

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
April 5, 2020 – Palm Sunday
Matthew 26:14-27:66

It is impossible to listen to the gospel account of the death of Jesus without asking many questions. Here are a few that strike me. How did Jesus feel when his closest followers abandoned him? Why didn't he defend himself before the authorities when given the opportunity? What was it like for him to be mocked, beaten and made fun of? Why did he accept a death that was so dreadful, so humiliating and so painful? Why didn't he fight back? Or walk away?

All these questions (and many more) directly relate to the human response of Jesus to his passion and death. Given that Jesus was also fully divine, they also have a direct connection with his divine nature. We know God by observing Jesus as human.

All the moments of his passion and death were experienced in his human nature, which is just like ours. His worries and fears, his disappointments and moments of discouragement, his pain and suffering, all these human experiences are on full display in today's gospel. We can sense that Jesus was spared nothing during his final moments before he died.

And he accepted all of it. He does not resist or complain during what must have been utter agony. So, we ask another question: Why this kind of ending to the life of someone who was always good and kind and loved all those he met before these final days?

I believe that we find some answer in the basic belief that he did all of this *for us and for our salvation*. He went through none of these horrific moments for himself. Nor for God, except that through his total giving of himself, he showed us the depth of God's love for us. God's love for all of us is without limit. And Jesus would allow the full force of evil and its results to show in stark clarity that he would do anything and everything for us.

The mystery and magnitude of God's personal love for you and for me is recalled by the Church each Palm Sunday. Since many of us will be unable to hear Matthew's account of the suffering and death of Jesus in formal liturgical gatherings due to the coronavirus pandemic, it would be good for all of us to take the time to slowly read this gospel (in our Bibles or online), individually or as a family, and give thanks for God's great love as we recall Jesus giving his life for all of us, his friends, then and now.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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A gospel meditation for your home
April 12, 2020 – Easter Sunday
Luke 24:13-35

On two very unique days God created. On the first of those days, God created the Universe. Before, there was nothing but God. Then, in an instant, using the visionary analysis of Albert Einstein, there was energy and there was matter. All from a point, later called by scientists who know about such things, *the singularity*. It all instantly moved outward in a flash lasting one-billionth of a second, a nano second. That would have been something to see. And God did.

Or if you want another description, just as insightful but with a bit more of a poetic flair, read the first lines in the Book of *Genesis*. God created the heavens and the earth with its whole surface wildly swishing with water until a mighty wind pushed the water aside and dry land appeared. And so that this could all be seen, light replaced total darkness. It took a day for God to do this although we still don't have a clue how long that day was. All we can say is that it was the first day.

I said that God also created on a second day. That's the day we now call Easter, the day Jesus Christ rose from being dead. He didn't wake up as if from a sleep because he really was dead. Jesus as risen was now something totally new, a new kind of life. St. Paul calls this "a new creation" that happened on "the first day" of all the rest that would follow. And this second creation would exist forever, and it would be God's gift to all of us.

Our earthly bodies will die and then we will be transformed and renewed, just as was the earthly body of Jesus. And some even wonder whether the New Creation will not only involve us humans who will receive this new life, but all creation. Again, to paraphrase St. Paul in I Corinthians, "Eye has not seen what awaits us." We just don't know ... yet!

But one thing we believe is that it will be wonder-full. Better than the first creation in all ways. Life without death. No suffering, Living and loving in ways totally unimaginable. The best of all possibilities. Some day ahead we will all have our own Easter moment. Death is not a wall but a bridge to life in the full presence of God and who knows what else!

David M. Thomas, PhD

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
April 19, 2020 – Second Sunday of Easter
John 20:19-31

I have a special appreciation of Thomas the Apostle. Not just because we share names but because he asked questions. If he had a doubt, he tried to find out more. Today we are given the wonderful account of his struggle with what the other disciples saw when he was somewhere else. Jesus appeared to his followers who were in hiding because they feared that they would be rounded up by the authorities who had recently crucified Jesus. They told Thomas what had happened in his absence. And true to form, Thomas was sceptical.

But to help Thomas overcome his doubt, Jesus again appeared. But seeing Jesus - as miraculous as that was - was not enough for Thomas. He wanted more. He wanted to touch the wounds of Jesus. Just seeing for him was not enough for his believing. Notice that the Risen Jesus did not criticise Thomas for wanting more. He knew that each of us had needs when it comes to believing that something is true or not. So, as the narrative goes, Thomas touches the wounds and then gives us this wonderful expression of belief when he addresses Jesus as "My Lord and my God."

Not only is there this full expression of belief in Jesus as risen, but there's something important about how this "Thomas event" shows us a direct connection between what happened during the earthly life of Jesus and his life afterwards as risen. Wounds before his death remain there after his death. In fact, all that happened "before" carried forward into what constituted the "after."

When I was a child in St. Joseph's School in Indiana many years ago, the nuns taught me that God keeps a complete record of what we do now here on Earth. That record will be used to determine how God will judge me after I die. I must add that this was not a lesson I enjoyed learning, nor one that I could easily forget. This all came back to me in reading this Sunday's gospel, but I saw something new in the connection between the present and the future.

The great good that Jesus accomplished during his life and death does not end with his earthly death. It's all carried over into what follows. Maybe Thomas wondered about this and therefore asked to see the wounds of Jesus. Did the past of Jesus connect with his new risen life? Apparently, it did. And might this also be true for us? Important to note is that today's gospel narrative also speaks of God's forgiveness. Thus, we can hope that for the bad in our lives, there is God's mercy. And for all the good that we have done, it will remain part of our joy forever.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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April 26, 2020 – Second Sunday of Easter
Luke 24:13-35

Many of us enjoy hearing or reading today's gospel. There's something both common and extraordinary about it. Two followers of Jesus are walking along a road just outside Jerusalem. (Some speculate that they might be a married couple.) A stranger approached and they begin to talk to him. The two are concerned and worried. They were in Jerusalem and had witnessed the terrible death of Jesus. They couldn't get that out of their mind. Their new walking companion doesn't seem to know about what happened to Jesus so the two filled him in on the details.

Approaching the small town of Emmaus, they asked if he had any plans for dinner. He apparently said that he didn't, so they invited him to join them. They continued to talk. In due course, the stranger (who was actually Jesus) said a table blessing, broke the bread and gave them each part of it. Suddenly, they realized who he was. It was Jesus, and just as mysteriously as he had joined them on the road to Emmaus, he left them. They must have been beside themselves, astonished to say the least. Then they admitted that even while on the road with him, they had questions. John used almost poetic language to describe them as they felt their hearts burning within them. Something very special might have been going on. It was.

We are left to wonder whether their dining experience of being with Jesus may have been a common experience for the early followers of Jesus after the Resurrection. At the Last Supper he had given them a way of remembering him. He would remain with them "in the breaking of the bread." Today, we call this celebrating the Holy Eucharist. Over the centuries Christians have created various ways to do this "remembering." It became a primary way to not only recall the events of the life of Jesus, but also an opportunity to be with him right now during our lives.

And doing this remembering while "breaking bread" also has its meaning. We believe that the Risen Christ is present in the consecrated bread, but that bread must be shared. The Eucharist is not to be an experience of dining alone, but it is the meal of a community, a kind of family meal. It is a time to recognize that the Risen Jesus has not left us alone and that whenever we break bread with him in mind, and with our hearts burning with love inside us, he remains with us.

David M. Thomas, PhD