

LENT: A PILGRIMAGE WITH JESUS TO THE CROSS

Today is Passion Sunday, the 6th Sunday of Lent. Jesus is now mere days from the Cross, and is departing popularity – where people want to crown him king – to rejection, where the mob favours mercy and exoneration for a known murderer named Barabbas. God's most beautiful plan is about to reach its climax . . . and our sinfulness has never seemed more shameful, more disgusting, more costly.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT: Read Isaiah 53; Psalm 22:1-18; Luke 23:13-49 (below).

Luke 23:13-49

¹³ Then Pilate called together the leading priests and other religious leaders, along with the people, ¹⁴ and he announced his verdict. "You brought this man to me, accusing him of leading a revolt. I have examined him thoroughly on this point in your presence and find him innocent. ¹⁵ Herod came to the same conclusion and sent him back to us. Nothing this man has done calls for the death penalty. ¹⁶ So I will have him flogged, and then I will release him."

¹⁸ Then a mighty roar rose from the crowd, and with one voice they shouted, "Kill him, and release Barabbas to us!" ¹⁹ (Barabbas was in prison for taking part in an insurrection in Jerusalem against the government, and for murder.) ²⁰ Pilate argued with them, because he wanted to release Jesus. ²¹ But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

²² For the third time he demanded, "Why? What crime has he committed? I have found no reason to sentence him to death. So I will have him flogged, and then I will release him."

²³ But the mob shouted louder and louder, demanding that Jesus be crucified, and their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate sentenced Jesus to die as they demanded. ²⁵ As they had requested, he released Barabbas, the man in prison for insurrection and murder. But he turned Jesus over to them to do as they wished.

The Crucifixion

²⁶ As they led Jesus away, a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, happened to be coming in from the countryside. The soldiers seized him and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A large crowd trailed behind, including many grief-stricken women. ²⁸ But Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the days are coming when they will say, 'Fortunate indeed are the women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child and the breasts that have never nursed.' ³⁰ People will beg the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and plead with the hills, 'Bury us.' ³¹ For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

³² Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. ³³ When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

³⁵ The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. "He saved others," they said, "let him save himself if he is really God's Messiah, the Chosen One." ³⁶ The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine.

³⁷ They called out to him, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ A sign was fastened above him with these words: "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹ One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!"

⁴⁰ But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

⁴³ And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The Death of Jesus

⁴⁴ By this time it was about noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. ⁴⁵ The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn down the middle. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" And with those words he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ When the Roman officer overseeing the execution saw what had happened, he worshiped God and said, "Surely this man was innocent." ⁴⁸ And when all the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw what had happened, they went home in deep sorrow. ⁴⁹ But Jesus' friends, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching.

Questions inviting response:

- Take a moment and prepare a list of unordinary, unexpected moments that appear in Luke's account above. Which moments impact you more than others? Why?
- Three o'clock on Passover Friday was the moment when the lambs were slaughtered in the temple of Jerusalem. From this moment on until early Sunday morning, those who loved Jesus were in a state of shock and deep grief. It is safe to assume that they spent these 36 hours going over events in their mind again and again, with heavy hearts and clouded minds.
 - How do you plan on spending Friday evening and Saturday? As you complete your Lenten journey, will you take this time for quiet reflection and sombre thanks for Christ's death that has brought you into the holy presence of our Father God?
 - Perhaps you will consider participating this year with fellow pilgrims in some of the Passion Week events in our city, such as the Stations of the Cross or a Good Friday Service.

Prayer

Merciful God, Lover of my soul. I have only my soul to give you today – a soul full of brokenness, and even lingering darkness though I may have known you for many years. As I recommit my life to you this Easter, may you overpower my will and enter even the darkest parts of my existence, cleansing them with your grace that washes clean all who come to you. Grant me humility, but also great boldness through your Spirit. Deliver me from my shame, and bring me into the joy of your salvation. Amen.