

# AColyte

Easter 2020

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things  
at Austin College



**THIS IS JUST  
A WEIRD TIME**

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Behind a Mask  
Among the Butterflies  
In the middle of Holy Week  
April 2020

*Wear... face coverings in public settings  
where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain  
(e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies)*  
--The Centers for Disease Control

*Please don't bury me  
Down in the cold, cold ground.  
I'd rather have 'em cut me up  
And pass me all around.*  
--John Prine

*When the going get weird,  
The weird turn pro.*  
--Hunter S. Thompson

This is such a weird time.

It's "Holy Week." That's not weird at all. Holy Week comes every year. It's always the week preceding the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox.

Seriously.

Holy Week is the time in the Christian Year when many Christians like me normally gather for a series of worship services marking significant events in the story Jesus:

- The Last Supper (which is was tied to a Passover Seder)
- The betrayal, arrest, and public execution of Jesus
- His burial
- And his resurrection.

At Austin College, at the church in town where my family and I are members, and in Christian churches all over the world, Holy Week is typically a very busy time of gathering, praying, and worshipping God.

All those things will still happen to some degree this year, but they will be different. We can't gather in the same physical place. Right now, loving each other means wearing masks and keeping our distance.

This is a weird time.

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Meanwhile, it's an especially weird time at my house.

I have some temporary new roommates right now.

The caterpillar on the left is named "Emoji."

The others are "Tootoo" and "Willie."



As far as I know, the apple in the middle has no name.

Normally, at this time of year there are caterpillars in my wife's Head Start Class at Fred Douglass Early Childhood Center. Every Spring, she and her students gather a couple caterpillars and watch them grow, form chrysalises (that's the correct plural of "chrysalis" – I looked it up), and eventually emerge as butterflies.

So in this Season of Remote Learning, the class's caterpillars are at our house.

Every morning, Linnea records and distributes a video message for her class. And those messages often include updates about Emoji, Tootoo, and Willie. (By the way – and I hope this is obvious – the 4-year-old students from her class named the caterpillars.)

Monday night, Linnea asked me to get my guitar and record a song about the Butterfly Life Cycle so she could use it as the audio for a video she was preparing.

The song was to the tune of the Christmas Carol "Up on the Housetop."

*First comes the butterfly that lays an egg  
Out pops the caterpillar, many legs*

*Now, see the caterpillar spin and spin  
One little chrysalis to sleep in  
Oh, oh, oh, look and see  
Oh, oh, oh, look and see  
Out of the chrysalis, my o my!  
Out comes a beautiful butterfly.*

I'm a good husband.

This is a weird time.

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Here comes an abrupt jump.

Stay with me, it will make sense in a minute.

Christians aren't the only people thinking about and living out their faith this week.

On Tuesday, we had an Austin College Zoom Interfaith Prayer Service.

It was awesome. We had students, faculty, staff members, and at least one sibling of an AC student. The service included

- Chanting of Hindu prayers and texts in Sanskrit and English,
- Jewish prayers and sacred readings,
- Arabic recitations from the Qu'ran and Muslim prayers,
- Christian prayers and Bible readings, and
- Specific prayers for
  - COVID-19 patients,
  - People who are especially vulnerable to the coronavirus,
  - Medical personnel and first responders,
  - National, local, and campus leaders
  - Persons facing difficulties related to social distancing and remote learning.

And we did it together.

I think there are some people (*I know* there are some people) who think Interfaith activities like that are inappropriate, or disingenuous, or impossible, or theologically shallow, or weird.

But it's not weird at all around here.

We've done things like that before.

That's how we roll at Austin College.

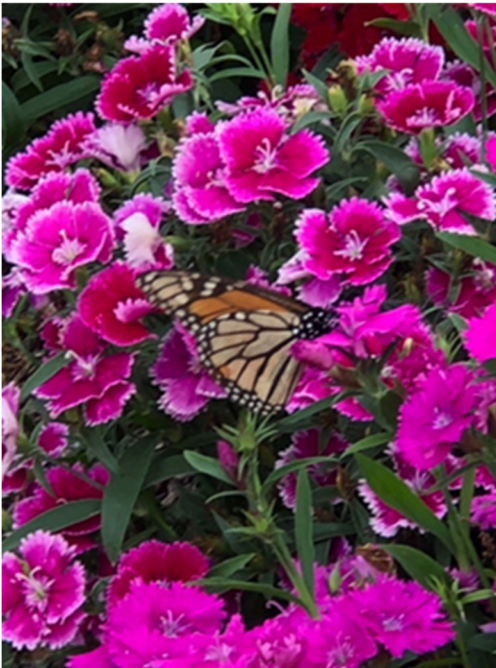
We don't "tolerate diversity," we embrace pluralism.

We believe our diversity makes us stronger.

As we affirmed at the beginning of the Zoom Interfaith Prayer Service:

*This is Us: Diverse and United.*

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President O'Day was an enthusiastic participant in our Zoom Interfaith Prayer Service.

After offering words of welcome and encouragement, he read selected verses from Psalms 19, 104, and 136. He spoke about the way those texts have helped him and Cece remember to appreciate the extravagant and consistent beauty of Nature even as they walk together with the rest of us through this weird Pandemic season.

And he shared this photograph from his yard:

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Throughout the history of Christianity, butterflies have consistently been used as metaphors for all these things we're remembering and focusing on during Holy Week.

It definitely makes some sense.

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday (or Passion Sunday). That's a day when Christians focus on the earthly ministry of Jesus. We emphasize his humanity, his status as a moral leader and ethical example, and the historical and political context of his life.

It's not too big of a stretch to see the caterpillar as analogous to that part of the Jesus story.

Like caterpillars, Jesus was a finite, living, limited animal. He got tired. He got hungry and thirsty.

I know that's kind of a weird way of saying it, but it's a big deal for Christians to believe and understand and remember that Jesus was just as human, just as biological, just as finite, as all the rest of us. That's what we are affirming in the Apostles Creed when we say that Jesus was "born of the Virgin Mary." To affirm that is to declare that Jesus had a human mother--just like you, me, and the Pope.

And Jesus dies on the Friday of Holy Week. Christians call that "Good Friday." And, in that narrative, Jesus is dead and buried by the time Good Friday is over.

That's an important part of the whole Christian narrative. It's a big deal to us Christians that Jesus, who was as human and finite as we are, also died like we're gonna die.

And a caterpillar entering, or becoming, a chrysalis is an understandable and appropriate metaphor for the death and burial of Jesus.

Jesus was a man walking among others and interacting with them.

And then he wasn't.

Emoji, Tootoo, and Willie are animals living and eating in my house.

But soon they won't be.

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But there's more going on in Holy Week.

Here's how the next part of the story is told in the Gospel of John:

*1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,  
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb  
and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.*

This occurs on Sunday morning after Jesus died on Friday and was removed from the cross and placed in a tomb.

It's is a typical, ancient public execution, crucifixion story. After someone who had been crucified finally died, the guards would take the body down and put it somewhere until their friends or family could retrieve and bury it.

That's what Mary was planning to do.

She was surprised and upset to discover that the stone at the entrance to the tomb where Jesus' body had been placed was not there.

*2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple,  
the one whom Jesus loved,*

Mary didn't go into the tomb.

Instead, she went to find her friends.

"Simon Peter" was Peter the disciple.

"[T]he other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved" was probably John. This curious and imprecise description of that second disciple has led to all kinds of questions and speculation among Bible Scholars.

Why isn't this second disciple named?

Why is that disciple described as "the one who Jesus loved"? Didn't Jesus love all the disciples?

Some scholars have suggested that this is a reference to Jesus' wife.

Others speculate that Jesus might have had a unique romantic relationship with this "other disciple."

While we cannot completely dismiss either of those speculations, I think they are beside the point.

The Greek word for "love" in this passage (ἐφιλει—"ephilei") refers to brotherly love or the love between friends, not romantic or erotic love.

I think John is simply describing himself in the third person here. I think it's him. That will be important later in the passage.

*2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple,  
the one whom Jesus loved,  
and said to them,  
"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,  
and we do not know where they have laid him."*

Again, Mary is concerned because the body of Jesus is not where she thought it would be.

She's worried because she can't prepare his body to be buried.

The situation is not what she expected it to be.

*3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out  
and went toward the tomb.  
4 The two were running together,  
but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.*

Now we've got at least three people who are energized by these surprising developments.

And I'm pretty sure the "other disciple" is John.

*5 He bent down to look in  
and saw the linen wrappings lying there,  
but he did not go in.*

He went farther than Mary.

He looked in and saw that a dead body had probably been in there, although it clearly wasn't there any more.

Why didn't he go in? Who knows?

He did have a lot of surprising information to process.

There was Mary's anxious message,  
the fact that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb where they thought Jesus' body was, and  
the linens that had been used to wrap the body were there, but he didn't see a body.



That was a lot.

Maybe he just needed to take a knee.

**6** *Then Simon Peter came, following him,  
and went into the tomb.*

*He saw the linen wrappings lying there,  
7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head,  
not lying with the linen wrappings  
but rolled up in a place by itself.*

Simon Peter showed up next.

He went a little farther.

And saw a little more.

**8** *Then the other disciple,  
who reached the tomb first,  
also went in,  
and he saw and believed;*

John followed Peter into the tomb.

He saw everything that Peter had seen:

- The linen wrappings,
- The head cloth,
- And the *complete absence of an actual body.*

**9** *for as yet they did not understand the scripture,  
that he must rise from the dead.*

This is an odd little aside.

But I think it's huge.

I think this is John saying, "Oh! – NOW I get it!"

Remember back in verse 8 when the other disciple "saw and believed"?

Apparently in the midst of all that weirdness, something came into focus for “the other disciple.”

Suddenly, he saw everything in a new way.

More about that later.

**10** *Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

Seems a little strange.

But what else were they going to do?

**11** *But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.  
As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;*

Mary was still trying to process this upsetting information.

She still hadn't been into the tomb, but after Peter and the other disciple had gone home she bent over and looked in.

**12** *and she saw two angels in white,  
sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying,  
one at the head and the other at the feet.*

The Greek word *αγγελ*, literally “angel” in Greek, means “messenger.”

**13** *They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"*

That seems like a strange way to address her, and kind of a dumb question.

I wonder what those angels, those messengers, contribute to this story.

*She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord,  
and I do not know where they have laid him."*

Maybe the angels were helping create a context for Mary to experience and understand what was about happen to her.

**14** *When she had said this,*

*she turned around and saw Jesus standing there,  
but she did not know that it was Jesus.*

Like Peter and the other disciple, Mary has a lot to process, and it takes her a minute.

**15** *Jesus said to her,  
"Woman, why are you weeping?  
Whom are you looking for?"*

Same fairly unhelpful question that the angels asked.

*Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him,  
"Sir, if you have carried him away,  
tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."*

A different version of her answer to the angels.

She's just trying to do what she had originally set out to do.

**16** *Jesus said to her, "Mary!"*

"Oh, SNAP! He knows my name."

**16** *Jesus said to her, "Mary!"  
She turned and said to him in Hebrew,  
"Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).*

Apparently in the midst of all that weirdness, something came into focus for Mary.

Suddenly, she saw everything in a new way.

**17** *Jesus said to her,  
"Do not hold on to me,  
because I have not yet ascended to the Father.  
But go to my brothers and say to them,  
"I am ascending to my Father and your Father,  
to my God and your God.' "*

"This is not just about you."

“It’s about all of them...all of y’all.”

“Go tell this story.”

**18** *Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples,  
"I have seen the Lord";  
and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

“I see everything in a new way.”

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When that story starts, Mary and the other disciple are certain that death is real and final.

By the end of the story, they still know death is real, but they also know – or at least they are beginning to suspect – that death might not be the last word.

It might not be the end of the story.

*Just one thing is clear to me:  
There’s always more than what appears to be  
And when the light’s just right, I swear I see:  
Poetry.  
--Walt Wilkins*

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Someday soon, Emoji, Tootoo, and Willie will enter chrysalises.

Sometime after that, they will emerge.

Their chrysalis time will look pretty static to the rest of us. They’ll pretty much just be hanging there.

But amazing things will be going on in those chrysalises.

And when they finally emerge, they will be sort of the same, but not the same at all.

Both we and they will see everything in a new way.

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I can't resist trying to squeeze a little meaning for #ROONation out of this caterpillar-chrysalis-butterfly-Easter business.

I wonder if Emoji, Tootoo, and Willie know what's in store for them.

I'm pretty sure that, on March 1, none of us had any idea what was in store for us.

But here we are in the RooMote chrysalis.

I think that might be an okay metaphor.

Strange stuff happens in the chrysalis.

Caterpillars essentially digest and reconstitute themselves.

Is that happening to us?

Maybe.

Like President O'Day, I have been seeing some butterflies on campus this week.

I absolutely believe something is coming that will have deep continuity with who we were six weeks ago, but will also be new and delicate and beautiful.

Meanwhile, it's weird in the chrysalis.

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John Prine died Tuesday night (April 7) from complications related to COVID-19.

He was a great songwriter who had millions of fans (including me).

I quoted one of his songs above:

*Please don't bury me  
Down in the cold, cold ground.  
I'd rather have 'em cut me up  
And pass me all around.*

In the last couple of days, many of my friends and I have been posting recordings or lyrics from John Prine songs.

We're essentially "cutting him up and passing him all around."

That makes me smile.

I believe death is real (John Prine, me someday, Jesus).

I just don't believe it's the last word.

Easter is a weird time.

The story isn't over.

The butterflies are coming.

The last good thing hasn't happened yet.

Happy Easter!

Until Next Time, I remain,  
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,  
Wondering whether Jesus thinks Communion Is "Cutting Me Up and Passing Me All  
around,"

JOHN WILLIAMS