



A MINISTRY OF LOUISA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
A VIRGINIA CHRISTIAN CHURCH DISCIPLES OF CHRIST CONGREGATION

The Disciple

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Traveling with Jesus On his Journey to the Cross

By Sinclair Ferguson

Journey with Jesus on the road to Jerusalem with Sinclair Ferguson's new Easter devotional [To Seek and To Save](#). As you walk through the second half of Luke's Gospel, you'll meet the people Jesus encountered on the way to the cross—and prepare your heart to appreciate his death and resurrection afresh.

Most of us have made journeys that have been memorable. Some have brought gladness, others sadness. Very few people we meet have never been on a journey—though I did know one of them, many years ago.

I was a minister on a very small, remote Scottish island. One afternoon I visited an elderly lady and as we talked she asked me what another place on the island was like—it was at the south end of the island, only five miles away from where she lived. She had never been there. "Let's get into my car and I'll

take you," I said.

"No," she said, "I don't want to go; I'd just like to know what it's like."

Neighbors told me that if a ball of string had been tied to her ankle the day she was born, with enough string to stretch for a mile, it would never have been fully unwound. The place she wanted to see had a beauty all of its own. I still wish that I had been able to take her on what would have been, for her, a memorable journey.

Jesus and his journey

I sometimes think of that afternoon when, by way of contrast, I reflect on the journey the Son of God took when he came "to seek and to save the lost". That elderly lady was not prepared to travel for a few miles to see a place she had heard was beautiful. How different the Son of God in his incarnation.

The journey motif is present in different ways in each of the four Gospels.

John is perhaps the most dramatic. There the Son of God travels the vast distance between the world in which he is "with" or "face to face with" God to the world in which he "became flesh" and lived "face to face" with us. That is a distance beyond calculation. In Mark's Gospel, the story is compressed into the last three years of our Lord's life; everything seems to happen "immediately." It is a breathless journey. In Matthew, the journey of the Son of God causes others to go on journeys: at the opening of the Gospel Magi journey from the east to Christ and at its end the apostles journey from Christ to the ends of the earth.



And if the Spirit
of him who raised
Jesus from the
dead is living in
you, he who
raised Christ from
the dead will also
give life to your
mortal bodies be-
cause of his Spirit
who lives in you.

Romans 8:11



But it is in Luke's Gospel that the journey motif comes into its own. Here, from the moment Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) everything takes place within the context of a single journey. The journey is the spine that holds the whole narrative together.

Exactly why Luke did this is not very clear. He was writing for someone called "Theophilus." If Theophilus was a real person (the name means "Friend of God" and so could simply be code language for any Christian), he was probably both well off and well educated. So perhaps Luke, himself the most educated on the Gospel writers, was echoing the journey motif in classical literature (like Homer's Odyssey, named after its central character Odysseus, King of Ithica, and in turn lending its title to any epic journey).

The disciples were on the wrong path

While Jesus' odyssey has the city of Jerusalem as its geographical destination, it becomes clear that its real purpose is accomplishing our salvation through his death and resurrection. He came or journeyed "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). He had already explained that to them (Luke 9:44), but they neither understood nor wanted to understand. En route he gave them more hints; on occasion, he would spell it out in words that could not possibly have been misunderstood, yet still the disciples "did not grasp what was said" (Luke 10:34).

It must, therefore, have been a lonely journey, and it would become lonelier still. And yet what is so fascinating about Luke's travelogue is the sheer number of people Jesus met on his journey. Between Luke 9: 51 and Luke 24: 53 Jesus engages with more than forty individuals or groups of people! These chapters are not only a single travelogue, but they are also a series of dialogues.

Following Christ's lead

I remember hearing a series of sermons on Luke's Gospel that made me think there is a kind of parallel in Bible reading and preaching that I came to call (depending on where I was in the world) the "Find Waldo" Method, named after those wonderful books where the little fellow in the striped sweater is hidden somewhere in a picture and you have to find him. It struck me that in the sermons I was listening to the preacher kept asking the question "Where are you in this story?" We were looking for Waldo—and he was us!

Of course, we are sometimes like the people who appear in the Gospels. But neither they nor we are what the Gospels are about! They are about the Lord Jesus. So we miss the main point if we are looking for ourselves instead of looking for him. The primary message is not "I am like them" (although that may well be true and important). It is "Jesus Christ is like this"—and he still is. He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). It is important to see that these words are not merely another way of saying Jesus Christ is eternal, although he is. Rather they are telling us that all that our Lord was "yesterday" (that is, during the ministry described in the Gospels) he still is "today" for us.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus

What then is the "takeaway" for us when we follow Jesus on the journey? First, we will find ourselves faced with a tremendous challenge. Despite the variety of people with whom Jesus engages, at the end of the day, they fall into two categories: those who are with him and those who are against him (Luke 11:23). There is no middle ground. We either follow him (notice the journey motif again), or we turn away from him (Luke 14:27).

But second, the more important lesson we need to learn is this: if we are going to follow him on the journey, we need to keep our eyes fixed on him—and that includes when we read the Gospel. If you do that when reading Luke's travelogue you will soon enough discover much more than the ways you are like the people Jesus meets. You will discover what he is like. And perhaps for the first time in your life, you will be able to give an extended answer to the question: "What is Jesus really like?" in which you are not talking so much about yourself and your experience as you are about who he is and what he is truly, eternally, and wonderfully like.

If so, the journey will have been well worthwhile.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Zoom Bible Studies

Wednesday
10:30am

Thursday
7:00pm

Contact Pastor Vincent to get the Zoom information.

Palm Sunday Plans

Palms will be placed on pews for Palm Sunday service. After service please place your palm in the cross.

Easter Sunday Plans

We will be placing flowers in the cross on Easter Sunday. Are you not attending in person, we invite you to come and place your flowers anytime Easter Sunday morning. If you arrive at the same time as another worshiper, please be respectful of distance (6 feet from others please).

Easter Sunday Services 9:00 AM

Outside service

A casual, shorter service entirely outside (weather permitting) Service includes music and a short homily from Pastor Vincent.

11:00 AM

Traditional service

Our regular Sunday Service to celebrate the day of the risen Christ.

UNDERSTANDING THE CROSS

A HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL ON JESUS' "SEVEN LAST WORDS"

DEVELOPED BY THE SALT PROJECT

Instructions: Each devotion follows a simple order of service in the "Tenebrae" tradition. Tenebrae means shadows and refers to the growing darkness as candles are extinguished one by one.

PRAY ~ READ ~ REFLECT ~ PRAY

The week begins by lighting a circle of candles. You can gather any 7 candles into a circle or add evergreens, bare branches, thorny stems in the shape of a wreath (like the crown of thorns). As the days go by the candles are extinguished until the wreath is shrouded on Holy Saturday. The "shroud" can be a simple rectangular cloth (tea towels work well). On Easter Sunday morning the shroud is lifted and all of the candles are lit. Plan a little ahead so you can add some flowers, some green sprigs or leaves, some extra tealights, and/or a few of your favorite sweets - whatever most clearly says to you, "Alleluia!"

Introduction:

The cross is everywhere: inside sanctuaries and atop church steeples, in jewelry and art, tattoos, and logos, billboards, and graffiti.

But what does the cross actually mean? How should we understand it?

Over the centuries, the Church has sometimes called official "ecumenical councils" to settle key theological questions—but when it comes to the meaning of the cross, no such council has ever been called. The openness itself is significant: the cross is a great mystery at the very heart of Christian faith, and so multiple avenues for understanding it are both possible and welcome.

In this devotional, we explore seven such avenues, using as point of entry Jesus' traditional "seven last words" (seven key comments he makes in the New Testament passion narratives). Each avenue approaches the cross from a different angle. Taken together, these lines of sight create a kaleidoscopic, complementary whole, as well as a reminder that there is no single "right answer" to what the cross means for us today. To approach the cross is to embark upon a lifetime of contemplation and struggle, inquiry and insight, wonder and praise.

Some of these avenues will be familiar, others new; some we may find intuitive and convincing, others less so. But keep your mind open as we move through the week. Each avenue is an attempt to make some sense of a great mystery, and we often find beauty and insight precisely where we least expect it.

PALM SUNDAY: THE FIRST WORD

PRAY: God of love and mercy, forgive us. Free us from all wrong doing and shame and let us shine as your beloved children. In Jesus' name, Amen

READ: Luke 23: 32-34

(Extinguish one candle)

REFLECT: One way of understanding the cross is as a vivid portrait of divine mercy. In our everyday lives, many people understand wrong doing as requiring some sort of "payment" or penalty in order to be made right. With the cross, God, essentially urges us to set aside the idea, since Jesus has paid every price on our behalf—thereby clearing all accounts once and for all, liberating humanity from shame, and reconciling us to God.

In other words, for those of us who despair that our guilt is too great for God to forgive, the cross declares: Fear not, God loves you, and has graciously paid every price - so there's no more price to pay. Not for the things we have done and left undone, and not ever for those sins we don't realize, or which manifest as larger systems and structures of corruption in which we are complicit. Forgive them, Jesus says, for they do not know what they are doing.

PRAY: God of love and mercy, thank you for liberating grace. On Easter morning, help us to rejoice that all debts are cancelled, all prices paid. Show us what we are doing, and help us to change. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Happy Birthday!

Jacob C	March 1
Sally Mae H	March 1
Carol L	March 4
Doug D	March 11
Maureen D	March 14
Miranda D	March 14
Rebeka Pippen P	March 16
Andrew P	March 16
Rebecca C	March 17
Butch D	March 20
Sarah E	March 20
John Jerl P	March 20
Luke P	March 25

If we missed anyone's birthday, please let us know.



It's time to order Easter Lilies. Lilies are \$9.

To order yours, contact Sharon Duke at

434-981-3115 or
louisalandlady@gmail.com.

Orders must be in by March 28th.

MONDAY: THE SECOND WORD

Begin by lighting six of the seven candles.

PRAY: God of kindness and compassion, remember us. Hold us close. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

READ: Luke 23: 39-43

(Extinguish one candle)

REFLECT: One way of understanding the cross is as a vivid portrait of divine love. Jesus has been abandoned and deserted by his friends, mocked and tortured by his enemies - and yet still shows compassionate love for all. In the eyes of the world, the man next to him is a criminal, both guilty and disposable; but when he asks Jesus to "remember" him, Jesus doesn't give him a moral or religious exam. He simply declares, with breathtaking, heartbreaking kindness, Today you will be with me in Paradise.

In other words, for those of us who despair that we are not good enough or pious enough to deserve God's love, the cross declares: Fear not. God loves you and cares for you, not because of what you have done, but because of who you are: God's beloved, in whom God is well pleased, a human being made for Paradise.

PRAY: God of kindness and compassion, thank you for loving us. Make us channels of that love for your world and all that is in it, on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TUESDAY: THE THIRD WORD

Begin by lighting five of the seven candles.

PRAY: God of community, it is not good for us to be alone. Help us to connect with each other, and take care of one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.

READ: John 19: 25-27

(Extinguish one candle)

REFLECT: One way of understanding the cross is as the center of a new kind of community. Too often, we build bonds with each other by excluding others, defining an "us" by crating a "them" of supposed outsiders and scapegoats. But in the story of the cross, Jesus steps into the role of the scapegoat, the outsider, the excluded, the other. And around the foot of the cross, a new kind of community is created, a family based not on bloodlines or exclusion, but rather on inclusion and mutual care. Woman, here is your son....Here is your mother.

In other words, for those of us who despair in the face of the world's scapegoating, polarizing, us-and-them-creating ways, the cross declares: Fear not. Another kind of community is possible. Understood this way, the cross can remind us of exactly where scapegoating leads - and whose side God is always on. In truth, there is no "us" and "them." Only us, all of us, God's beloved family.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for making us all part of one beloved community. Help us to reach out and connect to your children, our brothers and sisters, your great family of creation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY: THE FOURTH WORD

Begin by lighting four of the seven candles.

PRAY: God of love, when we feel abandoned, come to our aid. When we feel alone, be with us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

READ: Mark 15: 33-34

(Extinguish one candle)

REFLECT: One way of understanding the cross is as testimony to God's solidarity with the oppressed and down-trodden, the victimized and disinherited. God does not merely behold the world's violence and hate crimes, its pain and its suffering; rather, God enters into the suffering of the world, identifies with it, and so clearly signals God's passionate care for all those who are suffering today.

For those of us who despair in the midst of suffering, who feel godforsaken and alone, the cross declares: Fear not. God has experienced suffering and abandonment, and so is present with you now. And if God is with you in your suffering, so too will you be with God in the restoration, healing justice, and new life to come.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for being with us, even in the shadows of loneliness and despair, suffering and injustice. And for others in those shadows, help us be signs of your radiant presence, and instruments of your justice and peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

EASTER
CHANGES EVERYTHING

THURSDAY: THE FIFTH WORD

Begin by lighting three of the seven candles.

PRAY: Dear God, give us this day our daily bread. Quench our thirst: for water, and for justice. In Jesus' name, Amen.

READ: John 19: 28-29

(Extinguish one candle)

REFLECT: One of the oldest ways of understanding the cross - indeed, the primary way the cross was understood for roughly the first thousand years of Christian history! - is as part of God's victory over death-dealing powers. And while on the surface the story of the crucifixion seems to be a story of defeat, the Gospel writers embed it with clues that it's actually a story of divine victory.

What clues? First, Jesus' remark, "I am thirsty," along with the report that he was given sour wine to drink, echoes Psalm 69: "for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Ps 69:21). In the world of the psalm, God will deliver the psalmist from this distress, and the deliverance will be emblematic for other subjugated people: "Let the oppressed see it and be glad" (Ps 69:32). Likewise, the "branch of hyssop" in John's account echoes the exodus story: the Israelites use hyssop branches to mark their doorways with lamb's blood on the eve of their escape from bondage in Egypt (see Ex 12:22).

In other words, by including these key details - the thirst, the vinegar, the hyssop - John is saying that Jesus is actually about to be delivered, and a New Exodus is about to begin. Accordingly, for those who despair that death—dealing powers have the upper hand, the cross declares: Fear not. Easter means God ultimately is and will be victorious over the powers of evil and death. Just as in the days of old, a New Exodus, a new deliverance is underway!

PRAY: Dear God, we thank and praise you for your victory, unfolding even now, over the death-dealing powers of the world. Let us play a part in your ongoing mission, your New Exodus, from bondage to freedom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FRIDAY: THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH WORDS

Begin by lighting two of the seven candles.

PRAY: God who lifts up the lowly and turns the world around, restore creation. Transform our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

READ: John 19:29-30

(Extinguish one candle)

REFLECT: One way to understanding the cross is as part of God's surprising, transformative work of turning the world upside down - or rather, rightside up! From a Jewish point of view in first century Palestine, the Roman cross was arguably the worst thing in the world: a brutal imperial instrument of torture, terror, and disgrace. And yet, in and through Jesus' death, God co-opts, subverts, and transforms this "worst thing in the world" into one of the best: an instrument of salvation, a sacred sign, not a desecration but a consecration.

In effect, God takes a sword and turns it into a ploughshare. And if this is what God does with the world's "worst thing," imagine what God will do - and is doing - with the rest of creation!

In other words, for those who despair that the world is beyond saving, the cross declares: Take heart! If God has remade the Roman cross into the Tree of Life (It is finished!), one of the worst things into one of the best, then surely God will redeem and restore the whole wide world.

READ: Luke 23: 44-46

(Extinguish the last candle)

REFLECT: Another way of understanding the cross is as a testament to Jesus' faith. His last words here are an echo of Psalm 31, at once a prayer for help and a vulnerable expression of trust: "Into your hand I commit my spirit;/ you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God" (Ps 31:5). Despite the severe difficulties of death, Jesus gives himself over, trusting God's faithfulness. Our faith may falter, but God's faith is strong.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for being faithful, for making and remaking the world again and again and again, for taking the worst of what we have done and transforming it into something beautiful and new. In Jesus' name, Amen.





HOLY SATURDAY

To symbolize the sorrow and uncertainty of the day, suspended between life and death, hope and fear - shroud the circle of candles with a cloth.

REFLECT: For those of us who despair in the deepest shadows of life and death, when all light seems gone and all hope seems lost, the cross declares: Take heart! Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning.

PRAY: Dear God, when we run out of words, hold us in your hands. Be with us as we wait and watch and rest in the tomb with Jesus tonight. Mend our broken hearts. Help us hope against hope. Stay with us. Have mercy. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

Rejoice and be glad: Jesus is risen!

Remove the shroud from the Circle of Light, light every candle (and add a few more!), bring in some signs of God's spring, and sprinkle onto the table something sweet, so you can taste and see that God is good!

PRAY: Alleluia! Thank you, God, for this new and dawning day. Thank you for your steadfast faith in us, for forgiving and loving and remaking the world, lifting us up, again and again and again. In Jesus' name, Amen!

READ: John 20: 1 -- 18

REFLECT: Easter Sunday is the beginning of fifty days of Eastertide, just as Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of a new era of resurrection, mercy, love, and joy. In your life, where do you see signs of new life springing forth? How does understanding the cross help you understand the new life of Eastertide?

PRAY: Dear God, in the weeks and months and years ahead, let us take part in your work and play of resurrection. Let us be living signs of renewal. In Jesus' name, Amen.



ALLELUIA!

What's the good news of the Gospel on Easter Sunday? Is it that Jesus, through the cross, shows us love and mercy even unto death? Is it that Jesus, by rising from the dead, defeats death-dealing forces once and for all? Is it that Jesus, by paying every price, cancels all debts and in doing so sets us free? Is it that Jesus subversively transforms some of the worst things in the world (the Roman cross and betrayal among friends) in to some of the best (the Tree of Life and forgiveness among enemies) - thus effectively proclaiming that God will redeem everything in the end? Is it that the cross declares God's compassionate solidarity with all those who suffer? Is it that, to borrow a phrase from the poet Mary Oliver, this story will break our hearts open, never to close again to the rest of the world? Is it all of these things and more?