

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
4th Sunday of Lent
2021—B Cycle



"Light has come into the world."

John 3

Image courtesy of [Zuzana Ruttkay](#)
on [unsplash.com](#)

Gender usage in writing: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

God of enlightenment,
open my mind to receive the word of Scripture.
Let your wisdom enlighten my reflection.
Nicodemus felt safe coming to your Son, but only at night.
Let me shed my timidity and become a daylight Christian,
eager to share my faith with believers and non-believers alike.
I ask this in the name of Jesus,
to whom I owe my spiritual sight.
Amen.

Adapted from [Prayers for Illumination](#), [Caldwell Presbyterian Church](#), Charlotte, NC.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23 “Early and often did the Lord . . . send messengers to (the Jewish people).”

Psalm 137: 1-6 “By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept. . . .”

Ephesians 2: 4-10 “By grace you have been saved through faith.”

John 3: 14-21 “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes might not perish.”

A Reading from the Second Book Chronicles (36: 14-16, 19-23)

"All the heads of the priesthood, and the people, too, were exceedingly unfaithful, following the disgusting example of the nations around them, and so they defiled the house which Yahweh himself had made holy.

"Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, continued to send prophets to warn his people since he had compassion on them and on his dwelling place. But they *mocked* the messengers of God, *ignored* his words, and *laughed* at his prophets, until at last the anger of Yahweh rose so high against his people that there was no further remedy.

"[The Babylonian army] burned down the house of God, broke down the walls of Jerusalem, set fire to all its palaces and destroyed everything of value in it. The survivors were deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon, where they served him and his descendants as slaves until the kingdom of Persia came to power.



King Cyrus the Great (d. 530 BC), image from Mohawk Games

"This is how the work of Yahweh was fulfilled that he spoke through Jeremiah, 'The land will lie desolate for seventy years, to make up for its Sabbath rests that have not been observed.'

"And in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, to fulfill what Yahweh had said through the prophet Jeremiah, he stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to issue the following command and send it out in writing to be read aloud everywhere in his kingdom: 'Thus speaks Cyrus king of Persia: Yahweh, the God of heaven, who has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, has ordered me to build him a house in Jerusalem, in Judah. Now, all of you who belong to his people, go there; and may Yahweh your God be with you.'"

Listen to the choral [lament of the Hebrew slaves](#) from [Giuseppe Verdi's](#) opera, [Nabucco](#).

English translation:

"Go, thoughts, on golden wings; go, settle upon the slopes and hills, where warm and soft and fragrant are the breezes of our sweet native land! Greet the banks of the Jordan, the towers of Zion. Oh my country, so beautiful and lost! Or so dear yet unhappy! Or harp of the prophetic seers, why do you hang silent from the willows? Rekindle the memories within our hearts, tell us about the times that have gone by. Or similar to the fate of Solomon, give a sound of lament; or let the Lord inspire a concert that may give strength to endure our suffering."

Personal Reflection

When Hebrew scholars organized the Sacred Books, they began with the five Mosaic books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Then came a history of Israel from the Book of Joshua to the Book of Kings. Authors of these later books shared the view of Deuteronomy and the prophets: God made a covenant with Israel, then gave Israel the land, provided that they would remain faithful to the covenant.

"(The Israelites) mocked the messengers of God, ignored his words, and laughed at his prophets."

— Since this young year began, in what person or event did I recognize God's "messenger" (or "angel")? What made me realize what was said or what happened came to me as a word or sign from God?

— What message did I receive from these internal promptings? How did I react?

Responsorial Psalm 137 (1-6)

Homesickness in exile



Babylonian captivity, found on
[Fr. Kevin Eastbrook website](#)

Let my tongue be silenced if I ever forget you.

By the streams of Babylon, we sat,
and then wept, as we remembered Zion.
When we hung our harps on the poplars,
our captors asked for song.

Let my tongue be silenced if I ever forget you.

Our tormentors wanted songs of joy:
"Sing to us one of the songs of Zion!"
How could we sing Yahweh's song
in a strange and alien land?

Let my tongue be silenced if I ever forget you.

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
may my right hand fall useless!
May my tongue cleave to my palate
if I remember you not,

if Jerusalem is not the first of my joys.

Let my tongue be silenced if I ever forget you.

Personal Reflection

Psalm 137 recalls the lowest period in the history of the God's chosen people: the Babylonian captivity. This psalm represents the most difficult of all spiritual truths, that evil will pursue and challenge us to the day we die. The video of the Hebrews slaves you watched (and prayed with in this psalm) dramatized how the slaves suffered the consequences of their cruel defeat under Nebuchadnezzar's army after a decade of war (605 and 586 BC/BCE). For the exiled Israelites, their passionate love for Jerusalem and Yahweh gave them hope of deliverance. The Book of Revelation echoes the psalm: freedom in Jerusalem vs. enslavement in Babylon.

Revelation offers a “New Jerusalem” in opposition to Babylon, the great city that symbolized evil incarnate. In praying Psalm 137, we unite in prayer with all who love God above everything.

— *Does being a believer in the gospel and its message ever cause me some form of mental/spiritual distress? How do/did I experience this “dark side” of faith?*

“By the streams of Babylon, we sat; and then wept, as we remembered Zion.”

— *When have I experienced a bout of homesickness? Recall the occasion(s). How did I deal with my feelings at that time? If there remain any lingering effects of that experience, what are they and how am I dealing with them today?*

From the First Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians (2: 4-10)



*Ruins of the
ancient library
in Ephesus*

“God, who is rich in mercy, revealed his immense love. As we were dead through our sins, he gave us life, with Christ. By grace, you have been saved! And he raised us to life, with Christ, giving us a place with him in heaven. In showing us such kindness, in Christ Jesus, God willed to reveal, and unfold in the coming ages, the extraordinary riches of his grace. By the grace of God, you have

been saved, through faith. This has not come from you: it is God’s gift. This was not the result of your works, so you are not to feel proud. We are God’s work. He has created us, in Christ Jesus, for the good works he has prepared, that we should devote ourselves to them.”

Personal Reflection

Paul’s letters to Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon make up what we call his “Captivity Letters.” Their writing dates from either 58–60 AD/CE in Caesarea or 60–62 in Rome. Ephesians does not contain any real news or a personal message to a specific community. Like his letter to the Romans, Ephesians offers a treatise on faith and salvation. Perhaps Paul intended it as a circular letter intended for distribution to the churches of the Ephesus region (modern-day Turkey).

The key message of this reading? Christ raised us to life with him and in him (2: 6). Paul sees authentic conversion as a form of resurrection, adding that *nothing* can deter God’s merciful plan. God sees beyond time and has already raised us with Christ. We are already seated with him in heaven, therefore our victory is assured.

In *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*, Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM, restates Paul’s thought in this way: “God does not love you because you are good but because God is good.”

— *What do I hear Fr. Rohr saying to me in the above passage?*

- *How have I experienced the connection between Rohr's thought and St. Paul saying, "This has not come from you: it is God's gift. This was not the result of your works, so you are not to feel proud. What we are, is God's work?"*
- *How do I feel, knowing that God has prepared my entire ministry (my life) in the Body of Christ in advance? What is that service for which God sent me into the world? How am I living it out in my daily life?*
- *What grade (A-F) would I give myself in measuring up to God's unique design for me and my call to a mission of service?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to John (3: 14-21)

Nicodemus held a high office Jewish Temple leadership.

[Jesus said to Nicodemus] “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life.



*Courtesy of NYC
Public Library via
unsplash.com*

“God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world; instead, through him the world is to be saved. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned. He who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

“This is how Judgment is made: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Whoever does wrong hates the light. He doesn't come to the light, for fear that his deeds will be seen as evil. But whoever lives according to the truth comes into the light, so that it can be clearly seen that his works have been done in God.”

Personal Reflection

John's Gospel unfolds in a different manner than the other three. Jesus' activity in Galilee occupied a major part of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John focuses on what Jesus did between his baptism by John the Baptist and his return to Galilee. After that, almost everything takes place in Jerusalem. Jesus revealed to Nicodemus—and us—that God loves “the world.” Not a concept most Jews grew up with (and sadly, some Christians).

Many Christians define the three-pronged axis of evil as: “the world, the flesh, and the devil.”

- *If I'm one of those lifelong Christians, what did I learn in my early years about “the world”? As I've matured, how have I readjusted my attitude toward all elements of creation? Or haven't I?*

— How would anyone outside the “bubble” of my family and closest friends know that I have deep faith and a commitment to following “the way” of Jesus Christ in my life?

The Week Ahead

Caryll Houselander wrote the following about Jesus in her book, [The Way of the Cross](#) (1955):

“More bitter than all his other suffering is the desolation of His soul, His own unutterable loneliness, the sense of being unsupported by any love, emptied out, forsaken even by God. . . . He seemed to be quite alone, quite defeated, dying a useless death at the end of a useless life, the tragic life of the poor, deluded dreamer who, because of His fondest delusion—that his love for the world could save it—had come to a still more tragic death, to die alone, an object only of scorn or pity, not even hated, since now he is powerless, beaten. We hate only what we fear.”

Journaling Prompts

Houselander says, “We hate only what we fear.”

— *How is my observance of Lent helping me to face my Covid-time fears and challenges, as Jesus faced his fears during his passion? How do I experience that fear in my daily thoughts and environment?*

— *Based on this Sunday’s readings, what does God ask me to do this week regarding (1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships . . . and (2) my life as Christ’s emissary, charged with bringing his values and grace to the people I interact with—from a safe distance, e.g., social media?*

— *Who, especially, needs to get a call, letter, email, or text message expressing my love and offering a moment of laughter and personal concern? Why do I hesitate to make that move?*

Take some time to write about your experience and feelings about events occurring in your life and in our country.

For Inspirational Viewing/Listening

Video:

[John 3:16 - The Story of Love](#) (18 min.) A touching and powerful video from [The Church Tools Media](#), with a new take on the gospel verse.

(Warning: have tissue handy.)

Music:

[Psalm 137](#) by [Sons of Korah](#)

Book:

[Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality](#), Fr. [Richard Rohr](#), OFM

[Note: I read this book and gave it my highest rating.—AJG]

Website:

"The Influence of Christ on [Mahatma Gandhi](#)"

Preview of Next Week's Scriptures

Fifth Sunday of Lent

First Book of Samuel 16: 1-7, 10-13 "Then Samuel anointed David in the presence of his brothers."

Psalm 23: 1-6 "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Ephesians 5: 8-14 "You were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord."

John 9: 1-41 "As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth."

Closing Prayer

(edited for use here)

by St. [Ignatius of Loyola](#)



*Ignatius of Loyola,
anonymous (16th c.)*

O Christ Jesus, when all is darkness
and I feel my weakness and helplessness,
give me the sense of Your presence,
your love, and your strength.

Help me to trust in your protecting love
and strengthening power,
so that nothing may unduly frighten or worry me,
for, living close to you, I shall see your hand,
your purpose, and your will in all things.
Amen.

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

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(follow this link to my spiritual novel, [Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words](#))