

Palm Sunday, Maunday Thursday, Good Friday

Chapter 25, pages 299 – 302; Chapter 26

Jesus enters Jerusalem: Mark 11: 1-10, Matthew 21:14-17, Mark 12:35-37, John 12:27-50, Mark 14:1-3, Luke 22:3-6

Jesus enters Jerusalem to the acclamation of the crowd, in part echoing Psalm 118, which is a celebration of the king's victory over his enemies. The typical triumphal procession into the capital was a grand affair. The Davidic monarch would ride a white mule; the Roman warrior-emperor would ride a large spirited war-horse or ride in a chariot. Jesus rejects grandiosity by riding a borrowed colt with his followers' coats instead of fine saddle-blankets.

The cry "Hosanna!" means "Lord, save us!" and the other shouts of the crowd indicate their expectation of a restoration of the kingdom once ruled by David. They will be disappointed and a disappointed crowd can become murderous quickly.

A conquering king would enter the temple in the capital city and offer a sacrifice. What Jesus does instead is interfere with the complete operation of the Jerusalem temple---if only temporarily and symbolically.

What Jesus does is not a reform of temple worship but a condemnation of it. The saying on page 298, which is a combination of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, should not be understood as an objection to inflated pigeon prices or dishonest exchange rates. The word translated "thieves" means, not cheats, but muggers or highway robbers, who use their "den" not for robbing people, but for hiding and avoiding punishment. Here, as in Jeremiah, the objection is to religious leaders who have "robbed" the people of the true knowledge of God and believe that they can hide in God's temple from the consequences.

What the merchants and moneychangers were doing was not dishonest, but essential. Few could manage to transport a flawless animal all the way from Galilee or Transjordan to Jerusalem for sacrifice. It made more sense to purchase one upon arrival. One's gifts had to be made in the sacred coinage, not in the coins of Rome that bore the "graven image" of a pagan ruler with pretensions of divinity. If people can't buy animals and exchange money, worship in the temple is completely disrupted. Jesus's action here corresponds to his prediction that the temple would be destroyed because of the unfaithfulness of the religious leadership.

The saying about the “son of David” suggests that the Messiah is not a ruler like David, but a ruler to whom even David himself must defer.

Chapter 25 ends with Judas’s agreement to hand Jesus over to the authorities.

Please read the following passages before you come to worship on Maundy Thursday (7 p.m. in the sanctuary) and Good Friday (7 p.m. in the sanctuary)

Maundy Thursday – Chapter 26, 303-310:

Mark 14:12-17 Jesus’s strange instructions about how two of his disciples are to find a place for the group to eat the Passover meal recall his strange instructions about how to procure the colt. In both cases, however, it happens just as Jesus said it would. Notice on page 303 that Jesus sends two disciples ahead to prepare the meal, then Jesus himself comes “with the Twelve.” By my math, that’s a total of fifteen people counting Jesus, which reminds us that there were always more than the named “Twelve.”

John 13: 1-16, 21 – 30 Only John has the foot-washing scene and the Gospel of John does NOT have the scene that comes next in *The Story*, in which Jesus distributes bread and wine to the disciples.

Here, Jesus performs the service of a slave for the disciples by washing their feet, then tells them, “you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

With a few exceptions, Christians have taken seriously the command of Jesus regarding the bread and juice, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Only a few small Christian groups practice foot-washing. Why do you think we have never regarded Jesus’s command regarding foot-washing as something to be taken seriously?

Matthew 26:26-29 Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul all have some version of this story in which Jesus breaks bread and says, “This is my body,” then says of the cup, “This is my blood.” Only Matthew associates the cup with the forgiveness of sins. Luke and Paul call it the blood of the “**new**” covenant. You may remember from our fall study of *The Story* that covenant ceremonies always involved the sacrifice of an animal and manipulation of the blood, often pouring it on the altar and throwing it on the assembled people. Never, however, did the people of God drink blood. That was strictly forbidden. Jesus’s instructing his disciples to take his body and blood into themselves corresponds to the interior understanding of the Holy Spirit, who, elsewhere in the New Testament is said to live “in” believers.

Jesus and the Spirit work within believers to empower their ministry and enable their holiness.

John 14:1-17; 16:12-13, 32-33; 17:1-5, 24-26

The material from the bottom third of 305 through the top of 307 is made up of excerpts from the so-called “last discourse” in the Gospel of John—John 14-16. John 17 is Jesus’s “high priestly prayer” for his disciples then and afterward.

Notice the emphasis on mutual indwelling: The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father and the disciples are in the Son and in the Father and the Father and the Son are in the disciples. Do you think that we really live into what this means? What does it mean to you?

Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane, his arrest and examination by the religious authorities, and Peter’s denial – pages 310-302.

We call the scene in which Peter denies knowing Jesus “Peter’s denial of Jesus,” but if you read carefully, you will see that what Peter denies is his own identity as a follower of Jesus. He is trying to save his physical life but losing his true self, just as Jesus warned on page 291. Throughout this part of the story you will find biting irony: Peter says, on the top of 310, “Woman, I don’t know him!” Peter is lying, but ironically he is telling the sad truth. He doesn’t really know Jesus at all. He has never really known Jesus. But not until he is reminded about Jesus’s prediction of his cowardice does he break down in tears. And he really does have a lot to regret.

Good Friday – Chapter 26, pages 310-314

The scenes of Jesus’s trial before Pilate and his crucifixion and death are taken from all four Gospels and arranged into what the editors of *The Story* regard as chronological order.

As you read through these pages try to read slowly and pray through each stage of Jesus’s suffering and death. The Christian tradition teaches that each of these scenes are for our sake. Ask the Holy Spirit to internalize in you what it means that God loved you enough to become a human being, to speak and act out the coming kingdom of God, and to die to set you free from your self-inflicted idolatries and bondage.