

# Once For All

Lenten Devotions 2025

By Janice Brauer

Peace Lutheran Church—Lombard, IL

*Note: Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the English Standard Version.*

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## Holy Week — Monday, April 14

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

### **Cloud of Witnesses**

In our recent Lenten devotions, we have been considering what it means to live out our life of faith. Here in Hebrews 12, we are encouraged to endure and to run with endurance, keeping our focus on Jesus. After all, there is a cloud of witnesses watching us.

This makes me think of those who witnessed Christ's crucifixion. Some of the witnesses are identified for us in the Gospels: Jesus' mother Mary, Mary's sister, and Mary Magdalene; the disciple John; the soldiers who gambled for His cloak; the two criminals who hung on either side; and the Roman centurion who declared, "Truly, this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54b).

But shouldn't there have been more witnesses? Where were the other disciples? Where were those Christ had healed? Where were those who ate their fill when He multiplied the loaves and fishes? Sadly, many of Jesus' friends fled, but He was not alone. His Father was right there watching, and the angels, too.

What did the various witness see as Jesus hung dying? Those at the foot of the cross saw a suffering Man whom they either loved, despised or were indifferent toward. The heavenly witnesses saw much more. They saw God's dear Son bearing the weight of the sin of all the ages, fighting fiercely with the prince of darkness and the power of death. Amidst the anguish, I wonder if they also saw joy, for Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him—the joy of rescuing lost children and restoring them to the Father. As Holy Week begins, let us pause to ponder the wonder that Jesus found joy in redeeming you and me!

**Dear Jesus, Thank You for suffering for me and for counting it joy. Amen.**

Tuesday, April 15

*“Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 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. 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, for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:26b-29)*

### **Unshakeable Kingdom**

The verses preceding today’s reading take us back to the days of Moses, when God revealed His presence on Mount Sinai, accompanied by cloud and fire, lightning and thunder so great that the mountain quaked. The children of Israel found out that God, the unshakeable One, shakes us with His presence. That is a reasonable response of sinful people encountering the holiness of God!

Hebrews 12 goes on to explain a new way of meeting with God. This way is through the blood of our Savior. “You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness...” (Hebrews 12:24 NLT). When we receive cleansing through faith in Jesus, our names are written in heaven. We belong to God’s family. We are part of the unshakeable kingdom.

We look around us as human history continues to unfold, and we see a lot of shaking. Kingdoms totter; new rulers arise while others are overthrown. Sometimes we quake within, wondering what will happen next. Yet God remains sovereign, and His eternal purposes prevail.

We see that truth borne out as we follow Christ through Holy Week. His arrest and arraignment, the mocking and scourging, the death sentence, the crucifixion. Yet the gates of hell did not prevail. As Easter morning proves, nothing could destroy our King. Nothing can shake the unshakeable kingdom. And so, its subjects—you and me—are safe forever in the loving hands of our Risen Lord.

**Dear Jesus, Thank You for bringing me into the unshakeable kingdom. Help me worship You with reverence and awe this Holy Week. Amen.**

Wednesday, April 16

*Be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear; what can man do to me?"... Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:5b-6, 8)*

### **That's Faith Talking**

Yesterday we considered that we belong to God's unshakeable kingdom. The context of today's reading bears in mind that even life in the unshakeable kingdom is fraught with peril. Some believers are in prison. Some are mistreated. Some are tempted by sensual pleasures or the lure of riches.

How are kingdom members to respond? Hebrews tells us: choose contentment; remain confident; remind yourself that the Lord is your helper. When we make these good confessions, that is faith talking.

"That's faith talking" is a phrase that a pastor, who is a friend of mine, uses. What he means is that when we choose to believe the truths of Scripture, we do so by faith. For example, when he feels all alone but still says, "God is with me," that is his faith talking. He's not denying his experiences or emotions, but he is viewing them through the lens of God's truth.

I wonder if Jesus drew upon this spiritual practice during Holy Week. When betrayed by Judas, when denied by Peter, when the angry crowd shouted for Barabbas, perhaps He recalled the Psalms' many promises of protection and deliverance. Perhaps these reminders encouraged Him as the time of His ultimate sacrifice grew nearer and nearer.

In anguish on the cross, Jesus quoted Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). But, as He took His last breath, His final words were: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). That's a quote from Psalm 31, and that's faith talking.

**Dear Jesus, Help me to cling by faith to what You say is true. Remind me of Your promises and Your power to carry me through. Amen.**

## Maundy Thursday, April 17

*For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace ... We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. (Hebrews 13:9b-12)*

### **Come Right In**

This is another section of Hebrews where the writer contrasts the old covenant with the new covenant. We have an altar, he says, that is different from the altar where the Old Testament sacrifices were made over and over again. Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, sanctifies us through His own blood for all time. At the moment Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Access to God's presence was opened, and all who believe are free to come right in.

As we gather to worship tonight, we can come right in. We can come right to the altar. The food we will receive, the body and blood of our Lord, will benefit us in a way no other food could. We will remember His great sacrifice, holding its very tokens in our hands. We will be fed, nourished and strengthened by His grace.

What a gift! Do not hesitate; come right in!

*Come to the table of mercy, prepared with the wine and the bread.  
All who are hungry and thirsty, come, and your soul will be fed.  
Come at the Lord's invitation, receive from His nail-scarred hand.  
Eat of the bread of salvation, drink of the blood of the Lamb.*

(lyrics by Claire Croninger, CCLI#366327)

**Precious Savior, I come to You. Strengthen me with Your gifts of grace. Amen.**

## Good Friday, April 18

*Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.* (Hebrews 13:20-21)

### **Now May God**

We come once again to Good Friday. We ponder once more how Jesus has accomplished everything necessary for our rescue from sin and for our new life of faith. We remember that this is all God's doing. Jesus carried out our decisive redemption perfectly and completely through His obedience, suffering, and the offering of His very life for us.

Even while we await the dawn of Easter morn, today's Scripture reminds us that God brought our Lord Jesus back to life. Our Risen Savior is described as the great Shepherd of the sheep. What a comforting name! It echoes back to Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd," and to Psalm 100's reminder, "We are his people and the sheep under his care." What a comforting place to be—under His care!

As the author concludes his letter to the Hebrews, he entrusts the believers to God's care. "Now may God equip you ..." he says, fully expecting that the God who has accomplished so much for all people of every time and place will continue His work. He prays that God will create in His redeemed children a desire to do His will and to please Him in all things, for the glory of His name.

Now may God do this for you and me—on Good Friday, on Easter, and all the days of our lives.

**Gracious God and Savior, Thank You for Your once-for-all sacrifice. Equip me to do Your will, worshiping You and bringing You glory. Amen.**