

# Holy Week Devotional 2024



## **Introduction**

Welcome to Holy Week! In this devotional you will find prayers, spiritual practices, scripture and devotions all meant to give you an opportunity to go on a journey to the cross with Jesus. There is a devotion for each day of Holy Week from Palm Sunday to Easter as told by the Gospel of Mark. There are two sections of the devotions on each day. The first part is short, the second part will involve more reading and more time. The first section is designed for you to be able to do fairly quickly and will focus on one moment from Jesus' life on the day in question. The second section is designed to let you explore everything that Mark tells us happened to Jesus on each day of Holy Week and gives you more options for meditating and reflecting on the scripture. I hope that you enjoy this devotional and that it prepares your heart to experience the resurrection of Jesus in a new way this year.

- Ahnna Lise Stevens Jennings. Associate Pastor, Braddock Street UMC.



### Section One

**Scripture:** Mark 11:7-11

**7** Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. **8** Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. **9** Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! **10** Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

**11** Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

**Devotion:** “The Triumphal Entry”

Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week. It is the day that Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey as crowds cheered and lined the street ahead of him with palm branches and coats. Jesus is celebrated this day. The crowds that have been following him since his ministry began are here recognizing all that he has done for them. They know who he is, or at least they think they do. Sometimes we focus on how fickle this crowd is. In just a few days, they will turn on Jesus and demand that he be crucified. But for now, take a moment to celebrate with them. Jesus has arrived. He is the King, the Anointed One, the Messiah. He is here to save us all, though not in the way that most folks thought he would. He doesn't ride into Jerusalem on a war horse, but on a donkey. He doesn't show up ready for a physical fight, but instead chooses to throw off the oppression of Rome, and of sin, and of death by sacrificing himself as an ultimate act of love. Wave a palm branch today and thank Jesus for this journey to the cross.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, on this day your Son Jesus Christ entered the holy city of Jerusalem and was proclaimed King by those who spread their garments and palm branches along his way. Let those branches be for us signs of his victory, and grant that we who bear them in his name may ever hail him as our Lord, and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life. In his name we pray. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

**Section two:** Read this one if you have some time and want to go deeper.

**Prayer for Illumination:** Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that, as the scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

**Scripture:** Grab a Bible (or click the link) and read [Mark 11:1-11](#)

### Questions and Observations:

- How would you feel if you were the person who's donkey was taken?
- What is the message that is sent to the people by having Jesus ride in on a donkey?
- Read Zechariah 9:9
- Fun fact: We aren't sure where Bethphage was located, but Bethany is about two miles to the Southeast of Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>
- Read Zechariah 14:4. The Mount of Olives as a location also fulfills a prophecy and would be a sign to any reader who knew their Hebrew Bible well.<sup>4</sup>
- Mark 11:3 is the only time in Mark's Gospel where Jesus refers to himself as, "The Lord". Why do you think he chose to use such a big title at this point in time?
- Jesus knew that someone would ask why the disciples were taking the donkey. Do you think this is just a coincidence, a natural response to seeing someone untying a donkey, or is Jesus demonstrating his prophetic power in this moment?

**Prayer Practice:** Take a moment and imagine yourself as a part of the crowd. Describe what happened as Jesus came into Jerusalem using all of your senses. What do you smell? What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel? What do you taste? If you were there, what would you have done? Would you have been a passive observer of the scene? Would you have thrown down your coat? Climbed a tree to retrieve palm branches to spread on Jesus' path? Would you have been upset by the inconvenience of an unplanned parade on a random Sunday? Use these questions and observations and do something creative with them. Write a short story, or write out the experience like a scene from a play, movie, or show. Draw, paint, or sculpt the scene, or part of the scene. Act it out, or dance it out. Find a creative way to enter into this moment of Jesus' journey. Talk with God in whatever way you like best about what it was like to enter into the experience.

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<sup>1</sup> The United Methodist Book of Worship. Abbreviated as BOW pg 340

<sup>2</sup> The United Methodist Hymnal. Abbreviated as UMH pg 6

<sup>3</sup> The New Interpreter's Study Bible. Abbreviated as NISB Pg 1831 study notes

<sup>4</sup> Ibid



### Section one

**Scripture:** Mark 11:15-19

**15** Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves, **16** and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. **17** He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'?

But you have made it a den of robbers."

**18** And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him, for they were afraid of him because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. **19** And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

**Devotion:** "Flipping Tables"

On the Monday of Holy Week, Jesus enters the temple in Jerusalem and sees something that upsets him deeply. He sees how much money is being made in the temple. This place is supposed to be a refuge for all people, those with wealth, and those without wealth. But now, in order to worship and make the sacrifices that the faith required, you had to be wealthy. Or at least, you had to be able to give away what wealth you had. You weren't giving it away to help others, or even really to support the daily costs of running the temple, but so that others could become wealthy from your piety. Jesus recognized that this was exploitative and wrong. He did not just demand that they stop this practice, he stopped it himself. He turned over the tables of



the money changers and told everyone exactly what he thought of what they were doing<sup>5</sup>. Jesus saw the injustice and did what he could in that moment to correct it. When have you seen this kind of injustice and exploitation? What can you do about it? It may be time to flip over some tables.

**Prayer:** Defiant God, If you were the voice of the prophets, then you remain a God who speaks against exploitation and oppression. Silence the lies in our minds that tell us our fight is futile. Let hope in our cause swell as we come together with a shared voice.<sup>6</sup>

**Section two:** Read this one if you have some time and want to go deeper.

**Prayer for Illumination:** Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that, as the scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.<sup>7</sup>

**Scripture:** Grab a Bible (or click the link) and read [Mark 11:12-19](#).

#### Questions and observations:

- Have you ever been so hangry<sup>8</sup> that you could have cursed a tree because it didn't have any fruit? Do you think that is why Jesus is so upset?
- Seriously though, this moment seems out of character for Jesus. This is the only "miracle" that Jesus performs during the whole passion narrative according to Mark's Gospel.<sup>9</sup> What do you think this whole fig tree business is about? We know that figs aren't even in season, so what is he doing? Why is it doing it?
- How does this fig tree incident relate to Jesus' actions in the temple?
- Why is Jesus so upset in the temple? The money changers and the folks that were selling animals for sacrifice were doing what the community needed them to do. Roman coins had graven images of Roman gods on them and could not be given as an offering to the temple. Many pilgrims could not bring animals for sacrifice along with them while they traveled, and therefore needed to purchase them in the temple<sup>10</sup>. So, again, why is Jesus so upset?
- In Mark 11:14 Jesus quotes two different prophets. Read Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Why do you think Jesus picked these two? How does that relate to your answer to the question above?
- The priests and the scribes are not happy with Jesus. They haven't been for a while now, but at this moment, he is messing with their money. Any revolutionary will tell you,

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<sup>5</sup> Let this be a reminder to all of us that when someone asks "What would Jesus do?" flipping over tables is a valid answer and option, especially if it is a matter of injustice.

<sup>6</sup> Black Liturgies pg 139-140

<sup>7</sup> UMH pg 6

<sup>8</sup> "Hangry" means so hungry that you are angry.

<sup>9</sup> The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Volume VIII abbreviated as NIBC VIII, pg 660

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg 663

that's when the real trouble starts. But right now, the crowds are still with Jesus. What do you think is going to happen to turn the crowds against him?

### **Prayer Practice(s):**

If you can, go find a fig (or a fig newton, really anything with fig as the primary flavor) and eat it. Let the sensory experience of eating this fruit that Jesus was longing to eat help you put yourself into the story for a moment. If figs aren't your jam<sup>11</sup>, then do some research about the plant itself. Find out how figs were used during the time of Jesus and in the local economy. Find more pictures of figs and fig trees<sup>12</sup>. Now, re-read the section of scripture about the fig tree, but this time, imagine that you are the tree. How do you feel about your interaction with Jesus? Ok, enough about figs for now, but they will come back into the story tomorrow.

Let's move on to a prayer practice that can help us to reflect on Jesus' temple tantrum. This moment is so tactile that it seems appropriate to enter into the story again. You can once again imagine yourself at the scene and engage all your senses. Again, feel free to journal, script, or illustrate the event. You could also do a body prayer. Find something that you can flip without damage to the item or to yourself. A table, or a chair, a plank, or even a large book could work. Find a clear space, flip the object over while you say, "God, help me to overturn all tables of injustice." Or, "Just as Jesus turned over the table in the temple, God help me to see and stop injustice." Start off gently flipping your object and praying a few times, then flip with more gusto as you repeat your prayer. Do this as many times as you want, just don't hurt yourself, or your surroundings.

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<sup>11</sup> See what I did there?

<sup>12</sup> I say find *more* because the image for Tuesday is a fig tree. Yes, we have more figs to talk about.



### Section one

**Scripture:** Mark 12:28-31

**28** One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” **29** Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; **30** you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ **31** The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.

**Devotion:** “The First Commandment”

Tuesday of Holy Week is an odd day. There isn’t much in terms of action, but there is *a lot* in terms of conversation. Jesus talks to many people and teaches important lessons to those who gather to hear him. Some of them come to test him. They hope to catch him making a mistake so that they have something to take to the leaders as evidence against him. Jesus shares parables, answers questions, makes observations about the people around him, and even uses a fig tree to demonstrate his power. When asked what the most important commandment is he says love God and love your neighbor. He teaches many lessons on Tuesday, but this one is the most straightforward. It seems simple, but it isn’t easy. We spend our whole lives as Christians trying to get this commandment right. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, believed that Christian perfection was defined as the perfect love of God and neighbor. He believed that with the help of the Holy Spirit, we could get there in our lifetimes. The process of sanctification<sup>13</sup> is working and cooperating with the Holy Spirit every single day to get a bit better at loving God and loving neighbor. How can you do that today?

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<sup>13</sup> Sanctification means being made holy. It is the process of becoming more like Jesus.



**Prayer:** Eternal God, teach us to love you not only in mind and heart but also in purpose and action, that we may love the children of the earth, in Jesus Christ. Amen<sup>14</sup>

**Section two:** Read this one if you have some time and want to go deeper.

**Prayer for Illumination:** Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that, as the scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.<sup>15</sup>

**Scripture:** Grab a Bible (or click the link) and read [Mark 11:20- 13:37](#)

### Questions and observations:

- We have now circled back to the Fig Tree to get the end of that story. The tree has withered down to its roots, just as Jesus said. The disciples are amazed, but Jesus explains that it is all a matter of faith. What is the role of faith in our prayers and petitions to God?
- Jesus is clever. In Mark 11:27-33 he is able to trap the chief priests and the scribes. They came to him hoping to catch him in a mistake so that they could have a legitimate reason to accuse and arrest him. But he turns the tables on them.<sup>16</sup> He traps them in a theological conundrum and is able to avoid answering their trap question all together. When has the cleverness of God been revealed to you?
- Mark 12:1-12 is the last parable that Jesus tells in Mark's Gospel. It is told in response to the priests and scribes that tried to trap him. In this parable, we can draw a connection between the wicked tenants and the priests and scribes. Jesus is the vineyard owner's son. And the vineyard owner is God. The prophets are represented by the slaves and servants that the owner sends first. The vineyard itself represents the people of God. What do you think Jesus wants all those listening to this story to learn from it?
- Mark 12:13-17- if something belongs to you, you may put your name on it, or mark it in some way as yours. Coins at this time would have the image of the ruler under which they had been minted. The coins, in that sense, belong to the ruler. So, Jesus says, he can have them, and he can keep them because they are his. But human beings bear the image of God. We are the things that are God's and should be given to God and God alone. How have you seen the image of God engraved on yourself? How do you see it in others? How can we give ourselves to God?
- Mark 12:18-27- one of my college professors would always help us remember the difference between Pharisees and Sadducees by saying, "The Sadducees were sad, you see, because they didn't believe in life after death." Verse 18 and following remind us of this point too. The Sadducees are now trying to catch Jesus in another theological trap. Who is the true husband of a woman who has had the misfortune of being widowed

<sup>14</sup> Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Proper 26  
<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=227>

<sup>15</sup> UMH pg 6

<sup>16</sup> Luckily for them, this is a figurative table and not a literal one this time.

7 times? Jesus tells them that they have totally missed the point. They are focused on death, but God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. God is in the business of resurrection. Jesus, and many other Jews at the time, disagreed with the Sadducees and believed that souls live with God in heaven after the body has died. This is evidenced by God's introduction to Moses from the burning bush. "I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Not, "I was", but "*I AM*". That implies that those guys are still around in some form.<sup>17</sup> Since they had died, they must be with God. What do you make of Jesus' logic in this exchange?

- Mark 12:28-34. How do you live out the first commandment?
- Jesus' cleverness and rhetorical skill is on display again in Mark 12:35-37. The Messiah is understood by the scribes to be the son of David, but David calls the Messiah, "Lord". A father would not call his own son Lord, therefore, the Messiah must not be a literal son of David. The crowd has seen Jesus outwit his opponents several times now and they are really enjoying it. How do you think you would have felt as a member of the crowd watching Jesus school the religious leaders?
- Mark 12:38-44. First Jesus points out the hypocrisy of the scribes who want to be seen as holy more than they want to actually be holy. Then he spots a widowed woman giving all that she can to the temple after seeing many wealthy people give large sums. Jesus points out that her gift is much bigger than the gifts given by the wealthy because she has given a much bigger share of her wealth. I once attended a church with an impoverished congregation. I watched an unhoused man reach into his bag and put a muffin still in its wrapper in the collection plate. He didn't have any money, but he could share his food. When have you seen, or experienced something like this? What did you learn from it?
- Mark chapter 13 is a little apocalypse. Jesus is foretelling the end of the world. Apocalyptic writing is often a style used by and for people who are enduring suffering and persecution. The book of Mark was probably written between the years 60 and 70 CE, which would have been a time of persecution for the Jewish people and early Christians. This little apocalypse sounds terrifying,<sup>18</sup> but is actually meant to be a sign of hope. Jesus gives instructions on what to expect<sup>19</sup> and on how to deal with it. There is comfort sometimes in knowing what trials you'll have to face. And the hope come from Jesus' advice on how to survive it. Don't listen to false prophets. Don't let the tragic circumstances distract you from the goal. Stay awake, pay attention. Remember what he taught us. Keep moving forward. That feels like good advice not only for the disciples at the time, but also for all of us now. What similarities do you see between Jesus' prophecy and our world today?<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> NISB, pg 1834 study notes

<sup>18</sup> ....because it is...

<sup>19</sup> A LOT of pain and bad stuff.

<sup>20</sup> For the record, I am NOT implying that the world is ending right now, just noticing that we are dealing with a lot of bad stuff ourselves and Jesus' words may be able to give us hope, just like it gave hope to the disciples.

**Prayer Practice:**

This is the day with the most text to read. Tuesday is a day of conversation for Jesus. In many ways, this is his last day of teaching the crowds. Today's prayer practice will be Lectio Divina. If you are unfamiliar with this practice I will give an explanation below. If you already know what to do, then pick a passage from today's reading and get started!

Lectio Divina how to:

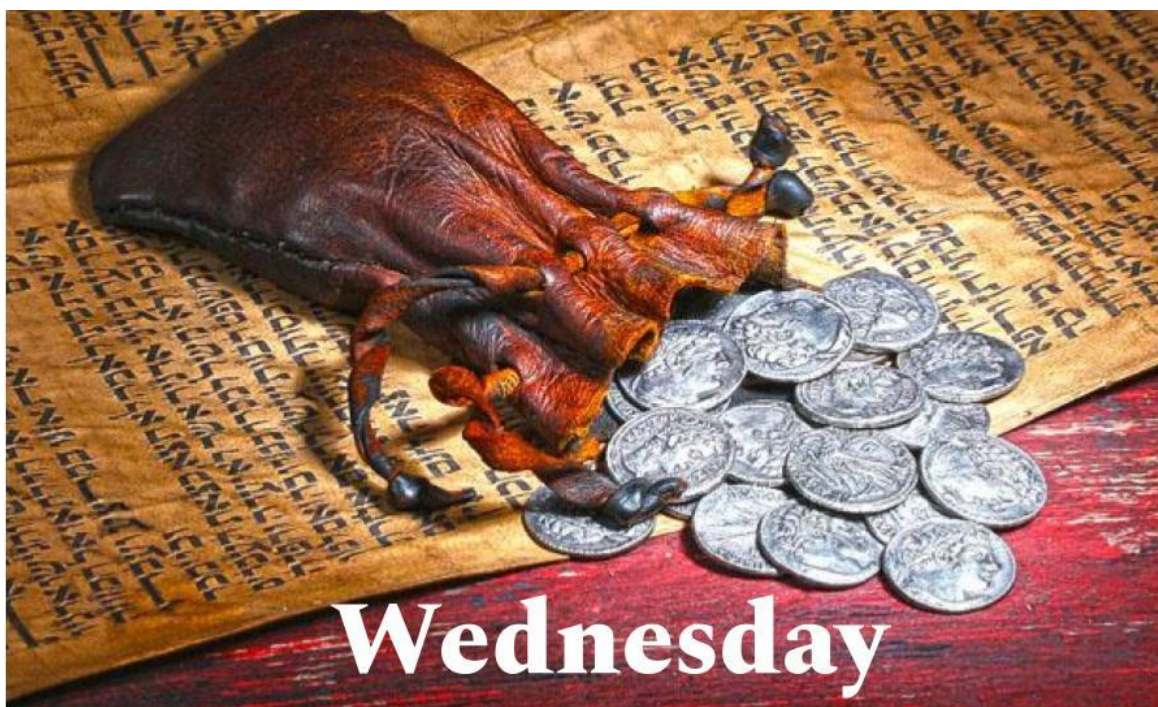
Step one- get into a meditative space both mentally and physically. Find somewhere quiet and comfortable. Light a candle or otherwise make your space feel set apart for a holy moment. Calm your mind and focus on breathing and staying in the present moment. Let thoughts of the past and the future fade away and then choose a passage from today's reading to read again.

Step two: Read- read through the passage and pay attention to any word or phrase that stands out to you. Read mindfully, and patiently wait for a nudge. Something will stand out. Circle it, underline it, highlight it, or just hold it in your heart and mind.

Step three: Reflect- read the whole passage again, then zero in on that word or phrase that stood out to you. You can read and re-read the word or phrase several times. Then start to open your heart and mind to why God may have drawn your attention to that particular point. Try to avoid going into Bible Study Mode, don't analyze it, feel it.

Step four: Respond- read the whole passage again. This time take the word or phrase and respond to it. Write it down and then follow that up with a written or spoken prayer. Talk with God about the word or the phrase. What insight are you gaining from it? How does it relate to your life right now? What might God be saying to you through this word or phrase? How does it relate to the rest of the passage?

Step five: Rest- read the passage one final time. Then follow that reading with silence. This isn't a time for you to speak, but to listen. If your mind wanders, then try silently repeating the word or phrase that you have been responding to. Try to let intrusive thoughts float away and spend at least 5 minutes in silent reflection. Then, thank God for your time together, and you are done!



### Section One

**Scripture:** Mark 14:3-9

**3** 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. **4** But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? **5** For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. **6** But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. **7** 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. **8** She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. **9** 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.”

**Devotion:** “An Alabaster Jar”

Wednesday of Holy Week has a few different important moments. In the passage above we see the moment when Jesus is anointed by a faithful woman.<sup>21</sup> It is also the day that Judas makes his deal to betray Jesus in exchange for thirty pieces of silver. In other Gospels, it is Judas that complains when the jar of expensive oil of nard is “wasted” on Jesus. There is something interesting about that considering he is about to get paid a significant amount of money for this betrayal<sup>22</sup>. Why is he complaining about a woman honoring Jesus with expensive oil when he is

<sup>21</sup> Other Gospels identify her as one of the many Marys in the New Testament

<sup>22</sup> One denarius was paid out a wage for one day’s work for “unskilled” labor. So 30 is a month’s pay. If we calculate that based on the minimum wage in the US today, he was paid about \$1,300.

about to make money for selling him out? If he, or the other disciples, are really concerned about the plight of the poor, then maybe they should look at their own choices before they judge others.<sup>23</sup> It is clear to Jesus, and to the onlookers with him, that this woman recognizes who he is, and understands what is about to happen to him. I have always wondered if the real reason the disciples protest is because they didn't get it, but this woman, who the author of Mark doesn't even bother to name, has been paying attention. She understands what the disciples do not. Looking back, we can see how correct she was, but the disciples have missed it entirely in this moment. When have you had an experience like this in your life? Were you more like the disciples, like Jesus, or like the woman?

**Prayer:** God of abundance, teach us how to share love extravagantly and not to count the cost. May we be as bold as the woman with the alabaster jar and rejoice in your presence whenever we see you in the world around us. Help us to see your face in every person that we meet. Amen.

**Section two:** Read this one if you have some time and want to go deeper.

**Prayer for Illumination:** Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that, as the scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.<sup>24</sup>

**Scripture:** Grab a Bible (or click the link) and read [Mark 14:1-11](#)

#### Questions and Observations:

- The scribes and chief priests are still plotting against Jesus, but they still haven't found the right path to his destruction. They believe that the people are still on his side. What do you think will happen to make the crowds turn?<sup>25</sup>
- Some theologians use Mark 14:7 as justification for not working towards ending the scourge of poverty. Do you think that is what Jesus intends his disciples to take away from his words? If not, what is the point that he is trying to make?
- The scribes and chief priests finally find their inside man, Judas. Judas was a zealot. He wanted to overthrow the power of Roman rule by force. The zealots had made a good amount of trouble for Rome, but not enough to really challenge the power of their massive empire. Why do you think Judas would choose to betray Jesus?

#### Prayer Practice:

There was a time when worship was a multi-sensory experience. Actually, there are still many faith traditions, Christian and otherwise, that engage all the senses when in worship. There are houses of worship where the first thing that you do is to remove your shoes. You will **feel** the holy ground beneath your feet. It connects you to the divine and leaves you feeling a bit more vulnerable and humble. Many faith traditions use food in worship, from communion to eating

<sup>23</sup> What was that thing Jesus said about pointing out specks in other people's eyes when you have A WHOLE LOG in your own?

<sup>24</sup> UMH pg 6

<sup>25</sup> Yes, I have already asked you this question. Answer it again!



fruit that was offered first to a god, **taste** is a very common sense to engage in worship. Incense is also common in Catholic, and Orthodox churches, as well as in Hindu and some forms of Buddhist worship which brings the sense of **smell** into worship. Almost all forms of worship include music, instruments, chanting, singing, or speaking, making **sound** a very important sense that is engaged in worship. Last, but not least, most worshiping spaces also have a strong **visual** impact, from Hindu and Buddhist shrines often adorned with fruit and flowers, to Protestant churches with our stained glass windows and altar tables decorated with flowers, candles, and crosses, to Orthodox churches covered in golden icons, or mosques with flowing calligraphy. Worship engages all of our senses.

So, our prayer practice today is to set up for yourself a sensory worship, prayer, or meditation experience. Think about setting up a space for yourself to pray, worship, or meditate that is going to engage all of your senses. Whenever I read the story of the woman with the alabaster jar, I can't help but to remember the smell of spikenard. You may not have that on hand, but grab some incense or a scented candle. **Smell** it and breathe it in. Set up or go to a space where you can take off your shoes and **feel** the ground under your feet. Find some images, pictures, or objects to adorn your space that you can **look** at and that will remind you of God's glory. Play, sing, or **listen** to worshipful music. Read or listen to poetry or scripture. Eat bread (or figs if you still have them) or something else that will remind you of your devotion to God through **taste**. And while you are in this holy place, speak to God.



### Section one

**Scripture:** Mark 14:22-25

**22** 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." **23** Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. **24** He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. **25** 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."

**Devotion:** "The Last Supper"

On the Thursday of Holy Week, Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples. Passover is a commemoration of God's liberating work with the Hebrew people. I believe that it is significant that one of the last things that Jesus does before his passion and death is to give new meaning to this moment for those who follow and love him. Passover represents God's saving work, and Jesus is about to complete that work in a new way on the cross. He is the perfect and unblemished lamb that is sacrificed for his people. His blood marks us as God's own who should be spared from the life-stealing force that threatens humanity. When we share in his blood and in his body we are made one with Christ, one with one another, and one with all those who have even taken the sacrament before along with all those who will ever take it after. This is a powerful tool of unity and connection. It may feel mundane to us sometimes, but remember, every single time you take communion, you are re-joined, re-connected, and re-membered in the body of Christ. The next time you eat the bread and drink from the cup try to imagine that web of connection and let yourself be amazed by it.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, your Anointed One, on the night before he suffered, instituted that 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. Amen.<sup>26</sup>

**Section two:** Read this one if you have some time and want to go deeper.

**Prayer for Illumination:** Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that, as the scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.<sup>27</sup>

**Scripture:** Grab a Bible (or click the link) and read [Mark 14:12-72](#)

### Questions and observations:

- Jesus says that it is one who is dipping bread into the bowl with him that will betray him. This is a sign to the readers of the day as to just how close and special the relationship is between Jesus and Judas.<sup>28</sup> These guys have become a family. The betrayal that Jesus anticipates is so great that it is hard for the disciples<sup>29</sup> to even imagine that one of them could do such a thing. Have you ever experienced this kind of betrayal?<sup>30</sup> If so, what did it feel like? How did you deal with it? If not, then raise a prayer of thanksgiving for not having had that experience.
- What does taking communion mean for you? How does it affect or inform your faith? How does it form you?
- Put yourself into the story as Peter. What makes you deny Jesus?
- Why do you think Peter, James and John couldn't stay awake? Have you ever needed a friend's support and they just couldn't give it? Have you ever wanted to support a friend in need and not been able to? What were those experiences like?
- Re-read Mark 14:51. What's up with the naked dude?<sup>31</sup>
- What is the significance of Jesus answering the question, "Are you the Messiah?" with the words, "I am."?

### Prayer Practice:

If you are able to attend the Maundy Thursday service of Tenebrae at our church, or at another church, I highly suggest that be your prayer practice for today. If that isn't an option for you, then take some time today to worship in the style of Taize. You can find Taize worship services on YouTube. [Here's an example](#). Or just get onto youtube.com and search the words Taize Community. The official channel for the Taize community should pop up there.

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<sup>26</sup> UMH #283

<sup>27</sup> UMH pg 6

<sup>28</sup> As well as the rest of the disciples. They are all eating together this way.

<sup>29</sup> With the exception of Judas for obvious backstabby reasons.

<sup>30</sup> In the position of either Jesus or Judas

<sup>31</sup> Just take a guess. No one knows the answer. It is just fun to speculate. Have a moment of levity in the middle of this dark story.



### Section one

**Scripture:** Mark 15:33-39

**33** When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. **34** At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" **35** When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." **36** And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." **37** Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. **38** And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. **39** Now when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

**Devotion:** "Jesus Dies"

Friday of Holy Week is the day that Jesus dies. It isn't a pleasant image to sit with. Less than a week ago he was being honored and praised. Now he has been mocked, beaten, hung from a cross, and has died. A lot can happen in a few days' time. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus only speaks one time after his trial. We read his words in verse 34. Jesus calls out and asks God why he has been forsaken. This is a deeply important moment. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus *is* God. How is it possible for God to have left him? If even Jesus can feel distant or even abandoned by God, then we can feel that too. Maybe you have felt far from God or found it hard to connect with God. Maybe you have gone through something difficult, or even terrible, and in that moment you have felt like God has left you. You aren't alone in that feeling, Jesus felt it too. But, we know that it isn't possible for God to have left Jesus, they are one in the same. God doesn't leave you

either, but pain and grief can leave us feeling that way. In those moments, be comforted in knowing that Jesus felt that way too. He has been treated in some of the worst ways that humans can treat each other. Take your pain and your grief to Jesus. He understands. You are not alone, even when God feels distant. Reach back out to God and to your community. You do not have to suffer alone.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, graciously behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed 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.<sup>32</sup>

**Section two:** Read this one if you have some time and want to go deeper.

**Prayer for Illumination:** Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that, as the scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.<sup>33</sup>

**Scripture:** Grab a Bible (or click the link) and read [Mark 15:1-47](#)

#### Questions and observations:

- Why do you think Pilate was willing to execute a man that he did not believe deserved it?
- Jesus is mocked, beaten and abused before he makes his way to the cross. Why do you think humans do this kind of thing to each other? Why did they do it to Jesus?
- Jesus refused the spiced wine, which would have helped to dull his pain. Why do you think he rejected this merciful offer?<sup>34</sup>
- What does it mean that the veil in the temple was torn when Jesus died?
- What may have compelled Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the sanhedrin, to offer his tomb to Jesus?

#### Prayer Practice:

My suggested prayer practice for you is to fast from all food for several hours. I suggest planning to skip at least two meals. Remember that you can drink juice to keep your blood sugar up if need be, but try your best to eat nothing and drink only water during your fast. Fasting is a great way to remember a few things; one, that you are a mortal being that must eat to survive, you are only a few days without food away from dying. You are a fragile and fleeting creature. You are dust and to dust you will return. Second, fasting reminds us that we must be grateful to God for everything that we have. God created everything and then gave it to us to care for. We would not have the food that nourishes us and sustains our lives if not for our gracious creator who died for us this day. Third, hunger is uncomfortable. Discomfort in our physical bodies can

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<sup>32</sup> UMH #284

<sup>33</sup> UMH pg 6

<sup>34</sup> Side note, spiced wine was expensive and usually reserved for the wealthy and powerful. Some scholars believe offering it to him may have been a real act of charity. Other believe that it was another way to mock him because it was a drink of kings and he was a king hung on a cross.



help us feel connected to Jesus and his sacrifice today. If you have health restrictions that do not allow you to fast, then find another way to be physically reminded of your mortality today.



### Section one

**Scripture:** Matthew 27:62-66

**62** The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate **63** and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ **64** Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise, his disciples may go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” **65** Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” **66** So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

**Devotion:** “A Day of Silence”

The Saturday of Holy Week is a day of silence. Jesus is dead, and his body lies in a tomb. It is easy to skip over this day. We hold Easter egg hunts, or spend the day prepping for Easter—washing and ironing our Easter Sunday best clothes, getting all the supplies we need for Easter dinner with the family, putting together Easter baskets, and so on. We fill this day with activities and we wait in joyful anticipation while dreaming of indulging in whatever thing we have given up during Lent. But this is a day that is unlike any other. God has died. He lays dead in a tomb. This is a day where the voice of God is silent. Those who love Jesus are in deep mourning. Even the ones with the most faith must have had at least one moment of thinking, “It is really over isn’t it? He’s dead, and the movement dies with him.” In order for us to have scripture to read for Holy Saturday, we have to go to a different Gospel. Mark’s Gospel says nothing at all

about this day. There is just silence. Dead air. We aren't comfortable with silence, or with sitting in grief, or with uncertainty. But that is what Holy Saturday is about. In the midst of your Easter preparations and celebrations, take a moment this day to be in silence. Don't avert your eyes from death. This is the last day of Lent. Only silence comes from the cross, the tomb, the disciples, and God. Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return. Repent, and believe the gospel.

**Prayer:** Merciful and everliving God, Creator of heaven and earth, the crucified body of your Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy day. Grant that we may await with him the dawning of the third day and rise in newness of life, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.<sup>35</sup>

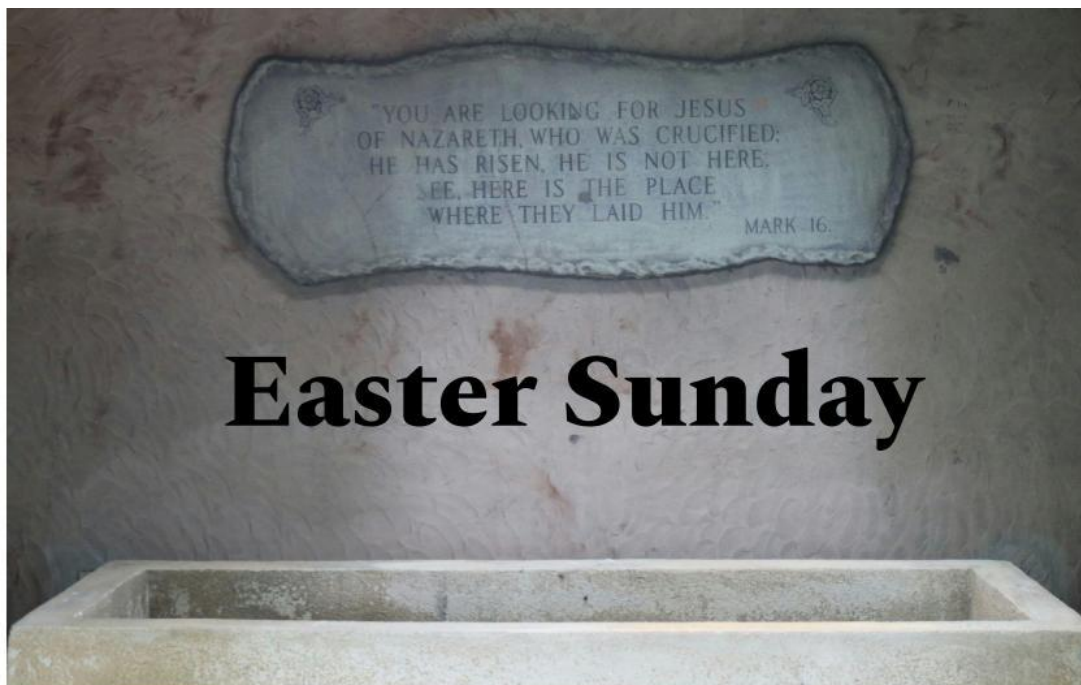
### **Section two:**

#### **Prayer Practice:**

If at all possible, find a quiet dark place and sit in silence. Do this for as long as you can. You can speak to God if you want, but the most important thing to do with this prayer practice today is to listen. Sit in the silence and listen for the voice of God.

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<sup>35</sup> BOW #367



### Section one

**Scripture:** Mark 16:1-8

**16** When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. **2** And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. **3** They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” **4** When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. **5** As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. **6** But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. **7** But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” **8** So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

**Devotion:** “Christ is Risen!”

Holy Week is over. You have made it to Easter Sunday! Jesus is risen from the dead. It is time to celebrate! Mark’s Gospel tells us that Mary, Mary, and Salome have come to the tomb, ready to care for Jesus’ body, but instead they find the stone rolled away, and a young man robed in white tells them that they will not find Jesus here. He is alive! He’s gone ahead to Galilee and wants to see his disciples there. The women are terrified and they run away and tell no one. Originally, Mark’s Gospel ends right there. That’s it! Jesus is gone. They do not see him. They run away and say nothing. Later editors added to Mark’s Gospel, and the other Gospels also give us more details and slightly different tellings of what happened that day. There is something intriguing though about the original ending of Mark’s Gospel. It is an ending to the

story that requires a lot of faith from the reader. The women do not see Jesus or interact with him. We don't know how the other disciples reacted to the news. We, the reader, along with the women have to take it on faith that what this mysterious man-in-white says is true. There were rumors after Easter Sunday that the disciples were lying and had faked the resurrection. If we only had the original ending of Mark to go on, it would be pretty easy to see why those rumors came up. That seems like a logical explanation for what happened. Early Christians had to have a lot of faith because evidence was scarce, and yet, the community grew. Today we are challenged too. Folks may think that we are silly, gullible, or even deluded or lacking intelligence if we believe in the resurrection of Jesus. But here we stand anyway two thousand years later celebrating our God who died and did not stay dead, and who has promised to raise us up to eternal life with him after we shuffle off our mortal coils. What gives you faith? Why do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? What does his resurrection mean to you?

**Prayer:** Almighty God, through Jesus Christ you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we, who celebrate the day of the Lord's resurrection, may, by the renewing of your Spirit arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.<sup>36</sup>

**Section two:** Read this one if you have some time and want to go deeper.

**Prayer for Illumination:** Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that, as the scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.<sup>37</sup>

**Scripture:** Grab a Bible (or click the link) and read [Mark 16:1-20](#)

**Questions and observations:**

- The original ending of Mark is verse 16:8. How would you feel if the story really stopped there?
- Verse 16:9 tells us that the first person the resurrected Jesus spoke to was Mary Magdalene. Women are present with Jesus at his resurrection in all of the gospels. Why do you think women were sidelined in the leadership of the Christian movement when Jesus himself chose them to be the first preachers of the gospel and first witnesses to the resurrection?
- Two unnamed disciples saw Jesus and told the other disciples. They were not believed. Would you have believed them? Why or why not.
- Jesus then goes to see them all together and isn't pleased that the unnamed disciples were not believed. Why do you think this upset Jesus so much?
- How do you proclaim the Good News?
- Mark 16:17-18 has been used as a reason to bring poisonous snakes into worship and to encourage believers to drink poison. Do you think that is what the author of these

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<sup>36</sup> UMH #320

<sup>37</sup> UMH pg 6

edits to Mark's Gospel intended? What do you think it is supposed to mean? Have you ever been to a snake handling church?

### **Prayer Practice:**

There is an old church tradition that dictates we stop using the word "Alleluia"<sup>38</sup> throughout Lent. Some churches even invite children to write the word on a piece of paper and then put it in a box which the pastor then locks up and places someone in the sanctuary throughout the season. Then on Easter Sunday morning, the box is unlocked and our Alleluias are released! Today's prayer practice is this; every time you have the opportunity today, say Alleluia. This will require some mindfulness. Pay attention to everything that is happening around you today and any time you think God should be praised for something that you see or experience, say Alleluia out loud. Give God praise and thanksgiving for everything glorious and wonderful that you experience on this Easter day. Celebrate with joy and thankfulness.

### Work Cited

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<sup>38</sup> Or "Hallelujah", or any other form of this word