

# THE WILD PLACES: WEEK 6

STEVE WATSON | DAILY BIBLE GUIDE | 2019

## Monday, April 15

*Jesus' God-with-us life reaches its climax in the week of his death. This one week in Jesus' life takes roughly a third of the text in the gospel accounts. We'll join Jesus for the final two days of this week, sometimes called The Passion, referring to Jesus' suffering as well as the intensity of the experiences generally.*

### Mark 14:1-9 (CEB)

It was two days before Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and legal experts through cunning tricks were searching for a way to arrest Jesus and kill him. <sup>2</sup>But they agreed that it shouldn't happen during the festival; otherwise, there would be an uproar among the people.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus was at Bethany visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. During dinner, a woman came in with a vase made of alabaster and containing very expensive perfume of pure nard. She broke open the vase and poured the perfume on his head. <sup>4</sup> Some grew angry. They said to each other, "Why waste the perfume? <sup>5</sup> This perfume could have been sold for almost a year's pay and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. <sup>7</sup> You always have the poor with you; and whenever you want, you can do something good for them. But you won't always have me. <sup>8</sup> She has done what she could. She has anointed my body ahead of time for burial. <sup>9</sup> I tell you the truth that, wherever in the whole world the good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her."

### Points of Interest

- Mark sets the scene by reminding us of the religious and political significance of this week. It's a holy week, the city's population is swelling with pilgrims, and a delegation of Roman soldiers has arrived as well. Crowd control is a concern, and reputations are at stake. The most empowered members of Jesus' society find his God-with-all-people-in-all-places message threatening to their control and are working out strategy and power angles.
- Meanwhile, Jesus has dinner with his friends – a ragtag group of young men from the countryside, a formerly ill and outcast host, and a woman who loves and respects Jesus immensely and has chosen a complex, intense, and costly way to express that love.
- The unnamed woman's breaking open of the vase is evocative of so much. She's emptying her life savings in giving Jesus a costly, extravagant, impractical gift. She's also treating him like a king, or a priest, or a loved one who has died – these were occasions for anointing in her culture – coronation, ordination, and preparation for burial. Any one of these would be an intense statement to make. But whatever she

had in mind, Jesus picks option three, interpreting the anointing as pre-death burial preparation.

- The men argue about the impracticality and waste of the gesture. For what it's worth, almost every man – other than Jesus – in the Passion narratives comes off poorly. All the women, every one, are devoted and loyal. I'm not telling anyone what to make of this, but it doesn't seem accidental and does seem noteworthy.
- I can't unpack all the symbolism and dense language here, but there's something about Jesus' explanation that is like communion in reverse. In the bread and the wine, representing Jesus' body and blood, the good news is embodied and proclaimed – the embodied God/human broken and poured out for us. Here, in preparation, a human gives broken and poured out love to Jesus, and this too is part of how the good news will be embodied and proclaimed.
- There's some kind of mirroring happening here. As if Jesus' passion is seeking to call out our own. As if the reaction that best honors Jesus' suffering is to join him in a broken-open heart – giving more generously, loving more extravagantly. There's a big heart and a big love opening up here.

### **A Direction for Prayer**

Pray for your church, if you have one, that more and more people would be moved to big-hearted, extravagant love of Jesus and others, thus embodying and announcing the good news everywhere.

### **Spiritual Exercise of the Week**

*Toward Courage over Fear* – If you're up for it today, consider for a moment a great fear of yours – a failure, a loss, or trouble you might face, perhaps even your own death. Ask Jesus to assure you that Jesus will be with you should you face this fear. Ask Jesus: how will you be with me in compassion and strength? After a few moments of imaginative prayer, welcoming Jesus' presence with you, close by praying this short excerpt from the ancient prayer, The Breastplate of Saint Patrick:

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Through the strength of Christ's healing with his laughter,  
Through the strength of Christ's teaching with his feasting,  
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Through the strength of Christ's resurrection with his ascension,  
Through the strength of Christ's descent for the judgment of doom.*

## Tuesday, April 16

### Matthew 14:10-26 (CEB)

<sup>10</sup> Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to give Jesus up to them. <sup>11</sup> When they heard it, they were delighted and promised to give him money. So he started looking for an opportunity to turn him in.

<sup>12</sup> On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, the disciples said to Jesus, “Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover meal?”

<sup>13</sup> He sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the city. A man carrying a water jar will meet you. Follow him. <sup>14</sup> Wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The teacher asks, “Where is my guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?”’ <sup>15</sup> He will show you a large room upstairs already furnished. Prepare for us there.” <sup>16</sup> The disciples left, came into the city, found everything just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

<sup>17</sup> That evening, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. <sup>18</sup> During the meal, Jesus said, “I assure you that one of you will betray me—someone eating with me.”

<sup>19</sup> Deeply saddened, they asked him, one by one, “It’s not me, is it?”

<sup>20</sup> Jesus answered, “It’s one of the Twelve, one who is dipping bread with me into this bowl. <sup>21</sup> The Human One goes to his death just as it is written about him. But how terrible it is for that person who betrays the Human One! It would have been better for him if he had never been born.”

<sup>22</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” <sup>23</sup> He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. <sup>24</sup> He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. <sup>25</sup> I assure you that I won’t drink wine again until that day when I drink it in a new way in God’s kingdom.” <sup>26</sup> After singing songs of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

### Points of Interest

- Preparation for the Passover always has been and continues to be a big deal. Clear the leaven out of your home, prepare for hospitality and feasting. The disciples and Jesus are doing this. It’s meant to be alarming that Judas is preparing for Passover by making financial arrangements for betrayal. While our jaws drop in horror, they delight in opportunity. Perhaps this is the nature of all betrayals – a song is playing that we should be listening to, even singing along, while we stridently whistle an unrelated, discordant tune.
- What a jarring meal. Jesus prepares for one of his closest students and friends to betray him. He feels and talks about all the stakes of this night. There is the waste of a life, the undying regret associated with Judas’ betrayal. And there is Jesus most pressing into his identity as the True Human (most traditionally translated “Son of Man”) as he prepares to die. It’s as if he’s aware that his death is destiny, but wishes for everyone it didn’t have to come to pass quite like this.
- And then in a moment in which I would be seized by anger and sadness, and locked in defensiveness, Jesus opens his arms and his heart to his friends, Judas included, and says, “Here I am. All that I am, all that I have is yours.” Today these words read to me like strange but holy wedding vows – take all of me!

- Covenants are somewhere between promises that involve a form of mutuality and solemnity. They're a little like contracts, but with much more heart and soul. Traditionally, in the Near East, covenants were marked with blood as well. Jesus interprets his death on these terms – as a new way of God with people coming to pass.
- We'll drink together again someday, Jesus says, before they sing and get up to go. Perhaps this refers to his post-resurrection feast with them on the beach, perhaps to something heavenly. I think of it as referring to the way we all can drink with Jesus as we celebrate communion, welcoming week after week Jesus' presence and leadership.

### **A Direction for Prayer**

Pray for your friends and family that may take communion in a church this week, that it would be to them an experience of God with them. Pray for those that don't ever take communion, that through other means they may encounter the generous, self-giving love of God.

### **Spiritual Exercise of the Week**

*Toward Courage over Fear* – If you're up for it today, consider for a moment a great fear of yours – a failure, a loss, or trouble you might face, perhaps even your own death. Ask Jesus to assure you that Jesus will be with you should you face this fear. Ask Jesus: how will you be with me in compassion and strength? After a few moments of imaginative prayer, welcoming Jesus' presence with you, close by praying this short excerpt from the ancient prayer, The Breastplate of Saint Patrick:

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 Through the strength of Christ's resurrection with his ascension,  
 Through the strength of Christ's descent for the judgment of doom.*

## Wednesday, April 17

### Mark 14:27-52 (CEB)

<sup>27</sup> Jesus said to them, “You will all falter in your faithfulness to me. It is written, *I will hit the shepherd, and the sheep will go off in all directions.* <sup>28</sup> But after I’m raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”

<sup>29</sup> Peter said to him, “Even if everyone else stumbles, I won’t.”

<sup>30</sup> But Jesus said to him, “I assure you that on this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”

<sup>31</sup> But Peter insisted, “If I must die alongside you, I won’t deny you.” And they all said the same thing.

<sup>32</sup> Jesus and his disciples came to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus said to them, “Sit here while I pray.” <sup>33</sup> He took Peter, James, and John along with him. He began to feel despair and was anxious. <sup>34</sup> He said to them, “I’m very sad. It’s as if I’m dying. Stay here and keep alert.” <sup>35</sup> Then he went a short distance farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if possible, he might be spared the time of suffering. <sup>36</sup> He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible. Take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.”

<sup>37</sup> He came and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Couldn’t you stay alert for one hour? <sup>38</sup> Stay alert and pray so that you won’t give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak.”

<sup>39</sup> Again, he left them and prayed, repeating the same words. <sup>40</sup> And, again, when he came back, he found them sleeping, for they couldn’t keep their eyes open, and they didn’t know how to respond to him. <sup>41</sup> He came a third time and said to them, “Will you sleep and rest all night? That’s enough! The time has come for the Human One to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>42</sup> Get up! Let’s go! Look, here comes my betrayer.”

<sup>43</sup> Suddenly, while Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came with a mob carrying swords and clubs. They had been sent by the chief priests, legal experts, and elders. <sup>44</sup> His betrayer had given them a sign: “Arrest the man I kiss, and take him away under guard.”

<sup>45</sup> As soon as he got there, Judas said to Jesus, “Rabbi!” Then he kissed him. <sup>46</sup> Then they came and grabbed Jesus and arrested him.

<sup>47</sup> One of the bystanders drew a sword and struck the high priest’s slave and cut off his ear. <sup>48</sup> Jesus responded, “Have you come with swords and clubs to arrest me, like an outlaw? <sup>49</sup> Day after day, I was with you, teaching in the temple, but you didn’t arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” <sup>50</sup> And all his disciples left him and ran away. <sup>51</sup> One young man, a disciple, was wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They grabbed him, <sup>52</sup> but he left the linen cloth behind and ran away naked.

### Points of Interest

- As Jesus looks at his friends, he quotes an obscure but evocative passage of Hebrew scripture. In Zechariah 13, there is this line about violence done to a shepherd and the sheep being scattered. Jesus sees this playing out before him, just as he does a previous verse that refers to the wounds dealt to us by our friends inside their own homes. There is no wound we experience, however odd or however deep, that God who is with us in Jesus, cannot imagine or relate to.
- The last time we saw the trio of Peter, James, and John, they were witnessing Jesus’ healing power in giving life to a 12-year old girl. Now they witness Jesus’ pain and doubt, as he feels the great cost of his healing mission. There is irony, of course, that Peter pledges unending, heroic, loyal partnership, but can’t even stay awake in Jesus’ hour of need. Our spirits are all so much more eager than our capacity for follow

through, aren't they? Jesus knows and accepts this. He encourages us to ask God for all the help we need.

- Jesus prays to God on both intimate terms (“Daddy”) and desperate ones (“take away this suffering”). Trust and intimacy can accompany even honest desperation. Perhaps this is an answered prayer – God will raise Jesus from the dead, not abandoning him to grave. And perhaps this is also unanswered prayer – Jesus will continue to suffer; that is not averted. In both our answered and our unanswered prayer, Jesus is with us.
- Jesus says he is betrayed into the hands of sinners – as if to say, this is what sin looks like, in its many forms. There is a kiss used for betrayal, and weapons used to batter, hurt, and kill. Intimacy perverted into harm, violence to our spirits or bodies, through words or through force. This is the usual way of things in a hard, off the mark, world.
- As all Jesus’ students flee in fear, there is this one boy who barely gets away naked. Perhaps this boy is the author Mark, a little sibling or young friend of one of the disciples. Perhaps the boy is in a way all the disciples – unmasked in their not-yet-transformed immaturity and fear. And perhaps in a way the boy is all of us, so often afraid and vulnerable, and running from God and running from love, just when we need each other most.

### **A Direction for Prayer**

Pray for the naked boy in all your friends and family, in all of us. Pray for yourself, and pray by name for people you love, that when we are most vulnerable and afraid, we will run toward love and connection, and we will run toward God.

### **Spiritual Exercise of the Week**

*Toward Courage over Fear* – If you’re up for it today, consider for a moment a great fear of yours – a failure, a loss, or trouble you might face, perhaps even your own death. Ask Jesus to assure you that Jesus will be with you should you face this fear. Ask Jesus: how will you be with me in compassion and strength? After a few moments of imaginative prayer, welcoming Jesus’ presence with you, close by praying this short excerpt from the ancient prayer, The Breastplate of Saint Patrick:

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Through the strength of Christ’s descent for the judgment of doom.*

## Thursday, April 18

### Mark 14:53-72 (CEB)

<sup>53</sup> They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders, and legal experts gathered. <sup>54</sup> Peter followed him from a distance, right into the high priest's courtyard. He was sitting with the guards, warming himself by the fire. <sup>55</sup> The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they couldn't find any. <sup>56</sup> Many brought false testimony against him, but they contradicted each other. <sup>57</sup> Some stood to offer false witness against him, saying, <sup>58</sup> "We heard him saying, 'I will destroy this temple, constructed by humans, and within three days I will build another, one not made by humans.'" <sup>59</sup> But their testimonies didn't agree even on this point.

<sup>60</sup> Then the high priest stood up in the middle of the gathering and examined Jesus. "Aren't you going to respond to the testimony these people have brought against you?" <sup>61</sup> But Jesus was silent and didn't answer. Again, the high priest asked, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed one?"

<sup>62</sup> Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Human One sitting on the right side of the Almighty and coming on the heavenly clouds."

<sup>63</sup> Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we need any more witnesses? <sup>64</sup> You've heard his insult against God. What do you think?"

They all condemned him. "He deserves to die!"

<sup>65</sup> Some began to spit on him. Some covered his face and hit him, saying, "Prophecy!" Then the guards took him and beat him.

<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, Peter was below in the courtyard. A woman, one of the high priest's servants, approached <sup>67</sup> and saw Peter warming himself by the fire. She stared at him and said, "You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus."

<sup>68</sup> But he denied it, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand what you're saying." And he went outside into the outer courtyard. A rooster crowed.

<sup>69</sup> The female servant saw him and began a second time to say to those standing around, "This man is one of them." <sup>70</sup> But he denied it again.

A short time later, those standing around again said to Peter, "You must be one of them, because you are also a Galilean."

<sup>71</sup> But he cursed and swore, "I don't know this man you're talking about." <sup>72</sup> At that very moment, a rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered what Jesus told him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down, sobbing.

### Points of Interest

- Mark tells the story of two trials, the one in which an innocent, blameless Jesus is condemned to death, and the one in which a guilty Peter escapes harm but breaks down in shame.
- The high priest and Jesus share an insider theological moment, with high stakes for them and their fellow second temple Jews. Jesus is asked if he is God's special son, the Christ, which in Hebrew, is the Messiah. In the early first century and the decades before, hopes ran high that this figure would save Israel. Jesus hasn't used this term of himself to date, but he says, essentially: Sure, you can call me that. But he reframes his identity and mission on different terms - language lifted from the then very popular book of Daniel. Jesus says he's that mysterious figure from Daniel's prophecy,

now alive in history. He is the “Son of Man”, translated here the Human One, and repeats Daniel’s metaphorical language for God’s right-hand man and messenger to earth.

- Jesus’ trial ends with him true to himself and soul-strong, but beaten, mocked, and spat upon.
- Peter doesn’t yet face legal trial for his role as one of Jesus’ closest known associates. Yet he does face a trial of reputation. His appearance and his accent make him a dead giveaway, but he’d rather pass as someone he is not than face ridicule, humiliation, or harm for staying true to the convictions and relationships God has given him.
- Peter’s trial ends with him safe in body, but empty of heart and soul, and weeping in shame. Earlier in Mark, Jesus had said to Peter and friends that there are times we save our lives only to lose them, while there are other times that we can lose our lives in order to save them. This was one of those times. This isn’t the end for Peter, but is one of the great failings and regrets of his life.
- This week we are praying that we arise “through the strength of Christ’s descent for the judgment of doom.” Most literally, this refers to the tradition and hope that between Jesus’ death and resurrection, he descended into hell or some form of spirit netherworld for the redemption of all those that died without knowing Christ’s love and hope. More generally, the whole of the incarnation, climaxing in Jesus’ death, can be read as God joining us in all of our death, darkness, and despair - cancelling its finality and sting, and giving us God’s hope and life in its place. Whatever your version of Peter’s shame or despair, know that Jesus hasn’t given up on you or abandoned you but is present to you in your pain, cancelling its doom, and releasing God’s life to you.

### **A Direction for Prayer**

Pray for the great places of doom in your city - all the homes and lives where despair seems final or ascendant. Ask Jesus to release hope and life there, stirring friends and neighbors to speak and to be good news.

### **Spiritual Exercise of the Week**

*Toward Courage over Fear* – If you’re up for it today, consider for a moment a great fear of yours – a failure, a loss, or trouble you might face, perhaps even your own death. Ask Jesus to assure you that Jesus will be with you should you face this fear. Ask Jesus: how will you be with me in compassion and strength? After a few moments of imaginative prayer, welcoming Jesus’ presence with you, close by praying this short excerpt from the ancient prayer, The Breastplate of Saint Patrick:

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*Through the strength of Christ's resurrection with his ascension,  
Through the strength of Christ's descent for the judgment of doom*

## **Friday, April 19**

*On our final day of Bible reading in Lent, we'll read the whole of Mark 15, a long passage, but I will keep my comments at the end brief. I encourage you to read slowly, imagining yourself present as a witness, even if the material is very familiar.*

### **Mark 15 (CEB)**

At daybreak, the chief priests—with the elders, legal experts, and the whole Sanhedrin—formed a plan. They bound Jesus, led him away, and turned him over to Pilate. <sup>2</sup> Pilate questioned him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus replied, “That’s what you say.” <sup>3</sup> The chief priests were accusing him of many things.

<sup>4</sup> Pilate asked him again, “Aren’t you going to answer? What about all these accusations?” <sup>5</sup> But Jesus gave no more answers, so that Pilate marveled.

<sup>6</sup> During the festival, Pilate released one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. <sup>7</sup> A man named Barabbas was locked up with the rebels who had committed murder during an uprising. <sup>8</sup> The crowd pushed forward and asked Pilate to release someone, as he regularly did. <sup>9</sup> Pilate answered them, “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” <sup>10</sup> He knew that the chief priests had handed him over because of jealousy. <sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas to them instead. <sup>12</sup> Pilate replied, “Then what do you want me to do with the one you call king of the Jews?”

<sup>13</sup> They shouted back, “Crucify him!”

<sup>14</sup> Pilate said to them, “Why? What wrong has he done?”

They shouted even louder, “Crucify him!”

<sup>15</sup> Pilate wanted to satisfy the crowd, so he released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus whipped, then handed him over to be crucified.

<sup>16</sup> The soldiers led Jesus away into the courtyard of the palace known as the governor’s headquarters,<sup>[a]</sup> and they called together the whole company of soldiers.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>17</sup> They dressed him up in a purple robe and twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on him. <sup>18</sup> They saluted him, “Hey! King of the Jews!” <sup>19</sup> Again and again, they struck his head with a stick. They spit on him and knelt before him to honor him. <sup>20</sup> When they finished mocking him, they stripped him of the purple robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

<sup>21</sup> Simon, a man from Cyrene, Alexander and Rufus’ father, was coming in from the countryside. They forced him to carry his cross.

<sup>22</sup> They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means Skull Place.<sup>23</sup> They tried to give him wine mixed with myrrh, but he didn’t take it. <sup>24</sup> They crucified him. They divided up his clothes, drawing lots for them to determine who would take what. <sup>25</sup> It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup> The notice of the formal charge against him was written, “The king of the Jews.”<sup>27</sup> They crucified two outlaws with him, one on his right and one on his left.

<sup>29</sup> People walking by insulted him, shaking their heads and saying, “Ha! So you were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, were you? <sup>30</sup> Save yourself and come down from that cross!”

<sup>31</sup> In the same way, the chief priests were making fun of him among themselves, together with the legal experts. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself. <sup>32</sup> Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross. Then we’ll see and believe.” Even those who had been crucified with Jesus insulted him.

<sup>33</sup> From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. <sup>34</sup> At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, “*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani*,” which means, “My God, my God, why have you left me?”

<sup>35</sup> After hearing him, some standing there said, “Look! He’s calling Elijah!”<sup>36</sup> Someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, and put it on a pole. He offered it to Jesus to drink, saying, “Let’s see if Elijah will come to take him down.” <sup>37</sup> But Jesus let out a loud cry and died.

<sup>38</sup> The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. <sup>39</sup> When the centurion, who stood facing Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “This man was certainly God’s Son.”

<sup>40</sup> Some women were watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James (the younger one) and Joses, and Salome. <sup>41</sup> When Jesus was in Galilee, these women had followed and supported him, along with many other women who had come to Jerusalem with him.

<sup>42</sup> Since it was late in the afternoon on Preparation Day, just before the Sabbath,<sup>43</sup> Joseph from Arimathea dared to approach Pilate and ask for Jesus’ body. (Joseph was a prominent council member who also eagerly anticipated the coming of God’s kingdom.) <sup>44</sup> Pilate wondered if Jesus was already dead. He called the centurion and asked him whether Jesus had already died. <sup>45</sup> When he learned from the centurion that Jesus was dead, Pilate gave the dead body to Joseph. <sup>46</sup> He bought a linen cloth, took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in the cloth, and laid him in a tomb that had been carved out of rock. He rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. <sup>47</sup> Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was buried.

## Points of Interest

- I’m going to restrain myself to two comments today. The first is on anti-Semitic readings of this passage. I’ve met Jews that as late as the 1970s or 80s, were told as children that “their people killed Jesus.” So let’s get something straight: there are only a few non-Jewish characters. Pilate, who sentenced Jesus to death, and the Roman soldiers who killed Jesus were emphatically not Jewish. The army captain who praises Jesus is also not Jewish. Simon, who helps Jesus carry the beam to which he is then nailed, may or may not have been Jewish. (He was African, and some African-American writers and preachers have seen Black lynching victims in particular and the unjust sufferings of Black Americans generally as known and understood by both Simon and Jesus here.) On the other hand, the good man who buries Jesus, the women who are faithful to the end, Jesus himself, Barrabas - the enemy of the state who is freed, and many of the crowds that mock and curse Jesus are all Jewish. There are no cultural or religious heroes or villains in the crucifixion.
- Who is crucified is God’s son. The Roman centurion, an army captain there to supervise crowd control and supervise the execution itself, proclaims this after seeing Jesus’ brave, and relatively quick, surrender to death. Crucifixion victims die of slow asphyxiation, literally hanging on for dear life for many, many hours. Jesus experiences great hope and despair. The words he cries are the first verse of Psalm 22, a lament of a victim of unjust suffering, but also a song of confident hope that God is in fact still with

the victim, working for redemption. After this, Jesus rejects a homemade painkiller and surrenders to death.

Surely the Roman army captain means to call Jesus a great man, an extraordinary model of a human life - a son of the gods. And yet for Mark, his praise echoes his very first verse, in which the author titles his work: The Good News of Jesus, God's Son.

In Jesus' whole of his teaching and healing ministry, he has shown himself to be the very picture of a great human life (The Human One), which is to be full of the love and power and wisdom of God. Now in Jesus' courage and hope, he shows that he shares the nature of God. In Jesus' identification with and experience of great human suffering, he fulfills God's mission to bring the great life of God into contact with all the death of humanity. Thanks be to God.

### **A Direction for Prayer**

Pray for friends and family that in any way will mark Good Friday or Easter this weekend, that their minds and hearts would welcome the good news of God with us.

### **Spiritual Exercise of the Week**

*Toward Courage over Fear* – If you're up for it today, consider for a moment a great fear of yours – a failure, a loss, or trouble you might face, perhaps even your own death. Ask Jesus to assure you that Jesus will be with you should you face this fear. Ask Jesus: how will you be with me in compassion and strength? After a few moments of imaginative prayer, welcoming Jesus' presence with you, close by praying this short excerpt from the ancient prayer, The Breastplate of Saint Patrick:

*I arise today  
Through the strength of Christ's birth with his baptism,  
Through the strength of Christ's healing with his laughter,  
Through the strength of Christ's teaching with his feasting,  
Through the strength of Christ's crucifixion with his burial,  
Through the strength of Christ's resurrection with his ascension,  
Through the strength of Christ's descent for the judgment of doom.*