



Luther, Les Mis & Life Lessons

Key to Weekly Reading Guides

To prepare for group, you might choose to read the weekly reading guide ahead of time; it's never longer than three pages. But if you don't have time to read ahead, no problem! The most important information will be read aloud in group, and key sentences in the "Luther Says" sections will be marked in **bold**.

<p>About Les Mis Scripture</p>	<p>Read these sections out loud before you watch the film clip.</p>
<p>Watch!</p>	<p>Watch the film clip together—and then discuss "<i>What just happened?</i>" to make sure everyone understands the clip.</p>
<p>About Luther</p>	<p>Read this section out loud after you watch the film clip.</p>
<p>Luther Says</p>	<p>This section you may wish to read ahead of time. If you don't have a chance to read ahead of time—no problem! Key passages are marked in bold if you want to refer to them during group.</p>
<p>Talk it Over!</p>	<p>Use these questions in your small group as discussion starters.</p>

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If you would like to get a sense of the story as a whole, here's the place!

But each weekly guide has a summary of that week's film clip, and you can pick up the story there, week by week, without reading this section.

Week 1

(The Bishop and Valjean)

Theme of the day: *To be Christ to another means that acts of love motivated by Christ within have dignity and power even when they may seem foolish and weak to the world.*

Life lesson: *Even though it may appear outwardly as weakness, mercy comes from a place of inner strength. As Luther would call it, the place of strength is the “indwelling Christ.”*

About Les Mis The story begins in 1815, in the city of Digne, France. The peasant Jean Valjean has just been released from imprisonment after nineteen years: five for stealing bread for his starving sister and family, and fourteen more for numerous escape attempts. Upon release, he is required to carry a yellow passport that marks him as a convict, despite having already served his time in jail. Rejected by innkeepers, who will not serve a convict, Valjean sleeps on the street, where he becomes ever more angry and bitter. However, the benevolent Bishop of Digne gives him shelter. In the middle of the night, Valjean steals the Bishop’s silverware and flees. He is caught, but the Bishop rescues him by claiming that the silverware was a gift; further, he gives Valjean his two silver candlesticks and chastises him in front of the police for leaving in such a rush that he forgot these most valuable gifts. The Bishop “reminds” Valjean of the promise (which of course Valjean never made) to use the silver to make an honest man of himself.

Scripture 1 Cor. 9:19-23 (NIV):

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Watch! 00:00 - 12:50

About Luther *Some reflections on Luther's “On the Freedom of a Christian.”* Luther says that the Christian is at once both “perfectly free lord of all, subject to none” (see Rom 13:8) and “perfectly dutiful servant to all, subject to all” (see 1 Cor 9:19). We are free because we are priests and kings in Christ (1 Pet 2:9). Yet our kingship is not a physical power but rather, Luther says “the more Christian a man is, the more evils, sufferings and deaths he must endure, as we see in Christ the first-born prince himself, and in all his brethren, the saints. Such a king “rules in the midst of enemies and is powerful in the midst of oppression.”

Consider the Bishop. From the point of view of the world, he is weak: he suffers the loss of his property—and, besides, who can tell if a man like Valjean will reform anyway? Perhaps he sacrificed his silver and Valjean will only sell it for alcohol. But does the Bishop seem like a victim to you? Notice that he shows a curious inner power in what he says to Valjean: “I have bought your soul for God.” Does the Bishop know what it means to be freed by the grace of Christ to be a king, even though he suffers outwardly? Certainly Valjean will have a different impression of who Jesus is—and what the Church is—as a result of his encounter with the Bishop.

Luther Says

The grace of faith is this: it unites the soul to Christ, as the wife to the husband, by which Christ and the soul are made one flesh. Now if they are one flesh, and if a true marriage is accomplished between them, then all that they have becomes theirs in common: whatever Christ possesses, the believing soul takes as its own, and whatever belongs to the soul, Christ claims as His. If we compare these possessions, we shall see how inestimable is the gain. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation; the soul is full of sin, death, and condemnation. Let faith step in, and then sin, death, and hell will belong to Christ, and grace, life, and salvation to the soul. Therefore, faith alone can fulfill the law and justify without any works. Works, since they are irrational things, cannot glorify God—although they may be done to the glory of God, if faith is present.

That we may have a wider view of that grace which our inner man has in Christ, we must know that in the Old Testament God sanctified to Himself every first-born male. The birthright was of great value, for the first-born brother was priest and lord of all the rest. This figure foreshadowed Christ, the true and only First-born of God the Father. But His kingdom is not of this world; it is in heavenly and spiritual things that He reigns—in righteousness, truth, wisdom, peace, salvation, and so on. As Christ by His birthright has obtained the dignities of priest and king, so He imparts and communicates them to every believer in Him, under that law of marriage of which we spoke above, by which all that is the husband's is also the wife's. Therefore all we who believe on Christ are kings and priests in Christ, as it is said, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you should show forth the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2.9).

As regards kingship, then, every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, in spiritual power, he is completely lord of all things, so that nothing whatever can do him any hurt; indeed, all things are subject to him, and are compelled to serve his salvation. Thus Paul says, "All things work together for good to them who are the called" (Rom. 8.28), and also, "Whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours; and you are Christ's" (1 Cor. 3.22, 23).

Not that in corporeal power any Christian has been appointed to possess and rule all things. That is the office of kings, princes, and men upon earth. **In the experience of life we see rather that we are subjected to all things, and suffer many things, even death. Indeed, the more of a Christian a man is, the more evils, sufferings, and deaths is he subject to, as we see first in Christ the First-born, and in all His holy brethren.** This spiritual power, which rules in the midst of enemies, is powerful in the midst of distresses. And this is nothing else than that strength is made perfect in my weakness, and that I can turn all things to the profit of my salvation; so that even the cross and death are compelled to serve me and to work together for my salvation. This is a lofty dignity, a true and almighty dominion, a spiritual empire, in which there is nothing so good, nothing so bad, as not to work together for my good, if only I believe. **And yet there is nothing of which I have need—for faith alone suffices for my salvation—except that faith may exercise the power and empire of its liberty. This is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.**

Adapted from <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/cclib-2.html>.

Talk it Over!

1. Do you think Valjean sees Christ (or God, or the Church) in a new way because of the Bishop's mercy?
2. Does the power of the Bishop's gift depend on whether or not Valjean reforms?
3. Have you ever "given away the silver" in an act of mercy toward someone else—or perhaps wish that you had? What did you feel—confident? foolish or weak? something else? What was the outcome for the person who received your "silver?"
4. Is there always a clear difference between "not sticking up for yourself" and showing mercy to someone so that they can experience Christ through you? (For example, what makes the Bishop's response to Valjean seem powerful rather than weak?)
5. What are some everyday areas in your life where you feel "wronged" (by family, by friends, by fellow workers, by the traffic cop, whatever)? Might remembering the kind of King Christ is—the kind of king that you are in Christ—change your response to the person who wronged you?

Week 2

(Valjean and Fantine)

Theme of the day: *To be Christ to another means that wherever we exercise authority, we temper justice with mercy and make community with those who suffer, recognizing Christ suffering in them.*

Life lesson: *Helping others helps you, too!*

About Les Mis Six years have passed. Valjean has tried to live a better life, assuming a new name so that he needn't live by the yellow passport that labeled him as a convict and made him an outcast. Having effectively disappeared, Jean Valjean is now a fugitive wanted for parole violation. But under his assumed name, Valjean has become a wealthy factory owner and mayor of his town. One day, the Mayor/Valjean sees a man pinned under a cart, and saves him by single-handedly lifting the heavy cart. Javert (formerly a prison guard at Valjean's prison and now the town's police inspector) recalls only one other man strong enough to lift the cart—the ex-convict Jean Valjean. Javert begins to suspect that the Mayor and Valjean are the same person.

Around this time, the Mayor/Valjean meets Fantine. Years earlier in Paris, Fantine was very much in love with a young law student who fathered her daughter, Cosette. Fantine's young lover and his friends, when they were ready to graduate, promised to take their college lovers on a special date—and then, on this “date,” they abandoned them as a kind of practical joke, never to return. Fantine is devastated, because among the three young women friends, she is the only one with child. Just as Valjean is branded by his yellow passport, Fantine is now branded as a social outcast because she is an unwed mother. So that Fantine can secure honest work, she leaves Paris for the same town where Valjean now happens to be mayor. She hides Cosette from the townspeople by boarding her in a town nearby with an innkeeper and his family, the Thénardiens. Fantine doesn't realize that the Thénardiens abuse Cosette and use her as forced labor, and she continues to pay their growing, extortionate demands for Cosette's upkeep.

When Fantine's co-worker discovers a letter from the Thénardiens asking her to send more money for Cosette, it causes a row among the workers, and some of them scapegoat Fantine as an unwed mother. When the Mayor/Valjean asks his corrupt foreman to sort out the disruption, Fantine is fired in the name of the Mayor, though Valjean himself does not learn of the circumstances until much later. Desperate to find money so that Cosette will be cared for, Fantine sells her hair, sells her front teeth (which are ripped brutally from her mouth), and eventually sells her body as a prostitute. Fantine's health deteriorates, and she is dying (probably of tuberculosis). Fantine cannot visit Cosette because of her shame, her illness, and because all of her money now goes to the Thénardiens and their growing greed. In these desperate straits, when she is harassed by a client, Fantine retaliates and is threatened with prison by Inspector Javert. Over Javert's protestations, the Mayor/Valjean grants Fantine her freedom and takes over her care, realizing finally that his blindness to the goings on at the factory contributed to Fantine's present destitution.

Scripture 2 Cor. 1:3-7 (NIV): Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Watch! 12:50 - 28:07

About Luther *Some reflections on Luther's "Magnificat."* What can you say to someone in so desperate a condition as Fantine? Of course, Fantine has acted unwisely—and yet the things that happen to her as a result are so far out of proportion that it seems jarring to even call them consequences.” At times, Luther can almost seem to commend out-of-proportion suffering like Fantine's as an opening for grace. For example, he says in an essay on Mary's Magnificat, “God has imposed death on us all and laid the cross of Christ—together with countless sufferings and afflictions—on his beloved children and Christians. In fact, sometimes God even lets us fall into sin, in order that He may look into the depths even more...and thereby make Himself known and worthy of love and praise.” By this standard, Fantine is surely open to a lot of grace—a questionable consolation to someone in such extreme distress!

Yet Luther, in his essay on the Magnificat, doesn't mean to commend the suffering of a person like Fantine but to expose it to an unseeing ruler. Luther's essay is addressed to a young prince who will one day rule Saxony. As you read, keep this context in mind: Luther is not justifying the desperate condition of someone like Fantine; rather, he is exhorting a prince to see Christ in suffering like hers, and to make community with the people who suffer. The Mayor/Valjean finally acts like a good ruler when he does the right thing by Fantine—recognizing that both he and his community have failed Fantine terribly. Valjean establishes community again with Fantine.

Luther Says To His Serene Highness, Prince John Frederick, Duke Of Saxony. Your Grace's kind letter has lately come into my hands and its cheering contents brought me much joy. By way of reply I send you this little exposition of the Magnificat, which I long since promised you. In order properly to understand the Magnificat, this sacred hymn of praise, we need to bear in mind that the most Blessed Virgin Mary is speaking out of her own experience, in which she was enlightened and instructed by the Holy Spirit. When she experienced what great things God wrought in her, notwithstanding she was so poor, meek, despised, and of low degree, the Holy Spirit taught her that God's work consists in this — to exalt them of low degree, to put down the mighty from their seats, in short, to break whatever is whole and make whole whatever is broken. **God looks into the depths and helps only the poor, despised, afflicted, miserable, forsaken, and those who are nothing. For this reason God has also imposed death upon us all, and laid the cross of Christ together with countless sufferings and afflictions on His beloved children and Christians; indeed, He even suffers us sometimes to fall into sin; in order that He may look into the depths, bring help to many, perform manifold works, show Himself a true Creator, and thereby make Himself known, and worthy of love and praise.**

What sort of faith is it, therefore, that trusts in God when all the while you have goods laid up to help yourself? **It is because of our unbelief that we see God's Word, the truth, and the right defeated, and wrong triumph—while we remain silent, do not rebuke, speak out, nor prevent it, but let things go as they will. Why? We are afraid that we too might be attacked and made poor, and might then perish of hunger and be forever laid low.** That is to esteem temporal goods more than God, and to put them in God's place as an idol. You need to feel the pinch of poverty in the midst of your hunger, and learn by experience what hunger and poverty are, with no provision on hand and no help in yourself or any other man, but in God only; so that the work may be God's alone. You must not only think and speak of a low estate, but actually come to be in a low estate, and be caught in it, without any human aid, so that God alone may do the work. Or, if it should not come to such a pass, you must at least desire it and not shrink from it.

EPILOGUE In conclusion I come once more to your Grace, craving pardon for my temerity. It is the hope of us all that God may by His grace so direct the future that the rule of Saxony shall come into your Grace's hands. That will be a great and precious thing if it turn out well, but a perilous and wretched thing if it turn out ill. We must in all things hope and pray for the best, but none the less fear and be prepared for the worst. For great possessions, glory, power and favor surround and lay siege to the heart of a prince, moving it to pride, to forgetfulness of God and neglect of the people and the common weal, to sensuality, blasphemy, arrogance and idleness, in short, to every sort of vice and evil.

Unless a lord and ruler loves his subjects, and has for his chief concern not how to live at ease, but how to uplift and improve his people, his case is hopeless; he rules but to his soul's perdition.

Adapted from "The Magnificat," http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_c5.htm.

Talk it Over!

1. Do you think his act of mercy toward Fantine changed Valjean as well as Fantine? Have you ever been changed by an act of mercy you showed to someone else?
2. Can you talk about a poor choice you've made in the past, and what stopped it from spinning out of control into the kind of chaos that takes over Fantine's life? Did you have a supportive community? Does St Paul's create a supportive community for outsiders like Fantine?
3. Have you ever been party to shutting someone out because he or she broke the social rules like Fantine did? Were you ever able to make amends to that person?

Week 3 (Valjean's choice)

Theme of the day: *To be Christ to another means that, forgiven and made alive by Christ within us, the riches of Christ flow through us in acts of love for our neighbors.*

Life lesson: *Who you are and what you do matters.*

About Les Mis Javert's suspicion that the Mayor is actually Jean Valjean is dispelled momentarily when a man in custody is identified as Valjean. After an agonizing decision, Valjean reveals his true identity at the trial to save this man's life. (Be aware as you listen to the song "Who am I?" that when the song ends with "I'm Jean Valjean—24601," in a staged production Valjean would be in front of the court showing them the number branded on his chest.) Before he is sent to prison, Valjean escapes to visit the dying Fantine, and promises to rescue and raise her daughter, Cosette. When Javert arrives to arrest him, Valjean asks for three days to fetch Cosette, but when Javert refuses to believe his honest intentions, Valjean overcomes him and escapes.

The scene shifts to a nearby town at an inn owned by the Thénardier family, where the child Cosette has been living—ill-fed, poorly clothed, and slaving long hours at menial labor. Cosette dreams of a better life (the song, *Castle on a Cloud*), but Madame Thénardier interrupts her reverie by sending her to fetch water in the dark forest, despite the child's fears. Valjean finds Cosette fetching the water and brings her back to the inn. After a bargaining session that exposes the evil intent of the Thénardiens, Valjean pays their extortion money to take Cosette away.

Scripture John 15:12-17 (NIV): My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

Watch! 30:06 - 42:50, 48:40 - 51:35

About Luther *Some reflections on Luther's "On the Freedom of a Christian."* If Luther has a hallmark expression for how "good works" ought to flow from believers, it is perhaps captured in the phrase "be Christ to the other." A Christian, Luther says, ought to think "Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part. I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me."

Valjean asks, "Who am I?" and the audience might well share his confusion. Under his own name, Valjean is a convict and fugitive—a penniless criminal who has no place in any community. Yet under an assumed name he has made a name for himself: he is a wealthy man, a respected citizen, a savvy businessman (whose workers depend on him), and a wise leader. Last week, we saw that Valjean was able to show mercy to Fantine and yet still keep all of these prizes. But now, to show mercy to a man who would go to prison in his place, Valjean must first lay down much of what he has won: his business, his power, and his place in the community.

Is Valjean a Christ to the man he saves? First we might ask: Was his sacrifice of love motivated by recognition of the mercy God showed him? Here is what Valjean says: "My soul belongs to God, I know/ I made that bargain long ago/ He gave me hope when hope was gone/ He gave me strength to journey on/ Who am I? / I'm Jean Valjean." So his decision to accept responsibility—to re-assume the name of a criminal—is rooted in the mercy he himself had received. Did Valjean, then, appear as a Christ to the man who would be prosecuted in his place? If so, it may well have been the first time that this man saw the mercy of Christ *specifically offered to him*. Like the bread and wine served at the Lord's Table, we can become a living sacrament to be received by another—an embodied Christ given to the person who receives our mercy.

Luther Says God, without merit on my part, of His pure and free mercy, has given to me—an unworthy, condemned, and contemptible creature—all the riches of justification and salvation in Christ, so that I no longer want for anything, except faith to believe that this is so. **For such a Father, who has overwhelmed me with His inestimable riches, why should I not freely, cheerfully, and with my whole heart do all that I know is pleasing to Him and acceptable in His sight? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, as Christ has given Himself to me.** And I will do nothing in this life except what is needful, advantageous, and wholesome for my neighbor, since by faith I abound in all good things in Christ.

Thus from faith flows love and joy in the Lord, and from love a cheerful, willing, free spirit, disposed to serve our neighbor voluntarily. Such a spirit does not place any obligation on those who receive its service, nor does it distinguish between friends and enemies, or expect gratitude or ingratitude, but most freely and willingly spends itself and its goods, whether it loses them through ingratitude, or gains goodwill. For thus did its Father, distributing all things to all men abundantly and freely, making His sun to rise upon the just and the unjust.

Therefore just as our neighbor is in want, and has need of our abundance, so we too in the sight of God were in want, and had need of His mercy. **And as our heavenly Father has freely helped us in Christ, so ought we freely to help our neighbor by our body and works, and each should become to the other a Christ, so that we may be mutually Christs, and that the same Christ may be in all of us; that is, that we may be truly Christians.** Who then can comprehend the riches and glory of the Christian life? It can do all things, has all things, and is in want of nothing; it is lord over sin, death, and hell, and at the same time the obedient and useful servant of all. **But unfortunately, this is unknown throughout the world, so that we are quite ignorant of why we are called "Christians." We are so named from Christ, who dwells among us—provided that we believe in Him and are reciprocally and mutually one the Christ of the other, doing to our neighbor as Christ does to us.**

We give this rule: the good things which we have from God ought to flow from one to another and become common to all, so that every one of us may, as it were, put on his neighbor, and so behave towards him as if he were himself in his neighbor's place. These good things flowed and do flow from Christ to us; He put us on, and acted for us as if He Himself were what we are. From us they flow to those who have need of them; so that **my faith and righteousness ought to be laid down before God as a covering and intercession for the sins of my neighbor, which I am to take on myself, and so labor and endure servitude in them, as if they were my own; for thus has Christ done for us.**

We conclude therefore that a Christian does not live in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor, or else he is no "Christian." In Christ by faith, in his neighbor by love—by faith he is carried upwards above himself to God, and by love he sinks back below himself to his neighbor, still always abiding in God and His love.

Adapted from <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-luther.html>.

Talk it Over!

1. Do you think the man that Valjean helped saw Christ in his act of mercy? Can you talk about a time when you saw Christ in something someone else did? When someone saw Christ in something you did?
2. Do you know of anyone who has a negative opinion of Christianity because of the way they have perceived Christians to act? How might you help to heal this impression?
3. Is there a difference between Luther's "be Christ to the other" and the often heard question "What would Jesus do?"

Week 4

(The coming revolt; Marius and Cosette)

Theme of the day: *To be Christ to another means that we risk telling the truth about injustice and speak out for just causes even while we condemn violent means.*

Life lesson: *We tend to think about faith as a private matter. However, according to Luther, our faith gives us a social responsibility.*

About Les Mis Ten years later an uprising is brewing in Paris. Students, led by a student named Enjolras, prepare to revolt. It is the eve of the ill-fated Paris uprising of 1832. The students await the event that they believe will spark the revolution—the death of General Lamarque, the only leader who showed sympathy for the working class. Meanwhile, the Thénardiens (the innkeepers from whom Valjean rescued the child Cosette) have also moved to Paris, and they now lead a gang of thieves. The Thénardier's daughter, Eponine, is in love with one of the revolutionary students, Marius Pontmercy; but Marius regards Eponine as a friend, not a lover. Marius catches sight of Cosette on her walks through Paris with her “Papa” Valjean, and falls in love. At Marius' request, Eponine reluctantly searches out where Cosette lives and takes Marius there. Marius and Cosette meet in Valjean's garden and declare their love for each other, unknown to Valjean.

Scripture Micah 6:8 (NIV): He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Watch! 51:35 - 54:38, 58:28 - 1:12:08

About Luther *Some reflections on Luther's “An Admonition to Peace.”* There are two stories in today's film clip—the lead-up to a revolt and the love story between Marius and Cosette. We will revisit the love story in the sixth week; this week we'll read a little about Luther's attitude toward political injustice and revolution. Because of the extreme harshness of Luther's later reaction to the Peasant Revolt of 1525, his writings about armed revolt present great difficulties to the Christian who wants to understand this most extreme of political acts in terms of faith. Luther's bold defiance of the papacy and the Emperor—underwritten by his understanding of the Gospel—seemed to some people in his time (and since) a ready defense of revolt by the oppressed. Yet Luther flatly rejected this move: the Gospel is a spiritual rule for Christians who live by a law of love; but most of the world is not Christian, and few Christians live by the Gospel. Therefore, God governs this sinful world indirectly through authorities. Luther claims that to oppose those authorities violently, using the Gospel as a justification, is to make a terrible mistake: it is to act as if some particular revolt could bring about God's Kingdom on earth. Of that great day we can only pray “Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in Heaven.” None of this, however, should be interpreted to mean that Luther was a pacifist. Luther believed that Christians could in good conscience take up arms in a just cause under a rightly instituted authority; what he denied was that Christians, in the name of Christ, could take up arms in their own defense against a rightly instituted authority—even if that authority was clearly in the wrong.

As you read the selection below, which reflects a time when Luther still hoped a revolt could be averted, listen for his strong rebuke of both sides. First, Luther never wavered in placing the blame for the unjust conditions squarely on the shoulders of the princes and the lords—clearly, publicly, repeatedly, and at great personal risk. The Quakers coined the phrase “speak truth to power” in the 1950s, but Luther was already committed to that practice in the sixteenth century.

Second, though, it was unacceptable to Luther that the revolt should go forward in the name of Christ. As Christians, the peasants should protest unjust laws and never submit to them willingly; still, if the authorities intervened, the peasants should never oppose them with violence; rather, like Christ, they should submit willingly to unjust suffering.

Luther promised the peasants that just as in his own suffering had exposed the evil of the papacy and caused Gospel to spread, so their suffering would reveal the evil of the princes and expose them to God's wrath.

When the revolt finally came, and the leaders did push it forward in the name of Christ, Luther reacted harshly: "Let everyone who can, smite, slay, and stab [the rebels], secretly and openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel. It is like when you must kill a mad dog; if you do not strike him, he will strike you, and a whole land with you." Luther's exhortation did not cause the subsequent actions of the princes, but it was accepted by them as an ideological justification. Between 70,000 and 100,000 peasants were slain in the uprising of 1525.

Few today would defend Luther's final word on the peasant revolt. Moreover, someone looking to Luther for guidance might well worry whether his earlier, more moderate statements lead naturally into his later position. Whatever you decide, you now have some context to read the following text, representative of Luther's earlier, more moderate stance.

Luther Says TO THE PRINCES AND LORDS: **We have no one on earth to thank for this mischievous rebellion, except you princes and lords. In your temporal government, you do nothing but flay and rob your subjects, in order that you may lead a life of splendor and pride, until the poor common people can bear it no longer.** The sword is at your throats, but you think yourselves so firm in the saddle that no one can unhorse you. This false security and stubborn perversity will break your necks, as you will discover. I have often told you to beware of the saying, in Psalm 107:40, "He pours contempt upon princes." Well, then, since you are the cause of this wrath of God, it will undoubtedly come upon you, if you do not mend your ways in time. For you ought to know, dear lords, that God is doing this because this raging of yours cannot and will not and ought not be endured for long. You must become different men and yield to God's Word. If you do not do this amicably and willingly, then you will be compelled to it by force and destruction. If these peasants do not do it for you, others will. **Even though you were to beat them all, they would still be unbeaten, for God will raise up others. It is His will to beat you, and you will be beaten. It is not the peasants, dear lords, who are resisting you; it is God Himself who is resisting you in order to visit your raging upon you.**

If it is still possible to give you advice, my lords, give a little place to the will and wrath of God. Try kindness first, for you do not know what God wills to do, and do not strike a spark that will kindle all Germany and that no one can quench. Our sins are before God; therefore we have to fear His wrath when even a leaf rustles, let alone when such multitude sets itself in motion. You lose nothing by kindness; and even though you were to lose something, it can afterwards come back to you ten times over in peace, while in conflict you may, perhaps, lose both life and goods. Why run into danger, when you can get more by another, and a good way.

TO THE PEASANTS: So far, dear friends, you have learned only part of what I have had to say: that the princes and lords, who forbid preaching the Gospel and oppress the people so unbearably, have well deserved that God put them down from their seats, as men who have sinned deeply against God and man. They have no excuse. Consider, though, not how strong you are and how completely wrong they are, but whether you have justice and a good conscience on your side. For no matter how right you are, it is not for a Christian to appeal to law, or to fight, but rather to suffer wrong and endure evil; and there is no other way (1 Corinthians 6:5).

However good and right your cause may be, nevertheless, because you would defend yourselves, and not suffer violence or wrong, you may do anything that God does not prevent, but leave the name of Christian out of it. Leave out, I say, the name of Christian, and do not make it a cloak for your impatient, disorderly, unchristian undertaking. I shall not let you have that name but shall do all I can to take that name from you.

In saying this, it is not my intention to justify or defend the rulers in the intolerable wrongs which you suffer from them. They are wrong, and do you cruel wrongs; that I admit. But what I hope is that, if neither party will allow itself to be instructed, and it comes to blows (which God forbid!), neither shall be called Christians, but that, as is usual when one people fights with another, God will punish one knave with another, as the saying goes. **Your name and title must be those of people who fight because they will not, and ought not, endure wrong or evil, according to the teaching of nature. You should have that name, and let the name of Christ alone, for that is the kind of works that you are doing.**

Adapted from http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_d17.htm.

Talk it Over!

1. What did the student revolutionaries in *Les Mis* get right? What did they get wrong? Like Luther, can we affirm what's good and right in their position and yet reject their choice to use violence?
2. In the last century, the Church has had an ambivalent record of "speaking the truth to power"—from a high point, perhaps, with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s non-violent civil rights protests to a low point with the Church's shameful silence during the holocaust. Where do you think the Church is doing well today telling the truth about social issues? Is today's Church showing the same courage Luther did in speaking the truth, at great personal risk, to the German princes?
3. How can we get good information about what is the truth about important social issues? What are the dangers of the Church taking a stand? How might St Paul's partnership with Lake County United help us fulfill our social responsibility to speak truth to power?
4. Was Jesus' act of cleansing the temple an act of violence in Luther's terms? Why or why not?

Week 5

(Javert and Valjean)

Theme of the day: *To be Christ to another means that because Christ paid for our sins and transforms us into his likeness, we act on the belief that Christ can change anyone and that no one falls outside his community.*

Life lesson: *Live the 8th commandment ("You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"): Explain your neighbor's actions in the kindest way.*

About Les Mis Last week's film clip ended with a secret meeting between the young lovers, Marius and Cosette. Coincidentally, the Thénardiens and their gang of thieves had planned to raid Valjean's house on that very same night. But Eponine, who guided Marius to Cosette's home, protects Marius, thwarting the raid by her screams. Valjean, alarmed to learn that someone has tried to break into his house, mistakenly concludes that Javert is on his trail again and prepares to flee to London with Cosette. Soon after, the student uprising is sparked by the death of General Lamarque, the only French leader who had shown sympathy for the working class. The students erect barricades in the streets and prepare for battle. Marius, believing that Cosette has abandoned him, joins them. Eponine also joins the revolutionaries, and is the revolt's first victim: she throws herself in front of Marius to save him from a bullet and dies in his arms.

When Valjean learns that Marius is Cosette's lover, he goes to the barricades to protect him and bring him home. Arriving at the barricades, Valjean learns that the students have captured Javert and will execute him as a spy. Valjean helps the students repulse the first assault of the French troops, and when this first battle ends, he requests that they let him execute Javert. In fact, however, Valjean intends to set Javert free. Valjean's refusal to kill him confounds Javert, who vows that he will not stop pursuing Valjean until he is brought to justice. Meanwhile, although the students have repulsed one attack, more French troops are amassing. The students' only hope is that the common people will fight with them. But the French officers announce over the barricades that Paris has gone to sleep, and that no one is coming to their aid. The students, resolved to fight to the death, are slaughtered in the second assault. The uprising is at an end.

Valjean returns to the barricades and finds Marius severely injured and unconscious. He carries him on his shoulders, escaping through the sewers. At the sewer's exit, he meets Javert, who grants him time to return Marius to his family. Alone, Javert agonizes, caught between his black-and-white faith in the law and the incomprehensible mercy shown him by a criminal. Finally, unable to cope with the contradiction between the man who granted him mercy and the criminal that the law bids him condemn, Javert throws himself into the river Seine and dies.

Scripture Gal.5:13-15 (NIV) You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Watch! 54:39 - 58:28, 1:35:00 - 1:45:06, 1:53:35 - 1:57:26

About Luther Some reflections on Luther's "Galatians Lectures of 1535" and "On the Freedom of a Christian." As a young man, Luther was plagued by an obsession with keeping the law, understanding "the righteousness of God" as the standard by which he would be judged. Javert's conflict also centers on whether law and grace can exist together. Javert sees himself as one of "those who follow the path of righteousness" and Valjean, by contrast, as a man "fallen from grace." "Once a thief forever a thief," Javert flings at Valjean. For Javert, because the world splits between the righteous and the fallen, the law must do more than punish sin: it must separate the righteous from the sinners. Valjean is marked by his yellow passport and Fantine by her illegitimate child. When a man like Valjean pretends to be reformed, it is as if a wolf has entered the sheepfold. God's perfect order is in danger until Valjean is, as Javert vows, "safe behind bars."

Luther, even later in his life, continues to see a violent conflict between grace and damnation. But for Luther, unlike Javert, that conflict is resolved in Christ: sinners really can become saints. Yet Christ's payment for sin is not just a past event for Luther. Rather, we live our lives in a "fortunate exchange" with Christ who "attaches" himself to us: we receive his blessing as he receives our curse. The atonement is not only a past event for Luther but a present reality: we are *in* Christ who atones for us *now*. When God sees us, God no longer sees the sinner but Christ. Because Christ pays for sin in us, Christians may also (as we saw in "On the Freedom of a Christian") intercede for the sins of others, becoming a Christ to them. Therefore we, unlike Javert, should expect to see Christ even in sinners—just as God sees Christ in us.

Luther Says Paul says that "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree" (Gal 3:13). The Law of Moses leaves no loopholes: a transgressor must be hanged. Let us see, then, how Christ gained the victory over our enemies, sin and the curse. **Since Christ was to bless all nations, whom he found to be accursed, He Himself had to remove the curse. But he could not remove it through the Law, because the curse is only increased by Law. So what did He do? He attached Himself to those who were accursed, assuming their flesh and blood; and thus He interposed Himself as the Mediator between God and men.** Thus he joined God and Man in one Person. And being joined with us who were accursed, He became a curse for us; and He concealed his blessing in our sin, death, and curse, which condemned and killed him. But because He was the Son of God, He could not be held by sin, death, and curse. Rather, he conquered and triumphed over them. **He took along with Him whatever clung to the flesh that He had assumed for our sake. Therefore all who cling to this flesh are blessed and delivered from the curse.**

By a fortunate exchange with us Christ took upon Himself our sinful person and granted us His innocent and victorious Person. Clothed and dressed in his person, we are freed from the curse of the Law, because Christ Himself voluntarily became a curse for us, saying "I shall assume your clothing and mask; and in this clothing I shall walk about and suffer death, in order to set you free from death." When we hear that Christ was made a curse for us, let us believe it with joy and assurance. By faith Christ changes places with us. He gets our sins, we get His holiness. There is no sin now, no curse, no death, no devil—because Christ has done away with them. This fact is sure. There is nothing wrong with the fact. The defect lies in our lack of faith.

In the Apostle's Creed we confess: "I believe in the holy Christian Church." That means I believe that there is no sin, no curse, no evil in the Church of God. Faith says, "I believe that." But if you want to believe your eyes instead, you will find many shortcomings and offenses in the members of the holy Church. You see them succumb to temptation, you see them weak in faith, you see them giving way to anger, envy, and other evil dispositions. "How can the Church be holy?" you ask. If I look at my own person or at that of my neighbor, the church will never be holy. But if I look at Christ, then it is completely holy; for he bore the sins of the entire world.

(From “On the Freedom of a Christian”) **We give this rule: the good things which we have from God ought to flow from one to another and become common to all, so that every one of us may, as it were, put on his neighbor, and so behave towards him as if he were himself in his neighbor's place.** These good things flowed and do flow from Christ to us; He put us on, and acted for us as if He Himself were what we are. From us they flow to those who have need of them; so that **my faith and righteousness ought to be laid down before God as a covering and intercession for the sins of my neighbor, which I am to take on myself, and so labor and endure servitude in them, as if they were my own; for thus has Christ done for us.**

Adapted from <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/gal/web/gal3-10.html> and <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-luther.html>.

Talk it Over!

1. Javert cannot seem to accept that Valjean, a criminal, is capable of showing respect and mercy to him. Is Valjean being a Christ to Javert? If so, why does Valjean's act of surrender and mercy trigger a process in Javert that eventually ends in his suicide?
2. Do you, like Javert, ever have trouble receiving grace? Do you feel like you need to earn it, rather than simply receive it as a gift?
3. Do you tend to view the world as black and white, or as gray? Why?
4. Do you tend to view people as saint or sinner, or a combination of both? What is your first inclination—to see someone as a saint or as a sinner?
5. Luther says we should see Christ when we look at the Church, not the faults in individual Christians. Is that consistent with being able to admit our faults and work toward change?

Week 6

(Valjean, Marius & Cosette)

Theme of the day: *To be Christ to another means that we act in community with all the saints of St Paul's, who are in community with Christ and all his saints in all times and all places.*

Life lesson: *No one is an island; we are all connected.*

About Les Mis Marius recovers slowly, and, in addition to his physical recovery, suffers from a kind of “survivor's guilt” over the death of his friends at the barricades. He is intensely curious about who saved him that night, but he is unaware that Cosette's “Papa” is also his rescuer. When Marius and Cosette are married, Valjean, recognizing that he is not really family to Cosette, admits to Marius that he is a convict and fugitive so that Marius can decide whether to admit him to his family. Marius is appalled at Valjean's revelation and, convinced that Valjean will be a bad influence, contrives to keep Cosette away from him on the pretext that Valjean is busy with other matters. Valjean colludes in Marius' falsehood. Cosette, who has regarded Valjean as a father, knows none of this. She is occupied with her new marriage, and, besides, she is bewildered and worn out by her Papa's stilted attitude towards her since the wedding. Cosette is, the narrator says, “more thoughtless than forgetful” of her love for Valjean. Alone, Valjean takes long walks through the streets at night, falls ill, and eventually takes to his bed to die.

When Thénardier (the innkeeper turned thief) recognizes Valjean in the street, he realizes that Marius' wife must be the same Cosette who had lived with his family at the Inn. He approaches Marius, intending to blackmail him with what he knows about Cosette's “father.” But in so doing, Thénardier inadvertently reveals many of Valjean's good deeds, including that Valjean is the man who saved Marius' life. Marius and Cosette rush to Valjean's side, but the great man is dying. For the first time, Valjean reveals his whole life's story, as well as the truth about Cosette's mother, to Marius and Cosette. Expressing his love to them, and they to him, Jean Valjean dies. In the play, the spirits of Fantine and Eponine sing to Valjean, and they are joined by a chorus that includes Marius' dead companions, singing “Do you hear the People Sing?”

Scripture Eph. 4:1-6 (NIV): As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Watch! 1:57:26 - 2:05:34, 2:08:04 - 2:17:04

About Luther *Some reflections on Luther's “Concerning the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ.”* At last we come to the lovers, Marius and Cosette. We must come to them—because when chorus rises, they are the only two living characters left on the stage! Fantine, Eponine, Valjean, and the student revolutionaries—all have given their utmost, each in his or her own way, so that Marius and Cosette can live the good life that these friends intended to win for them and others. Before now, the lovers had been asleep to this great communion. Marius had thought himself above letting his house be the home of a fugitive; and Cosette had been absorbed with her newfound love, thoughtless of the man who had devoted his life to her. In their reconciliation with Valjean, these two finally realize the great price that has been paid for them. Perhaps someday, they will gladly pay the price for others.

Are we in a similar case to Marius and Cosette? How goes it with our communion with the saints who went before us? Can we be Christs for others if we are not aware of who has been a Christ for us? In the text below, Luther encourages us to meet those who went before us at the Lord's Table and be conformed to Christ together with them. Surely, as the hymn says, "we're gonna sit at the welcome table one of these days." But Luther wants us to realize that we sit at the welcome table today, not just when we die—especially when we partake of the Lord's Table. In fellowship with the saints, we become like them, and together we all become conformed to Christ. To "be Christ to the other," then, is not just an ethical demand; it is something that grows out of a habit of worship that is sensitive to the communion of saints and throws this communion open to the whole world. To be Christ to the other we must, like Marius and Cosette, wake up to the communion of saints that is all around us.

Luther Says Like the sacrament of holy baptism, the sacrament of the holy and true body of Christ has three parts: the sign, the significance, and the faith that receives it. The sacrament, or outward sign, is in the form of bread and wine, just as baptism has water as its sign. The significance is the fellowship of all saints. If any one is in despair, if he is distressed by his sinful conscience or terrified by death, or has any other burden on his heart, and desires to be rid of them all, let him go joyfully to the sacrament of the altar and lay down his grief in the midst of the congregation and seek help from the entire company of the spiritual body. **When you have partaken of this sacrament, or desire to partake of it, you must in turn also share the misfortunes of the congregation. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray—and if you cannot do more, have heartfelt sympathy. That is what it means to bear in your turn the misfortune and adversity of Christ and His saints.** Here the saying of Paul applies, "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." Therefore this holy sacrament is of little or no benefit to those who have no misfortune or anxiety, or do not feel their adversity. For it is given only to those who need strength and comfort, who have timid hearts and terrified consciences, and who are assailed by sin, or have even fallen into sin.

Just as the bread is made out of many grains which have been ground and mixed together, and out of the many bodies of grain there comes one loaf, in which each grain loses its form and body and acquires the common body of the bread, so should it be with us. Christ with all saints, by His love, takes upon Himself our form, fights with us against sin, death and all evil; this enkindles in us such love that we take His form, rely upon His righteousness, life and blessedness. **And through the interchange of His blessings and our misfortunes we are one of, one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common. Again, through this same love, we are to be changed and make the infirmities of all other Christians our own.** That is a real fellowship and the true significance of this sacrament. **In this way we are changed into one another and brought into fellowship with one another by love, without which there can be no such change.**

See to it, then, that you make yourself a fellow of every man and by no means exclude any one in hatred or anger. **Let the infirmities and needs of others burden your heart, as though they were your own, and offer others your strength, as though it were their own, as Christ does for you in the sacrament. That is what we mean by being changed into one another through love, out of many particles becoming one bread and drink, giving up one's own form and taking one that belongs to all.** See to it also that you use the sacrament not because of what it is in itself, but because of your faith. There must be a sorrowing, hungry soul, desiring heartily the love, help, and support of the entire communion of Christ and of all saints—doubting not that in faith it obtains them and making itself one with everyone.

Adapted from http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_b2.htm.

Talk it Over!

1. In your life, who surrounded you with love, support, and self-sacrifice in the way that Valjean, Fantine, Eponine, and the student revolutionaries surround Marius and Cosette? Who has been your community?
2. Does the image of Marius and Cosette surrounded by their loved ones help conjure an image of what Luther means when he says that to prepare for the Table you must “bear in your turn the misfortune and adversity of Christ and His saints?”
3. In what ways does worship at St Paul’s help you experience the community of the saints? Does the community you experience in worship give you a greater sense of community in other areas of your life?
4. What do you think Luther means that at the Table we are “changed into one another through love?” Does what he says fit with your experience of communion?

As our meetings come to a close, what stands out the most to you about our time together looking at Luther, *Les Mis*, and life lessons?

Summary of Les Misérables

(Adapted from Wikipedia)

The story begins in 1815, in the city of Digne, France. The peasant Jean Valjean has just been released from imprisonment after nineteen years: five for stealing bread for his starving sister and family, and fourteen more for numerous escape attempts. Upon release, he is required to carry a yellow passport that marks him as a convict, despite having already served his time in jail. Rejected by innkeepers, who will not serve a convict, Valjean sleeps on the street, where he becomes ever more angry and bitter. However, the benevolent Bishop of Digne gives him shelter. In the middle of the night, Valjean steals the Bishop's silverware and flees. He is caught, but the Bishop rescues him by claiming that the silverware was a gift; further, he gives Valjean his two silver candlesticks and chastises him in front of the police for leaving in such a rush that he forgot these most valuable gifts. The Bishop "reminds" Valjean of the promise (which of course Valjean never made) to use the silver to make an honest man of himself.

Six years have passed. Valjean has tried to live a better life, assuming a new name so that he needn't live by the yellow passport that labeled him as a convict and made him an outcast. Having effectively disappeared, Jean Valjean is now a fugitive wanted for parole violation. But under his assumed name, Valjean has become a wealthy factory owner and mayor of his town. One day, the Mayor/Valjean sees a man pinned under a cart, and saves him by single-handedly lifting the heavy cart. Javert (formerly a prison guard at Valjean's prison and now the town's police inspector) recalls only one other man strong enough to lift the cart—the ex-convict Jean Valjean. Javert begins to suspect that the Mayor and Valjean are the same person.

Around this time, the Mayor/Valjean meets Fantine. Years earlier in Paris, Fantine was very much in love with a young law student who fathered her daughter, Cosette. Fantine's young lover and his friends, when they were ready to graduate, promised to take their college lovers on a special date—and then, on this "date," they abandoned them as a kind of practical joke, never to return. Fantine is devastated, because among the three young women friends, she is the only one with child. Just as Valjean is branded by his yellow passport, Fantine is now branded as a social outcast because she is an unwed mother. So that Fantine can secure honest work, she leaves Paris for the same town where Valjean now happens to be mayor. She hides Cosette from the townspeople by boarding her in a town nearby with an innkeeper and his family, the Thénardiens. Fantine doesn't realize that the Thénardiens abuse Cosette and use her as forced labor, and she continues to pay their growing, extortionate demands for Cosette's upkeep.

When Fantine's co-worker discovers a letter from the Thénardiens asking her to send more money for Cosette, it causes a row among the workers, and some of them scapegoat Fantine as an unwed mother. When the Mayor/Valjean asks his corrupt foreman to sort out the disruption, Fantine is fired in the name of the Mayor, though Valjean himself does not learn of the circumstances until much later. Desperate to find money so that Cosette will be cared for, Fantine sells her hair, sells her front teeth (which are ripped brutally from her mouth), and eventually sells her body as a prostitute. Fantine's health deteriorates, and she is dying (probably of tuberculosis). Fantine cannot visit Cosette because of her shame, her illness, and because all of her money now goes to the Thénardiens and their growing greed. In these desperate straits, when she is harassed by a client, Fantine retaliates and is threatened with prison by Inspector Javert.

Over Javert's protestations, the Mayor/Valjean grants Fantine her freedom and takes over her care, realizing finally that his blindness to the goings on at the factory contributed to Fantine's present destitution.

Javert's suspicion that the Mayor is actually Jean Valjean is dispelled momentarily when a man in custody is identified as Valjean. After an agonizing decision, Valjean reveals his true identity at the trial to save this man's life. (Be aware as you listen to the song "Who am I?" that when the song ends with "I'm Jean Valjean—24601," in a staged production Valjean would be in front of the court showing them the number branded on his chest.) Before he is sent to prison, Valjean escapes to visit the dying Fantine, and promises to rescue and raise her daughter, Cosette. When Javert arrives to arrest him, Valjean asks for three days to fetch Cosette, but when Javert refuses to believe his honest intentions, Valjean overcomes him and escapes.

The scene shifts to a nearby town at an inn owned by the Thénardier family, where the child Cosette has been living—ill-fed, poorly clothed, and slaving long hours at menial labor. Cosette dreams of a better life (the song, *Castle on a Cloud*), but Madame Thénardier interrupts her reverie by sending her to fetch water in the dark forest, despite the child's fears.

Valjean finds Cosette fetching the water and brings her back to the inn. After a bargaining session that exposes the evil intent of the Thénardiens, Valjean pays their extortion money to take Cosette away.

Ten years later an uprising is brewing in Paris. Students, led by a student named Enjolras, prepare to revolt. It is the eve of the ill-fated Paris uprising of 1832. The students await the event that they believe will spark the revolution—the death of General Lamarque, the only leader who showed sympathy for the working class. Meanwhile, the Thénardiens (the innkeepers from whom Valjean rescued the child Cosette) have also moved to Paris, and they now lead a gang of thieves. The Thénardiens' daughter, Eponine, is in love with one of the revolutionary students, Marius Pontmercy; but Marius regards Eponine as a friend, not a lover. Marius catches sight of Cosette on her walks through Paris with her “Papa” Valjean, and falls in love. At Marius' request, Eponine reluctantly searches out where Cosette lives and takes Marius there. Marius and Cosette meet in Valjean's garden and declare their love for each other, unknown to Valjean.

Coincidentally, the Thénardiens and their gang of thieves had planned to raid Valjean's house on that very same night. But Eponine, who guided Marius to Cosette's home, protects Marius, thwarting the raid by her screams. Valjean, alarmed to learn that someone has tried to break into his house, mistakenly concludes that Javert is on his trail again and prepares to flee to London with Cosette. Soon after, the student uprising is sparked by the death of General Lamarque. The students erect barricades in the streets and prepare for battle. Marius, believing that Cosette has abandoned him, joins them. Eponine also joins the revolutionaries, and is the revolt's first victim: she throws herself in front of Marius to save him from a bullet and dies in his arms.

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Valjean returns to the barricades and finds Marius severely injured and unconscious. He carries him on his shoulders, escaping through the sewers. At the sewer's exit, he meets Javert, who grants him time to return Marius to his family. Alone, Javert agonizes, caught between his black-and-white faith in the law and the incomprehensible mercy shown him by a criminal. Finally, unable to cope with the contradiction between the man who granted him mercy and the criminal that the law bids him condemn, Javert throws himself into the river Seine and dies.

Marius recovers slowly, and, in addition to his physical recovery, suffers from a kind of “survivor's guilt” over the death of his friends at the barricades. He is intensely curious about who saved him that night, but he is unaware that Cosette's “Papa” is also his rescuer. When Marius and Cosette are married, Valjean, recognizing that he is not really family to Cosette, admits to Marius that he is a convict and fugitive so that Marius can decide whether to admit him to his family. Marius is appalled at Valjean's revelation and, convinced that Valjean will be a bad influence, contrives to keep Cosette away from him on the pretext that Valjean is busy with other matters. Valjean colludes in Marius' falsehood. Cosette, who has regarded Valjean as a father, knows none of this. She is occupied with her new marriage, and, besides, she is bewildered and worn out by her Papa's stilted attitude towards her since the wedding. Cosette is, the narrator says, “more thoughtless than forgetful” of her love for Valjean. Alone, Valjean takes long walks through the streets at night, falls ill, and eventually takes to his bed to die.

When Thénardier (the innkeeper turned thief) recognizes Valjean in the street, he realizes that Marius' wife must be the same Cosette who had lived with his family at the Inn. He approaches Marius, intending to blackmail him with what he knows about Cosette's “father.” But in so doing, Thénardier inadvertently reveals many of Valjean's good deeds, including that Valjean is the man who saved Marius' life. Marius and Cosette rush to Valjean's side, but the great man is dying. For the first time, Valjean reveals his whole life's story, as well as the truth about Cosette's mother, to Marius and Cosette. Expressing his love to them, and they to him, Jean Valjean dies. In the play, the spirits of Fantine and Eponine sing to Valjean, and they are joined by a chorus that includes Marius' dead companions, singing “Do you hear the People Sing?”