

Lean Back... It will be ok

Jesus as **Empathizer**: John 16:16-33

PREPARE

Lent is a season of the descending way. It is the way of suffering, but it is also the way to healing. It is the way of humiliation, but also the way to resurrection. It is the way of tears, but of tears that turn into tears of joy. The descending way of love, the way to the poor, the broken, the oppressed becomes the ascending way of love, the way to joy, peace, and new life. The cross is transformed from a sign of defeat into a sign of victory, from a sign of despair into a sign of hope, from a sign of death into a sign of life. This descending way is often overgrown with weeds and seldom walked on. Slowly but surely, we have to clear the weeds, open the way, and set out on it unafraid.

(Excerpt from Lent and Easter Wisdom by Henri Nouwen)

Read Psalm 143: 1-6 (Passion Translation)

- 1 Lord, you must hear my prayer,
for you are faithful to your promises.
Answer my cry, O righteous God!
- 2 Don't bring me into your courtroom for judgment,
for there is no one who is righteous before you.
- 3 My enemies have chased and caught me
and crushed my life into dust.
Now I'm living in the darkness of death's shadow.
- 4 My inner being is in depression
and my heart is heavy, dazed with despair.
- 5 I remember the glorious miracles of days gone by,
and I often think of all the wonders of old.
- 6 Now I'm reaching out to you, thirsting for you
like the dry, cracked ground thirsts for rain.

- **Be honest with how you feel and ask Jesus to meet you where you're at. Acknowledge the weeds that have grown up on your path.**

REFLECT

In your core group, briefly share your response to one of these three questions.

1. How have you experienced the blessing of God in these past few weeks?
2. What burdens, worries, or anxieties have you been carrying and would appreciate prayer for?
3. What's a next step looking forward that you are excited about, fearful about, or uncertain about and want to step out in faith and need prayer support for?

STUDY

Read John 16:16-33. A "little while" indicated a short time, the hours between Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus predicted great joy after the shock and grief of the cross, knowing the disciples will grasp this truth more fully later on. The anguish that gives way to the joy of God's blessings is likened to

"labor pains." Resurrection declares that sin and death are conquered. Jesus predicted persecution and scattering of the disciples, but He also promised the Holy Spirit as Counselor and Judge.

Read vv. 16-22. What were the concerns of the disciples?

Read vv. 23-24. How does a believer's joy become "complete"? What is your greatest source of joy as a follower of Jesus?

Read vv. 25-30. Jesus emphasized to the disciples that they can associate his name as they pray to God. What does it mean to you to pray "in Jesus' name"?

RESPONSE

Read vv. 31-33. Obviously we have the insight of the Gospel writings that inform us that the disciples fled and scattered after Jesus was arrested, just as He had predicted in this passage.

We would like to believe that if we had been one of the disciples, we would have stood fast and resisted that urge. Take a moment to reflect on your present relationship with Jesus. How would you characterize your commitment? In what ways do you need courage to stand up for Jesus in your family? Among your friends? With your neighbors?

Read v. 33 again. Trevor Hudson describes two different kinds of peace in his little book Pauses for Lent: One is a "fleeting feeling of contentment when everything in life is going well. We feel a pleasurable sense of well-being. The other kind of peace is the one God offers to us. It is a lasting peace that cannot be taken away from us. It does not depend on our lives running smoothly. God's peace provides an inner assurance that, ultimately, all will be well. This peace occurs in the presence-not the absence- of upheaval and turmoil. We observe the most obvious example of God's peace in the life of Jesus. For most of Jesus' life, the odds are stacked against him. Tested, tried, and taunted, Jesus maintains an inner serenity through it all. He knows instinctively that, because he trusts God completely, all will be well-even when things aren't in the moment."

How would you describe your level of true peace on a scale of one to ten? What has put you there? How might Jesus be wanting you to seek His peace? Are there practices you do or false narratives that numb you from experiencing His peace?

As you reflect on these words, ask God to speak these words over you in the midst of your present circumstances: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

Close in Prayer. List prayer requests here.