

Sermon Notes: The Last Week

Lent 2024, Week #6

Introduction

We conclude our Lenten sermon series based on the book *The Last Week* by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, journeying day by day through Jesus' last week in Jerusalem. As we journey in Worship the entirety of Holy Week, we will begin with the waving of palms and conclude in silence. As we look at Palm and Passion Sunday, we revisit our full Lenten journey.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONbUs4uek1s>

A clip from the 1997 film *Amistad*, where African men are fighting for their lives in a trial to determine whether they are escaped slaves or free men.

Video Discussion Questions

1. What are your earliest memories of your faith? Did you come to Christianity as a child or later in life? How did this take place? What did you learn and how? Has your way of learning about your faith changed since then?
2. As the two imprisoned Mende men discuss the illustrations in the Bible, they see oppression followed by liberation in the coming of Christ. As you watch the clip and see their perception of Christ's life, do you agree with how they understand it?
3. Jesus is observed as a healer and a protector, someone who is able to walk on water... until he is accused of a crime. The reader sees a parallel between Jesus' arrest and the people with whom he is imprisoned, asserting that Jesus was innocent just as they were. Do you agree with this parallel? Have you ever faced a similar circumstance? Do you think the Mende found comfort in this?
4. The scene concludes observing the ascension of Jesus and the statement that—if this is what happens in death—perhaps “It doesn't look so bad.” What do you think about this assessment? Considered alongside the previous question above, is there comfort?

Mark 15:1-15 (CEB)

¹At 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. ²Pilate questioned him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus replied, “That's what you say.” ³The chief priests were accusing him of many things.

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

⁶During the festival, Pilate released one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. ⁷A man named Barabbas was locked up with the rebels who had committed murder during an uprising. ⁸The crowd pushed forward and asked Pilate to release someone, as he regularly did. ⁹Pilate answered them, “Do you want me to release to

you the king of the Jews?” ¹⁰He knew that the chief priests had handed him over because of jealousy. ¹¹But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas to them instead. ¹²Pilate replied, “Then what do you want me to do with the one you call king of the Jews?”

¹³They shouted back, “Crucify him!”

¹⁴Pilate said to them, “Why? What wrong has he done?”

They shouted even louder, “Crucify him!”

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

Note: the rest of the day’s narrative [can be found at this link](#).

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. These final hours of Jesus’ life were very emotional. How would you feel if you were one of the disciples witnessing this?
2. Have you ever had a friend get in trouble for something she/he didn’t do? If so, how did you react? What did you do?
3. Why do you think Judas betrayed Jesus? Do you think Jesus forgave Judas?
4. What Old Testament stories or passages come to mind that help us understand Jesus’ death on a cross? (Examples could include: Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac, Passover Lamb from the Exodus story, the sacrificial system of the Temple, etc.)
5. What is the significance of Jesus dying on the cross for our relationship with God? For our relationship with others?
6. Does Jesus ask for anyone to come and save him? Why or why not?
7. One of the ways we acknowledge the Crucifixion during our Communion Liturgy is when we say that Jesus’ death “delivered us from slavery to sin and death.” How does knowing that Jesus gives us life abundant change the way we live our lives today?
8. This chapter of Mark ends with Jesus’ death and burial. If you were living in the story, you would not know the Resurrection is coming. What would you be doing in the hours following Jesus’ death?

Add'l (Optional) Questions for Consideration

1. What is said and done to Jesus by others in [Mark 14](#) and 15?
2. How does Jesus respond to what is said and done to him in Mark 14 and 15?
3. Is a chief priest (see verse 1, or the [preceding chapter](#)) something that Jesus would have been considered during his lifetime? Do you think it is a label that Jesus would welcome?
4. [Hebrews 4:15](#) says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are...” Jesus suffered a great deal. How was the way that Jesus suffered in the passages from Mark different from how many of the high priests at the time would have experienced life and death?

5. Why do you think Jesus' suffering is a big part for some in the Christian faith? How? Why do you think it is a less important part of the story for others?
6. It can be difficult to talk about all the pain that Jesus went through. Why is that? Why is it difficult to talk about or witness pain and suffering?
7. How do you think people who go through great pain feel about Jesus going through the same things they do?

Weekly Action

This week, read through Holy Week again according to the Gospel of Mark ([Mark 11-15](#)). This will take some time, so plan how you would like to read during this week. As you read, pay attention to the teachings and how they speak to you. Remember to look for the Markan frames as we've been discussing since the first week. Most importantly, listen to how God speaks to you as you re-read the Holy Week story.

Prayer

Merciful God, we recount and recall the injustice, pain, and suffering your son endured on the cross at the hands of sinful humanity. Grant us awareness as we enter the story of Christ's Passion, that in not shirking away from Christ's suffering, we would be surprised by grace, because even in humiliating and shameful death, your love never failed. Train our hearts on the Light that is the life of all people, that as the darkness encroaches, we might remain tenacious in hope and persistent in love. Amen.