

Week 6 (Palm Sunday): March 25 – 31

Gospel Reading: Mark 14:1-15:47

Path of Discipleship: Beneath the Cross

This final week of Lent, we will consider other ways in which prayer labyrinths can be used for meditation, devotion, and to gain and keep healthy spiritual perspectives throughout our lives.

Day 1 (3/25): In the Gospel reading for this final week of Lent, we are told of the corporeal death of Jesus, but we know that, in the days to come after that, the glorious truth would be made known that his death was truly not an ending, but rather was the miraculous beginning of a new and glorious era.

During the past five weeks, we have walked together through the path of a labyrinth and considered just one of an infinite number of possible interpretations of the journey. Retrace the entire journey – inwards, the center, and back out – this time with no outside input, considering only how the winding path represents various times and aspects in your life.



What times or aspects of your life do you feel relate to this path?

Do you feel that you can relate your life today to any specific point along this path?

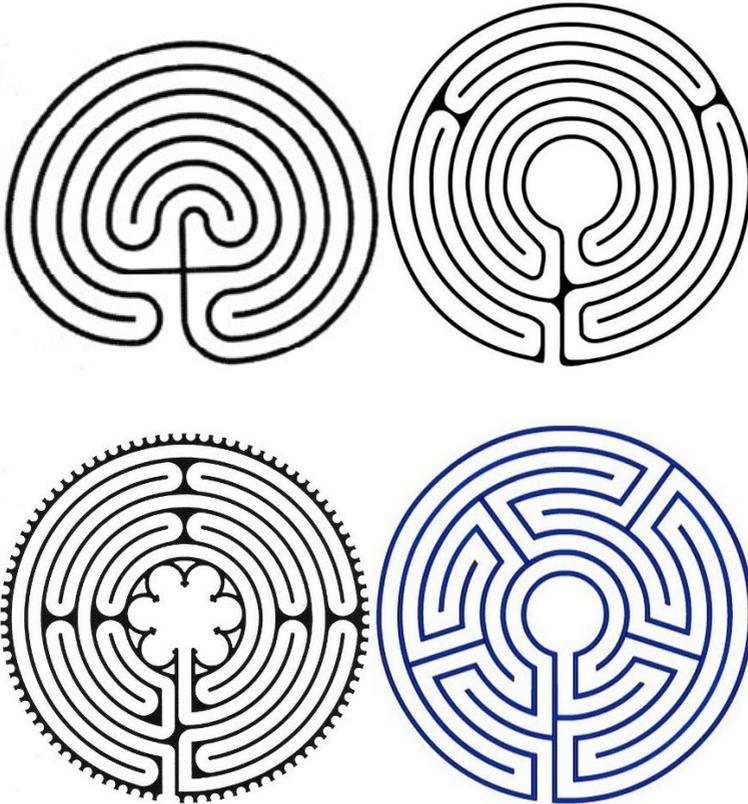
Prayer for Day 1: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, today we observe Palm Sunday and celebrate your triumphant return to Jerusalem as its Savior and King. We also remember that, during that most auspicious occasion, you rode in on a donkey, not only to bring ancient prophecies to fruition, but also to demonstrate that, although triumphant and victorious, you arrived humbly. When things are going well for us and we become filled with self-satisfaction, help us remember to always be humble before you, and celebrate each triumph and victory with humble thanksgiving to you. Amen.

Day 2 (3/26): Do you feel that you are on different journeys regarding various aspects of your life, or that you are at different points along this path when considering those various aspects? If so, are there certain aspects in which you think you are either more or less mature than in others?

Are there certain aspects of your life in which you feel that God is calling you to be more mature – to speed up your travels on the path which he has laid out for you?

Prayer for Day 2: Lord of life, we thank you for all of the new beginnings in our lives, in the past as well as yet to come. Please help us to keep strong in our faith in you, regardless of where our journeys take us, and to never forget to start each new undertaking by asking for your blessings and dedicating ourselves to your service. Please help us to grow and mature more in spirit and faith each day. Amen.

Day 3 (3/27): The design of Calvary's labyrinth is just one of many designs that have been used in prayer labyrinths throughout the centuries. Here are several other designs:



How does each one vary in design and path?

We discussed ways in which the path of Calvary's labyrinth can be used to trace the paths of the early church as well as our own journey through life. When studying these other labyrinths, can you think of the ways that each path represents a part of your own spiritual journey? Do you see ways in which they relate to an aspect of the history of the Christian church?

Some labyrinth paths start out with the early parts of the journey far from the center and lead the journeyer generally steadily inward as they continue on the path. Other labyrinths (like Calvary's) follow a course which can seem less predictable while en route: sometimes guiding you rapidly towards the center, then just as rapidly guiding you away from it, just when it might have

seemed that you were so close to reaching it – so close that you could even touch it, only to find that it was not yet accessible to you – then finding yourself once again moving “backwards” towards the outer perimeter.

How do you feel that each type of path represents various aspects of your spiritual life? Is there one of these paths that you think best represents your journey in life so far?

The paths in different labyrinths vary in length and complexity. Consider this in the context of Jesus’ Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, which can be found in Matthew 20:1-16. How might this comparison change the way in which you view other people that you encounter in your day-to-day life?

Prayer for Day 3: God of mysteries and answers, we praise you for your eternal wisdom and divine plan for each of us. Please help us to understand and remember that each of us is different in that we walk our own paths, but that we are also the same in that we each walk the one path that was designated for us by you. Help us to always rejoice in that personal relationship that we have with you. Thank you for all of the wonders that you have laid in front of us in this life and the next. Amen.

Day 4 (3/28): The Luther Seal, also known as Luther’s Rose, was designed by Luther himself to represent his theology.



Luther explained the meaning of this seal as follows:

First, there is a black cross in a heart that remains its natural color. This is to remind me that it is faith in the Crucified One that saves us. Anyone who believes from the heart will be justified (Romans 10:10). It is a black cross, which mortifies and causes pain, but it leaves the heart its natural color. It doesn't destroy nature, that is to say, it does not kill us but keeps us alive, for the just shall live by faith in the Crucified One (Romans 1:17). The heart should stand in the middle of a white rose. This is to show that faith gives joy, comfort, and peace—it puts the believer into a white, joyous rose. Faith does not give peace and joy like the world gives (John 14:27). This is why the rose must be white, not red. White is the color of the spirits and angels (cf. Matthew 28:3; John 20:12). This rose should stand in a sky-blue field, symbolizing that a joyful spirit and faith is a beginning of heavenly, future joy, which begins now, but is grasped in hope, not yet fully revealed. Around the field of blue is a golden ring to symbolize that blessedness in heaven lasts forever and has no end. Heavenly blessedness is exquisite, beyond all joy and better than any possessions, just as gold is the most valuable and precious metal.

Consider each of the elements of this seal. What does each of these symbols and explanations mean to you in the context of your personal faith? The black cross? The red heart? The white rose? The blue sky? The golden ring?

aWareness Wednesday: Are you ready to take action if you notice that someone may be experiencing a mental health or substance abuse issue? Would you like more training on how to handle those types of situations? There is an eight-hour Mental Health First Aid certification class that can equip you with more knowledge and confidence in your ability to be the difference by helping someone else in a crisis. Just as CPR helps you assist an individual having a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid training helps you assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use-related crisis. In this class, you learn risk factors and warning signs for mental health and addiction concerns, strategies for how to help someone in both crisis and non-crisis situations, and where to turn for help. Find more information, including where classes will be held near you, at <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/take-a-course/>

Prayer for Day 4: God of everything, we praise and thank you for the beauty and wonder to be found in all of your creation. Everywhere we look, we see your creation, and everywhere in your creation we are able to learn more about you and your love. Please help us to remain mindful of and grateful for your presence at all times and to always be looking for more ways to learn about your glory and will for us. Amen.

Day 5 (3/29): The Path of Discipleship for this week is “Beneath the Cross.” What does it mean to you to “stand in the shadow of the cross”? What imagery does it bring to mind? Perhaps the onlookers who witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, or symbolically leaving your sins at the base of the cross to be forgiven and

washed away by the loving sacrifice that he made there that day?
What else?

Yesterday we discussed the meaning of Luther's Rose, which includes a black cross, which "mortifies and causes pain, but it leaves the heart its natural color. It doesn't destroy nature, that is to say, it does not kill us but keeps us alive, for the just shall live by faith in the Crucified One." How does this explanation of that symbolism compare to the images that you just considered?

Think back to Jesus' teaching from John 12:24 ("unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit") and consider the fact that it is an instrument of bodily death that has become the symbol of eternal life. How does that affect us as followers of Christ?

Prayer for Day 5: Risen Lord, we pause this week to remember, honor, and rejoice in the sacrifice that you made for us. Please help us to not limit our reflection on that gift to this season, but to remember and honor it throughout the year and throughout our lives. Thank you for loving us. Amen.

Day 6 (3/30): Envision a 3-dimensional Luther's Rose over Calvary's labyrinth – large white petals growing up out of the ground and a life-sized cross standing up at the center.



In this context, the gold ring at the border can be thought of as God's eternal love for us through Jesus Christ – it encompasses the entire journey and we have never and will never find ourselves outside of it. In our earthy journeys, we start from it, just as the early church started from it, then we go through the journey of growth and helping others in his name and return to it, never having left its confines.

The rose leaves can be seen as the walls of the labyrinth's paths – while seen from the point of view of the journeyer on the way in, they seem like pointless obstructions that are inhibiting the view of and journey to the center; at times, they cast shadows on the journeyer and can seem dark from the backsides. But from the center, with the benefit of the elevated view from the cross and the glory of Christ's ascension, the beauty of the true form of the white rose can be seen, adored, and finally understood.

After obtaining the knowledge of the true nature of the labyrinth from the point of view of the center, the journeyer can confidently, faithfully, and lovingly return to the winding and sometimes dark journey of the labyrinth. This time, however, they are armed with new strength through faith, and are able to help those who are still feeling lost in the confusion of the journey – those who are “not able to see the rose through the petals” – and

strengthen and encourage them by spreading the knowledge and faith that they have received.

As you prepare for the coming of Easter and the celebration of the resurrection of the Lord, reflect back on the journeys of your life and the insights that you have gained through those experiences. Give thanks to God for them and consider how you can pass those on to others.

Prayer for Day 6: Eternal protector, we know that we do not and will never in this life understand your divine nature or plans, but we rejoice in the knowledge of your benevolence and mercy. When we sin, help us to always turn to you for forgiveness, and when we doubt, help us to always remember your love and wisdom. We thank you for the wonderful challenges that you provide us as means for personal growth and we rejoice in the assurance that you will never allow us to be tested beyond our ability. We acknowledge that those abilities, and everything else that we have in this life, are gifts from you and we thank you for those with our every breath. Amen.

Day 7 (3/31): In this week's Gospel reading, we hear of the betrayal, trial, and execution of Jesus. We also read of the words and actions of many of the people who were around him during these times. We read of a woman who wanted to honor Jesus, so she did "what she could" in the present situation, which was to pour expensive ointment on his head. Others around her saw this as a waste of an earthly resource and even chastised her as such. Jesus, however, not only defended her action, but instructed that, "wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her" (Mark 14:3-9). This was a "nobody" – a woman who just happened to be present at a house that Jesus visited. Mark divulges no other details about the visit other than the name of the house's owner, and doesn't

even mention the woman's name. But her story has remained indelibly linked with that of everything else in Holy Week for one reason: "She has performed a good service for me" (Mark 14:6).

When we contrast that story of an apparently random woman, whose act of selfless good service to Jesus set her apart in his eyes, to what we read about the twelve men that had been following and learning from Jesus for many years, we find an interesting dichotomy.

Immediately following the story of the woman and the ointment, we are told that "Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve [disciples], went to the chief priests in order to betray [Jesus] to them" (Mark 14:10). Not long after that, we hear Peter refusing to believe what Jesus foretells about what will come (Mark 14:26-31) and then of Peter, James, and John collectively and repeatedly – three times! – falling asleep while waiting for Jesus to return after giving them one simple instruction: "Keep awake and pray" (Mark 14:32-42).

After Judas' betrayal is complete, we follow not only Jesus through the next hours of trial, but also his disciple Peter. As Jesus was arrested, Peter, along with all of the other disciples and followers, deserted Jesus and fled. Later, Peter (as foretold to him by Jesus) denied knowing Jesus three times, during the last of which he even cursed and swore an oath that he did not know him. After these denials, Peter "broke down and wept" at his behavior (Mark 14:66-72).

After all that Peter had learned from and been through with Jesus, on that most important of nights, he succumbed to his human weakness and failed a test of faith. This was a low, dark moment in the course of Peter's life, when the burden of his guilt must have felt overwhelming. Even so, we know from our studies of the Book of Acts over the past six weeks that this was not the defining

moment in Peter's life; this moment of weakness was not the end of his journey.

Instead, he became a very influential and prominent leader in the early church. He went on not only to help grow and strengthen the early church, but also to face many additional challenges and trials that would test his faith, including being repeatedly imprisoned and threatened with death. He faced those tests with courage (not the absence of fear, but the strength to overcome it) and led many more converts to the teachings of Jesus through his strength and perseverance in those times.

What does this mean to our lives in the context of the labyrinth's path?

One thing to consider in this context is that, even after you have "reached the center" and are going back out in to the labyrinth to "share the light" with others, you will still personally face dark times, twists, turns, shadows, and trials. You will still stumble and fall. But it is still part of the path. You don't need to stop. You don't need to start over. You need to keep moving forward, seeking the will of God in the path *ahead* of you.

What else can you learn from the twisting and turning path of Peter's spiritual growth and ministry? Also reflect back in this context to the two stories that we discussed on Day 1 of Week 2 regarding someone being chastised for their behavior (Acts 8:9-24 and Mark 8:31-33) and the different roles that Peter filled in each of those incidents.

The Gospel is a story of salvation. In it and throughout the rest of the Bible, we see normal people being called by God and doing their best to follow that calling. We see them struggle and stumble, then we see them overcome and triumph in the name of the everlasting God.

Spend the rest of this last day of Lent enjoying your life. Not necessarily doing something that you enjoy, but simply enjoying that you have life. Notice the beauty all around you and praise God for all of it as you do.

“The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore” (Psalm 121:8).

Prayer for Day 7: Heavenly Father, the Alpha and the Omega, creator of all things and all time, we thank you for the life that you have given us and for all of the gifts and blessings that you have showered upon us. Most of all, we thank you for sending us the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Help us to keep your will in our hearts at all times as we continue to move forward in this blessed life. To you be the glory, in this life and the next, in our hearts and on our lips forever. Amen.