

# The Greatest Love Story Ever Told

# Reflections on the Easter Story

■ by Linda Ostlund, MS, LCPC

As we reflect on the Easter season, we think about how the Easter Story is the greatest love story ever told. It is a love given freely, yet given with tremendous cost—death by crucifixion. The Bible tells us God's love is different from all kinds of human love. Humanity turned against their Creator. Man chose to rebel—man therefore, deserves to die: "For the wages of sin," (i.e., rebellion), "is death." (Romans 6:23) God created a moral universe such that those who sin must in due course reap what they have sown. There is nothing man can do to earn favor with a holy God (Galatians 6:7).

## The Dilemma of Sin

As you read the Bible, you see that God dealt with the problem of man's sin: "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son," (i.e., Jesus Christ), "so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) It is only as you see the spotless Son of God crucified that you can see what love means. It is not a love given to the worthy or to those God favorably assumes to be worthy; it was lavished on sinners. When you see man for what he is, the wrath of God for what it is, and the cross for what it is, then and only then do you see love for what it is. God's love brings individuals to eternal life, but not without proper recognition of the deserving consequences of sin—"eternal damnation." Yet, God took the initiative and said: There is deliverance, and it comes by way of crucifixion—the cross.

## The Gift of Imagination

Take a moment and use your imagination. The year is AD 33. You are in the land of Palestine. You are in the city of Jerusalem; the month is April. A great preparation is taking place to celebrate the Jewish Passover (i.e., commemorating God's deliverance of his people from bondage who were in Egypt for 430 years). Crowds of people are coming into the city with their goats, sheep, lambs, and bulls to make sacrifices—"it's in the shedding of blood that there is forgiveness of sins." (Hebrews 9:22) As you continue to sit quietly, you imagine the dust is thick. The smells are many mingled with body sweat, the baying of animals, and the smell of blood.

## The Rabbi

In your mind's eye, there's a procession of the Roman guard, a squad of four, followed by four men. One man—known by his followers as rabbi or teacher—is so exhausted he collapses; he cannot carry the crossbeam. He is assisted by a foreigner from Cyrene who carries the crossbeam. The other two men walk behind carrying their crossbeams. You learn that these men were judged by Roman law as criminals and are being led to their execution (i.e., crucifixion).

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## The Mockery

Behind are two men, one older and the other younger; they are high priests of the Jewish Sanhedrin wearing long, flowing robes. Smiling and laughing, they say to each other, "This so-called miracle worker is not mighty anymore. Look at him—he can't even walk without falling to the ground! Where are his miracles, his proclamation that he is the messiah, the king of the Jews! Look at him! He's weak, bleeding, falling down—he's a man that's going to die and be dead. We will be rid of him and his miracles! Ha-ha-ha!"

## The Followers

Behind the high priests is a small band of followers. There's a man, a disciple of the rabbi. He is assisting a woman, the mother of the rabbi. She is distraught, weeping profusely, unable to keep up with the procession. Behind her at a distance are women, female followers of the rabbi.

## The Crucifixion

The procession finally ends. The men are crucified. The Jewish priests were in earnest that the crucifixion be done and these men be taken down from their crosses due to it being the sabbath, and a high and holy sabbath: that of Passover. To hasten the death, the Roman guards break the legs of the two men, but the man (i.e., the rabbi) in the middle is already dead. To be sure, a guard with his spear pierces the man's side under his heart—water and blood flow out.



## The Burial

Since the man is dead, his body is released. The two men who took the body are from the Jewish high council. They did not give consent to the death of this man. They are secret disciples. They believed this man came from God because of the many signs he had performed. They take his body, wrap it in cloth with spices, and lay it in a tomb belonging to the one man.

You would consider this was the end. But, the story continues. Again, sit quiet and use your imagination, and now follow the women who watched where their rabbi was to be buried. Their purpose was to come back after the sabbath to additionally prepare the body for burial.

## The Women

Who are these women? Women in AD 33 were considered second-class citizens. Women were to be shunned in public social contact. They were not to be taught the Torah (i.e., the compilation of the first five books of the Bible). They were restricted from orally communicating the Torah to others, even to children. Most rabbis had nothing but disdain for women. Jesus on the other hand, treated all women with the greatest respect. Jesus was approachable, kind, did what was right, and taught any who were ready to listen, including women.

As a result, Jesus had many women who followed him. Women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager;

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Suzanna; Mary the mother of James and Joseph; Salome, the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee; and many other women, all contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples (Matthew 27:55-56; Luke 8:1-3).

## The Resurrection

Using your imagination, the evening passes and the sabbath ends. Early on Sunday morning, while it is still dark, your mind's eye sees a woman coming to the tomb of where her rabbi is buried. You are surprised to see, just as the woman is surprised, that the stone has been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. What could this mean?

The woman is standing outside the tomb crying, believing someone has taken her Lord's body away. As she weeps, she stoops and looks in. She sees two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the feet of the place where the body was lying. The angels ask her, "Dear woman, why are you crying?" The woman says, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have put him." (John 20:11-13)

The woman, still weeping, turns to leave and sees someone standing there. It is her Lord (i.e. Jesus), but she does not recognize him. Jesus says to her, "Dear woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" She thinks he is the gardener and says, "Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." At that, Jesus says, "Mary!" She turns to him and cries out, "Rabboni!" (i.e. teacher; John 20:14-16)

## Reflection

Open your eyes, and now reflect on the Easter Story. What has impressed you? Hopefully you are amazed with God's love. A love that brought you forgiveness of sins and in a right relationship with a holy God (Romans 5:1). The women in Jesus' life got it right—they knew the love of their Lord!

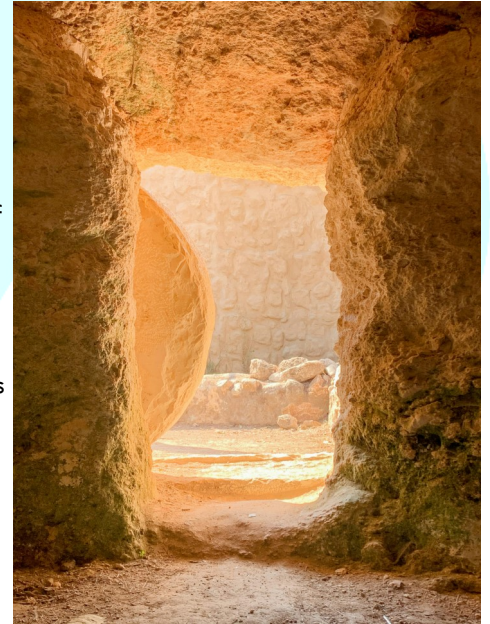
## The Lies vs. Truth

You may believe the lies of the world: I am not good enough. I am too much. I am not pretty enough. No one loves me. If I were someone else....

But the truth is, both during AD 33 and today, Jesus said: "No! You are valued. You belong—come, follow Me!"

## Conclusion

The Easter Story is a story of hope for all people. We are dearly loved by God and are worthy to belong to him. Embrace Jesus and be loved! ■



Linda Ostlund, MA, LCPC, is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and sees clients in our New Lenox and Orland Park, IL locations.

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