

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

Adapted from *The Final Week* by John Birch

March 21 *The Journey to Jerusalem*

Opening Prayer

Speak to us anew through familiar words of Scripture and enable us to understand more fully the Easter story and what it means, both to our faith and lives.

Amen

Please Read

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

Mark 14:43-52

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

Mark 14:53-65

Jesus Questioned by Pilate & Sentencing

Matthew 27:11-26

Mockery by the Soldiers

Matthew 27:27-31

The Crucifixion

Matthew 27:33-61

- There's much drama in this scene, but it is worth looking briefly at the main players involved. We start with Judas who John tells us left the meal before the others, possibly heading straight to the authorities (John 13:30). It was evening, and he needed a sign to alert those wanting to arrest Jesus as to who was their target within the group they would encounter in the darkness of the garden. He chose a kiss, a sign of respect when greeting a Rabbi, and yet the Greek word Mark uses of the kiss he gave to Jesus is that of a lover. Then there are those who have come with Judas from the Sanhedrin, which had limited policing duties within Jerusalem. From Mark's description of the scene it may be that others, hostile to Jesus and armed with swords and clubs also joined the hunt. That they came armed suggests fear that Jesus was the leader of an armed rebellion. Mark does not mention which of Jesus' followers struck out and injured one of those who had come to arrest Jesus, though John mentions Peter's name (John 18:10). Mark does not even mention the word 'disciples' when describing the way in which everyone deserted Jesus and ran for their lives, possibly because he does

not see these men acting as would be expected, so refuses to call them by that description. Compared to all the action in this scene, Jesus appears to have accepted that the scene is over, and he is on the path that must now be followed.

1) Imagine yourself in this scene, whether as Jewish authority or a bystander, describe the tension during this time.

2) Verses 48 & 49: Consider the fear that motivated the Jewish authority to show up with many men and weapons. Has fear ever been a motivation for you?

- The Sanhedrin were aware that what Jesus had done and said could imply that he saw himself as the true King and Messiah. Though claiming to be a Messiah was not a capital offence, a claim to be the rightful king would certainly incur the wrath of the Roman governor and end in death, as both Jesus and the high priest Caiaphas would know. Jesus was asked a leading question (this was against correct procedure) and at this point must have decided that the whole procession of false witnesses and accusations had gone far enough, so brought it to a conclusion by answering that he was indeed Christ, the Messiah, and goes on to quote Scripture claiming that he would be vindicated and share the throne of the God of Israel, giving his accusers the opportunity to charge him with blasphemy, worthy of death and handing over to Pilate as a rebel king.

3) If we brought this event into the present day, what might the newspaper headline be that would sum up the way the Sanhedrin handled this situation?

4) If you were a follower of Jesus watching this questioning unfold, how would you be feeling?

- It is clear Pilate was impressed by Jesus' demeanor, possibly even sympathetic to his plight, but politically he also wanted to hold on to his position so sought a way out of the predicament that might suit all parties, taking advantage of a custom that allowed a prisoner to be released during the Feast. So, he offers them a choice of Jesus who he appears to think is not guilty, or Barabbas, known as a notorious prisoner, and in doing so attempts to shift the blame from his own hands to those who have brought Jesus to him, even symbolically washing his hands as a sign of his frustration. But even this did not stop him handing Jesus over to be cruelly flogged before being taken away.

5) Does Jesus' refusal to answer Pilate frustrate you?

- 6) What are differences between the Sanhedrin questioning of Jesus versus Pilate's questioning?
- 7) Pilate tried to distance himself from the situation by symbolically washing his hands. In the 21st century how do those in power try to do the same?
- 8) How does the tearing of the temple curtain symbolize the relationship between God and humanity?
- 9) What does Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" teach about expressing distress and despair to God?
- 10) How does Jesus' journey from crucifixion to burial impact your understanding of the journey from suffering to redemption?

Prayers for the Week

As Easter approaches, pray that those passing our churches might venture inside to try and understand what the celebration is all about.

Pray that lives might be transformed by the power of the Cross.

Quotes to Ponder

'If man had his way, the plan of redemption would be an endless and bloody conflict. In reality, salvation was bought not by Jesus' fist, but by His nail-pierced hands; not by muscle but by love; not by vengeance but by forgiveness; not by force but by sacrifice. Jesus Christ our Lord surrendered in order that He might win; He destroyed His enemies by dying for them and conquered death by allowing death to conquer Him.'

(A.W. Tozer, Preparing for Jesus' Return: Daily Live the Blessed Hope)