



For The Joy Set Before Him

A Good Friday Devotional
By Marcus DeHart

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. - Philippians 3:10-11

“I want to know Christ.” What a powerful ambition. My human nature wants to stop right there with the thought of how my relationship with the Son of God is no more than a warm fuzzy feeling. But that is not knowing Christ. That is being known by Christ. I am a child of God and nothing brings me more joy. But that might inform me more about who I am than who Christ is.

If someone were to ask me what they should know about Jesus Christ, I would immediately think of his love and compassion. But Paul’s list of characteristics that he wants to know about Christ does not include love and compassion (these are qualities he is already familiar with). He starts with the power of his resurrection. I like this. It brings hope. It gives me confidence that there is more to living and dying. There is new life. There is renewal. There is freedom from pain and healing of all wounds. That is a good start.

But then Paul ruins it for me. Next on his list is “participation in his sufferings.” Wait a minute. I thought Jesus took on our sins so that we would not need to suffer. Then he adds salt to the wound by saying he wants to become like Jesus in his death. Is Paul some kind of masochist?

Within the context of the epistle, I can understand that Paul is trying to *strengthen, encourage, and comfort* (1 Corinthians 14:1-3) the Philippians as they undergo persecution. He reminds them that he too is suffering for the gospel and that they should take joy in being worthy to suffer for the gospel—just as Jesus did.

But can we truly participate in Jesus’ suffering? I don’t think that Paul is telling us that we all need to be nailed to a cross, and he certainly doesn’t think that doing so would accomplish what Jesus’ death did—namely, redeeming humanity from sin. Still, Jesus himself tells us that if we want to be his disciples, we need to take up our cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24-25). At the very least, Jesus’ words tell us that we should expect opposition, persecution, and suffering as we follow him.

I wonder if there is another way to participate in Jesus' suffering and become like him in his death. Not in place of the suffering that we encounter as believers, but in addition to the trials and tribulations we encounter in life. And in that participation, can we somehow understand what the writer of Hebrews says in chapter 12 verse 2? "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Growing up in the Catholic church I experienced traditions that had deep roots going back centuries beyond the reformation. One in particular held special meaning to me: The Stations of the Cross, which has its origins in the 12th century when Francis of Assisi went on a pilgrimage to the holy land to experience the lands where Jesus lived. From these practices, the Franciscans developed the tradition of walking the *Via Dolorosa*, which can be translated "the way of suffering." Many Christians today still make pilgrimages to the holy land for similar reasons.

In the church that I attended, the Stations of the Cross consisted of 14 enormous tapestries around the perimeter of the sanctuary depicting significant events starting with Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane. The priest would stand before each mural and narrate the scene depicted and then say a prayer. The final tapestry depicted Jesus' death because it was performed on Good Friday. The idea was to experience what Jesus and his disciples went through and then spend the rest of the weekend reflecting on it before experiencing the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning. As a young child, such a ceremony was tedious and long for me. Yet, I always walked away with a sense of solemn awe.

Remembering those moments, I decided to walk through each of the stations as individual meditations. I wanted to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to me through these scriptures. I wanted to know Christ. This, to me, was one way to participate in his sufferings.

But to truly participate in his sufferings, I realized I need to let go of my own sense of me. I'm not trying to be mystical or super spiritual when I say that. If you're like me, it feels natural to read the Bible and immediately ask the question, "What does it mean to me?" I felt that taking that approach would diminish the idea of participating in his sufferings. Instead, I felt I needed to develop compassion for Jesus.

Compassion is an interesting word that has both inspired and eluded me most of my life. You can see the word "passion" nested in this term. I was recently surprised to learn that the origin of "passion" comes from the Latin word *pati*, which means suffer. This struck me as odd. I hear the word "passion" used most often toward the object of someone's love. But then it struck me that when someone is passionately in love with another person, they are suffering as they strive to win their affection. So the word compassion means to suffer with or to bear the suffering with another.

I've learned that we are called to walk with those who suffer. In doing so, we lighten the load of the one who is suffering, and they know that they are not alone. Often this means just being with them and listening to them. This has been uncomfortable for me. I immediately want to fix the problem and remove the suffering, in part because I don't want to suffer. And so, I try to fill the silence with good advice, words of wisdom, and explanations for why they might be suffering. I often attempt to comfort people by telling them that I understand what they are going through and then proceed to tell them some story from my own experience that relates to what they are going through. Oddly enough, that rarely results in relieving their suffering. In time I've come to learn that this tactic only serves to make me feel good and comes across as "hey, you shouldn't feel so bad. I've been through the same thing, I know how you feel, and I've survived. So, get with the

program.” When I reflect on events where someone has done this to me, I have a memory of a wall coming up between us and thinking, “You don’t really understand me.”

But when someone stops and listens to me, I feel like I’m heard. I feel like what I think and feel and experience matters.

In this context, my earlier statement about developing compassion for Jesus seems odd and out of place. Jesus is the Son of God. Everything he thinks, feels, and experiences matters. So what is the point of having compassion for Jesus? I have two thoughts. First, it honors Jesus. I would even go so far as to say that it is a form of worship. It’s saying, “Jesus, you went through so much for me. You suffered a horrible death and then some. You are worthy of all praise.” Second, it enables us to participate in his resurrection. How much more joyful is life on the other side of death. One way or another we have to pass through that door. Because of Jesus, we know that death no longer holds us forever.

So come walk with me—or rather, walk with Jesus, who “for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

1. Jesus in Gethsemane

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Matthew 26: 36-41

Jesus is hours away from fulfilling his mission for leaving Heaven, humbling himself by becoming a human, and suffering shame and humiliation on the cross. In these final hours, we see him going to a garden to pray. That takes me back where this mission began, in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were presented with a choice—a choice of following their own will or the will of the Father who created them out of dust, breathed life into them, and declared “it is very good.” He has known since their fateful decision that it would come down to this moment. Now that he has arrived, his soul is overwhelmed with sorrow. I’ve seen paintings of this scene where the artist depicts Jesus kneeling at a rock with a gentle expression on his face as he looks heavenward. But Matthew tells us that Jesus fell with his face to the ground.

How he must have felt alone. He brings his disciples with him into the garden, the eleven remaining men he has shared his life with for three years. Perhaps, he will find comfort knowing they are nearby. He then singles out his three closest friends to join him deeper in the garden and

asks them to keep watch. Still, he knows that he is alone in what he must do. How discouraging it must have been to return to Peter, James, and John only to find them sleeping. I normally read his question as a rebuke for falling asleep. But now I see his sorrow expressed through a plea for help. “You are my friends. Can you not be here to comfort and support me in my hour of need?” But Jesus’ burden is beyond our understanding. Not only must he die a horrific, painful death and suffer shame and humiliation, but he also anticipates the one thing that he has never experienced before: separation from his Father. He has known the Father and walked in His presence for all eternity. But within the next 24 hours, he will lose all of that. And for what? So, these friends, who can’t even stay awake for an hour, can be set free from the experience? This is the pattern of mankind. From Adam and Eve’s first departure from the Father, a long history of the Israelites walking away from God has played out over and over again through history. Yet the Father lovingly reaches out and draws them back into his arms like a wayward child. And so, Jesus, like his Father in heaven, reaches out to you and me today.

How deep is the love of the Father that He would surrender His own Son and be separated from Him so that you and I could enter His throne room and dwell in His glory?

2. Jesus is betrayed and arrested

Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him.

Mark 14:43-46

Jesus is silent throughout this passage. He doesn’t greet the crowd or speak to Judas—neither words of acknowledgment or accusation of betrayal. Jesus is aware that the dominoes have been set up and with a kiss from Judas the first will tip and then the course of events will play out according to plan. The cup he just prayed to be released from drinking is now brimming and placed to his lips.

To add insult to injury, Jesus has just suffered alone in his anticipation of death while his disciples slept. In their ignorance, they could not see the events about to unfold. But Judas knew that handing Jesus over to the chief priest at the very least would be confining him to prison and humiliation at the hands of the council. Jesus receives his kiss.

And then there’s the crowd. Other translations use the term “mob” or “ruffians.” This is not a group of armed soldiers. This is a crowd incited to arrest Jesus by force. In this moment, Jesus could have launched an angelic assault on these people and wiped them from existence. Here again, we see Jesus humbling himself. He could hold onto his divine authority and make them bow down to him. Instead, he humbles himself, submitting to the children of the disobedient. What irony. Mankind would not submit to God, so God submitted to mankind in order to save those who abandoned him.

3. Jesus is denied by Peter

Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Luke 22:54-62

I find myself naturally drawn to Peter in this passage, but I have to stop and ask myself "What was Jesus thinking and feeling at that moment? He had foreseen the event. He knew that Peter would deny him three times. At that moment, when Jesus turned to look at Peter, it's easy to imagine an "I told you so" look on Jesus' face. But if we go back about 20 verses to when Jesus first warned Peter, we see a different heart.

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32)

Imagine instead that the look on Jesus' face was one of compassion. Jesus wants, in that look, for Peter to find strength, so that his faith will not fail. By human priorities, Jesus "should" have been focused on the trial before him and the injustice being inflicted on him. Instead, he turns to those he loves, he prays for them, and he seeks to strengthen them.

4. Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin

At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. "If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us."

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"

He replied, "You say that I am."

Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips."

Luke 22:66-71

Jesus is not brought before the Sanhedrin to reveal the truth. He stands in judgment. He knows the hearts of his accusers and refuses to play their games. They will not believe him, nor will they answer their own questions, for they fear the people.

Jesus is able to stand in the midst of this crowd of accusers for one reason. He knows who he is and why he is here. He knows that his place is seated at the right hand of the Father.

The Sanhedrin fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, "They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand." Isaiah 44:18

Have you ever felt misunderstood about something important to you? I have often felt my reputation was on the line because of being misunderstood. How much more did Jesus have on the line? His life. Pain and suffering, for sure. But that is all that his accusers could inflict upon him. What awaited him was much more painful, much more devastating. Soon he would be separated, not just from friends and life, but from the Father he has known throughout eternity. He had to walk this path before he could take his seat at the right hand of the Father and usher the children of God into his kingdom.

5. Jesus is judged by Pilate

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

"Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate.

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."

But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Mark 15:1-5, 15

"You have said so," are the only words Mark records Jesus saying to Pilate. John delivers a longer conversation where Jesus proclaims that his kingdom is not of this world and that his purpose is to testify to the truth. I personally like John's rendering better because in it Jesus makes an effort to shine some light on his motives and actions. His silence in Mark's account is disturbing. He's

been accused of many things by the chief priests, but he makes no effort to rebut any accusations. He stands in silent submission to the ruling authorities.

Jesus' encounter with Pilate concludes with his own people calling for the release of the rebel Barabbas. I have always read this and imagined the pain of rejection and humiliation that Jesus must have experienced as his people cried, "Crucify him!" As I read it now, I wonder if he might be rejoicing that Barabbas would not suffer the same fate that he was about to endure. Barabbas, to Jesus, is the first of many to be liberated by the pain, suffering, shame, and death Jesus is about to walk into for the joy set before.

6. Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns

*Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.
John 19:1-3*

It is difficult to imagine the physical pain that Jesus endured. Most injuries I have received have been isolated: a scrape, a broken bone, a cut. The memory of such injuries fades with time. We only know that we don't want to experience it again. But Jesus' flogging was repeated over and over again. The scripture does not tell us how many times he was whipped. Some traditions claim he received 39 lashes, which is the limit the Jews placed on flogging. However, this flogging was administered by the Romans who had no such limit. Likely, the soldiers would have continued till they tired of their play or Jesus passed out.

We have no record of Jesus' reaction to the torturers. He is silent during the proceedings—like a lamb before the slaughter. But unlike a lamb he knew what awaited him.

And the Roman soldiers continue their play even after they have tired of flogging Jesus. Perhaps Jesus' silence wasn't gratifying to them. When physical suffering isn't enough, try breaking the spirit. So, they turn to mockery: a crown of thorns, a discarded royal robe, and insincere praise followed by a slap in the face.

Again, Jesus remains silent. Imagine him looking into the eyes of the men he is dying for and seeing the hatred and contempt in their hearts and feeling the palm of their hands as they strike his face. But this is why he left his throne in heaven where he was robed in light with stars set in his crown. He came to seek and save the lost—the very men who now mocked and humiliated him.

Throughout the gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that he only says or does what the Father tells him. What was the Father telling him at that moment? Was he speaking words of comfort and reassurance? Or was Jesus' silence the result of the Father's silence?

7. Jesus bears the cross

As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

John 19:5, 15-17

I cannot help but wonder if at this moment Jesus is thinking, "This is really happening." He has spoken openly to his disciples that he would suffer, die, and rise again. But until this point, it had always been a basic three-point sermon. Now he was facing hate-filled cries of "Crucify him!" What a dreadful sound that must have been. Jesus, who described himself as "gentle and humble in heart," now felt the complete hatred of mankind pressing down on him. The chief priests were done beating around the bush trying to trip him. They laid their cards on the table and demanded the life of the man who came to save them.

When Pilate asks, "Shall I crucify your king?" the chief priests, answer, "We have no king but Caesar!" Their words must have taken Jesus back to the days of Samuel when the people asked prophet to give them a king so they could be like all the other nations. God's response to Samuel's indignation was, "It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king." They have chosen Caesar, their oppressor, over the King of kings who set them apart from all other nations and liberated them from injustice.

I wonder which was a greater weight to bear: the heavy timbers of the cross upon which he would die, or the absolute rejection and undeserved animosity of his own people?

8. Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene

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.

Mark 15:21

It's tempting at this point to focus on Simon and his role in the way of suffering. This simple sentence begs the inquiring mind to ask, "How am I like Simon? What role do I play in Jesus' sacrifice?" I urge you not to go that path. Whenever we see names dropped in the gospels, it is either to give historical context, such as the name of rulers or because the audience is likely to know of the person mentioned, so they can verify the account of the author. Simon was a Greek Jew from a city more than 1,700 miles from Jerusalem. Beyond that we can only speculate about the man. We know that he had two sons who Mark also names, again so that the readers can get their first-hand account of the events. These are all clues to the audience to seek out their testimony.

More importantly, this man points out the condition of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include this event, but none of them provides a reason for why Simon was forced to carry the cross. Ancient tradition suggests that Jesus stumbled three times before Simon was conscripted into carrying the cross, but we have no written account in the Bible.

What we can assume is that Jesus was now incapable of carrying the cross. Having been scourged and beaten, and probably unfed since the Passover meal, Jesus' body has reached its physical limitations. Seeing how the Roman guards had treated him, it's safe to say that they would have preferred to make him carry the cross all the way to Golgotha. Simon was enlisted because Jesus was no longer capable, and the soldiers were losing their patience.

Now, imagine Jesus' emotional state at the moment. In his pain and weakness, he might find relief from the burden. But at that same time Simon's assistance accelerates his progress to the only event that he truly dreads. What were his thoughts as he looked upon Simon? Did he feel gratitude? Did he feel compassion for the man pressed into service and fearing for his own life? Did he feel anger at the injustice thrust upon the man? He likely felt them all. In the midst of his physical and emotional pain, did he still experience the joy set before him? The joy that one day Simon would be with him eternally?

9. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'"

For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"
Luke 23: 27-31

In this passage, these are the only words that Jesus speaks between his trial with Pilate and his final words on the cross. These are harsh words. These are prophetic words. Commentators

generally agree that Jesus is foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Note that he doesn't comfort them with the promise that he will rise again, and their sins will be forgiven. We don't know for certain who these women are. Luke doesn't mention any of the women by name, but Jesus refers to them as "daughters of Jerusalem," so these may just be local women who took pity on him. It's possible they didn't even know them.

Jesus is quoting from Hosea—the context of which may provide insight. The prophecy from that passage speaks of a deceitful people wrapped up in idolatry. It describes people mourning the loss of their idol. Hosea goes on to describe a people who depended on their own strength and in turn were destroyed. Might these words from Jesus be a rebuke? Are these women weeping and wailing because Jesus failed to bring the military victory that they had placed their hope in? Do they cry out of pity for Jesus?

His final words to them reveals their misplaced pity. Jesus is a green tree that is being cut down—he is without sin. These women are like dry trees. How much more will they suffer if he is not spared?

In Jesus we see the heart of God. In his own suffering, he is compassionate toward those who are blind to their own suffering. Jesus finds no comfort in pity. Pity is misguided, especially when it comes from those who are worse off than he is.

10. Jesus is crucified

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.
Luke 23: 33-34

The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus scorned the shame of the cross. This passage gives us a glimpse of that shame. He is crucified between two criminals—he has been counted among the unrighteous. He has been stripped of his only possession—the clothes on his back. And the Roman soldiers have placed greater value on his clothes than on him. These are not clean white garments fresh off the loom. They are the clothes he wore after being scourged and beaten. They are likely soaked with blood and sweat. And the soldiers still find them worth gambling for. Perhaps they'll be able to clean them up and get a few coins for them.

Packed in between these two humiliations, Jesus pleads with his Father to forgive those who have done this to him. Jesus knew that he would have to die this horrific death by the hands of men. But those men are blind to the purpose of his suffering. They are blind to his innocence, his righteousness, and his love for them. They may have taken a fatalist view that since Jesus is suffering, he has done something to deserve it.

All of the pain and shame he endured, he scorned. He held it in contempt. He would not allow it to have power over him. He endured it for the joy set before him. The joy of seeing those living in darkness entering into the light of the love of the Father.

11. Jesus promises his kingdom to a criminal

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself 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 him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Luke 23:39-43

Jesus is at his most vulnerable moment. He is helpless and even a condemned man finds insults to hurl at him. Jesus makes no defense against such cruelty. I wonder if the criminal's taunt might be a temptation to Jesus. He is, after all, the Son of God. Couldn't he call angels to his side? Couldn't he jump down from the cross as if the nails that held him there were made of sand? Couldn't he heal himself? We don't know if these thoughts crossed his mind. We do know that even if he could do these things he wouldn't without the consent of the Father. In John's gospel, Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does." Jesus has no reply to the criminal's insults because the Father is silent.

But then the other criminal comes to Jesus' defense. The criminal has no hope for surviving his punishment, but he does fear God. He understands the concepts of righteousness and justice. He knows that Jesus does not deserve this fate. He knows that he does deserve punishment, and his life is the payment. His only hope now is an innocent man hanging beside him on a cross.

"Truly I tell," Jesus says to the criminal. I hear joy in those words. I hear hope. I hear satisfaction in Jesus as he promises paradise to a repentant criminal. At that moment we get a clear picture of the "joy set before him" that enabled Jesus to endure the cross and scorn its shame.

12. Jesus speaks to his mother and to John

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

John 19:25-27

No one wants to witness someone they love die. But four women and one disciple follow the crowd to Golgotha to be there at his passing. Perhaps they hoped a rescue or a pardon would take place, or that God would stop these events from unfolding. Or perhaps they just couldn't bear the thought of Jesus being alone in his final hours surrounded by Roman soldiers and mocking religious leaders. Perhaps they wanted him to see them and know that they still loved him and would not abandon him.

Did Jesus take comfort in seeing them? Or did he grieve for them and the pain they were experiencing on his behalf? His words suggest the latter as he seeks to comfort his mother by offering John as her son in his place. And then to John he offers Mary as his mother to care for her. We have no record of Mary's husband Joseph since Jesus was a boy. Mary is likely a widow at this time, since John takes her into his home.

I think Jesus is offering them more than comfort. He is giving them hope. They are not alone. There is a future that waits for them. All is not lost. While they don't understand, they will see Jesus again.

13. Jesus is forsaken

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

Mark 15:33-36

Six hours hanging on a cross. Exposed, in pain, struggling to breathe. Three hours of darkness toward the end. And the crowd remained. What were they expecting? Like so many times before, they misunderstood what Jesus was saying. One of them feels pity for Jesus and tries to ease his pain with wine vinegar. I wonder about his closing words, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down." Was he mocking Jesus at this point? Or after so many hours of darkness was he secretly hoping to see Elijah appear and take Jesus down from the cross? Was he hoping to witness a miracle?

But Jesus' cry was not to Elijah but to his Father. Two things stand out to me about how he addresses his Father. First, he uses a possessive pronoun, "My." This harkens back to Genesis and Exodus when God first established covenants with the Israelites saying, "I will be your God, and you will be my people." "My God" is the God of covenant. God is fulfilling that covenant through Jesus. Second, Jesus repeats the phrase "my God." Repetition is often used for emphasis in the Bible. The repetition of a name, however, is an expression of intimacy. Consider when God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son by calling, "Abraham, Abraham." Jesus says, "Martha, Martha," when she complains of her sister's laziness. And again, Jesus warns Peter of his betrayal by saying, "Simon, Simon." Now, dying on the cross, he addresses God with intimate words and asks, "Why have you forsaken me?" Some translations use the word "abandoned." Jesus is now

experiencing for the first time the one thing he dreaded the most: He has been separated from his Father. Up until now, he has maintained that he only does what the Father tells him to do. He has been in complete submission to his Father. But now, he is alone. He no longer hears from the One on whom he has relied upon for every breath. Without that guiding presence, what else is left to do?

14. Jesus dies on the cross

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Luke 23:44-46

And so, we come to the end. Jesus speaks his final words and breathes his last breath. His words do not express regret. They do not address his friends and family offering his love or bringing them comfort. His final words reflect his relationship with his Father in heaven. A relationship that preexisted time itself. Begotten, not made. One in being with the Father. He returns, or hands over, to the Father what has come from Him. He commits his Spirit into the hands of the Father. He completes his final act of submission. And in doing so, the barrier that has separated mankind from God is torn asunder.

John's depiction of this final moment records Jesus' final words as "It is finished." In the Message the words are translated, "It's done... complete."

I get the sense, not of resignation—as if Jesus were giving up—but of satisfaction. He has endured and paid the price for all mankind. Having seen it through to the end, he is ready to entrust his life and Spirit to the trustworthy hands of the Father.