

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Week Seven

Prepare

Take a moment to center yourself for communion with God. You may do so by lighting a candle, signifying the presence of the Spirit with you, singing a hymn, saying a prayer, or simply sitting in silence before God. Invite the Holy Spirit to come and speak to you through these words of Scripture and time of meditation and reflection.

Read

Colossians 3:1-4

Additional Scriptures for this week: Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, John 20:1-18

Reflect

After seven weeks of reflecting upon the stories of Christ in his life, suffering, and death, we have arrived at Easter; the tomb is empty. Though we remember and celebrate this same story each year, the significance it carries for our lives is never diminished. The challenge, instead, is being open to the change it can make in us.

The resurrection of Jesus certainly brings great hope in proclaiming that death is not the last word in our lives. No matter how much suffering and tragedy we undergo, no earthly circumstance can change the truth that Jesus is risen and we will be with him someday. But what does the story of Easter, the sight of the empty tomb mean for us on a day-to-day basis?

The passage from Colossians provides an important answer to this question. You might notice the somewhat strange wording of these four small verses. In the very first sentence, it reads: "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above" (NRSV). This seems slightly contradictory. If we have been raised with Christ, why would we still need to seek things "above"? It is possible that Paul was implying that we can participate in the resurrection of Jesus, precisely in our seeking the things of God.

Christ's crucifixion and resurrection bring together both death and life in his body. For our daily lives, this means no matter how broken or sinful a situation is, Christ can transform it and bring it new life. However, there are also some situations such as relationships, jobs, addictions, or habits that need to be put to death and mourned. Thankfully, we know that Christ's suffering on the cross allowed him to experience and identify with our pain, so we know we are never alone, even in moments of utter darkness.

Justine* is someone who knows this from firsthand experience. When both of her parents died, Justine had no other family and became an orphan, dropping out of school and begging for food. Without the protection of a community, people abused her by taking her parents' land, and tragically, she was raped.



Justine gave birth to baby boy named David*, and their first year of life together was full of hunger and despair. Justine was angry with whatever God had allowed her to suffer so much. Then, Justine met Zoe Empowers.

From the first day meeting with her Working Group, Justine was told that even though she had been abused and neglected with no sense of her worth, she had deep worth as a child of God, something that had been neglected and abused by those around her. Zoe Empowers also helped her by reclaiming her parents' land, and with the help of her fellow orphans in the Working Group, planted crops of beans and sweet potatoes. Additionally, she received a goat to provide fertilizer for the garden and milk, which provides nutrition for her and David.

Slowly, Justine has regained her dignity as she has worked to become self-sufficient, able to care for herself and her child. She now knows the love God has for her and her baby, experienced through the partnership of Zoe Empowers and the support of her community in the Working Group. If the resurrection has the power to bring new light to this orphan's story, despite the death and destruction she has experienced in our fallen world, how much more can it do for your life?

**Names changed to protect the identity of the children.*

Reflection questions:

1. What areas of life do you need to allow death in order to allow God to bring new life?
2. How does Jesus overcoming death affect your daily life? What does it mean for your understanding of our inevitable bodily death? Metaphorical death?

Pray

Respond by speaking or writing out a prayer to God, or use the prayer below as a starting point:

Lord, we stand in awe before you, utterly amazed at the power that lies on the cross and in the empty tomb. Your goodness in bringing together both death and life in Christ's body is unfathomable, and we praise you for allowing us to partake in it despite our sin. Help us to allow death in the areas of our lives that need it, and to allow your offer of new life to transform those ashes into beauty. Thank you for the gift of Easter, and let us live in its truth this day and always. Amen.

Act

This is what we partake of in sharing Communion, where death and life come together in Christ's body. At the table, we humbly repent of the ways our sinful humanity brings death and destruction to ourselves and others, while also rejoicing in the opportunity to experience new, free life in Christ. Consider ways that you might bring the sacrament of Communion to your communities.

Learn

To learn more about Zoe Empowers and the ways our organization partners with orphans in Africa, visit www.zoempowers.org!