

THE MOST AMAZING WEEK IN HISTORY



Reflections on the final week of Jesus' life on earth

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The final week of Jesus' life on earth is commonly known as the Holy Week. Evidence of the church observing this week, dates back to the 3rd Century. For centuries Christians have observed the week leading up to Easter as the most important and solemn week of the year.

Modern day Christians however, have neglected to see the central place the resurrection of Jesus Christ has in our lives. Without the resurrection of Christ there is no Christian faith. Paul puts it this way:

1 Corinthians 15:14 (NLT) And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless.

Unfortunately, the Easter weekend has become just another weekend of the year. It is not my intention to take us all on a guilt trip. I am however wanting to reinsert the significance of this week into our lives and the life of our church.

I am therefore inviting us all to observe this week together. Let us set aside time daily this week to reflect on the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. Time where we **fast** and **pray**. Yes **FAST** – Consider skipping a meal. Or fast from the internet or TV and spend that time with the Lord. Yes **PRAY** – talk and listen to the Lord in prayer and Bible reflection.

Let us recover the solemnness and importance of this holy week in our calendar. May this little booklet help you as you endeavour to do so.

Andrew Kulasingham

PALM SUNDAY

Which procession are you following?

Mark 11:1-10 (NLT) Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; 2 and He said to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. 3 And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here."

4 So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. 5 But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?"

6 And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. 8 And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Jesus' final week in Jerusalem begins with a bang. This time He enters Jerusalem with a little more fanfare. It's a procession. Mark tells us "*Jesus was in the center of the procession*". While the whole thing was spontaneous, yet you cannot help but see the hidden hand of God behind this entire event. Notice how there is Divine guidance in the most mundane things, yet every detail was significant to glorify the Christ.

Hearing and Obeying

The disciples get clear instructions – “*Go into that village over there...you will see a donkey...*”. A specific village, a specific donkey. It required obedience from those who received the instructions.

It also required faith - “*If anyone asks, ‘What are you doing?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it and will return it soon.’*” The deed could be misinterpreted. What if the people didn’t believe what they said? What if they didn’t know who “the Lord” was? It did require faith.

Following Christ requires us to listen and to obey. The entire process of listening and obeying requires faith. Faith to believe that the Lord does indeed speak to us. Faith to believe that when we do hear him we can obey him with confidence that whatever He says will come to pass.

Two processions

Mark makes this statement - “*Jesus was in the center of the procession...*”. We read about this procession and how the crowds were boisterous and loud. Shouting blessings on this One whom they thought was coming into Jerusalem as their Deliverer. Coming to deliver them from the tyranny of Rome.

What is not recorded here in Mark’s gospel or any of the gospels for that matter, was that there was another procession that happened probably a few days prior. Every year prior to the Feast of Passover, the governor of Judea (Pontius Pilate at that time), would come to Jerusalem on the pretext of participating in the festivities. The real reason however was to ensure there was no insurrection. After all, the Passover was the celebration and remembrance of how God delivered Israel from the

tyranny of Egypt. It is not difficult to assume that resting in the heart of every Jew was the belief that if God raised a deliverer once for ancient Israel, He could do it again for them. Pontius Pilate's presence in Jerusalem was to ensure no such ideas were entertained.

So there were two processions. One was an Imperial procession – full of pomp and splendour, chariots and horses, military display of force. The other a mere peasant procession – a donkey, a rabbi and a group of tired young men after a long journey.

The central figure of the first procession, was the governor, who entered Jerusalem and headed to the palace of Herod, where he would reside for the week. The central figure of the second procession was the Christ, who entered Jerusalem and was headed to Golgotha where he would be crucified. One sought to save his position; the other was positioning himself to save the world.

As you reflect on this day, which procession do you think you would follow? Many times our hearts are drawn to the magnetic effect of the Imperial Procession. The world demands that we join that procession and pay our allegiance to the modern day “Emperor” – that promises us wealth, power and influence.

Or would you be part of the procession where Christ is centre. The path may lead to the death on the cross but the story will end with life everlasting. Palm Sunday invites us to consider which procession we follow everyday of our lives.

Pray and Reflect:

1. **Pray** and invite God into your everyday life. Let Christ into even the most mundane tasks you are doing. Maybe He will speak – maybe He may instruct you to do things a certain way. Maybe in listening and obeying He may become the centre of your day. Maybe in listening and obeying – your process may become His procession.

2. **Reflect** on these words of Jesus.

John 12:24-26 (NLT) I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.

Monday

House of prayer?

Mark 11:12-14 (NKJV) Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. 13 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it.

Today's reflection begins with an unusual event which occurred the day after Jesus' procession into Jerusalem. The Lord had left the city on Sunday evening and returned back to Jerusalem the next morning. Mark tells us that Jesus being hungry was attracted to a fig tree that looked like it may have fruit even though it wasn't the season for it. Finding it without fruit the Lord says to the tree that it will never fruit again. It is important that we continue reading the events of the rest of the day for us to appreciate the message Mark is trying to convey to us on that last Monday Jesus was in Jerusalem.

Mark 11:15-17 (NKJV) So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. 17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves."

Jesus re-enters Jerusalem on Monday and heads straight to the temple. Remember he had already seen what was going on the evening prior (Mark 11:11). Jesus then

“drives out” and “overturns” and “would not allow anyone to carry wares” into the temple. In other words He shut down the activities in the temple. His words following His actions gives an explanation to why He did what He did. The comparison between “house of prayer” and “den of thieves” is very telling. God saw His house as a house of prayer for all nations. What it had become was a dwelling place (den or hideout) for thieves.

Remember the fig tree – full of leaves and looking like it was fruitful. Calling out to the hungry traveller come and feed on me. But it was fruitless. The temple – calling out to the famished soul – come and receive a God encounter. All they were left with were empty pockets.

The apostle Paul referred to our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. Peter calls us a royal priesthood. We as followers of Christ, are representations of God and intermediaries of Divine blessings. The question is are we like the barren fig tree? Do we appear to be full of “green leaves”, having the outward resemblance of “godliness” but offering no nourishment to those around us? As a body of Christ (His church), do we have all the equipment for temple activities but offer no Divine encounters for the hungry soul? We are called to be a house of prayer for all nations. Do our hearts have room for others? When the Lord looks at you and me, would He consider us a house of prayer or a den of thieves?

Mark’s narration of this event spills over to the following day. It is the conclusion of this whole event.

Mark 11:20-25 (NLT) The next morning as they passed by the fig tree he had cursed, the disciples noticed it had withered from the roots up. 21 Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree on the previous day and exclaimed, “Look, Rabbi! The fig tree you cursed has withered and died!”

22 Then Jesus said to the disciples, “Have faith in God. 23 I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. 24 I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you’ve received it, it will be yours. 25 But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.”

On their way back the next morning they noticed the fig tree had withered and died. The disciples were obviously impressed that Jesus’ mere words had caused the tree to wither and die. But they weren’t mere words. They were words spoken with faith. He had done some faith talk.

The entire fig tree saga is a lesson for all Christ’s disciples. Prayer is not a bunch of words that have no effect. Jesus was teaching them that as temples of the Holy Spirit or in this context the “house of prayer for all nations”, believers are actually in a position to bring about change through prayer. *“You can pray for anything, and if you believe that you’ve received it, it will be yours.”* Imagine such a person who could ask for anything and see it come to pass. If you were that person what would your “anything” be? Would it be restricted to personal comforts and wants? Then wouldn’t we be thieves, stealing from the treasuries of God for our own selfish desires? Or would we use such a gift to serve this lost world - a house of prayer for all nations?

The events of Monday invite us to a lifestyle of prayer. Should you choose to accept God’s call to become a house of prayer for all nations, then remember the three ingredients that are needed for effectual prayer:

- Unwavering conviction that all things are possible with God - *“you must really believe it will happen”*

- A strong defense against the inevitable barrage of doubt - “*and have no doubt in your heart*”
- An offense free heart - “*first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against*”

Dear friend, God has called us to be a house of prayer for all nations - all people, all ethnic groups. That means there is no room in our hearts for self-centred goals and desires. Our hearts must make room for others. And prayer is the only way we can make that happen.

Pray and Reflect:

1. PRAY: If you do not already have one, make a list of all those around you. Your family, loved ones, friends, work colleagues, neighbours – why not include our government, nations at war etc. Set aside 15 minutes everyday and commit yourself to praying through the list you have made. Declare blessings over their lives. Remind yourself of the three ingredients for an effective prayer life.

2. REFLECT on these words of Scripture:

James 5:16 (NLT) Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

Tuesday

Stay awake!

This was a very busy day for Jesus. Mark spends more than two chapters (11:20-13:37) on this one day. It begins with a series of challenges from the Pharisees and religious leaders, attempting to undermine Jesus' authority and testimony. It wasn't just this Tuesday that Jesus was experiencing push back. It was part and parcel of following God. To follow God is to go against the grain. A follower of Christ must expect to experience resistance for just choosing to be obedient to God.

Matthew 5:11-12 (NLT) "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. 12 Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way."

Jesus however was not distracted by the evil intentions of those seeking to trap him with his words. Instead he used it as an opportunity to teach those who were gathered around him. Using parables and activities around him, Jesus taught on various issues that were brought up by those around him. I wonder how aware we are in our day to day interactions that opportunities do present themselves, where a life lesson or a Divine principle could be shared to someone around us through simple conversations.

Our focus in this reflection however is an intimate conversation Jesus had with His disciples at the tail end of the day. Jesus tells them about future events that would take place – some in graphic details, others

couched with metaphors and symbolism. What was made clear to His disciples and now to the reader of the Gospel is how we as followers of Jesus are to respond to these troubling future events.

Mark 13:32-37 (NLT) “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. 33 And since you don’t know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert!

34 “The coming of the Son of Man can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. When he left home, he gave each of his slaves instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return. 35 You, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know when the master of the household will return—in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at daybreak. 36 Don’t let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. 37 I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him!”

Recent events that have occurred these last two years, brought about by Covid, have turned the attention of many Christians to end time events recorded in the Bible. People want to know if Christ’s return is imminent. Some are interested to know about the rapture, fearfully clutching to a concept of being “caught up” and thus avoiding persecution. The reality is that all the teachings in the New Testament about Christ’s return and us being “caught up” with him are found within the context of a church in the midst of persecution. Christ’s second coming and our resurrection are meant to be pillars of hope for all Christians in the midst of suffering and persecution. How then should we respond when we are faced with opposition? How do we live our lives in perilous times?

For that we turn to Jesus’ teaching on his final Tuesday on earth. Mark records some details of what Jesus told the disciples:

- He speaks of events that are signs of the end – wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines. He refers to them as mere birth pangs.
- He warns us that as disciples we can expect to be persecuted, brought to trial, brother against brother, children rebelling against parents, all men will hate those who believe.
- He gives everyone a reality check. Heaven and earth will pass away. For those who are living as if this life on earth will last forever, He warns us this was going to pass away.

Then He warns us of the futility of trying to guess when His second coming was going to occur.

Mark 13:32-33 (NLT) “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. 33 And since you don’t know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert!”

The instructions are clear – be on guard, stay alert! Implied in these instructions is a warning that we can get distracted by being preoccupied with things that don’t concern us. “Since you don’t know...” don’t try and figure that out. Just focus on what you need to do to be on guard and stay alert. Jesus then goes on to illustrate how we need to go about our daily lives.

Mark 13:34-37 (NLT) “The coming of the Son of Man can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. When he left home, he gave each of his slaves instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return. 35 You, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know when the master of the household will return—in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at daybreak. 36 Don’t let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. 37 I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him!”

Take note of the subtext in the story. The master “gave each of his slaves instructions about the work they were to do”. Every believer has been given their own individual assignment. I will be required to answer for my specific assignment. Not anyone else’s. The warning is that we will be found sleeping.

These last two years we have been so unhinged by the global pandemic and if we are honest with ourselves we have neglected the assignment Christ has given us – to go and make disciples of all nations. That’s our general call but each of us are meant to operate within our sphere of influence. If we are not going about our all important assignment – if we are busy being preoccupied by everything else but the work of making disciples – then we will be found to be sleeping when Christ returns.

The message on this Tuesday is a simple one. Let’s keep going about our Father’s business – sharing the love of God and the good news of the Gospel through our relationships with those around us. Shifting someone’s trajectory even if it is a minute degree towards God. As we keep doing our assignment in our own context, being us and nobody else, sharing the love of God in our unique ways – then we can be assured that we will be alert, we will be watchful and we will not be caught off guard and asleep when Christ returns.

Pray and Reflect:

1. **PRAY** this week for God to give you a burden for the lost around you. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the ability to be sensitive to the ones He is working on. Be bold and respond like the prophet Isaiah and say to the Lord, “here I am send me”. And may the Lord send you to those who are earnestly hungry and searching for him.

2. **REFLECT** on this Scripture:

Matthew 9:37-38 (NLT) He said to his disciples, “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. 38 So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”

Wednesday

Be a believing believer

Mark 14:1-9 (NLT) It was now two days before Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The leading priests and the teachers of religious law were still looking for an opportunity to capture Jesus secretly and kill him. 2 “But not during the Passover celebration,” they agreed, “or the people may riot.”

3 Meanwhile, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over his head.

4 Some of those at the table were indignant. “Why waste such expensive perfume?” they asked. 5 “It could have been sold for a year’s wages and the money given to the poor!” So they scolded her harshly.

It’s Wednesday. For most in Jerusalem that day, it was just another Wednesday. Mark however has begun the countdown - *“It was now two days before Passover”*. This of course is hindsight. Everyone around Jesus did not know of what was about to happen in two days. The plan to capture and kill Jesus however was imminent.

Wednesday’s scene is in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper. We are told he was a leper, a detail which would probably be relevant only if Jesus had healed him of it. The story focuses on an unnamed woman who pours an expensive perfume over the head of our Lord. She was chided for her action by those around her who saw the act as a waste of good money which could have been used for the poor. Jesus’ response to the

attendees, which included the twelve disciples, is very telling.

6 But Jesus replied, “Leave her alone. Why criticize her for doing such a good thing to me? 7 You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. 9 I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman’s deed will be remembered and discussed.”

Have you ever wondered what Jesus meant when He said that her deed will be remembered and discussed? Was it that she was extravagant in her display of love for Jesus? I believe the key lies in this statement Jesus made – “*She...has anointed my body for burial ahead of time.*” She was the only follower of Christ who understood and believed that Jesus’ death was imminent.

Jesus spoke of his impending death

In three separate occasions in the Gospel of Mark we come across Jesus warning and teaching His followers that He was going to suffer and die. The first time was recorded in Mark chapter 8.

Mark 8:31 (NLT) Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead.

Peter’s response in this occasion was to reject what Jesus was saying to them.

Mark 8:32 (NLT) As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things.

The second occasion occurs in the following chapter.

Mark 9:31 (NLT) for he wanted to spend more time with his disciples and teach them. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead."

Again the response from the disciples were an inability or even an unwillingness to believe what Jesus was saying.

Mark 9:32 (NLT) They didn't understand what he was saying, however, and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

The third occasion when Jesus predicted His death is recorded in Mark chapter 10.

Mark 10:33-34 (NLT) "Listen," he said, "we're going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. 34 They will mock him, spit on him, flog him with a whip, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again."

Again the response from the disciples were to ignore the topic all together and we see James and John requesting for positions of authority in Jesus' kingdom.

Mark 10:35-37 (NLT) Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do us a favor." 36 "What is your request?" he asked. 37 They replied, "When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left."

These three predictions Jesus made and His teachings around them must form the context of this Wednesday's event. The woman is performing an act which Jesus saw as anointing His body "ahead of time". She could not have known that in two days the Messiah would be crucified. At some point in her following of Christ, she was exposed to one or more of these

predictions of His impending death. She heard, she received it and she believed it was true. Now she responds in the best way she knew – “*She has done what she could*”. This woman would be the first believer of the death and resurrection of Jesus before it had even occurred.

Dear friends, anyone can act after an event has occurred. But to act based only on what you have heard from God – that is faith. Hebrews chapter 11 is a list of men and women who acted by faith based only from what they believed God told them to do. And they are celebrated for all eternity as heroes of faith.

Hebrews 11:13 (NLT) All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it.

Easter challenges everything we believe in. We believe that Jesus died, was buried and He rose again on the third day. It was not a tragedy no one anticipated. Jesus knew it was for this very reason he came to earth. It was His sole purpose of His existence on earth – to die for the sins of the world. To die that He could reconcile man with God. Easter reminds us that to say we believe takes more than just intellectual assent. To believe in Jesus Christ is not just to agree with His teachings. To believe is more than just to go along with some of His ideas. To believe in Jesus requires a radical change in the way we think, speak and act. To believe in Jesus is to conform to His ways of being.

The disciples heard about Christ’s death and resurrection. One attempted to correct him and got a strong rebuke. So they just went along with what He said. But His death and resurrection had no effect on them until it came to pass. Not so for this woman. The words of

Jesus – everything Jesus said about his impending suffering and death, had a profound impact on her. It wasn't just something she tucked away at the back of her mind. He said He was soon going to be crucified. He said He would die and rise on the third day. She heard, she believed and she acted on the words of the Lord. I can almost hear her inner voice – “My Lord will soon suffer and die on the cross. I want to take this opportunity to show him how much I love him and honour what He is doing for me.” And Jesus' response to such an act of faith? *“She has done such a good thing to me. She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time.”*

What about you my friend? Is your faith merely an intellectual assent? Do you just agree with the teachings of Jesus and that's as far as it has taken you? Or are you prepared to be like this woman? Holy week Wednesday demands that we go beyond mere words but to put our faith into action. What has God been speaking to you about that still requires action? Don't wait for it to occur before you respond. Faith requires you to step out ahead of time. Faith requires you to step out when you hear from God. Imagine a band of followers of Christ who act on every word He says to us, doing His bidding because we believe He does what He says He will do. Imagine him saying these words ‘“they have done such a good thing to me”’. Amen! May it be so!

Pray and Reflect:

PRAY this prayer of St Francis of Assisi:

Lord make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred, Let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, Joy.

O Divine Master grant that I may
Not so much seek to be consoled As to console;
To be understood, As to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
And it is in dying that we are Born to eternal life.

REFLECT: Let these words sink deep into the crevasses of your heart:

Mark 8:34-38 (NLT) Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. 35 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. 36 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? 37 Is anything worth more than your soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Thursday

Effective Prayer

This final Thursday of Jesus' life on earth forms part of 4 days which historically have become the most sacred days observed by the church through the ages. "Maundy Thursday", along with Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday have become main stays in the liturgical calendar. This day was when the events of Christ's death and resurrection began to unfold. This Holy Thursday is when Jesus had His final meal with His disciples, He grappled with the reality of being separated from His Father during His prayer time in Gethsemane, He was betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter and abandoned by all His followers. Everything Jesus prepared himself for was now a reality.

Our focus on this reflection is on what occurred at the Mount of Olives.

Mark 14:32-36 (NLT) They went to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and Jesus said, "Sit here while I go and pray." 33 He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. 34 He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Every man and woman of God who has experienced the pinnacle of their calling will testify that prior to that came the greatest test they have ever faced. You see that among the biblical giants as well as the contemporary heroes of our faith. After making himself ready for thirty three years, Jesus was now facing his greatest test yet – a possibility of death before the cross. "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death." It wasn't the body that

was failing. It was the soul. A soul crushed with grief. What was this grief the Christ was experiencing?

There have been many suggestions to what was Jesus experiencing that night. My thoughts are guided by the words grief and a crushed soul. Loss produces grief. A great sense of loss can have a soul crushing effect. The Son of God has never been separated from the Father. Even on earth he lived his life at one with Him. "I and the Father are one." That's the way Jesus lived his entire life. In a few hours he would face the most crushing experience he would ever experience. Sin will separate him from the Father.

On Friday, he remained silent when he was mocked. He remained silent when they slapped him, whipped him and drove the thorns and nails into his body. He took it according to the prophetic call that rested on him. Then the moment he took the sins of the world on him, he experienced the crushing blow he anticipated at Gethsemane. That's when for the first time in eternity the Father and the Son were not one. He would cry out the cry no one else would ever need to cry out - "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?". "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

I believe this was his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Anticipating this, his soul was "*crushed with grief to the point of death*". How does one face life when they are presented with soul crushing grief? What is the right response when the suffering goes beyond the physical and enters into a realm deeper than the body, mind and emotions. Holy Thursday calls everyone who is in the midst of a soul crushing experience to join the Saviour as he shows us the way to walk in the valley of the shadow of death.

Mark 14:35-36 (NLT) He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. 36 “Abba, Father,” he cried out, “everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

All prayer must begin with unconditional faith

This is not the first time Jesus uttered these words - *“everything is possible for you”*. All three synoptic Gospels record a statement Jesus made that remained etched in the minds of the disciples. The statement is a window into the man Jesus and the confidence he had in everything he said and did.

Matthew 19:26 (NLT) Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.”

Mark 10:27 (NLT) Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.”

Luke 18:27 (NLT) He replied, “What is impossible for people is possible with God.”

Now facing the greatest test he has faced, he says these words again - *“everything is possible for you”*. Pray, genuine effective prayer must begin and end with this inner belief - beyond a shadow of doubt - everything is possible with God.

We need to get to the place where we truly believe that everything is indeed possible with God. It was that mindset which positioned Abraham to receive the promise of Isaac, Joseph to keep his eye on God’s presence until he became prime minister of Egypt. It is this faith that drove blind Bartimaeus with a stubborn determination to cry out until he received his sight. It was this unconditional faith that enabled Peter to look at the lame beggar at the

temple gate and declare healing into his lame feet. Unconditional faith carried the apostle Paul across the entire then known world preaching and planting churches declaring publicly “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”. We need to know God and experience God to the point we can truly believe everything is possible for God. When faced with a crushed soul – our only option is to believe – God can do the impossible.

All prayer must be accompanied by unconditional obedience

The prayer heard in that dark garden in Gethsemane was accompanied with words that acknowledged the sovereignty of God. *“Yet I want Your will to be done, not mine.”* Jesus’ unconditional faith was accompanied by his unconditional obedience to his Father. This too was the way he lived his entire life on earth.

John 5:19 (NLT) So Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.”

Unconditional faith without unconditional obedience can lead to presumption. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had both these ingredients when faced with a life threatening situation:

Daniel 3:16-18 (NLT) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. 18 But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”

They begin with an overwhelming confidence in their God who is able to save them. They have no doubt God

was going to do it for them. But unconditional faith must give room for the sovereignty of God. So along with unconditional faith they add these words “even if He does not”. Their obedience to God was not conditional in Him saving them. They would follow Him even unto death. Likewise, Jesus accompanied his unconditional faith with his unconditional obedience - *“Yet I want Your will to be done, not mine.”*

Holy Thursday invites us to consider the times when we are faced with our own Gethsemane type moments. How do our prayers sound? Do our prayers reverberate the sound of confidence in the God of the impossible? Do our prayers always carry the tone that “all things are possible with God? May it be so.

As we enter confidently in prayer with God, are we also confident enough to trust Him that His ways are higher than ours. Are we able to make space to acknowledge sovereignty of God and echo the words of our Christ – “Yet I want Your will to be done, not mine.”

When faced with a crushing soul – pray. Pray unconditional faith prayers. Accompany your unconditional faith with unconditional obedience.

Pray and Reflect:

PRAY: Spend a few moments using the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane over your situation.

Pray - “*Abba, Father,*” - know that you are talking to your Heavenly Father. Be aware He is close to you and listening to every word you are saying. Call Him Abba, call Him Father – until you are convinced the one who hears is the same one who calls you His child.

Now pray these words - “*everything is possible for you.*” Repeat these words until it embodies your mind, your body, your emotions and your spirit.

Now pray over your situation - “*Please take this cup of suffering away from me.*” Replace the cup with your own personal needs. Speak into your pain, your suffering, your grief, your need and surrender it to the Lord – take this Lord.

Finally lean on the Holy Spirit and prayer these words to the Lord - “*Yet I want Your will to be done, not mine.*” Repeat these words until the peace of God rests on you.

REFLECT on these words of the Apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 (NLT) We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. 8 We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. 9 We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. 10 Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. 11 Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies.

Good Friday

The ultimate exchange

Then came Friday. The culmination of the plan of God which was foretold right from the Garden of Eden where the first son sinned against God. Now the second Son, strengthened at another garden called Gethsemane, is betrayed by the one he called friend. This act of betrayal would begin a chain reaction - falls accusation, lies, injustice; the falling away of disciples, the denial of Peter. Then the suffering began - beatings, mocking, the crown, the nails, the cross. Finally the inconceivable happened – the death of the Son of God. Yes the Son of God hung on the cross and died.

The 3rd century church father Augustine penned the words that best describes the significance of the event:

*Man's maker was made man, That he,
Ruler of the stars might nurse at his mother's breast;
That the Bread might hunger, the Fountain thirst,
The Light sleep, the Way be tired on his journey,
The Truth might be accused of false witness,
The Teacher be beaten with whips,
The Foundation be suspended on wood,
That Strength might grow weak,
That the Healer might be wounded,
That Life might die.*

But for all of us it wasn't just an ordinary Friday. For us it has turned into Good Friday. Good because something happened that day that changed the course of history for mankind. An exchange happened on the cross, that blessed Good Friday.

Isaiah 53:4-6 (NLT) Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! 5 But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. 6 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.

- He took our pain and in exchange gave us His comfort.
- He took everything that was wrong with us and made it right.
- He took our punishment and in exchange gave us forgiveness.
- He bore our failures and made us perfect.
- By His stripes we are healed.

An amazing day - Good Friday. The cross gave us access to God and all God has for us - every miracle, every healing, every answered prayer we have experienced was made possible because of Good Friday.

The presence of God in us, the power of God through us, all made possible because of Good Friday.

Thank God for Friday – Thank God for Good Friday.

Come to the cross and make your exchange

Have you a need to make an exchange today?

A pain that needs to be brought to the cross today?

Things that have gone so wrong that need to be made right?

Sin that needs cleansing?

Failure that needs perfecting?

A body that needs healing?

Reach out to Jesus, the One who died so you may live.
What better time to experience the miracle you need than today - on this Good Friday.

Pray and Reflect: The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

I call you Father to acknowledge You as originator of all that exist. I recognise and give You pre-eminence in my life. You are always the One who acts and I gladly allow You to act upon me and my needs. I thank you for this privilege to call you Father.

In heaven

I am assured that Your domain though far reaching to the heavenlies, You are still as close to me as the very breath I breathe. You are with me, You are in me, You are for me.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

I choose to be under the domain that is self-contained and sustained by You, under Your perfect rule and free from the effects of sin, wickedness and evil. I am committing to a life of continuous, moment by moment, daily choosing to seek out Your will in every situation.

Give us this day our daily bread

I confess that You are the source of all my needs. I look to You and depend on You for my sustenance. I can rest in the assurance that everything will be sufficient for today and I can live a life of contentment. Because You provide for me daily, I am not swayed by the fear of poverty or the glitter of abundance.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

I am encouraged that the forgiveness I experience from You, empowers me to release forgiveness to others. The more I dwell on the depth of Your forgiveness towards me, the more I will increase in my capacity to forgive others.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

I recognise the danger of ungodly desires that make me vulnerable to temptations. I pray my desires are safely sheltered in Your presence where I am shielded from such temptations. And when I am in the most vulnerable place, I am confident of Your protection from the evil one who seeks to exert wickedness and evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever.

I declare with every fibre of my being that my life begins and ends with You. I acknowledge that You are the Alpha and Omega, the author and the finisher, the way, the truth and the life.

Amen. It is so!