

“The Heart of Christ is a Community of the Cross.”



Photo by Becket Logan

*Now you are the body of Christ and individually
members of it.*

1 Corinthians 12:27

Friends at First, our Lenten theme is “The Heart of Christ is a Community of the Cross.” You and I, the disciples of Jesus in this place, are the very cells that create Christ’s heart here in San Diego. Christ is the literal em-body-ment of the cross, and we being both individual and corporate, are a community of the cross. As we start our Lenten journey, I’d like to offer two thoughts to begin your meditations.

First, The Rev. Stanley Olson was First Lutheran’s Bishop from 1979 - 1988. One of his favorite sayings was, “The ground at the foot of the cross is flat. The ground at the foot of the cross is flat.” (And yes, he did often say it twice for emphasis. It’s the way I still hear it in my head.) It means everyone is equal before God. We are a community of the cross.

Second, is the powerful meaning of the cross. The cross is real. It is what makes your life, all lives, sacred. The cross is tragedy, tragedy that redeems all suffering. The cross is triumph: the triumph that restores each of you and all humanity to new life. The cross is our lens to the human story.

On this day of ashes, our Lent, our journey to the cross begins. We begin with the ashes of tragedy, which teach us that all which we imagine is precious is burned away. We begin with the ashes of triumph, which teach us that all that is most genuinely precious is left pure and holy, as God’s gift of grace in Jesus. Although we are physically separate, let us travel now in community so that we may stand together, at the foot of the cross. Where the ground is flat.

Peace,
Pastor Kurt

February 18

Mark 14: 1-2

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; ²for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

Given the chaos of the recent years, you may well have grown tired of politics. There are indeed dimensions of politics that are nasty, mean, ugly and even violent.

This lesson, appearing in the early days of our Lenten journey, tells us that this will be a political story. Religious leaders like those in our story are concerned about specific dimensions of their actions. We see that they are plotting **something that may not play well with the public.**

So what do we do with this unsettling political drama? It doesn't seem right to disregard it and only seek a more spiritual interpretation. Perhaps a good approach is to look at how Jesus enters the story. What kind of leader will he be in both the religious community and in society? Will we see how he acts not just out of compassion for individuals in need but also with concern for justice and equity and truth? And will his leadership threaten the religious leaders who are conspiring against him?

Will we find a leader who will "bear our griefs and carry our sorrows" but also challenge us to be active members of our communities and conscious of what makes for good politics?

Jim Friedrich

February 19

Mark 14: 3-5

³While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way?" ⁵For this ointment could

Gracious acceptance of hospitality is a rare thing. Many of us are very good at giving, but not so good at receiving. Perhaps it speaks to our own sense of inadequacy / unworthiness or maybe it comes from a false sense of selflessness. We think we are being humble when we are really focusing on ourselves and not on others.

Imagine if the woman poured the ointment on Jesus's head and he told her, "oh, don't waste it on me, keep it for yourself." That would be the exact opposite of what Jesus gave her – acceptance. When we refuse to accept gifts, we are maintaining the upper hand in the relationship – the scales are never equal, we are never on the same level of community. Thus this is an exhibition of pride rather than the humbleness that we think we are expressing. What Jesus gave freely was accepted with gratitude, what this woman gave freely was also accepted with gratitude by Jesus. When we start comparing and judging the value of someone else's worship, we are committing idolatry – taking pride in our actions and not humbly sharing God's love.

We don't know why this woman was moved to worship Jesus in this way, at this time; whether she knew that Jesus's death was at hand. We know that she gave Jesus the very best that she had – and would probably ever have. She gave what was most precious in gratitude for the invaluable precious gifts that Jesus gave her – forgiveness, acceptance, unconditional love, dignity, and ultimately, eternal life.

Martha DeMers

February 20

Mark 14:6-9

⁶But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

A woman...precious oil upon the head
An anointing of abundance, of compassion.
Some say "why this waste?"
Jesus says why do you trouble her?
She has performed a good service for me
Do this in remembrance of her.

Jugs of water, left in the desert
For those who cross, on the Way of the Cross.
Some say this is a waste, a crime, a betrayal
Jesus says show kindness to the poor.
Why do you trouble them?
I give water that is like a spring gushing up.
Do this in remembrance of me.

People invited to eat each week with Jesus
A home for the homeless
An anointing of nutrition and kindness.
Some say this is unsightly, a waste, it only enables
Jesus says why do you trouble them?
You do me a good service in the sharing of this bread.
Do this in remembrance of her, in remembrance of me.

Prayer (May be said as you make the sign of the cross on your forehead with water or oil): *I belong to Christ. I am a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever.*

Bill Radatz

February 21

First Sunday in Lent

Come, Let Us Use the Grace Divine

- 1. Come, let us use the grace divine, and all with one accord,
in a perpetual covenant join ourselves to Christ the Lord;
Give up ourselves, thru Jesus' power, his name to glorify;
and promise, in this sacred hour, for God to live and die.*
- 2. The covenant we this moment make be ever kept in mind;
we will no more our God forsake, or cast these words behind.
We never will throw off the fear of God who hears our vow;
and if thou art well pleased to hear, come down and meet us now.*
- 3. Thee, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, let all our hearts receive,
present with thy celestial host the peaceful answer give;
to each covenant the blood apply which takes our sins away,
and register our names on high and keep us to that day!*

Text: Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

Music: English melody; arr. by Ralph Vaughan Williams

February 22

Mark 14:10-11

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

For an unknown reason, the faith in Jesus that Judas once had, faded. John tells us that the Jewish Authorities were offering a bounty for information leading to Jesus's whereabouts. Judas realizing it was just a matter of time before someone cashed in mused, "Why not Judas?" He then negotiated the price for Jesus' whereabouts. We all know that Money motivates people to do outlandish things...devilish things. Judas jumped camp and played for the Dark side. Luke and John tell us "that the Devil entered into Judas."

Why Judas betrays Jesus is not completely clear, but one reason is offered....MONEY.

How we get our money and how we spend it affects our spiritual lives. How we get our money and what we spend it on tells a lot about our relationship to God, and Jesus. Our check books and our investments tell us a lot about where our hearts are anchored. It's Tax Time. Are we as honest with Jesus as we are with the IRS?

Prayer:

Lord, of all Currency,

We open our checks books before You. Timothy tells us that "the Love of Money is the root of all evil." Deliver us from fooling around with our destiny. Keep us from going after Money, by whatever means is necessary. Let us be watchful for ways to share our bounty, so as to make heaven on earth more visible for some less blessed than we are. Amen.

Ron Garton

February 23

Mark 14:12-16

¹²On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹⁵He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." ¹⁶So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

At first glance this seems to be a simple story of Jesus miraculously providing space for him and his disciples to have supper. It is a more impressive feat when one considers that Jerusalem would have been packed during the Passover and finding a place to house thirteen people for a dinner would be like trying to get same-day brunch reservations on Mother's Day for a group of 13.

On face value we can see this as another piece of evidence of Jesus' divine nature. But, as with many of the incidents cited in Scripture, there are layers of meaning and multiple lessons to learn. Jesus is providing a place of community for his believers in their present time but it is also a foreshadowing of what he will do for us for eternity. Elsewhere in Scripture Jesus tells us that his Father's home is a mansion with many rooms and that he goes to prepare a place for us. Can we believe him?

The disciples go and find the man with the water jar as Jesus said; they follow him to the house as Jesus said; they ask the owner of the house to show them the room that their master needs. The owner of the house provides the room as Jesus said and voila! They have a place to fellowship with Christ. Everything was as Jesus said it would be. And everything is as Jesus said it will be. Jesus' actions show time and time again that his word is true. We will all be together for fellowship in God's house now and forever. Amen

Nancy Eckert

February 24

Mark 14:17-21

¹⁷When it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” ¹⁹They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, “Surely, not I?” ²⁰He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. ²¹For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

The disciples, upon hearing Jesus’ revelation, expose their shock and sadness and ultimately self-doubt. The disciples did not seem to suspect Judas. Maybe they thought one of them would betray Jesus on accident so he could correct his action before it was too late. But Jesus does not tell the disciples who; He does not single Judas out.

Jesus could see into the heart of Judas, as He can see into our hearts. There may be things we succeed in hiding from our neighbors, but we cannot hide them from Jesus. He knows what is in us. Here, Jesus puts Judas on notice but still leaves the ball in his court – Jesus tells him that He knows what is in his heart to do, and even warns him of the consequences of such betrayal. This is also the way God deals with us. There is no compulsion. Jesus could have stopped Judas, but instead He shows His love towards Judas. God has given us free will. His love appeals to us. His truth warns us. He doesn’t dictate our actions or make us do things. Judas disregarded the appeal of Jesus’ love and disregarded His warnings.

How often do we disregard God’s love and warnings? God doesn’t stop us, whether we like it or not, from sin. In the end, there is no one but ourselves to blame. God seeks to make us love Him so much that His voice and love is so much sweeter than all the voices that call us away from Him. I pray that we are able to suppress the voices urging us down a sinful path. I pray we clearly hear God’s voice amidst all of life’s distractions and choose to act as a reflection of God’s love.

Kara Oien

February 25

Mark 14:22-25

²²While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” ²³Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

When I read this verse I cannot help but think about what we call the “Two natures” of Jesus, the Christ. That is, that Jesus was a mortal man who ate and drank as we all do throughout the week. But, Jesus was (and is and ever shall be) the Son of God. This is a title which the gospel writer Mark ascribes to Jesus in the very first verse of the gospel. Jesus is also called the Son of God near the very end of the gospel (after the crucifixion) by none other than the Roman centurion.

The full impact of this title seems to be intentionally placed by Mark at the beginning and at the earthly end of the life and work of Jesus. His work, his reason for coming to earth to bring salvation, has now been accomplished in the cross. Jesus remained faithful to his disciples even when one lied about him, another betrayed him and when the rest just ran and hid for cover (save a few of the women). As the meal in our reading for today concludes, the disciples would prove unfaithful, but Jesus would always remain faithful. That to me is what grace looks like: Undeserved and unconditional love. It is grace that continues to empower us here at First Lutheran Church to be a community of the cross that is always heart-shaped in our life and witness.

Rich Ajer

February 26

Mark 14:26-28

²⁶When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

²⁷And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

²⁸But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

There are several things we could focus on in these verses. Jesus tells the disciples that they will become deserters which, I believe, was probably the furthest things from their minds at that point. He also tells them that he will be "raised up" and go to Galilee. That probably raised a few brows! What was special about the Mount of Olives? But I will focus on the singing of a hymn. That was probably as important an event as the other things mentioned in the verses.

Why did they sing a hymn? Why do we sing hymns today? Jesus and the disciples had just finished their meal (known to us today as the "last supper"). Jewish tradition was to sing Psalms 113-118 (or a selection of stanzas from them) at the end of the meal on the first day of Passover. Some religious scholars believe this is the hymn that Jesus and the disciples sang. Hymns can be different things to different people: a joyful sound, a teaching moment, a peaceful presence, a gathering of community, a vision for hope, the fulfilment of faith. I imagine these aspects of the singing of the hymn were present that evening.

One of my favorite hymns is *When Peace, like a River* (AKA *It Is Well With My Soul*). The last verse is my vision for hope and the fulfilment of my faith:

*And, Lord, haste the day when our faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trumpet shall sound, and the Lord shall descend;
Even so it is well with my soul.*

Need we ask for more?

Chuck Leib

February 27

Mark 14:29-31

²⁹Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." ³⁰Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." ³¹But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

The degree to which Jesus knew the character of his disciples is a little unnerving. "One of you will betray me--the rest of you will have nothing to do with me when the chips are down." Jesus seems to have known his disciples better than they knew themselves. But isn't that the way it is when it comes to human nature. We are the Peters who are sure that our character is so unshakable that it is impossible for our dedication to our high principles ever to be questioned. "Uh, uh, Jesus, the rest may hang you out to dry, but not me."

And yet. Jesus faces the judgement of the Sanhedrin and the sentence of Pilate and the Way of the Cross alone. His disciples deserted him. Peter was not at Jesus' side at what must have been a moment of supreme loneliness. Jesus--betrayed and deserted.

Jesus' little community of disciples was not very faithful to him. He knew that would be the case then and that it would always be the case. Jesus' faithfulness to his followers is always greater than his followers' faithfulness to him. Jesus faithfully followed the Way of the Cross – alone – establishing a community of grace, open for all to stand together in faith and service.

John Davis

February 28

Second Sunday in Lent

Forty Days and Forty Nights

*Forty days and forty nights
You were fasting in the wild;
Forty days and forty nights
Tempted, and yet undefiled.*

*Shall not we Your sorrow share,
And from earthly joys abstain,
Fasting with unceasing prayer,
Glad with You to suffer pain?*

*And if Satan vexing sore,
Flesh or spirit should assail,
You, his Vanquisher before,
Grant we may not faint or fail.*

*So shall we have peace divine;
Holier gladness ours shall be;
Round us, too, shall angels shine,
Such as ministered to You.*

*Keep, O keep us, Saviour dear,
Ever constant by Your side;
That with You we may appear
At the eternal Eastertide.*

Text: George Hunt Smyttan (1822-1870).

Music: HEINLEIN attributed to Martin Herbst (1654-1681).

March 1

Mark 14:32-36

³²They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." ³⁵And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."

The Heart of Christ is a Community of the Cross: I feel so much with Christ in this passage. His throwing himself on the ground is such powerful imagery. His pleading not to bear the cup he knows he must. I feel like I have thrown this tantrum, too; that I have been with Christ, of Christ, in Christ in this kind of moment. That we as Christians and as Lutherans share this common humanity – this act of Jesus in this moment seems so truly human – not divine, but messy, difficult and rough – exactly what life is like for humans.

I feel so in community, with the heart of Christ as he feels all the feels – so much emotion, so dramatic (yet real) "I am deeply grieved, even to death." The human condition of emotion, of pain, of fear of death, of not wanting to do what you know you must, of pleading with yourself and with God to not have to bear this moment, this time, this reality.

And yet, it draws us into community – these feeling, these workings of the heart. We are common, in community, with being this human vessel of feelings and emotions. For Jesus to be so truly human, for God to have so loved the world that he in the form of Jesus suffered these feelings, this humanity, to be truly one of us, so much so that he dies for us – even as in the moment this passage reveals to us that he does not want to – but he still does.

"Dear Lord, help us on this Lenten journey to be truly with you in our emotions, in our feelings, in the hearts of our humanity, as you lead us to the cross, and we stay with you in community. Amen"

Shaun Travers

March 2

Mark 14:37-38

³⁷He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Dear Lord, we are tired. Weary in flesh and spirit, in a year that often feels like a perpetual season of Lent. A season of waiting, of sacrifice, and one of immeasurable suffering. Of screaming out into the void: "How long, Lord? How long?"

This year I find myself sitting with both more empathy and more frustration with Simon Peter than I have felt before. He is tired. His body calls for rest. We know this feeling all too well. Instead we are called to keep awake and pray. To listen for His call. To wait for signs that God remains here with us. To look for signs of hope through heavy eyes.

I reminded through these verses that as humans we often find it easier to sleep through the suffering that surrounds us. To turn it off. Not for a moment of rest, but as a consistent, repeated choice. To not awaken at calls for justice. Maybe because we think it doesn't directly affect us or maybe simply because it's all too much. We hit the snooze button as we see the destruction of Earth's precious resources. Snooze as walls are built to unwelcome the stranger. Snooze again and again and again, as God's children remain unhoused, unfed, imprisoned, abused, and murdered. We snooze through pain and suffering, clinging to the safety of our status quo.

Author Austin Channing Brown wrote: *To practice love is to disrupt the status quo which is masquerading as peace.* It is hard not to hear the echoes of MLK: *True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.*

Lord, help us stay awake when we find it easier to fall asleep. Help us see the truth with new eyes. Help us to be your hands and feet, to move for justice. Help us disrupt in love, knowing that you are always with us.

Allison Emery

March 3

Mark 14:39-40

³⁹And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him.

Gethsemane*, more than an 'oil press'.

An o-press-ive place, heavy on the spirit.

A place that press-es on you, agonizingly so.

Any ability to wake up is press-ed down.

Any word to be spoke is sup-pressed.

Will we ever be im-pressed?

How can we learn to ex-press?

Who can bear this press-ure?

What a de-press-ing place.

"Gethsemane, a place called the oil press"

(*Wikipedia.com)

Frank DeLouise

March 4

Mark 14:41-42

⁴¹He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴²Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Three chosen disciples, Peter, James, and John, couldn't keep awake – couldn't carry out the task given them to "watch and pray." (The term "watch" here seems to mean be alert, especially in a spiritual sense.) Momentous spiritual and physical events are afoot and can take you unaware. These men were warned but what was happening was so unthinkable and hard to fathom that all they could do was sleep. It was too much for them right now; I have been in situations that were such and can understand how they felt.

Suddenly, the reality is here, and they are ill prepared – both physically and spiritually – for what is already upon them. Jesus wakes them (again) with urgent and compelling words, "Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners." Not hands asking for bread or for healing but grasping, angry tools of the Chief Priests and Pharisees. A riled mob that has been fed with "fake news" that Jesus is himself a sinner to nth degree; that, if he is not silenced, he will bring God's (and the Roman's) wrath upon them all.

Fast forward 52 days – to Pentecost – we see a completely different Peter, James and John. Men filled with the Holy Spirit, watching and awake.

Let us be watchful and alert putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:13) and praying that we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jim Boyd

March 5

Mark 14:43-44

⁴³Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. ⁴⁴Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard."

For so long I read about this betrayal and denounced Judas' actions as unforgivable, as foreign to anything a believer would do. But is that true?

How many times have we justified our actions, claiming we're doing the right thing, that God would approve of our actions, that He was on our side, when it was our own self-interest? How might we be like Judas, reacting out of fear—of persecution, of hurt, of violence, of a loss of status—and instead trying to 'save' others by betraying them?

While we know what Judas did was wrong, I think, like Peter, we so often think these actions are foreign to us, and impossible for us to make. Instead, we need to realize how very human these choices are, how very like us they are. We can also choose out of fear, out of selfishness, and justify it to ourselves. How might Judas' betrayal be not unlike our own?

Dear Lord,

Reveal to me the ways in which fear work through me, in which I struggle to see your will and instead make my own path. Embrace me with your love and confidence, that I may know who I truly am.

Amen.

T.J. Tallie

March 6

Mark 14:45-50

⁴⁵So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁴⁶Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. ⁴⁷But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ⁴⁹Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." ⁵⁰All of them deserted him and fled.

WAS I DECEIVED?

I pause, holding the tree...sweat dripping and my heart racing...

Wild eyed I look around....no one near...I am alone...

Shouts in the distance...as I pause....

My ears still ring with the Cry

As my sword cuts through the flesh....

His ear drops...

To the ground coated in dust... and blood....

My heart pounds...All I could think... was to arms....

"It is time...the kingdom is upon us...Rise UP...NOW...NOW"

"MY GOD RISE UP, IT IS TIME....TO THE ENEMY WE FIGHT"

But I was alone...unable to see...Did I hear wrong....

Was I misled....is it a lie...

"Why LORD...OH MY GOD...have you deceived us...are we forsaken..."

I run...deep into the woods...that ear...lays upon the ground....

I pause and hold onto the tree...alone...alone...alone.

Matthew Eckert

March 7

Third Sunday in Lent

We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight

*We walk by faith and not by sight:
No gracious words we hear
Of him who spoke as none e'er spoke,
But we believe him near.*

*We may not touch his hands and side,
Nor follow where he trod;
Yet in his promise we rejoice,
And cry, "My Lord and God!"*

*Help then, O Lord, our unbelief,
And may our faith abound;
To call on you when you are near,
And seek where you are found.*

*That when our life of faith is done
In realms of clearer light,
We may behold you as you are
In full and endless sight.*

*Text: Henry Alford (1810-1871)
Music: Set to various tunes including
SHANTI, by Marty Haugen (b 1952)*

March 8

Mark 14:51-52

⁵¹A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, ⁵²but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

When we read these two verses from Mark, we may scratch our heads in wonder. I believe it's a "leader", like the opening scene on a radio or TV program, it draws you in to get the "rest of the story."

Go back and read; "The Betrayal and Arrest of Christ" (Mark: 43-52). As this helps to put the young man in context, it may also leave you with unanswered questions. Such as, who was this person, why was he dressed this way and who is "him" the young man was following? Aroused from his sleep, was he following the noisy group because he was a true believer in Christ or simply a curious person? What we do know for sure he did not want to be swept up in the crowd action that was taking place and he feared for his life. In that regard he was no different than Christ's disciples who we know were true believers but yet feared for their lives' as well.

"Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (Matthew 8: 26)

Dan Kjonogaard

March 9

Mark 14:53-54

⁵³They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. ⁵⁴Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire.

Howard Thurman wrote: "It is impossible for Jesus to be understood outside of the sense of community that Israel held with God."

Here, in Mark's three sentences, we have the keepers of that relationship, the powerful leadership that dictated the Law, gathering to exercise that power. Their authority was being undermined; their interpretations of the sacred law redefined, dumbed-down, made unclean, secularized for the poor and powerless masses. The protectors of Israel's covenant with Yahweh are holding Jesus accountable for endangering Israel's inheritance as the chosen people.

Here, too, we have Peter, whose loss and emptiness seeps through to us, still, as he warms his hands. Surely liable for arrest himself, he is suddenly a man without a community. How can he return to the teachings of the priests? His culture, his people, his whole life up until three years ago had been formed by the Law as it was taught by those righteous men. But Jesus has taught and lived a different relationship with God. Peter has felt loved, worthy to do kingdom work. It had been so astonishing to go from being an unremarkable fisherman to being followed by throngs of people wanting, needing. Now, all the power that Peter had ever known to be good in this world was upstairs in Caiaphas' palace, in chains. In this courtyard there was no Jesus, no band of Christ followers, only his fellow countrymen, the guards, with the old laws and their armaments. Peter, with the future unknown, tries to become unworthy of attention once again among their shields.

Lee Kaercher

March 10

Mark 14:55-59

⁵⁵Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. ⁵⁶For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, ⁵⁸“We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” ⁵⁹But even on this point their testimony did not agree.

I found it so interesting that I was to reflect on Bible verses discussing the “false testimony” that was given at Jesus’ trial, considering what our beloved country has suffered over the past few months.

Of course, the people provided false testimony, because the truth would have vacated the needed outcome of crucifixion. And, of course “their testimony did not agree.” False testimony never does. Lies are confusing.

The chief priests and the whole council were desperately seeking evidence, but they found none. Sound familiar?

In the case of Jesus, the lies provided the excuse to fill the cup that he willingly drank from and granted us the gift of forgiveness and the promise of eternal life that we SO did not deserve.

Luckily, in modern time, the “false testimony” did not prevail! Lord, help us to do your will and speak your truth! Amen.

Jude Annunziata

March 11

Mark 14:60-62

⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” ⁶¹But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” ⁶²Jesus said, “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

Jesus faces many trials. There are many witnesses against him with inconsistent testimony. There are deniers. Jesus is very humble. Jesus is silent for a long time. He finally says he will be coming with the clouds of heaven. Clouds allow God to directly interact with His people without exposing them to the brilliance of His glory (Exodus 33:20).

We all face trials. May Jesus and God give us the strength to be humble. Use the Lenten devotional as your daily reminder to pray for strength throughout this Lenten season and carry those prayers throughout the year. When you see clouds, also be reminded of God’s brilliance and your humility in his face.

Kem Taylor

March 12

Mark 14:63-65

⁶³Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?” All of them condemned him as deserving death. ⁶⁵Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophecy!” The guards also took him over and beat him.

So, the head guy of all the leaders and followers became frustrated not able to legitimately have his way.

So, using them, the ‘mob’ of them, he incited them. Convincing leaders and followers their truth, his truth, was true.

Then he said, ‘You’ve heard the bogus tales, you all heard it, and I’ve confirmed it and being the greatest of you, people have said so, many have said it, is there any reason to hear what anyone else has to say?’

‘Now, what are you going to do...’
They responded, confident their superior Superior heard them, loved them, would lead them.

‘Destroy their ‘TRUTH’, we have our truth and have been given the right’, they said.

So, they stormed the vessel of TRUTH, spewed on it and beat it, gleeful in their righteousness.
‘Ha, Ha, Ha, tell us of these many, who defiled you, who broke you.

Even your enforcers are on our side, see how ‘right’ we are, see how ‘our’ truth prevails.’

The TRUTH has been seen and will be the Judge, Jury ...and Prevail.

Frank De Louise

March 13

Mark 14:66-68

⁶⁶While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” ⁶⁸But he denied it, saying, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about.”

Our scripture today records the first of Peter’s three denials that he is in any way connected with Jesus. Peter’s three denials of Jesus come in rapid-fire succession, which is I guess the way denials come most often. Peter’s denial reflects his deepest fears about all that has been happening since they entered into the chaotic walls of Jerusalem during the Passover. He doesn’t have to imagine very hard how being a follower of Jesus may end up badly. Maybe it is time to abandon the whole mission and get out of there asap. The unfolding mood was dark and sinister to say the least, and Peter being challenged with guilt by association by quickly responding “No way! I don’t know what you are talking about! ”

Our denials of Jesus will likely not have the intensity that Peter’s did. But, Lent is as good a time as any to consider when my (or our) denials harm the heart of Christ. Have you ever said something, and immediately regretted having said it? I imagine we all have. Maybe part of what it means to embrace our Lenten theme of desiring to be the “Heart of Christ as a Community of the Cross” is speaking our words deliberately and thoughtfully. I suspect that in a day of social media outbursts that could be a very counter-cultural thing to do. Maybe the familiar words of the psalmist can guide us: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.” PS 119:14

Rich Ajer

March 14

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Nature With Open Volume Stands

*Nature With Open Volume Stands
To Spread Her Maker's Praise Abroad,
And Every Labour Of His Hands
Shows Something Worthy Of Our God.*

*But In The Grace That Rescued Man
His Brightest Form Of Glory Shines;
Here On The Cross 'Tis Fairest Drawn
In Precious Blood And Crimson Lines.*

*Here His Whole Name Appears Complete;
Nor Wit Can Guess, Nor Reason Prove
Which Of The Letters Best Is Writ,
The Power, The Wisdom, Or The Love.*

*O The Sweet Wonders Of That Cross
Where God The Saviour Loved And Died;
Her Noblest Life My Spirit Draws
From His Dear Wounds And Bleeding Side.*

*I Would For Ever Speak His Name
In Sounds To Mortal Ears Unknown,
With Angels Join To Praise The Lamb,
And Worship At His Father's Throne*

*Text: Isaac Watts
Music: Georg Joseph*

March 15

Mark 14:69-70a

And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. ⁶⁹And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." ⁷⁰But again he denied it.

While we were not in the courtyard, in some ways we ARE Peter.

"Surely, not I Lord", we cry out. I would never betray you, deny you, forget you, ignore you....the list goes on and on. And yet, we do those very things repeatedly, sometimes unaware of what we are doing; sometimes, in defiant awareness. We do these things whenever we put something – anything – before our relationship with Jesus. And as much as we may try not to do these things, as many times as we vow to love and follow Jesus, we are never completely successful. At those times, I invite us all to turn to these words from "Ah, Holy Jesus" (ELW 349):

"There-fore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee, I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee:

think on thy pity and thy love unswerving, not my deserving."

Let this be our prayer. And let this be our assurance: God is steadfast, even when we are not!

Margy Ajer

March 16

Mark 14:70b-72

Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.”⁷¹ But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.”⁷² At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

As Jesus predicted, Peter denies his association with him. Jesus also predicted the same for all his other disciples, but Mark doesn't mention their betrayals. Peter swore that he didn't know Jesus. Then he heard the rooster crow, and he realized the bitter truth. Not once... not twice... but three times he denied knowing Jesus. In order to emphasize the faithlessness of Peter, the nature of his three denials increases in intensity each time. First, he gives a simple denial to a servant girl who claims that he was “with” Jesus. Second, he denies to the servant girl, and a group of bystanders, that he was “one of them.” Finally, he denies with a vehement oath to a group of bystanders that he was “one of them.” How could he have done it? I feel fairly certain that it was societal pressure that was at play here. We have been taught that a short time earlier he had drawn a sword and been willing to take on the armed group that had come to arrest Jesus. Where had his courage, his conviction, and his commitment gone? The tide of public opinion was rising against Jesus. I'm sure that the immense fear of bodily harm was too much for Peter.

None of us can say with certainty how we would react in such a situation. It is worth remembering that according to Mark, Peter was the first disciple called to Jesus' side and the first who confessed that Jesus was the Messiah. Nevertheless, his denials of Jesus may be the most vehement of all, which is why Mark discusses them. This is the last we see of Peter in Mark's gospel and therefore we don't know why, exactly, that Peter wept. Was it because he betrayed Jesus or because he was discovered to be a disciple?

Chuck Leib

March 17

Mark 15:1-5

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.² Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “You say so.”³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things.⁴ Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.”⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Poor Pilate. Imagine being the governor of a state where the laws say one thing, but the religious leaders want you do to something else. So many people follow the religious leaders; they have the loudest voices, and make some of the biggest contributions to your campaign. Pilate tries to make Jesus responsible for the outcome by putting the question of His kingship to Him to answer. Jesus does not comply.

Lately we have witnessed in our own country the torturous line that leaders walk trying to appease a strong man and their constituents by turning their backs on their own consciences and honor. Many have chosen to do as Pilate did – capitulate to the loudest voice by disavowing any responsibility for the outcome.

In 1845, the New England poet and noted abolitionist James Russell Lowell published a long poem in the Boston Courier about the national debate over slavery and the impending war with Mexico after the annexation of the slave-owning Texas by the United States. Lines from that poem were incorporated into the hymn, “Once to Every Man and Nation,” which was quoted by Martin Luther King in his “We Shall Overcome” speech in 1966. These words were true for Pilate, for Americans in 1845 and 1966 and are still true today:

*Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Then it is the brave man chooses
While the coward stands aside,*

We know what Pilate decided. We see what our leaders have decided. Jesus's silence in no way absolves Pilate, just as our silence in the face of oppression, injustice, hate, and violence does not absolve us. What will you decide?

Martha DeMers

March 18

Mark 15:6-11

⁶Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. ⁷Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. ⁸So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. ⁹Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” ¹⁰For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. ¹¹But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead.

The festival referred to in this scripture is “Festival of Unleavened Bread” (hebrewrootsmom.com) is mentioned in Mark 14:1.

Pilate offers the Jewish crowd a choice: Barabbas or Jesus. Barabbas, a person who was a murderer and was involved in an insurrection, well known as a notorious criminal throughout Jerusalem and Judea; yet the crowd preferred Barabbas over Jesus. I’m sure that Pilate was very aware of Jesus, knowing his worst offense was in irritating the chief priests and other high ranking church officials of the time. However, Pilate was also aware of Jesus’ growing popularity with the population throughout Judea.

At the onset of Jesus’ interrogation Pilate addressed Jesus as “King of the Jews” (Mark 15:2) and continues the use of the title as he addresses the crowd. On making this statement to the crowd Pilate realizes the chief priests have whipped the crowd into a frenzy.

In spite of what Pilate may have thought, he surrendered Christ to the crowd which led to Christ’s crucifixion. This was a political gamble for Pilate, but in making his decision he became an instrument of the Lord.

Dan Kjonogaard

March 19

Mark 15:12-15

¹²Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” ¹³They shouted back, “Crucify him!” ¹⁴Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” ¹⁵So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

As a child, I hated Pilate. I blamed him for killing my Jesus. It was so easy to place the blame on him. Of course as an adult, I learned otherwise. Pilate didn’t really want to kill Jesus but he found himself between a rock and a hard place and he made a choice. Ends up and unbeknownst to him, Pilate played an important role in God’s plan for our salvation.

What strikes me today is the crowd, the community, the culture. I’m afraid I can’t help but see similarities to recent events in our crowds, communities and in our culture. There was pain then and there is pain now. There was anger then and there is anger now. There was fear then and there is fear now. I am sure there is something to learn here, to do here.

As a community of Christ, Christ on the cross, are we not called to alleviate the fear, pain and anger? I know over this past year I have worked hard to understand. I have read, studied, discussed, and voted. I may not be as ready as I’d like but now is the time to get to work, together, for peace, justice and reconciliation.

Colleen Kramer

March 20

Mark 15:16-20

¹⁶Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

One of the things that appeals to me or comforts me most about Christ is his suffering and humanity. I know that whatever I am going through, Jesus understands it perfectly. Christ didn't take an easy route during his time on earth. He never used his divine power to spare himself from the trials of being human, and he suffered more than most humans ever do or ever will.

In this passage from Mark, we read about how Christ was spat on, mocked, and dehumanized. I live with chronic paranoid schizophrenia, so I understand what it is like to be made fun of and to be the object of people's cruelty.

I take comfort knowing that our Savior sees me fully and can relate to all I have endured and much more. Jesus being fully God and fully human means he has compassion for us in a way that can lighten our loads and unburden our hearts if only we will seek Him.

Rebecca Chamaa

March 21

Fifth Sunday in Lent

O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done

*1. O Love divine, what has thou done!
The immortal God hath died for me!
The Father's coeternal Son
bore all my sins upon the tree.
Th' immortal God for me hath died:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!*

*2. Is crucified for me and you,
to bring us rebels back to God.
Believe, believe the record true,
ye all are bought with Jesus' blood.
Pardon for all flows from his side:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!*

*3. Behold him, all ye that pass by,
the bleeding Prince of life and peace!
Come, sinners, see your Savior die,
and say, "Was ever grief like his?"
Come, feel with me his blood applied:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!*

Text: Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

Music: Isaac B. Woodbury, 1819-1858

March 22

Mark 15:21

²¹They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

Surely you've known someone who just seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Could that have been Simon's dilemma? He was from Cyrene, a town with a large Jewish community about 750 miles from Jerusalem. And, since the Cyrenians had a synagogue in Jerusalem, it was not unlikely that Simon had made a pilgrimage to the city to celebrate Passover, maybe even having heard rumors of a teacher called Jesus. Traveling first by boat from Cyrene, then walking the remaining 30 miles, he was no doubt excited to pass through the city gates and lose himself in the joyous holiday throngs. However, as he entered the city, he was instead caught up in rowdy, angry mobs that lined the streets, and found himself face to face with a horrific sight: a bloodied, beaten figure with a crown of thorns, collapsed in the dusty street under the weight of a heavy wooden cross. The man was obviously bound for crucifixion, and too weak to carry on. Appalled, and paralyzed with shock, Simon was roughly grabbed by a Roman soldier who demanded he carry the cross for Jesus. Probably too frightened to refuse, Simon picked up the heavy beam and followed the stumbling footsteps of Jesus, the wailing "daughters of Jerusalem" (Lk 23:28) at his heels. The wrong place at the wrong time? Perhaps.

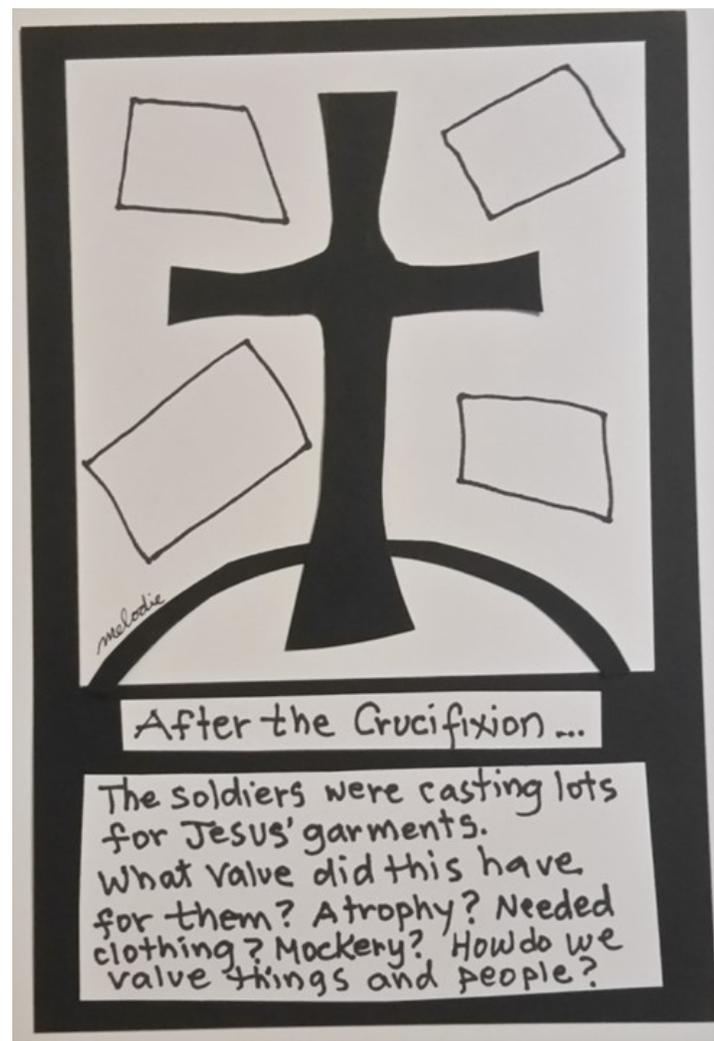
A seminary friend of my husband once wrote in a letter that Bill always seemed to be in the "wrong place for all the right reasons"---finding himself in uncomfortable or perilous circumstances, compelled to confront or witness to some injustice. Simon, whether he understood it at the time or not, found himself right where he was needed, being used by God to render service to the Messiah. Can we trust, even in the bleakest circumstances, that God is at work in us, and that God's hand is leading us where we need to be?

Martha Radatz

March 23

Mark 15:22-24

²²Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). ²³And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. ²⁴And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.



Melodie Baker

March 24

Mark 15:25-27

²⁵It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.

There were three, not one, but three. The others were not kings, not leaders, likely uneducated, no one of significance in society. They were just bandits. We might say "common, ordinary bandits."

The truth of crucifixion is that it was common; it was ordinary. It was merely another way for the empire to deal with those it no longer wanted. Crucifixion was also a display. It wasn't just for dealing death. It was meant to send a message. A cross was public punishment, demeaning, dishonoring, a form of jest and mockery. Crucifixion was a common, disturbingly ordinary, cruel, evil sport.

Jesus will die as he lived, with bandits on his left and on his right. They will not die alone. These common bandits will suffer with "the King of the Jews" by their sides. The empire seeks to denigrate and mock, but Jesus had already lifted the lowly, healed the common, ate with the ordinary, touched the untouchable, and set the sinner bandits free. As he lived, he will die, Emmanuel, God with us, God by our side. Our King lives and will die, with common, everyday ordinary sinners.

Let us pray; Good and gracious God, remind me today that you have come to be with me in my ordinary life. Beside you, even the worst kind of ordinary suffering can be made extraordinary. You do not deserve death, but you have come to the common and cruel cross none-the-less. You are my King. You are God with us. Let me live this day in the truth of your presence, regardless of my sin and circumstance. Amen.

Pastor Kurt Christenson

March 25

Mark 15:29-30

²⁹Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰save yourself, and come down from the cross!"

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

How easy...

How human...

To mock what we don't understand.

Lord, have mercy!

Carol J. Schultz

March 26

Mark 15:31-32

³¹In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³²Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

Here we see Christ, hanging nailed to the cross, a sign posted over his head proclaiming him be "The King of the Jews" (verse 26). Jesus is flanked by two bandits (verse 27) on crosses, suffering the same fate, all three soon to die. The chief priests and scribes – proud of their work – are further deriding Christ by claiming he's not the Messiah; if he were, he would climb down off the cross, save himself and put an end to his pain and suffering.

Emboldened, the crowd also taunts Jesus and even the two bandits hanging next to Jesus have the energy to join in.

Could we have resisted the call and the crowd if we had been there? Let us all pray that we can in the future.

Dan Kjonggaard

March 27

Mark 15:33-34

³³When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

A black shroud suddenly drops over a bright noon-day sun. This was no ordinary solar eclipse. The moon was in the wrong phase and it lasted too long. There was a foreboding in this sudden darkness that would heighten the poignancy of this moment, a moment that has been waiting, since the very beginning. Even before creation, when the cosmos was nothing when "God said let there be light and there was light" (Gen 1:1-4).

Then Jesus came into the world where a bright light hovered over the place of his birth, signaling a new beginning: a better way to separate the light from the darkness in our lives, in our relationship with God and with each other.

Then Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). He brought a spiritual light that shows the difference between the dark and the light.

On that fateful day, his light goes out on the earth and the sun no longer sheds its welcoming, warming rays for three hours and the mourning would last till Sunday – resurrection day.

We, God's people, are called to carry on; being the reflected light of Christ in a dark and dangerous world. Let us be the "Heart of Christ in the Heart of the City."

Jim Boyd

March 28

Sixth Sunday in Lent—Palm Sunday

Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

1. *Hosanna, loud hosanna,
the little children sang,
through pillared court and temple
the lovely anthem rang.
To Jesus, who had blessed them
close folded to his breast,
the children sang their praises,
the simplest and the best.*

2. *From Olivet they followed
mid an exultant crowd,
the victor palm branch waving,
and chanting clear and loud.
The Lord of earth and heaven
rode on in lowly state,
nor scorned that little children
should on his bidding wait.*

3. *"Hosanna in the highest!"
that ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer,
the Lord of heaven our King.
O may we ever praise him
with heart and life and voice,
and in his blissful presence
eternally rejoice!*

*Text: Jeanette Threlfall, 1821-1880
Music: Gesangbuch der H.W.k. Hofkapelle;*

March 29

Mark 15:35-36

³⁵When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

What did they hear, these bystanders? Why "bystanders," why not "disciples" or "followers?" Are they caring for Jesus by bringing him wine, or is this more mere mockery? Is their curiosity about Elijah a display of piety or another jibe at Jesus' expense? Who are these nameless people?

I can stand on both sides of this text. On one, the tone has shifted and suddenly those who have gathered to watch this man die a ghastly public death have come to their senses. When Jesus cries out in the words of the psalmist, they realize this is no ordinary man. Someone rushes to offer a brief moment of comfort. They look for Elijah's return. The moment has become sacred.

On the other hand, this is more of the same. In jest and cruel humor, Elijah's claim is dismissed. The prophet's power is belittled. Someone gleefully skirts to the old jug of wine to further taunt the parched man's lips, dragging out the death. No one expects anything sacred to happen. Elijah will not appear. The moment remains profane.

I am humbly saint and sinner. I am painfully reminded this day how sadly clear I understand both sides, and have acted out, both readings of this text. God, forgive me.

Let us pray; Good and gracious God, help me this day to stand on the sacred side of time. Open my eyes to the miracle of your presence. As Good Friday draws near, help me not simply stand by, but give me the courage to stand with you. Help me to not simply see miracles but to also expect them. Amen

Pastor Kurt Christenson

March 30

Mark 15:37-39

³⁷Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

We've come to the end of the earthly life of Jesus.
He's chosen followers and taught them with fresh parables
and by his example.

But they haven't a clue that His time was up.
His last words recorded by Mark form a question
and a quote from Psalm 22,
"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"
All through his years of teaching and discipling,
The Apostles saw God working through Him.
But with his last breath, He felt abandoned
by the One who sent him.

I believe the sin of the world was so great
that its weight momentarily blotted out
His Father's love and presence.
The world's stage went black...We took him down
to our level, in order that He could lift us up
to heaven one day, when we breath our last breath.
Symbolically, the great Temple Tapestry tore in two.
Heaven came to earth....Life sought out the-end-of-death.
His last questioning words were answered three days later
with the unaccounted for rolling away of the giant gravestone.
Alleluia!

PRAYER:

Dear God, We now know...we see and we believe...You came on our behalf. While we are here, we would be about the things of Jesus....carrying on, as if he were still in our midst. Give us a good word to share with someone who needs encouragement this day. Help us to run a few life-giving errands along our way, for Jesus' sake. Amen!

Ronn Garton

March 31

Mark 15:40-41

⁴⁰There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

On the surface this passage may appear to serve just to provide texture to the picture of Jesus on the cross, but that is far too shallow of a reading. While the men who were closest to Jesus betrayed, denied, and abandoned him, the women were different. The men who have traveled with Jesus these last several years and gathered with him at the Last Supper – have all been scattered. As he foresaw, one of them, Judas, betrayed him. And as predicted, Peter, the leader of that band and perhaps the one closest to Jesus, denied him not once, not twice, but three times.

From the beginning, women supported Jesus' ministry and were vital to his mission here on Earth. Luke tells us that these women travelled with Jesus and the twelve, providing for them – funding them – from their own means. Who do you think washed their clothes? Cooked their food? Provided bedding? Tended to any illness or injury? And who had the determination and sheer guts to see it through to the bitter end? And, shortly, it will be women who go to the tomb to render once last gesture of respect and obedience only to be surprised that the even death could not contain the love of God embodied in Jesus. Women disciples were the last to see Jesus at this death, and the first to see him risen.

Today, give thanks for these faithful women who followed Christ with determination, fortitude, resourcefulness, and courage; and remember the women who helped you mature and grow in your spiritual journey.

Martha DeMers

April 1

Mark 15:42-43

⁴²When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

This is an interesting day for me to be randomly assigned to – no, not because it's April Fool's Day! At the time I'm writing this in early February, April 1st is the day on which my husband is returning to the U.S. from Japan and the day on which I'm planning to move from San Diego to New York City so we can once again be in the same city together. The themes of this verse - of preparation, of waiting, and of going boldly are particularly poignant given these circumstances.

Thinking about the guidance of this gospel for me and for us, I think about what preparation and waiting - which often go hand in hand - are like to experience. They are a combination of flurries of work and moments of reflection mixed together with a smattering of uncertainties and anxieties. This is why the third point in this verse is instructive - where we get the example of Joseph of Arimathea going boldly and asking for the body of Jesus - despite the anxious time of preparation and waiting that must have preceded it for him.

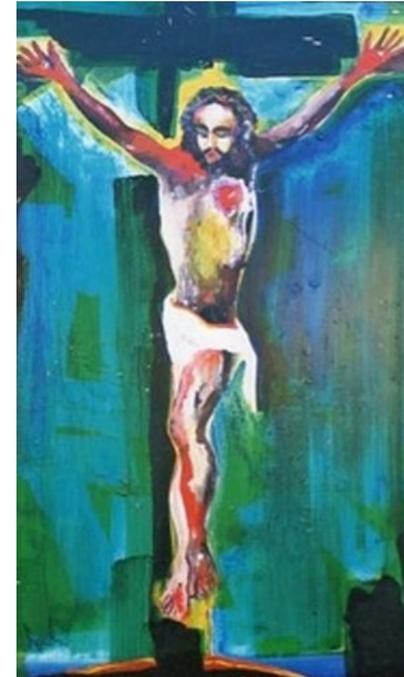
This, I think, is an example we can strive to follow as individuals and as First Lutheran.

Jim Geison

April 2

Mark 15:44-46

⁴⁴Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.



In the chapel of First Lutheran hangs a large painting entitled, "Crucifixion" by William Gambini (1918-2010). The artwork is a dramatic interpretation of Jesus' crucifixion inspired by the artist's early childhood memories of a reproduction of Peter Paul Ruben's, "The Elevation of the Cross" that hung in his mother's sewing room. "Crucifixion" was a creative effort by Mr. Gambini over a seven year period (1987-1994) through the artist's stated attitude and method he called, "Time and Space" - which he described as, "finding a way and practice to arrive at a stop, a wait, and then later to further develop the painting to a finish".

Perhaps the artist's method reflects – whether consciously or not – the final words of Jesus, "it is finished."

Richard S. Phillips

April 3

Mark 15:47

⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body was laid.

Death is **real!** Sit down and talk, and pray with any of the families who have lost a loved one during this dark journey of Covid

19. Sadness will sweep across each face and weigh heavily on each heart as they share where their loved one was laid. In many cases, it all happened without family ever being permitted to be present, no hugs, no holding of hands. And death arrived and there were tears shed from a safe distance.

Death is **real!** Sadness still grips my soul as I think back to that day of ministry in Latin America, when I joined with pastoral colleague and personal friend, Fr. Joe. In silence we carried a small homemade wooden coffin holding the body of a child who had died from drinking the polluted water in her neighborhood. We, too, saw where she was laid.

Death is **real!** I remember that bitterly cold winter day, walking across the cemetery grounds to bury my father. A hard-working Iowa farmer who had come from Sweden, a person of deep faith. I was 14 at the time. I saw where he was laid.

In true love and deep devotion, Mary Magdalene and the mother of Joseph spoken of in this Holy Saturday text, had followed Jesus to the cross and beyond, to see where he was laid. They were part of a community of the cross, just as are we. And in the distance, yet to arrive, there would be heard the beginnings of a Holy acclamation.

"He is not here! He is Risen!"

From darkness to light! From death to life! Talk about **REAL! Thanks be to God!**

Bill Bengtson

April 4

Easter Sunday

The strife is o'er, the battle done

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

*1. The strife is o'er, the battle done;
the victory of life is won;
the song of triumph has begun:
Alleluia!*

*2. The powers of death have done their worst,
but Christ their legions hath dispersed;
let shouts of holy joy outburst:
Alleluia!*

*3. The three sad days are quickly sped;
he rises glorious from the dead;
all glory to our risen Head!
Alleluia!*

*4. Lord, by the stripes which wounded thee,
from death's dread sting thy servants free,
that we may live, and sing to thee:
Alleluia!*

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Text: Anonymous Latin; trans. by Francis Pott, 1832-1909

Music: Giovanni P. da Palestrina; arr. by W.H. Monk