

Deeply Rooted in the Discipline of Solidarity in Jesus' Suffering

Christ Suffered

I love Easter, but honestly, I enjoy celebrating the fact that Jesus did not stay in the tomb. He died on the cross for our sins, they took His body and put Him in a tomb, and then on Sunday morning when the women went to His tomb, it was empty. I love to rush to the end of the story and celebrate the wonderful news that ***"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay"*** (Matthew 28:6). It is easy for us to rush through the pain, suffering and agony that Jesus endured. He was mocked, spit upon, ridiculed, his flesh torn by a whip, a crown of thorns crushed upon his head, and He was forced to carry the cross beam on his weary shoulders to the place where He would give his life. He was nailed to a cross—nails (more like spikes) tore the flesh of His hands and His feet, and there He hung. It would have been hard to breathe in the position they had Him in.

Slow down this month, and really contemplate the last week of Jesus. Listen to His words, sit with His heartache, and His pain. One of the ways I slow down is to read and meditate on a passage and then I write a poem on that passage. Here is John 19:17-30, that I wrote as I slowed down, really dwelling on these grueling 6 hours Jesus endured on the cross, leaving Him dead, and not rushing to the end (really the beginning) of the story.

To Golgotha, Jesus was led away, Forced to carry His own cross that Friday.
Nailed to a cross to be crucified, Two criminals were on either side.

A sign was nailed above His head,
With a message for all; in three languages, it read:
"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

The chief priests didn't like the words Pilate would choose.
Despite their instance, His kingship was merely a claim,
Pilate declared, "What I've written will remain the same."

Four soldiers divide His clothes as He hung there.

What remained, - a seamless undergarment they didn't want to tear.
So for His garments the soldiers cast lots—they gambled,
In the action, a prophecy from David was fulfilled.

While hanging on the horrid tree, Jesus responded so unselfishly.

In the midst of His pain and agony, His mother's breaking heart He sees.
Before His life comes to an end, He puts Mary in the care of His closest friend.
John willing does His part, And cares for her, from his heart.

Jesus desired His mission to be completed,
To assure that all had been prophesied was accomplished,
"I am thirsty," He proclaimed.

A wine vinegar soaked sponge to His lips were offered.
After He drank, "It is finished," He declared.

He bowed His head;
Gave up His Spirit. Jesus is dead.



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Conversation Starters

This month, gather with some friends and talk about what Christ's suffering, death and His resurrection means to you.

- ◆ What is your favorite Easter candy?
- ◆ What was the best Easter you ever had?
- ◆ What was the most painful thing you have ever experienced physically? What about emotionally?
- ◆ What does it mean to you that Jesus understands our suffering and our pain? How does this help with what is causing you hurt and pain right now?
- ◆ During His crucifixion, what physical pain did Jesus endure? What emotional pain did He endure? What spiritual pain did Jesus endure? What do you think was the hardest for Him to endure?
- ◆ Good Friday is the day we remember Christ's death on the cross. It doesn't necessarily feel good, but how is it good?
- ◆ What does Easter morning mean to you? With whom will you share the real meaning of Easter?

"The deep meaning of the cross of Christ is that there is no suffering on earth that is not borne by God." Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Additional Resources

Check out our website for more resources that go along with this month's theme:

<https://usw-womensministries.org/>

Bible Study: An in-depth look at the suffering of Jesus by Major Sybil Smith.

Blog: We are reminded that Jesus took our place. He endured the suffering so we won't have to.

Devotional: *Christ Truly Understands Our Suffering* by Major Harryette Raihl.

Craft Idea: *Mosaic Cross Craft* by Margaret Grieco, THQ WM Department.

Taste His Suffering: Figs & Flatbread

When we taste something, we experience it. Taste can transport us back in time to a specific location or moment. As we read about the last week of Jesus' life, there are several opportunities, for us to "taste" and experience part of what Jesus was experiencing and enduring. These prayer ideas could be used in a corporate setting as various prayer stations, or these could be done individually as separate prayer encounters throughout the month.

Figs (Fruit). As you read Matthew 21:1-22, enjoy some figs (fig newtons) or some other kind of fruit. Jesus was hungry, which emphasizes that He was God but was also human, and he experienced the physical limitations that we do. Yes, His tummy grumbled when He was hungry. The abundance of leaves was an indication of abundant fruit, but it had none. The fig tree was all show. The people's words on His triumphal entry, were just words. The worship that was taking place in the temple, was more a business transaction than worship. The fig tree looked fruitful, but wasn't. Spend some time eating your fig, and ask yourself these questions: Do I profess Christ with my lips, but my actions don't match? Am I only going through the motions of loving and worshiping Him? Do I have evidence of His Spirit in me? Am I displaying the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)?

Flatbread. As you read Matthew 26:17-30, enjoy some unleavened bread (bread without yeast—tortilla, pita, matzo crackers, flatbread). Jesus and His disciples were commemorating the Passover, when God rescued the Israelites from Egypt (read the story in Exodus 12:1-30). The Israelites were told to make bread without yeast (yeast is what makes bread rise and it takes time). Yeast in the bread is a picture of sin. As you eat your flatbread, think about how Jesus was without sin, and He died in our place for our sins. What in your life do you need to confess?

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This month read the Easter story from Matthew's perspective.

Flourishing in the Word

Although all four gospels record the final week, death and resurrection of Jesus, this month we are going to focus on just Matthew's account of Christ's Passion Week, Death and Resurrection.

Mar 1	Matt 21:1-17	Mar 17	Matt 26:17-30
Mar 2	Matt 21:18-27	Mar 18	Matt 26:31-46
Mar 3	Matt 21:28-32	Mar 19	Matt 26:47-56
Mar 4	Matt 21:33-46	Mar 20	Matt 26:57-68
Mar 5	Matt 22:1-14	Mar 21	Matt 26:69-75
Mar 6	Matt 22:15-22	Mar 22	Matt 27:1-10
Mar 7	Matt 22:23-33	Mar 23	Matt 27:11-26
Mar 8	Matt 22:34-46	Mar 24	Matt 27:27-31
Mar 9	Matt 23:1-12	Mar 25	Matt 27:32-44
Mar 10	Matt 23:13-39	Mar 26	Matt 27:45-56
Mar 11	Matt 24:1-35	Mar 27	Matt 27:57-61
Mar 12	Matt 24:36-51	Mar 28	Matt 27:62-66
Mar 13	Matt 25:1-13	Mar 29	Matt 28:1-10
Mar 14	Matt 25:14-30	Mar 30	Mat 28:11-15
Mar 15	Matt 25:31-46	Mar 31	Matt 28:16-20
Mar 16	Matt 26:1-16		

Flourishing Ideas from the Territory

Cathedral City, CA sold floral arrangements made from donated flowers at a community event.

Ebeye, Marshall Islands ladies learned how to prepare a sermon so that could preach the Word of God (despite their culture frowning upon women preachers).

El Centro, CA began a timbrel brigade with the Home League ladies.

Modesto, CA had a coffee outing where they had coffee, played board games and chatted with one another. Many of the ladies said they felt like teenagers again.

Pike Street Social Services (Seattle, WA) ladies like cooking. They've had classes to learn how to make Italian sodas, Chinese Lettuce Wraps and Pumpkin Chocolate Chip Cookies.

Tempe, AZ ladies have been learning about Christ shining in them and made candles to share with others.

Turlock, CA toured 'Prodigal Sons and Daughters,' a local organization that helps individuals who are struggling and in need.

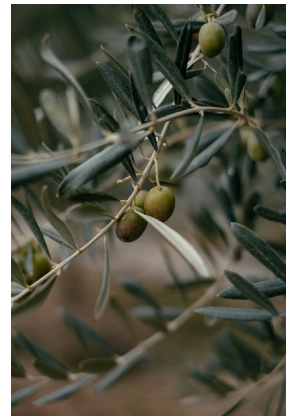
Yuma, AZ ladies did a photo scavenger hunt while on a hike.

Taste His Suffering: Olives & Vinegar

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Olive Oil. As you read Matthew 26:36-46, eat some olives or taste some olive oil. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, which literally means oil press. Olives are pressed and crushed to make oil. Think about how hard it was for Jesus to do what God was asking Him to do. It was a struggle, but He finally prayed, ***“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*** What crushing circumstance is God asking you to go through? What pressing situation are you finding hard to endure? Are you willing to pray the same prayer Jesus did—***not as I will, but as you will?***

Vinegar. Read Matthew 27:11-61. Vinegar is a sour taste with a pungent smell. As you read the events of His sentencing, mocking and beating, carrying His cross to the place of His death, His crucifixion (where they offered Jesus vinegar to drink—Matthew 27:48), and His burial, sip on the vinegar (I know, we don’t usually drink vinegar). Allow the sour taste to fill your mouth, allow the smell to penetrate your nose. Really think about what Jesus endured for us. Allow His pain to sour your stomach. He suffered physical pain—the beating, the crown of thorns on His head, the weight of the cross, blood loss, the pain of the nails in His hands and feet. He suffered mentally—the anguish He endured in the Garden of Gethsemane over what He was going to face. It was so excruciatingly painful, Jesus sweat drops of blood (Luke 22:44) He also suffered emotionally—they mocked Him, spit on Him, stripped Him naked. How embarrassing! He suffered spiritually—for the first time in all of eternity, Jesus experienced the feeling of separation from His Father while hanging on the cross, that is why He cried out, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”***



“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.” Isaiah 53:3



Taste His Suffering: Sweet Cake

Sweet Cake. Hallelujah the death of Jesus is not the end of the story. Read Matthew 28 and celebrate His resurrection. Enjoy the sweetness of the cake, and as you do, thank the Lord for the sweetness of His resurrection. He did not stay dead—He rose again, and because of His resurrection, death was defeated and those who believe in Christ, can experience new Life in Him. Savor the sweetness the resurrection brings to your life.

Also read Matthew 22:1-14, the parable of the wedding banquet. When I think of a wedding, I think of a wedding cake. We can also celebrate the fact that because of His death and resurrection, everyone is invited to be a part of His family (that is what the wedding banquet is all about). John 3:16 says, ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** As you savor the sweetness of the cake, think about those who haven’t experienced the sweetness of salvation. Pray for them. Perhaps invite them to church this Easter. Or better yet, invite them over for cake and share the Easter story with them.