

# The Second Sunday of Easter, Year B

## SHOWING UP – IT'S ESSENTIAL

John 20:19-31

The Second Sunday of Easter

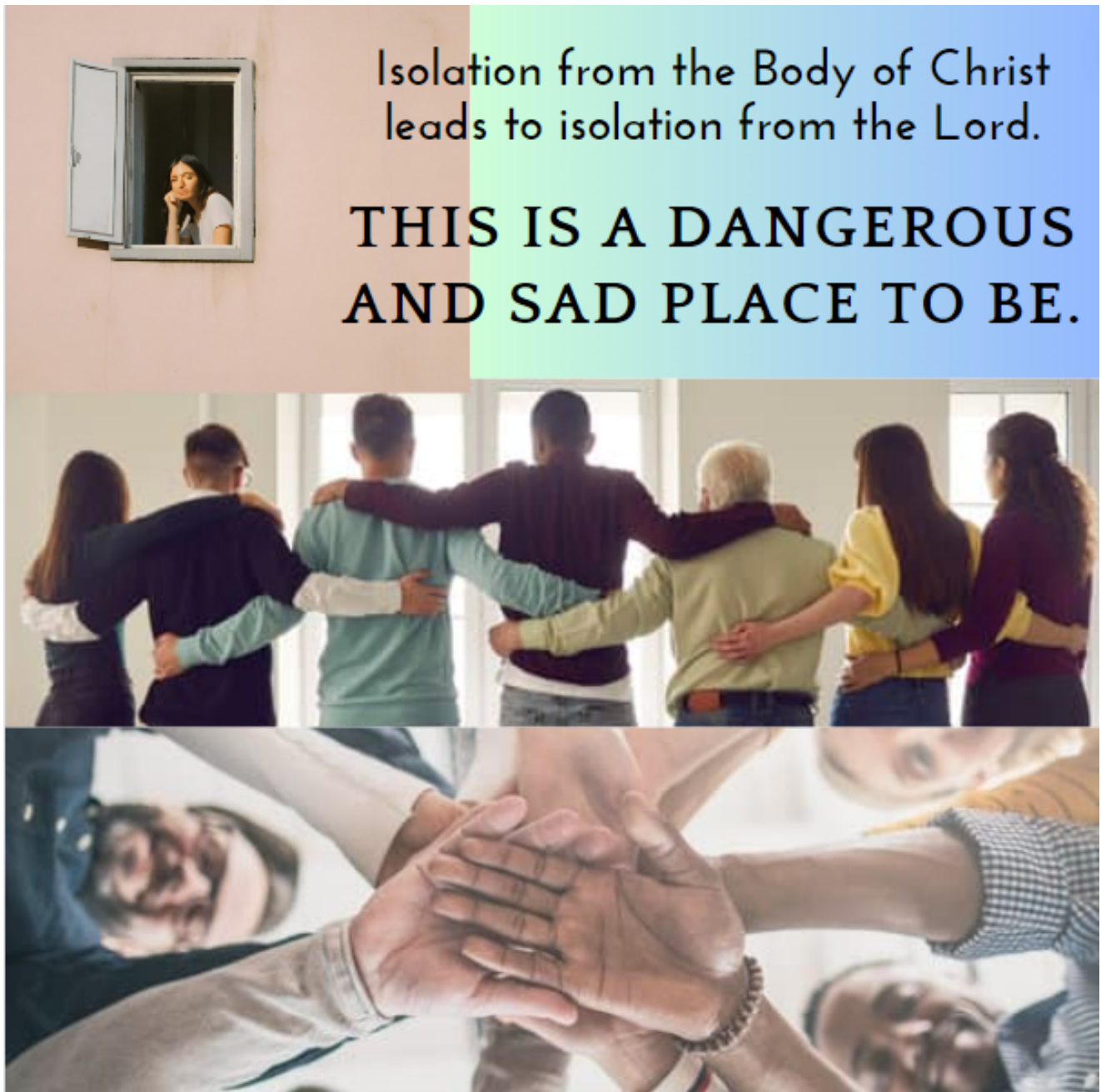
Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

*19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

*24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

*26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

*30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*



*From Canva*

*"His death on the Cross breaks down the isolation between us and God and provides the way to life in his name."*

## **DIAGNOSIS: The Cost of Not Showing Up**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): *Isolated and Afraid***

Today we hear a lot about isolation. Loneliness is endemic. Coming out of the COVID pandemic, people are reportedly more isolated than ever. An article in the *New York Times* even suggested we need a "loneliness pill." Whatever was happening in Jerusalem following the events of the Lord's death and resurrection, it is certain that the disciples were isolated. They were afraid, cowering behind locked doors, probably spouting one conspiracy theory after another, certain of only one thing: "They are out to get us!"

### **Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): *Stubborn Unbelief***

Thomas only adds to the problem. Not only is he a member of this fearful band; He is an absent member. When Jesus shows up, he is nowhere to be found, and when he learns of the sighting of Jesus that his compatriots report, he is dismissive of the whole business. "Unless I see the very print of the nail in his hands and put my hands in his side, I will BY NO MEANS believe he was actually here!"

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): *A Dangerous Place to Be***

Without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gives, without the fellowship that other members of God's community provide, without the forgiveness that is promised and given to us to extend to one another, we are lost. Isolation from the Body of Christ leads to isolation from the Lord. This is a dangerous and sad place to be.



*From Canva*

## **PROGNOSIS: The Gift of Jesus Showing Up**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis: (Eternal Solution): *Jesus Shows Up***  
Jesus shows up! Jesus does the very thing that we cannot do; *he shows up*, even though we have given him up for dead. His death on the Cross breaks down the isolation between us and God and provides the way to life in his name. He takes our isolation in death and comes to give us his life beyond it – having the marks to prove it. Despite our locked doors, and fearful hearts, Jesus shows up, crucified and risen, with nail holes and gaping side yet plain for all to see. We are given a glimpse of the

Crucified One, simply by being present with God's people. How good it is!

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis: (Internal Solution): *Faith Rekindled***

Seeing Jesus in our midst we cry out with other doubter/believers, "My Lord and My God!" It turns out that our dismissal of Jesus' risen self does not keep him from coming to us, and seeing this, we cannot but help confess our faith. We have come to believe that Jesus truly is the Messiah, and we are given life in his name.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis: (External Solution): *Peace Shared***

Jesus grants us his peace, his shalom, his wholeness, and then he says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He sends us out to announce the forgiveness of sins to all people, and to live into that forgiveness ourselves. We become ambassadors of Christ's peace, saying again and again to one another, and to the world, "Peace be with you." By our witness the world knows Jesus, believes, and receives life in his name.

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# **Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A**

## **Deceived No More**

**Matthew 16:21-28**

**Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Analysis by Glenn L. Monson**

**21** From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. **22** And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." **23** But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance[\[a\]](#) to me, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.

**24** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **25** For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. **26** For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

**27** "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. **28** Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."





*Domine, Quo Vadis – Annibale Carracci –  
[From Wikimedia Commons](#)*

*Christ denies himself, takes up the Cross, loses his life, forfeits his life, all that we might gain our life.*

**DIAGNOSIS: Satan the Life Giver**

***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Human Things***

Satan is championing life! Now there's a novel concept. We thought he was the Dealer of Death, the Deceiver, the pitchfork carrying lord of Dante's Inferno. It turns out he wants life for

us. Who knew? Human things, worldly things—that's what he wants for us. Sounds good. What could be wrong with that? Isn't that what the abundant life is all about? Aren't we supposed to embrace prosperity?

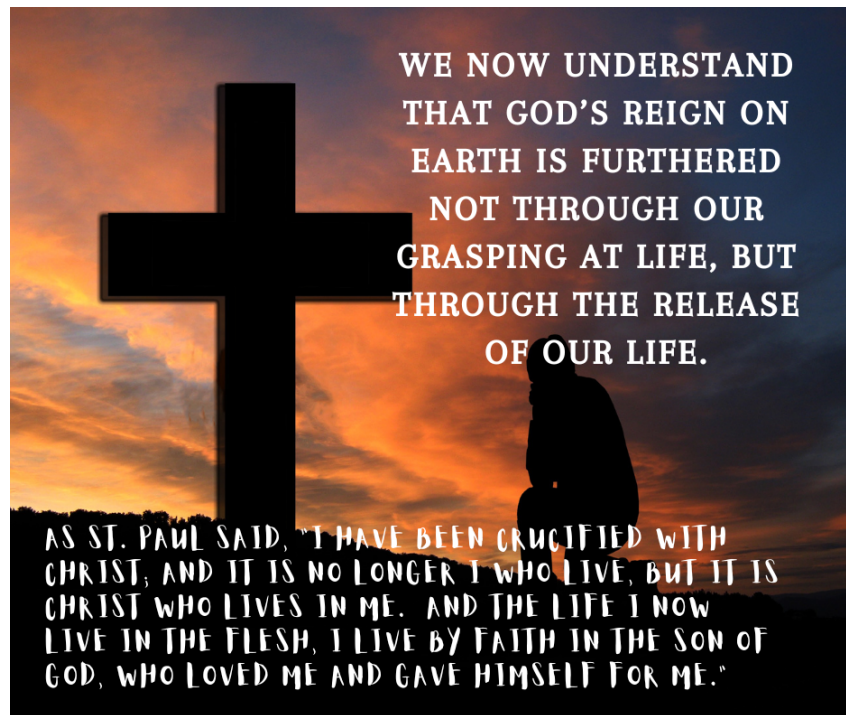
***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Jesus, we got this!***

We are disciples of Jesus; of course, we aren't going to let Jesus die. That would be to abandon him as well as our plans for the kingdom we are helping him bring in. Jesus must be confused. We know what is best for the furthering of God's reign on earth. Step aside, Jesus. We got this.

***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Scammed!***

It turns out that we've been scammed by the Ultimate Source of Disinformation. Attempting to save one's life leads only to misery and death. It leads to the death of everything we thought was ours. Satan's claim to want life for us is just one more lie, but this lie is the lie that is the basis for all other lies. To follow Satan's lead is to forfeit one's life completely.





From Canva

## **PROGNOSIS: Jesus the Death Giver**

### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Church: Divine Things***

Jesus is the real champion of life, but it comes in a form we did not conceive, it comes through the Cross. Christ denies himself, takes up the Cross, loses his life, forfeits his life, all that we might gain our life. His plan for life does indeed involve death, but death that leads to life eternal.

### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Jesus, you got this!***

We now understand that God's reign on earth is furthered not through our grasping at life, but through the release of our life. As St. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

## **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): True Abundance**

Divine things, the fruits of the Spirit, and life as a member of the Body of Christ are my greatest treasures. The abundant life is defined now as a life of abundant compassion, overflowing hope and joy, never-ending justice and love. My life is not consumed by the pursuit of treasure and pleasure, and Satan's lies have no power over me. Christ is my all in all.

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# **Good Friday**

## **COMPANIONS IN THE DARKNESS**

**Psalm 22**

**Good Friday**

**Analysis by Fred Niedner**

*1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

*Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*

*2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.*

*3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

*4 In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.*

*5 To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.*

*6 But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.*

7 All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

8 "Commit your cause to the LORD;

let him deliver – let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb;

you kept me safe on my mother's breast.

10 On you I was cast from my birth,

and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

12 Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

13 they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;

my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;

15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

16 For dogs are all around me;

a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled;

17 I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me;

18 they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

19 But you, O LORD, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!

20 Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!

21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;

in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

23 You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;

*stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!*

*24 For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted;*

*he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.*

*25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;*

*my vows I will pay before those who fear him.*

*26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;*

*those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever!*

*27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;*

*and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.*

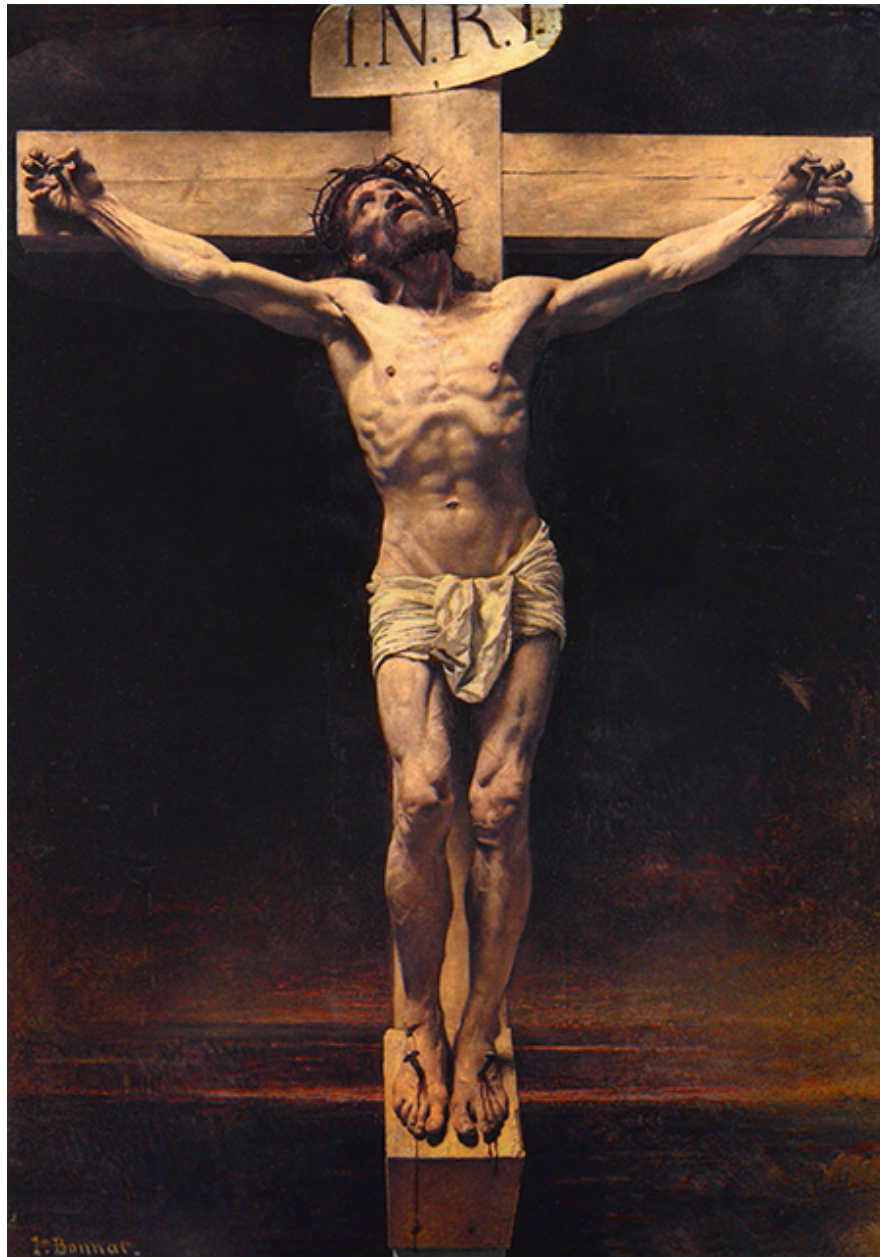
*28 For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.*

*29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;*

*before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.*

*30 Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,*

*31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.*



By *Diego* *Velázquez* —  
<https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/cristo-crucificado/72cbb57e-f622-4531-9b25-27ff0a9559d7> (Museo del Prado), Public Domain,  
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*A brutalized young man in the deep darkness outside Herod's and Pilate's Jerusalem one Friday afternoon long ago ... sang this very song, cried out its awful question: "My God, my God, why? Why have even you forsaken me?"*



## **DIAGNOSIS: Abandoned—What a Scandal!**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Thrown to the Dogs***

Nobody knows the trouble I've seen—or gives a rip. My body aches—what's left of it, anyway—and my courage has melted. My dried-up tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth, so when I speak it sounds like the vultures have shoved my socks down my throat and are just waiting to run off with my clothes the moment I croak. The Bashan Bullies gang has come to watch me die. The dogs that will one day lick poor Lazarus's wounds are making me their first course. If I could still speak, I'd tell them to go eat worms. Then again, I am a worm.

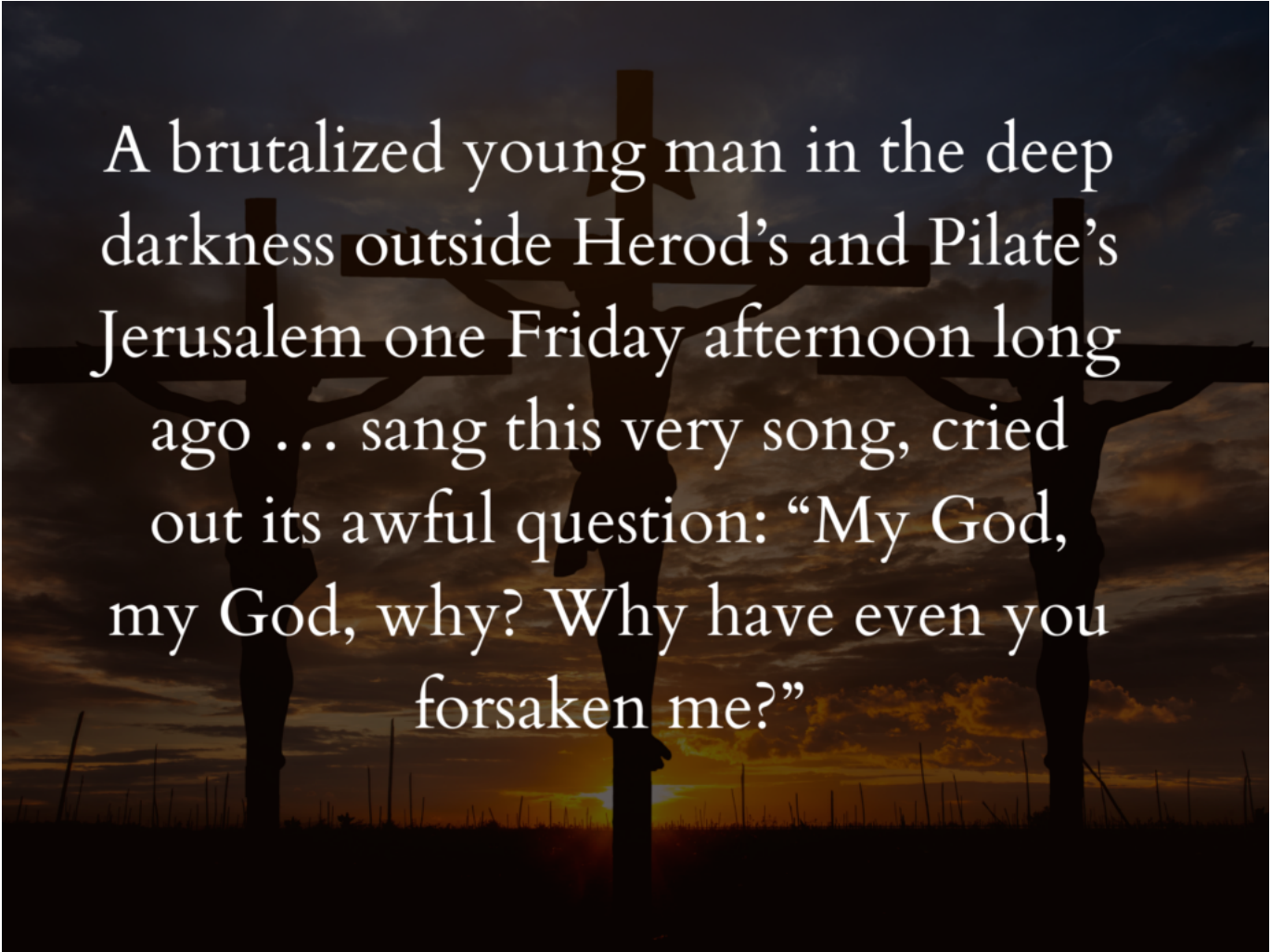
### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Can You Trust Your Awesome God?***

You see all this, don't you God? Everyone else does. I've attracted a crowd of gawkers and professional Schadenfreudists. They've waited for this day. They mock me, screw up their faces to imitate my anguish. "Where's your High and Mighty God now?" they ask. "If you're the apple of God's eye, when will deliverance come? We've heard all the rescue stories you yourself have told us about the God of your ancestors. Have you ever wondered if maybe your God's only 'throne' is the stories you tell and the songs you sing? And maybe God only listens when you praise, not when you beg for your life, or the lives of your children?"

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): It's a Hell of a Life***

I confess, these jeerers' jibes and questions rattle around in my soul as well. Indeed, I have been abandoned. I cry and pray and groan. I gag wordlessly on sorrow. Then I do it some more. No one hears. I truly am a worm, no longer human. If hell is the absence of God, then I have arrived. Let me die. I'm good as

dead anyway. And to paraphrase an old friend from the Land of Uz, "To hell with you, too, God."

A dramatic image showing three silhouetted figures on crosses against a sunset sky. The text is overlaid on the image.

A brutalized young man in the deep darkness outside Herod's and Pilate's Jerusalem one Friday afternoon long ago ... sang this very song, cried out its awful question: "My God, my God, why? Why have even you forsaken me?"

*Why have you forsaken me? (from Canva)*

## **PROGNOSIS: Hell Un-helled**

### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): A New Voice Joins the Hell Choir***

Does anyone hear the howling in hell? Can high heaven escape the stink of Gehenna? Even if no one hears, its denizens cry out perpetually ... as have countless mothers who begged for the lives of their fevered or starving babies, and then buried them. As have millions marched into gas chambers even as they sang the

psalms of Zion. As have thousands of generations born into slavery and treated like mules and sex toys for the few years of the only life they would ever get as flesh and blood. As did a brutalized young man in the deep darkness outside Herod's and Pilate's Jerusalem one Friday afternoon long ago. Indeed, he sang this very song, cried out its awful question: "My God, my God, why? Why have even you forsaken me?" And just then, of all people, a centurion, the head executioner, recognized him. Something about that song had rent the heavens, and behold, it was him! Yes, we were still in hell. Indeed, we find ourselves there—here—even as we speak . . . and as we sing that psalm, but we sing it now with him. We are not alone. And he says what he always says, "Come, follow me."

#### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Flipping the Script***

So, we do. Foolish as it seems, we trust him. We follow—as best we can with our hands and feet nailed to these damned posts. In the congregation of the nailed and abandoned, we tell our stories, especially the astonishing news about finding the One who claims dominion, who rules over the nations, right here, in the pit, every bit as naked, wrecked, and derided as we are. Here, together, we raise up our praise in the great congregation. Our God is enthroned on the hymns of the damned. We reckon they might even hear us up there somewhere in the Bashan Bullies' skyboxes. It must sound like a joke in those lofty reaches. And it is, actually—but it's on them.

#### ***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Singing the Hell out of Hell***

You'd think that now we would organize a way to bust out of here, go off to the Garden of Eden somewhere, or join a heavenly choir that feasts on mangos between rehearsals and gigs. We

could, perhaps, but that's not our calling. That crucified singer in our midst, upon hearing our songs of confession, reminds us daily that for now, at least, this is our place. It's a hell of a place, but it's our place, even as it's now surely his. And as he once told his sinks-like-a-stone friend, "They can't keep you out." So, we stay. We keep singing, but we listen with just as much care and purpose as we sing. We listen with our hearts to the cries of the lost and abandoned, including the wordless choking of the broken and condemned. We sit with them, take in their anguish, share with them the strange manna we always seem to find. And because we keep listening to that lonely, crucified singer, we needn't say to the others, "Follow us to true life and freedom." No, we get to say to each new companion, "Blessed are you. You're already here."