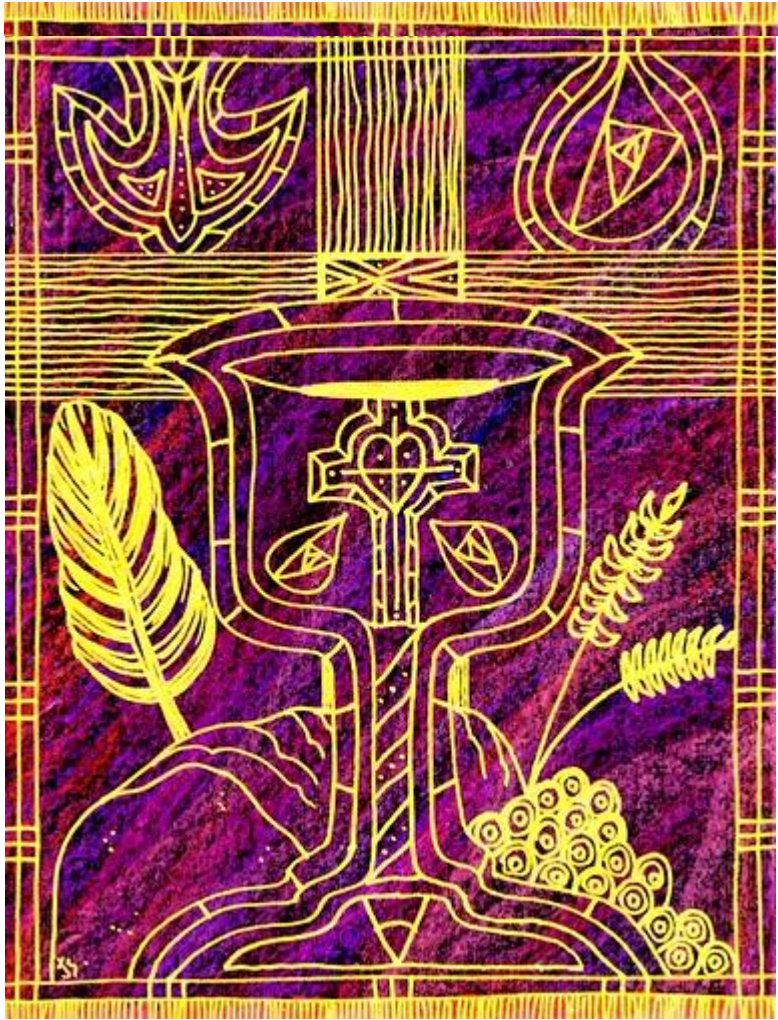


2021
Holy Week



*2021 Holy Week
Devotional Booklet*

First Baptist Church
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With word and art, members of our church family have shared thoughts and images that have come to them in reading the biblical events of Jesus' last week on earth, events that Christ-followers all over the world will be pondering this Holy Week.

We offer this devotional guide to you with the hopes that these scripture lessons will speak to you in fresh ways, that the vulnerability shared by the authors and artists will deepen your ponderings, and that this central reading will unify us as the body of Christ at 99 North Salisbury Street.

May we be emboldened to share this Good News in authentic and meaningful ways with our world.



Holy Week
Sunday, March 28

Mark 11:1–11

Libby Barnes

“ . . . with you I am well pleased.”

After his baptism by John and this affirmation from God, Jesus began his public ministry. Up to this point, as far as we know, he had not performed any miracles, nor taught multitudes of people or done anything that would call attention to himself as God’s Beloved Son.

We know so very little about those first thirty years of his life. So, if God pronounced this blessing before his ministry began, it begs the question, with what was God pleased? The only clue we have is that scripture speaks of Jesus’ early years saying he “increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.”

Then what were those qualities of Jesus? Was it the relationship he developed with God during those years? Was it that he sought and followed God’s will for his life? It’s easy to imagine that he related to others with love, compassion, gentleness, and kindness. The good news for us is these qualities form the framework of living as God’s children, something possible for ***all of us!***

Obviously, we cannot know the mind of God nor answer the question of specifically why God said those words to Jesus. However, it certainly leads to a compelling question for each of us: Am I becoming a person to whom God can say “with you I am well pleased”?

Loving God, how we long to please you. Yet so often we try to avoid living as your children by making it seem as something beyond our reach. Your response of grace, however, assures us we do not have to be perfect. We ask that you “grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the living of these days. . . that we fail not man, nor Thee.” Amen.



Artist: Emily Hoover

Holy Week
Monday, March 29

Matthew 26:14–16; 20–22

John Shell

Betrayal.

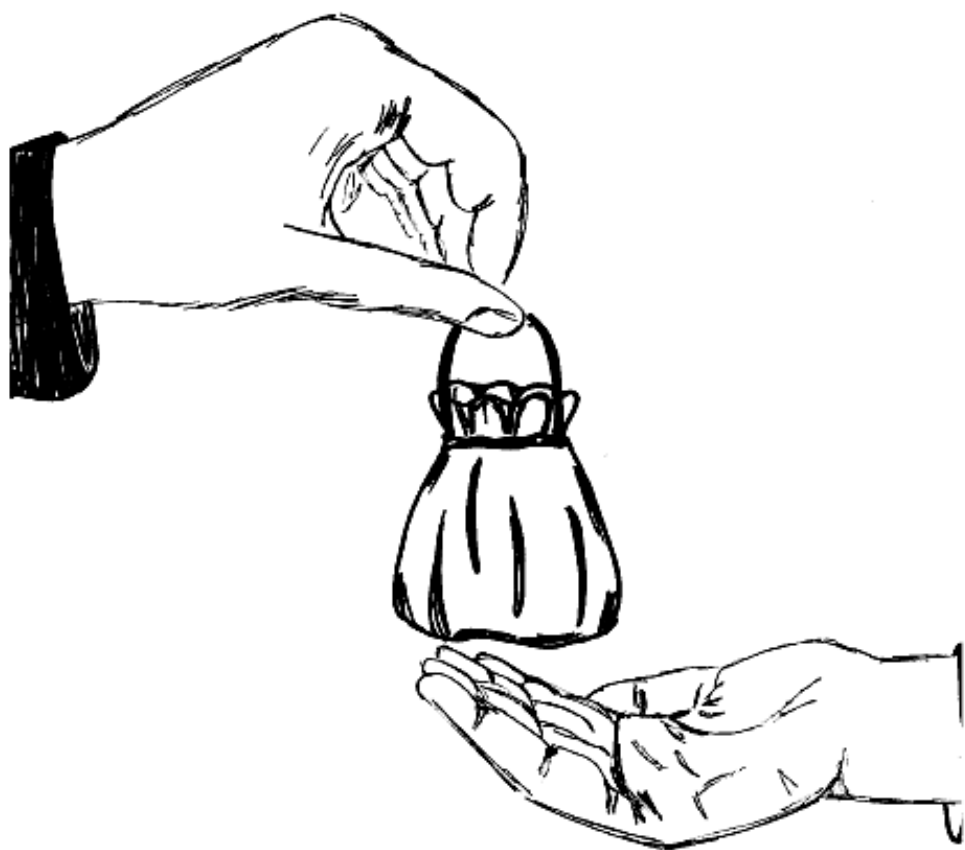
Judas fascinates me. Why did he do it? Some say it was money, but I don't think so — 30 pieces of silver isn't enough. Immediately preceding today's reading, a woman pours perfume on Jesus' feet worth ten times what Judas got. No, this was only enough money to grease the way for what he already intended to do.

Fascinating, but perhaps not personally relevant. We can distance ourselves from Judas. We are not so blatant. I more easily identify with the other disciples.

Matthew says that in response to Jesus' accusation that one of them would betray him, the disciples were "sad" — not shocked, not incredulous, not indignant but sad. They began saying, "Are you talking about me?" Each harbored enough doubt about his own integrity to suspect that Jesus might mean him. I can relate to that kind of self-doubt.

In today's world, what makes us squirm as the disciples did? Is it the person holding a sign by the exit ramp? Do we wear our undeniable privilege a bit too comfortably? Do we act kindly at every opportunity? Do we tolerate disrespect of another in order to avoid uncomfortable confrontation? Would Jesus?

Lord, during this Easter season, help us to reflect honestly on our commitment to be your servants. You don't call us to solve the world's problems but to love our neighbor. Make us observant of our neighbor's need. Give us courage to be kind. And assure us that your grace is sufficient to make our faltering efforts an acceptable gift. Amen.



Artist: Claudia Dare

Holy Week
Tuesday, March 30

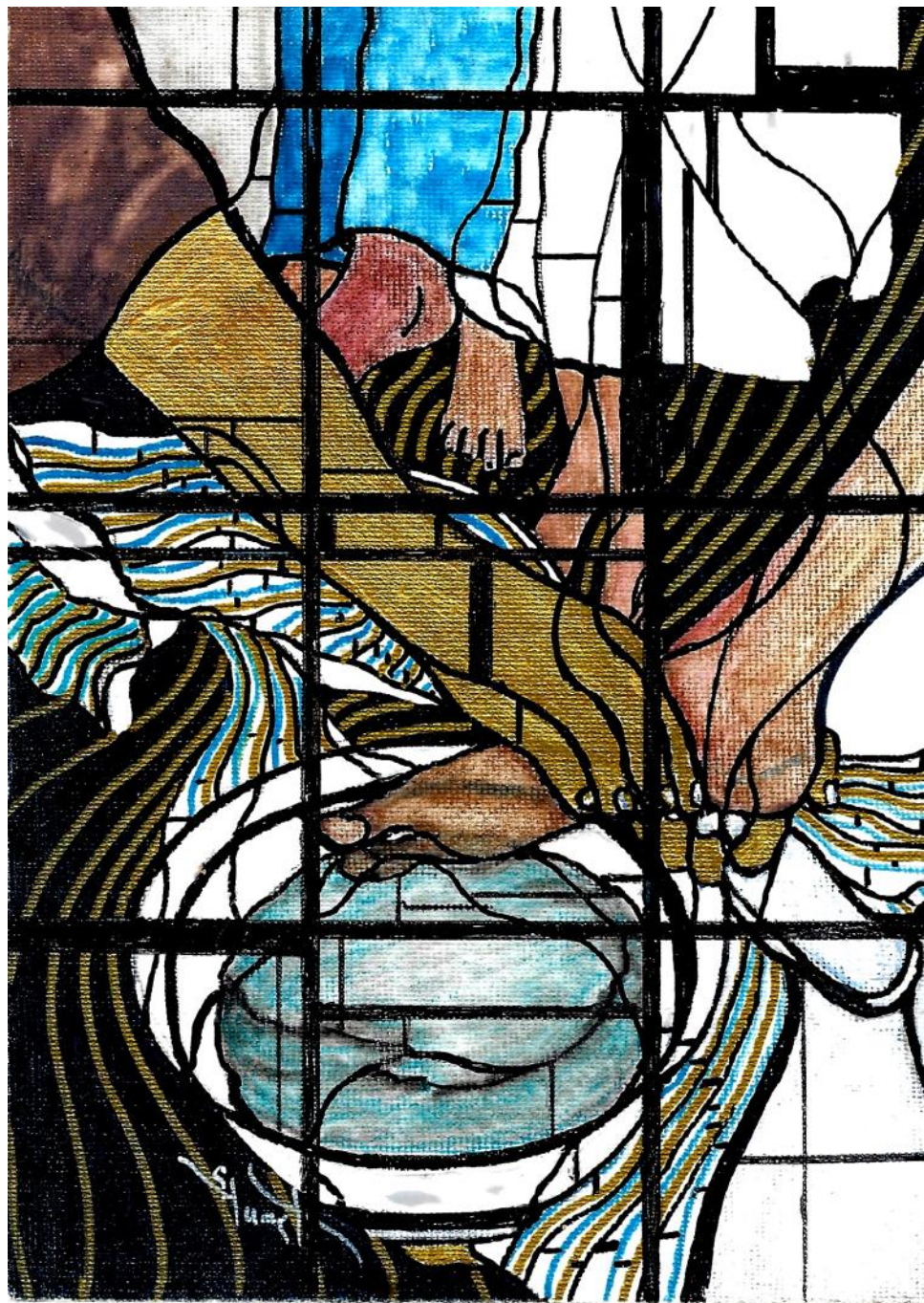
John 13:3–17

Ella Sasser

When I read this passage, I'm especially struck by Jesus' role as both an example and a teacher. Jesus puts himself in the position of a servant while calling himself "Teacher" and "Lord," leading by example for the disciples and for us. If Jesus, son of God, humbles himself to wash his friends' feet, what does this mean for us? I think that Jesus calls us to love one another wholly, to serve one another in genuine, meaningful ways, and to listen intently for how God wants to work through us. Jesus says, "Do you understand what I have done for you?"

This is reassuring to me that it's okay not to comprehend fully God's plan, but with a teacher as passionate and patient as Jesus was to his disciples, we can do our absolute best to love and serve each other and love God — without knowing the whole plan. In some ways, Peter in this passage is who I think we should all strive to be — excited about our faith, actively wanting to participate, and willing to learn and grow.

God, I pray that You will work through each one of us to do Your will and share Your love. I pray that we can follow the example that Jesus showed us with enthusiasm. Mostly, I pray that every single person is able to feel Jesus' love, patience, and guidance as Teacher and Lord. Amen.



Artist: Pat Stumpf

Holy Week
Wednesday, March 31

Luke 22:14–20

Stan Crocker

The Institution of the Lord's Supper.

As familiar as this passage is to all of us, I can honestly say that I somehow “missed” the significance of verse 15. Let me say that another way: I missed its implications for my faith.

The verse reads from the Greek, “And He said to them, ‘(Epithymia) With desire (epethymesa) I have desired this Passover to eat with you (pro) before I (pathein) suffer.’”

There was a clear imperative in Jesus' statement. He really wanted to share this meal NOW, pro pathein, with the disciples. He knew that NOW, pro pathein, was his only opportunity.

And what did this say to me? Take a moment to ask yourself this question. Would you rather be remembered for how you died or how you lived?

When I read this passage, it occurred to me that Jesus may have wanted his disciples to remember firstly how He lived.

This is my body, this is my blood, I am here with you right NOW! Remember me in life and what I did in life! Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God NOW! There is no guarantee of tomorrow.

God of the present
Be present in us each day
Help us remember how you lived
so that we may help others live
NOW!
while we are still able. Amen.



Artist: Kennedy Gardner

Holy Week
Thursday, April 1

Matthew 27:27–31

Kati Gardner

We can all think of a time in our lives when we've been the object of someone else's jokes, when we were ridiculed for things we wouldn't change — our hair, our very bodies.

In this passage Christ is mocked for being exactly who He is, the Christ...the Savior of nations. Matthew states all of this matter-of-factly. There is no emotion or colorful descriptions other than that the robe the soldiers placed on Jesus was scarlet. Each statement comes at us with impact, allowing us to feel the pain that Jesus must have felt.

And Christ never defends himself or sinks to the level of the soldiers, mocking them. And how easy would that be to do? Jesus is the literal Son of God! He can actually say that his Father is bigger than all of them and their dads! Instead, He knows that this must happen for what is to come next.

And Matthew once again states it very simply.

Then they lead him away to crucify him.

Let those words sink in your heart and think of how Christ reacted.

Lord, thank you for this message of unflappableness of Christ. For His love and strength in front of those that only wanted to hurt and demean Him. Help us to focus on his example and to be strong in our own faith. Be with us, comfort us, and lead us. Amen.



Artist: Wiley Jones

Holy Week Friday, April 2

John 19:16b–18

Nathan Rice

As Christians making our way through Holy Week, we are beckoned to journey figuratively with Jesus, remembering his suffering and death. It is during this time that we are often reminded to “take up our crosses, and follow him.” We approach this text, year after year, and identify the burdens we carry. This time around, the weight for many of us is heavier. With us are physical, mental, and spiritual sicknesses; grief from loss of friends and loved ones; fear and anger from social injustices; loneliness and isolation... I need not continue.

Undoubtedly, we have spent wholly more than a week dwelling in the shadow of suffering and macabre. Our burdens feel as real as a splintery wooden load on our tired shoulders as we trudge uphill. But as we have with many of our traditions of late, perhaps this year we might reimagine our perspective a bit. As I asked Kristin last night while slyly unwrapping a Cadbury Creme Egg, “May I have a taste of Easter a little early this year?”

In that spirit, I offer two observations from our text. First, in this passage Jesus carried his cross by himself. We don’t have to. Second, it is only in light of Easter that we remember Holy Week in the first place.

So, as we climb upward together, still carrying our crosses, know this: Christ is with us. God is with us . And Hope is on the horizon.

Dear God, as we make our way through Holy Week we are mindful of the suffering around us in our communities, families and individual lives. Thank you for journeying ahead of us, beckoning us to follow an often difficult path. We acknowledge that you are with us as we press onward, motivated by a glimmer of hope and assurance that suffering and death do not have the final say. In Christ’s name, Amen.



Artist: Matt Bullard

Holy Week Saturday, April 3

Mark 15:40–47

Kimberly Taylor

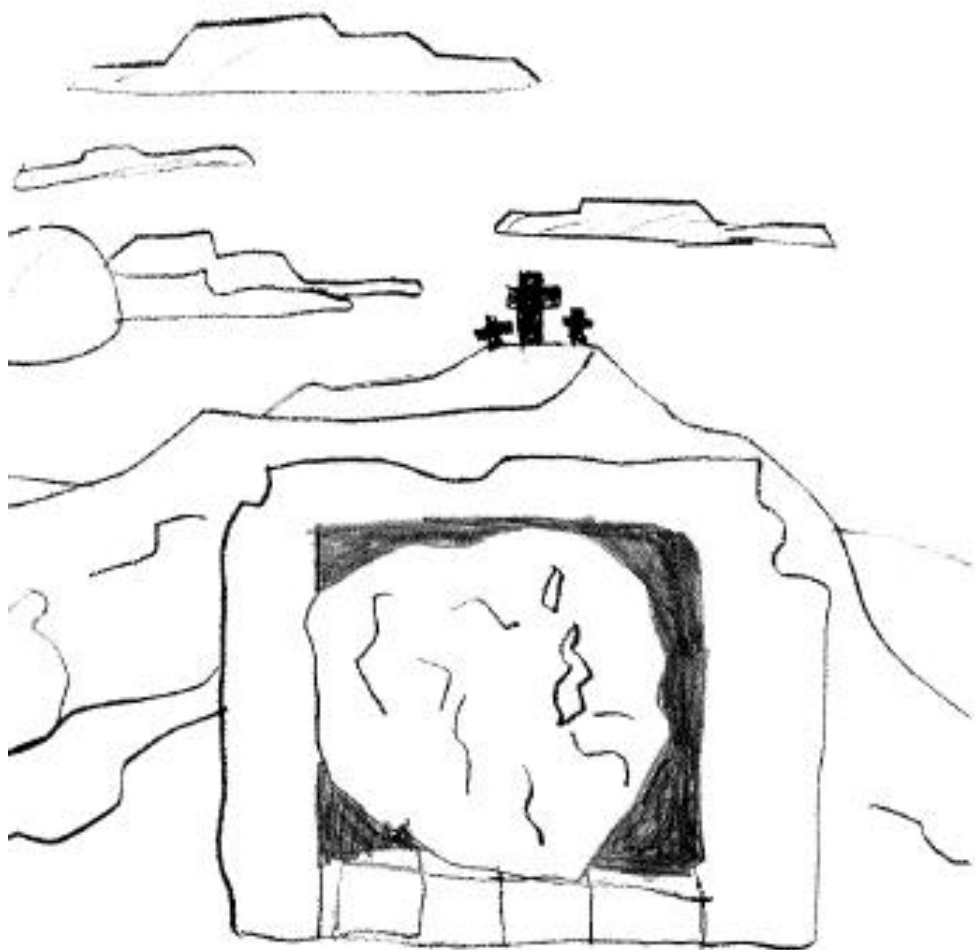
It's no secret that the past year has been difficult and full of uncertainty. While it has been easy at times to become absorbed in my own little world of challenges (and even unexpected blessings), again and again, I have witnessed the extraordinary suffering of others, usually from afar. I have seen how the pandemic has further exposed economic, social, and racial inequities. Closer to home, our own church family, neighbors, and friends have experienced loss, illness, and grief, as well as the joys of births, graduations, engagements, and other milestones. It has been a particularly challenging time to offer support and encouragement to the people I care about.

In the last verse of today's reading (v. 47), we are told Mary Magdalene and Mary saw where Joseph laid Jesus' body in the tomb. In fact, verse 40 tells us they had been there all along, "from a distance," as Jesus died on the cross and now as he was buried. In the midst of Jesus' deepest suffering, he was not alone, and these women were a witness to his suffering and bearing that burden with him. I like to think that Jesus knew the women were there, and in some small way, it eased his suffering. We recently commemorated the 209th anniversary of First Baptist with the reading of our Church Covenant during worship. One line really stood out to me as I read the Covenant with fresh, 2021 eyes.

"That we will participate in each other's joys, and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy, to bear each other's burdens and sorrows."

Mary Magdalene and Mary are a beautiful example of what it means to "bear each other's burdens and sorrows," especially during a season of such deep burdens, complicated by having to be more apart than we would like.

Dear God, thank you for carrying us through the past year and enabling us to bear one another's burdens while we have been apart. Amen.



Artist: Carter Pegram

Holy Week Easter Sunday, April 4

Matthew 28:1–8

Anthony Petty

In April 2018, the Pew Research Center summarized the findings of a fascinating study concerning Americans' religious beliefs (<https://www.pewforum.org/2018/04/25/when-americans-say-they-believe-in-god-what-do-they-mean/>). The respondents' answers illustrate why consensus on any theological issue, even among persons of faith, is elusive.

Congregations like ours normally don't feel threatened by differences of opinion. When reading scripture, we often look for nuance. Most of us don't subscribe to biblical inerrancy. Our faith doesn't lead us to reject science. Like our Baptist forebears (and unlike some Baptists today), we aren't creedal. We know that the kingdom of God is big enough to include a wide range of perspectives.

The Easter story, though, is unique. On the matter of Jesus' resurrection, Christians don't equivocate.

It's vividly, not subtly, described in all four Gospels, and the accounts are fairly consistent. The differences that do exist are largely extraneous. The key point — that Jesus rose from the dead physically, not metaphorically — is reinforced by each account.

This event is the cornerstone of Christianity. One can question the veracity of the resurrection story and still admire Jesus and use His teachings as an organizing principle for one's life. However, it's hard to deny the resurrection and still argue that Jesus is God Incarnate.

As Christians, we know that Jesus is far more than a wise teacher and a prophet. He is indeed the Son of God. As such, He does more than inspire and guide us. He saves us.

Our faith in Jesus and our belief in the resurrection are more important than our differences. Let's renew our commitment to using our collective talents to further the work of God. Happy Easter!

Lord, thank you for the miracle of Easter. May we emulate Christ in all that we say and do. Amen.



Artist: Alice Strickland