

Where to begin a story? Does Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow..." have the same weight without the madness of Lady Macbeth? Or the words of the three witches? There's always backstory.

Today, we reflect on the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. With a shout, John the Baptist invites each of us into the story already in progress: "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29)

Question: What is sin? Why do the sins of the world need to be taken away?

Behold the sacrifice of "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world"!

Scripture: John 19:17 – 30

¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."

²² Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

"They divided my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment."
So this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "**It is finished.**" With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Despite its importance, the story of the death of Jesus is shockingly short. So how far back do we have to rewind to make sure we don't miss the significance?

Should we look to the unjust trial that closes with a death sentence, or to the many times Jesus actually predicted his looming death? Perhaps we need to jump back even further, to the Old Testament passages where God establishes animal sacrifice as an imperfect answer to sin and brokenness. Or, do we need to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden and the taking of forbidden fruit?

Though Scripture clearly shows us its ancient roots, the problem of sin is alive and lurking in our hearts.

Question: How is going after our own way rather than God's the same as that first bite from the forbidden fruit? Why can't we just fix the problem of sin ourselves?

These questions point to humanity's deepest need. And God responded with His greatest gift.

The Cross.

Song:

"Well Done, Good and Faithful One" Andrew Peterson
<https://shorturl.at/acmU0>



Scripture: John 19:38 - 42

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Art: "ET POSUERUNT EUM IN MONUMENTO" – Salvador Dali

What do you notice? What do you wonder? What does this remind you of?

"The color blue is often associated with freedom, strength, loyalty, and new beginnings, which might explain why Salvador Dali chose to illustrate Christ in a tomb in a completely monochromatic color scheme. Since Christ will soon rise from the tomb, the blue and striking turquoise signify new beginnings, as he won't rest here long."

Richard Hart, "Biblia Sacra: Dali & His Bible"

In the crucifixion story, God enters our story at the point of our deep helplessness. We can't shake our longing for rescue and restoration.

Easter is on the way. Death is not the end. And it is right for us to sit with our need for a Savior. Today, receive and reflect on the gift of God's mercy and forgiveness. And may you find deepest rest and hope in Jesus' final words from the cross – "It is finished."

Prayer:

We veil our faces before your glory,
O Holy and Immortal one,
and bow before the cross of your wounded Christ.
with angels and archangels,
we praise you, our Mercy,
and we bless you, our Compassion,
for in our brokenness
you have not abandoned us.
Hear us as we pray through Jesus, our high priest:
heal all division,
reconcile the estranged,
console the suffering,
and raise up to new life
all that is bound by death. Amen.