SCRIPTURE:
This is how you should think among yourselves — with the mind that you have because you belong to the Messiah, Jesus:

Who, though in God's form, did not regard his equality with God as something he ought to exploit.

Instead, he emptied himself and received the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of humans.

And then, having human appearance, he humbled himself, and became obedient even to death, yes, even the death of the cross.

And so God has greatly exalted him, and to him in his favor has given the name which is over all names:

That now at the name of Jesus every knee within heaven shall bow—on earth, too, and under the earth;

And every tongue shall confess that Jesus, Messiah, is Lord, to the glory of God, the father.
—Philippians 2:5–11 (NTE)

MEDITATION:
This beautiful hymn extols a Messiah who, although in essence very God and creator of the universe, took on the role of a creature incarnated as a human being, and humbled himself to endure, not just all the indignities of human life, but also the very worst that evil could possibly do to him. I fear my own view of Jesus has often focused so much on his divinity that I have neglected, at times, to appreciate the vulnerability of his humanity, particularly in the Garden of Gethsemane.

During that last night, he first humbled himself taking a servant role to wash feet caked with dust, and probably also manure. Yes, he recognized that in his role as Messiah he would become the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and he announced that he would rise again the third day (Luke 18:33). What could this mean experientially as he prayed in sorrow, tears, sweat, and blood in Gethsemane? He surely struggled with what the indescribable horror and cruelty of the Roman crucifixion really would be like the very next day, and what it would mean to be alienated from the
Father in this struggle to overcome evil and redeem his own creation. He could have relied on his divinity, and called legions of angels to defend him (Matt. 26:53).

As Brian Zahnd points out in *The Unvarnished Jesus: A Lenten Journey* (Spello Press, 2019), the evil one suggested easier routes to become Messiah, such as winning followers using divine power to meet purely physical needs. Or using power to persuade with a dazzling public relations stunt like jumping from the temple pinnacle, or using the power of the world political system to seize the emperor's crown. Jesus resolutely rejected the way of power in his ministry, in his last night in the garden and on the cross. And so he died tortured, naked, and alone.

Amazingly, as death turned to life in the cool morning of a different garden, his divinity was vindicated. Self-giving love proves in the end to be stronger than evil and coercion. And thus all power and authority on Earth and in heaven became his.

Adam and Eve in their hubris, grasping for what was not rightfully theirs, set all of creation into disorder. The Old Testament narrative, however, portrays not only a garden lost, but also the promise of renewal for humans and all creation. But who would, who could, set things right? Only one who gave up all power for self-giving love could turn this fractured world, with its fractured humanity, into the mature garden that God planned all along. The exalted Christ will then dwell among his people, and the earth shall be full of the glory of the Lord as the weapons of force are transformed into gardening tools. And in that coming garden city, where he sits on the throne, the leaves of the trees will be for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2).

**REFLECTION:**
What does Jesus struggle in Gethsemane mean for my own hopes and fears? When I feel alienated and alone, forsaken by God and others, can I draw comfort from the realization that Jesus himself felt the worst that I have ever felt? What does that mean as I face my own death, perhaps brought nearer by this pandemic?

What does Jesus's self-giving humility mean for my petty grudges and resentments against the people in my life? My pride in being knowledgeable? My disdain for the disorder and inequalities I see around me?

How do we respond as God's image bearers in this discomfiting year to help establish his kingdom here, now, on Earth? Are we using our talents and resources to do kingdom things such as healing the sick, feeding the hungry, speaking truth, and bringing good news?

**PRAYER:**
Father, I ask that you would plant seeds of humility, faith, and love in my heart that I might become more like Jesus. In whatever circumstances I face this year, may I find comfort in your life. And grant that I may grow into the maturity of self-giving love in ways you intend specifically for me. Amen.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Judith Toronchuk holds an MA in zoology and PhD in physiological psychology from McGill University as well as an MA in theological studies from Regent College. Before retirement, she taught neuroscience and psychology at Trinity Western University for over twenty years. She was first introduced to the ASA as an undergrad at Rutgers University, was elected as an ASA Fellow, and has since served on the executive councils of both the ASA and the CSCA and on the editorial board of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*. She lives with her husband Tim in Vancouver, BC. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening.