

Holy Week/Easter, A Contemplative Journey

Part Two, Contemplative Reflections: The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus

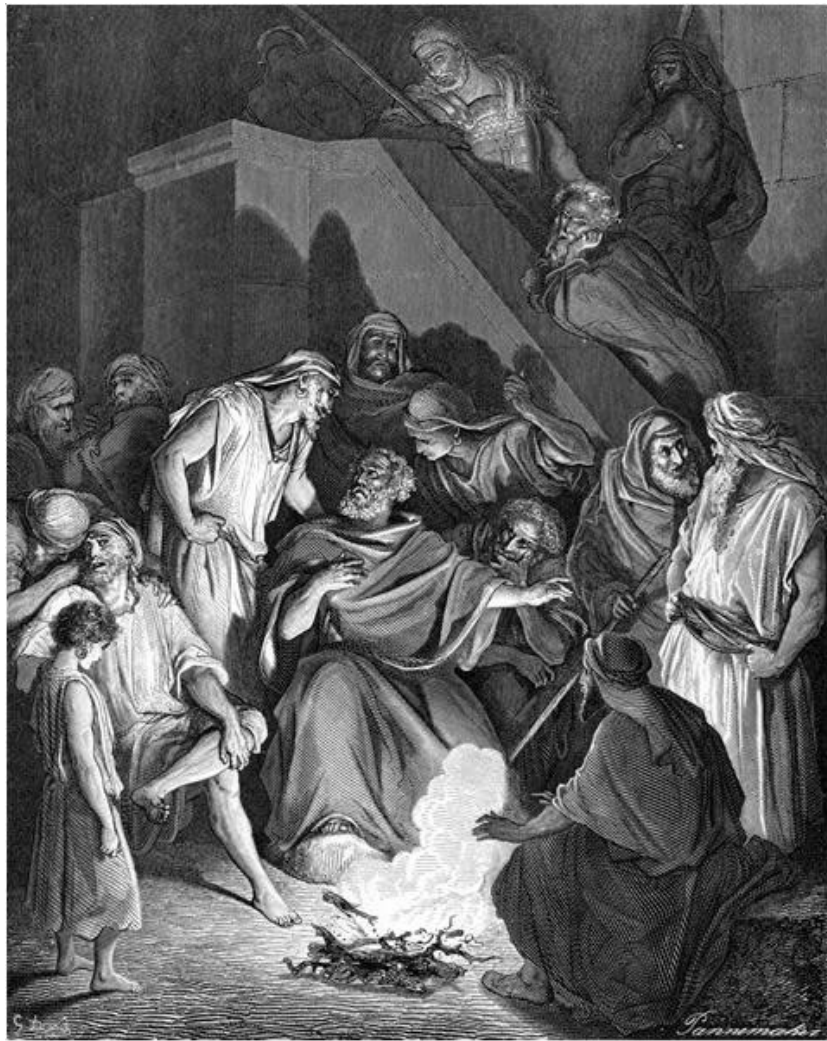
(Based on the gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke)

By Angie Rebert

This Prayer Corner has three parts, Peter's Denial, Crucifixion, and He Is Risen.

PETER'S DENIAL

(As recounted by Peter)



*Peter denies knowing Jesus
Gustave Doré, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

Again, I am sitting in my quiet sacred space, letting my thoughts return to the evening before the crucifixion of Jesus. This time I am contemplating how Peter must have felt after denying that he knew Jesus. As Peter is walking in the early dawn, he meets an old friend, who asks him about the arrest of Jesus. Come with me and hear Peter's story.

I can hardly bear to talk of that night. It haunts me every time I lay down to sleep and again when I awake. Thoughts of that night haunt my every waking moment. How could I deny my Beloved Jesus? My heart grieves at the memories. I yearn to forget.

Peter buries his face in his hands. Catching his breath, he stifles a sob into a groan, forcing himself to look up again and begin his account of the evening before.

We followed the angry crowd, as the temple guards marched Jesus down the path from our garden retreat. The other disciples fled, disappearing into the shadows of the night. Looking around, I saw only John lingering behind, almost hidden behind a tree. I followed believing John would also follow, both of us being careful not to be noticed.

They took him to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest. I was able to enter though the gate of the courtyard which had been left open. I sank down in the shadows of the fire burning in the center of the courtyard. I kept my head down and half covered by the folds of my tunic. I needed to find out what was going to happen to Jesus. I needed to be near him even though I feared being recognized as one of his disciples.

Suddenly a young servant girl cried out, "This man was with him!"

I muttered, "I do not know this man!" She turned, shaking her head, she went into the house. I tried to make myself even more invisible, but to no avail.

Suddenly, another servant woman declared, "You also are one of them!"

I sternly but quietly answered, "No, I am not."

Almost an hour passed as I hunkered down, waiting to find out what was going to happen to Jesus. I could hear loud angry voices from within as the priests questioned and accused him. Then a shrill voice pierced the night air, "Surely, this man was also with him, for he is a Galilean!"

I jumped up, and loudly denied, "I do not know what you are saying!"

At that very moment, Jesus was being led out of the house and his sad eyes connected with mine. A bolt of great sorrow shot through my heart. I ran sobbing from the courtyard as I heard a rooster crowing. Three times I denied my Beloved Jesus. Three times! I bolted through the gate and ran sobbing and cursing and praying. "Oh Lord, forgive me! Jesus, dear Jesus, forgive me!"

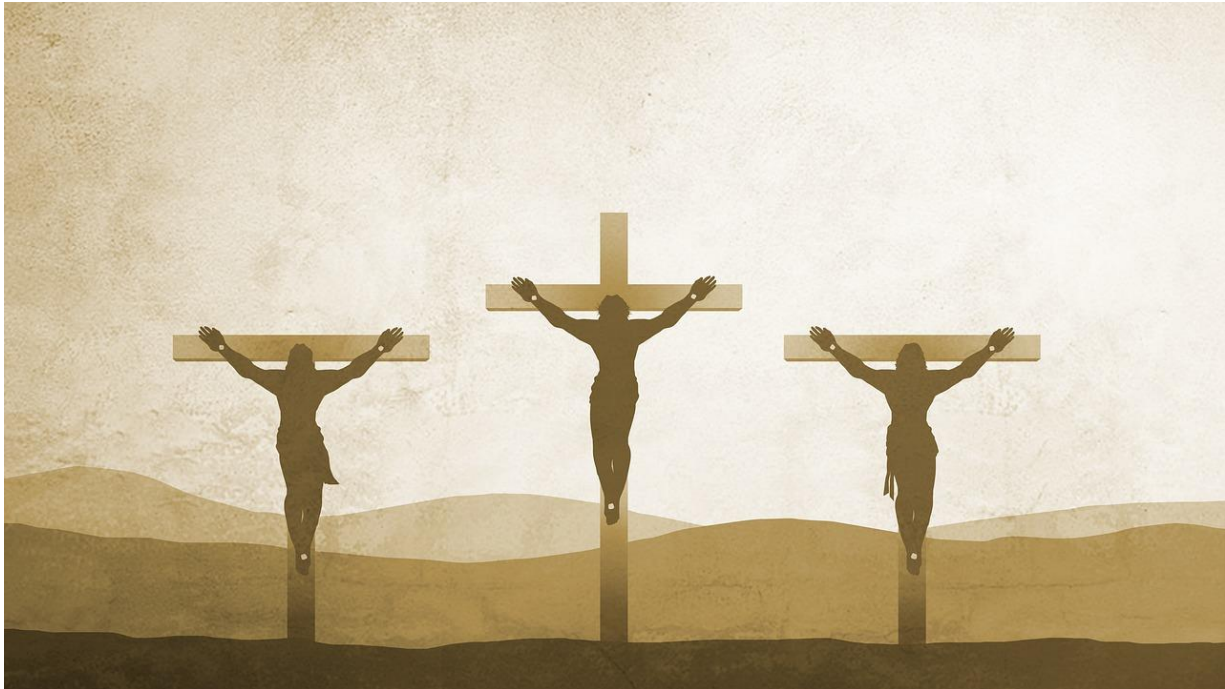
I ran, oblivious to the path; I didn't know where I was going. I didn't stop until I fell on the ground where Jesus had prayed and wept. I was once again in the Garden of Gethsemane. I

awoke in the early hours of the morning. My clothes grass stained, muddy and dampened by the night air and my tears. I wanted to remain alone. I could not face the others. I could not face myself. I could never face Jesus again!”

Peter stared off into the distance; his friend was silent. Peter stood up abruptly and without another word, turned and walked away.

CRUCIFIXION

As told by John



Christ and two prisoners are crucified.

Image by Jeff Jacobs from Pixabay

I am envisioning the day Christ died, through the heart spirit of his disciple John.

In my contemplation, John has just met up with an old friend, who has been away from the events of the last few days. They are sitting in the courtyard where John lives, a few days after the crucifixion. Come with me, and hear John's story.

John begins, as he clears his throat, clearly troubled and sad.

My dear friend, it is hard to remember and speak about that day. The reality of my Lord's suffering haunts me, both day and night. My nightmares torture me, and then I wake up and reality is even worse!

I can still hear the roar of the crowd, incited to a feverish insanity “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

John looks down at the ground, and there is a long silence. His friend waits patiently, having known John for many years. Finally, John looks up and gazes off towards the darkening evening sky. His friend encourages him to continue, “Tell me about it, John.”

I followed the crowd, falling in behind my Lord, and I wept. I did not try to cover the tears rolling down my face. I fell in step behind Jesus. I watched as Jesus was forced to carry the heavy beam of the cross that would crucify him. I watched as he stumbled under its heavy weight and almost fell.

A soldier ordered a man named Simon who was walking near him to carry the beam the rest of the way. Jesus straightened and painfully, slowly, with his jaw set in a grim determined way, moved forward to this death.

I wept all the way to that dreadful place, where I stopped, my feet rooted to the ground. I was numb as I watched the horror that followed.

I watched, standing there in front of the cross. I shuddered when I heard the sound of the nails pounding into his wrists and feet. I shrank back as I heard the thud of the cross, when it was lifted up and then thrust into its freshly dug hole in the ground. I could not look up at him. I just stared at my feet and tried not to think.

Finally, I ventured to look around, as a group of women moved near me. I was shocked to see Mary, the mother of Jesus, standing close by. She too, was grim and stone faced, with tear-stained cheeks, her head covering sliding off her grey streaked hair. She was supported by her women friends as they too watched in horror and grief.

Oh, Sweet Mary, mother of my Lord! How can you bear to see Him die like this? But she had come. She would be there for her precious son Jesus until his last moment!

After a while, I forced myself to look up and see, really see, my Lord, my beloved Lord Jesus, hanging there. He was naked except for his loin cloth and blood was dripping from his thorn piercing crown. Blood was dripping from his wounds after his brutal flogging. And blood was dripping from his nail pierced wrists and feet. Yet, I was amazed! He still held an aura of authority around Him. I could sense they were not killing him. **He was ALLOWING himself to be killed!**

Even while hanging there dying, my Lord was thinking of the people around him. For the next three excruciating hours, from noon till the ninth watch, Jesus spoke seven times. These seven sayings will be remembered through the ages!

His first words were, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He forgave his murderers and the crowd who screamed, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” He spoke with compassion

to one of the criminals hanging beside him, when the dying man asked Jesus to be remembered. Jesus replied, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Later, Jesus looked down and saw his mother beside me. He first spoke to Mary as she also looked up, with grief-stricken face, "Woman, behold your son." Then He looked right at me, our eyes locked, and Jesus said to me "Behold your mother." I was touched that Jesus wants me to take care of his mother.

Mary let out a little gasp and then leaned against me. I slipped my arm around her frail waist and held her gently close to my side.

From the moment the cross was lifted up, the sky began to cloud over and quickly darkened the entire countryside. Suddenly, it became menacingly dark, although there had been no clouds before. Now a deathly dark covering shut out the afternoon sun. The air was heavy, almost suffocating. A deep sense of foreboding crept into my despair and heartbreak.

It was then, I heard Jesus cry out in an agonizing moan. "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"

The silence that followed that question was terrifying! I trembled and thought: "God, where are You? How could you allow this to happen to your Beloved Son?"

Beneath His Cross, the soldiers gambled, drawing lots for his garments. Even the tunic made with only one seam went to the victor of the toss. Time moved slowly, painfully. Finally, in that deathly darkness, Jesus uttered the words that were almost a shout of acclamation! "It is finished!" His words vibrated through the air and cut deeply into my heart.

I was struck by a strong knowingness. Jesus, by those three words, "It is finished!" was proclaiming that this was God's will. This was the cup he had pleaded for His Father to remove. Jesus in his dying agony, was proclaiming that through His suffering and death, He had completed God's will. A fleeting shiver shot through my body, as my spirit accepted this blessed wisdom. I don't understand it; yet, somehow, I accept this mystery.

Soon thereafter, as Jesus strained to get another breath, He whispered the words: "Father into Thy hands, I commend my spirit" and Mary beside me, was whispering at the exact same time, "Father into Thy hands, I commend His spirit."

Before I helped Mary down that stony path, I looked up one more time. The soldiers were making sure the three who hung on those crosses were truly dead. They wanted to have their bodies removed from the crosses before sunset, which was pacifying the Jewish custom, that dead bodies must be buried before sundown. The soldiers cracked the leg bones of the two criminals, hastening their death. When they came to Jesus, he appeared to be dead. To be sure, a Roman soldier pierced His side with a sword. Blood and water gushed out, proving Jesus was already dead. They did not break his legs. I was grateful for that mercy.

I was relieved to notice that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two wealthy and well-known Jewish men, respected by the Roman leaders, were at the foot of His cross. They brought linens and spices to wrap in the burial cloths so Jesus would be properly prepared for burial. However, I wondered who would come forth to provide this task.

I turned away then, and supporting Mary gently, as she quietly wept, I guided her carefully down the stony path and took her to my home. Our tears fell all the way.

I stopped talking, stood up, and paced back and forth. Finally, I stopped, looking sadly at my friend, and murmured, "I am sorry. This has been very hard for me to remember it all. It is almost like it is happening all over again. I am exhausted and heartweary."

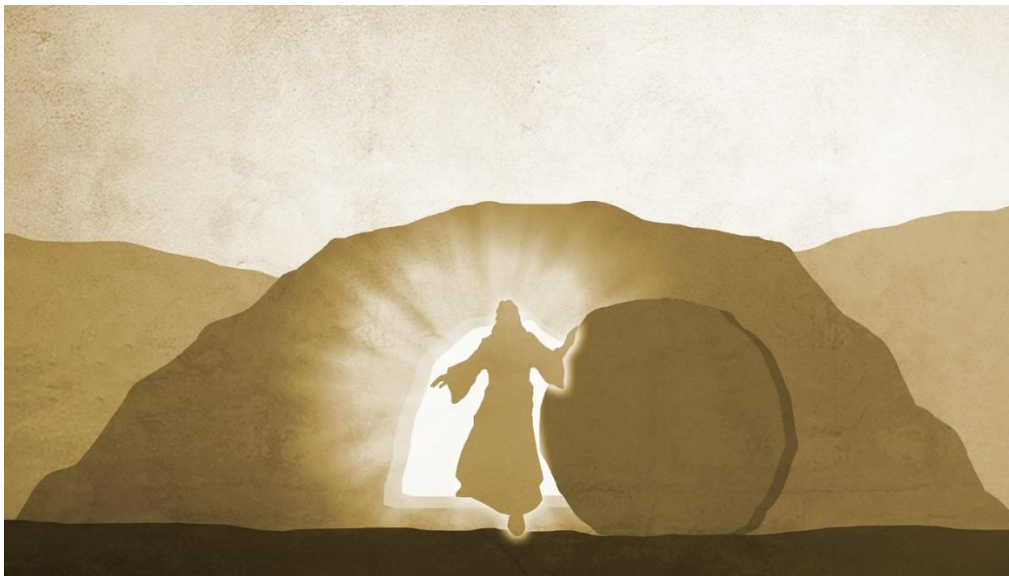
I remained standing there, oblivious to my friend for the moment. The silence created a distance between us, but I went on to tell him, "I am again feeling His pain, but I also, feel His great love to the depths of my soul. I assure you, my friend, this is not the end! Come back tomorrow morning. I will tell you of a Glorious Beginning!"

I told my friend to go in God's peace, and I patted his shoulder, turned, and walked slowly away.

Now, I remain sitting in my favorite place. My mind has emptied. There is just sacred space. Silence. Time stops. Sometime later, I hear His whisper, "Yes, dear one, Go in My Peace."

Listen to the hymn, [Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?](#)

HAVE YOU SEEN JESUS?



*Christ is risen
Jeff Jacobs, Pixabay*

During these days of Holy Week, I have been envisioning the events before and after the crucifixion. What was it like for those who loved Jesus, to witness and mourn His death and then to learn that Jesus rose from the dead and was alive? What was it like to actually see and speak with Jesus and even touch him?

I let my mind heartspirit wonder and wander to those days. Come with me and share my thoughts as they have been revealed.

The disciples and other close followers have spontaneously gathered at the house of Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus in Bethany. They are out in the spacious courtyard, standing about or sitting on the stone benches placed there for easy visiting. The question of the day could be heard in every conversation, “Have you seen Jesus? Have you seen Jesus?”

Laughter and shouts of excited joy ring out through the air. Everyone is talking at the same time, when John’s voice rings out; “Quiet everyone! You are all talking at once. Let us hear your stories, but PLEASE speak one at a time!”

John’s Story

John did not wait for anyone else to speak. He rushed on; “When Mary Magdalene rushed up to Peter and me, she was so out of breath. she could barely talk. “They have taken away my Lord! I do not know where they have laid him!”

Peter and I started running without even hearing Mary’s last words. I got there first! I stooped at the opening and looked in. All I saw was a white linen burial cloth. There was no body! Peter bumped up behind me, and we both went in.

Peter interrupted me, shouting. “He’s right! Just the burial cloth is here, but the white linen cloth which had wrapped his head, was lying at another place, folded neatly. The body of Jesus was not there! Gone! Stolen? Who would dare to do this terrible thing? We stumbled out of that empty tomb and ran to tell the shocking news!”

Mary’s Story

Mary Magdalene stood up and went to stand beside John and Peter. She began to speak quietly but her voice rose as she shared her story. “Yes, I went there, but when I looked into the tomb, I saw two angels, dressed in white. One sat at the head and one at the foot of where Jesus had laid. But there was no body! One angel asked me why I was weeping. I replied, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

Mary continued, “I turned around from the tomb entrance and through my tear-filled eyes, stood a man, right in front of me. It was a misty foggy morning, and I thought he was the gardener. He spoke to me, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

He seemed strangely familiar, but in my grief, I shouted, “If you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take Him away.” Then he said my name, “Mary”. And I knew Him! “Rabbi!” I answered and rushed to embrace him. I couldn’t help myself. I was going to hug him! Jesus, my beloved Jesus!

Jesus quietly said, “Do not cling to me, for I am not yet ascended unto my Father.”

I just stood there smiling through my tears, just so close I could feel his breath. And Jesus said to me, “Go tell my brethren that I am ascended to My Father and your father, to my God and your God.”

Then I sat down, quite overcome by her emotions. But Peter spoke persistently to me, “Mary, tell them what Jesus said to you about me.”

I quietly assured Peter, “Yes Peter, Jesus told me to go and tell you. He is very eager for you to know that He is alive.”

Peter choked up as he confessed, “Even though I denied knowing my Lord, he forgave me.”

The group began murmuring among themselves, and James yelled out, “Remember when we were out fishing on the lake? When we came close to the shore, a man was calling out to us, “Put your nets down again on the right side of the boat!”

And although we had fished all night with no luck, we cast the nets out again. Within minutes, the net was full and overflowing. An astonishing catch! It was so huge we had a challenge to pull it up and row our way to the nearby shore.”

John resumed the story. “It was then we knew the stranger was Jesus, our Lord! As we came ashore, Jesus offered us bread and broiled fish from his freshly made fire. What a fine time we had! It was just like old times, joking and laughing, except there was this new feeling... Jesus was different.

Jesus was no longer sad. Actually, he seemed very peaceful and His peace seemed to cover us and the feeling of this holy peace, crept into the very depths of my soul.”

The group had other stories to share about this very sacred time with the risen Jesus. But my thoughts have drifted away. I slowly transition back to my quiet prayer corner. I am wondering how the disciples planned to stay together and how they would try to stay with Jesus. As once again, Jesus was no longer with them. He just seems to come and go.

I am wondering how much I desire to seek out time with Jesus? And the question from my contemplations echoed in my mindspirit: “Have you seen Jesus? Have you seen Jesus?”

I stop writing and pray:

Dear Jesus,

I am so grateful You came.

I'm so sorry You had to suffer for me.

Thank You for forgiving me.

Thank you for finishing Your Great Plan for me.

Help me to stay close to you.

I want to be with you now and always.
I love You Jesus.

Listen or join in the song, [Christ the Lord is Risen Today](#).