

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Easter Week, 2025



Easter Sunday, April 20: *"For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead"* (Jn 20:1-9).

Resurrection is not for the faint of heart. Rising above, rising up, hoping against hope, awakening to new life takes great courage and faith. I was praying the other evening with the image of the men deported from the US held captive in El Salvadoran prisons. Among them, I imagine, are violent criminals who are to be punished for their crimes. And among them, I know, are innocent men wrenched from their families whose only crime is a desire for a better life for those families. The image reminded me of photos I've seen from Auschwitz and Dachau. It also brought to mind the searing poem, "They have threatened us with Resurrection," by exiled Guatemalan poet, the late Julia Esquivel. Written in 1980, she commemorates the memory of thousands of Mayans executed in the last half of the twentieth century. Here's an excerpt: (You can read the whole poem here: <https://www.gatheringinlight.com/they-have-threatened-us-with-resurrection-1980-by-julia-esquivel/>).

"It isn't the noise in the streets that keeps us from resting, my friend...It is something within us that doesn't let us sleep, that doesn't let us rest, that won't stop pounding deep inside, it is the silent, warm weeping of Indian women without their husbands, it is the sad gaze of the children fixed somewhere beyond memory...What keeps us from sleeping is that they have threatened us with Resurrection! Because every evening, though weary of killings, an endless inventory since 1954, yet we go on loving life and do not accept their death!... Because in this marathon of Hope, there are always others to relieve us who carry the strength to reach the finish line which lies beyond death. ...Join us in this vigil and you will know what it is to dream! Then you will know how marvelous it is to live threatened with Resurrection! To dream awake, to keep watch asleep, to live while dying, and to know ourselves already resurrected!"

Provision: Rise up. Some are called to rise up in active protest, to lobby, to provide sanctuary and to protect those in harm's way. Some are called to rise up to aid loved ones left behind. But all of us are called to rise up in hope and faith, believing in the promises of Christ's resurrection and the true Kingdom of *God* where all are treated with dignity and respect. Pray this Easter Sunday that compassion, mercy, and common sense will prevail and lead us to a more just world. Pray with all your heart for those unjustly imprisoned.

Monday, April 21: *And, quickly departing from the tomb with great fear and joy, [the women] ran to announce it to his disciples. And look: Jesus met them, saying, "Greetings!"* (Mt 28:8-15, literal Greek translation).

I love this translation of Matthew's resurrection story. "Great fear and joy" cannot begin to capture what the women are feeling. They are overwhelmed, likely doubting their own ears, eyes, and sanity. Then, out of the blue (or the dark, I suppose), Jesus appears and greets them with a familiar, friendly, and, to our ears, casual expression: "Greetings!" He of course then says what he always says: "Do not be afraid" and tells the women to instruct the Apostles to head back to Galilee, that too being a familiar place that holds great memories for the disciples.

Provision: Trust in Jesus' greeting! What do I mean by that? Well, think of what happens next: in Mark's version of the story no one believes Mary Magdalene or the travelers to Emmaus either, so there has to be some conflict about what to do next. The trip from Jerusalem to Galilee will take the disciples a good three days. It could be that they were eager to get out of Jerusalem, but can you imagine the conversations along the way? Mary and the other women had to hold tightly to what they experienced. When we have an intimate encounter with Jesus, there are bound to be naysayers and skeptics who question what we have experienced. And even when we get to "Galilee," Jesus may not be there waiting for us. (I think of the story of St. Teresa of Calcutta, and how she heard Jesus' call loud and clear, only to toil in darkness for the rest of her life.) Hold tightly to the voice of Jesus you've heard. Trust him.

Tuesday, April 22: *[The disciples returned home.] Mary Magdalene stayed outside the tomb weeping* (Jn 20: 10-18).

Peter and John leave the scene. They are terrified and confused. Perhaps they want to confer with the others about what to do now, but there's a pattern here. They turn away and leave. But Mary stays, just as she stayed at the foot of the cross. She stays with her grief. She does not run away. She's heedless of the danger and she doesn't try to figure out what happens next. She stays right where her heart is. And for her loyalty and devotion, Jesus rewards her in a way he does not bestow on anyone else.

Provision: Stay with what hurts. * When we experience loss or trouble, we may be tempted to move on to the next thing, to try and figure out what to do. The trouble is that we then fail to be in the present which is exactly where we need to be--with our grief, with our anger, with our confusion. Don't be afraid. Jesus is with you. He is calling your name. (*This, of course, does not mean we stay with others who are hurting us; this is about processing pain due to loss.)

Wednesday, April 23: *A man crippled from birth was placed at the gate of the temple called "the Beautiful Gate" every day to beg for alms... Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk." Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong (Acts 3:1-10).*

Provision: What needs to grow strong for you? Use this scene for an imaginative prayer experience. You have been saddled with something that has crippled you for a long time. In some ways, it has become an identity for you. You've grown accustomed to the routine. Maybe it's an unhealthy or abusive relationship with another person or a church or other institution. Perhaps it's an addiction, a "this is the way we've always done it" type of behavior. We can become enmeshed and fail to see how our lives and dreams are stifled, crippled by unhealthy expectations of society or those around us. Sit quietly and pray for healing. Find a licensed pastoral counselor or spiritual director who can help you stand up and walk again. (Be cautious because there are those who say they heal in Jesus' name but are in it for themselves. Pay attention to the Spirit's promptings. If it doesn't sound or feel right, it probably isn't.)

Thursday, April 24: *"Now I know, brothers and sisters, that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did" (Acts 3:11-16).*

We hear the word "ignorant" a fair amount these days. It's used as an insult, bandied back and forth across the political aisle, each side assailing the other about their ignorance. In today's reading, I've got to hand it to Peter. Even though he wasn't around to hear Jesus' words, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (i.e., forgive them, they are ignorant), he seems to be open to giving everyone, even the leaders, the benefit of the doubt. All they have to do is "change their hearts and turn about" (Greek translation).

Provision: In what ways are you ignorant? Ignorance isn't meant to be an insult; it means being unaware or lacking in knowledge on something. I learned how ignorant I am when I began to work with people who make decisions based, not on logic or plans, but on survival. People in survival mode make what many of us would consider bad, even immoral choices. As I get older, I realize just how ignorant I really am. We talk sometimes about stepping outside our "echo chambers" to open ourselves to hear God's message in the stories of others, especially those who are different from us. See if you can stop acting out of ignorance and instead act out of awareness, understanding, and compassion.

Friday, April 25: *Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So, Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of 153 large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn (Jn 21:1-14).*

I have a confession. One of my guilty pleasures when I need to be numb for a while is to watch fishing shows. And let me tell you, 153 large fish would be quite a catch! Why 153 fish? There are at least that number of explanations. Some involve mathematical formulas since numbers and letters were aligned in ancient languages, but there are two less complicated theories. The first is practical: an exact number attests to an eyewitness account. The second is from Aristotle via St. Jerome. Aristotle apparently numbered all the different species of fish in the sea at 153. St. Jerome sees this as representing the universality of Jesus' call. The Apostles, as "fishers" of humanity are to cast their nets to include every class and race of people. Everyone is welcome!

Provision: Cast a wide net of love! We need not worry that this will exceed our abilities. "The net"—the grace of the Spirit we receive—will not fail us. Think about this the next time God is calling you beyond what you believe you can do.

Saturday, April 19: *"It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4: 13-21).*

Many years ago, someone asked me how I knew I had experienced "*metanoia*," a change of my heart. Without thinking, the answer spilled from my mouth: "Because I no longer have a choice." Even if I had thought about it, the answer would be the same. It is still the same today. This is not about free will and the choices, good and bad, I make every day. It means I can't turn away from the path I am on. It means even as I sin, day after day, it's impossible for me to run away, to keep quiet about what I see and hear and feel. This is why I can't keep silent about the betrayal of God's Kingdom I see happening in my country under the guise of Christian nationalism. As we talked about on Thursday, perhaps it is that I am ignorant and unaware, but I don't understand how Jesus' messages of love, compassion, and humility are evident in mass deportations and layoffs, decimation of programs to alleviate poverty, and entitlements for the super-rich.

Provision: Speak about what you have seen and heard. I challenge myself and each of us to continue to speak up and speak out and to continue to take action when we hear Christ's name taken in vain. "*If I sit next to a madman as he drives a car into a group of innocent bystanders, I can't, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe, then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver*" Dietrich Bonhoeffer (<https://bonhoeffersociety.org/about/bonhoeffer/biography/>).