

Night Prayer

April 2022: Eastertide

Introduction

Easter is a time where the whole gambit of human emotions gets full play. Hope and uncertainty, love and betrayal, courage and cowardice, pain and ecstasy, sorrow and joy. We know the story so well that the resurrection does not take us by surprise. But for those living through the events there was no such foreknowledge. They had to take each hour as it came.

We are going to share some of those events, I hope taking some different perspectives. Have a happy and blessed Easter.

Palm Sunday



The Poet Thinks about the Donkey by Mary Oliver

On the outskirts of Jerusalem
the donkey waited.
Not especially brave, or filled with understanding,
he stood and waited.

*How horses, turned out into the meadows,
leap with delight!*

*How doves, released from their cages,
clatter away, splashed with sunlight!*

But the donkey, tied to a tree as usual, waited.
Then he let himself be led away.
Then he let the stranger mount.

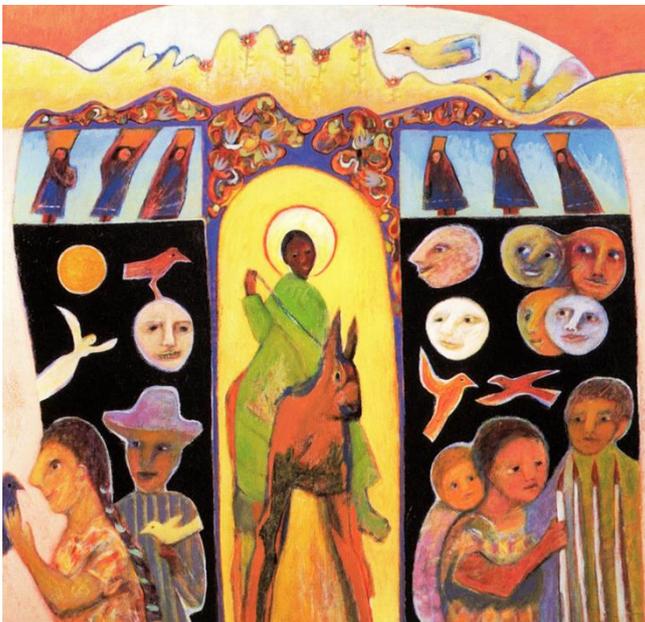
Never had he seen such crowds!
And I wonder if he at all imagined what was to happen.
Still, he was what he had always been: small, dark, obedient.

I hope, finally, he felt brave.
I hope, finally, he loved the man who rode so lightly upon him,
as he lifted one dusty hoof and stepped, as he had to, forward.

The donkey isn't just a convenient prop, needed for this so-called 'triumphal' march into Jerusalem. Nor is he a famous, beautiful or even clean donkey. He likely has no idea how to race around meadows with horses, leaping with sheer joy. Nor does he know how to fly into the sunlight alongside released doves.

All he knows is how to stand, wait, and do what needs to be done. Which, on this day, means carrying on his small back the hope of all Jerusalem. Well...almost all Jerusalem. Cheers and jeers sometimes sound all too similar.

Was he brave? Probably not. It is unlikely that he had been cleaned up for the occasion, and dirt and dust would hang in the air around any well used road. His calling on that day was just to walk forward without coaxing or threatening, carrying (though he did not know it) the hope of all the world on his small back. He kept going through a noisy crowd, one dusty hoof after the other, without turning back, running away, or refusing to move at all.



Betty LaDuke (American, 1933–), *Guatemala: Procession*, 1978.

In this painting of a procession that takes place annually in a small village in Guatemala, Christ appears on a donkey surrounded by the masks worn by the Mayans who dance to honour and celebrate their indigenous roots. They also dance a re-enactment of the brutal Spanish invasion, with satirical masks representing the conquistadores.

Jesus on Palm Sunday Evening

This time
there will be no flight into Egypt.
This donkey has too much to carry,
and too far.

The shadows wait for me,
around the table at Passover,
among those in high places
in the condemned cell,
on the hill outside.
Fear haunts my waking moments
and I cannot sleep.
Why has God forsaken me?

The crowd today is with me,
but not for long.
They are the powerless ones
(the ones who matter).
The ones who count
are counting.

Time is running out.
This time
there will be no flight into Egypt.

(posted on the United Church of Christ website.)

We Pray

Lord God
Help us to keep going forward,
despite all the distractions around us,
bearing the burden of your love for this world.
And when there can be no turning back.
Amen

Maundy Thursday

Reading John 13:1–17, 31b–35

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

...

When [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."



Solomia Kazanivska, *Washing of the Feet*, 2018

The main panel of contemporary iconographer Solomia Kazanivska's *Washing of the Feet* shows Christ, whose halo bears a faint cross-shape, washing the dirt off Peter's feet, as the other disciples, silhouetted in white, look on. At first Peter was much distraught by the notion of his superior stooping to such a menial act of servitude, and he objected. But when Jesus told Peter that Peter would have no part with him unless Peter received the foot-washing, Peter changed his tune completely: he figured that if this were true, then a full body wash would give him an even *bigger* part with Jesus, so he exclaimed, "Wash my hands and my head too!" That's why icons show Peter pointing to his head (not, as might be assumed, to signal his initial discomfort, as in "Oh dear . . .").

Song

'Ubi caritas et amor.' This has been used for many centuries as an antiphon commemorating Jesus washing his disciples' feet on Maundy Thursday.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vvfr_2eulFo

Last Supper



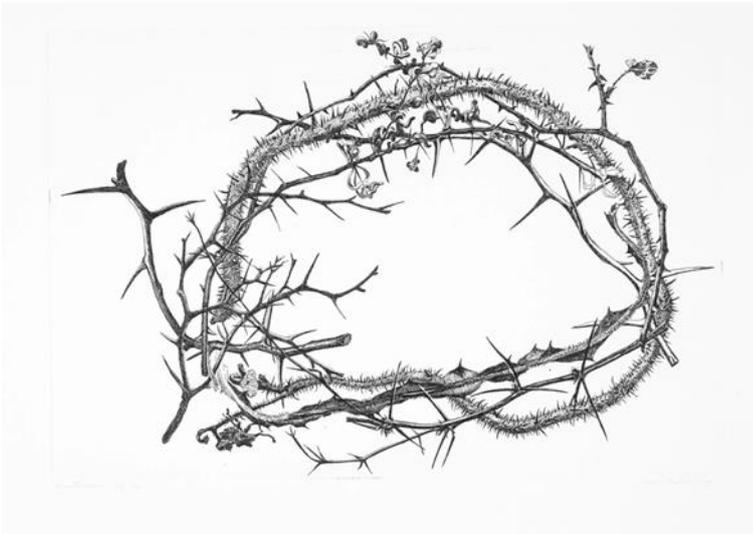
Denise Weyhrich (American, 1956–), Tabernacle, 2010. 70,000 used communion cups, 7 silver ribbons, plexiglass base.

From Easter 2008 until Yom Kippur 2009, installation artist Denise Kufus Weyhrich collected unwashed cups from weekly communions at St. John's Lutheran Church in Orange, California, and a few neighbouring churches, leaving them out to dry in her studio. Apparently over that year and a half when they accumulated, the room became filled with the fragrance of wine.

Once she had collected 70,000 cups into stacks—seven is the number of completion or perfection in Judaism and, by extension, Christianity—she arranged the stacks on a plexiglass disc and bound them together with six silver ribbons, like a sheaf of wheat. The seventh ribbon she threaded through all the cups and up to the ceiling, which could be read as the love of God coming down and through the people, uniting them, and/or the people's thanksgiving going up to God through this ritual act of celebrating the Eucharist.

Each one of those wine-stained cups represents a person being fed by the body and blood of Christ. Their collective presentation is a beautiful picture of the church and of God's ongoing bestowal of grace and forgiveness. Weyhrich named the piece *Tabernacle*, the place where God dwells.

Betrayal and Arrest



Paul van Dongen (Dutch, 1958–),
Crown of Thorns (4), 2004. Etching

Good Friday



Reconciliation: Emma Elliot UK 2016

‘God in Auschwitz and Auschwitz in the crucified God—that is the basis for a real hope which both embraces and overcomes the world, and the ground for a love which is stronger than death and can sustain death.’ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*

The Roman nail. The inked needle. Each left an indelible mark on the limb(s) of its recipients, Jewish men living nineteen hundred years apart: Jesus of Nazareth, “King of the Jews,” and Eliezer Goldwyn, former prisoner 157040, survivor of Auschwitz.

When British sculptor Emma Elliott visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, for the first time in 2012, the emotional weight of this genocide landed on her with a force, and she knew she had to respond through her art. During a return trip to Jerusalem the following year to visit friends on a kibbutz, she met Eliezer Goldwyn, a German-born, English-speaking Jewish scholar who had lived on the kibbutz for sixty years—and who had survived the Holocaust. A friendship evolved, and Elliott drew up the courage to ask if he’d be willing to lend his Auschwitz serial number to her developing art project. He agreed, with the request that the project be about remembrance, about being good to people and not letting suffering happen.

Elliott conceived of a sculpted marble arm that would bear two stigmata: Christ’s nail wound from the Crucifixion, and Goldwyn’s number tattoo. After making several small clay models and then plaster casts, she went to a marble studio in Pietrasanta, Italy, to do the carving with the assistance of a small team. *Reconciliation* is the result. It was her first major project in marble.

The sculpture was first exhibited at Noho Studios in London in 2016, accompanied by a short [concept film](#) . The film lasts about six minutes (and is worth it) and you can watch it by clicking on the words concept film and then on open hyperlink. If that fails, you can go to <https://www.artway.eu/artway.php?id=1243&action=show&lang=en> and follow the text down to the video.

We Pray

Let us remember in silence the victims of the actions of other human beings.

Father forgive.

Worship Music

Agnus Dei by Samuel Barber 1967 Sung here by the Flemish Radio Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRL447oDId4>

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.

English translation:

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace.

Easter Saturday



This is from a sequence of seventeen paintings by Canadian artist Ovide Bighetty *The Creator's Sacrifice* (2002)

We have another from this sequence for Easter Day with more about the artist and the nature of his work.

Easter Day

Easter Edmund Spenser

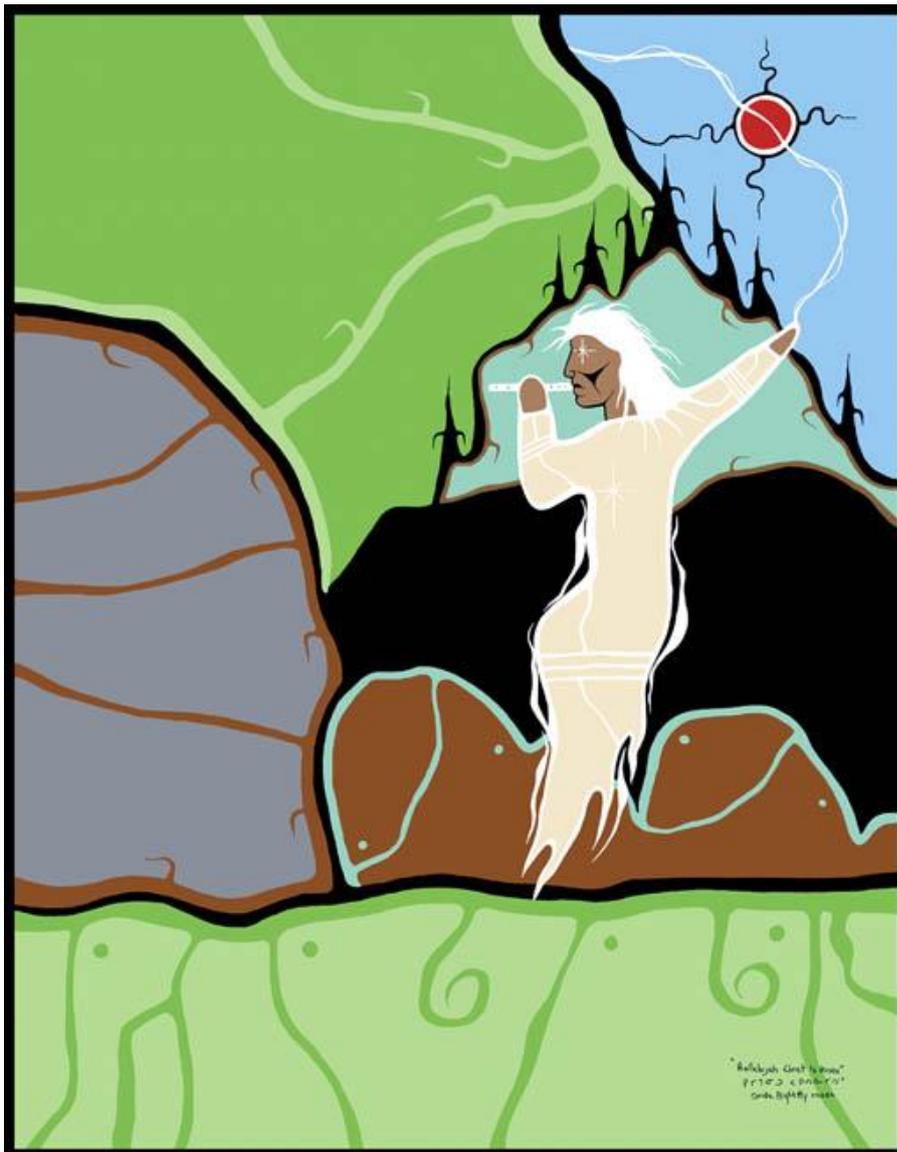
Most glorious Lord of Life! that, on this day,
Didst make thy triumph over death and sin;
And, having harrowed hell, didst bring away
Captivity thence captive, us to win:
This joyous day, dear Lord, with joy begin;
And grant that we, for whom thou diddest die,
Being with thy dear blood clean washt from sin,
May live for ever in felicity!

And that thy love we weighing worthily,
May likewise love thee for the same again;
And for thy sake, that all like dear didst buy,
With love may one another entertain!
So let us love, dear love, like as we ought,
—Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.

The Prayer of St. Hippolytus of Rome

Since it doesn't rhyme, this early church prayer may be more of an ode than a poem. However, its repeated words "Christ is risen" give it a kind of rhythm, not unlike the best hymns.

Christ is Risen: The world below lies desolate
Christ is Risen: The spirits of evil are fallen
Christ is Risen: The angels of God are rejoicing
Christ is Risen: The tombs of the dead are empty
Christ is Risen indeed from the dead,
the first of the sleepers,
Glory and Power are His for ever and ever



Ovide Bighetty (Cree, 1969–2014), *Hallelujah, Christ Has Risen*, 2002

Ovide Joseph Bighetty was a Cree self-taught artist in northwestern Manitoba.

In 2002 the Indian Metis Christian Fellowship commissioned Bighetty to create a series of paintings on Christ's death and resurrection. According to their website, "among North American indigenous peoples, there is the story that, before Europeans arrived on Turtle Island, elders had visions about white people coming from the east with a story from the Creator." One elder even had a vision of "the Creator's sacrifice" that corresponds to elements of the biblical passion narratives and Easter story.

Hallelujah, Christ Has Risen is the sixteenth painting in a sequence of seventeen. The ICF website offers the following description based on Matthew 28:2-4: "Early on the third day, there was a violent earthquake. A spirit sent by the Creator came down from heaven, rolled the stone away and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes white as snow. The warriors were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men." It looks to me like the angel is playing a flute with one hand, and with the other he gestures toward the sky, indicating Jesus's impending ascension.

Listen or sing along: "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

Words by Charles Wesley, 1739 Music from the *Lyra Davidica*, 1708

Arranged and performed by pianist Craig Curry on *A Jazz-Inspired Easter*, 2012.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkwWAXQvyQM&t=9s>

Christ the Lord is ris'n today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heav'ns, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ hath opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where's thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Foll'wing our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Hail the Lord of earth and heav'n, Alleluia!

Praise to thee by both be giv'n, Alleluia!
Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia!
Hail the Resurrection, thou, Alleluia!

King of glory, soul of bliss, Alleluia!
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!
Thee to know, thy pow'r to prove, Alleluia!
Thus to sing, and thus to love, Alleluia!

Confession

Living Lord,
when we stand before the empty tomb
we don't always feel the joy of resurrection.
We feel fear, doubt, and distrust.
We feel empty.

Forgive the fear that paralyzes us at the brink of new life.
Forgive our doubt of your love.
Forgive our distrust of your surprising, joyous plan.
Fill our emptiness with your glorious light.
Raise us to abundant new life
for the glory of your name.

Words of Assurance

Wake up, sleeper!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.

Sisters and brothers,
Christ has forgiven our sins.
Christ calls us to new life.
Christ will lead us into righteousness.

Amen.

(written by Greg Scheer)

After Easter Day

Walking Together by Chunye He (Chinese 2018)



He's piece, which shows two dragonflies flying in tandem, is "a poetic rendering of the way family, friends, and God 'walk alongside' us especially in times of trouble and loss." It is stamped in red with the Chinese character for "earth," which happens to be shaped like a cross.

Blessing

May God,
who comes to us
in the things of this world,
bless your eyes
and be in your seeing.

May Christ,
who looks upon you
with deepest love,
bless your eyes
and widen your gaze.

May the Spirit,
who perceives what is
and what may yet be,
bless your eyes
and sharpen your vision.

May the Sacred Three
bless your eyes
and cause you to see.

*(from In the Sanctuary of Women, Jan L. Richardson. Posted on the painted prayerbook.
<http://paintedprayerbook.com/>)*