



40 DAYS OF LETTING GO

Lent 2023



EASTER

Is Our Story

Rev. Ellen Debenport

The long-told story of Jesus' crucifixion, entombment, and resurrection is the story of our lives. We resonate with its loss, darkness, and new life because we cycle through the same process time and again in our human lifetimes.

We all experience deaths—deaths of loved ones, of hope, of plans; deaths of life as we know it when everything changes; deaths of jobs, of relationships, of what is familiar. Sometimes we experience a public crucifixion that feels as if everyone is watching and jeering—bankruptcy, divorce, arrest.

Although Lent can be observed as a period of letting go and releasing what no longer serves us, sometimes we don't seem to have a choice about what we must release.

Many crucifixions—these metaphorical deaths—are so painful that we find ourselves in a tomb afterward. Our lives are in limbo. We must recover and regroup. This is the Saturday experience of Jesus' mother and disciples. When their beloved leader was killed as a common criminal, their hope was lost and everything they believed was thrown into doubt. What a terrible period of grief it must have been.

But there is always a resurrection. That's the message of Easter for us. Nothing stays dark forever. A new day always dawns. We are given new beginnings and fresh starts. The sun comes up again. There is nothing so painful in our lives that it can't be redeemed for good somehow, and that is our prayer from the tomb: "Show me the good." Then we can start to create a new day.

Through the cycles of your life, the Easter story might speak to you differently in different years:

Some years you might be in the Garden of Gethsemane, dreading what you fear is about to happen, wondering whether you have the courage to let go of life as you know it for the promise of resurrection.

Some years you might be experiencing a crucifixion—in pain, asking why God seems to have forsaken you.

Some years you might identify with Jesus' grieving mother and his friends after their great loss.

Some years you might be in a tomb, waiting and trusting that something lies beyond this darkness.

Some years you might be exhilarated by the promise of resurrection, of lifting yourself into new life.

Some years you might know the joy of the women who discovered the tomb was empty, realizing a situation is not as bad as you feared.

Some years—every year—Easter can remind you of your own divinity and what your spiritual nature means for your life. Each year you can ask: *What does the Easter story tell me about myself as an expression of God in human form?*

Among its beautiful lessons, the Easter story reveals that death is not the end; it is only a physical event. It happens to our bodies and within our human circumstances, but it cannot touch our spirits, the eternal essence of God that we are. Death in its many forms—the people, places, things, thoughts, and habits we must let go—is not to be feared because we cannot die.

Life is eternal, far beyond this physical existence. In the Unity tradition, resurrection is Jesus' final teaching for us. The risen Jesus tells us, *There's so much more to life than you have realized.*

It puts divinity within our grasp. It reminds us that everything Jesus was, we are and more, just as he said. It lets us know we can survive anything—literally anything—because we will always keep living in one form or another. We are the energy of life because we are part of the one eternal presence and power in the universe.

That's a pretty spectacular message, any way you look at it, wherever you are in the cycle of death, tomb, and resurrection. We celebrate our divine, eternal selves this Easter.

Rev. Ellen Debenport is vice president of publishing and content at Unity World Headquarters.





RELEASE *and Let Go*

Rev. Tawnicia F. Rowan

The lyrics to the song “I Release, and I Let Go” by Rickie Byars and Rev. Michael Bernard Beckwith capture the essence of Jesus’ message for us and his example during the days leading up to his crucifixion:

*There was a time in my life
I thought I had to
do it all myself.
I didn’t know the grace
of God was sufficient
Didn’t know the love of God
was at hand.*

*But now I can say
If you are discouraged
Struggling just to make it
through another day
You’ve got to let it go,
let it all go
And this is what you have to say:*

*I release, and I let go
I let the Spirit run my life
And my heart is open wide
Yes, I’m only here for God.*

*No more struggle,
no more strife
With my faith I see the light.
I am free in the Spirit
Yes, I’m only here for God.*

Having lived a life of devotion to God and committed service to God's people, Jesus knew that the end of this life was near. He also had a clear sense of his calling, and though he would have preferred a different outcome, he was willing to surrender his own desires. A shift happened in Jesus when he made the commitment to release and let go. The same shift happens in us too. The attachment to outcome dissolves, and faith in the perfect outworking of spiritual law emerges.

"It is finished."—John 19:30

The Gospel of John attributes these words to Jesus as he hung from the cross. They are the English translation of the Greek word *tetelestai*, which comes from the verb *teleo*, meaning "to bring to an end, to complete, to accomplish." In an article titled "The Meaning of Tetelestai—'It Is Finished,'" Rev. Ray Pritchard, D.Min., writes:

It's a crucial word because it signifies the successful end to a particular course of action ... It means, "I did exactly what I set out to do" ... This was not the despairing cry of a helpless martyr; it was not an expression of satisfaction that the termination of His sufferings was now reached; it was not the last gasp of a worn-out life. No, rather was it the declaration ... that all for which He came ... was now done; that all that was needed to reveal the full character of God had now been accomplished.

The 17th chapter of John reports that as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before the crucifixion, he said in part, "Father ... I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed" (John 17:1, 4-5). In other words, *No more struggle, no more strife. With my faith I see the light. I am free in the Spirit. Yes, I'm only here for God.*

For New Thought Christian metaphysicians, the life and ministry of Jesus has significance both literally and metaphorically. Since we understand the scriptures as the story of the generation, degeneration, and regeneration of human consciousness, we believe that the work God has given us to do—the work Jesus demonstrates—begins in our own minds. It begins with the crucifixion of erroneous, limiting beliefs about who and what we are and what we can achieve. It continues with the acceptance of the Truth that we are all made in the image and after the likeness of God.

But it doesn't end there.

Like our Master Teacher and Way Shower Jesus, we are here to be individualized expressions of God in the world—to do the work of bringing forth the kingdom of heaven on earth by bringing forth the divine qualities of life, love, wisdom, power, and substance. We have a responsibility to know, to speak, and to demonstrate Truth right where we are. Our work is not finished until we have done our part to make manifest the glory of God for the benefit of all creation.

What must you release in order to fulfill your assignment? What must you become? Today is your day to nail to the cross everything that's been holding you back. Every doubt. Every fear. Every insecurity. Every critical thought. Every selfish motive. Every seeming obstacle. Let it all go. Nail it to the cross and be free.

Rev. Tawnicia F. Rowan is staff minister at Universal Truth Center for Better Living in Miami, Florida, and on the faculty at the Johnnie Coleman Theological Seminary.

"I Release, and I Let Go" is reprinted with permission. Music by Rickie Byars; lyrics by Rickie Byars and Rev. Michael Bernard Beckwith.

Ash Wednesday

FEBRUARY 22, 2023

I LET GO of *anger*.

Anger, you come into my life like a ferocious thunderstorm in the afternoon. You stay and get comfortable in my body. Do you think you can have your way with me?

Where does anger come from? Perhaps some fear that I haven't fully accepted, some emotional wound that has not healed. Anger's intense energy can be channeled into something wonderful, or it can be destructive to others and myself. I might even think I can get God's attention with my anger. Maybe I'll get what I want if I am angry enough with God.

There is a gap, a moment between the fuse being ignited and the explosion of anger. It's a spiritual practice to mind the gap and let go before the explosion. As I practice, I become proficient in the art of surrender, letting go of the old ideas and old hurts that no longer serve me.

**Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak,
slow to anger.—James 1:19**

—Rev. John Beerman

AFFIRM:

I release my emotional reactions and heal from within.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2023

I LET GO of *anxiety*.

Feelings of anxiety are the equivalent of paying interest on a debt that we have yet to incur. I can think of nothing more rewarding than letting go of the time and energy put into thoughts of fear, which is at the core of all anxiety.

In order to release anxiety, we can remember how often those feelings have lied to us. I recommend a practice I have used for decades. When feeling anxiety, I write down the issue in a notebook and leave space to write the eventual outcome. Across the span of 40 years, whenever I look back, I see that 100 percent of the issues never resulted in the worst-case scenarios my fears and anxiety prophesized.

Each time I record a new fear or worry in that notebook, I am reminded of the prior outcomes. They are proof that anxiety and fear were false prophets.

**Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer
and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests
be made known to God.—Philippians 4:6**

—Rev. Bill Englehart

AFFIRM:

I envision only best-case scenarios.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2023

I LET GO of apathy.

If there could be such a military officer, “General Apathy” would be highly successful. By applying the strategy known as lack of interest, general apathy has eliminated more ideas than can be counted. The strategy works by killing that which is insufficiently desired.

We might joke that a favorite restaurant has gone out of business because we neglected to dine there frequently enough, but there is truth in that jest. Nothing on the physical plane lasts forever, but we preserve it to the degree that we feast upon it. If we are apathetic, the reason for its existence dissipates until it disappears.

Dining on what we really enjoy is a strategy that does not consume but instead inspires us to discover more that is enjoyable. The universe is full of goodness awaiting our attention. Apathy is not invincible. It is defeated when we take command.

These are the things you must insist on and teach.—1 Timothy 4:11

—Rev. Michael Jamison

AFFIRM:

I salute the divinity in me and take command of my life.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2023

I LET GO of bitterness.

When we have suffered a wrong or a perceived wrong, our hurt and anger can burrow into our being. We can find ourselves living with deep resentment, a bitterness that is corrosive to our soul. While we may feel justified in our feelings, we are only harming ourselves.

Releasing bitterness asks us to dig deeper than our pain and anger and shift our awareness to a place of forgiveness and compassion. Beneath the hurt is love, and that love becomes available to us when we are willing to let go.

Forgiveness does not mean condoning what happened. Forgiveness means letting go of the heaviness in our hearts. When we bring compassion and forgiveness to ourselves, when we focus on our resilience and wholeness, we shift from the past to present awareness. We open a space in our heart for deep healing. Letting go of bitterness frees us to know more love and compassion.

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.—Philippians 3:13

—Rev. DeeAnn Weir Morency

AFFIRM:

I soften, forgive, and release any bitterness I carry within my heart. I free myself.