



SERMONS
THAT WORK

SERMONS FOR *Holy Week 2020*

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Sermons That Work

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

Holy Week 2020

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Liverpool Cathedral, the second-largest Anglican church in the world, is an imposing and glorious structure. Situated atop a hill at the end of Hope Street, the edifice rises 330 feet over the city in northwest England. It is a jewel-box of stained glass, soaring arches, stonework, organ pipes, and memorials to bishops long-gone to their rewards. It borders on obvious to say that one's eyes are always drawn along the vertical axis, looking ever upward, reflecting so much – and still but a sliver – of the glory of God.

Still, perhaps the most intriguing part of the cathedral is a long, horizontal, light situated just above the interior front doors. In bright pink neon, designed after artist Tracey Emin's handwriting, the light reads, "I Felt You And I Knew You Loved Me." It is jarring – so different than the stone and glass and light surrounding it – but the illustration is fitting. It may be that the Christian life began for you when you had the same feeling. When all is chaotic and falling apart, it may be the only thing left to hold. That feeling, that knowledge, that love – they may be the foundations of our walk with God, upon which we set towering stones and resplendent windows.

This week, we will watch as Jesus walks toward the cross. When you see him enter the city, when you see him serving and being served, when you see him betrayed and arraigned, when you see him dying and dead, pray to feel his presence and know that he loves you, even now.

Your brother in Christ,
Christopher Sikkema

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

READINGS:

ISAIAH 50:4-9A; PSALM 31:9-16; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11;
MATTHEW 26:14- 27:66 OR MATTHEW 27:11-54

COLLECT

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

MADE HOLY

by the Rev. Canon Anna Sutterisch

In the name of the One who saves. Amen.

We might need a deep breath after hearing this epic story. We've just heard a long passage narrating days of events that take us from Jesus planning a dinner with his friends, to Jesus' body being sealed in a tomb. A lot just happened. This is the story, accounted by Matthew, that establishes us in Holy Week. There are a lot of details, a lot of parts, a lot of emotions.

We hear a version of it every year; we start the Sunday with fanfare and palms, singing, "Hosanna!" and then the whirlwind of the mess of humanity comes, and all of a sudden Jesus is dead. Each year, we come to this same story, and each year we bring to it the hurts and joys we've just lived through. The

births and deaths, the sufferings and excitements, the pain and the learnings that time has taught us since our last Palm Sunday.

It's easy to rush through this, skip through the week with our eyes fixed on what we celebrate *next* Sunday. To sit dutifully through Thursday, Friday, and Saturday services, knowing that the real deal is on Easter morning. Because we know what's coming next. We know that this Sunday and Thursday and Friday are merely the setup to the triumphant Resurrection on Easter. We know that Jesus will defeat evil, injustice, and other forms of death, not with the military might of kings but with the new life of the Resurrection. But this will come later. For now, there is value in sitting in the Passion without rushing to the Resurrection.

Too often in life, we don't have a happy ending to hold during tough times. In the midst of crisis and chaos, how often do we get to say, "But in just a week, everything will be great! I'll get to eat chocolate or watch tv or go on Facebook or – your Lenten discipline of choice – again!" The blessing of the church calendar is that we get to live through the seasons, year after year, delving deeper and bringing more experience from our lives into the meaning of the stories.

But it's also a liability—that we might skip through the tragedy to get to the happy ending. Skip the complicated pregnancy to get to Christmas morning. Skip the flight into Egypt to get to Jesus in the Temple. Skip the illness to get to the healing. Skip the hungry to get to the loaves and fishes. Skip the martyrdom to get to the sainthood. Skip the Crucifixion to get to the Resurrection.

One of the benefits of all of our Holy Week service offerings is that we pull out big moments in this story, draw near to them, learn about them, live them, identify with them, sit with them. On Thursday, we will sit in the moments of

Gethsemane. We will sit in the times, like the disciples, that we simply can't stay attuned and attentive to God at work in our midst. We will sit through the betrayal of Christ that we see – and participate in – in the world around us.

On Friday, we will sit in the moment of death. How has our experience of death changed since we last heard the story? What grief do we bring to the political execution of our savior, the political martyrdom of our messiah, the murder at the hands of the authorities, claiming law and order?

Even later this morning, or later this week, or the next time we celebrate the Eucharist, we'll hear the familiar words we heard in the story today: "Take, eat; this is my body," and "Drink from it, all of you." When we hear these words in *this* story, the Passion, it's a reminder that Jesus shared the cup and the bread with everyone at his table—including the one he knew would betray him. Yes, the "last supper," in which Jesus shares the bread and wine as his body and blood, happens *after* he discloses the knowledge that he will be betrayed by one at his very table. It lends a new significance to making room at the table, to sharing our gifts with everyone.

Look at all the elements in the story. The plot, the places, the people—we might know them well. So, take another look at the props. We see a donkey and a colt, regular livestock given for the glory of God. We see palms, stripped from the plants grown naturally all around them, and waved to the glory of God. We see cloaks, spread out on the dusty road, taken off of normal people's backs and offered to the glory of God. Later, there is bread and wine. A table. A simple meal made sacred in the glory of God. These are everyday, mundane, secular, and worldly items, made holy in their offering to the Messiah. In their offering, they have been made sacramental.

Jesus, too, lives in the perfection of the worldly made godly. Fully human and fully God. Paul reminds the Philippians that while Jesus "was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." Even in his own identity, Jesus showed us how something so worldly – humanity – can be so holy – divinity.

The Incarnation not only exemplifies all that is sacramental but also blesses that which is human. That Jesus would empty himself in order to be one of us is a sacrifice akin to his crucifixion – have you met humans? We're horrible. What humanity did to Jesus and continues to do to so many who are oppressed, shot, exploited, arrested, deported, and executed, is horrible. Why would God want to be part of this mess? It must be love.

And in return, we are asked to love. To love those who come to the table, even if we know they will betray us. To love the one who asks to borrow our colt, even if it's confusing and requires hospitality and generosity beyond our capabilities. To love the divinity which is in the mess of humanity enough to lay down the coats from our backs. And to love Jesus, the one who has shown us how to seek and honor the divinity in all of the world.

What do we have available to us, as individuals and a community, that we can offer to God and make holy? Look around at what we see, use, take for granted in the day-to-day. How can we make what we have an offering to God, a thanksgiving of gratitude, an acknowledgment of Christ's good news?

Putting ourselves into the story can touch us to our core. We can hold onto the hope of Easter as we live into the moments of betrayal, grief, injustice, and violence – in the

story of the Passion as well as in our daily lives. May all that we have be made holy. And may everything we have, and everything we do, be pleasing unto God. Amen.

The Rev. Canon Anna Sutterisch is the Canon for Christian Formation in the Diocese of Ohio, working with children, youth and young adults and serving as the Chaplain at Bellwether Farm Camp. She is passionate about new ways of being and doing church, and sharing the Gospel in a way that is relevant and life-changing to today's people in today's world. Anna is a proud member of the inaugural class of the Bexley Seabury Seminary Federation (2019), and benefited greatly from its low residency program, which allowed her to receive her M.Div. while remaining rooted in her ministry context of Cleveland, Ohio. She lives there with her husband Noah and two beloved cats, Phoebe and Thecla. Prior to seminary, Anna worked at the intersection of faith and politics through the IAF doing interfaith community organizing.

Monday in Holy Week

READINGS:

ISAIAH 42:1-9; PSALM 36:5-11; HEBREWS 9:11-15;
JOHN 12:1-11

COLLECT:

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

by the Rev. Danáe M. Ashley

*Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain,
wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.*

This is the first verse of hymn 204 in our hymnal and, while it is an Easter hymn and we are not yet there, its lines echo our natural surroundings in the northern hemisphere. We travel the turning of the seasons in conjunction with Holy Week, glimpsing signs of spring in the world around us, just as we receive a foretaste of the signs of Jesus' journey to the cross in our scriptures this week.

In our Gospel story today, we find Jesus attending a dinner that Lazarus, Mary, and Martha are giving in his honor. It seems to be a farewell dinner, a predictor, in John's Gospel,

for the last supper that would occur in just a few days. Mary is moved to anoint Jesus' feet with costly perfume and wipe them with her hair; in the same way Jesus will with the disciples' feet not long after this encounter. The house was "filled with the fragrance of the perfume"—a significant image in contrast to when the same sisters went with Jesus to Lazarus' tomb and were afraid of the stench within. Now, the house is filled not with the smell of death, but with the perfume of a costly act of love. Mary's anointing of Jesus filled the entire house with fragrance, just as our expressions of faith in and love for Jesus spread widely around our community. Her act is a sign of her true discipleship and, because she has paid attention to Jesus and the events happening around her, she is the first disciple who understands that heartbreak is coming. Mary loves Jesus lavishly, without thought to cost.

Grief expert, author, and speaker David Kessler gave a lecture on February 19, 2019, entitled *On Grief and Grieving*. He explains something called anticipatory grief as the "grieving we do before the person dies." This type of grief is primarily non-verbal, meaning that people are often unable to express their grief in words; their actions reveal it in other ways. Depression, anxiety, irritability, anger, fear, loneliness, unexpected sadness, and crying are all manifestations of anticipatory grief.

One of the ways that a person can help mitigate this anticipatory grief is to connect deeply with their loved one while they are still alive, doing things that are meaningful together, and finding ways to show what the loved one means to them. Marking this time before death can aid in the healing process after death occurs. It is helpful for both the person or pet that is dying and the person who will be bereft.

Marking time is something that the Church does very well. We have our liturgical calendar that takes us through the year, in addition to the many rites and prayers included in our Book of Common Prayer and its supplements. There are several pastoral offices in our prayer book that are especially considered healing rites: reconciliation of a penitent, ministrations to the sick, and ministrations at the time of death. In their own particular set of circumstances, each of these rites gives us the ability to have a spiritual, emotional, and physical container in which to pour our grief and sadness, while marking significant times in life. They do not promise a cure but instead invite us into healing and wholeness within the relationship of our loving God. To have another bear witness to our circumstances is a powerful tool for healing. It is also an extravagant gift of love—a reminder of God's love for us and of the way we are called to bear that love to another physically and with immediacy.

Mary loved Jesus extravagantly. What do you do when someone you have journeyed with in life is going to die? Mary's answer was to love in the same way that Jesus had shown her. She exemplifies discipleship and understands it before Jesus explicitly teaches the disciples his commandment to love. In the Gospel of John, Jesus' true disciples are not just the twelve men, but any person who loves him and responds out of this love. Mary marks this time with meaning, and her ritual of pouring out the costly perfume and wiping Jesus' feet with her hair is part of her anticipatory grief. She was transformed from a woman—seen as near-worthless in her culture and society—into someone with purpose and call. The love she reveals is a testament to the relationship she had with Jesus and what it meant to her.

In contrast, Judas can only sneer at what she did. In false piety, he asks why the perfume was not sold and given to the poor, when, in reality, he wanted to skim off the top of the profits.

Our evangelist, John, explains that Judas was a thief—he would steal from the common purse and did not care for the poor. We also know that Judas ultimately betrays Jesus, and while we hope to take after Mary, we may wonder how often we too, play Judas' part.

We are faced with two very different reactions to Jesus: Mary's response of the fullness of life in discipleship and Judas' denial of that same path. Yet, the two probably feel familiar to each of us because we are comprised of both. We have a little Mary and a little Judas sitting on each shoulder, don't we? The Judas stops us from being extravagant with God's love because of arguments about practicality, which are often self-justifying, while the Mary asks us to give everything to follow Jesus—to perfume the world with love. The Judas tells you to serve yourself and not worry about how it affects others, while the Mary encourages you to love others fiercely and lavishly. Which will we choose to heed?

Thomas Merton wrote, "The spiritual life is first of all a *life*. It is not merely something to be known and studied, it is to be lived." Thinking about life is not living. Thinking about how we would like to love Jesus is not loving. Mary got it. She was the best disciple of all—she loved Jesus and was not afraid to show the abundance of that love, even though others thought her behavior scandalous and wasting a valuable resource. A fool, really. Kind of like Jesus, who was foolish enough to know the possible fate ahead of him and still turn his face to Jerusalem.

We are all dying, aren't we? How would it be if we recognized this and loved each other extravagantly? Perhaps we would be disciples, as Mary was, and live into this blessing sometimes attributed to the Franciscan order:

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart. May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace. May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy. May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world so that you can do what others claim cannot be done. May the peace of God and the God of peace be with you forevermore. Amen.

The Rev. Danae M. Ashley, MDiv, MA, LMFT is an Episcopal priest and marriage and family therapist who has ministered with parishes in North Carolina, New York, Minnesota, and serves as the Associate Rector at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Seattle, and a therapist at Soul Spa Seattle. Danae uses art, music, drama, poetry, and movement in counseling, spiritual direction, and creation of ritual. Her interfaith Clergy Care Circles for therapeutic group spiritual direction directly supports diverse clergy in varied circumstances across the country. She is an alumna of Young Clergy Women International and is a member of Thank God for Sex - promoting healing for those who have shame about their bodies, sexuality, and faith. Danae is also one of the contributors of the book Still a Mother: Journeys through Perinatal Bereavement. Additionally, she produced the play Naming the Un-Named: Stories of Fertility Struggle with playwright Amanda Aikman; has written for Working Preacher: Craft of Preaching; and has been featured on several podcasts regarding fertility struggle and faith. Danae's favorite past times include hiking with her husband and beloved dog, reading, traveling, volunteering as a Master Gardener, dancing with wild abandon to Celtic music, and serious karaoke.

Tuesday in Holy Week

READINGS:

ISAIAH 49:1-7; PSALM 71:1-14; I CORINTHIANS 1:18-31; JOHN 12:20-36

COLLECT:

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

SHAME

by the Rev. Jazzy Bostock

Brené Brown's TED talk, *The Power of Vulnerability*, has, as of this sermon, over 12 million views on a single recording on YouTube. That should tell us something. Part of what it tells us is how hungry we are to make connections with one another – and yet how much shame and fear stand in the way of those connections.

Brown's work around vulnerability and shame is prescient today because of the mention of shame in our collect for today. And again in our psalm. And again in our epistle reading. The work she has done is around human connection – her thesis is that we are hardwired for connection to one another. Shame is an obstacle for connection, and so it has become one of the focuses for her work. She says, "Shame is really easily understood as the fear of disconnection. Is there something about me, that if other people know it or see it, that I won't be worthy of connection?"

Shame shows up in our lectionary today in an interesting way. The collect for the day says that God "made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life." Isn't that an interesting way to look at what happened on the cross? That it was intended as part of a shameful death is historical – crucifixion was a gruesome capital punishment, used to make an example of the one left hanging – in an attempt to dissuade witnesses from perpetrating similar crimes.

But, how interesting that this instrument of shameful death becomes for us the means of life. Jesus is well-known for turning things upside down. The last will be first, and the least will be great. The Son of Man wants little to do with the religious professionals but chooses to share meals with prostitutes and tax collectors. God is always showing up where we least expect and taking what we shy away from, or what scares us, or what makes us feel unworthy, and turning it into the means of life.

Shame keeps us from connection. Shame such that, if people saw our true selves, they wouldn't accept us. Perhaps you struggle with shame. Perhaps the Church, in particular, has made you feel shame about a certain thing. Maybe you're a member of the LGBTQ community. Maybe you're divorced. Maybe you've cheated on a partner. Maybe you've had an abortion. Maybe you think that for some reason you are not enough – or that God couldn't love you.

But here's the thing – the nexus of that shame, the place which feels the most tender and difficult to hide, the part which you are trying to numb – that is where God is working in you to create a means towards life. That part of you is a part which God loves unconditionally – a part being called into relationship and into connection with God.

Those of you who are part of often-marginalized communities know this well. Your gender doesn't keep you from God – but is an expression of God's image, which is bigger than a binary. Your color doesn't keep you from God – it is an expression of diversity and beauty, which is part of God's vision for the world. Your past actions don't keep you from God – they are parts of how you have come to know God and important parts of your story. Your wealth, or marital status, or job, or education level, don't matter to the one who knows each hair on your head – for the Holy One has named and claimed you, from the beginning of time itself.

Our Psalm talks about shame, too. The very first line says, "In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge; let me never be ashamed." In God, there is no shame, and we are made by God. Our life breath is the breath of God. Shame is something which comes not from God, but from fear – and in God, there is no fear. The fear of not being accepted manifests itself in shame, leading us to believe that we are not worthy of love and connection or that something is wrong with us.

Beloved, that fear where shame grows – that sense that something is wrong with you – it is a lie. God takes that and turns it on its head. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he says, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"

This is a necessary reminder – particularly now, as we get to the end of Lent. Lent is a season of self-examination, of repentance and renewal. But as we go into our self-examination, it can be easy to judge ourselves rather than showing ourselves compassion. When we take honest stock of ourselves and see the ways we have inevitably fallen short, there can be a strong sense of our own failure or our own darkness. Even this darkness, though, is a place we can come to know God. Even the cross was used for the glory of God, and it was a tool of empire and violence.

Shame is an obstacle for connection, and thereby an obstacle we put between ourselves and God. God is known through connection and through relationship. The way God reveals Godself in three persons is relationship itself. Blocking ourselves from this is none other than the tool of the devil. It keeps us from wholehearted living – from living in union with God.

How do we move past our shame? Brené Brown says we have to start believing that we are worthy of compassion, connection, and love. Undoing a belief and trying to recreate pathways in our brain to prove this worthiness to ourselves is daunting – and, of course, it will take time. Nothing is fixed overnight. But here in our scripture today, we hear again the promises and the vision God has for us – that the places of shame in our lives can become the pathways to real relationship and real life.

Our darkness and our shame are claimed by God. We have been claimed by Love. Amen.

The Rev. Jazzy Bostock is a recently ordained kanaka maoli woman, serving her curacy at St Peter's Episcopal Church in Honolulu, Hawaii. She is thrilled to be back in the 'aina, the land, which raised her, and the waves of the Pacific Ocean. She loves the warm sun, gardening, cooking, laughing, and seeing God at work. She strives to love God more deeply, more fully, with every breath she takes.

Wednesday in Holy Week

READINGS:

ISAIAH 50:4-9A; PSALM 70; HEBREWS 12:1-3;
JOHN 13:21-32

COLLECT:

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE PARADOX OF JUDAS

by Susan Butterworth

The Paradox of Judas: ultimate betrayer or player in the cosmic drama of salvation?

Today's gospel passage begins, "After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.'" Looking back to what Jesus has just said, we hear these words, spoken after he has washed the disciples' feet: "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he" (John 13:17-19).

Jesus makes it clear that there is a betrayer among the inner circle of disciples, and that the betrayal was prophesied. He

quotes Psalm 41, verse 9: "Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me." To increase the dramatic irony and tension, Jesus is at the table, sharing bread with his bosom friends: the beloved disciple, Simon Peter, and the others. To whom could Jesus be referring? The disciples are mystified. Who could it be? Then Jesus reveals the betrayer by dipping a piece of bread in oil and giving it to Judas Iscariot.

What do we know of Judas? The name Judas Iscariot, son of Simon Iscariot, identifies him, according to many scholars, as a man from the town of Kerioth in Judea. All four gospels include Judas among the twelve of Jesus' closest disciples. He seems to have played a faithful role along with the other eleven whom Jesus sent out with power over unclean spirits and a ministry of preaching and healing. Thus, two basic facts we know about Judas are that Jesus chose him as one of the twelve disciples and that Judas handed Jesus over to the Jerusalem authorities, leading to Jesus' execution.

Was Judas' call to discipleship genuine? It is unlikely that Judas was an imposter from the beginning. In addition to his ministry as a follower of Jesus, he was trusted with the common purse, though John the Evangelist portrays him as a thief. What happened to change Judas into a betrayer? John tells us that Satan entered into him. Does this indicate a change of heart? Why did he betray Jesus? For money? In the Gospel of Matthew, Judas betrays Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. For political reasons? Some scholars suggest that Judas wanted Jesus to be arrested to precipitate an uprising against the authorities and that he didn't really think Jesus would be killed. Others suggest that Judas wanted Jesus arrested to end a dangerous armed rebellion before it began. Still others suggest that he was disillusioned with Jesus, having hoped he

would overthrow Roman rule of Judea. Or perhaps Judas was a faithful follower who betrayed Jesus at Jesus' own request, to fulfill the prophecy of scripture and set the inevitable in motion, as suggested in the apocryphal Gospel of Judas.

The possible reasons for Judas' betrayal follow two interwoven patterns. Either Judas was a greedy, unfaithful man, led into sin by Satan to betray Jesus for money or political reasons, or Judas was a player in the cosmic drama of good and evil, playing an essential role in the salvation of mankind when he handed Jesus over to the authorities. If Jesus' crucifixion was inevitable and necessary for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind, then Judas' action in leading the authorities to Jesus was part of the divine plan.

The distinction rests in some measure on translation. Twentieth-century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar asserts that the New Testament Greek word *paradidonai*, often translated as "betrayed," actually means "handing over of self." Thus, Paul's description of the institution of the Lord's Supper in his First Letter to the Corinthians, "The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread" (1 Corinthians 11:23), take on a different theological meaning when translated "on the night he was handed over."

In the 1979 Book of Common Prayer alone, we find a variety of translations. Whether we read the traditional translation in the Rite I Eucharistic Prayer: "In the night in which he was betrayed," or the contemporary language of Rite II, Eucharistic Prayer A, "On the night he was handed over," or the language of Eucharistic Prayer D, "When the hour had come for him to be glorified," there is no doubt that the name Judas has become synonymous with betrayal.

Mark's gospel tells us that Judas led the authorities to Jesus as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and then betrayed Jesus with a kiss: "Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.' So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him" (Mark 14: 44-46).

From beloved, trusted disciple to betrayer, it's clear that love and betrayal go hand in hand. Matthew tells us that Judas immediately felt regret, tried to return the money he had taken in exchange for Jesus' life, and then hanged himself.

We really don't know why Judas turned Jesus over to the authorities. It is possible that Judas, like most of us, acted from complicated and unclear motives. It is possible that Jesus knew this. From the prayer of Jesus: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, and keep us from temptation." The sinner who has succumbed to temptation could be Judas. The sinner who has succumbed to temptation could be any of us.

Considering Judas' role in the events of Jesus' last days in Jerusalem, we ponder the nature of betrayal, of sin and redemption. We know that Jesus was troubled in spirit, that the knowledge that one of those he loved would betray him caused him distress. As human beings and as followers of Jesus, we are called to love. We strive not to betray that love. We know that it is never too late to change or repent, that God's love and capacity for forgiveness are infinite. We are left with the paradox of Judas. Was he a faithful man who did what had to be done for the salvation of humankind, who made a difficult choice, even though his name would be synonymous with betrayal for millennia? It is possible. Was his decision to hand Jesus over to the authorities an act of

politics, in hope of advancing a revolt and overthrowing an unjust power? Perhaps the outcome wasn't what he hoped it would be. Some of us may be very frustrated with our country's politics; would we do something as desperate as Judas' act? Was Judas truly called to ministry with Jesus, and later succumbed to a loss of faith? He could be any one of us. Did Judas hang himself out of regret or remorse? Did he repent before he died? Was he an evil tool of Satan or a flawed, doubting human being? Was Jesus betrayed, or was he handed over? Was Judas' act a result of one man's greed and sin, or obedience to God's purpose for our salvation? There are no easy answers.

Judas as a rebel, a man with a political agenda. Judas as a disciple called to ministry, coping with loss of faith. Judas as an agent in the cosmic drama of God versus Satan. Any of these faces of Judas could be you or I. May we be called to examine our hearts this Holy Week, to discern our motives, to struggle against Satan when the need arises. May we strive to keep faith with those we love.

Let us pray: Christ Jesus, when temptation urges us to abandon you, you pray within us. Even if we forget you, your love remains, and you send your Holy Spirit upon us. And when we come to know our weaknesses, unexpected resources appear within us. Amen.

Susan Butterworth, M.A., M.Div, is a writer, teacher, singer, and lay minister. She leads Song & Stillness: Taizé @ MIT, a weekly ecumenical service of contemplative Taizé prayer at the interfaith chapel at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). She teaches writing and literature to college undergraduates and writes book reviews, essays, and literary reference articles.

Maundy Thursday

READINGS:

EXODUS 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; PSALM 116:1, 10-17;
1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26; JOHN 13:1-17, 31B-35

COLLECT:

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

BY OUR LOVE

by the Rev. Ada Wong Nagata

*We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored,
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love.
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

*We will work with each other, we will work side by side.
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride,
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

This is a hymn written in the 1960s by a Catholic priest, Peter Scholtes, inspired by today's Gospel: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Today is Thursday in Holy Week, often called Maundy Thursday. Maundy is connected to the word “mandate,” a command. Jesus gives us a new commandment.

As written in the above gospel text, Jesus commanded his disciples to love each other. He did not only command them through words but also through example, by getting into action. The action was not by force, not by beating them up; he set the example himself. As we pray in the collect, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of his body and blood.

Saint Paul writes to the people in Corinth what he had received and would pass to others: “The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”

Does it sound familiar? Whenever we have Eucharistic service, we hear this institution of the Eucharist: Take. Bless. Break. Give. Forgive. Remember. These are the actions of Holy Communion, mentioned in the synoptic gospels and testified to by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians.

Jesus takes up some very basic things that are used every day, and in turn, gives us life and strength. The bread: he blesses the God-given thing, breaks it open, then he gives it to the people. Think about this: for the bread to be shared, it has to be broken. For Jesus to be shared, he has to be broken. He loves us; he is willing to be broken so he can share himself with us, so he would be in communion with us and we would be in communion with each other.

Our Lord Jesus’ willingness to share himself is an act to redeem God’s people. He uses the table wine as a metaphor of his blood, tells us that he uses his own blood to cleanse us from our sins, and gives us life by instilling his blood in us.

Before our Lord is betrayed and handed over to the Roman authorities, he hands himself over to his disciples – and to us.

Jesus uses some outward and visible signs – in this case, our daily basic sustenance – to remind us, to enter into us, and to be with us. That is how he loves us. Therefore, whenever we eat this bread and drink this wine, we do so remembering Jesus our Christ. We do it in remembrance of our Lord’s love for us, his willingness to hand over his body and blood, his willingness to die on the cross. However, this remembrance is not just for us to keep within ourselves; that remembrance is to be proclaimed so that it will be remembered.

Jesus has demonstrated how he loves us. Just in case the disciples do not get it, he further demonstrates by washing his disciples’ feet. To wash their feet, he has to kneel down in front of them. He shows his willingness to do something that appears humbling. Peter has not grasped the meaning and declines the washing at first. He considers *himself* humble and unworthy to have his teacher wash his feet.

Let us think deeper. If we think that we are lowly and unworthy to be served, haven’t we already divided people into different classes, including those that are unworthy to be served – even if that’s us? If we feel embarrassed to have our feet washed or to be served, do we also elevate some people to a point where they are too good to serve others? This is not how we love each other. No person is higher or lower on the list to be served or loved.

In a little while, Jesus will be arrested. He will be stripped of his clothes, stripped of his dignity, and even stripped of his life. Are the dignity and life of our Lord Jesus less important than our own dignity and life? Once again, his washing of feet and suffering are breaking through this barrier to show the love that Jesus has for us. He wants us to love each other as he loves us.

Therefore, the liturgy of Maundy Thursday is to remind us again of the love our Lord has for us. The institution of the sacrament of his body and blood. The forgiveness of sins. The foot washing. The stripping of the altar. All ask us to remember Jesus' great love for us, and our response must be to love each other.

When we receive the Eucharist, therefore, we should remember that Jesus loves us, even to the end. Before he is betrayed, before he is handed over to death, he hands himself to us. He takes up the bread and wine and blesses them to be the Holy Sacrament, his body and blood, our bread of heaven and cup of salvation. By taking this bread and cup, we become one body and one spirit. Whenever we take them, we take them knowing that Christ died for us, and we feed on him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving, loving each other.

With Jesus' wondrous love for us, how can we not love Jesus back? To love him back, we, his disciples, are to follow his commandment to show the world we are his disciples. That is our discipleship.

Let us not only sing, "And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love; yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love," but also act by *being* one in the Spirit and one in the Lord, by working with each other side by side, and by guarding each person's dignity and saving each person's pride.

Amen

The Rev. Dr. Ada Wong Nagata is an Episcopal priest, recently retired. She has served in parishes in the Dioceses of Los Angeles and New York. She serves on the General Convention Task Force on Church Planting and Congregational Redevelopment and is also an honorary canon of the Cathedral Center of St. Paul, Diocese of Los Angeles. Ada earned her Doctor of Ministry from Episcopal Divinity School in 2015. She loves hiking and meditative walk.

Good Friday

READINGS:

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12; PSALM 22; HEBREWS 10:16-25
OR HEBREWS 4:14-16; 5:7-9; JOHN 18:1-19:42

COLLECT:

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

CHRIST OUR PASSOVER

by the Rev. Canon Frank Logue

From noon on Good Friday through Easter Sunday morning is the Christian Passover. In these three days, Jesus passed over from death into life and opened the way for us to follow. The two stories of the Passover and Jesus' death are quite intertwined. This is why we refer to Jesus as our Passover who is sacrificed for us. To look back to the beginning of John's Gospel, the evangelist wrote in the first chapter that John the Baptist referred to Jesus as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

In his death, Jesus makes this imagery real. Jesus becomes the Passover Lamb. The Gospel of John is very precise in its use of time. John wants his readers to understand that Jesus is sentenced to die at 12 noon on the eve of Passover. The disciple John saw this as no accident of history, but as a significant theological fact.

Jesus died along with the Passover lambs, making complete his identification as our Passover sacrificed for us. There is one small problem. Passover lambs were not sacrifices. I know this would be a small distinction for the lamb itself as, either way, it dies. But in the story of the first Passover, the lambs were not put to death to atone for sins, to make us one with God again. It is helpful to remember the Passover.

The first Passover occurred on the night before the Israelites were set free from bondage to the Egyptians. The Israelites gathered in homes to eat the meal as prescribed by God. The blood of the Passover lamb was painted on the doorposts so that the Angel of Death would pass over the Jewish homes as it traveled through Egypt, killing all the firstborn in the land. Passover became the central act of remembrance of the Jewish Community. Through the Passover meal, the story of the Exodus from Egypt is retold. Each generation is called to make the story of the Exodus their own story.

Then, on the night before he died, Jesus said that he was making a New Covenant. But the new covenant Jesus proclaimed was not a new idea as the prophet Jeremiah had anticipated the new covenant centuries earlier in writing,

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

In his death and resurrection, Jesus sealed that new covenant with his own blood. As the blood of the Passover lamb marked the Israelites as God's own people and protected them from the Angel of Death, Jesus' blood overcomes death and seals the new covenant that marks us as children of God. We too can pass over from death to life as we by faith make Jesus' death our own in baptism.

Jesus expands on the role of the Passover lamb. Once a meal to connect the people of God to their covenant with God, Jesus also made the Passover lamb into the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Jesus' death would accomplish once and for all what the blood of thousands of lambs could never do. Jesus was the perfect Passover lamb who ended the need for sacrifices and changed the meaning of the Passover itself.

Our reading from the Prophet Isaiah is an important example of the prophecies that were in Israel's sacred writings long before Jesus' birth. Yet, by the time he was born, no one was reading this passage from Isaiah as messianic. How *could* it be the Messiah? Isaiah prophesied of a person who would be unjustly killed and that in his death, this martyr would carry our infirmities and diseases, our transgressions and iniquities. A Jewish martyr, yes. The Messiah, no.

From Abel's death at the hands of his jealous brother Cain to the wholesale slaughter of faithful Jews in Israel by King Antiochus Epiphanes about 160 years before Jesus' birth, there had been many good people martyred for scant cause. The perversion of justice prophesied by Isaiah seemed all too real.

When God became human in Jesus, the Holy Trinity would not give up on divine love for us, no matter what the cost. If being God in first-century Palestine meant that Rome would unjustly put Jesus to death on a cross, then the Messiah would pay that price. It was so beyond what anyone expected to happen to the Anointed One that Isaiah wrote hundreds of years earlier, "Who could have imagined his future?"

After his resurrection, Jesus explained the prophets of old to his disciples. This is shown in stories like Jesus encountering two followers fleeing Jerusalem on Easter Sunday, only to meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus. He explained the scripture to them to reinterpret Isaiah's Suffering Servant passages and other texts in the light of Easter.

Why did Jesus have to die? Jesus said he was going to give his life as a ransom for many. Of course, the idea that the sacrifice of a life could be for the forgiveness of sins was not a new one with Jesus. Judaism had centuries of practice in sacrificial culture. Goats, bulls, lambs, and even doves were among the many animals offered as a sin offering. The life of the animal was given as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people.

Judaism put an end to the Canaanite ideas of human sacrifice that preceded them, but they did not abolish animal sacrifices. Moses' law proscribed when and how animal sacrifices were to be offered, and it was in this culture of sacrifice that Jesus ministered. There had always been voices within that culture that spoke against sacrifices. In Psalm 50, the Psalmist wrote, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the whole world is mine and all that is in it. Do you think I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?"

The answer in a sacrificial culture, is, Yes, God we did think you wanted that blood, those lives. And while the Psalmist writes that the content of the heart is what matters, he does not write directly against sacrifice. And so it was within this culture that lifted up animal sacrifices as how one could get right with God after committing sin that Jesus came to do away with the whole sacrificial system. God ended the system in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus' death revealed to humanity both the depth of our estrangement from God and the path back to reconciliation—which is faith in God as revealed in Jesus, the Christ. Jesus was the one whom Isaiah had called the righteous one, who will make many righteous and bear their sins.

There is yet another connection to the Passover lamb. The Passover lamb was first and foremost a meal. The way one sealed a connection with the covenant was to eat the meal. Jesus changed the significance of the Passover meal making his body the bread and his blood the wine.

Jesus called on his disciples to continue to observe that ritual meal with its significance for the New Covenant, and we do in each Eucharist. Every time we take the bread and wine, we celebrate our Passover anew. In doing so, we remember Christ our Passover who is sacrificed for us. In doing so, we are invited to partake of the meal that binds us to the new covenant. In doing so, we renew our commitment to Jesus, the one who died that all might have life and have it abundantly.

For this is the Passover of the Lord. It is on this day that Jesus died to destroy the power of death. And it is on this day that Jesus invites you once more to take part in his passing over from death to life through faith in him.

Frank Logue is the Canon to the Ordinary and Bishop-Elect of the Diocese of Georgia. He blogs at loosecanon.georgiaepiscopal.org.

The Great Vigil of Easter

READINGS:

EXODUS 14:10-31; 15:20-21; PSALM 114;
ROMANS 6:3-11; MATTHEW 28:1-10

COLLECT:

O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

HE HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD

by the Rev. Dr. J. Barrington Bates

Imagine this, a conversation between two women named Mary, long ago and far away:

“Let's go home, Mary. There's nothing more to be done, really. It's pointless.”

“No, Mary, it's important that we anoint his body, if we can. That's what we do.”

“But it's cold, and I'm tired. Yesterday was a terrible day, and it's dark and scary out here.”

“Let's go on. We need to perform our rituals. That's who we are. It will help our grieving, and it will show our respect for the one we loved so much.”

“I can’t believe he’s dead. I know we were there. We saw it—so horrible. But it’s almost as if it never happened.”

“Oh, it happened, alright. But we need to go on.”

“Well, alright—but this is not something I’m much looking forward to.”

The Resurrection: in this brief imaginative reconstruction of a dialogue, it wasn’t a very big event. No candlelight vigil, no singing, no dramatic lighting effects, no fragrant flowers, not even any incense! Just two women, the pre-dawn chill of the desert, and the darkness of a cave.

What must it have been like for those two women, both named Mary?

The one from the town of Magdala, who we call Mary Magdalene, we know was one of Jesus’ closest and most trusted companions.

In the apocryphal gospel that bears her name, Jesus appears to the disciples at the Resurrection and charges them to “preach the good news.” But, the story goes on, “they were distressed and wept greatly. [They asked,] ‘If they didn’t spare him, how will they spare us?’”

“Then Mary stood up. She greeted them all, addressing her brothers and sisters, “Do not weep and be distressed nor let your hearts be irresolute. For his grace will be with you all and will shelter you. Rather we should praise his greatness, for he has prepared us and made us true Human beings.’ When Mary had said these things, she turned their heart toward the Good, and they began to debate about the words of the Savior.”

It’s no wonder this gospel was suppressed; thousands of years of misogyny simply would not permit such a story, that a *woman* should be responsible for founding the church!

Get this clearly: the men were crying, and the *women* were strong. The men were afraid, and the *women* were resolute. And that upside-down notion of Late Antiquity’s view of humanity is precisely what we read in the canonical gospels, as well—the ones attributed to male authors.

The men had, so far as we can tell, abandoned Jesus. The women returned to the tomb to anoint his body. And there is no account anywhere that suggests they actually *wanted* to do this. It was their duty, their solemn obligation.

Those of us who have buried a close relative may have an inkling of how they felt: it has to be done, and I have to do it, but I really, really don’t want to—something like that. Mixed emotions, contradictory urges, complex and confusing feelings.

So, it’s no surprise that they left the empty tomb with joy *and* fear. They’d just encountered an angel, whose appearance, we are told, was like lightning. And whose countenance caused Pilate’s burly guards to shake in their boots and freeze up.

Yet these women, in their quiet determination to pay their respects to Jesus—in all their pain and anxiety and terror—these women would actually stop and listen to the angel’s message. And what a message it is: “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you.”

This announcement—like the resurrection appearances of Jesus—is defiant but quiet, mystical but also somehow clear, confusing but ultimately revelatory.

And *this* earthquake took place while everyone was sleeping, unlike Good Friday's noonday tremor. This proclamation happens to two faithful women and a few wimpy soldiers—not to the hundreds, maybe thousands, who witnessed Jesus' death. And this joy comes in the midst of profound grief—a surprise that certainly would be difficult to adjust to.

When you think about it, it's really quite amazing that we are here, nearly two thousand years later. A faith founded by a God who is executed as a criminal and who rises from the dead, not in the glorious majesty we would have wished, but in quiet and confusing encounters—starting, by all accounts, with a couple of women.

Christianity: a great movement, a gigantic and enduring institution, an amazing phenomenon—and all from this humble beginning.

How this could have happened has always been something of a mystery. That is, until one Lent, hearing of two travelers who had the privilege of spending a few days' vacation on the Caribbean island of St. Croix. Outside their bungalow was a large bush, mostly twigs and almost bare of leaves. Although this island had not suffered greatly from the previous fall's hurricane season, there was lingering evidence of powerful storms.

So, this bush: there for the contemplation every morning as they sat and sipped their coffee. Just a few twigs, really—and at the end of about half of them, some very defiant blossoms. Nice, eh? It was as if the bush was trying to say, in its own quiet way, "I'm not dead."

Nevertheless, impatient city people that they were, they considered the bush an eyesore, and they thought about just ripping it out by its roots and throwing it in the dustbin, as a service to the landlord and the greater community.

But, about the third day—it takes three days to decompress from urban life, right? On that third day, they noticed on a bare, stark branch a hummingbird perched on a twig, apparently asleep.

Have you ever seen a hummingbird relax? It's a rare thing indeed. And this little bird chose this apparently dead bush for its rest and safety. And, as they looked closer, they noticed *hundreds* of tiny lizards crawling all over that bush, jumping from limb to limb.

What at first appeared at a glance to be dead, or at least disfigured, turned out to be a sign of hope and abundant life. The discovery was more profound because, at first glance, it appeared otherwise. More convincing, perhaps, because they had realized it themselves—and almost by accident. More believable, because the difference between the bush being dead and teaming with life was not about confronting a huge display of blossoms and foliage, but about noticing the tiny, almost imperceptible signs.

This is the resurrection of Jesus. No thunder or displays of divine pyrotechnics. No booming voice from heaven. No majesty, no pomp. Just an ordinary guy, blending in with the crowd, cooking fish on the beach, breaking bread at the dinner table, comforting his friends.

As Mary Magdalene has told us, "Do not weep and be distressed nor let your hearts be irresolute. For his grace will be with you all and will shelter you. Rather we should praise his greatness, for he has prepared us and made us true Human beings."

So, today we pause from the frenzy of our lives for this great vigil. We have made ourselves still so that we can notice for ourselves: Jesus has been raised from the dead. Amen.

Now retired, Barrie Bates has served Episcopal and Lutheran congregations in California, New York, and New Jersey over the past 20+ years. He holds a Ph.D. in liturgical studies and serves on the General Board of Examining Chaplains. He looks forward to spending more time on the shores of Lake Michigan, and he welcomes conversation about his sermons.

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