The Quiet Voices of Lent

A Lent by Candlelight Meditation

The following Lent by Candlelight meditation was written to encourage a renewed appreciated for the passion of our Lord and what it means to each of us individually. Ideally it would be held just before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. A desert or snacks may be served before the program itself to encourage fellowship. The focus is on the passion of Christ as seen by some of the ordinary people who observed the happenings of that week. Seven candles are extinguished, one by one, during the readings. (If everyone is sitting at tables, seven candles could be used as the centerpiece and one lady at each table instructed to extinguish a candle per the program.) Hymns may be changed or sung by soloists for variation. This meditation was written by Missy Martens of Eastside Lutheran Church in Madison, WI. The theological content was reviewed by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor-emeritus David Valleskey.

The Quiet Voices of Lent

We welcome you and thank you for joining us in preparing for this Lenten season. Tonight we will listen to some of the quiet voices of Lent. These small voices, these minor characters of Lent, are often overlooked, although they have a lot to share with us. In these busy times, in times of struggle, we can all use a little perspective from God’s Word. We pray that through this service, and throughout this Lenten season, you will be edified by the quiet voices of Scripture.

**OPENING PRAYER:** (spoken together)

Lord God, you have brought us safely to this hour of evening prayer. We thank you for providing all that we need for body and life. Bless us who have gathered in your name. Forgive our sins. Speak to our hearts. Dispel our sorrows with the comfort of your Word, and receive our hymns of thanks and praise, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**OPENING HYMN:** *How Great Thou Art* (CW 256)

(Extinguish one small candle at your table)

**The Owners of the Colt**

We do not know their names; we do not even know how many there were. All we know is their obedience and trust in the Lord. They are the owners of the colt that Jesus needed to ride triumphantly into Jerusalem.

Luke 19: 29-38:

*He sent two of His disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’”*

*Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as He had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They replied, “The Lord needs it.”*

*They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As He went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When He came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:*

*(Spoken together)* ***Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”***

Such a minor role. Their one line in the Passion Play is “Why are you untying the colt?” A colt may seem like a small thing to us today, but imagine you looked out your kitchen window and saw someone hotwiring your new car. You ask, “Why are you starting my car?” and the culprits answer, “The Lord needs it.” If you let them go without a fight, you would be considered a fool. At the very least you would probably ask for some sort of collateral so you could be guaranteed its return. But the owners of the colt did not ask for the disciples’ outer garments as collateral; they simply trusted that the Lord needed their colt, and that they would get it back when the Lord saw fit.

Quiet acceptance. Quiet worship. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on that colt, the people erupted into cheers. On Palm Sunday we remember the loud hosannas and praise. But do not forget the quiet obedience when those owners heard the powerful words Jesus told his disciples to say: “The Lord needs it.”

 (Extinguish the second candle)

 **Hymn:** *No Tramp of Soldiers’ Marching Feet* (Supp. 716)

**Malchus**

He is referred to as a servant of the high priest. The disciple John, who was familiar in the court of the high priest, calls him by name: Malchus. We meet him in the Garden of Gethsemane as he comes with a band of people to arrest Jesus. We watch as Peter slices off his ear, and then as Jesus miraculously reattaches it.

John 18:2-11:

*Now Judas, who betrayed Him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with His disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?”*

*“Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am He,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground. Again He asked them, “Who is it you want?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”*

*“I told you that I am He,” Jesus answered. “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” This happened so that the words He had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.”*

*Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”*

Luke 22: 51-53:

 *And He touched the man’s ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard and the elders, who had come for Him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”*

The men who came to arrest Jesus didn’t know what to expect. They knew Jesus was powerful; if they hadn’t seen His miracles in person, they had certainly heard of them these past few years. They came prepared for a fight, armed with swords and clubs. Jesus met them with such quiet power that they fell backwards. And when Peter foolishly drew his sword and cut off Malchus’ ear, Jesus rebuked him. Luke, the physician, is the one who relates the miracle of Jesus touching Malchus and healing his ear.

We don’t know much about Malchus aside from this bittersweet night, but we can speculate on the range of emotions he experienced. He came inches away from dying by Peter’s sword, felt the pain of losing his ear, and watched in astonishment as his enemy, the man he came to arrest, touched his ear and healed him. We have no evidence that Malchus, this minor character in Gethsemane, ever came to faith as a result of this encounter with Jesus. But every time he touched his ear he had a poignant reminder of Jesus’ power, and of His abundant mercy. In Jesus we too find healing of body and soul.

(Extinguish the third candle)

**Hymn:** *Come to Calvary’s Holy Mountain* (CW 106)

**Simon of Cyrene**

He was an innocent bystander, simply watching the action, just one of a crowd of hundreds. He is pulled from the sidelines and forced to carry the cross of Jesus.

Mark 15: 21-24:

*A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). Then they offered Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it. And they crucified Him.*

It has been named the Via Dolorosa, which means the way of grief, and it spans about half a mile. Half a mile may not seem too far to those of us who are accustomed to driving in cars or flying in airplanes. But it is a long way to walk while carrying a heavy wooden cross, especially if you have recently been beaten and flogged as Jesus had. So Simon was pulled out of the crowd to carry the cross for Jesus. At first he was probably not too happy about this unexpected load, but equally unexpected blessings came to him from bearing the cross for Christ.

Mark mentions the names of Simon’s sons, one of which was most likely the same person to whom Paul sends greetings in his letter to the Romans. This suggests that he and his family became followers of Christ, and even were well-known in the church. Although Simon might not have seen it this way at the time, he was honored to be able to share his experience with generations to come. To be able to tell his children and grandchildren that he followed Jesus to His crucifixion and actually carried the cross for Him.

We also have our crosses that Christ asks us to bear. Like Simon, we may not be able to appreciate the unexpected weight that seems to be forced onto our shoulders; however, we have God’s promise that in bearing the cross and in following Jesus, He will work things out for our good, and He will not give us more than we can bear.

(Extinguish the fourth candle)

**Hymn:** *Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spoke* (CW 453)

**The Criminal on the Cross**

He was the Charles Manson, the Jack the Ripper, the Jeffrey Dahmer, the Boston Strangler of the first century. Had we known him and his deeds, we would have been relieved to see his deeds finally come to an end on the cross.

Luke 23: 32, 39-43:

*Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed….One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourselves and us!”*

*But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”*

*Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

Crucifixion was a punishment reserved for the worst of criminals. We can be sure that Jesus was the only man who didn’t deserve to be there. The criminal next to Jesus even admits it freely: “We are punished justly...but this man has done nothing wrong.” We are not given details of the terrible crimes committed by this man that led him to his own cross, but we are allowed to view a beautiful deathbed confession.

This criminal deserved the death sentence. And yet, we will see him in heaven. How sweet Jesus’ words must have sounded to that man’s ears: “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” What an overwhelming joy he must have felt to know that all of his evil deeds were forgiven, to receive grace and mercy from his Savior.

We all deserve nothing but death and hell for the sins we commit. We like to think that we are pretty good people—we haven’t stolen or committed any murders—but we deserve to be hanging on the cross next to Jesus. By grace alone we too can look to Jesus and hear the words the criminal heard, and we can know with confidence that we will be with Jesus in paradise.

(Extinguish the fifth candle)

**Hymn:** *Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See* (CW 219)

**Joseph of Arimathea**

A member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea had everything going for him. He was respected, held a position of high standing, and he was pretty wealthy. Yet he risked it all to bury a dead man.

Matthew 27: 57-60

*As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.*

Joseph of Arimathea was a secret believer in Christ who had a lot to lose by admitting his beliefs. Handling a dead body was on the long list of things that made one unclean, and being unclean would make Joseph unable to participate in many of the Passover events that were going on that holy week. And yet he picked this moment to step forward to claim Jesus’ body and give Him a proper burial. Most crucified criminals were merely tossed into a mass grave, a vast pit of unclaimed bodies. Joseph could not let that happen to his Lord, and the Sabbath was quickly approaching. He gave up his celebrations to serve his Savior, and he boldly asked Pilate for Jesus’ body.

Gently and with a presumably heavy heart, he prepared the Lord’s body for burial. He placed it in his own family tomb and rolled the heavy stone in place. Imagine his guilt at not stepping forward earlier. Imagine his grief as he wrapped Jesus’ body in linens and placed Him in the tomb. Feel his pain as Joseph rolled the stone into place. His Lord had suffered and died for him, and now He was lying in Joseph’s tomb. You and I know Jesus did not stay in that tomb for long, but for Joseph of Arimathea, the glorious resurrection probably seemed far away and perhaps even doubtful.

(Extinguish the sixth candle)

**Hymn:** *Abide With Me* verses 1, 2, 6, 7 (CW 588)

**Mary Magdalene**

She has a shady past, her claim to fame being that she was once possessed by demons. We see her at various times in Jesus’ ministry, following and supporting this man and his disciples. We remember her for her quiet devotion.

John 19: 11-18:

*But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had bee., one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”*

*“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put Him.” At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.*

*“Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking He was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him.”*

*Jesus said to her, “Mary.”*

*She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord.”*

 Women did not hold a very high position in Jesus’ society; however, they played an important role in Jesus’ ministry. Mary Magdalene, despite her past, or perhaps because of it, was one of the faithful women of whom we catch glimpses as Jesus spreads the Word. Mary Magdalene was at the foot of the cross, something not even most of the disciples can claim. She watched as Jesus’ body was laid in the tomb, and she went back on Sunday morning. To her great surprise the heavy stone had been rolled away and her Lord was gone. Although a firm believer in Jesus, she did not yet realize that Christ had risen like he said he would. And so she wept.

Jesus chose to appear to Mary as she wept, not to rebuke her for failing to realize His resurrection, but to comfort her. Think of the swing of emotions Mary experienced. In one moment she went from bitter anguish to utter joy at the revelation of her risen Lord.

In the season of Lent we too experience that swing of emotions. We feel the guilt of our own sin and stagger under the grief of seeing our Lord on the cross for us. We weep bitter tears as the stone is rolled into its place, enclosing our Lord in the tomb. And we, like Mary, experience utter joy when Jesus appears to us, risen and glorified.

(Extinguish the final candle)

 **Hymn:** *O Sons and Daughters of the King* verses 1-3, 8 (CW 165)

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Lord God, we pray that we have gained a little perspective this evening from the quiet voices of Lent. Let us, like the owners of the colt, follow your commands readily and obediently. Like Malchus, bestow on us reminders of your mercy and love. Give us the strength of Simon to bear up under the cross and follow you. Free us from our guilt and take us to be with you in paradise, as you did the criminal who hung next to you on the cross. Like Joseph of Arimathea, grant us the courage to step forward for you, and when we weep like Mary, Lord, comfort us with your loving care, and gently remind us that you did not stay in that tomb, but rose triumphantly from the grave. Make us strong to tell others this wonderful news. In your name we pray. Amen.

 (Relight the center candle on your table)

**Closing Hymn:** *Jesus Refuge of the Weary* (CW 108)