

Prayer Garden Holy Week Walk

Start of the path

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

Luke 9:51-53

Lent is a journey. It begins right after the Transfiguration when Jesus sets his face, sets his sights, on Jerusalem and the cross that he knew it would hold for him. During this season the church has traditionally brought focus to sacrifice and loss, it is the darkest season of the church. This year has been a very different journey for us as a country, and all around the world. Sacrificing has been thrust upon us. Loss and pain have followed. Take some time to connect to your own sense of loss and pain.

Prayer: Gracious God, bring comfort to this time. Hold us in your care. Send comfort to all those who are suffering, from those who mourn lost loved ones, to health care workers in shock dealing with so much death, to high school seniors with no prom. You know all, and care.

First bench

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii,^{1a} and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Mark 14:3-9

I can understand the complaint about wasted resources. There were, and are, those in tremendous need. While most of us wonder what to have for dinner, so many in the world are in want of any meal. Yet Jesus defended this act of service. Maybe this woman really understood that the crucifixion was at hand. With acceptance and faith, she was preparing him for burial. Maybe we can learn from this that there are times in life that warrant some extravagant generosity to our Lord. Then we are given an extraordinary proclamation from Christ. I ask you, have you ever heard this woman's act remembered when the good news was proclaimed? Christendom has failed greatly in this charge. This day let us remember the loving service of this unnamed women. We remember her faithful actions; and hold in our hearts all the nameless servants who have furthered the gospel and led us to this time.

Prayer: Our heavenly Mother, we trust you remember the names of all your children. Draw us to your side.



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Here "all" means "all."

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Top of the stairs

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.

John 13:1-5

John's telling of the last supper differs from the other three. What they hold in common is that he gathered with his friends in a meal before facing the horror of the cross. While Luke has Jesus settling a dispute about greatness, John has Jesus embody greatness. Humbling oneself, serving and loving, acting like a servant, that is what greatness looks like. No less love is shown to his betrayer. Jesus, the Lord of love, displays love with hands, on his knees. As you descend these stairs, think about where in your life you could choose humility and service, to better serve and show God's love.

Prayer: God of wisdom and love, humble us to desire to serve you more than our desires to be great. In the name of our great servant leader, we pray.

Chair at the bottom of the trail

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

Luke 22:39-44

The Passion of Christ refers to the last week of Christ's life. Passion is understood from its Latin origin to suffer, bear, or endure. It is a phrase that recognizes the heart ache that Christ experienced. All of our lives contain some measure of heart ache. Maybe you can relate with anguish that drained you so that it felt as if your blood, your life force, was draining out of your body in the sweat and tears you shed. I invite you to enter into the experience of this passionate anguish of Jesus, the human feelings we all can feel.

Prayer: Thank you Christ, for loving the world so much that you were willing to walk this journey. Thank you for being willing to be with us in our anguish.



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Base of the hill

After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

Mathew 27:31-32

Think of the weight of the cross that Simon carried. The physical weight, but also the emotional weight. He was forced to carry the instrument of torture for Jesus. The systems of institutionalized racism and subjection of the poor are a part of our world. Being a part of the world, buying anything that was made by people who were not paid a living wage – much of what we buy – compels us to carry the weight of oppression. We can educate ourselves and work for a more just world. Right now however, as you walk up the hill imagine the weight Simon bore, and the weight of injustice you bear.

Prayer: Lord, help me carry this weight. Help me to know how I'm being called to fight injustice. And let me know your grace is greater than my participation, so that love, not guilt, can motivate me.

In view of the metal art sculpture

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Luke 23:32,39-43

Sometimes it feels that we are suffering alone. There is something oddly comforting to know that on the cross, Jesus was not alone. There are some people who would choose to increase suffering when they are suffering as well. Let us strive to be like the second criminal: recognize what part we have in our suffering, and reach out in comfort to others. That understanding of contrition and act of kindness brought this criminal to paradise with Christ. Reflect on the beautiful art before you and think about the turns in your life, even the painful places in life can turn into something beautiful when we look with compassion and turn to Christ in our need.

Prayer: Loving Christ, open our eyes with compassion. Allow us to see our own lives and others with your compassionate love.



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Stone memorial

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he[†] breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Mark 15:33-39

It is impossible to hear this text without the knowledge of what God was to do next. I invite you to look at this scene as the women that Mark tells us were watching from a distance. Their loss is real. Yes Jesus will be resurrected, but their loss is still real. Jesus will not be with them physically in the same way again. When we lose those we love now, the loss is real. Easter gives us the knowledge that the separation is not forever, but the separation now is real. Know also, as the centurion says, truly this is the son of God.

Prayer: Miraculous God, thank you for entering into our life and death, and tearing away the curtain that separated us from you. Be with me as I walk through this holy week in the uncertainty, mourning, and anxiety that accompanies it. Be with me always. In Christ's glorious name I pray. Amen.



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