

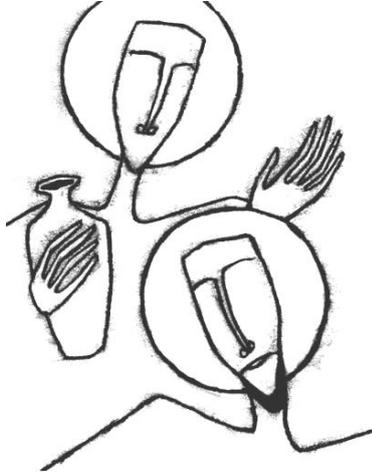
Liturgy of the Passion for Palm Sunday & Holy Week 2020

graphics Jan Richardson, Orlando Florida

Reading 1

Mark 14: 1-9

The Anointing at Bethany



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; for they said, «Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.»

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.

But some were there who said to one another in anger, «Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.» And they scolded her.

But Jesus said, «Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.

She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.»

Meditation: Truly I tell you

‘Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.’

That has not happened too often. Actually why not?

Exploring the story, the first thing I learn is that this woman does not have a name. What she did seemed to be so marginal and secondary, or maybe so annoying and displeasing, that remembering her did not seem to need a lot of care.

I guess that has to do with the fact that she is a woman.

Many names of others are conserved: James the Elder and John – the Sons of Thunder, who live up to their byname (even the byname has been conserved), when they want to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans.

Why do I know their name and not the one of the woman?

Or Peter, the rock (how ridiculous), the coward and betrayer, who sleeps in the garden and pulls out the sword.

Why do I know his name and not the one of the woman?

What is behind all this, that the names of those who are connected to violence and terror, betrayal and pomposity are written in bold letters, while the name of the woman, connected to an awesome act of love is kept secret?

I assume that the disappearance of her name has to do with the fact that she refuses to be part of this undeserving game of always being above and never being deeply touched by suffering.

She accepts that you can't have things under control all the time, that you don't have to find words or a backdoor for everything.

What a source of uncertainty she must have been, how insecure she must have made people just by her quiet and yet unmistakable act of love.

A challenge for all who confidently focus on certainty, control and distance. A challenge for all who, besides doing all the talking, unlearned the other forms of communication, the language of the hands and the eyes of this woman.

I can watch her in my mind's eye touching and smoothing Jesus' forehead with her hands, softening the wrinkles and soothing away any tension he may have had by her warm fingers and the smell of her precious oil.

I can see, in my mind's eye, how she looks at him knowing that nothing in the past can be changed but preparation for the future can begin.

I can see her in my mind's eye, how Jesus starts to relax as she massages his feet and, as she watches him, how he draws breath and arranges his thoughts.

The longer I watch her, in my mind's eye, her tender loving, the more I feel my own tension soothed away, how I draw breath and arrange my ideas, how I start losing my fear of being weak and powerless, my fear of losing words, my fear of being touched.

Being touched, not only did Jesus good, it also eases me and puts my mind at rest.

The silent love and giving of the unnamed woman helps me to realise that I don't need to know or understand everything, and sometimes accepting what lies ahead, without question, is what is required of me.

The woman encourages me to believe in the language of silence, the language of touching and being present, the language of going along and sharing the suffering.

This is still a strange and somehow foreign language and I am ambitious to learn and listen to her message.

The unnamed woman is a patient teacher, as she has been for nearly 2000 years.

I still do not know her name. She still remains silent with a smile on her lips...it is up to us to keep silent no longer but to tell about the unnamed woman and her tender love which touches and moves not only me.

Music

Reading 2

Mark 14: 12-25

The Last Supper



On 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?»

So 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, and 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?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.» So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And 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.» They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, «Surely, not I?» He said to them, «It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me.

For 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.»

While 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.» Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.

He said to them, «This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly 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.»

Meditation: The Last Supper

Three to four hours, and a meal that would forever change the world.

No war or time of peace, no government or nation, no army or ruler has had or will ever have an impact on the course of history in a way this one evening did.

They all sat round the table. Lively conversation... and the main course served.

Jesus hadn't said much throughout the evening. He seemed serious, almost sad.

Where there tears in his eyes?

A sadness in his smile?

And then in a brief moment of silence while everyone's mouths were full, he spoke: "I tell you the truth" – and he looked at them all – "one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." The truth, the bitter truth in the middle of a feast.

You could have heard a pin drop. Suddenly everything came to a sudden halt, and one by one his disciples asked, "It isn't I, is it?"

But it could be all of them.

It could be me.

"It is one of you – one who dips bread into the bowl with me.

They all had been dipping their bread into the bowl...

They all stopped dipping and eating, as he continued.

"The son of man will just go as it is written..."

He'd just got to Jerusalem. How could he talk about leaving it? Talk about going? Where to?

People still needed him. People wanted to hear his teaching. People longed for his love and support.

How can he talk about betrayal?

But hadn't he warned them? Prepared them?

Now they were all angry. Confused. Upset. They didn't know what to think. And they'd lost their appetite.

Silence. Denial. Nobody wanted to think such thoughts.

But then he broke the silence again.

He took some of the bread that was prepared for that day, and said: "Take it; eat it; this is my body." His body? What did he mean, his body? They had no idea what he was talking about.

When the food was gone and it was time for another glass of wine to be served, Jesus took the cup of wine, and they drank from it.

"This is my blood of the new covenant which is being shed for many." Drinking blood sounds strange. But that wasn't what they were thinking at that moment. ...his blood being shed for many...

They weren't hearing things. That was the way he phrased it.

Not something in the past or something in the future, but something in the present. As if he knew something had already started. Like this traitor who he had spoken of was already up to no good plans. As if his death was already on the way... As if he was already dying.

And shed for many? What did he mean? How could they ever understand?

Jesus thanked his host, when he left the house.

On the table in the upstairs room were bread and wine – body and blood – a reminder of Jesus' last meal with his friends, forever changing the world.

It's become communion for the church.

And we have been celebrating it ever since, remembering him, getting closer in line with him, becoming more and more who he was, who he is, who he's meant us to be.

Music

Reading 3

Mark 14: 32-42

In the Garden

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, «Sit here while I pray.» He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, «I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.»

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.



He said, «Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.»

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

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

He 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. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.»

Meditation: In the Garden

In the shadows of Gethsemane's trees we find a place of broken promises.

In the end they all had left Jesus and fled. These people are the same who just hours before had been fighting amongst themselves over which one would be sitting at Jesus' right hand. They had declared undying loyalty. Peter even went so far as to say "even though all may fall away, yet I will not."

They'd left the lighted upper room where they'd shared the last supper, and entered the darkness of the garden. An olive orchard away from the busyness of the city of Jerusalem.

Their faithfulness fails. Their commitment fades away. Their best intentions are lost in these moments of tiredness and fear.

Jesus told 8 disciples to stay at the edge of the garden. 3 he took further on to share with him.

He urged the three to keep watch, to stay awake, to stay alert, to stay near him.

It would have been so good, not to be alone. It would have been so good, not to be so exposed, so abandoned.

Jesus' agony is deep – to the point of death.

He's got to let go.

He's got to accept.

He's got to suffer right through to the end.

But they don't understand.

Pray with me – but they are caught in their own thoughts and fears.

Remain with me – but they distance themselves by falling asleep.

Stay awake for me – but they miss the point right from the beginning.

The garden of the broken promises becomes the garden of the broken heart.

Jesus' disappointment goes deep.

Weighs heavily. Aches unbearably.

And this all doesn't happen once – which would be painful enough.

No, it happens three times.

That is too cruel to bear!?

No friends at your side – but God?!

In this situation of utter loneliness would he have known that God was still with him? Could Jesus have known this when he threw himself to the ground and prayed to his father?

He must have.

He speaks with God. Negotiates. Pleads.

And the outcome is: not what I want, but what you want.

In spite of his enormous pain Jesus can still make a decision. “Whatever comes – it will be with God at his side.

When Jesus comes back to his disciples for the 3rd time, his words are almost ironic: Are you still sleeping and taking a rest?

And before any of them could answer, he adds: the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Such a death is not a decision one can make for oneself.

Such a death is a decision the others make...

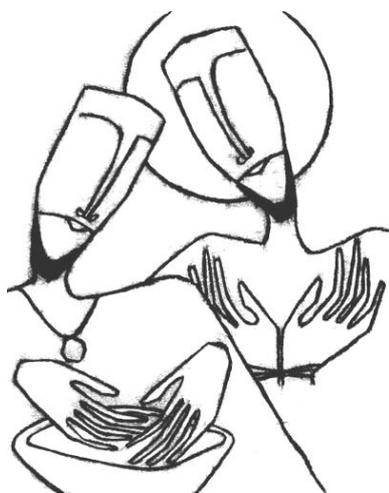
...having utterly abandoned the one they were friends with for so long.

Music

Reading 4

Matthew 27: 15-26

Pilate



Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted.

At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas.

So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, «Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?»

For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, «Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.»

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.

The governor again said to them, «Which of the two do you want me to release for you?» And they said, «Barabbas.»

Pilate said to them, «Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?» All of them said, «Let him be crucified!»

Then he asked, «Why, what evil has he done?» But they shouted all the more, «Let him be crucified!»

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was

beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, «I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.»

Then the people as a whole answered, «His blood be on us and on our children!»

So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Meditation: Pilate

We have come a long way from the last supper and the broken promises in the garden of Gethsemane.

“Get up, let us be going. See my betrayer is at hand.” were Jesus’ last words spoken in freedom. Immediately after he’d said this, he was kissed by Judas, arrested by the chief priests and elders and abandoned by all his friends.

Peter denies him. Judas commits suicide.

And Jesus is brought before Pilate.

There stands Jesus in front of Pilate.

Even though Pilate is the man who controls the country, he appears confused.

Confused that a king would attempt to set up a kingdom in the manner that Jesus has pursued.

Confused that the religious leaders are fighting against their own people.

Confused about the way this all goes...

He notices the mob that seems to be restless on that morning. They are howling about something and they are quite serious about their requests. Pilate tries to recall what he knows about this wandering preacher... the words in his heart, "I find no fault in this man." And he reviews the last three years:

A widow's son is miraculously called from the deathbed.
The bride whose wedding almost went bad had more wine than she'd ever planned.
The cripple who walked out of the house carrying his bed.
The parents who rejoiced over their daughter's restoration to life.
The thousands who were fed.
All of this Pilate remembers.
And now Jesus was thrust into his courts by the religious leaders.
It was here that things began to go wrong for Pilate.
He violates the voice of his conscience.
Instead he orders Jesus to be whipped.
But that is not enough. They want him crucified.
Pilate can no longer stand this. In the brilliance of his mind, he vaguely remembers an old Hebrew habit: He calls his servant and orders a basin of water to be sent and washes his hands.
Pilates actions and non-actions may accuse us in one way or another.
They may question us.
They ask us, where we see ourselves as we are reflecting on Jesus' hours before Pilate.
Are we part of this washing hands and looking the other way, saving our bare skin and neglecting what could be done to save somebody else's life?
Where are we standing?
...guilty of doing nothing?
Are we among the oppressors who are handing innocent lives to the cross?
Are we washing our hands in innocence as Pilate does, because we shove the responsibility for what is going on in the world to others?
Stations of the Cross cannot be looked at without getting involved.
They touch us.
They draw us near.
They make us part of their story.
And they make us part of the story of Jesus' passion.

In all who suffer, in all who are tortured and die Jesus suffers, too.
...and at the same time he bears the guilt of the world.
Whoever is willing to follow Jesus, must play a part in the stations of the cross of this world...
Then we learn to see with Jesus' eyes:
images of horror on the one side,
and visions of hope on the other;
people who comfort and help and
people who believe in life in spite of death.

Music