the Old Testament prophets that promised a savior: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." – Isaiah 53:5.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, you put the weight of all of our sins on your Son so that He could bear the punishment we deserve. Instead of answering His prayer to remove Your cup of suffering You laid it all on Him because of Your love for us.

As we repent of our sins and acknowledge the cost that our sins had on Jesus, help us to be always reminded of Your love that put this plan of Salvation into motion. Thank you for making us holy through Jesus' payment on our behalf and help us to live in the joyful knowledge that we are holy to You.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior, who died on the cross for us. Amen.

EASTER WEEK: LEADER
 WEEK 8: WEEK OF APRIL 21
THE EMPTY TOMB
 Luke 24:1–11

OPENING

- L Alleluia! Christ is risen!
 C **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**
 L Almighty God, as the heavens are higher than the earth,
 C **so are Your ways higher than our ways and Your thoughts than our thoughts.**
 L But You made Your way of salvation known
 C **in the proclamation of Your Holy Word;**
 L in the death of Jesus Christ, our Savior;
 C **and in His resurrection from the dead.**
 L Now work in our lives through Your Word and Spirit
 C **that we might be living witnesses of your life-giving work.**
 L Alleluia! Christ is risen!
 C **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative (Luke 24:1–11), Luke relates the resurrection of Jesus. At the heart of this scene is the contrast between confusion and clarity.

The women go to the tomb with spices to care for the body of Jesus. Upon finding the tomb open and empty, they stand there confused about what they see. When they leave the tomb, however, they have clarity. They run to the disciples, proclaiming the resurrection. What accounts for this reversal?

The words of Jesus.

In the center of the narrative, between the coming and the going of the women, stand angels. Angels are messengers, and these angels bear the message of the words of Jesus.

Thus, Luke reveals to us how the words of Jesus bring clarity to the meaning of His Passion and inspire God's people for witness to the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. When you read Luke’s account of Easter, you will notice that Luke has three events that follow the resurrection: the appearance of angels to the women at the tomb (24:1–12); the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (24:13–35); and the appearance of Jesus to His disciples (24:36–53).

If you read these events as a sequence, how do you see a greater and greater revelation of Jesus in the movement from morning to evening on the first Easter day?

Luke is recording the events of one day. He begins early in the morning (v. 1), continues later that day (v. 2), and then closes with events that happen that evening (v. 33). As the reader is taken from place to place on this day, Luke offers a fuller and fuller revelation of Jesus.

In the first event, the women are at the tomb. They discover the absence of the body of Jesus. Angels appear to them, but the women do not see Jesus, and Peter confirms that the tomb is empty (v. 12).

In the second event, Jesus is present with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (v. 15). Here, however, the disciples are prevented from recognizing Him. Thus, Jesus is there but not there for most of the account. When Jesus breaks bread, their eyes are suddenly opened, and Jesus just as suddenly disappears (v. 31). So, in the second event, the disciples have a brief glimpse of a hidden but present Jesus.

In the third event, Jesus is fully and richly present with His disciples. When Jesus stands among the disciples, they think that He is a spirit (vv. 36–37). In response, Jesus reveals His full fleshly existence. He asks them to see Him (v. 39a), to touch Him (v. 39b), and to give Him something to eat (v. 41). This Jesus then bodily ascends into heaven (v. 51).

In recording these events of the first Easter Day, Luke offers the reader a growing revelation of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The disciples are not lost in delusions of mourning or wishful thinking but slowly discover the risen and ruling Jesus, present with them and yet also ruling over all.

2. As Luke offers us a fuller and fuller revelation of Jesus, Luke also offers a fuller and fuller remembering of God’s Word. As you read these three events as a sequence and focus on the sections of dialogue, how do you see a fuller and richer revelation of God’s Word?

In this sequence of events, Luke joins the growing revelation of the risen Jesus to a growing remembrance of God’s Word.

In the first event, the angels ask the women to recall what Jesus had said to them during His ministry: “Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise” (vv. 6–7). Luke then informs the reader that “they remembered His words” (v. 8).

In the second event, Jesus speaks to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and calls to their minds “all that the prophets have spoken” (v. 25). Whereas the angels pointed the women to Jesus’ words, Jesus points the disciples to the words of the Scriptures: “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (v. 27). While the women understood the resurrection on the basis of the words that Jesus had spoken, the disciples on the road to Emmaus understand the resurrection on the basis of the words of Scripture.

In the third event, Luke brings both of these witnesses together, so that the resurrection is attested by the testimony of Jesus and the testimony of the Scriptures. After Jesus reveals Himself to the disciples, He asks them to remember “My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you” and “everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets” (v. 44). Luke thus joins the fullest knowledge of the bodily resurrection and rule of Jesus with the fullest remembrance of God’s Word, both the words that Jesus has spoken and the words of Scripture.

3. In Luke’s Gospel, when the words of Jesus and the words of Scripture are remembered, one has the fullest revelation of the resurrected Jesus who rules over all, and one sees how God’s people become witnesses of God’s work in the world.

What happens in the ending of each of these events, and how does that ending encourage us in God’s work among us today?

At the ending of each of these events, Luke offers a revelation of how God’s people become witnesses of the resurrection.

In the first event, the women are named for the reader, and Luke records how they went and told the disciples of these things (vv. 9–10).

In the second event, the disciples on the road to Emmaus return to Jerusalem and tell the others “what happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread” (v. 35). Here, Luke records their excitement about the message they have been given to share, noting that although it was already evening and they had already traveled that day, they “rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem” (v. 33). Upon arriving, they discover that Simon Peter had a similar experience, as the eleven who were gathered were discussing that “the Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon” (v. 34), something which Peter must have returned to tell them.

Finally, in the third event, after Jesus opens the Scriptures to His disciples and reminds them of His teaching, He commissions them to be “witnesses of these things” after they have been “clothed with power from on high” (vv. 48–49).

The message of Scripture is centered in God’s work of salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the Good News that we celebrate this day as we celebrate Easter, and this is the Good News that we share with others as we leave this place and enter into the world.

CONCLUSION

The apostle Paul often speaks of the Gospel as the mystery of salvation (e.g., Romans 16:25 and Ephesians 3:9).

On that first Easter morning, Luke reveals how that which was hidden for ages was made manifest to the world. Christ not only opened the grave, but He also opened the Scriptures, opened His teachings, and opened the mouths of His disciples that they might bear witness to the clarity of salvation from sin by the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ.

Today, as we remember Easter, we also remember the words of Jesus, the words of the Scriptures, and the words of all who have borne witness to this work of God for us. By remembering God's words, we, too, become witnesses of God's saving work in the world.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, when the women came to the tomb that first Easter morning, You sent angels to teach them Your Word, and You changed their lives forever.

Be with us now as we celebrate Easter. Open our minds to understand the Scriptures, open our hearts to trust in Jesus Christ, our risen Savior; and open our lives to be witnesses of Your work in this world until Your Son returns and brings His glorious kingdom that never ends.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.