

**A JOURNEY
THROUGH HOLY WEEK**

**Reflections on Scripture
by
Members of Fellowship
Presbyterian Church**

Lent 2009

Sunday April 5

Mark 14: 1-9

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.' 3 While 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 have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her. 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.'

One of the more interesting parts of this passage, for me, is Jesus' remark about always having the poor but not always having him. While there is the obvious meaning, which refers back to the first two verses and the impending plot to kill him, I think there are also other meanings. One is that there will always be others around you that need help or your attention. Jesus particularly sites the poor in this passage. Obviously the relevance of this idea is particularly important with our current economic problems. Another is the idea of just doing what you can, what is currently in your power or ability to give or do, without chastising yourself for your limitations. Sometimes I think we get caught up in trying to compete in how and what we give, when the important thing is that we simply give. But I am intrigued most of all by what I think Jesus was also saying with his statement "you will not always have me." I think this idea can be understood on the literal level, referencing his coming crucifixion, and a more metaphorical level. The latter touches on an individual's crisis of faith. What happens when we question our faith and we no longer "have" Jesus? Are the good acts we have done and hopefully continue to do during our doubt-filled times a way to sustain us and carry us forward until we can "have" Jesus again?

Ginny Gaylor

Monday April 6

Isaiah 42:1-4

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. 2He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; 3a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 4He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Serving others has many rewards. Those rewards may be as grand as bringing forth justice or as simple as bring forth a smile. Yet the rewards are often far more fulfilling for the donor than for the recipient. Throughout our lives we learn that it is better to give than to receive. A servant leader not only understands this, but lives it daily as well.

As Christians, I believe that we all strive to serve others in some way. We learn the art of servant leadership from Jesus. We practice the art of servant leadership in our daily lives through compassion, empathy and love for one and another, and by giving of ourselves to help others. Through all these actions, we inherently teach others about values of servant leadership.

Fellowship nurtures these values of servant leadership. We learn from the gospel and follow the teaching of Jesus. We are blessed with many servants. Our missions help others less fortunate. We care for each other. Let us rejoice in the rewards of service to others.

Stephen Marks

Tuesday April 7

I Corinthians 1:18-25

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

For today's devotion, I've adapted a portion of a sermon my dad wrote in 1978. In it he discusses the various messages of the cross, from which we learn again that God's power, strength and wisdom are all much greater than man's.

“The ultimate message of the cross is salvation, the mystery of our faith. How does the death of a perfect man save imperfect man from the consequence of his sin? It is not so important how it does it, but that it does it! We do not know how Christ's death brings salvation but we know it is true for we experience this saving grace. The cross is the only accurate measure of God's love for us; Jesus died to make possible the union between God and man because like God, He loves us for what we can become. How should we respond to this great salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus? Gazing at the cross reverently is not enough. It is only a prelude to going out and living in response to this love. We have to deliberately choose to carry a cross for Him. We have to dare to take a stand for Christ in difficult or hard times. We have to move out in the world carrying crosses for Christ. As Jesus said, 'Take up your cross daily, and follow me.'”

Julie Davis

Wednesday April 8

John 13:21-30

21After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.' 22The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. 23One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; 24Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. 25So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' 26Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. 27After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do.' 28Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. 29Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor. 30So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

What if . . .

God had a plan for Jesus. Jesus knew what had to happen. Judas played a role in carrying out God's plan for Jesus. What if Judas decided not to play along? What if he didn't point out Jesus to the roman guards later in the evening? One day, just like Judas, you may realize that God's plan for you may have you do the unexpected. With or without Judas, Jesus would have died for our sins. While Judas could have changed the story line, god's plan would have prevailed. God has a plan for each of us. The storyline often gets changed and we often stray from the path. But the word of god as told through the life of Jesus defines the path and provides us with the story's end.

During this Lenten season, listen to God. Get a head start on the right path. Don't give up chocolate, French fries, couch potatoing, or staying up late, for Lent. Give up hate, selfishness, greed and pettiness. Set your goals high. Listen to God and do the unexpected. What if you live each day thinking: tomorrow I will change. You miss out on so much personal peace, receiving love, and the opportunity to care for others. Walking the path God has set for us, being led by Jesus, may have us be a Judas or a Peter, but not at the expense of living the Word and sharing our love.

Mark Kirstner

Thursday April 9

Psalm 116:1-7

1I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. 2Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. 3The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. 4Then I called on the name of the Lord: 'O Lord, I pray, save my life!' 5Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. 6The Lord protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. 7Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

Today, my husband of 50 years would be gone except for the Grace of God who heeded a multitude of prayers.

Don had his first heart problem in 1983 when they repaired holes which had ruptured in the septum and right ventricle. He had another open heart surgery in 2003 to repair two valves and have three bypasses. In 2007 he had ventricular tachycardia and a defibrillator was implanted. By the summer of 2008 Don's health was declining and there was nothing further that could be done since no surgeon in our area would perform a third open heart surgery. His doctors told Don that he had less than a year or two to live and that it would be a rapidly downward spiral of oxygen, wheelchair, Hospice, and death due to his severe congestive heart disease.

On September 8th at 1 p.m. Don was seeing a cardiologist in Houston and by 3:30 p.m. Don was in the hospital. Had it not been for Hurricane Ike his surgery would have been on the 11th but it had to be postponed until the 15th. By that time Don's chances were 50/50. After the 13 hour surgery and a month in the hospital Don was home only to develop an abscess with MRSA and suffer a life threatening nasal hemorrhage. Now this is behind him and Don has a much better quality of life.

All through this ordeal the Lord was with us both.
Thanks be to God.

Mary Lu Sanders

Friday April 10

John 19:16b-30

So they took Jesus; 17and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. 18There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. 19Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' 20Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. 21Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' 22Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' 23When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. 24So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' 25And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' 27Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. 28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' 29A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. 30When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

“It Is Finished”

We were living in a Washington, DC suburb during the years immediately preceding the consecration of the Washington National Cathedral. Over the years, we watched the transformation of this majestic edifice as it neared its completion. I watched news accounts from the day the builder placed what was to be the last stone; and I can still hear him say “It is finished” – our work is done. Two thousand years ago marked the conclusion of another event, one without which the majestic cathedral church in Washington would not have been necessary. The day was Good Friday – the day that Jesus made for us the ultimate sacrifice. The story of Jesus’ trial, crucifixion, and death are filled with tension, hate, venomous words, tears and pain. There is one simple sentence, uttered quietly and likely missed by most except the closest bystanders. Jesus’ words -- the most profound of the whole event – **It Is Finished!**

I find it amazing that Jesus could almost certainly have escaped from the garden and likely missed or delayed the events of that week. The geography of the area was such that at night He would certainly have seen Judas and his entourage coming. Jesus allowed his captors to do what they did; and through it all fulfilled the prophecies of the scriptures. Now, hanging helplessly on the cross, Jesus was at a point where his “pending tray” was empty – his work on earth was done. Every last thing his Father in Heaven intended for Him had been done and He could relinquish control and surrender Himself to His life’s end knowing that there was nothing more to do.

Prayer: Give us courage to take life a day at a time, strength to bear its burdens, courage to face its challenges and joy in the knowledge that some day we can with Jesus say “It is finished”, knowing that everything intended for us on this earthly journey has been completed. Amen.

John Fair

Saturday, April 11

Lamentations 3:22-33

22The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; 23they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’ 25The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. 26It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. 27It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, 28to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it, 29to put one’s mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope), 30to give one’s cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults. 31For the Lord will not reject for ever. 32Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; 33for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.

On this day between Jesus’ crucifixion and his resurrection from the dead, we lament. Were we living in his day, we would seek out his friends so that we could mourn in community, grieving not only for the death of our friend and leader, but for the dashed hopes of a new age. We might gather in a nearby synagogue, or if we felt unwanted there perhaps we could find a room in one of the homes in Jerusalem where we would be safe from Roman soldiers and Jewish religious leaders from the Temple. There is a time, as the Teacher wrote in our ancient records, to mourn before we dance. Or, as our Jesus commented bitterly, when we did not dance and rejoice at his presence among us, we were “like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;’ yet surely today he would have said, ‘we wailed, and you did not weep.’” Today surely is a time for weeping.

Yet even on this day we would remember the sacred text which says that the Lord’s steadfast love never ceases. That the faithful are those who hope in the Lord. Then we remember how Jesus was mistreated, as the scriptures describe his own arrest and trial, that he gave his cheek to the smiter; that he was filled with insults. We wonder if he did that for us, to spare us such torment. And now we will be comforted by the mercy of God, and discover the indescribable abundance of that love. We must wait. We will continue to hope. We will trust in God’s steadfast love that out of this death of his beloved son, baptised in the Jordan, healing the ills of our people, showing us new truth and strength, we will be awed at the depth and the power of that love. We believe we will once more see our beloved leader and Teacher somehow, in some amazing way. Only God knows.

Jean Rodenbough