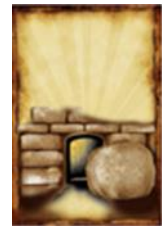


# Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings  
Holy Week, 2024



**Sunday, March 24:** *He said to his disciples, "Remain here and keep watch." ...When he returned, he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ...Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open and did not know what to answer him (Mk 14:1–15:47).*

*"They did not know what to answer him."* These words have been on my heart all week. I can take them literally: the disciples don't know how to respond to Jesus' question, "Could you not keep watch?" The obvious answer is, "No, we can't. We are exhausted and confused, and full of the Seder meal." Or I can take it a bit deeper: they don't know how to answer him this dark Passover evening, just like they struggled to answer him throughout their time together. They don't understand. God's instructions for the first Passover seem lost on them: Wake up! You are to eat with girt loins, sandals on your feet, like those who are in flight. Oh, they will be in flight, alright... just not the way God intends!

**Today's Provision: Do I know what to answer him?** When Jesus asks me to wake up, to pay attention, to keep watch with him and be with him as he suffers, how do I answer him? What do I say? How do I answer when I am called to be with him among the poor and hungry, on the border, in prisons, with the elderly and infirm, with the mentally ill, with those without hope? I'm afraid that often, much like the disciples that night, I take flight when the going gets rough. I'm not sure I really understand either, and though my spirit desires to be with him, my flesh is so weak. Perhaps, the best answer we can give to Jesus is the truth: "Lord, we are exhausted and confused. Help us understand you are with us through it all. Give us the courage to journey with you as you live among us today."

**Monday, March 25:** *"I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice" (Is 42:1-7).*

**Today's Provision: How are you called to work for justice?** This passage is from what are known as the Four Songs of the Suffering Servant (Is 42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; and 52:12–53:12). We hear all four this week, but before they get lost among all the other lengthy readings, consider reflecting on all four today. If you have *The Message* contemporary translation by Eugene Peterson, use that for a new take on the words. Notice how different these images are from our oh so human need to have our "victors" seen as powerful and strong, surely not as victims. How does the author of Second Isaiah define justice? How does that compare to your own definition? Do you aspire to work for justice? Is God calling you by name? What must change for you to answer the call to work for justice?

**Tuesday, March 26:** *Peter said, "Master, I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Amen, amen, I say to you, the cock will not crow before you deny me three times" (Jn 13:21-33, 36-38).*

A saying comes to mind as I read this: "The darkest hour is just before the day dawneth" (Thomas Fuller). Peter is in the deepest of darkness. He is afraid for his own life, he doubts, he is confused. When he responds to the accusations of the bystanders, "I do not know the man," maybe he is speaking a deeper truth. Maybe he doesn't know him. Maybe he will never know him until the day when he does indeed lay down his life for his Master.

**Today's Provision: Let the Lord look at you.** *"When a person is in the thick of his sin, his last thought is to throw himself down and repent. ...When Peter would rather have looked anywhere else than at the Lord, the Lord looked at Peter. This scarce-noticed fact [Luke 22:60-61] is the only sermon needed to anyone who sins—that the Lord turns first"* (adapted, from "Turning," by Henry Drummond, from *Bread and Wine*, 2003, p. 126). Darkness can be scary and make us weak and vulnerable. The darkness of sin and denial can lead us to turn away from the merciful Light of God. Despite our fear and weakness, let us turn and see that the Lord has turned to us first. *"Turn, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is near" (Lk 21:28).*

**Wednesday, March 27:** *Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver (Mt 26:14-25).*

There are all sorts of theories about why Judas decides to hand Jesus over to the chief priests. And we know the thirty pieces of silver refers to the value of a slave (Ex 21:32). But I wonder why the chief priests decide to do this in the first place. Couldn't they have just arrested Jesus on their own without having to pay someone? Or did they think, "Well, if people realize one of his *closest disciples* has handed him over, that can take the onus off of us!"

**Today's Provision: Do I ever "hand Jesus over?"** Do I, by my actions or lack thereof, by my words and public stances in effect hand Jesus over? Do I allow expediency or my alignment with "the authorities"—be they political or

religious—misrepresent or even betray what I know in my heart to be Jesus's message? If I present myself as Jesus' close disciple and yet betray him by my alignments and actions, do I not play into the hands of those who use him for their own gain? "*Jesus was brought down by law and order allied with religion, which is always a deadly mix*" (Barbara Brown Taylor). Think about this. Pray with this.

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**Holy Thursday, March 28:** *So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power...he rose and took off his outer garments* (Jn 13:1-15).

Jesus is fully aware that God has put everything into his power. So, what does he do? He washes the dirty feet of this rag-tag team that has been following him, to include the one who in a matter of hours will turn him over to the authorities. Think about it: Jesus gets to decide his fate, so as he lies prostrate in the garden of Gethsemane, he doesn't need to implore God to have the cup pass him by. He can decide it himself. He is God. (If you really want to make your head spin, as Chesterton writes, "*in a garden, Satan tempted man. In a garden, God tempted God.*") We talked on Monday about Isaiah's Suffering Servant and how very different the image of this servant is from anything humanity considers powerful. What would we do if we knew God had put everything into our power?

**Today's Provision: You get to decide.** It's called "freewill," and if you think about it, it's an awesome responsibility. Now, of course, things happen in our lives over which we have no control. But in most cases, we do get to decide how we will respond: with peace, with hope, with love, with courage, or with violence, with bitterness, with anger, with despair. And, most times, things that happen come down to a decision between our own will and God's will, which is why an informed conscience is essential if we are to use our freewill for good. It seems to me some people are surrendering their freewill to follow shepherds other than Jesus. You get to decide. Use this incredible gift wisely.

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**Good Friday, March 29:** "*Shall I crucify your king?*" *The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar"* (Jn 18:1-19:42).

We can't know for a fact that the chief priests did indeed say, "We have no king but Caesar," but their actions during this time support the idea. Their only goal was to preserve the uneasy peace with Rome. In their defense, they were doing what they thought they were supposed to do. This Jesus of Nazareth guy was stirring things up, talking some nonsense about the Kingdom of God as if it were something different than the Kingdom of Israel. Regardless of the proclamations of the prophets of old, the Kingdom of Israel sought, above all else, self-preservation to maintain its exclusive relationship with God. Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, open to all.

**Today's Provision: Open our hearts to all.** Take note: exclusivity is not a word associated with Jesus. Jesus did not exclude anyone: the poor and sick, sinners, non-believers, the wealthy, the scribes, and the Pharisees. He was willing to dialogue with everyone, and he was willing to let them walk away to make their own choice. And he does not exclude anyone today. All are invited to be part of the Kingdom of God. If we, in our "zeal for his house," in effect put limits on those who are welcome at the table, we are called to scrutinize our goals. Are we more concerned with preserving the kingdom of our faith practice or nation? Or are we working with Jesus to bring forth the Kingdom of God, open to all?

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**Holy Saturday, March 30:** Do you recall our theme this Lent? "*One thing to notice as you observe Jesus: he pays attention. He makes himself available. He doesn't always assume he knows what is needed, but he sees and touches both the joy and the brokenness in those around him. Try this Lent to pay attention to the people and situations around you. But more importantly, allow Jesus to touch you in your brokenness and joy. He invites you to come along and learn. Take him up on the invitation!*"

I imagine the disciples that first Holy Saturday were paying attention, alright. Locked in the upper room, they were on high alert to every noise outside, for footsteps on the stairs. I hope they each were paying attention to their various emotions: fear, grief, confusion, worry, sadness, desolation. Perhaps they were able to find some solace in each other's presence. I wonder if they were able to recall the lessons Jesus taught them. Did they share stories about how Jesus spoke to them and loved them?

Now, I know you are busy but try to allow yourself some time over the next few days. Get out your calendar and/or journal. Imagine you are in that upper room on Holy Saturday. What emotions are you feeling? Think back on the Jesus stories we read this Lent. Which ones spoke to you? How did Jesus challenge you and show his love for you? Then, if you can, look back nonjudgmentally on the various situations and people you encountered these past few weeks. Were you able to be attentive to the needs around you? To your own needs? Were you able to model Jesus' way of being available?

In another 40 days, we will celebrate the Feast of Empowerment—Pentecost—when Jesus gives us his Spirit and invites us to continue to learn, to go and live and do and say what he has taught us. Let's take these coming weeks to continue to hone our attentiveness, to look for and rejoice in Jesus' risen presence alive with us. Happy Easter!