

Journey to the Final Week
Lenten Scripture Study and Reflection
St. Matthew's Church

Adapted from *The Final Week* by John Birch

March 14 *Preparations*

Opening prayer

Prepare our hearts for Easter, with its tears and celebration, and strengthen our faith through the reading and understanding of Scripture's truth and wisdom.

Amen

Please read:

The Anointing at Bethany

Mark 14:1-11

The Passover Ritual

Exodus 12:1-14

Preparations for the Passover

Mark 14:12-26

The Agony in the Garden

Mark 14:27-42

1) Verse 2: They said, "Not during the festival, for fear that there may be a riot among the people." This is an exploitive and manipulative thought, disingenuous. Reflect on situations that you have been disingenuous or others have been to you. How did the situations turn out?

- Jesus chose to stay in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper. It was customary to pour a few drops of perfume on a guest upon arrival or when sitting down for a meal, but this woman broke the jar when pouring oil on Jesus. This may have been a recognition that here was a very important guest, but to Jesus this meant something much deeper. It was customary to anoint the dead with oil, with the flask subsequently broken and laid with the body in its tomb. Whatever the gesture meant to the woman, it provoked a harsh judgement from some of those present.

2) The woman was generous with the oil, which bothered some who were present. Have you been in a situation where others were angered by your generosity, or you angered by someone else's generosity?

- Jesus not only sides with the poor; he also shares their lot. This is a powerful lesson for his disciples in every age. This is the meaning of his observation that "the poor you will always have with you". The poor will always be with us, yet that should not make us indifferent, but summon us instead to a mutual sharing of life that does not allow proxies. The poor are not people "outside" our communities, but brothers and sisters whose sufferings we should share, in an effort to alleviate their difficulties and marginalization, restore their lost dignity and ensure their necessary social inclusion. On the other hand, as we know, acts of charity presuppose a giver and a receiver, whereas mutual sharing generates fraternity. Almsgiving is occasional; mutual sharing, on the other hand, is enduring. The former risks gratifying those who perform it and can prove demeaning for those who receive it; the latter strengthens solidarity and lays the necessary foundations for achieving justice. In short, believers, when they want to see Jesus in person and touch him with their hands, know where to turn. The poor are a sacrament of Christ; they represent his person and point to him.
MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE FIFTH WORLD DAY OF THE POOR 14 November 2021, Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

3) Verse 7: Did you ever question the meaning of this verse? Does Pope Francis' explanation of this verse help you to understand it? Do you have a different explanation of the verse?

4) Verse 8: "She has anticipated anointing my body for burial." There are many encounters that anticipate Jesus' death. Do you contemplate death? If so in what ways?

- This passage again shows the preparations that Jesus had made, this time with their eating place in the upper room of one of the city's houses, and he sent two disciples ahead of the rest to make the preparations for the ceremonial meal, each aspect of which spoke of the day of deliverance when God led the people from slavery in Egypt. The symbolism in this special Passover meal is striking, as now it will be Jesus going ahead of the twelve, the nation and the world, through a greater darkness than slavery in Egypt and into a new kind of freedom. The disciples were still coming to terms with all that was happening around them, but they would think about this moment in the future as another piece of the jigsaw fitted into the bigger picture of the Jesus they had followed. Now, Jesus

needs his disciples to know that he was aware of what was about to happen to him. Scriptures such as Psalm 41:9 ('Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me') might have been in his mind as he looked in the heart of Judas, and offered both a warning and a way out. What Jesus did not do is identify the one who is to betray him, as the other disciples would have no doubt stepped in and prevented this happening. What he did do was identify two items within the Passover commemoration (the wine and the unleavened bread), make them his own and gave the disciples an assurance that his Kingdom would come. The hymn they sang was possibly Psalm 136 which ends the traditional meal.

5) In the Exodus passage, what allusions to Jesus do you find?

6) As far as the apostles and disciples were concerned, they were going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with Jesus. The meal did not turn out that way. How would you be feeling if you were an apostle at the table?

7) What are some commonalities you find among the Passover, the Last Supper and our current Eucharistic celebration?

8) What does sharing in the act of Holy Communion mean to you?

- As the time drew near for Jesus' betrayal and arrest, his words took on a more somber tone as the inevitability of his disciples running away dwelt heavy on his heart. This is a complex scene. In the center was Jesus in the garden praying that there might be another way, filled with the horror of what was to come, knowing that all things are possible with God but acknowledging that his path was already marked out. There are the disciples, frightened, weary, but essential for Jesus' message to continue, who must be spared the fate that awaits him. And waiting in the dark for his moment is Judas, well away from the crowds and in the perfect place for what must follow. Jesus had chosen not to be arrested in the upper room and so they go to a quiet and familiar place, where Jesus could find space to confront his fears in the company of his heavenly Father and his closest friends. We might add that with the disciples still uncertain about the nature and purpose of Jesus, this makes their post-Resurrection transformation so remarkable.

9) Verse 34: Jesus asks the apostles to simply remain and keep watch. Jesus does not ask them to do anything else. Are you comfortable just being present to someone who is suffering?

10) Verse 36: How do you relate to Jesus' petition to God?

11) Verse 38: "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." How do you relate to this verse?

Prayers for the Week

Pray for those who are struggling on their faith journey and are hounded by doubts, that at this season of Lent they might be drawn back to the Cross and the embrace of their Savior.

Pray for relationships that have been damaged by harsh or harmful words, that there might be a spirit of humility and forgiveness leading to healing and restoration.

Quotes to Ponder

'O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, faintheartedness, lust of power, and idle talk. But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to your servant. O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sin and not to judge my brother, for You are blessed from all ages to all ages. Amen' (St. Ephraim the Syrian)

'Lent is a time for discipline, for confession, for honesty, not because God is mean or fault finding or finger-pointing but because he wants us to know the joy of being cleaned out, ready for all the good things he now has in store.' (N.T. Wright)