

# Following a Risen Christ in a Fallen World

*The Wired Word for the Week of April 17, 2022*

## In the News

As we celebrate Easter, we recognize that some of the events that preceded this special day this year have more in common with the horror of the Crucifixion than with the hope of the Resurrection. Especially, the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces and the war crimes committed by some of those forces in the Ukrainian city of Bucha belong to the darkness of Friday rather than the joy of Sunday.

Against this backdrop, Pope Francis has called for an Easter truce in Ukraine to make room for a negotiated peace, "weapons to be laid down to begin an Easter truce, not to reload weapons and resume fighting, no! A truce to reach peace through real negotiations," the pontiff said.

"When we resort to violence ... we lose sight of why we are in the world and even end up committing senseless acts of cruelty," the pope said. "We see this in the folly of war, where Christ is crucified yet another time," he said.

As this is being written ahead of Easter, we don't know whether the pope's plea will be heeded, but with Easter's emphasis on healing, renewal and victory over the forces of death, Pope Francis' call to stop the killing at least for that day is not unreasonable or even unrealistic, though it's anybody's guess whether Russia leader Vladimir Putin will commit to it.

If he does, it's our prayer that it's the beginning of a negotiated solution.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Pope Francis Calls for an Easter Truce in Ukraine. AP](#)  
[Bucha Massacre. Wikipedia](#)

## Applying the News Story

The atrocities at Bucha are yet another reminder -- not that we needed one -- that we live in a "fallen world."

That the world is fallen is a foundational belief of Christianity. The concept of fallenness is based in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. According to that narrative, after our first parents disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit, God expelled them from the garden. Although that's not described in Genesis as a "fall," it's clear that the expulsion puts Adam and Eve into a different kind of world from the one they had inhabited in the garden. There, life was easy and good. Outside the garden, there was pain, toil and troubles.

With the possible exception of [Isaiah 43:27](#), the rest of the Old Testament doesn't dwell on the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and Jewish tradition lays no particular blame on either Adam or Eve for the human plight. In the New Testament, however, the apostle Paul introduces the idea

of sin and death entering the world through one man, referring to Adam. He seems to be using that reference in an allegorical way to show that the way to eternal life entered the world through another man -- Jesus Christ. Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22: "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." (Paul also developed this thought in Roman 5. See the scripture section below.)

But, of course, it's easy to quote scripture and to speak as though the resurrection of Christ completely overrides the daily challenges and losses we -- and the world with us -- still face. From our own experience of life we know that isn't the case.

Jennifer M. Rosner put it this way in her essay, ["Christ Conquered Death. He Didn't Cancel It"](#): "As so many of us have experienced, reality is far different from the simple statement that death has been conquered by resurrection. Death, in all its insidious forms, still pervades our daily lives. Even after Jesus' glorious resurrection, we continue to wrestle with the disquieting dimensions of our humanity: the traumas we relive, the losses we endure, the disappointments we amass, the anxieties we are paralyzed by."

In such a troubled and fallen context, how can the resurrection of Christ 2,000 years ago make any difference to us today? Answering that question is the topic of our discussion here.

### **The Big Questions**

*Instead of our usual "Big Questions," we offer the following Easter affirmations. With each one, discuss why you agree with it or why you don't.*

1. When we follow a risen Christ, we know that the events of today are not the end of our story. Our lives are stories being written. And we know that our temporal lives are a prelude to a life hereafter.
2. Following the risen Christ and being faithful to his teachings will -- in and of itself -- prevent us from making some dubious choices, committing unethical practices. In short, following Jesus makes our lives a whole lot better by cutting off potential stupid and bad stuff from ever happening in the first place. When we made a decision to follow Jesus, our lives just got 500% better.
3. We can follow the risen Christ by living as he lived -- to serve others. There's a joy in serving others that helps to relieve the bondage and dispel the shadows of life in this world.
4. Following a risen Christ means we no longer let a fallen world define us. See [Romans 12:1-2](#). We live in a fallen world, but we're citizens of another world and we live by its rules, ethics and values.
5. Following a risen Christ means that we do not despair or sorrow as others may despair ["as those who have no hope."](#) We follow Jesus in the context of hope.

## **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### **1 Corinthians 15:3-7, 11**

*For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ... so we proclaim and so you have come to believe. (For context, read [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#).)*

**Questions:** Why does Paul highlight these particular events "as of first importance" for Christians? In what ways is this statement a testimony? What does it mean to you? Why do you think Paul enumerates the witnesses to the risen Christ?

### **Romans 5:15**

*But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. (For context, read [Romans 5:12-21](#).)*

When Paul used the Adam-Christ contrast in the letter to the Romans, he spoke of "one man's trespass" and the Greek word he used, *paraptoma*, means literally "to slip or fall sideways" or "a lapse," but he seemed to be speaking allegorically.

Eventually, however, some Christian theologians, and especially St. Augustine, began speaking of the disobedience of Adam and Eve as the "fall," and they argued that our first parents' choice to disobey God allowed the entrance of sin to contaminate the entire human race, and they said it has done so ever since. They called Adam and Eve's disobedience "original sin."

Not all current theologians view the concept in quite the same way today, but it's hard to argue that the world as it is is the world as God wants it to be. Most of us can think of evidence that might lead us to say, "We live in a fallen world."

**Questions:** What is the "free gift in the grace of the one man"? In what ways have you experienced it?

### **John 8:12**

*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (For context, read [John 8:12-20](#).)*

### **Revelation 21:3-4**

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." (For context, read [Revelation 21:1-7](#).)*

We know something about the difference in the darkness of life and the light of life. Imagine for a moment that you had a piece of paper in front of you with a line drawn vertically down the center, dividing the sheet into two columns. In the first column -- let's call it Column A -- you are to write down all the good, enjoyable and happy things of your life, the things you count as blessings. What might go on there? -- the birth of your children, some fun vacations, a hobby or pastime you really enjoy, your good health, not having to worry about having the necessities of life, etc., as well as wider-scale blessings, such as the freedoms we enjoy in America, our relative affluence as a nation, and similar things.

Then in the other column -- Column B -- you are to list the things that you count as troubles, pains, bitter disappointments, fears, terrors, griefs, and so on. What might go on there? -- worries about your children's choices, crime, fear for personal and family security, chronic pain, unemployment or employment at a job you hate, poor health, etc., as well as such global problems as abused children, poverty, drug use among the population, the pandemic, human trafficking, wars, terrorism and the like.

Depending on our individual stories, some of us might have a longer list on one side or the other, but suppose for a moment that you could simply take all the stuff in Column B and with a wave of your hand, make it to never have happened. Your life would consist of only the blessings stuff. What might you call your world then? How about "utopia," "paradise" or even "heaven"?

Now suppose the blessings column was removed and your life consisted only of the awful stuff in Column B. What might you call your world now? How about "nightmare," "purgatory" or even "hell"?

But life as we know it is not just Column A or just Column B but a mix of both. So what do we call that world? How about "reality" or even "fallen"?

Now, going back to that two-column list once more: In which column would you put death? Certainly thinking of the death of our loved ones, we'd put it in Column B, the dark column. It's true that death can sometimes be seen as a relief for someone who is suffering, and in that sense, might be thought of as a good thing, but that's only because it's relatively better than unrelieved suffering, which is a Column B thing. If, as we've suggested, all the Column B stuff were removed from life, then death would never be thought of as a good thing.

It's worth noting that when the Bible describes the world to come in the book of Revelation, it says not only that "death will be no more," but also that "mourning and crying and pain will be no more." In other words, *Easter isn't just about the defeat of death, but also the end of all that Column B darkness*. There is no Column B stuff in the kingdom of God.

Because we follow a risen Christ, we know that sometimes it's not possible to know immediately whether something is bad or if it's good. We've learned that Jesus has a way of transforming or redeeming things that at first we thought were bad into beautiful things.

**Questions:** Given that it's not always possible to know right away, how can we be sure which things belong in Column A and which belong in Column B? In what ways does the resurrected Jesus walk with us through the difficulties and the hurts of life?

### **1 Corinthians 15:16-20 (The Message)**

*If corpses can't be raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. It's even worse for those who died hoping in Christ and resurrection, because they're already in their graves. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ has been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries. (For context, read [1 Corinthians 15:12-26](#).)*

Easter morning is not merely a time to celebrate a miracle that happened to Jesus 2,000 years ago. Rather, it is a declaration that because Christ defeated death, he is the Lord not only of our lives, but also of our destiny. We live in a fallen world, but we follow a risen Savior who has come to release our world from bondage to death and to put all that terrible Column B stuff into a context of hope, until the day when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness, and Column B is no more.

**Questions:** If Christ had not risen, what would be the point of church? What problems would remain unresolved if Jesus had not risen from the dead? What does it mean that Christ is Lord of our destiny?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Respond to this from TWW's sister publication, *Homiletics*: "The gigantic rockets used in America's space program, before the days of the space shuttle, had at their very top a structure called the 'escape tower.' The escape tower was a metal framework, supporting a small but powerful rocket. It was bolted to the pinnacle of the capsule in which the astronauts reclined, waiting for takeoff.

"In the event of a launch disaster, the role of the escape tower was to carry the astronauts in their capsule up and away from the main rocket. A parachute would then float them safely back to Earth.

"The resurrection is more than Jesus' escape tower. The point of the resurrection is not so much that Jesus escapes death. That would more properly be called "resuscitation." Resuscitation and resurrection are very different things.

"The good news of resurrection is not merely that Jesus, by the power of God, survives death. The good news is that he conquers it, once and for all.

"Most often, when people grimly observe, 'We live in a fallen world,' they're assuming there's nothing to be done about that, other than escaping this vale of tears. Death's portal leads to 'a better place.'

"In the resurrection, Jesus doesn't simply return for his own sake. He returns for the sake of all humanity: to reassure us in our bewilderment and pain, to say (as he proclaims to the disciples when first he sees them), 'Peace be with you.'"

2. C.S. Lewis once famously remarked that he believed in Christianity just like he believed in the sun: "Not only because I see it," he said, "but because by it I see everything else."

Picking up on Lewis' comment, Brandon Ambrosino, who covers culture and religion for [Vox.com](http://Vox.com), wrote, "That's how I see Jesus' resurrection; not so much an event I look at, as an event I look through. For me, it remains the interpretive key to the entire universe. And though it might seem improbable and primitive, we're all aware that the idea is writ large across both our imaginations and even the cosmos. Each morning, the sun is reborn; each spring, harvests come back to life; after each disappointment, our dashed hopes are reanimated, and soar to even newer heights. For all the death and evil and greed and ugliness of our world, I can't shake the fact that every last atom of this place is pulsing in time with the rhythm of resurrection."

In what ways does the resurrection of Jesus help you interpret the world? In what ways do you receive from it both daily hope and long-term optimism?

3. Discuss this, from TWW team member Frank Ramirez. "Matthew's account of the Resurrection takes [the biggest swipe at the occupying army](#). Here are Roman guards, set in front of the tomb, the folks who conquered the Western World, and they get knocked senseless. 'For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.' I picture the Cowardly Lion shaking with fear at the Wizard of Oz. That's a comic picture that might have pleased first-century slaves hearing the story read aloud in their house churches. And then the message of the angel is given to the women, not to the representatives of the emperor, the inheritor of Augustus Caesar's titles of Prince of Peace, Son of a god, and Savior of the world.

"We're hearing stories out of Ukraine, anecdotal, so they may not be true, of Russian soldiers abandoning their tanks, or self-sabotaging their trucks in the convoy (in contrast to horrifying stories of butchery and genocide, which are easier to believe). While the New Testament tells of brutal Roman soldiers skilled in conducting crucifixions and ready to commit atrocities, it also tells of centurions who take time to get to know the locals, build synagogues, and impress Jesus and villagers.

"Anyway, with regard to the Roman soldiers knocked silly, I can't help but think of the song sung by The Angels: 'My boyfriend's back and you're gonna be sorry, hey la, hey la, my boyfriend's back.'"

4. Several years ago around Easter time, the late English intellectual and journalist Malcolm Muggeridge wrote in his column in *The Observer* that he could not believe that Jesus was in a particular sense God's Son, nor, he said, could he believe in the Resurrection. He said that he preferred to believe that if Jesus' body was missing, then some body snatcher had made off with it and abandoned it to the vultures, leaving his bones to whiten in the sun.

Sometime after that Muggeridge became a Christian, and here is a comment he made in more recent years: "If you should ask me by what authority I talk about the power of Christ to change human nature, I should reply to you simply ... because he has changed me. I can look anybody in the face today -- my friends, my colleagues, and what, perhaps, is most difficult of all, the members of my family -- and be sure that they know, as I know, that I am really and literally a new creature in Christ Jesus since the day when he came into my life."

In other words, Muggeridge encountered a living Lord.

5. Sometimes, it's eyewitnesses who help us grasp the impact of what has happened. Consider this story by TWW team member Stan Purdum called "Eyewitnesses":

"It couldn't have been him," the distraught woman said. "I talked to him not more than an hour ago."

The police officer shifted on his feet. These things were never easy. "I'm so sorry, Ma'am," he said, "but we identified him from his driver's license. And the car was registered in his name as well."

"Well, it's got to be a mistake. It's not him."

"Actually," replied the officer, "we will need someone to formally identify him."

"I'll do it." That was from the woman's 16-year-old son, Ryan. She didn't know how long he had been standing behind her, but suddenly she was glad he was there. He was such a level-headed boy. He'd be able to straighten out this colossal mistake. One look and he'd know the man lying in the morgue was not his father. And then the police could put their energies into finding out who the unfortunate driver was.

"Thank you, Ryan," she said. Then turning to the officer, she added, "My son will go with you, and you'll see. It's not my Tom you've got there." The starch in her voice was almost convincing, but both the officer and Ryan noticed the quiver in her lip.

"Is there someone we can call for you first?" the officer asked.

"Not necessary," the woman said, gathering her courage. "You'll have Ryan back in no time. You'll see."

It was less than an hour later when Ryan came back. But as he opened the door, his mother took one look at him and knew the awful truth.

They crumpled into each other's arms, sobbing for great grief.

"It couldn't have been him," Philip said. "They crucified him. All Jerusalem saw it. Nobody could have survived that. He's dead. I didn't want to believe it, but it's true."

Mary Magdalene could hardly stand still, even though she'd run all the way from the tomb. "But it was him," she said, "He spoke to me."

"You've got to be mistaken, Woman. It's not him."

"Actually," replied Mary, "John and Peter have been to the tomb. It's empty."

"Yes. They told me. But all that proves is that his body has been moved."

Mary realized that Philip was not going to be convinced by anything she said, so finally she simply told him, "You just wait. You'll see."

Much later that day, she entered the house where the Eleven had been staying. Except for Thomas, they were all there.

And all ten of them were sobbing for great joy.

## **Responding to the News**

Pray for the people of Ukraine. Support whatever programs your denomination has to help that situation. And if any refugees from Ukraine arrive in your area, welcome them.

## **Prayer**

We rejoice, O God of our salvation, that by your great mercy, you have caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Fill us with the power of his resurrection, that our lives may bear witness to his living presence among us. Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen!

## Other News This Week

# Nation Observes Historic Confirmation of Ketanji Brown Jackson to Supreme Court of the United States

*The Wired Word for the Week of April 17, 2022*

## In the News

After Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer announced in January that he would retire at the end of this year's term, President Joe Biden fulfilled a promise he made during the 2020 presidential campaign to nominate the first black female jurist to the nation's highest court in its 233-year history. On February 25, 2022, he nominated Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to become the 116th Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

According to [USA Facts](#), "The courts have historically been white and male. Although the courts have slowly become more diverse, about 71% of all current federal judges are white, non-Hispanics. By comparison white, non-Hispanics are about 58% of the U.S. population."

On April 7, Vice President Kamala Harris announced that Judge Jackson's nomination was confirmed by a bipartisan vote of 53-47. The next day, at a White House celebratory event, Harris noted that when Jackson is sworn in as an Associate Justice, it will be the first time four women will serve on the Supreme Court simultaneously.

Then the president spoke. "This is going to let so much sun shine on so many young women, so many young black women," he said. "We're going to look back and see this as a moment of real change in American history."

The image of President Biden standing between Harris, the first black and Asian-American vice president, and Jackson, the first black female who will soon sit on the Supreme Court, was striking.

Visibly moved, Judge Jackson observed that "It has taken 232 years and 115 prior appointments for a black woman to be selected to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States. But we've made it. We've made it -- all of us. All of us. And our children are telling me that they see now more than ever that here in America, anything is possible."

Jackson credited her achievements to others who preceded her: "I am standing on the shoulders of my own role models, generations of Americans who never had anything close to this kind of opportunity, but who got up every day and went to work believing in the promise of America," she said.

"For all of the talk of this historic nomination and now confirmation, I think of them as the true path breakers," Jackson commented. "I'm just the very lucky first inheritor of the dream of liberty and justice for all."

"The path was cleared for me, so that I might rise to this occasion, and in the poetic words of Dr. Maya Angelou, I do so now while 'bringing the gifts my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave,'" she added.

Christine Ayanna Croasdaile, who is studying at Howard University School of Law, remarked on the significance of Judge Jackson's elevation: "Having this esteemed force in the field of law join the bench and highest court of these United States would mean the world for every little black girl to know that they too can aspire for the best and be a vessel of wisdom and justice in this country and beyond."

Hailey Guillory, another law student at Howard, said, "It's important to note that black people are not a monolith. We have different backgrounds and philosophies just like everyone else. With that said, representation matters. It's about black people everywhere who don't see themselves reflected in the spaces they aspire to be. It's also about people everywhere who aspire to achieve things that they've historically been marginalized from. KBJ's confirmation serves as a reminder of not only how far we have to go, but also how far we have come."

Nina Turner, a former Ohio state senator, stated that celebration of this historic moment should not be limited to the black community, but "the entire country should be proud because this has certainly been a long time coming."

The ideological balance of the Supreme Court will not change when Jackson joins the bench, but for the first time in the court's history, white men will be in the minority, the entire liberal cohort at the court will be made up of women (including Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor), and there will be two blacks serving simultaneously on the high court (the other, Justice Clarence Thomas, represents a conservative perspective).

While Jackson, Kagan and Sotomayor will be in the liberal ideological minority, they may still influence the direction of the court through dissents.

"Dissents are extremely important because they're a reminder to the public and the court that there's an alternative approach," says Fatima Goss Graves, the president and CEO of the National Women's Law Center. "They are sometimes guiding posts for future decision-making."

According to the [NAACP Legal Defense Fund website](#), Judge Jackson has made and may continue to make an impact in the life of our country through the positions she takes on issues such as access to justice, economic discrimination and workers' rights, criminal justice and capital punishment, race-conscious policies and affirmative action, appropriate sentencing and fair treatment of incarcerated people, policing, qualified immunity and accountability for law enforcement.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Senate Confirms Ketanji Brown Jackson to Serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. \*The White House\*](#)  
[Jackson's Speech Highlights U.S. Race Struggles, Progress. \*AP News\*](#)

[Profile of a Potential Nominee: Ketanji Brown Jackson. SCOTUSblog](#)  
[What Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson Means for the Country. Politico](#)  
[Ketanji Brown Jackson 'Means the World' to Every Black Girl. BBC](#)

## The Big Questions

1. What was your first reaction to the announcement of President Biden's decision to nominate Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States? How do you think her presence on the nation's highest court may impact our country?
2. What are the most important tasks of a judge, in your opinion?
3. What are the most important character traits a judge should possess? What kind of life experiences might be particularly useful as a judge considers the facts of a case?
4. Where in the Bible do we see Jesus or others acknowledge or lift up under-represented groups? the oppressed? women? racial/ethnic people? What does this tell us about how God sees these people?
5. [1 Kings 3:16-28](#) tells the story of how King Solomon ruled on a dispute between two prostitutes over the custody of a child. Given the likelihood that Solomon's life experiences differed greatly from those of the litigants who came before him, how do you think he was able to reach a decision that was widely acclaimed as wise and just?

## Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### **Judges 4:4-5**

*At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. (For context, read [Judges 4:4-10](#).)*

### **Judges 5:7, 31**

*The peasantry prospered in Israel,  
they grew fat on plunder,  
because you arose, Deborah,  
arose as a mother in Israel. ...*

*And the land had rest forty years. (For context, read [Judges 5:6-12, 31](#).)*

In the time when judges governed the Israelites, the people "again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD," so the Lord gave them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who oppressed them cruelly for 20 years (4:1-3).

The people sought out the prophetess Deborah to render judgment when they had disputes. She also counseled Israelite military leader Barak on how to defeat Jabin's army and his military commander, Sisera (4:6-7). Barak was unwilling to go without Deborah, so she agreed to

accompany him, but told him that the glory of Israel's victory would not belong to him, but would go to a woman (4:8-10).

So Barak and Deborah went to war with 10,000 troops, utterly destroying Sisera's army with its 900 iron chariots (4:11-16). Sisera fled on foot, and was killed by a woman, Jael, who tricked the commander into thinking she was an ally. Deborah's prophecy was thus fulfilled (4:17-24).

**Questions:** How do you think Deborah's diverse experience, as a wife, mother, prophet, judge and military adviser shaped her as a leader? What is the connection of the phrase, "And the land had rest forty years" to Deborah's leadership? Why do you think only two chapters of the Bible were devoted to her, while entire books were written about men like Moses, who were liberators of their people?

### **Numbers 27:1-2, 4-7**

*Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward. Zelophehad was son of Hopher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph, a member of the Manassite clans. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they said, ... "Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers." Moses brought their case before the LORD. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them." (For context, read [Numbers 27:1-11](#).)*

At the time of a census, when land was allotted to the male heirs in the tribes and families of the Israelites (Numbers 26), five daughters of Zelophehad brought a petition to Moses and other leaders, asking for the right to inherit land that would have gone to their father, had he lived. They argued that since he had no sons, his estate should be passed on to his daughters, so it would remain in the family.

Moses took the case to the Lord, who agreed that the women had a right to fair treatment under the law, and that their petition should be granted.

It's noteworthy that in a time when most of the names mentioned in biblical lists and censuses were male, these five women were mentioned by name. Apparently, their case was significant enough that it resulted in the elaboration of further related case law (vv. 8-11).

**Questions:** Why do you think the conclusion of this case was not applied more broadly to other females in subsequent generations? On what basis was this case decided: the rights of the clan, the father or those of the daughters? What difference might that make?

### **Mark 7:25-29**

*... but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed*

*first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go -- the demon has left your daughter." (For context, read [Mark 7:24-30](#).)*

When Jesus came to the region of Tyre on the Mediterranean Sea, perhaps for a little R and R, he hoped for some quiet time, but a non-Jewish woman heard he was in town and came to see him about her troubled daughter.

Jesus responds the way we might imagine Supreme Court justices might question a plaintiff who appears before them: "You ask for relief, but on what do you base your claim? Some would argue that we shouldn't grant your request, because you don't have standing (you aren't one of God's 'chosen' people), or because if we grant your request, we will have to treat others unfairly."

But the woman countered that there was more than enough justice in God's heart for everyone. Her argument pleased Jesus, who told her that her request had been granted. When she heard this, she went home to find her little girl at peace, no longer troubled by the demon (v. 30).

**Questions:** Have you ever had the audacity to "talk back" to God the way this woman talked back to Jesus? If not, why haven't you? If so, what happened, and what did you learn?

### **Luke 18:3-5**

*[Jesus said,] "In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" (For context, read [Luke 18:1-8](#).)*

Throughout the Bible, [patriarch](#), [prophet](#) and [psalmist](#) alike raise their voices to heaven, calling on the Judge of the earth to deliver justice, pleading "O Lord, how long shall the wicked exult?"

By faith, Abraham asks, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" and the psalmist declares that God will repay "wicked rulers ... who contrive mischief by statute," though they do not yet see the justice they long for. By faith, [Habakkuk](#) proclaims: "Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation."

The widow in Luke 18 fits this pattern of persistent prayer for justice, even when faced with seemingly impenetrable obstacles. She repeatedly came before a corrupt judge who should have been the one person she could trust to be impartial, but he had no respect for God or for people (v. 2). Yet, because she persisted, the judge finally relented and gave her the justice she was seeking.

**Questions:** Where in biblical and church history have you seen examples of God's people persisting in prayer and faith against enormous odds? Where have you seen such persistence and faith in our own nation's development? Around the world today?

What does it take to sustain such persistent faith? What are you doing to build and strengthen that kind of persistent faith in your own life and community?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Read this excerpt from [Iron Sharpens Iron: Ancient Moral Wisdom and Contemporary Psychology on the Virtue of Patience](#).

"Two years ago, what started as a two-week stay-home order turned into two months, rising COVID-19 case counts and deaths, a blur of vaccine news, finally a rollout -- a slow one -- and then reluctant uptake by some segments of the population.

"Our expectations have been repeatedly challenged during the pandemic. Our stress compounded for many by employment interruptions, remote online schooling, and on the daily level, perhaps, your child's uncooperative attitude or a confrontation with a friend's contrasting political views.

"A reflective question we can ask ourselves is: Through these trials, have we developed virtuous habits, such as patience? Or do we just want it to be over?"

Compare and contrast the way our nation has dealt with the pandemic with our handling of under-representation. How would we answer these questions, when applied to that issue: "Through these trials, have we developed virtuous habits, such as patience? Or do we just want it to be over?"

2. U.S. District Court Judge Louis H. Pollak called Irene Morgan "Rosa Parks's mother-in-law" for good reason. In his article, ["On the Bus a Decade Before Rosa Parks,"](#) Daniel Moskowitz describes how Morgan defied an unjust law requiring racial segregation and preferential treatment of whites on buses, eleven years before civil rights icon Rosa Parks did the same. When Morgan was arrested for refusing to comply with the order to vacate her seat on a bus to accommodate white passengers, she took her case all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled in her favor.

Though Morgan's story has largely faded from the nation's collective view, on occasion her name is mentioned among other luminaries, as it was in 2001, when President Bill Clinton awarded her the Presidential Citizens Medal for her "courage and tenacity" which "helped make America a more just society." Other awardees that year included [Constance Baker Motley](#), the nation's first black woman to serve as a federal judge, baseball legend Hank Aaron and champion boxer Muhammad Ali. During her Senate confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson stated that she stood on Motley's shoulders.

On whose shoulders do you stand today? Give thanks for pathfinders who have paved the way for you.

What are you doing today to break a trail for those coming up behind you?

3. Respond to this, from TWW team member, Frank Ramirez: "Recent articles in magazines like *The Smithsonian* and websites like *space.com* bring stories to light about scientific advances made by women over the past several centuries, with the credit often going to male colleagues,

or with the women simply written out of the story altogether, despite their expertise. It's fun to contrast older NASA archival documentaries featuring uniformly white men (knowing now there were Hidden Figures in the background) with contemporary reports featuring project managers who are often women of all ethnic backgrounds.

"Restoring women into the picture not only validates them, but also encourages young girls and young women to pursue careers in science," Ramirez continued.

"Biblically, we are finally filling in the picture and recognizing women play an important and visible part," he added. "Take the Greek word that is translated 'deacon' when it involves a man, but 'serving' when it involves women like Martha.

"I recently read Amy-Jill Levine's book *Witness at the Cross: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Friday*, in which she notes that 'women are only sporadically part of the story' in Mark's gospel," Ramirez remarked. "But at the end of chapter 15, Mark notes, with regard to the women looking on at the Crucifixion from a distance, 'These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.' (Mark 15:41)

"Then Levine writes: 'The women had been with Jesus the entire time, from his days in Galilee to his final week in Jerusalem. Thanks, Mark, better late than never. Now when we read Mark again, we see the women at the healings, the teachings, and the controversies. They were there the entire time.'"

## **Responding to the News**

Share the story, ["I'm not just a Scribble" by Diane Alber \(Video 4:19\)](#), with a child you know. Talk about how God created each person unique and special, with something to offer the world that no one else has. Take time to thank God for making everyone different, so we can learn from each other and enjoy the variety God created.

**Prayer** suggested by [Hebrews 11:6](#)

Judge of all the earth, come quickly to help your people who cry to you for justice day and night, lest long delay lead to the loss of faith in your fairness. Help us never to lose heart, but to pray in faith always, believing that you are good, just and merciful. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer that we would treat others fairly as well. For the sake of Jesus the Faithful and True. Amen.