

A better way
Meditations for Holy Week 2022



In these weeks leading to Easter, we are appalled at images of destruction in Ukraine. We may feel overwhelmed and powerless. These meditations aim to help us find a better way, following the way that Jesus showed us in journeying through that Holy Week so long ago. Please meditate daily, journal your reflections and consider yourself invited to come share them in the online holy listening circle (zoom link available [here](#)).



The scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, ©1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scriptures are selected from the Revised Common Lectionary. Images are from Pixabay.

Week preceding Sunday April 10 - Luke 19:28-40

April 10 is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. There are no palm branches in Luke's version. There is much use of garments, though, which is why some churches celebrate this Sunday as Garment Sunday instead.



We remember that Luke wrote his gospel to provide an 'orderly account' of those things in which his audience had already been instructed. So Luke's audience would not read his gospel like a mystery novel, eager to learn the next twist in the plot. Luke had told them he was trying to provide an explanation to help his audience - and us - make sense of the story we already know.

Today's passage continues the demonstration of Jesus's kingship, the qualities of his kingdom. Luke embellishes the remembered fact - that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey - with imaginative touches and old-testament references to help explain the larger arc of Jesus's life, death and resurrection. Here's the story (Luke 19:28-40):

8 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, **30** saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **31** If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" **32** So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. **33** As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" **34** They said, "The Lord needs it." **35** Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. **36** As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. **37** As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, **38** saying,

"Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." **40** He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Jesus's way of entering Jerusalem is a parody of how the Roman governor was entering through another gate at much the same time. For example:

- Jesus enters surrounded by his disciples and followers brandishing their traveling garments, not by soldiers in their fine regalia with banners, flags, swords and lances.
- Jesus rides a donkey - a lactating donkey accompanied by her foal - not a broad, powerful, well-trained warhorse.



- For a saddle, Jesus uses a cloak, not a finely-tooled construction of solid leather.
- Jesus enters (scholars think) through the eastern gate opening toward the Mount of Olives, not the magnificent ceremonial gate leading north to Caesarea Maritima, the gate through which Pontius Pilate is entering in all his intimidating finery and trappings of power to supervise Passover, this politically volatile holiday in which the Jewish people remember their liberation from oppression.

Luke also adds an (adapted) quote from Psalm 118: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord." The adaptation, using the word 'king' instead of 'he', signals how the disciples are viewing Jesus. This reference to the old testament serves to explain the significance of Jesus in terms of the older Hebrew writings. His words about the stones shouting out is thought by scholars to be a well-known saying that Luke has included to emphasize the boundary-breaking significance of these events.



Questions for reflection

- in what ways might we support leaders who today imitate Jesus's humility?
- in what ways might we oppose the use of violence and military might, while remaining compassionate and holding sacred all life lived in communion with God?
- what might be your next step toward a better way?

Monday April 11 - John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.



Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her

alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

A few comments

- Mary's action is counter-cultural. It is an intimate act conducted in public; it flies in the face of the power-culture that would reserve luxury goods like expensive aromatic oil for special people and special occasions.
- That money-culture has even influenced the values of Jesus's disciple, Judas.
- Mary is criticized for her action.
- Jesus voices support for Mary.
- Even Lazarus is threatened because of his inactive but central participation.

Questions for reflection

- in what ways might we imitate Mary's example?
- what is the 'costly perfume' that we might now feel called to give?
- what might be your next step toward a better way?

Tuesday April 12 - John 12:20-36

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be



glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”



After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

A few comments

- This story finds Jesus seemingly preoccupied with his coming death. He has retreated from the crowds that wish to meet him, and later he hides from the disciples as well.
- Jesus's words call his disciples to action: follow, serve, walk while you have the light, believe, become children of light.
- Jesus resists the temptation to seek personal safety: his task is to be lifted up for all people.

Questions for reflection

- in what ways might we be called to become children of light in our times?
- in what ways might we risk our personal safety and comforts to help others?
- what might be your next step toward a better way?

Wednesday April 13 - John 13:21-32

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the



one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need

for the festival”; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.”

A few comments

- This story finds Jesus troubled in spirit, perhaps anxious about what lay before him.
- Jesus instructs Judas, his betrayer, to ‘do quickly what you are going to do.’
- Jesus then gives a shout of triumph; perhaps glorying in having the courage to allow himself to be betrayed.

Question for reflection

- in what ways have we betrayed others?
- in what ways might we need to forgive people who have betrayed us?
- what might be your next step toward a better way?

Thursday April 14 - John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You



will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 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."

A few comments

- This story describes Jesus loving the disciples to the end, not stopping.
- Jesus assumes the role of servant, washing feet.
- Anyone who wishes to be Jesus's disciple must allow Jesus to act as servant.
- Disciples are to do for each other as Jesus has done for them.
- Jesus gives the new commandment of love.

Questions for reflection

- in what ways might we be called to imitate Jesus's example of serving others?
- in what ways might we love one another in these times of war and oppression?
- what might be your next step toward a better way?

Friday April 15 - John 18:1-19:42

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his



disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back

and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me."

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he

had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.



Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

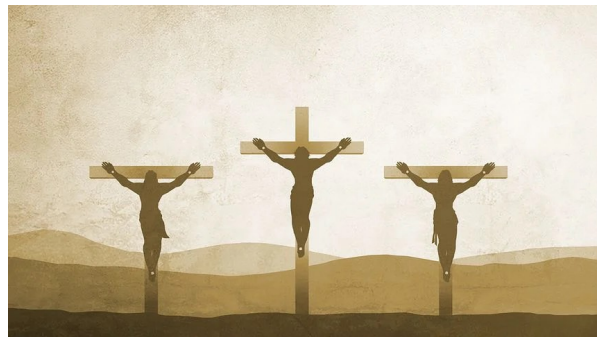
Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and

crucify him; I find no case against him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.” Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”



When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

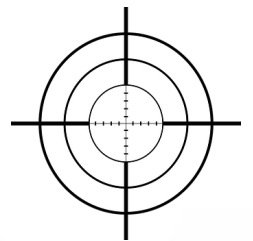


A few comments

- Throughout this long account we see manifestations of the power of the dominant culture
 - soldiers, police, torches and weapons
 - people with authority - Annas, Caiaphas and Pilate
 - the threat of the emperor
 - the legal process
 - the intimidation of Peter
 - the mob frenzy of the crowd
- We also see Jesus's quiet persistence in resisting these manifestations, speaking truth to power and continuing to show loving compassion

Questions for reflection

- in what ways does the dominant culture seek power over us today?
- in what ways might we resist, speak truth to power and be lovingly compassionate?
- what might be your next step toward a better way?



Saturday April 16

The lectionary provides no new gospel account for today. It is a day for remembering, for experiencing the sense of disappointment and loneliness, a day for grieving.

We suggest you might re-read your notes from Lent and Holy Week. To wrap up your time of Lenten and Holy week reflection, we offer three questions.

- what actions might we take to bring about compassionate and fair redistribution of resources?
- in what ways might we oppose the use of violence and military might, while remaining compassionate and holding sacred all life lived in communion with God?
- what might be some next steps for you toward a better way?



We also suggest that you participate in today's Easter Vigil, which will include Ukraine as one focus. The vigil will take place from 3 to 4 pm, in two separate locations: in-person in the sanctuary and online on ZOOM (to receive the zoom link, email spirituallisteningcircle@gmail.com).

Sunday April 17 - suggestions for Easter Sunday

Come and participate in the online holy listening circle (request zoom link [here](#)).

Participate in Harcourt's worship service (details [here](#)).



Hallelujah, Christ is risen

These meditations are brought to you by Harcourt's spiritual life committee