



Introduction

I've written about Easter and the Resurrection before, and I will yet again. This, however, is a book both for Lent and for every other time¹ when consolation is needed or when questions arise about suffering and about the meaning of life. I have written now about Jesus and his struggle to fulfill his calling, especially in his last days. In the meditations around Jesus' death I have sought to understand more what it was like for him than what we might think it means for us. These little essays can be read straight through in order, if the reader wishes, but there is actually no strict sequence to the book. Or one may dip into it here and there at will.

I have also written on questions about temptation and the struggle against evil, about illness and other forms of suffering, about the bread of life and atonement. The perspective is my own. I am a woman and a pastor, and for many years now I have been afflicted with a condition known as fibromyalgia, which causes me much pain and fatigue.

I make use of the Synoptic Gospels mostly, but I've also used texts about Thomas from the Gospel of John, as well as others. Where the same material exists in more than one of the Synoptics, I have chiefly followed Mark, since it is the earliest of the three and since Matthew and Luke both have access to Mark as they write.

With the church and most scholarship, I have followed John's chronology. I assume along with John that Jesus' active ministry was spread over a period of three Passovers, that is to say, a period of two or three years. The parallel between John 6 and Matthew 14

places the latter story at the second of these three Passovers, when Jesus was not in Jerusalem. I also assume with John that Jesus died on the day before the Jewish Passover.

There is no general agreement on the exact chronological order of the many recorded events in Jesus' life. Even the Passion Narrative is given with some variations among the four Gospels. The other Gospel materials are assembled according each evangelist's own thematic method—each of them without a doubt carefully considered, though more or less inscrutable to us. As a framework for the period of Jesus' life that focuses on his passion—namely, from the day he determined to set out for Jerusalem to the day of his crucifixion—I have chosen Luke's Travel Narrative in chapters 9–19. Luke (9:51–56) doesn't mention the place where Jesus began his final journey, but the parallels in Mark (10:1; cf. 9:33) and Matthew (19:1–2) suggest it was his home territory, in both cases Capernaum, to which he and his followers had recently returned after spending some time in the region of Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27; Matthew 16:13).

Otherwise, the passages I cite or allude to are often chosen from the Lenten texts recommended in *Den Svenska Evangeliehandboken 2002*. For the English translation, these texts are usually cited according to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Sometimes I quote a biblical text rather freely and sometimes I retell a story in my own words. Likewise, I vary my style according to the character of the texts, from the everyday, to the purely objective, to the poetical. I have been inspired in these freer renderings through Danish translations done by Anna Sophie Seidelin and Paul Seidelin as well as through the Jerusalem Bible.

At the end of nearly every meditation, for reference and for the readers' convenience, I have listed the biblical texts on which I have based my thoughts. Readers should feel free, indeed encouraged, to look up these texts and compare them with what I have written. The various biblical passages could certainly be used as texts for daily devotions, even though I have not included them with this purpose in mind.

Both the English and Greek languages have vocabulary words that refer either to a specific gender—*girl* for example—or to both genders, such as *sibling*. They also have words that can function both ways, either referring to a single gender or to both genders; we sometimes call these terms “inclusive” words. The English word *dog* belongs in this latter category. Consider the following: “Do you have a dog or a cat?”—“I have a dog.”—“Is it a dog or a bitch?”—“It’s a dog.” An especially sensitive Greek word in this regard is *adelphoi*, which can mean either “brothers,” or siblings of both sexes. I translate the word with *siblings* or *brothers and sisters* wherever it is not obviously wrong to do so. In applying this method to texts from Mark’s Gospel, I have benefited directly from Fredrik Ivarsson’s inclusive translation in his “The Gospel according to Mark and Mary” (*Tro & Tanke*, 1999:4); elsewhere I follow his model.

Since deity does not have gender, I have tried to avoid referring to God as either “he” or “she,” unless I am quoting another source, a confirmation student, for example. Whenever I use the word “Lord,” I have in mind Jesus Christ, whom I regard without reservation as my Lord.

The word *disciples* has various senses in the New Testament. Sometimes it stands for “the Twelve,” the circle of twelve men Jesus gathered around himself. Sometimes it refers to a larger circle of disciples that included women (cf. Luke 8:1–3; 9:1–2; 10:1). The number of those who traveled with him varied from time to time as people joined themselves to his band (Luke 9:57) or left him (John 6:66). The word *apostle* is sometimes used as a synonym for one of “the Twelve,” but in Acts 1:26 Matthias was chosen as an apostle to succeed Judas Iscariot. Paul and Barnabas are also designated as apostles, not just Paul alone (e.g., Acts 14:14); likewise Andronicus and Junia in Romans 16:7.

I have read hundreds of books, both religious and profane, on the subjects of suffering, evil, grief and crisis, and death, and I am not counting those belonging to the more literary genres. Three in particular have helped me both in living and in thinking: Ludvig

Jönsson, *Uppgörelse med allmakten och döden* [Reconciling Omnipotence and Death], Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, and Nathan Söderblom, *Humor och melankoli och andra lutherstudier* [Humor and Melancholy, and Other Studies in Luther]. I have also returned to Luther's thoughts on *Deus absconditus* (The Hidden God), which I wrote about for Gustaf Wingren² in 1974 and which became an essential element in my faith perspective.

The discussion groups on Christian faith that gathered at my home for years have given shape to many of the questions that surface in this book—and that find some sort of answers there. In the same way, groups who have practiced preaching together with me in the Pastoral Institute in Lund have given me ideas and inspiration. I thank you all!

Names of the persons who appear in the texts have been changed for the most part, in order to protect their privacy. The Anna in the meditation “A Woman and a Half” actually has a different name. Charlott and Ninni, who are identified with their own forenames, have given me permission for that, as has Inga-Lill's husband. Again, my thanks.

My husband, Professor Birger Olsson, has checked my use of Scripture and answered a thousand questions. In no way, however, is he responsible for my conclusions. Thank you, Birger! Thanks as well to all others who know they have supported me either by reading texts or by bearing me up, body and soul, in some other way, especially my physical therapist, Marie Louise Fredborn. Thanks to Pastor Anna Eklund, agronomist Fredrik Stendahl, and my co-minister Joyce Tenghamn, for reading the entire manuscript in various stages. I particularly wish to single out Joyce, who shares with me the experience of pain and who wanted to share with me in this book as well. The poems introducing each section of the book are written by her. Other poems are mine, unless I have indicated differently.