

# I Set Before You the Way of Life and the Way of Death

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8 April • Monday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Jeremiah 21:1-10

<sup>1</sup>This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchiah and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Inquire of the LORD for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is making war against us. Perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds and will make him withdraw from us."

<sup>3</sup>Then Jeremiah said to them: "Thus you shall say to Zedekiah, <sup>4</sup>"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls. And I will bring them together into the midst of this city. <sup>5</sup>I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath. <sup>6</sup>And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a great pestilence. <sup>7</sup>Afterward, declares the LORD, I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people in this city who survive the pestilence, sword, and famine into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their lives. He shall strike them down with the edge of the sword. He shall not pity them or spare them or have compassion.'

<sup>8</sup>"And to this people you shall say: 'Thus says the LORD: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. <sup>9</sup>He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have his life as a prize of war. <sup>10</sup>For I have set my face against this city for harm and not for good, declares the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.'

## Meditation

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A great danger facing Christians today is the sin of presumption. When we squeeze God into six-word slogans, when we pick and choose what we like about Him, when we demand outcomes to our prayer the way we want them—we deny His very nature as God, we usurp His sovereignty, and we treat His grace as our entitlement. That is presumption.

King Zedekiah in Jeremiah 21 was staring at the threat of the Babylonian invasion. He sought the prophet for the word of the Lord. In presumption, he expected deliverance from disaster, that all will be well, and business will go on as usual. But he didn't realise that God can no longer stand "business as usual", if it meant arrogance, idolatry, injustice, corruption, seemingly with no consequences. This time, God will act against His unrepentant people.

But even in His wrath, God shows mercy. He offers a way to life for those who will submit to His discipline. Following the pain, there will be healing and restoration. The humbled remnant will rise again, purified and be more glorious than before (Jer 23:3).

As we seek the face of God in this season of Lent, let us lay ourselves bare before Him, acknowledging our failings, especially our presumption. May our God, who is gracious and good, remove the scales of pride and presumption from our eyes, that we may follow Him on the way that leads to life.

"Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion..." "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ... "Who

said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." (C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*)

## Prayer

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Open my eyes, that I may see  
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;  
Place in my hands the wonderful key  
That shall unclasp and set me free.

Silently now I wait for Thee,  
Ready my God, Thy will to see,  
Open my eyes, illumine me,  
Spirit divine!

(Clara H. Scott, 1895)

## Action

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Is there any trouble we are in that God is telling us to stop justifying ourselves, and stop wishing they would go away? In what ways will accepting the consequences be for us "a way to life"? What important lesson is God teaching us for a better future? Have a confidential conversation with a trusted friend or mentor who will walk with you without judgement. Take that step, today.

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# Paradox of the Cross

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9 April • Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

John 8:21-30

<sup>21</sup>So he said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." <sup>22</sup>So the Jews said, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?" <sup>23</sup>He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. <sup>24</sup>I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." <sup>25</sup>So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. <sup>26</sup>I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." <sup>27</sup>They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. <sup>28</sup>So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. <sup>29</sup>And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." <sup>30</sup>As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

## Meditation

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"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he..." (8:28)

More than anything, the cross represents the Christian faith. We find it displayed on buildings, emblazoned on flags, worn on the body, and imprinted in every conceivable form. Over the millennia of history, the cross has been championed and condemned, raised in glory and trampled in rage. We should not be surprised because it has been so from the beginning.

In his confrontation with the religious leaders, Jesus points to the cross. The Pharisees begin by challenging what Jesus is saying, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." (8:13) They go on to question what he is doing, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'" (8:22) They end up asking him who he is, "Who are you?" (8:25)

Jesus answers them by relating to his authority, his mission and his identity. But they fail to understand any of these. Jesus gives the reason: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world." (8:23) Finally, Jesus tells them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he..." (8:28)

Jesus speaks again of being "lifted up" after he enters Jerusalem and is sought out by a delegation of Greeks: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (12:32) Both are references to his crucifixion. The cross on which Jesus will be put to death presents a paradox. On the one hand, he is lifted up by man to shame him and kill him. On the other, he is lifted up by God to honour him, and raise him back to life. Through his death he will pay the price of our sins, and by his resurrection, he will guarantee our forgiveness and new life.

We cannot understand who Jesus is apart from the cross. It represents his mission, together with his authority and his identity. We who follow Jesus are people of the cross, misunderstood and rejected by the world, but accepted and embraced by God, bearing the paradox of shame and honour, death and new life.

## Prayer

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“Lord Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross for me. When I see You lifted up on it, I understand what You say, I know why You came, and I submit to who You are, my Lord and my God.”

## Action

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The Lent season reminds us to focus on the cross. Take time to do that. In our pain, let's remember that Christ suffered too. On the cross He was lifted up. But let's look beyond the cross to the empty tomb. From it, Christ was raised up! May we have joy as we meditate on the cross.

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# Later it Yields the Fruit of Righteousness

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10 April • Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Hebrews 12:3-13

<sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup>In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup>And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor be weary when reproved by him.

<sup>6</sup>For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

<sup>7</sup>It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

<sup>8</sup>If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup>Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup>For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup>For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, <sup>13</sup>and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

## Meditation

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They seemingly did well at first as they underwent persecution. These early believers suffered well for the

glory of Christ. As time went on, they grew weary and tired in their souls.

The apostle reminds these saints of one huge invaluable point. This truth, understood correctly, would give them the spark they needed to endure. This one truth would change everything.

The hostility from sinners that the Apostle speaks of was really God working. We often don't think that God uses ungodly people to accomplish His purposes.

The universe is at God's command. He determines the numbers of stars in the sky and the number of grains of sand along the ocean. He is sovereign over all people... those who are His and those who are not His. He can raise up evil armies to render judgement on His own people to promote repentance. He can give success to evil people in business so they will accomplish His purposes. In this case, God used evil people to challenge and stretch those whom He loved, in order that they would be better equipped to bring Him glory.

Any good runner knows that he will only get better as he endures the pain of training and practice. It's the same thing spiritually.

Like it or not, we grow the most as we suffer through various trials that come our way. God knows exactly what trial to use to cause us to grow.

We often don't think about God sending us hard times. For some reason, we only think God sends us good times.



This text is very clear when the writer shows us that the hard stuff believers endure comes from God in the form of loving discipline.

When we think of discipline, we most often if not always, have in mind punishment. We think of committing a sin and then God punishing us like an earthly father punishes a child who breaks curfew or something like that.

Discipline means “to instruct or educate; to inform the mind; to prepare by instructing in correct principles and habits; as to discipline youth for a profession; or for future usefulness”.

This word comes from “disciple”. It means to strengthen or to train in righteousness; much like a runner is strengthened as he trains in endurance. Discipline, though painful produces hope, righteousness and peace in the midst of tribulations.

## Prayer

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Lord, discipline us as we move along in life, so that we experience the joy of righteousness and peace. Amen.

## Action

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Inculcate discipline in your work place and family.

*Rev Dr M.Mani Chacko  
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The Bible Society of India*

# Strive for Holiness...Our God is a Consuming Fire

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11 April • Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Hebrews 12:14-29

<sup>14</sup>Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup>See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; <sup>16</sup>that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. <sup>17</sup>For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

<sup>18</sup>For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest <sup>19</sup>and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. <sup>20</sup>For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” <sup>21</sup>Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” <sup>22</sup>But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup>and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup>and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

<sup>25</sup>See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. <sup>26</sup>At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” <sup>27</sup>This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may

remain. <sup>28</sup>Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, <sup>29</sup>for our God is a consuming fire.

## Meditation

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This world we live in now offers many unholy temptations to lure us from a life consecrated to God: easily available pornography and prostitution, acceptance of a private permissive lifestyle, gambling in many forms and places, perhaps even disguised with a veneer of respectability. But it is not just immoral temptations that seek to seduce us. We are seduced by the ways of the world. The way the world does things stand in contrast to God's way, but so many of us choose the way of the world in business and even in the Church. Sometimes the way we deal with church staff, missionaries and pastors, the way we make decisions, the way we plan, have nothing to do with grace or God.

Today's passage acknowledges that in the Church, there are those who have failed to obtain the grace of God. These people may be in church on Sundays, maybe even serving in ministries, but they don't know God. They remain outside his kingdom.

Even within the people of God, those who do know God, there may be a "root of bitterness" causing dissension and spreading poison. For example, one church leader may bad-mouth other leaders or other churches, or make claims designed to promote oneself or church while belittling other churches. People may appear to be holy, but inwardly they are not and they cause harm to the whole Church. Can they continue with what they are doing?

Today's passage reminds us that we are already citizens of "a kingdom that cannot be shaken"! This kingdom is ruled by a righteous judge who will make all things right, who will shake the earth and the heavens. As citizens of this kingdom and as subjects of this righteous judge, we have to strive for holiness, to be holy as our God is holy. God allows us to repent and turn to Him. So we need to pursue holiness, it doesn't come easily. Not with the temptations of this world.

But it is that holy life, the offering of our bodies, that is our acceptable worship. What else do we have to offer?

## Prayer

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Almighty God heavenly Father, I know that I sometimes go astray. I don't always choose Your way. I know You want me to be better, to be holy. So help me strive after holiness, that I may not reject You or Your ways, that I may be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let me not be shaken by the ways of this world. But let me be holy, as You are holy.

## Action

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Consider if there is any part of your life that is not holy and repent! Renounce any immorality and ask yourself what you can do to be more holy.

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# But You, O LORD, Reign Forever

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12 April • Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Lamentations 5:1-3, 15-22

- <sup>1</sup>Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;  
look, and see our disgrace!
- <sup>2</sup>Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,  
our homes to foreigners.
- <sup>3</sup>We have become orphans, fatherless;  
our mothers are like widows.
- <sup>15</sup>The joy of our hearts has ceased;  
our dancing has been turned to mourning.
- <sup>16</sup>The crown has fallen from our head;  
woe to us, for we have sinned!
- <sup>17</sup>For this our heart has become sick,  
for these things our eyes have grown dim,
- <sup>18</sup>for Mount Zion which lies desolate;  
jackals prowl over it.
- <sup>19</sup>But you, O LORD, reign forever;  
your throne endures to all generations.
- <sup>20</sup>Why do you forget us forever,  
why do you forsake us for so many days?
- <sup>21</sup>Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!  
Renew our days as of old—
- <sup>22</sup>unless you have utterly rejected us,  
and you remain exceedingly angry with us.

## Meditation

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This fifth lament by the prophet Jeremiah is actually a prayer. In verse 1, he begs the Lord to ‘*remember*’, to ‘*look*’ and to ‘*see*’ the plight of the people (of Israel). The KJV uses the words ‘*remember*’, ‘*behold*’ and ‘*consider*’ which are much more poignant words to use given

the occasion and situation. Babylon has conquered Jerusalem. The holy city and the beautiful temple have been destroyed, the people are in exile. Jeremiah knew this captivity will continue for 70 years yet he 'laments' to the Lord for mercy and grace.

Likewise in our own daily situations whatever they may be (good, bad or ugly), we can follow Jeremiah's example and ask the Lord to '*remember*' us and to '*look*' and '*see*' our plight.

But we too should '*remember*' the Lord during our plight. We need to recall His good hand upon us thus far because in remembering, we can renew and refresh our view of the ever-faithful God. I was recently reminded of God's promise some 18 years ago that He will take care of my son when he was diagnosed with meningitis that caused him to be a special child albeit for a few years. My son has just started university in the UK on a full scholarship. Praise be to God! He is indeed true to His words!

We should also '*look*' up and '*see*' where the Lord is. Jeremiah was clear where the Lord is. In verse 19, he says "*you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations.*" The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God is enthroned in the heavens and the earth is his footstool (Is 66:1). Yes, He is seated up there yet He is here amongst His people through His Spirit and is very much in the details of our lives. He knows and sees what is going on with us, and in His time and in His way, He will surely rescue us.

During this season of 'self' i.e. self-examination, self-reflection and self-preparation in remembering and celebrating the Risen Lord, let us '*remember*', let us

‘look’ up and let us ‘see’ Him who is enthroned ‘forever and ever’ (Ps 45:6).

## Prayer

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Heavenly Father, You are truly the great ‘I am’—the ever present One who sees all that is going on everywhere and anywhere. I ask that You will help me to remember who You are. I forget easily. I ask that You will help me to look up. I usually look around and down. I ask that You will help me to see You enthroned in each and every situation. I need to see where You are. You are sovereign and in Your time and in Your own way, You will bring about justice and relief and salvation to those who seek after You. Help me to seek after You more and more. I ask this in Yeshuah’s name, amen.

## Action

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Write down a promise or a verse that God has given you in the past (maybe you have forgotten it) and use it to remind yourself of who He is. If He said it, surely He will fulfill it. He is after all the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

*The Revd Canon Andrew Shie  
Priest-in-Charge*

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# He Prophesied That Jesus Would Die

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13 April • Saturday of the Fifth Week in Lent

John 11:45-57

<sup>45</sup>Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, <sup>46</sup>but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. <sup>47</sup>So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. <sup>48</sup>If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." <sup>49</sup>But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. <sup>50</sup>Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." <sup>51</sup>He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup>and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. <sup>53</sup>So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

<sup>54</sup>Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

<sup>55</sup>Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. <sup>56</sup>They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?" <sup>57</sup>Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.



# Meditation

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He Prophesied that Jesus would die.

Khalil Gibran, the Persian Poet told a story; Once a person went for a stroll in the fields. In those fields, he encountered a figure of a scarecrow to chase away the birds. One day, he asked him a question, "You have been here for a long time, aren't you bored?" The scarecrow replied, "No, I am indeed happy to be here." "What would then be the reason for that happiness?", he asked. "I am here to frighten others, especially the birds and other animals out to eat the crops. So they will fear and run away. So I am the sole leader of this place. By using the authority that I have, I am much happier to be here. The joy of Caiaphas, the High Priest and the scarecrow is one and the same.

Why did Caiaphas the High Priest, said a statement to the effect of making Jesus Christ a martyr? Wasn't he part of the structure and the office that put Jesus Christ to death?

A few assumptions can be derived from his statement;

- i. It is better to sacrifice one man for the sake of a nation.
- ii. Caiaphas the High Priest is prophesying that through sacrificing Jesus Christ, he would fulfill the Substitutionary Atonement for all.
- iii. To bring about the political upheaval that will trigger Jesus' followers to stage a mass rally and subsequently the denouncement of the Roman Government.

Whatever the conclusions, Caiaphas resorted to destroy Jesus Christ. The one who spared life for the world, they are scheming to take out his life. But the truth

remains inadvertently that Caiaphas is giving a new interpretation for death and that is, for it is deemed that one man sacrificed his life for all. It is worthy to be noted that in John 11:47 the Council of Sanhedrin “is meeting” to take Jesus’ life, but in John 11:52, the children of God is “gathering together” to “create life”.

## Prayer

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May God Almighty continue His redemptive work in all of us to bring about integration and unity.

## Action

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The lessons we learn from these events that took place;

- i. God chose the least expected person, Caiaphas to pronounce a new meaning to suffering and death, that is, there is redemption and hope through Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.
- ii. When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself. (Jn 12:32). Rather than a disintegration, that many of Jesus’ opponents would have expected, his suffering and death on the cross brings about integration of all humanity, hope and life for all creation.

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# The Lord Has Need of It

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14 April • Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday)

Luke 19:28-40

<sup>28</sup>And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup>When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” <sup>32</sup>So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. <sup>33</sup>And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup>And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” <sup>35</sup>And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup>And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup>As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, <sup>38</sup>saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” <sup>39</sup>And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” <sup>40</sup>He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

## Meditation

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I once saw a short video about two young donkeys chatting on the streets of Jerusalem. One of them sighed and said, “It was only yesterday when I carried Jesus into the city. The multitudes were rejoicing, and even let me walk on pavements covered with their cloaks. Yet today, no one knows me! The other young donkey replied, “My friend, this is reality. Without Jesus,

you and I are nothing!”

The Lord Jesus rode on a young donkey into Jerusalem, facing the cross and prepared to die for the sins of the world. This is the redemptive work that the Father sent Him into the world to complete. The journey into the city was sensational and bustling on the surface, but full of dangers and threats underneath. Religious leaders along the way were already trying to silence the disciples’ sounds of rejoicing in exalting Jesus. Jesus’ response was: if the disciples of the Lord kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into praises. It seemed to be a reminder for the disciples that if they refuse to honour and exalt Jesus, the Lord can still use the silent and humble stones to praise and serve Him!

While meditating during Holy Week, let us focus on the Lord Jesus’ call to the disciples: He sent two disciples to the village to bring the young donkey He had already arranged. The two disciples followed Jesus’ instructions and went. Jesus did not give them any detailed instructions, but the disciples firmly believed what He commanded and followed accordingly. Sure enough, everything went smoothly and Jesus entered the city with glory, fulfilling the prophecy of the prophet Zechariah.

The same is true for the young donkey. Who it was carrying that day was different from other days—this is the son of God, Jesus of Nazareth! What a privilege!

Yes, as long as we are willing to be used by the Lord, His light will shine from us and bring glory to Himself.

## Prayer

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O Lord, let me learn from the young donkey in submitting to Your call and invitation. Send me and use me.

## Action

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Young donkeys are docile and quiet by nature, and faithfully complete the work assigned to them. Let us also serve others quietly and do our best to complete our work in our respective spheres of life.

*Bishop Dr Chong Chin Chung*  
*The Methodist Church in Singapore*

(Source: Translated from Chinese Lenten Devotions 2019)