

Thursday, April 17: Exit Music (for a film) (Maundy Thursday)

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<https://open.spotify.com/track/0z1o5L7HJx562xZSATcIpY?si=272a4d9d257842cf>

I have a Lenten discipline that you may find odd (some people call me extra). Every Lent, especially during Holy Week, I make sure to mow the grass. That in itself is not that remarkable. However, while I mow the grass, I listen to the entirety of Radiohead's 1997 album *OK Computer*.

The album is pretty dark (and so is Lent), so now is probably a good time for a warning. This is not going to be a cheery devotion. But there's something to this lawn mowing ritual which I'm excited to share with you, anonymous reader. I have a fan theory that the entirety of *OK Computer* is actually a soundtrack for a musical or a film about Jesus' last week, only it's even more moody (and biblical) than *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Admittedly, if you go listen to this album right now you'll likely find it grim. But, look, the biblical narrative of Holy Week is a grim story! It's a confrontation between Jesus' righteousness and the depravity of humanity! Now, I know there are some of you that will say "I'm not into all that human depravity theology," and that's fine. As for me, I wouldn't say I'm into it so much as I would say I'm aware that I am in it. Lent helps me confront my own sin, and the sin of humanity writ large, and witness as it is borne by another, and borne entirely away.

So, I put on my cheap "noise cancelling" headphones, start up the mower, and press play on my annual suburban labyrinth pilgrimage through my front yard, accompanied by Radiohead.

I can't take you through the whole album, and it's hard to pick just one track. "Airbag" works as an ode to the incarnation. "Paranoid Android" works as Jesus' temple tantrum in the Gospel of John. "Subterranean Homesick Alien" speaks to Jesus' nature as one of us and yet totally "other" than us. You'll have to take my word on all of that, though (if you email me, I'll send you my notes).

But the next track, "Exit Music (for a film)," *that's* where the action slows down. Think late Maundy Thursday night, the Last Supper is drawing to a close. The disciples have started tidying the table. Judas is about to leave. That's when Jesus lifts a glass and says "This is my blood, of the new covenant." So much is ending, but Jesus is proclaiming something new is about to dawn. "Wake from your sleep, the drying of your tears. Today we escape. Pack and get dressed... before all hell breaks loose."

The sound of the wind kicks up as the remaining disciples and Jesus walk out to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus says to himself, as a prayer, "Breathe, keep breathing. Don't lose your nerve. I can't do this alone." In other words, "Lord, let this cup pass... but not my will but your will be done."

The disciples fall asleep, and no matter how many times Jesus asks them, they can't stay awake. "Sing us a song, Jesus," they ask, "a song to keep us warm. There's such a chill." Hasn't he done

enough for them already? In John 20 he has prayed that they might receive all that the Father has given him, and declared “now we are one in everlasting peace,” but in their sleepiness, in their failure to stay awake with him, in their sin, their actions speak for themselves “We hope that you choke.”

I told you it got dark. And I know this takes some suspended disbelief, but try and stay with me.

By the time I get to the back yard, I’ve mowed myself into this story, into the reality of human drowsiness, our willful or sinsick sleepiness to the things of God, and I’ve listened my way into the reality of Jesus’ rejection. Not only does humanity fail to stay awake, we ultimately push him away, push him out. We hope that he chokes.

The album and the biblical narrative bear this out as Jesus is “Let Down” by his disciples, arrested by the “Karma Police,” is “Electioneered” but *not* elected by the crowds. Peter, poor beloved Peter, denies even knowing Jesus. It’s awful, but really there are “No Surprises” here. This is the confrontation that the incarnate Christ was bound to endure since the Fall.

Just as I get to the last of the mowing, the part of the back yard that’s just weeds and mud and sticks, the album comes to a close. I release the gas on the lawn mower and empty the last bag of clippings into the bin in silence.

Then, the album starts to auto play again. “Airbag” comes back, and suddenly, it’s Easter. I’m not kidding. It surprises me in the best way every year. In an “interstellar burst,” as Thom Yorke sings, Christ is “back to save the universe.”

I need that autoplay. I need this pilgrimage. Every year. We all do. What happens on Easter shines new light on the whole of Lent, and of life. It reveals to us that the grim journey to the cross is not for nothing. In fact, it’s for our gain.

Again, I know not everybody is into “that human depravity theology,” and I get it. No one wants to look in the mirror that deeply. No one, myself included, enjoys taking a long hard look at our own sin, or the sin of the human family. We want to believe we’re not all that bad.

But what I want to say to you is that Easter changes things. Easter shines new light even on our depravity. Easter says, “it’s okay, you can be honest with yourself.” In fact, if we want to discover the redemptive power of Christ, we must. We must see the depths of sin. We must bravely journey along the labyrinth of truth to its center, its depths. For it is to *that depth* that Jesus has journeyed, to catch us, like an “Airbag,” interrupting our fall in order to raise us into something against which all our depravity could not and shall not prevail: Christ’s work of redemption.