

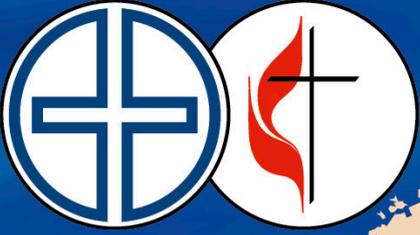
Jesus is...

DAILY MEDITATIONS

March 12 to April 16, 2017



*Prepared by men and women of The United Methodist Church
in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe*



**Central Conference of
Central and Southern Europe**



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JOHN 1:14

Sometimes, when I look through some older pictures, which are of people who are not among us anymore, I think how wonderful it would be if the person could just step out from the picture and tell us about how things were back then or what he/she thinks about what we are doing today.

The Scripture saying that Jesus became flesh somewhat reminds me of this idea. It was as if Jesus stepped out from heaven to come among us to tell us and show us how God sees things. He came here to become the perfect example of how to live. He gave up his environment in heaven to become human. Even though he was still fully God, he experienced some limitations of humanity — as for time and space, possibly power, too. He gave up some of his divine rights to dwell among us. And thus when he calls us to follow him, the call includes giving up things that might be holding us back. And we continue to see this in the Gospels as he calls people, some had to give up their family, some had to give up money, some their status.

What are the things that you need to give up, to be able to fully follow Jesus?

- Lenka Procházková (1976), Slovakia

Prayer:

Lord, we are humbled by the fact that you came on earth giving up your divine home to save us and all that out of love for imperfect humankind. Please, help us to see those things in our lives that are holding us back from following you, things that we still keep to ourselves and have not given up for you. Amen.

Jesus is...

to see.

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said: 'Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"

JOHN 1:29

An important condition for many people to believe, is to be able to see God. They tell you in a conversation, show me your God and I will believe.

To be able to see God and Jesus is also important for us Christians. In the Gospels there is written, that also for the disciples and for others it was important to see Jesus. The stories of Zacchaeus and Thomas are good examples.

Do we really want to see Jesus? After seeing Jesus would we really believe, listen and obey? The path to get there is sometimes difficult. Jacob had to wrestle hard at the river Jabbok. Job had to go through a lot of misery and many days where God was silent until he spoke. In the end, Job said these wonderful words: "My ears had heard about you. But now my own eyes have seen you."

The lives of the ones who could see God often changed tremendously. They were filled with love to God, to Jesus. To follow the example of the Lord in this condition is not a burden, but is pure joy. Also we, the Christians from today, need to be able to see the Lord. It is still possible today. Not like John the Baptist or the disciples could see him, with their real eyes. But, like then, Jesus draws near to us and if we are open and willing, the Holy Spirit will reveal Jesus to us again and again.

- Josef Červeňák (1949), Czech Republic

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, draw near to me. Help me to see you and fill my heart with love to you – and to the people around me. Amen.

Jesus is... one who forgives.

"Jesus said: 'Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, don't sin anymore.'"

JOHN 8:11

A new morning. It is dark outside, but I can hear the song of the birds praising the new day. I am laying on my bed with a man beside me. No, he is not my husband. My husband is away on business. He doesn't love me anymore. He seldom speaks to me. When he arrives home from his work, he only cares about food and his own comfort. When he goes to bed in the evening, he turns away from me. My life is boring, aimless and contentless. I desire love. I long for appreciation, understanding, conversations, touches, and passion. And now another man is laying beside me. I am not made this way, but I believed I was loved this time. But what is this noise? Oh, my husband has come home earlier!

I am being rushed, pushed and dragged toward the temple. What are they going to do to me? Will they kill me? Then why are we going there? They are blood thirsty, filled with excitement as they try to get stones as soon as possible. They are shouting, making loud noises, their faces are flushed. They are sick of me. I feel like I am the devil. Do stone me! It is all the same for me. I know I am guilty.

What is this? I don't understand. Why are they asking that teacher? They are also teachers of the law. Certainly I have my own opinion about them. Pharisees keep themselves immaculate, but they are not at all. I saw them breaking the law. But who would believe me? I am watching this rabbi. He is so different from the others. He radiates calmness. His peace is even more noticeable because of the cantankerous men around him. I am not able to look away. He is watching my accusers, not me. Now he is bending down and starting to write on the ground with his finger. This is very strange. Suddenly, it's quiet. Am I hearing it correctly? He says: "Whoever hasn't sinned should throw the first stone. Is the shower of stones coming? My God, please help me!"

But it is incredible, everyone goes away. Nobody stays, only he and I. What should I do? Should I stay or go? He is looking at me. I can see pure love in his eyes. It is unexplainable, but I can feel, and I know that he loves me. Why? I really sinned. I realize what I have done. Where are those who condemn me? Can't he see they all have left? I can hear his peaceful voice: "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, don't sin anymore." Does it mean that I have escaped? Can I live? I can only say... thank you, Lord!

- Ágnes Vadászi, Hungary

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you know our imperfection. Grant us your love and give us merciful hearts for one another. Amen.

Jesus is...

the light that does not dazzle.

"Jesus spoke to the people again, saying: 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me won't walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'"

JOHN 8:12

I remember when my parents turned on a little light with a smiling face every night when I went to bed. The little reflection made me feel calm and safe. That is what our lives very often look like. When we walk through the darkest hour of our lives, we think about the amazing light from our God. Although sometimes it is not perfectly visible, it is always near us.

Jesus Christ is the source of an incredible light. This is he, who through the Holy Spirit, can enlighten us and kindle the lamp of our lives and make us the light. Those who are "irradiated" with this light are only meaningful when they can give this light back.

Those who saw the first Christians once said: "Look! How they love each other!" They loved each other because they were filled with Christ's light. Am I for all of them the reflection of God's light? Thus, we should shine on those who really need that, but we should remember not to dazzle them. As Christians and Methodists, we must be recognizable and expressive. That is why: "Let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

- Julia Kopacz (1994), Poland

Prayer:

Dear God, make us shine in our daily lives with the reflection of Jesus' light, which does not dazzle anyone, but shows us the proper way to you. Amen.

Jesus is... the gate.

"I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture."

JOHN 10:9

Full of excitement, they are waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom. The 10 girls have prepared themselves for the wedding celebration. The bridegroom arrives. He lets five of the girls in, but he closes the door right before the noses of the other five girls. The first five were clever, graceful and prudent. The others were plump, simple and awkward.

Wedding celebrations are also "seeing the bride." The casting show takes place behind closed doors. In front of the door is hopelessness, because a woman without a man is worthless. The bridegroom allows this exclusion. Solidarity, as known in the biblical message, is not recognized here.

Jesus said: "I am the gate." He is the one who opens doors, in contrast to the bridegroom. No one will be left standing in the rain by Jesus. All are invited. He picks one up at the fountain, he lets one climb down from the tree, or he just simply visits others without being invited. With his love, he takes part in the problems and needs of these excluded women and men.

When Jesus tells this parable, he is an eye-opener. Observe carefully today, where persons are being excluded. Don't let it happen that behind closed doors negotiations are taking place over being and having, instead of negotiations over going and sharing.

- Christine Preis (1965), Switzerland

Prayer:

Our gracious God, we are coming to you. In turning to you, we are disclosing our concern. So many people are standing in front of the door, excluded and deported. With courage, fantasy, and your blessing, we would like to be door-openers. In loving sympathy. Amen.

Jesus is... the good shepherd.

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me."

JOHN 10:14

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of himself: "I am the good shepherd." The Son of God became the personification of Love Divine. He came to the world to tell people, with his words and deeds, that God loves them. For the love of human being, he gave his life. "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." He did it for us on the cross of Golgotha. His death was not accidental — he voluntarily gave his life for the sheep.

Jesus not only spoke of himself that he was the good shepherd, but he was indeed — and he proved it. He died but rose on the third day. As he speaks of himself: "I'm the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, but look! Now I'm alive forever. I have the keys of Death and the Grave." (Revelation 1:18)

A characteristic of a good shepherd is love, which found its expression, in the case of Jesus, in death from crucifixion. Jesus says that he "knows his sheep." He knows them so well that he calls them by name. This is greatly comforting for us. There is someone who knows us: knows our names, takes care of us, and looks for us when we go astray. We are not anonymous.

We live at the beginning of the 21st century. Every day we are depressed by worries and cares. As a proverb says: "No man is free from worries. If there were to be one, he or she would not be human." We forever care for many things, feel lonely in our worries and needs. But we are not alone. We are accompanied by the good shepherd, who wants to help us. We are not left to our own devices, helpless about our faith. Our Lord Jesus, the good shepherd, wants to help us. Like he did in the past, so he does today.

- Józef Bartos (1968), Poland

Prayer:

Lord our God, thank you for Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, who was, is and will be the same for evermore. Amen.

Jesus is...

a friend weeping with me.

"Jesus began to cry."

JOHN 11:35

Did you notice that in this story, the Son of God is crying? I am just so glad that it is written in the Gospel of John that Jesus had tears in his eyes as he saw Mary weeping and the Jews also weeping. Indeed, he was deeply moved in spirit because Lazarus had died.

Very often, I've heard Christians saying: "We do not cry if someone is passing away, because we know death is not the end." Although it is true, I've experienced that we often do encourage each other with these words: "Oh, come on, be strong, do not cry!" Let me ask something: Are tears allowed in your church? Actually, Jesus was deeply moved, he "could not be that strong" not to cry. I love to read the reaction of people around Jesus: "See how he loved him!" They did not say: "Look how weak he is!" Tears are allowed, don't worry.

I think the most difficult thing on earth is the loss of a beloved one. The loss of someone is hard, it is sad. We need to allow tears to come down; we don't have to be always that strong not to show our grieving and difficulty. Jesus did go through it. Jesus was not ashamed to cry, others noticed his tears. More than that: everybody can read about his tears in the Bible! Actually, the Gospel shows us a vulnerable Savior, one that is full of compassion, one that is like a friend who is there if it's cloudy and dark. Jesus' compassion means really a lot to me. He knows about our silent tears.

- Lilla Lakatos (1984), Hungary

Prayer:

Jesus, our faithful Friend, you know every tear and wound in our lives, you are always there, even in the hardest days. Thank you for your compassion that is very often shown through your Word and through our fellows in the church. Help us to hold the hands of those who are facing the loss of someone. Blessed be your name! Amen.

Jesus is... the way.

"Jesus answered: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

JOHN 14:6

One of the clearest and most well-known verses of the Bible is John 14:6. Jesus says "I am." The path to God is not a religion or a race or a ritual. It's not about rules and regulations. It's about a person.

Jesus is the "I am" — not the "I might be" or the "I'd like to be." Jesus is the way and the truth and the life — not "one of the ways" or "part of the way." Jesus said: "I am the way." Not "one of the truths" or "part of the truth." Jesus said: "I am the truth." Not "part of life." Jesus said: "I am the life."

There was a time when people going on a trip began their journey with a road map in their hands. The map is very helpful to the travelers in order to find the destination they would like to go to. Today, we only very rarely use a road map. Most of us who own a car also have a GPS in our car. How does this GPS work? When you are ready to go somewhere, you type in the respective address, and the GPS connects to a satellite and shows you the path to your destination. As soon as you start driving, a map appears on the screen and a voice from the GPS gives you turn-by-turn directions. "Leave the main street in 700 feet, turn right in 300 feet, turn right now." What happens if you miss a turn? The GPS says "Recalculating" and immediately computes a new route to get you back on the right path to your destination.

When we are trying to follow Jesus in our daily life, it would be nice to have a GPS to lead us in the right direction, wouldn't it? It would be nice to have something to keep us on the right path and keep us from getting lost. Something that would help us get back on the right track when we made a wrong decision.

We have not seen Jesus like Thomas and Philip or other apostles had and asked him many questions about this and that. But we can follow the teachings that he has given to us in the Bible — God's Holy Word. That is our GPS, and it will keep us on the right path!

- Boris Fazekas (1989), Serbia

Prayer:

God, thank you for your instructions that you give us through your Word. Help us that we can clearly see your way in our lives. Amen.

Jesus is... peace for the world.

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid."

JOHN 14:27

Among the anxieties and storms that sway human life. In the face of financial difficulties, problems with health, fear for the near and the dear. In defiance of disasters, natural calamities, wars, turmoil, acts of terrorism and all cruelty — Jesus is there.

The one who tread on water among crashing waves, controlling the laws of nature as their ruler. The one who told a violent storm: "Quiet! Be still!" and was instantly obeyed. He promises to all of us: "My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid."

We received an extremely precious and unusual gift. Jesus wishes to share his peace with us. He, the Lord of the world, who commands all circumstances, has a full right not to be afraid of anything and to grant us all-encompassing peace. Not so for we, the little ones. We have no such power to live our lives safely, to the best of our thought. We also lack wisdom. It is only in the loving arms of Jesus that we can find protection and a perfect plan for our lives.

Let us persist in trusting the Almighty, the One who is wisdom, love, salvation, and redemption that God has given us.

-Katarzyna Bator (1976), Poland

Prayer:

Lord, in full confidence I entrust myself and all that concerns me to you. You are the only one who never fails. Take my whole life in your loving hands. May your peace fill my heart. Amen.

Jesus is... the vine.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything."

JOHN 5:5

With the words "I am," Jesus begins parables, which encourage disciples not to regard him as human only, but rather see a message through him, reflecting the will of his Father.

It is the case here, when Jesus presents himself as the vine, the Father as the winegrower and us as the branches.

Several years ago, I planted 16 seedlings of vine in my garden. After some time, I realized that it is necessary to cut off the fruitless branches, so the plant would have strength to grow properly. And the fruitful branches have to be cleaned. I removed excess sprouts to make space for the grapes. It may help us to understand the following challenge.

Jesus calls us to "stay in him." It seems simple. If we hold on to his love, we will stay with him in a personal relationship; he will be in us. Jesus says: stay in my love, stick to my love!

But it is not so simple. It happens despite our doubts and failures. We may have been unable to fulfill his words, yet he says: "Hold on to my love. The time will come, when you realize you are still included in it. My love will give you strength to live — and bear much fruit."

During the grape harvest last year, I was surprised how many beings have gained from the fruits of the vine. I found some newborn snails stucked to grapes.

And I realized: Similarly, God may sustain many people in Christ, thanks to the fruit that our lives bear.

- Boris Fazekas (1989), Serbia

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, that your love is greater than our feelings and perception of ourselves. Thank you for the fact that you are with us and we may be rooted in you. Help us to hold on to you strongly, like your branches. Amen.

Jesus is...

the one who sees me.

*“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother: ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple: ‘Here is your mother.’”
And from that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”*

JOHN 19:26-27

Jesus sees me! Does this cause me to be afraid or is it comforting? In the Bible, there are many examples where God/Jesus sees people. Gott saw Hagar in the desert of her hopelessness (1 Mose 21:14-20). God saw and let a wonder happen. Elia overworked himself so much to fulfill God’s plan that he was suddenly unable to continue and then crawled into a cave far away from everybody (1 Kings 19). God encountered him personally.

Jesus saw the sorrow of the rich man (Mark 10:17-27). Jesus had compassion with the people who go sadly away from him. He saw the tax collector Zacchaeus and wanted to meet up with him eye to eye (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus saw his mother and looked that she was cared for. Jesus sees me! Does that makes me afraid or is it comforting?

When I was a child, this thought often made me uneasy. Jesus sees, when I “steal” a piece of chocolate. He knows what I want to hide, he knows my thoughts, my feelings. Today I am glad that Jesus sees me.

He sees me when I am sad. He sees me when I have taken on too many projects — or when too much responsibility was placed on my shoulders. He sees that I am not always able to trust in him completely, to give him all. Jesus sees me in my distress being a mother, who has to see the suffering of her child and not be able to do anything about it. He sees me and takes care of my needs with a soothing hand. I am his well-loved child.

- Martha Wicki (1947), Switzerland

Prayer:

Jesus, you keep your promises. You have promised us that you would be with us until the end of all times. I will hold firm to your promise. Amen.

Jesus is...

just a prayer away.

*"For everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds.
And to everyone who knocks, the door is opened."*

MATTHEW 7:8

Our world, in all its beauty and terror, can often feel overwhelming and full of contraries. Especially in our age of new technologies and social media, it appears as if everyone is constantly available. Never before has it been easier to get in touch with others, regardless of where they live. All over the world, people are glued to their phones and laptops, sending messages and emails, sharing pictures with everyone and showing each other how content they are in life. However, people undoubtedly still feel a sense of loneliness and isolation. Although it seems easy to stay in touch with each other, we may, in fact, be growing more and more apart from each other.

Despite the quantity of people we can reach out to, the number of people we can confide in seems to be stagnant, if not even decreasing. It is during times like these that we can remember the close relationship we have to Jesus. The Son of God has over and over told us that he is always there for us, in times of worry and trouble as well as in times of thankfulness, grace, and joy. A well-known hymn reminds us:

*What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer*

Getting in touch with Christ does not require Wi-Fi, an account on a website, or a phone. It does not cost money, and we can come before him without shame or feeling as if we were bothering him.

Jesus is there for us, listening to us and blessing us all the time when we want to come closer to him. Jesus is just a prayer away.

- Sarah Brustmann (1993) / Sarah Kudaya (1993), Austria

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, for being close to us wherever we may be and however we may feel. And even if we lost sight of you, you remain just a prayer away. Amen.

Jesus is...

my assurance.

"Even the hairs of your head are all counted."

MATTHEW 10:30

From the beginning of our human life, we need to feel secured and to have an assurance. We need this for developing our mental and spiritual health. In our childhood, our family and home give us stability and assurance. As we are growing and developing, we seek for more.

Our world offers and promises a bright future thanks to many insurances, safety systems and security measures. Most people believe in this offer, because this is something visible and touchable... They rely with hope on bank systems or medical experts, trusting that they would help them in times of crisis. But many forget that even with the best will in the world, any human being is limited. There are moments in our lives when everything collapses. Hope is sinking, plans are in ruins and there is a failure on every step. There is nothing but hopelessness on the horizon. This is a test for our assurance and hope. What is it that holds us in such times?

It is the invisible hand of the Almighty God, who is acting and caring visually. I am in his hands, and no matter what will happen, he will work all things together for good.

We should question ourselves: What are we building our life foundation on? Even in our hypermodern civilization, we feel instability from all sides. And although we can forecast the weather for the next day very precisely, we don't know what tomorrow will bring... But assurance in this unpredictable and shaking world is possible through the faith in our heavenly Father.

As believers and children of God we may keep in mind that our Lord even knows the details of our life conditions. Keeping in mind that he even counts our hair, we do not need to be fearful and worried when thinking of tomorrow.

- Mária Ďurovka Petraš (1983), Serbia

Prayer:

Almighty God, when we see our shaking world and the unpredictable future, we ask you to grant us your peace and the assurance that you are taking care of us every day. Thank you that you surround us with your love. Amen.

Jesus is... the liberator.

"Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

MATTHEW 11:3

The disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus with a question that one could answer with either yes or no. Jesus requested personal insight. Personal experience is in this case more important than a great theological discussion. Jesus demanded that they change from having a passive observer status to having a dynamic attitude. Seeing and listening should enable them to share with others what they have seen and heard. Jesus did not force a dogmatic answer upon them. He told them about the first fruits of the kingdom of God: the blind see, the paralyzed walk, the lepers are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are resurrected... in short: announcement and reality of deliverance, liberation, being free.

John and his disciples were expecting the promised Messiah, who would perhaps free them from the Roman yoke. Jesus showed them instead where becoming free begins: from a person within. The human being must free himself from his blindness, from his deafness, from his impurity, from everything that is connected with death. And Jesus frees us for a real life that God gives us through his love.

What are we expecting: a savior, who frees the world from all injustice? Or are we ready to be co-workers of God, who would like to have us on his side after having made us free through Christ? Our participation in building the kingdom of God lets us be a part of God's project, a project out of a renewed life that begins in the human heart.

- Etienne Rudolph (1966), France

Prayer:

Lord, set us free from everything that hinders us to do what you have called us to do. Amen.

Jesus is...

the one who came to call the sinners and not the righteous.

"When Jesus heard it, he said to them: 'Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners.'"

MARK 2:17

As a pastor, I have the opportunity to meet with many people. Most of these people are from the church. There are also some who are expecting something from the church: seekers, those that need help, and people who have failed.

In regards to Levi the tax collector, Jesus says he did not come to call the righteous, but the sinners. Levi is not seeking anything, he's not needy and he's not unsuccessful. Levi is very skilled at letting the injustice serve himself. Ruthlessly, he exploits the power structures of his time for his own benefit. Scripture doesn't specifically say that he gains his success this way. It only says that he is associated with other tax collectors who exploited the system. Being part of this group came at a high price. He risked being ostracised from all others.

Even today, there are those who thrive at other people's expense. Very seldom do they have to pay the consequences of their doing. Even bigger is the (malicious) joy of when one of them gets taken down by the judicial system. My satisfied thought: They deserved it.

But Jesus sees Levi, who sits at the tax collector's office. He asks him to follow him. What was Levi's enticement to give up his position and follow Jesus? What kind of yearning and longing must have driven Levi? And why would I be more excited about Levi being condemned than being called?

- Stefan Schröckenfuchs (1978), Austria

Prayer:

Merciful God, teach me not to be guided by my prejudices but by your love. Open my eyes, to see the people, not the facade. Amen.

Jesus is...

God's authority and power.

"We heard him saying, 'I will destroy this temple, constructed by humans, and within three days I will build another, one not made by humans.'"

MARK 14:58

Surely we remember the many people who had over us certain authority and power, but memories of them are not pleasant. Commands, prohibitions, humiliation, never praise, always rigor and austerity... In the presence of people with such authority and power, we did not feel well. Their presence strangled, killed our joy to live.

On the other hand, we treasure the memories of people who had over us authority and power without even trying to get those. Maybe it was our parents, friends or other close people. Maybe it was a teacher, an artist, a preacher or, quite simply, a human who you observed. Their lives motivated us to the good.

The difference between two such groups of people with different kinds of authority and power is well demonstrated by the meetings of the Scribes with Jesus. The Scribes were educated, high-ranking people who enjoyed respect and authority in society. Jesus had another type of authority and power. He spoke with power.

The witnesses heard Jesus prophesy that the material temple would be superseded by a spiritual temple. Later they understood: that has become true in the community of believers in Jesus, in the Church. There, people meet Jesus as God's authority and power. By putting their trust in him, they share his authority and power that makes them support and motivate others to good and merciful decisions, working toward a better world that is not made with hands only.

- Pavel Procházka (1951), Slovakia

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, your words promised us power and authority over Satan. We confess that very few of us live out the authority that we have in you. Teach us to stand in this authority that gives power to motivate others toward true hope in God. Amen.

Jesus is...

calling me to take action.

"If you love those who love you, why should you be commended? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, why should you be commended? Even sinners do that."

LUKE 6:32-33

We often hear people say how grateful they are to the Lord for their jobs, for the family and friends they have, for the stuff they own, for their food, etc. That's something that is really nice to hear. Knowing that there are people in your environment who appreciate and are thankful for what they have in their lives is a great thing.

As a Christian, I give thanks to God for many things I have and things I don't have, but should the act of gratitude remain only with spoken words, or is there something more to it?

We all know that Jesus called people to take action instead of passively following rules and saying prayers. It is more than clear that we can't do anything to pay back for God's love, for all the blessings and for all the things we already mentioned, like job, family, friends, etc. But are there actions that we can take in addition to our gratitude?

Can't we show our thanksgiving through simple acts that require a little bit more effort and time than the usual "thanks"? Think about Jesus' words in Luke 6 and think about all of today's possibilities.

We can show our God that we are thankful by showing daily acts of Christianity in our everyday life.

- Daniela Stoilkova (1988), Macedonia

Prayer:

God, because you do so much good to me, I'm inspired to follow your example and do good to others, too.

Be my guidance through the day and let all my actions reflect your unconditional love. Amen.

Jesus is... a traveling companion.

"While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey."

LUKE 24:15

He was born in a stall, but his life began with a journey, and the way became more important than the lodging. The early Christian stories about his birth already used the term "followers of the way" for the disciples. Stories of journeys are frequent in the book of Psalms — one telling of walking through the darkest valley, another stating that "with my God, I can scale any wall." From time to time, I compose my own psalms for walking out of the book of Psalms. They conclude with the petition, "Lead me in the way everlasting" or "Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow."

Jesus told those who confused being on a journey with abandoning their lives that "foxes have dens to live in, ... but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head." He traveled through death to life, and met the disciples on the road of Emmaus where, in his presence, they could discuss all the events that had transpired. Even more, he offered the blessed bread to his hosts. The disciples' defeated blindness became the experience of hearts that burned. With this awakening, they returned to Jerusalem, speaking of that which filled their hearts.

Faith in Jesus Christ cannot be captured in sentences. It becomes real through discipleship. Christ says of himself, "I am the way" and lays himself under our feet to be our path.

Instead of a prayer, I offer a text from Dom Helder Camara that has accompanied me since my youth.

To start on a mission is, above all, to emerge, to break through the crust of egoism that seeks to imprison us in our own self. We must stop revolving around ourselves, as if we were the center of the world and of life. Mission means to not let the the problems of the small world to which we belong block us. As important as these problems may be, humanity is greater and we must serve humanity. Mission means always to leave, but not necessarily to travel endless miles, cross oceans, or travel faster than sound. It means, above all, to open ourselves to others, to recognize them for themselves, and to encounter them as brothers and sisters.

May Jesus be our companion and, for each new undertaking, grant us kindness and strength.

- Christoph Petau (1959), Austria

Jesus is... a stranger.

"They were prevented from recognizing him."

LUKE 24:16

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, two of his disciples were on their journey to a village named Emmaus. A stranger joined them. Only at the end of the story, in the blessing, breaking and giving of the bread, the disciples' eyes were opened and they began recognizing that the stranger was Jesus himself.

Other disciples were fishing in the Sea of Tiberius the whole night but caught no fish. In the morning, a stranger stood on the shore and told them to throw their net on the right side of the boat. When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. They recognized that the stranger was Jesus. (John 21:1-14)

We find similar encounters with strangers in the Old Testament, as well:

- Abraham met three strangers, ate with them and discovered that they were God's angels." (Genesis 18:1-2)
- Jacob wrestled with a stranger at the river Jabbok and discovered that he wrestled with God." (Genesis 32:22-32)

Again at the Mount of Olives, Jesus said to his disciples: "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me to come in." (Matthew 25:35)

It is easy to honor God, when he appears as God — and when he does it in the community of like-minded people. What is difficult is to honor him, when we encounter him as a stranger, the "other," the one who is different. To live a life of faith is to see the trace of God in the face of the stranger; to learn to see Christ in the people, who are very different from us, even in our enemies.

If we are willing to meet Christ in the stranger, maybe somewhere down the road we will discover that he is also our brother and that serving God and offering hospitality to strangers are not two things but one and the same.

- Mihail Stefanov (1979), Bulgaria

Prayer:

Jesus, help us to look into the faces of the strangers – and to recognize you. Amen.

Jesus is... the Wisdom of God.

"But we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those who are called — both Jews and Greeks — Christ is God's power and God's wisdom."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:23-24

Why was Christ crucified a scandal or a stumbling-block? What did people expect about the world Savior?

The Jews, the people of God, demand signs, says apostle Paul. They knew that God had chosen them and had given them everything they needed — Torah. For them, Torah was the ultimate instruction for living according to God's will — wisely. They needed the clear signs of God's will and they had received many signs that there is only one God.

For Greeks, wisdom was not a "to do" list but something desirable and achievable, something reasonable. They could not take a crucified Son of God as something wise. However, the apostle says, "In God's wisdom, he determined that the world wouldn't come to know him through its wisdom. Instead, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching." (1 Corinthians 1:21)

Wisdom and foolishness in the Bible do not refer to our intellectual resources. Wisdom is living according to God's will. That is why it is called "a tree of life" (Proverbs 3:18). Foolishness is going on the opposite path that leads to death. Jesus came to the earth to live and die in order to give us eternal life. It happened something that neither Jews nor Greeks expected: God made foolish the wisdom of the world to save those who believe.

- Nina Topalska (1981), Bulgaria

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for your gift of eternal life:
Jesus – the Wisdom of God. Amen.

Jesus is... my foundation.

"No one can lay any other foundation besides the one that is already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

1 CORINTHIANS 3:11

A house in our neighborhood was torn down a few months ago. It took less than a couple of hours to remove the house completely, but the workers struggled hard for days or even weeks to remove the foundation. When I observed this, I began to ask myself: "What is the foundation of my life, my marriage, my family, my job, etc.?"

In his first letter to the congregation in Corinth, Paul gives an answer to the question about foundations. In his eyes, it is Jesus Christ. But then he warns those who want to build on this foundation: "So, whether someone builds on top of the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, or hay, each one's work will be clearly shown. The day will make it clear, because it will be revealed with fire — the fire will test the quality of each one's work." (1 Corinthians 3: 12-13)

Paul makes it clear that the foundation in Corinth is not the problem, but rather the materials that have been used to build on the foundation — and the way that the materials have been used. For him it is clear — teachings that are not built on the foundation of Christ cannot be called "Christian."

Neighboring houses may be constructed differently. Similarly, the diversity among our congregations and our theologies is without doubt an enormous wealth — but only if they are built on the foundation that was laid in Christ. It is he who is the basis for the unity of the entire structure that is called the church.

In today's times, because of all that is happening around them, people need support, security, stability, and a sure point of reference. And, yes, even I need a solid foundation myself.

- Freddy Nzambe (1969) Tunisia

Prayer:

Lord, a house cannot be stable and strong without a good foundation. Help me to recognize how much I need the connection to you. Christ, you are the only one who can offer real support — to me, to my family, to my community, to all people. Amen.

Jesus is... our victory.

"Thanks be to God, who gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

1 CORINTHIANS 15:57

Today's world is filled with winners in various categories, from successful athletes to masters of painting, dancers, poets, writers, singers, musicians and others. Each of these people is, indeed, worthy of admiration and applause for the work that they do.

A Jewish man who was called Jesus once came into this world. It was the Christ — the Messiah. Long ago, holy prophets had predicted that he would come. He was born of a woman, a virgin, preached God's will and taught the people great truths. He offered eternal life in the kingdom of heaven to every person regardless of social status, of sinful past or present. He, however, took on the form of a servant, facing enmity of religious elite and later execution. He paid the price on the Calvary wood so that we might live. That is the incomprehensible way of our victory. On our part only acceptance: giving him place in our heart, allowing him to become our personal Lord and Savior, giving him way so that his Spirit gives new life and sanctifies.

John Wesley once said, "Indeed, believing is the act of man, but it is the gift of God. For no one ever did believe unless God gave him the power."

I thank God for the gift of faith as well as for the opportunity to learn about his love every day of my earthly pilgrimage to the eternal joy and glory. Let us rejoice over our heavenly Father's love that is infinite and boundless. He is the best winner because he won us so that we may win in our daily struggles. Soli Deo Gloria!

- Ivan Lukac (1990), Slovakia

Prayer:

Holy God, we sincerely thank you for the work of salvation carried out in your Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. As we look at your cross, may we always remember that it is our victory, our joy and hope. Amen.

Jesus is... my strength.

"He said to me: 'My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness.' So I'll gladly spend my time bragging about my weaknesses so that Christ's power can rest on me. Therefore, I'm all right with weaknesses, insults, disasters, harassments, and stressful situations for the sake of Christ, because when I'm weak, then I'm strong."

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

Since I got to know God, my life changed a lot. The whole perceptions I had needed to change. I learned what is good and what is bad, I learned about sin and forgiveness.

The first time I went to a church, I was invited by a friend. There, I heard for the first time about a man named Jesus who was doing great things. My curiosity pushed me to go every Saturday to the children's meeting and to ask for the kids books. They had great stories and I was imagining every part of them.

I learned from him how to respect people, how to love and to be a believer. He gave me courage to accept that I'm a Christian. I believe in God and I believe that Jesus is his beloved son who gave his life for us. Every day, I'm growing in Christ and he is the strength that encourages me every day. And even when I often feel weak from my life, I find peace in him. I thank him because he gives me grace.

- Aurel Isufi (1993), Albania

Prayer:

Dear God, I'm thankful for my life in you. Thank you that you care for me every day – and thank you for changing me and for accepting me as a part of your kingdom. I will always follow you, my Lord, and I will ask for your presence everywhere I am. Blessed be your name. Amen.

Jesus is...

the one who set us free for freedom.

“Christ has set us free for freedom. Therefore stand firm and don’t submit to the bondage of slavery again.”

GALATIANS 5:1

Paul reminds the Galatians of their freedom and life in Christ. But freedom is an endangered thing. For this reason Paul repeats the message: “for freedom” Christ has set us free.

With my mother, I grew up and felt at home in the Methodist Church. At the same time, I learned critical thinking through my father who was far from church. I watched the world closely. As a teenager, I realized that faith can be a liberating force, but that it is only a life prospect for me if it has liberating effects on my personal and social life. I have entered the venture of faith. I am grateful to Christ for having seized me and opened up to me a liberating horizon of faith.

Back then, as now, I appreciate critical thinking and watch the world. Unfortunately, there are so many Christians whose faith is more characterized by precepts, the forbidden and fears, than of joy, confidence and hope. To all of us, Paul reminds us that Christ has freed us to freedom.

The devotion to Christ has enabled Paul to love God and the people of this world in a new way, and to emit joy and hope even in difficult situations of faith in Christ. Liberation in Christ remains liberating when we implement the duality of love for God and fellow human beings. This is why Paul writes in the same context: “Being circumcised or not being circumcised doesn’t matter in Christ Jesus, but faith working through love does matter.” (Galatians 5:6)

This was a favorite verse of John Wesley. His life, too, has been freed from Christ to a new freedom, with liberating effects in society. Founded in Christ, I too would like to extend this liberating message.

- Bishop Patrick Streiff (1955)

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Prayer:

Jesus Christ, we praise you and your liberating power; Let us be firmly established in you, and renew in us the love of God and our fellow-men. Amen.

Jesus is...

more than a name.

"Therefore, God highly honored him and gave him a name above all names, so that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow."

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-10

In the letter to the Philippians, the name of Jesus is not only praised to the highest regards, but raised to the heavens. God gave him the name that is above every name. And all who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth shall fall on their knees at the name of Jesus.

This statement is astonishing. Jesus is perhaps the only man who did not strive for higher things on this earth. He didn't leave behind anything written in his life. His words and deeds that are recorded in the New Testament, are based on oral testimonies. These testimonies, among others, indicate that he wrote something, but only with his finger in the sand. What he wrote, no one could read and they understood it even less. However, he shamed some of the scribes when they demanded that he would condemn an adulteress (John 8:6ff).

The Gospels report, that after his resurrection, Jesus sat with his friends at the table again. This gave them hope because...

Jesus was entitled to "speak once more of the happiness of hope."
It was possible for him to "talk once more about the warmth of life."
He spoke once more in the language of love, "so that perhaps some might say it happened once, it must happen again." (Erich Fried)

- Ueli Frei (1965), Switzerland

Prayer:

Jesus Christ, your name is to be praised, because you speak the language of love. Amen.

Jesus is...

my provider.

"Don't be anxious about anything; rather bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you."

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-9

Our everyday lives are full of things that worry us, like natural disasters, poverty, evil, injustice, moral decay, etc. Very often we say: "Why God? How can you allow this?" or "Why me?" Worrying makes a Christian doubt God's care for us. If you worry, even for the smallest things, you show that your faith is small.

Jesus himself says: "Therefore, don't worry and say, 'What are we going to eat?' or 'What are we going to drink?' or 'What are we going to wear?'" Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:31-33)

It is irrational for Christians, who believe that they are saved and released from Satan's chains and have the gift of eternal life in the Kingdom of God, to worry about how they are going to spend the next few weeks or months.

Worries destroy us. With worrying you say: "God, I don't know if I can trust you." Worrying everyday leads us toward sin. If we are worried, discouraged, disappointed, let us come to God and with thankfulness receive the peace that comes from him. To confide in him and to focus to his word and have a faithful approach that he will take care of everything.

- Dimitar Janevski (1985), Macedonia

Prayer:

God, please help us cast all our worries on you. Let us have strong faith and let Your peace and joy fulfill us. I ask that in the name of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus is... my integrity.

"Because all things were created by him: both in the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible. Whether they are thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him."

COLOSSIANS 1:16

My husband works in a bank. Recently, he took part in a training course where the group focused on the practices of exceedingly successful people. I also read the course book with interest. It contained "old-new" terms like "proactive," "goal oriented," "priority setting," "win-win situations," "synergy," and "independence." Old content, old values in new, modern packaging.

This applies as well to the concept of "integrity." In the dictionary, this word is defined with concepts like soundness, intact, complete — a condition that I long for from my deepest soul. Jesus is my integrity. He gives me dignity, and gives me a seal that verifies me as relevant and credible — as something real. I may be articulate — through him I can say something meaningful. I may be active and busy — through him I can accomplish things, be creative, shape things. I may strive for something — with him I can reach goals, gain something valuable.

Without him we are just rowing — with him we catch fish. Without him we trudge along our path — with him our hearts are warmed and rejoice. Without him we are unwanted blotches of ink — with him we become a framed watercolor. Without him we are a mob — with him a goal-oriented community. Without him we are the depleted crust of the earth — with him we are good, fertile soil.

It is he who activates us all, as if with an entirely personal PIN-Code, and sets in motion our individual dedicated characteristics, talents, and skills, and empowers us to work on his Kingdom. "The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters." (Romans 9:19) Let us remain true to our calling!

- Grethe Jenei (1969), Hungary

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are of good will towards us, even until today. We praise and glorify you for Christ, whose sacrifice opened access to you, and we are thankful for the Holy Spirit, who develops in us all that is worthy. Amen.

Jesus is...

unique and eternal.

"He existed before all things, and all things are held together in him."

COLOSSIANS 1:17

I could not write about God. Since he found me and I found him, my life changed completely. He is the center of my life, everything has started with him and all will end with him. I have neither words nor talent to talk about him as I want. It is like everything I say is too little and would not fully describe the depth of my feelings or thoughts. He is wonderful, magnificent, and of perfect beauty. He is humble, powerful, the perfect friend, the best older brother, the perfect love. The one who has him, has everything! In him there are life, strength, joy, and peace. In him lies the whole fullness of God! He is the redeemer, the Savior, the healer, the deliverer, the beginning and the end, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the good shepherd, the bread and the water of life. He is perfect, complete, flawless, matchless, unique and eternal!

You might believe that Jesus' brief description is formal and made up of words copied from the Bible, but for me every written word that describes him is personal. Each word has an incomparable weight and impact on my life. I have a relationship with him and I say it not to brag about it, but with joy and gratitude. When I write or talk about him I am moved every time, look for my words carefully and my heart fills with happiness and fulfillment. His image in my mind and my heart is so complex and so beautiful, so intimate and personal, so precious, as if I was afraid to talk about it, not to "spoil" something — this is because I know that I don't have a special gift to use words and I am not good at writing. I think that I am a common woman who has a treasure, a treasure considered uncommon by some. He is my treasure!

- Alina Goia (1978), Romania

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, please open my eyes and help me to see you, every day, exactly the way you are, the way I need to see you every single day. Amen.

Jesus is... my highest good.

*"I said to the Lord: 'You are my Lord.
Without you, I don't have anything that is good.'"*

PSALM 16:2

What would a person be willing to pay in order to know his life accompanied? Not by someone who is visible to our human eyes, but by the presence of him who is given all powers in heaven and on earth; by the one who received the authority, by the one who has promised to accompany us throughout our entire lives. Accompanied by the ruler of all rule and powers.

Can it be that we are ultimately blinder than we can imagine — because while our human eyes have opened at the moment of our birth, they cannot see God's reality?

David says: "The Lord looks down from heaven on all people. He wants to see if there are any who understand. He wants to see if there are any who trust in God." (Psalm 14:2)

David proclaims the sovereignty of his Lord without whom his life would no longer have any meaning. His entire joy and hope rests upon him. My Lord! David recognizes God's greatness and power and submits to it. He celebrates the majesty and the authority of the almighty God. David also regards God as his greatest wealth, his most valuable heritage, object of all his desires, and all his longing. In God's presence, everything becomes worthless.

Paul could proclaim: "But even beyond that, I consider everything a loss in comparison with the superior value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have lost everything for him, but what I lost I think of as sewer trash, so that I might gain Christ and be found in him." (Philippians 3:8)

If somebody expresses himself the way Paul and David do, he has attained a genuine and deep perception of God, and at the same time an intimate relationship with him. May this also apply to you.

- Abdhour Aït Abdelmalek (1955), Algeria

Prayer:

Oh Jesus, may your sovereignty and majesty always be the subject of our prayer and worship. Amen.

Jesus is... my Savior.

"We work and struggle for this: 'Our hope is set on the living God, who is the savior of all people, especially those who believe.'"

1 TIMOTHY 4:10

Last year, I was able to celebrate my 50th birthday. The fact that I could live to see this special day made me very happy — and, of course, my friends who came to help me celebrate made this day a joyful memory.

During my life, I was able to hear about Jesus Christ first in Sunday school, then also during various youth meetings where we sang together and praised and thanked God. With my faith, I was able to realize that Jesus went a difficult way, to save even me from my sins. This was very theoretical and general, but also very clear. Later in life, I experienced more situations where Jesus really was a "Savior" and redeemer from earthly death. This influenced my faith and helped it to grow deeper. The roots of faith became deeper. I was able to hear God's voice and was able to speak with him until I was ready to quietly say: "God, your will be done."

God recognized again my weakness and he helped me — especially that he gave me the necessary strength, that he strengthened my trust and cleared away the obstacles in the way.

We may pray for each other, also praying for someone else, but a personal faith that God is one's savior is something that each person must receive for herself. I pray for this, I work for this and try to go as an example and witness.

- Marija Virag (1966), Serbia

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you that you have made a vessel out of the broken pieces of my life. Give me wisdom that I may bring honor to you for this. Thank you for the fullness of my life, thank you for the strength, and thank you for the satisfaction that makes my heart cheerful and thankful. Amen.

Jesus is...

on the shore..

*“Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore,
but the disciples didn’t realize it was Jesus.”*

JOHN 21:4

After the disappointment of the cross came the discouragement of daily life. The disciples had spent an unsuccessful night fishing. But now Jesus was present, there, directly before them. He would fill their day, their life.

What can “shore” mean in the life of the people who are around us? Perhaps it is the shore of their usual activities, their discouragement. If Jesus could call from the shore to the disappointed disciples, isn’t the church also called to go to the shore — there, where disappointed, disoriented, discouraged people are?

The church’s place is at the end of the night, on the shore. There it should give signs of hope to those who have no hope left.

The resurrected Christ went to the disoriented disciples and gave them signs of his love, so that new hope could spring up in their hearts.

The church needs signs of God’s love, for itself, but also to serve humanity. It needs signs of God’s love in order to be present in all the nights of this world. In nights of abandonment, of indifference, of suffering. It should be a witness to the hope in Christ, with appropriate words, deeds, signs of patience, persistence, solidarity, kindness, forgiveness, and peace — simply with signs of God’s love.

- Etienne Rudolph (1966), France

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that you brighten our nights with your hope. Help to dare to take steps to give your Love to people on the shore of their disappointment. Amen.

Jesus is...

the exact imprint of God's very being.

"The Son is the light of God's glory and the imprint of God's being. He maintains everything with his powerful message. After he carried out the cleansing of people from their sins, he sat down at the right hand of the highest majesty."

HEBREWS 1:3

The author of Hebrews starts his epistle with a very strong statement: Jesus is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being. God, who is spirit and dwells in unapproachable light, reveals himself in Jesus Christ. Through him the invisible God becomes visible. The dream of seeing God is not a dream anymore. Apostle John gives us a witness out of his and other apostles' personal experience — they have heard the word of life with their own ears, and they have even seen it with their own eyes and even they have touched it with their own hands.

What a wonderful and unbelievable revelation! God has made an unpredictable and scandalous challenge to all theological and philosophical ideas about the divine being and clearly has demonstrated that he could not be domesticated in the framework of human concepts and well-ordered rational systems. This challenge was made once and forever. What is our response to it today? Is it different to the reactions of Jews and Greeks in the first century? Do we really believe that Jesus Christ is the exact, perfect imprint of God's very being? If we believe so, what are the consequences of that belief?

We do not need to wonder what kind of God we have. Our God is God of the sacrificial love. He loves his own people to the end — to the last breath of his only begotten Son. This love wins and even death has no power to overcome it. We have a God who is for us and with us, a passionate God who is willing to make us partakers of the divine life by grace. Let us share that passion, which will transform not only our lives but also the lives of many others.

- Daniel Topalski (1974), Bulgaria

Prayer:

Dear Lord, give us strength to be like you in our daily lives. Amen.

Jesus is... love.

"We have known and have believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them."

1 JOHN 4:16

The Bible says: love one another, for love is from God. I was thinking about love as a word definition or an abstract concept, but it was not what made me feel peaceful. To love one another is something you can touch and see every single day. To comfort your insecure child's fears, to cook your family's favorite meal, to change your vision from self-orientation to a focus on the needs of other people around you — that is the love God is looking for and speaking about.

As a pregnant woman, I realized that I don't have to wait till the baby is in my arms to start loving her. I experienced day by day in all these small movements what love is — even though it was not yet something that I could see. This experience made me think about what love is — and how important it is to love in simplicity, as a reflection of what Jesus was and what he did.

It is of course utopic to speak about loving everyone, everywhere, always. It is also (from my point of view) a bit exaggerated to speak about unconditional love for all humankind. What matters is to be the person you are, to look your neighbor in the eye, to speak words and to take action that do not damage the other but comfort, encourage, inspire him or her, to serve when you are able to, making use of the means available to you.

- Xhuli Kasmollari (1984), Albania

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for loving us as we are. Thank you for all the differences and multiplicity of all the people around us. My prayer goes for all those hearts that are missing love. Please fill our life with the joy of your love. Amen.

Jesus is... the Lamb of God.

*"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said:
'Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"*

JOHN 1:29

I often feel sad when I hear and read about all the suffering in the world. Its cause is most often evil present in the people — violence and dishonesty, desire for power and selfishness, but also laziness and indifference. The thing is — we cannot blame only the other people, or the devil. My own reluctance to help might be as damaging as other person's active wrongdoing.

Everything is connected. "No man is an island..." we see it in our modern times even more clearly than before. Therefore, everyone is to blame. And hope to correct the ailing world only by human goodwill and hard work has proved to be false. Our collective sin is sinking the world into the darkness.

But here comes the Lamb of God, the one who takes away the sin of the world. He takes away the cosmic consequences of our sinning. His is the sovereignty and power to give life and happiness to those who have none in this world. He brings in the beginning of the renewed world — not only in Church, but also in the Judgment Day and the creation of the new earth and new heaven. And he did it by sacrificing himself.

What is sacrifice to us? Do we not shudder when thinking about the bloody sacrifices of lambs and bulls in the ancient Israel's Temple? And yet it all was there to teach the people that there are bloody consequences to every sin. It all comes to Jesus' sacrifice, the mystery of the cross. Let us embrace that mystery today, try to touch it with our hearts.

- Jana Danečková (1977), Czech Republic

Prayer:

Dear Lord, please help us be grateful for your sacrifice and know more and more about your astounding love. Amen.

Jesus is...

the offering for sin.

"But the servant was pierced because we had sinned. He was crushed because we had done what was evil. He was punished to make us whole again. His wounds have healed us."

ISAIAH 53:5

Usually, all the feasts are imbued with many traditions. It seems that people love traditions. Countries have traditions, religions have traditions, and families have traditions. One of the traditions in Romania for Easter is painting eggs. Since I was a child, I loved this tradition. Every time Easter was approaching, my family gathered eggs and red onion leaves and painted them in a special manner with flowers and other small leaves. It was something that made the Easter more beautiful, especially for children.

Though there are many people who argue that the egg is a pagan symbol, it is used both in Judaism, and in Christianity. In Judaism, it is eaten for Passover and it symbolizes the destruction of the Temple (in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians and in 70 A.D. by the Romans). The egg recalls every year the prosperous spiritual life of the Hebrew people, associated only with the Temple, where the presence of God was felt, and it gives them a hope that there is the possibility of changing one's status: from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive.

Also, as Christians, we have this concept of spiritual new birth. Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees, came to talk to Jesus about spiritual things, and Jesus answered: "I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it's not possible to see God's kingdom." (John 3:3) Jesus was challenging him to start a new life according to God's laws and with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was inviting him to death toward the old life of sin and to resurrection to a life lived with Jesus himself.

- Ligia Istrate (1986), Romania

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, thank you that on the cross you have taken my sins, my diseases, my physical and mental suffering and that you took upon you the judgment of God, which was destined to come upon each of us. I pray that you will help me this year to celebrate Easter in a proper manner by choosing to have you by my side and to renew my life. Please God bring everything that is dead in me to life and give me the life to the full. Amen.

Jesus is...

not among the dead!

"The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them:

'Why do you look for the living among the dead?'"

LUKE 24:5-6

Recently, I had to do a funeral ceremony for the burial of a woman from our church. I was surprised by the number of other people that came to visit the graves of their relatives. While a lot of people go there, the churches remain half empty. Why do people prefer going to the graveyard rather than going to church? Solomon said: "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting." (Ecclesiastes 7:2) If we had to choose between the graveyard and the church, where would we go?

That first Easter morning, the women went to Christ's grave, but they heard the words mentioned above. This is the main Easter, as well as, life question. Jesus is not dead; therefore he should not be looked for among the dead. He has risen. Christ's resurrection is the pillar of the evangelical message. Our faith is not based on stories and traditions, but on the powerful truth of Christ's bodily resurrection. If Christ didn't rise from the grave, our faith is in vain. Everything stands on this, or falls. With the resurrection, Jesus completed the mission of the salvation. We have to respond with faith on this undeniable fact. If my Savior is alive, my body will rise with immortality. As the righteous Job says in the Old Testament: "I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another." (Job 19:27)

- Lazo Tanchev (1959), Macedonia

Prayer:

Jesus Christ, 2,000 years ago you were crucified and you rose for all humankind. Everything will remain history if you don't rise today in my heart. I pray in hope and faith for your close coming. Amen.

“Christ is Lord”, the theme of the 2017 Central Conference of The United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe, is a central affirmation of Christian faith. Devotions prepared in all the countries of our Central Conference refer to this theme and accompany us up to the feast of Easter, which this year can be celebrated on the same day in view of the fact that the calendars of the Western and the Eastern churches converge. The meditations are an expression of an amazing diversity; “Christ is Lord”, however, unites us across all differences of language, culture and patterns of spirituality.

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