

# Lent 2019

## Stepping Stones

### Week Six – *Emptied*

Monday, April 15<sup>th</sup>

Jim Pierce

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5—8*

Empty is a versatile word. We use it as an adjective — empty glass, empty room; as a verb — she emptied the dishwasher; as a noun — put the empties there. We use it to describe a particular state of things, an absence — the house feels empty.

Empty also describes the way we feel as our lenten journey nears its end. In this season when we reflect on our brokenness, our failed relationships, all those failed promises we've made through the years to do better, to be better, we draw near to despair. And despair is a particular kind of emptiness, bottomless, overwhelming. There is nothing I can do to be filled.

Empty is an appropriate way to approach Holy Week, an appropriate way to stand at the foot of the cross. We look around and see that we are part of a whole a host of empty people gathered there. It's not just me that is empty, not just you, it's everyone.

Who do we meet there? Scripture tells us we meet Jesus, the one who emptied himself. The very Word of God, the Word who is God, emptied himself of what it is to be God in order to become flesh (*John 1: 1, 18*), one of us, one with us. We meet Jesus, who on the cross is finally emptied — as we will all one day be — of breath, of heartbeat, of brain activity, of life itself. There, on the cross, God, the source and sustainer of the life, of all creation, dies — emptied, poured out for us.

Let me say it again, God, in Jesus, is emptied, poured out for us, for the whole of creation. Why? So that we might see, in an awful way, that nothing, not even death, separates us from God's love for us.

**Emptied!** That's the way to enter Holy Week. **Emptied!** That's the way to stand at the foot of the cross. **Emptied!** That's the way to walk with those who carried Jesus body from the cross and placed it in an empty, ready tomb. **Emptied, only emptied,** are we ready to approach that tomb again as Easter dawns **to be filled** with hope, filled with God's promise that the final word is not death, but life.

*God of grace, of fullness, of life, help me to lose myself this week in the great story of your love for me that causes you to empty yourself so that my emptiness might be filled with your promise. Amen*

**Tuesday, April 16<sup>th</sup>**

**Jeff Langdon**

This week is Holy Week. It began on Sunday with the procession of the palms and included **two** gospel readings... the traditional reading of Jesus's hosanna entry into Jerusalem and the reading of the death of Jesus. As a child we only read or were presented the hosanna text... a joyful Sunday. Over the past few decades, the tradition has been to start with that text and then the service quickly moves to the passion text... Jesus's death.

I think I like it this way. Yes, the hosanna text is joyful and happy. But if you miss out on worship on Maunday Thursday and Good Friday, you left worship Sunday and you will come back on Easter. Another happy joyful Sunday. Jesus praised by the people one Sunday and then happy and excited people the next Sunday worshipping the risen Jesus. You miss out on the suffering Jesus.

If we miss Maunday Thursday and Good Friday we miss our part in the whole drama. It is thru the Word, we play the part of Jesus's followers as they fall asleep, betray, deny, flee, despair and generally fail to really "get it". Thru the Word, God helps us to imagine what it was like for the followers of Jesus to watch their friend, teacher, Savior and King be arrested, whipped, humiliated, stripped, crowned with thorns, and hammered to a wooden cross.

So I get it... we have to squeeze in the suffering Jesus on Palm Sunday. Some even refer to it as Passion Sunday. It is important. The work of Jesus happens between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. We should not miss it. This is when Jesus emptied himself for us. When we read of the suffering, we know that because of that suffering, we have an advocate. We have a Savior who is not on some great throne in heaven gazing down at us. No... we have a Savior who has emptied himself, and is beneath us, waiting for us to let go, and to fall into his arms.

So if you were at worship Sunday you heard part of the passion story... probably the most important part. But, better yet... join in experiencing it. Come to worship on this Thursday and Friday. Hear the Word... experience the Word. Remember the Word.

Two evenings... just two.

*God, teach us your way. Help us to remember the depths of your love for us, that you suffered death for us, and that it is thru Grace that we have been joined with you. Help us to reflect that love in how we experience the world. Amen*

**Wednesday, April 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Juel Pierce**

When the gas tank gets down below half full, I usually fill it up. I keep the pantry stocked by putting items on the grocery list before I use the last one up. When I'm hungry, I get something to eat. I have a full closet, a full refrigerator, a house full of stuff that I love to own. If I have to choose between "empty" and "full," I almost always choose full.

This was not Jesus' way. As Paul urges us in Philippians 2:  
*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God*

*as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.*

Jesus emptied himself so that we might be full. Not full of food, or full of clothing, or full of gas! But full of God's love and grace. As humans, we often want to exploit any advantage we might have. Jesus turned his back on any sort of exploitation, and instead of seeking lordship, or wealth, or mastery, he became a servant. This week we have an example of this servanthood, as John tells us the story of the last time Jesus met with his disciples. Rather than making them vow obedience and faithfulness to him, he showed himself to be obedient to their needs and faithful to the love God had for them by putting on the garb of a servant and washing their feet.

He knew what was coming. He knew that they all would abandon him, or deny him, or betray him. And yet he served them in the most humble way possible, by washing their feet. And then, even more humbly, he chose to serve them and us, bearing our afflictions, carrying our desires to be full of ourselves at the cost of others, to the cross, in obedience to the call of God.

*Jesus, in this Holy Week, we give thanks to you, who emptied yourself for us, that we might be full of grace and forgiveness. Amen.*

**Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Rev. Roger Lenander**

There is a saying, "He has played every trick in the bag." When it came to God's relentlessness to bring us back into a trusting relationship the final words of Jesus were the ultimate of God's efforts to bring salvation. The efforts of humanity to make things right with God have all failed. Covenants are broken, alliances with false gods prove to be too tempting for humanity, and the power of the Enemy continued to sway even the heartiest of believers (as we will find out in the denial of his disciple, Peter). So, the final words of Jesus are the message to all of humanity that this is it.

This is the challenge to all who would follow Jesus. This is the final step of salvation. It is to trust in Jesus alone for true life with God. It is faith on this Rock alone, Jesus Christ, to plant our life firmly in the real of God's eternity. Even as we would empty ourselves to trust in God alone we are not to be fooled by our own efforts. For it is in Jesus who emptied his self for our sake that we shall live forever in the arms of a God whose love shall never be finished.

*Eternal God, your love is forever steadfast and true. Help us each day to trust in the fullness of that love through faith in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord. Amen*

**Friday, April 19<sup>th</sup>**

**Misty Coyle**

We have been watching a lot of DIY shows lately. Brooke's and my favorite show is "Love It or List It". The basis of the show is interior designer Hilary Farr and real estate agent David Visentin compete for the affections of fed-up homeowners looking to either renovate or sell their current home. Farr transforms their worn-out space while David works to find them a new home. At the end of each episode, the homeowners decide if the changes designed by Hilary are enough for them to stay, or if the new property David has found better suits their needs. It's a show you must watch to the end! Because you always wonder if the home owners will stay or go.

When Hilary starts a renovation, the house is emptied of all the contents. The first thing some of the homeowners then realize is how much space they truly do have in their current home. Hilary will take down a wall or move a window or door, to make even more room. Sometimes it takes an outside person to see where the potential for change in a home an owner had become so use to. God is our outside person. Our hearts can be filled with things that have nothing to do with God. During the season of Lent, we meditate and try to empty our hearts of all our sinful ways known and unknown to us. Why? So, God can move a window to the other side so that we can see something; or, take down a wall here because we are blocking what he wants us to have. God knows what is needed to fill our heart to do his will and love our neighbors as he loves us.

These stepping stones are big, rugged, and a bit slippery. When you land on one, it helps to take your boot and scrape the slimy moss off so you can't lose your balance so easily. The ruggedness can actually help you maintain your stance on the rock by keeping your foot turned a certain way. With all of these tips, you keep your footing on this rock and let God work on your heart. Taking away the hate and replacing it with his love. Taking away the sin and leaving room for your neighbors' needs. We stay on this rock because we trust God. We can move onto the next rock because we trust God. We don't go back to the previous rock, because we trust God. We empty our hearts because we trust God.

*All-knowing God, you empty our hearts to fill them with what we need. Give us the strength to not feel like we need to fill our own hearts. Help us to remember to trust you know what should be in our hearts. To trust you will put down the next stepping stone. May our feet walk your way; our hands do your work, and our words fill the ears of those who need to hear of your love! Amen!*