The Women of Lent

A Lent by Candlelight Meditation

This meditation was written by Mollie Schairer and based on Rev. Paul Schweppe’s 2005 Lent sermon series, “The Women of Lent.” Theological content was further reviewed by Rev. Joel Gerlach.

Notes: This meditation is written for three narrators. Narrator A is the main narrator. Narrator B is responsible for Bible readings and the longer responsive reading in the meditation. Narrator C gives a dramatic reading/performance of a monologue.

The meditation requires some simple props. First, 7 scarves of different colors are needed: green, black, amber (orange yellow), dark reddish purple, red, gray, and white. The scarves of different colors correspond to the different women of Lent. Narrator A will wear the scarves for her narration as directed in this Leader’s Guide, *except* for the reddish purple scarf, which will be worn by Narrator C. In order to put on and remove the scarves easily throughout the meditation, a tree-style coat rack with at least 5 hooks is needed.

NARRATOR A: Welcome. This evening God gives us the opportunity to join together with our sisters in worship, meditation and praise. To aid us in our reflection of our Savior’s suffering and death on the cross for us, we will view these events through the eyes and ears of the women who were there. Let us together journey to the cross...with the women of Lent.

**Opening responsive prayer**

*(from Psalm 119)*

NARRATOR A: LORD, please accept the willing praise from our mouths,

GROUP: **And teach us your judgments.**

NARRATOR A: Deal with your servants according to your mercy,

GROUP: **And teach us your statutes.**

NARRATOR A: We have inherited your testimonies forever

GROUP: **Yes, they are the joy of our hearts. Amen.**

**Opening Hymn**

“Jesus, I Will Ponder Now” (CW #98) v. 1, 3

[NARRATOR A puts on the green scarf and the black scarf.]The First Woman—Eve

NARRATOR A: Women played a very significant part in the events of Jesus’ passion. Most stand out as exemplary, even heroic. However, this first woman of Lent is not a hero. She is a tragic figure. Her disobedience necessitated Jesus’ life of humble obedience to God’s law, and Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.

Her name was Eve. The name comes from a word that means “living,” for she was the mother of all the living. But she was also the mother of death. For this reason, I wear two scarves. The green scarf symbolizes life. The black scarf reminds us of the first sin, and death which came into the world as a result of that sin.

Let us listen now to the account of Eve’s disobedience from Genesis, chapter 3, verses 1-6.

NARRATOR B:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

NARRATOR A: God was right that Eve would die if she ate the fruit. She brought physical death into the world. She would not live forever, as God had intended. She also brought spiritual death. She was no longer holy, perfect, like God. She lost that perfection, the image of God, and could no longer be in God’s presence. Worse yet, her fallen condition would be passed on to all her offspring. Instead of bearing children in the image of God, all humankind would be born in the image of Eve—sinful.

Every day we suffer the consequences of sin in the world and in our hearts. Truly our enemy, Satan, rages against us with a fierce hatred. Terrorism. Shootings. Chronic illness. Addictions. Betrayal. Abuse. Broken relationships. Broken hearts.

In silence, we reflect on the hurts we have suffered at the hands of our enemy.

*(Silence for reflection.)*

We see sin in ourselves. The good we want to do, we so often fail to do. The evil that God has warned us against—gossip, grudges, bitterness, worry, envy, complaints—these we take from the tree and eat.

In silence, we reflect on the ways we have hurt others and sinned against God.

*(Silence for reflection.)*

Yet God gave Eve, and us, reason not to despair, but to rejoice. One was coming who would heal us, restore our relationship with God, and return to us the life of eternity with God that he intended for us. Let us read together God’s word of promise from Genesis chapter 3, verse 15.

ALL: **I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.**

NARRATOR A: The devil, who overcame us by a tree, would in turn by a tree be overcome. Jesus secured for us the victory. All our sins are forgiven and eternal life is ours. In the joy of that forgiveness, let us sing together the next hymn.

[NARRATOR A removes the green and black scarves and hangs them on the coat rack.]

**Hymn**

754, “The Tree of Life,” v. 1-3, or“Sing My Tongue” (CW #122) v. 1-4

[NARRATOR A puts on the amber-colored (orange-yellow) scarf from the coat rack.]

The Women of Lent—Mary, the Sister of Martha and Lazarus

NARRATOR A: This next woman of Lent displayed love and faith in her Savior that we would seek to emulate. She poured out to Jesus a rich, bold, selfless offering just days before his death on the cross.

This woman is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Let us listen now to the account of this offering.

NARRATOR B:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume?It could have been sold for more than a year’s wagesand the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” (John 12:1-3, Mark 14:4-9)

NARRATOR A: This costly perfume was made from the spikenard flower, which grows in the Himalayan mountains. This oil has a rich amber color, so I wear an amber colored scarf to remember Mary’s offering.

Customs were very different at the time of Jesus. Men ate only with other men. The women were supposed to leave the men alone, unless they were serving the food, as Martha was. Women were to avoid drawing attention to themselves at all times. And women were to observe the culture’s rules of modesty by keeping their hair covered.

Yet what does Mary do? She interrupts the men, in effect “crashing” the dinner party. She draws every eye to herself by breaking this jar of fragrant perfume over Jesus, and then she removes her head covering to wipe his feet with her hair!

And what was the reaction to this shocking and immodest display? The disciples “rebuked her harshly.”

Why did she do it? I think we know why.

This was her dear Jesus. These were the precious feet at which she would sit, soaking in her Savior’s words of joy, peace and forgiveness. These were the precious feet that had come to the tomb of her dead brother, where Jesus then called Lazarus back to life. A year’s wages could never be enough to thank him.

Months ago, when her sister Martha had challenged her to stop listening to Jesus and get to work, Mary heard Jesus say, “Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” And no one was going to take this moment away from her, either! Cultural taboos or the criticism of others meant nothing to her in that moment. Only one thing was on Mary’s mind: to anoint Jesus for the death he predicted. She had to do this for Jesus—it was her last chance. For her, there were only two people in that room—herself and Jesus. And she knew that he would understand, and that was all that mattered.

**Responsive Prayer**

NARRATOR B: Dear Jesus, we too, have heard from you the sweet words of the Gospel that have brought us back to life. As Mary poured out upon you a lavish gift,

GROUP: **So let us now pour out our very lives in service to you.**

NARRATOR B: As Mary offered her gift despite the scorn of others

GROUP: **So let us continue in our lives of service, undeterred by criticism or ridicule.**

NARRATOR B: As Mary spared no expense to show you love,

GROUP: **So let us never count the cost of living for you. Amen.**

**Hymn**

“You Are My All in All” (CCLI Song #825356) or “Take My Life and Let It Be” (CW #469 v. 1,4,6)

[NARRATOR A removes the amber-colored scarf and hangs it on the coat rack.]

Women of Lent: Pontius Pilate’s Wife

NARRATOR A: It is now one week later, Good Friday morning. Jesus has been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples have fled. In a sham, late-night trial at the home of the High Priest, the Jewish leaders have condemned Jesus. They have led him, bound like a criminal, to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.

We now hear from another woman, unexpectedly caught up in the events of the first Good Friday. This woman is Pontius Pilate’s own wife. A wealthy, prominent Roman woman, she would have worn the ultimate status symbol of her day—clothing dyed Tyrian purple. The ancient Phoenicians in the region of Tyre first developed this rich, reddish purple dye. It was obtained by boiling thousands of Mediterranean snails in huge vats, a time-consuming and costly undertaking.

We now listen to Pontius Pilate’s wife recount in her own words the role she played in the events of Good Friday.

NARRATOR C [This monologue may be performed dramatically and in costume if desired. Whether or not a full costume is used, the speaker will wear a deep reddish-purple scarf]: Out of the darkness comes the sound of people—many people—a mob! They are driving a man ahead of them as one would herd a sheep to the slaughterhouse. Somehow I know this poor man was innocent.

Next I see him standing before my husband. The sight fills me with dread. I try to cry out to help him, but I cannot make a sound! I try to run to him, but I cannot move at all! I stand rooted to the spot, helpless, as he is condemned. A deep darkness falls. Then a clamor rises—the voices of demons, shrieking in celebration, in delight!

Then, suddenly, a flash of bright light! The shrieks turn to screams of terror! Screams from the demons, and also now from the mob. Standing over them in glorious splendor is the righteous Man, with a sword raised in judgment!

My eyes open. Sunlight streams through my bedroom window. Oh, it was only a dream!

But then I hear the screams—a mob, just outside! My husband, Pontius Pilate, is gone! Terror fills my heart.

Quickly, I send for a servant. “What is going on?” I demand. She explains that the Jews have brought a man for trial early that morning, and my husband has just sat down in the judgment seat. I need to warn my husband! I get my writing kit and hastily pen a message for him: “Don’t have anything to do with this innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”

But, to my horror, he does have something to do with this just man. My terrifying dream is coming true.

In defense of my husband, let me say that ruling these Jews is a difficult task. Proud, independent, ­­forever clinging to their own bewildering religious laws. And how they hate us! But Emperor Tiberius wants peace above all else. If my husband cannot deliver it, someone else will be found who can. My husband will be cast aside, like the refuse thrown onto the trash heap outside Jerusalem’s walls. He will be sent into exile, or even ordered to commit suicide! You see, he must keep the peace, above all else.

So my husband makes the decision that means infamy for him until the end of time. He gives in to the mob and the Jewish leaders. He betrays justice. He condemns a just Man. My nightmare comes true!

Now I look back and think of the irony of that morning. My husband did what he thought would preserve the peace, and his own future. He took action to resolve the matter quickly, so he and I could go on with our lives. Yet the name Pontius Pilate forever will be synonymous with condemning a just man. Remember that—there are no quick, convenient solutions. Only right solutions, and wrong solutions.

So where is the guilt? With my husband, clearly. He sent an innocent man to the cross. But so did I. So did *you*. This you confess every time you gather to worship the righteous Man.

My husband’s name will live on in infamy. How easy to cast all the blame on him. Yet the blame, we know, lies with us all.

**Hymn**

O, Dearest Jesus v. 1,3,4

[NARRATOR C removes the purple scarf and hangs it on the coat rack. NARRATOR A puts on the red scarf.]

The Women of Lent: Mary, the Mother of Jesus

NARRATOR A: It is now Good Friday afternoon. Pilate has ignored the plea of his troubled wife. Barabbas has been freed, and Jesus has been sentenced to execution. We now stand before him in his final hours. We view his suffering on the cross through the eyes of the woman most grieved by this hideous sight. There are other women at the cross who love Jesus deeply. His beloved disciple John also is there. All of them are losing a teacher, a dear friend, a man they believe to be the Messiah, their Savior. But Mary also is losing her child. I wear a red scarf to symbolize the pain that pierces Mary’s own heart.

Some of us have experienced the death of a child, or a grandchild. It is a feeling that is intensely unnatural...why did he or she go before I? The pain of such a loss in time becomes more bearable, but it never goes away.

Now Mary is suffering this pain. She remembers the Angel Gabriel’s announcement, Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, the visit of the Wise Men, and raising this child who never disobeyed but always astonished her. She was right there during the early years of his ministry when he was popular and sought after, then later the opposition to his ministry, the rejection, the hatred, and finally the terrible events of Holy Week, culminating in this excruciating death as a condemned criminal. Let us read responsively the prophetic words of Isaiah. Through them we give voice to her grief, and confess the reason for Jesus’ death.

**Responsive Reading**

NARRATOR B: He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.

GROUP: **And the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

NARRATOR B: He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

GROUP: **And the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

NARRATOR B: He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter

GROUP: **And the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

NARRATOR B: By oppression and judgment he was taken away, yet who of his generation protested?

GROUP: **And the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

NARRATOR B: His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—

GROUP: **And the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

NARRATOR B: He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death,

GROUP: **And the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

NARRATOR B: He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.

ALL: **We all like sheep have gone astray, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

*(Silence for personal reflection.)*

NARRATOR A: As Mary stands by the cross, helpless, watching the death of her son, that son sees *her*. He knows the depth of pain she is experiencing. He knows her needs.

He is dying on the cross to take care of her greatest need, her need for atonement of her sins. He is paying the price for her sins, for Eve’s first sin, for all sins of all time.

Yet he gives Mary even more. In the midst of his agony, he lovingly focuses on her other needs as well. Financial needs. Domestic needs. Emotional needs. He gives her to his disciple John to care for and love until she joins Jesus again in Heaven.

And isn’t it the same for us? Jesus has taken care of our greatest need. Our sins are completely paid for, completely forgiven. What agony Jesus endured to repair our relationship with God.

And yet he gives us even more. He gives us relationships with others here on earth, for our security, our well-being, our happiness. He meets our needs through these relationships, with family, with fellow church members, with friends. Jesus cares about us and *all* our needs just as much as he cared for Mary’s. In thankfulness to him, we sing our next hymn.

[NARRATOR A removes the red scarf and hangs it on the coat rack.]

**Hymn**

My Song is Love Unknown (CW #110 v. 1-5)

[NARRATOR A puts on the gray scarf.]

The Women of Lent: All the Women Who Watched Jesus’ Crucifixion and Burial

NARRATOR A: Mary was not alone in witnessing Jesus’ death on the cross. As we have heard, John was right beside her. Mark’s gospel tells us that other women were there as well, watching the crucifixion from a distance.

NARRATOR B:

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. (Mark 15: 40-41)

NARRATOR A: These women had played an important role in Jesus’ ministry. They had spent considerable time, energy and money to provide for Jesus and his disciples. They often traveled with him to take care of his bodily needs. They probably had helped to serve the Passover meal on Thursday evening, the first Maundy Thursday. After that meal, they likely went to stay the night with friends or at an inn. What a shock when they learned on Friday that Jesus was to be crucified that very day!

So what did these women do? They did not run away, like the disciples, except John. They went to Golgotha. They watched the humiliating death of their beloved Jesus, crucified as the worst of criminals.

Then, even in death, they stayed near him. They watched to see where he was buried. Luke records for us: “The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes.” (Luke 23:55-56a)

This scarf of gray symbolizes the stone tomb in which these loyal women witnessed Jesus’ hasty burial. It is to this tomb that they planned to return after the Sabbath. They wanted to ensure that his body had proper preparation with the spices.

And *why*? Why did they remain so loyal? They had heard his teaching. They had seen the miracles. They believed he was the Promised One. But now he was dead! How could that be? How forsaken, even betrayed, these women must have felt. They had built their lives on Jesus—had that been a horrible mistake?

Though these questions thundered in their minds, though their whole world had gone dark, they remained faithful. They refused to forsake him, even in death.

Sisters, let us also remain faithful. Through the happy times. Through the bleak times. Those times when our plans, our hopes are dashed. Those times when our world goes black. Those times when we just don’t understand. We hold onto Jesus. We stay by his side. We believe his words that he is in control, and he is working out everything for our good.

Let us read together Romans 8, verse 28.

ALL: **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

NARRATOR A: God worked everything for the good of these women of Lent. Eve received the powerful first promise of a Savior. These women were eyewitnesses of this prophecy’s fulfillment. They faithfully kept watch as the Devil struck their beloved Jesus. And then, on Easter Sunday morning, these loyal women were the first to see the proof. Proof that Jesus had indeed crushed Satan’s head! When they returned to that tomb, it was empty!

[NARRATOR A takes off the gray scarf and hangs it on the coat rack, and puts on the white scarf.]

I now wear a white scarf, symbol of Jesus’ triumphant resurrection from the dead. His resurrection assures us that we, too, will rise from the dead. This evening we have seen him through the eyes of the women who witnessed these events. Then we will see him with our own eyes. All pain, all grief, all ridicule, all confusion, all doubt, will be swept away. We close this evening in joyful anticipation of that day. The day when we will see our risen Savior face-to-face.

**Hymn**

Lord When Your Glory I Shall See (#219), or “When Trials Come” (CCLI #4619523)

**Closing Blessing**

ALL: **May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself. May the power of the Lord Jesus make us strong to do his will. May the peace of the Lord Jesus fill our lives. Amen.**