

Background for Week 15

We continue to have a front row seat to the intimate last moments of Jesus' life. This chapter concludes his trial and narrates his crucifixion and burial.

As commentator Gerard Sloyan writes about the gospel of John, faith in Jesus "is God's doing but it is not without a component of human responsibility. The refusal to believe is by all means presented as a conscious choice of darkness over the Light."

As we've heard and seen along the way:

- John often zeros in on Jesus as the Son of God, as the person who is closest to the Father than anyone has ever been before.
- Jesus is a sign of division. The battle of opposites continues, intensifies in fact here.
- Christ's identity is revealed through what he says and does, which does not necessarily exclude silence and inaction. Notice how little Jesus talks here compared to the times when he was out among people.

Text for this week: John 19:1-42

1. Read John 19:1-42 in its entirety. What jumps out at you in the text? What thoughts are inspired by it? What questions arise?
2. Next, we'll break it down by verses.
 - a) 1-12:
 - Vs. 1-3: What feelings emerge as you read this scene? Have you ever been publicly humiliated, ridiculed or put on display?
 - 6: Have you ever been so incensed that your anger turned violent, even in thought or word? What other times have you witnessed the mob mentality?
 - 11: What are the possibilities of who could be the one "from above" that gave Pilate power over Jesus?
 - b) Vs. 13-25a:
 - 15: Though the religious leaders accuse Jesus of blasphemy, they claim no king but the secular emperor. It is the ultimate betrayal of trust in Yahweh and outright denies God's sovereignty. This brings to mind 1 Sam. At some point after Yahweh has brought them out of Egypt, Israel asks the prophet Samuel to appoint a king to govern them. This is the beginning of the monarchy. The Lord responds in 1 Sam 8:7 noting their rejection of God back then.
 - 17: What crosses have you had to bear? Have you ever done so alone, with no other humans to help carry the weight?
 - 18: Some people don't watch movies such as *The Passion of the Christ*

because it is too uncomfortable to witness the crucifixion. Some might even find merely thinking about it to be too much. What about you?

- Vs. 19, 21-22: Consider what the Jews requested be put on the sign and what was actually written. What message does each of them convey? What is ironic about it?
- 24: This scripture references is from Psalm 22, which is often read at the Maundy Thursday service.

c) Vs 25b-30:

- 25: Put yourself in the shoes of his family and friends. Have you ever had a child or a close relative or friend tragically die? What was that like for you? How are you coping?
- Vs. 26-27: Women in those days had no legal rights and no sustainable way to support themselves. Why do you think Jesus would say, “here is your son” and “here is your mother?” What does Jesus’ spoken act do for his mom? His friend?
- 28: This statement harkens back to Psalm 69:21. What do you think Jesus meant here when he said he was thirsty? What have you been offered when you were “thirsty?” What quenches it?
- 29: According to the Oxford Annotated Bible, hyssop is “a wild shrub whose branches were used for sprinkling blood and water in religious ceremonies.”
- 30: Reflect on what Jesus might have meant when he said, “It is finished.”

d) Vs 31-37:

- Vs 31-32: “...great day of solemnity” refers to the holiness of the first day of Passover (see Deut 21:23). Crucifixion was meant to be an agonizingly slow death. In addition to exposure to the elements, a person would tire from bearing his/her weight and trying to keep themselves lifted up enough that the nail in the feet/ankle area wouldn’t tear and so they could breathe. So, to speed up their deaths, they broke the legs so they couldn’t “stand” any longer to catch their breathe.
- 34: The blood and water are both literal and symbolic. What would they perhaps denote?
- Vs. 36-37: It is of course Passover as has been mentioned, when the people will celebrate God’s saving act of passing over their house while slaves in Egypt. During which they will partake of a slaughtered lamb. A number of times now John has made scripture references. This is to identify Jesus as the embodiment of the Passover Lamb (Ex 12:46 and also Ps 34:20 and Zech 12:10). This is part of the development of one atonement theory (Substitution, Satisfaction, and Sacrifice). Atonement, from the English “at” and “one”, has to do of course with how we

understand the cross in relation to salvation. What is your take on Jesus' death on the cross? What does it have to do with our salvation? (For more interesting reading, check out *Making Sense of the Cross* which is a conversation based book written by David Lose on the atonement theories.)

e) Vs 38-42:

- 38: Have you ever hidden your faith from others for fear of what they might say?
- 40: Do you know of or have any unique preparation practices from your ethnic heritage? What are some of the common practices in the church? What is the point of them? In your opinion, are they archaic rites or do you find meaning in them? Talk about any distinctive practices you've experienced from another faith tradition, not just in Christianity but other religions as well.
- 41: Jesus is arrested, buried, and raised in a garden. What do you make of that?

3. General questions:

a) Churches for years have struggled with the question of what to do with Palm Sunday. Do we keep it focused just on those texts or do we include the Passion narrative? The trend to include the crucifixion the Sun before Easter started a number of years ago in response to the fact that fewer and fewer people were attending Good Friday services. To not hear the passion story, but to jump from Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem to his celebrated resurrection seriously robs us of a critical aspect of our faith. One that is ugly yes, but one that is crucial to our salvation. What does the resurrection mean if there is no death? How did you observe the Three Holy Days that lead up to Easter (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Vigil)?

For your prayers:

Dear Lord, we beg of you to govern our lives and then turn around and crucify you in the things we think, say, and do-to others, to your creation, and to ourselves. Forgive us. Break the power of sin in our lives. Wash us clean in the holy water of baptism and in your precious blood of communion. Amen.

Next week: John 20:1-21:25