

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

Lent begins with truth, a hard truth: ashes remind us that we are finite, vulnerable, and broken. They mark our foreheads with the honesty of our condition: we are creatures of dust. It also begins with an invitation that is not sentimental. Jesus does not offer an escape route from the truth or our mortality or even from suffering, nor does he romanticize pain. He calls us instead into a way of life: to follow him, to take up the cross daily, and to walk the road where truth and love collide with the powers of the world.

To be rooted at the cross is to be rooted in reality. The cross is not merely an object of devotion; it is the public unveiling of what happens when God's justice confronts human systems built on domination. The crucifixion of Jesus reveals the brutality of empire, religious complicity, and political cowardice. It shows how quickly the innocent can be condemned when their presence threatens the status quo.

For many communities, especially those shaped by migration, racialized violence, and colonial histories, the cross is not an abstraction. It is familiar territory. It is carried in our bodies and memories. It is written into the stories of people who have been told, explicitly or implicitly, that their lives are disposable. In such a world, to preach Christ crucified is not to glorify suffering; it is to insist that God has entered the suffering of the most vulnerable and has made it the very site of divine presence and solidarity.

This is why our Lenten theme matters so deeply: Rooted at the cross, new horizons of resurrection. The cross roots us in truth, truth of our mortality, truth about suffering, injustice, and sin, personal, systemic, and structural. But resurrection opens horizons, new possibilities for individuals, communities, institutions, and leaders who have grown weary, disillusioned, or afraid. Resurrection declares that what temporal powers call "the end" is not the end; what it deems inevitable is undone by divine grace. It announces that the powers that crucify do not have ultimate authority over history.

In theological education, we live in this tension every day. We form leaders amid shrinking resources and rising anxieties. We teach in a cultural moment marked by polarization, cynicism, suspicion, and spiritual exhaustion. Yet Lent becomes a kind of pedagogy: it teaches us how to name what is broken without surrendering to despair. Lent trains us to practice repentance as a communal act, not just as private piety. It calls us to imagine the church not as a fortress of nostalgia or spiritual self-help, but as a people being remade by the God who raises the crucified and brings justice to those places in need of repair.

May this season form in us a faith courageous enough to tell and hear the truth, and a hope bold enough to expect healing and repair.



Javier Viera is the president of Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary and a Professor of Education and Leadership. His long-lasting career in theological education has offered many contributions to the broader ecology. Born in Puerto Rico and raised in the US, Viera is a thought and visionary leader.