Ash Wednesday Homily
"The Day God Died: A Lenten Journey to the Cross"
Rich Lusk

Even though it's Ash Wednesday, we're looking ahead to Good Friday. What does it mean to think of Good Friday as a day in the life of God? To view the cross as an event in God's Triune life? One of the challenges of Lent is focusing on and reflecting on these themes for 40 days. If Lent does anything, it should drive us to a deeper grasp of the cross.

What happens when we more fully enter into the mystery of the cross? The cross begins to shape us. We begin to live more cruciform lives. This is why sometimes I wonder if, instead of giving up something for Lent, we should add something in. Instead of removing something from our lives with an ascetic discipline, perhaps we should strive to add some new virtue of love and kindness. The goal of Lent should not simply be self-denial as an end in itself, but the cultivation of cruciform love in all we do.

Don Macleod on the cross:

Yet, remarkably, there is an emotional depth beyond Gethsemane: that of Golgotha itself. This is reflected particularly in the cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?, (Mt. 27:46)." The state of mind indicated in these words is not coterminous with the crucifixion itself on the cross, the Lord moves deeper and deeper into the abyss.
Jesus was not forsaken all the time he was on the cross. The dereliction was only a moment in the long journey from the immolation to expiry. Yet it was the climactic moment, and a moment of incredible density; and it was so precisely because its agony was so compacted - so infinite - as to be well night unsustainable. As an eighteenth-century Gaelic hymn expressed it, to whole entail of sin (pains and agonies it would have taken the world eternity to endure) were all poured on him in one horrific moment.
What the emotional content of the forsakenness actually was, it is impossible for us to know. What is certain is that Golgotha was more awful than Jesus had envisaged in Gethsemane. He felt forsaken, and he *was* forsaken. This involved, among other things, Jesus experiencing the agony of unanswered prayer. In Psalm 22, this idea is expressed just beside the words quoted by Jesus on the cross:
My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest. (Ps 22:1-2)
What he prayed for is hidden from us. Whatever it was, there was no answer: only the echo of his own voice, the derision of those he had come to save, and the cruel taunts of hell…

Corresponding to the loss of the sense of sonship there was a real abandonment by God. No-one was ever less prepared for such an experience than Jesus. As the eternal Word he had always been with God (Jn. 1:1). As the incarnate Son the Father had always been with him (Jn. 16:32). They had gone from Bethlehem to Calvary, like Abraham and Isaac, together, (Gn. 22:6, 8). But now, in the hour of his greatest need, God is not there. When he most needs encouragement, there is no voice to cry, This is my beloved Son., When he most needs reassurance, there is no-one to say, ŒI am well please., No grace was extended to him, no favour shown, no comfort administered, no concession made. God was present only as displeased, expressing that displeasure with overwhelming force in all the circumstances of Calvary. Every detail in a drama which walked a fine line between chaos and liturgy declared, This is what God thinks of you and of the sin you bear!...
Christ took death,"even death on a cross," (Phil. 2:8). The subject of this dying - the One who dies - is God the Son. He obeys unto death. In his original form he was immune to death, but he deliberately assumed a form that was mortal. He went towards death, choosing it and tasting it, deciding not to be its master but its victim, and accepting a destiny according to which it would be a sin for him not to die. The Son of Man must suffer. Death was obedience; not dying would be disobedience. Besides, it is death in its most aggravated form, not merely because the cross involved indescribable physical pain, but because in his case it was the occasion, the instrument and the symbol of the curse due to sin. He experienced death unmitigated and unqualified: death with the sting; a death without light, comfort or encouragement. The long, long journey from Caesarea Philippi to Calvary was a journey into a black hole involving not only physical and emotional pain but a spiritual desertion beyond our imagining. In his agony, he would cry and not be heard. He would lose all sense of his divine sonship. He would lose all sense of his Father,s love. Into that tiny space (his body, outside Jerusalem) and into that fraction of time (the ninth hour, on Good Friday) God gathered the sin of the world; and there and then, in the flesh of his own Son, he condemned it (Rom. 8:3). On that cross, at its darkest point, the Son knew himself only as sin and his Father only as its avenger. Here was a singularity. The Logos, the ground of all law, became lawlessness (anomia), speechless in a darkness beyond reason. He so renounced his rights that he died; and he so made himself nothing that he died that death. He did not shrink from the connection with flesh. When a second great step was called for, he shuddered, yet resolutely accepted the connection with death. He became flesh, then went deeper, tasting death.

Taken from his book, *The Person of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), 275ff.

Dorthoy Sayers, on how the "dogma is the drama":

So that is the outline of the official story, the tale of the time when God was the

underdog and got beaten, when He submitted to the conditions He had laid down and became a man like the men He had made, and the men He had made broke Him and killed Him. This is the dogma we find so dull, this terrifying drama of which God is the victim and hero.

If this is dull, then what, in Heaven,s name, is worthy to be called exciting? The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore; on the contrary, they though Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him meek and mild, and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies…

Now, we may call that doctrine [found in the creeds] exhilarating or we may call it devastating; we may call it Revelation or we may call it rubbish; but if we call it dull, then words have not meaning at all. That God should play the tyrant over man is a dismal story of unrelieved oppression; that man should play the tyrant over man is the usual dreary record of human futility; but that man should play the tyrant over God and find Him a better man than himself is an astonishing drama indeed.

From her book, *Creed or Chaos?*

Stanley Hauerwas, on the Triune work of salvation:

“Of course, Father, Son, Holy Spirit - we need 'em all. We need all the help we can get.”

Edward Shillito’s famous theopaschite poem:

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.
The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.
If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;
We know to-day what wounds are, have no fear,
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.
The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;

They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

Mark Horne, with some excellent thoughts on God's suffering:

God suffers

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God has always suffered ever since the point that humans began suffering and sinning.

The whole point of **telling people not to grieve the Holy Spirit** is because **there are actions that cause God grief**. Furthermore, **when God's people are afflicted, then God is afflicted**. In fact, the idea that humans experience frustration and emotional painful pangs due to circumstances while God is above such things is precisely backwards, if the Bible is true. The reason we groan "in the pains of childbirth" waiting for the resurrection world is **precisely because God allows us to participate in his own frustration**. God is engaged and affected by fallen reality. If it were not for His presence with us, we would be detached stoics.

Of course, God's suffering takes on a new dimension in the incarnation. Through the humanity of Jesus God suffered, **bled**, and died in a new way–one that accomplished our redemption.

But the important point here is that the incarnation did not obscure God's nature, but perfectly revealed the character of God. If God were incapable of suffering then the incarnation would be misleading. That is totally backward. And even though Jesus has entered resurrection life ahead of us, **he still suffers with us**. Jesus did not suffer *instead* of God. They are not two persons. Rather, God the Son, Jesus, suffered *through* the humanity that he assumed.

This fact is both revealed in the Bible, and part of the unique offense of Christianity. All the Christological heresies of the early church were attempts to protect God's "transcendance" from being vulnerable to physical reality. The whole doctrine of the incarnation is intended to cut off these non-christian metaphysical delusions.

The only way that theologians have found to evade the Bible's clear teaching is to come up with a way of saying that the Bible teaches false doctrines that require a sophisticated theologian to correct (**see Gerstner, for example**). Contrary to John Calvin, God does not "lisp" and require us to read the *Institutes*

to correct his lisping. God reveals himself clearly. You should put your faith in Him.

An article by Paul Buckley on the cross:

The major newspapers and magazines regularly write about Jesus this time of year. More often than not, the news is scandalous, at least where Christian believers are concerned. Several years ago one paper published a story about professing Christians who believe that their faith needs a new symbol: The cross (they say) is too violent. In its first draft, the story quoted no one who might have pointed out that you'd have to move mountains of New Testament testimony to the cross to dislodge it from its central place. The cross stands out, as if in a pop-up book, on nearly every page.

In the years since that report, one of the national news magazines published a story about what followers of the great world religions think of Jesus. They gave him great reviews for his character and teaching -- as they understood them -- but they all had this in common, too: They stumbled over Jesus' cross. The cross was offensive, nonsensical, unthinkable. If the story did nothing else, it proved that the apostle Paul's words still hold true: The message of Christ crucified is "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles."

Mark, of course, wrote one of the first stories about the cross. His whole Gospel is about the cross. Especially from the middle of the book on, the cross throws a shadow that grows darker as the story goes on, until we finally arrive at the awful moment itself. What we have heard tonight is the climax of the story. But how does Mark begin to tell it? Here's his first sentence, which isn't really a sentence but something more like a title: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Already we risk tuning out. We hear the words so much -- gospel, Jesus, Christ, Son of God -- that we hardly hear them at all. But keep listening, more closely, and you may end up asking questions: What's a gospel? What's a Christ? Who is God? We think we've got the answers down pat. But if we suspend what we think we know and open ourselves to Mark's story, we may find ourselves challenged to think afresh.

Take the gospel: What is it? Most of us have gotten in the habit of saying something like this: Jesus loves you and died for your sins. That sort of statement is true, and it's part of the gospel, but it's not quite how Mark puts it. Or, more to the point, it's not quite how Jesus puts it when he himself "preaches the gospel." Listen to how Jesus begins a public ministry that is destined for the cross: He came into Galilee, "proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel." We're not used to putting it that way. Awhile back I polled dozens of friends and acquaintances with this simple question: What is the gospel? As I recall, none but one said anything about the reign of God, which, for Jesus, was the big headline.

But what will it look like? How will God bring his reign to bear? Mark's answer is full of irony and the unexpected. Not least in the confession of the centurion at the cross: "Truly this man was the Son of God." He -- the executioner, a non-Jew -- is the first human being in the Gospel to make that confession. The opening of the Gospel identifies Jesus as the Son of God, and the Father bears witness to his Sonship, at his baptism and at his transfiguration. But the centurion is the first to say, in effect, "Amen." And he says it when we least expect it: When Jesus breathes his last in shame.

On the Gospel's first page, Mark tells us that the cross-story about to unfold is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, one of whose great themes is the coming reign of God. Think back to a scene involving that prophet almost four centuries before the scene we've heard described tonight. In the year that Israel's King Uzziah died, Isaiah was given a vision of the Lord in his temple. He saw the Lord enthroned, "high and lifted up." He saw the train of his robe fill the temple. The foundations shook. Smoke filled the house. Seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, borne aloft on their wings, flew around him crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" The sight did not leave the prophet unmoved. Seeing the Lord of hosts in glory put him on his knees. Isaiah saw the sorry hypocrisy of his heart. "I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the king!"

The centurion as well saw the Lord, "high and lifted up." But how unlike Isaiah's vision this is! And yet Mark is saying that this, too, is a vision of the king. Soldiers mock Jesus with acclamations of royalty. They dress him in purple. They crown him with thorns. Above his head they post the accusation against him: King of the Jews. The chief priests taunt him as he hangs on the cross: "Let the Christ [the Anointed One], the king of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."

In all this, Mark wants you to see and believe. He wants you to believe that even in mockery, the mockers speak more truth than they know. Yes, this is where the gospel of the kingdom is reaching a climax. He wants you to see -- not something other than what you see, not a fiction in which Jesus does come down from the cross -- but he wants you to see the scene in its shame and degradation and to say, with the executioner standing by: "Truly this man was the Son of God." Jesus is the king, and this cross is his throne. Here he comes with saving authority to bring God's reign, dealing at last with what's wrong with the world, which is to say you and I. Here is the gospel. Here is God, not "acting like he's God" as we often say of someone who's "lording it over someone or everyone else." No. Here is God, the servant of all, giving his life as a ransom for many.

"The hopes and fears of all the years," we sing at Christmas, "are met in thee [Bethlehem] tonight." Maybe so. But here, in the nails of the cross, are met the human spitefulness of all the years, all your spitefulness, all your selfish ambition, all your self-centeredness, all your ugliness; here in the darkness around the cross is all the darkness of your heart. Jesus carries it there and absorbs it, suffering alienation from the Father, alone in darkness of the dreadful curse. "He

saved others; he cannot save himself." But if he saves himself, he cannot save others. "

The whole earth is full of his glory." On this day, it was the glory of God to undergo voluntary humiliation. It was the glory of God to hang naked on a cross. Will you face that image, for the first or millionth time, and own it? St. Augustine said, "God has humbled himself, and man is still proud." Behold your God. And, beholding him, humble yourself. Cry within the dark places of your heart, "Holy, holy, holy. ... Woe is me apart from you. For I am a man, I am a woman, I am a girl, I am a boy of unclean lips." Say, with Isaiah, "My eyes have seen the king." And with the centurion, "Truly this man is the Son of God." And embrace him, cross and all.

To him be glory and honor, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Peter Leithart:

> Paul determined to know nothing but Jesus and the cross. Was that enough? To answer that question, we need to answer another: What is the cross?
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> The cross is the work of the Father, who gave His Son in love for the world; the cross is the work of the Son, who did not cling to equality with God but gave Himself to shameful death; the cross is the work of the Spirit, through whom the Son offers Himself to the Father and who is poured out by the glorified Son. The cross displays the height and the depth and the breadth of eternal Triune love.
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> The cross is the light of the world; on the cross Jesus is the firmament, mediating between heaven and earth; the cross is the first of the fruit-bearing trees, and on the cross Jesus shines as the bright morning star; on the cross Jesus is sweet incense arising to heaven, and He dies on the cross as True Man to bring the Sabbath rest of God.
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> Adam fell at a tree, and by a tree he was saved. At a tree Eve was seduced, and through a tree the bride was restored to her husband. At a tree, Satan defeated Adam; on a tree Jesus destroyed the works of the devil. At a tree man died, but by Jesus' death we live. At a tree God cursed, and through a tree that curse gave way to blessing. God exiled Adam from the tree of life; on a tree the Last Adam endured exile so that we might inherit the earth.
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> The cross is the tree of knowledge, the tree of judgment, the site of the judgment of this world. The cross is the tree of life, whose cuttings planted along the river of the new Jerusalem produce monthly fruit and leaves for the healing of the nations.

The cross is the tree in the middle of history. It reverses what occurred in the beginning at the tree of Eden, and because of the cross, we are confident the tree of life will flourish through unending ages after the end of the age.

The cross is the wooden ark of Noah, the refuge for all the creatures of the earth, the guarantee of a new covenant of peace and the restoration of Adam. The cross is the ark that carries Jesus, the greater Noah, with all His house, through the deluge and baptism of death to the safety of a new creation.

The cross is the olive tree of Israel on which the true Israel died for the sake of Israel. For generations, Israel worshiped idols under every green tree. Israel cut trees, burned wood for fuel, and shaped the rest into an idol to worship. Now in the last days, idolatrous Israel cut trees, burned wood for fuel, and shaped the rest into a cross. The cross is the climax of the history of Israel, as the leaders of Israel gather to jeer, as their fathers had done, at their long-suffering King.

The cross is the imperial tree, where Jesus is executed as a rebel against empire. It is the tree of Babylon and of Rome and of all principalities and powers that will have no king but Caesar. It is the tree of power that has spawned countless crosses for executing innumerable martyrs. But the cross is also the imperial tree of the Fifth Monarchy, the kingdom of God, which grows to become the chief of all the trees of the forest, a haven for birds of the air and beasts of the field.

The cross is the staff of Moses, which divides the sea and leads Israel dry through it. The cross is the wood thrown into the waters of Marah to turn the bitter waters sweet. The cross is the pole on which Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, as Jesus is lifted up to draw all men to Himself.

The cross is the tree of cursing, for cursed is every man who hangs on a tree. On the tree of cursing hung the chief baker of Egypt; but now bread of life. On the tree of cursing hung the king of Ai and the five kings of the South; but now the king of glory, David's greater Son. On the tree of cursing hung Haman the enemy who sought to destroy Israel; but now the savior of Israel, One greater than Mordecai. Jesus bears the curse and burden of the covenant to bear the curse away.

The cross is the wooden ark of the new covenant, the throne of the exalted savior, the sealed treasure chest now opened wide to display the gifts of God – Jesus the manna from heaven, Jesus the Eternal Word, Jesus the budding staff. The cross is the ark in exile among Philistines, riding in triumph even in the land of enemies.

Jesus had spoken against the temple, with its panels and pillars made

from cedars of Lebanon. He predicted the temple would be chopped and burned, until there was not one stone left on another. The Jews had made the temple into another wood-and-stone idol, and Israel must have her temple, even at the cost of destroying the Lord of the temple. Yet, the cross becomes the new temple, and at Calvary the temple is destroyed to be rebuilt in three days. The cross is the temple of the prophet Ezekiel, from which living water flows out to renew the wilderness and to turn the salt sea fresh.

The cross is the wood on the altar of the world on which is laid the sacrifice to end all sacrifice. The cross is the wood on which Jesus burns in His love for His Father and for His people, the fuel of His ascent in smoke as a sweet-smelling savor. The cross is the wood on the back of Isaac, climbing Moriah with his father Abraham, who believes that the Lord will provide. The cross is the cedar wood burned with scarlet string and hyssop for the water of purification that cleanses from the defilement of death.

The cross is planted on a mountain, and Golgotha is the new Eden, the new Ararat, the new Moriah; it is greater than Sinai, where Yahweh displays His glory and speaks His final word, a better word than the word of Moses; it is greater than Zion, the mountain of the Great King; it is the climactic mount of transfiguration where the Father glorifies His Son. Calvary is the new Carmel, where the fire of God falls from heaven to consume a living twelve-stone altar to deliver twelve tribes, and turn them into living stones. Planted at the top of the world, the cross is a ladder to heaven, angels ascending and descending on the Son of man.

The cross tears Jesus and the veil so that through His separation He might break down the dividing wall that separated Yahweh from his people and Jew from Gentile. The cross stretches embrace the world, reaching to the four corners, the four winds of heaven, the points of the compass, from the sea to the River and from Hamath to the brook of Egypt. It is the cross of reality, the symbol of man, stretching out, as man does, between heaven and earth, distended between past and future, between inside and outside.

The cross is the crux, the crossroads, the twisted knot at the center of reality, to which all previous history led and from which all subsequent history flows. By it we know all reality is cruciform – the love of God, the shape of creation, the labyrinth of human history. Paul determined to know nothing but Christ crucified, but that was enough. The cross was all he knew on earth; but knowing the cross he, and we, know all we need to know.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Again, Leithart:

> What is the cross? For Mark, the cross is not so much Jesus' passive suffering as His last great act of power.
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> While Matthew shows Jesus as the great teacher of Israel, Mark shows Jesus as a man of action. In the first verse of his gospel, he identifies Jesus by the royal title "Son of God," and as Son of God Jesus moves immediately from place to place conquering and to conquer. He casts out a demon from a man in a synagogue and a legion of demons from the Gadarene demoniac. He is the stronger Man come to bind the strong man.
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> Toward the middle of this gospel, however, the tenor of Jesus' ministry changes, as He begins to tell His disciples He is going to Jerusalem to be tried, rejected, and crucified. Mark's point is not that Jesus ceases to be the conquering Son of God when He arrives in Jerusalem. Rather, Mark is showing that Jesus' last and greatest work of power is His death on the cross. The cross was not so much passion as His one final conquering action.
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> Though Mark tells us that Jesus is Son of God, throughout most of the gospel no human being recognizes Jesus as Son of God. The Father identifies Jesus as Son of God at His baptism and transfiguration. Even demons recognize Jesus as the Son of the Highest. But neither the Jewish leaders, nor the crowds that follow Him, nor the disciples themselves acknowledge Jesus is Son of God. The only human being who recognizes Him is the centurion at the cross, who sees the way Jesus dies and says "Truly this was the Son of God."
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> This is Mark's gospel message: Jesus is king, but Jesus is a king in a far different way than all other kings are kings. As king, He comes endowed with salvation, humble, mounted on a donkey, even a colt, the foal of a donkey. As king, He conquers by offering Himself for His people. And if we want to share His conquest, we must go and go likewise.

Again, Leithart:

> In medieval iconography, John the Evangelist is depicted as an eagle, and this portrait expresses the opinion of the early church fathers, that John wrote a “spiritual” gospel which has a “loftier spiritual purpose” than the other gospels. John is the eagle because he soars “aloft to contemplate and proclaim sublime truths,” while the other gospel writers are land animals, preoccupied with the “more mundane aspects of Jesus’ ministry and person” (quotations from article by Barbara Pitkin on Calvin’s

commentary on John, found in Janse and Pitkin, The Formation of Clerical and Confessional Identities in Early Modern Europe). That assessment of John's gospel is ancient and still very popular, but it's highly misleading and based on a partial reading of the gospel. Far from being the work of an eagle who hovers mystically over the earth, John's is the most contentious of the gospels. John records more arguments, and more intense arguments, and longer arguments, between Jesus and the Jews, than the other evangelists. He uses more legal terminology than in the other gospels – "witness" and "judgment" and "testimony" and "convict." Even the word "Paraklete," translated as "Comforter," is a legal term.

John's gospel is full of trials, and can be read as one very long trial scene. The Jews repeatedly bring charges against Jesus, and Jesus repeatedly turns the tables and tries them instead. It is a politically charged gospel, and no scene is more politically charged than the trial scene before Pilate, which is all about Jesus' kingship, about power, about who is a true friend to Caesar.

Everyone has a self-interested political agenda. Pilate rules a cantankerous Jewish people, and is clearly frustrated by their stubbornness. He asks them to reconsider their attacks on Jesus, but they shout more loudly for crucifixion. To satisfy the Jews, Pilate permits his soldiers to conduct a mock coronation – crowning Jesus with thorns, putting a robe on Him, bowing before Him in mock deference. But the mockery is directed against the Jews as much as against Jesus. "Behold your king," Pilate tells the Jews. "This is the king you deserve, you nation of rebels, you nations of losers."

More generally, the trial scene exposes the foundational injustice of the Roman imperial system. The Roman empire expanded amidst apocalyptic hope. Now the world will be remade, Virgil wrote of Augustus; now the golden age returns. Rome brings final peace and justice to the world.

There was something to that, but in the trial of Jesus we discover the blunt injustice and bald pragmatism on which Roman peace was founded. Three times Pilate declares Jesus innocent: I find no fault in Him, I find no fault in Him, I find no fault in Him. But the Jews insist that since Jesus has made Himself a king, He threatens the Roman empire, and it's clear from the agitation of the Jews that Jesus threatens the peace of Israel. If I don't get rid of Jesus, Pilate reasons, I'm going to have no end of trouble from these Jews. I could lose support in Rome, and I could lose my job. It's better for one innocent man to die than for me to be faced with enraged Jewish agitators. It's better that one man die, than for me to lose the perks of being a provincial governor.

This is Roman peace. It is peace founded on the murder of the innocent.

It's a peace designed to protect the interests of those who hold power. It is peace from the barrel of a gun. Augustine recognized that Roman peace is a kind of peace; you can keep most people quiet if you have enough guns. But it is only a shadow of the tranquility of order that is true peace.

For their part, the Jewish leaders realize that Jesus threatens the nation – or, more precisely, their leadership of the nation. "One man must die for the people," Caiphas said, thinking not of substitutionary atonement but of national survival. If Jesus isn't stopped, he reasons, then the Roman army will come crashing down on us to destroy the temple and scatter our people.

In the event, we know this is ironic, because the New Testament shows that the Jews' rejection of Jesus and the apostles is precisely what brings the Roman siege engines to Jerusalem. That irony is already evident in the trial itself. The Jews are given a choice of Jesus or Bar-abbas, Jesus or this other "Son of the Father." They choose Bar-Abbas, and that choice expresses a political agenda. For Bar-Abbas is not a "robber" but a rebel leader, an insurrectionist, a bandit who uses his banditry to destabilize Rome. We could without much exaggeration call him a terrorist. This is the man the Jews want more than Jesus. This is the path they choose. To save themselves from the Rome, they choose a man who devoted his life to provoking Rome. The irony turns tragic when Pilate asks them if he should crucify the Jewish king. Their answer is, "We have no king but Caesar." This is apostasy. Israel exists as the kingdom of Yahweh, and for no other reason. And it's foolish apostasy. The Jewish leaders have learned nothing from Israel's long history of political idolatry. Throughout her history, Israel has longed for kings like the kings of the nations. Samuel warned them at the beginning that this desire was a death-wish, and that rejecting Yahweh as king would leave Israel to the tyrants. Every time they wanted to be like the nations, and worship the gods of the nations, Yahweh allowed it, delivering them to Midian and Moab, to the Philistines and the Assyrians, to Israelite oppressors and to Gentile oppressors. They never learned: When they choose Caesar as king, they get Caesar, and he rules with a club and a cross.

This is the political message of Good Friday: The Word of God, who was with God and was God, the Only-Begotten Son, takes flesh and dwells among us, and in response the most sophisticated religious leaders of the ancient world join forces with the most powerful political leaders of the ancient world to murder Him. God enters His creation, and His creatures concentrate all their ingenuity, passion, piety, and power to destroy Him. "Now is the judgment of this world," Jesus had said. While the world thinks it's passing judgment on Jesus, it is really judging itself. Good Friday is a key moment in the political history of humanity. Jesus pulls up

a rock, exposing all the corrupt priests and Pilates in their naked opportunism. In the light of Jesus' cross, we can see the world's backroom deals, their patriotic rhetoric and pleas for justice, their threats of war and promises of peace, for what they are – cruelty and a lust for domination.

But the political message of Good Friday is not ultimately pessimistic. Jesus does not say that power as such is corrupt, but instead speaks of a power from above. Now is the judgment of this world, but in the Roman Praetorium, the bleeding bruised Jewish prophet admits that He too is a king. Now is the judgment of this world, but in the Roman Praetorium, the King with the Crown of Thorns announces that He too has a kingdom. Now is the judgment of this world, but in the Roman Praetorium, the eternal Word speaks, proclaiming that He was born to establish a kingdom of truth, justice, and peace. Now is the judgment of this world, but when Pilate sends an innocent man to his cross, he unwittingly helps to found another kingdom, an eternal kingdom, a kingdom that is not from this world.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Yet again, Leithart:

Who died on the cross on the first Good Friday? All the Christological heresies of the early church arose from false answers to that question. Arius contemplated the man writhing and bleeding and crying out and suffocating on the Roman cross, and asked, Can this be the Creator of heaven and earth? Nestorians were more offended by the idea that God could be born as a baby, but they too raised questions about the cross: Surely, they said, only the human nature of Jesus was born of Mary; only the human nature of Jesus suffered and died. Like the rulers of this age, the church herself has often had difficulty believing that the one crucified was the "Lord of glory."

Incredibly, through the guidance of the Spirit, the church endured all the attacks of the heretics and clung to the offense of the cross. Offensive as it was to all reason and apparent wisdom, impossible as it sounded, the church confessed that the Romans had crucified the Lord of glory. They confessed faith in "Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried." The Nicene confession was even more emphatic: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us

men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate for us by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, He suffered and was buried.

Throughout these long sentences, there is only one subject: Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son our Lord. There is no shift from what God the Son did to what Jesus the man did. Everything that happened to Jesus happened to the Incarnate Son of God; and everything that Jesus did God the Son did.

These creedal statements have guided the church's reading of the gospels. We are not, the early fathers argued, to go through the gospels dividing Jesus' story into the God parts and the man parts. The one Person of the incarnate Son was baptized by John in the Jordan, and fasted forty days in the wilderness; the Lord of glory healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead; the Lord of glory ate at the same table with tax gatherers and sinners, and touched lepers; the Lord of glory rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and cast out the moneychangers from the temple; the Lord of glory broke bread with His disciples in the upper room, and agonized in prayer in Gethsemane; the Lord of glory was arrested and beaten, and put on trial. It was the same Lord of glory who hung on the cross.

We often think that Jesus' death on the cross somehow weakens His sovereignty. God the Son is, with the Father and Spirit, the sovereign Lord, Creator and ruler of all things; He can do all that He pleases, and everything is in His hand. But, we think, in spite of that, He is also the One who was weak, suffered and died. The death of the Son of God somehow contradicts His Lordship.

Paul knew no such tension: in one breath he is talking about predestination and in the next he is talking about the cross; the rulers of this age crucified the Lord of glory. Nor did the Nicene Fathers see any contradiction: in the same sentence, they affirmed that the Son was Creator of all things visible and invisible and also that the Son died on the cross.

Jesus' death does not cancel or contradict His sovereignty. It is a revelation of that sovereignty. Jesus' life and death reveals that God is Lord not only over all things; He is Lord in all things. He is not only Lord over the safe confines of heaven, but Lord in the rough and tumble of Roman and Jewish politics; not only Lord over galaxies, but Lord in the world of hunger and thirst; not only the Lord over nations, but the Lord in suffering, injustice, and pain; not only the Lord over life, but also the Lord and tamer in death. No human experience is closed to God; we cannot put a sign outside any area of human life that says God has no business here, God may not enter. We may try to set up obstacles and roadblocks, but the Lord bursts in regardless.

> The cross is not a contradiction of God's Lordship, but its most dramatic expression and revelation. He is the Lord even in the place that is most opposed to Him, and He exercises this Lordship for us. He is the Lord of light in the midst of darkness, accepting our darkness so that He can transform our nighttime into day; He is Lord of laughter in the midst of tears, crying out in agony so that He could change our mourning into dancing; He is the Lord of glory in the depths of His shame, submitting to shame so that we can be transfigured from glory to glory; He is Lord of life even in death, absorbing the death that is due to us so that death will have no dominion over us.
>
> They crucified the Lord of glory. This has often been an offense and a scandal. Paul exhorts us instead to make it a boast: Let him who boasts, boast in this Lord, the Lord of glory, the crucified Lord of glory.

T. F. Torrance:

'Is God like Jesus?' Questions like that which gnaw at the back of people's minds but which they suppress and which come to the surface only in moments of sharp crisis and hurt, tell us of the insidious damage done to people's faith by dualist habits of thought which drive a wedge between Jesus and God. [...]It is quite different when the face of Jesus is identical with the face of God, when his forgiveness of sin is forgiveness indeed for its promises is made good through the atoning sacrifice of God in Jesus Christ, and when the perfect love of God embodied in him casts out all fear.

Bob Dylan once said, "I remember seeing a Time magazine on an airplane a few years back and it had a big cover headline, "IS GOD DEAD?" I mean, that was- would you think that was a responsible thing to do? What does God think of that? I mean, if you were God, how would you like to see that written about yourself? You know, I think the country's gone downhill since that day."

Of course, Dylan is right: God lives, God reigns, and God will judge. To the degree we have driven God out of our culture, we have also threatened everything true, good, and beautiful.

But maybe there's another way to look at this. In another sense, God likes it when we proclaim his death -- provided we proclaim that he died in the flesh of the man Jesus -- and that we also proclaim he rose again the third day. Sin must be a pretty big deal if only the death of the immortal God could undo it! But God, in his great humility, has expressed his lordship in a way the others would not and could not – by dying in love for the sake of his fallen creation.

More great thoughts from Mark Horne:

Is your god not man enough? Here's a question. Is there any moment of Jesus' life, any event in his biography, which you could glance at and come to the legitimate conclusion that He could not possibly be the incarnate son of God? Perhaps some passerby could catch a glance of Mary changing her baby's diaper (or swaddling loincloth, or whatever they used) and think, "Cute baby but obviously not the god of Israel." Would God approve his reasoning since he simply didn't have enough information? Another question: When Jesus' worked mighty miracles was he trying to offer reasons for believing that he was God in order to offset legitimate reasons for denying his deity? Lots of people deny that the incarnation is possible. They don't believe it is conceivable that the infinite God could join the finite creature and remain one person. But is it really an affirmation of the incarnation to claim that only when Jesus does something that is an exception to his humanity that we can say that we observe evidence of His Deity? Then what are the exceptions? Works of power. God is like mastery over nature and healing by his word at a distance. True. But is this the total picture? What about when God dirtied his loincloth and had to be changed? Or when God had his foreskin cut off? Or when God slept in the boat? Or when God died? If you look at the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion it is clear: the mark of Israelite (and Gentile) unbelief was failing to see Jesus for who he is while he hung from the cross. No, they insisted that the only way they would believe was if he came down. Aren't we saying basically that they were right when we get squeamish about confessing the Gospel of God crucified?

Ben Meyers:

Summary: *In the story of Jesus, God defines himself as Father, Son and Spirit in a triunity of love.*

We have seen, then, that if we want to speak of God we must tell the story of Jesus. The question “Who is God?” is answered by the story of Jesus. “God” is name of what happened when Jesus was raised from the dead. In the first century CE, a certain Jewish man was executed and then raised into the life of the future: that is what we mean when we use the word “God.”
Throughout his earthly life, Jesus was defined above all by his unique relationship to the God of Israel. He calls this God “Father,” and he understands himself as the Father’s obedient Son. He lives to do the will of his Father. His entire life is nothing other than an expression of faithful obedience to the Father. He gives himself over fully to the will of the Father – and this self-giving

obedience finally culminates in his obedient death on the cross. In just this way, Jesus shows that he is truly the Son of the Father, truly the one in whom the Father's will finds expression.

But Jesus carries out the Father's will not in his own strength. Rather, it is the Father's *Spirit* that empowers him to do the Father's will. The Spirit – the living Spirit who comes from the future in the power of the kingdom – comes to Jesus and rests on him. The Spirit sets Jesus apart, leads him, anoints him (literally: "Christs" him!) as God's messenger, and empowers him to *be* the Father's Son, to live and act and die in radical obedience.

When Jesus' ministry terminates in crucifixion, even then he continues to trust in the Father. Even then, strengthened by the Spirit, he continues to do the Father's will. And when Jesus is dead and buried, the Father vindicates him by raising him into new life through the Spirit. Coming from the future in the power of God's kingdom, the Spirit proceeds from the Father to the Son and raises Jesus from the dead. Thus the Father bestows on Jesus this final, decisive act of affirmation: he shows that Jesus *is* the true Son of the Father, the one on whom the Spirit rests, the one with whom the Father is well pleased.

This story of Jesus' resurrection is the definition of God. God *is* the historical event that takes place between the Father and the Son through the Spirit when Jesus is raised from the dead. God is not a "divine substance" or a "first cause" or even a "supreme being" – God is a living *event*. God *happens*! God *takes place* as a unity of self-giving, reciprocal life between Father, Son and Spirit. The Father sends the Son; the Son goes from the Father in obedience; the Spirit is the uniting power of this relationship. God *is* this narrative; God is this triune life.

In a word, then, God is *love*. In the story of Jesus, God defines himself as an event of self-giving love. He defines himself as a life rich in relationships, full of movement and energy, a harmony of repetition in difference. God is not an isolated, motionless "being" – he is not a static unity, but a dynamic *triunity*. He is not a single voice, but a harmony; not a monologue, but a conversation; not a march, but a dance.

God is God a first time; and then God repeats himself, and so he is a God a second time; and then God is also the bond between this "first time" and this "second time," between God and God. Like repetitions and differences within music, God is thus a living harmony – he is always in motion, always on the way from himself to himself, always giving himself and responding to this giving. Thus – in unity and in difference – God is love.

In this vibrant, energetic unity, God is Father, Son and Spirit. He is an event of love. No, he is *the* event of love – the love that sent Jesus from the Father and then raised Jesus from the dead into the triune life of God's future.

Peter Leithart on Lent:

Many Christians observe the last few Sundays before Lent as "pre-Lenten" Sundays. This might look slightly daft: After all, Lent is itself a period of

preparation for Easter, and if we need a time of preparation for the time of preparation, perhaps we also need a pre-pre-Lent to prepare for pre-Lent. It threatens to become an infinite regression.

Yet, the Christians who designed the church calendar with all its halting beginnings displayed a great deal of wisdom. Among other things, the pre-Lenten Sundays help to head off any notion that the Lenten fast will be a matter of heroic spirituality. The BCP collect for the wonderfully named "Sunday Next before Lent" reads:

"O Lord, who hast taught us that all our works without love are worth nothing: Send Your Holy Spirit, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever lives is counted dead before thee: Grant this for the sake of Your only Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

For anyone paying attention, this is a blunt reminder that the Lenten fast that begins on Ash Wednesday is nothing without love, and that the love that gives a fast its focus is a gift of the Spirit. The periods of pre-festive preparation that mark the church calendar are a reminder that we can come to the feast only if we are clothed appropriately; the pre-preparation periods that mark the church calendar are a reminder that we come to be clothed rightly only by grace.

Again, Leithart on Lent:

This Sunday is the first Sunday in the traditional church season of Lent, the 40-day period of preparation for Easter. Though Lent is not mandated by Scripture, it is edifying for the church for a couple of reasons.

First, Lent cannot be separated from Easter. It is a journey toward Easter, a 40-day preparation for a feast. Easter, with its celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, is also a celebration of our participation in Easter, in resurrection and new life. This has been symbolized historically by the practice, in some places, of reserving baptisms for Easter, and using Lent as a preparation not only for Pascha but for baptism. This is not a wise practice, but the theological logic behind it make sense: We have been baptized into the new life of the kingdom, but we are frequently forgetful of the life we have in Jesus and need to be restored. Lent has been part of the church's assistance in keeping us focused on the life we have in Jesus. Each year, we are given 40 days to refocus on the resurrection, to purge out the old leaven of hypocrisy, sloth, and nominalism, and to renew our baptisms.

Second, Lent is a period of fasting. Fasting in Scripture is not for the purpose of ascetic self-disciple. Fasting is associated with periods of penance, and there is an affliction of soul in fasting (Lev 16), a reminder of our sinfulness. Yet, we don't fast because food is bad or the body is bad. We fast as a way of preparing for the feast to come, of making the way clear for a festival renewal. Fasting is also a means of reminding ourselves that we do not live by bread alone, but by the word and Spirit of God. Lenten fasting shows us that our life is in the Risen

Son, and not in the bread and meat that we eat. Fasting is part of the baptismal renewal that is at the heart of Lent.
Here are a few suggestions for Lenten practices. First, don't try to be Supersaint with the fasting. If you wish to fast, start slow and do it one day a week, fasting from a single meal rather than through the whole day. Second, during the time that you would be eating the meal, meditate on various passages of Scripture that describe the new life we have in the resurrection of Jesus -- such as Matthew 5; Romans 6:1-14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; Galatians 5:16-24; Ephesians 4:17--5:2; 5:15-33; Colossians 3:12-17; and so on. Any passage that lists Christian virtues and fruits would be useful. Ask God to expose times when you've sinned in those areas, to forgive you for those sins, and to work in you by His Spirit to produce the fruits of resurrection life. Use Lent to systematically "put off" the deeds of the flesh, so that you can enter into Easter by "putting on" the fruits of the Spirit.

Once again, Leithart on Lent:

Lent is a season for taking stock and cleaning house, a time of self-examination, confession and repentance. But we need to remind ourselves constantly what true repentance looks like. “Giving up” something for Lent is fine, but you keep Lent best by making war on all the evil habits and sinful desires that prevent you from running the race with patience.
Going through the motions of Lent without turning to God and putting our sins to death is hypocrisy, and few things rile our God so much as hypocrisy. “Rend your hearts and not your garments,” Joel says.
So: During this season, don’t just give up soft drinks; mount a concerted campaign against impatience. Don’t just put aside your favorite TV show; subdue your anger. Don’t just fast; kill your self-centeredness.

This doesn’t make Lent a season for gloominess and defeat. On the contrary, during this season we celebrate the victorious suffering and death of Jesus, and we should enter the season trusting in the Spirit of Jesus, who subdues our flesh and molds us to the image of Christ.

Lent is a season for joy also because it is a motif in a larger composition. The rhythm of the church year follows the rhythm of the Lord’s day service. Each week, we pass through a small “Lenten” moment in our liturgy, as we kneel for confession. But we don’t kneel through the whole service, and in the same way we don’t observe the fast forever.

Jesus tells us to fast with washed faces and anointed heads, that is, to fast as if prepared for a feast. We fast properly when we fast not only in humility but in hope; we keep the fast when we fall before God full of repentance but also full of confidence that our Great King will raise us up.

More Leithart on Lent/Ash Wednesday:

Today is "Ash Wednesday," the beginning of the traditional church season of Lent. Lent is a fast season, traditionally set aside as a time of penitence and abstinence, a forty-day period of self-denial and meditation on the cross.
How depressing, we might think, to spend forty days every year meditating on the cross, thinking about our sins, fasting. Don't we want to be more upbeat? Aren't Christians supposed to be happy?
As a historical matter, the churches that have excluded Lent have not replaced it with a permanent atmosphere of joy. Reformed churches abolished Lent early on, and at the same time suppressed popular amusements and festivals: "In Scotland," for example, "from the mid-1570s on, there was a sustained attack on the celebration of Christmas, Midsummer, and other festivals with singing, dancing, bonfires and plays" (Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, p. 219).
This was not an exclusively "Puritan" trend. During the 17th century, Catholics in Madrid closed the theaters, just as Protestants in London did, and Orthodox reformers pursued a similar program in Russia. In Reformed churches, the suppression of Lent has been simultaneous with the suppression of Carnival and other seasons of playful joy. Suppression of Lent did not produce perpetual Easter; it produced a perpetual Lent.
I'm not suggesting a direct cause-and-effect. But I am suggesting that there is wisdom in setting aside a specific period for mourning, self-examination, and fasting. We acknowledge Lent in the same way and for the same reason we have a time of Confession at the beginning of each worship service. There is a time for lament over sins; there is a time for mourning our own depravity. But lament and mourning ought not choke out rejoicing in the goodness of God.
When the Lenten spirit is not given its due, it has threatened to engulf the whole year. The Lenten spirit is part of the church's life, and if we don’t wear ashes and purple [or black] for forty days, we might well end up wearing them for 365.

Alexander Schememann:

Is it necessary to explain that Easter is much more than one of the feasts, more than a yearly commemoration of a past event? Anyone who has, be it only once, taken part in that night which is "brighter than the day," who has tasted of that unique joy, knows it....On Easter we celebrate Christ's Resurrection as something that happened and still happens to us. For each one of us received the gift of that new life and the power to accept it and live by it. It is a gift which radically alters our attitude toward everything in this world, including death. It makes it possible for us to joyfully affirm: "Death is no more!" Oh, death is still

there, to be sure, and we still face it and someday it will come and take us. But it is our whole faith that by His own death Christ changed the very nature of death, made it a passage—a "passover"—into the Kingdom of God, transforming the tragedy of tragedies into the ultimate victory.

Such is the faith of the Church….Is it not our daily experience, however, that this faith is very seldom ours, that all the time we lose and betray the "new life" which we received as a gift, and that in fact we live as if Christ did not rise from the dead, as if that unique event had no meaning whatsoever for us? ... We simply forget all this—so busy are we, so immersed in our daily preoccupations—and because we forget, we fail. And through this forgetfulness, failure, and sin, our life becomes "old" again—petty, dark, and ultimately meaningless—a meaningless journey toward a meaningless end. ... We may from time to time acknowledge and confess our various "sins," yet we cease to refer our life to that new life which Christ revealed and gave to us. Indeed, we live as if He never came. This is the only real sin, the sin of all sins, the bottomless sadness and tragedy of our nominal Christianity.

So let us rediscover Lent. A journey, a pilgrimage! Yet, as we begin it, as we make the first step into the "bright sadness" of Lent, we see—far, far away—the destination. It is the joy of Easter, it is the
entrance into the glory of the Kingdom. And it is this vision, the foretaste of Easter, that makes Lent's sadness bright and our Lenten effort a "spiritual spring." The night may be dark and long, but all
along the way a mysterious and radiant dawn seems to shine on the horizon.

Daniel Kirk
(http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=2/6/2011&tab=3&alt=1), with some interesting thoughts on 1 Cor. 2:

In this week's reading, Paul continues to explore the paradox of the gospel message.
As he describes the gospel message, his own ministry, and the wisdom of God, Paul surprises the Corinthians, and us, by the way in which each helps interpret the other.

Paul's Message and Paul's Ministry
Verses 1-2 recall Paul's tactic when arriving at Corinth: he was proclaiming the mystery of God, but not "in lofty words or wisdom." Why didn't Paul use lofty words or wisdom? Because (verse 2) he chose instead to know only Christ crucified. Paul is not reveling in the idea that he only had one thing to say. Instead, to a church rallying to the glories of worldly wisdom, Paul wants to show that the message of the cross demands a particular kind of ministry—a cruciform

(cross-shaped) ministry. Paul's strategy is not unusual to us. We often will talk about how a particular person is a "hypocrite" for failing to live up to the standards of the Christian message. But the measure by which Paul takes stock of his ministry cuts against everything that we too often take for granted. When Paul says he was with them in weakness, fear, and trembling, he is drawing their attention to the type of ministry that accurately embodies the cross of Christ. If the cross is the message, then ministering with integrity means that the messenger will look weak and despised in the eyes of the world—only to have the power of the Spirit of God break through to compel the listeners. This is the dynamic of the gospel story: power in and out of weakness. It points to the God who brings new life by means of a crucified messiah (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

God's Mysterious Wisdom

As Paul continues to reconstruct the Corinthians' notion of "wisdom," he seems to imply that he has more to disclose than merely "the word of the cross" (2:6). And yet, he continues to insist that the cross shows us that following the world's wisdom is not a path that ends up at the wisdom of God. Even the mysterious, hidden wisdom of God is cruciform. In fact, throughout 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 Paul places God's wisdom and the world's wisdom in sharpest antithesis. The special wisdom to which Paul claims access (a) is God's wisdom, that (b) leads God's people to glory, and (c) is knowable only by the Spirit. This stands in stark contrast (a) to the world's and the world's leaders' wisdom, that (b) is the product of people doomed for destruction, and (c) lacks the sight to apprehend the saving wisdom of God. The cross is at the center of this dichotomy. The rulers of this age put their worldly "wisdom" on display when they crucified "the Lord of glory" (2:8). There is some debate about who Paul intends by "the rulers of this age": is this a reference to the spiritual forces that rule over the earth, to the earthly leaders themselves, the power of the systems that exceed the doings of any set of individuals, or some combination of these? Though the rule of which Paul speaks is exercised through human agents, it is also clear throughout the passage that something larger is in view. Behind these human agents stand other cosmic forces and a world-system that is larger and more powerful than the individuals who enact its understanding of "wisdom". Paul sets the disputes in Corinth on a cosmic stage: to side with those who advocate worldly wisdom is to side not with the God who saves by means of the cross but, instead, with those who blindly warred against God's wisdom by crucifying the Lord of glory (2:8). Paul offers a scriptural proof for his claim that God's wisdom is hidden from normal human perception (2:9). But the source of the citation is not clear. The first-century church father Clement of Rome links it back to what would be a lost Greek version of Isa 64:4. Somewhat later, Origin of Alexandria tells us the source is the no-longer extant *Apocalypse of Elijah*. The most we can say for sure is that the images of closed eyes and untold ears are present in Isaiah 64, Isaiah 6, and elsewhere, and that Paul sees them coming to fulfillment in the death of Jesus as God's great act of salvation.

Here's Hope: The Spirit of God

If human wisdom is manifest most plainly in the wisdom of the rulers of this age who put Jesus to death, how is a human ever going to be capable of knowing the wisdom of God? In the final section of today's reading Paul insists that it is only by receiving the Spirit that one can know the things of God (2:10-16). Because God has given the Spirit, those who receive the Spirit can know the mysterious wisdom of God. Paul probably has his eye on the competition that has erupted on the ground at Corinth, where Apollos' high level of attainment in the world's standards of wisdom has led to the formation of a group that identifies as his followers. Undermining the value of this group's claim to superior learning, Paul maintains that the Spirit whom believers receive is none other than the Spirit of God with God's cruciform wisdom—it is *not* the Spirit of the world with its Christ-crucifying "wisdom" (2:12). And so one more time we see that the story we tell about the cross of Christ becomes the measure by which the stories of our own communities are judged. Do we hope to draw people to our communities based on our ability to achieve, in step with the corporate, educational, and political systems that set up our own cultures' assessments of power? Or, are we participating in the upside down economy of the cross, an economy that can only be known and understood and believed and lived by the power of God's Holy Spirit?