*DEVOTIONAL*

March 26 – 31

*Easter Sunday*

**Monday, March 26 Matthew 26:1-30**

*“She did it for my burial”*

Jesus was at the house of Simon the leper, a man he had healed. The woman came with a vial of very expensive perfume and poured it on the head of Jesus. Speaking out of their materialism, and probably stirred by Judas’ murmuring, the disciples complained at the waste, saying that this could have been sold and given to the poor. Jesus’ reference to this being preparation for his burial is evidence of his awareness of what was happening in relation to himself; and he commended her deed, for it affirmed the Jewish belief that anointing a dead body was a faithful act before God.

Judas’ act is in vivid contrast to the act of Mary. There are many questions as to why Judas acted in this way. He probably expected the messianic kingdom in a nationalistic way. Being disappointed when it became clear that Jesus was not an active revolutionary, Judas took things into his own hands to try to force Jesus to act with his amazing power. Having made his decision against Jesus, Judas sought opportunity from that time on to betray him.

*I accept you on your terms, Jesus, setting aside any false expectations I have of you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 27 Matthew 26:31-56**

*“Sit here while I go and pray over there”*

Jesus led his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. Here he would wrestle in prayer over what was to come. Leaving eight of his disciples to wait, he took the three – Peter, James, and John – as a small “inner circle” to be close to him in his anguish, and he shared with them the deep sorrow that was affecting him. In verse 41 the statement, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,” is no doubt a reference to himself. He was ready to do the Father’s will, but was wrestling with the limitations of humanness.

Jesus’ three prayers are separated by his coming to the disciples for support, only to find them sleeping. The first time he reproved them; the second time he seems to have left them asleep. The third time, having been heard by the Father and strengthened in his resolve, Jesus returned to the disciples with a determined spirit. He was composed and ready to meet his betrayer. On a clear night with the full moon of the Passover season, Jesus could easily have seen the mob coming up the western slope of the Mount of Olives to take him.

*In times of trouble, Lord, I turn to you in prayer and you strengthen me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 28 Matthew 26:57-75**

*“It is as you say”*

The Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, was in session, waiting for Jesus to be brought before them. What Caiaphas needed was two witnesses who agreed in order to bring a charge against Jesus. Finally, two are found who give the same false testimony. But, in the face of the false charges, Jesus refuses to defend himself. Knowing that he did not yet have enough evidence to find Jesus guilty, Caiaphas asks him the question of the Oath of Testimony of the Hebrew Constitution: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?”

Jesus’ response, “It is as you said,” is the traditional form in which a cultured Jew responded to a question of importance, courtesy forbidding a direct “yes” or “no.” Caiaphas had what he wanted. When it appeared that the trial was breaking down, he confronted Jesus with the Oath of Testimony to which silence was forbidden. Caiaphas shouted, “Blasphemy!” and tore his clothes, a symbolic expression of horror, after which he called for an immediate verdict. “Guilty,” they responded, and sentenced him to death.

*You, Lord, are the Messiah, the Son of God, and I confess you as my Savior. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

March 26 – 31

*Easter Sunday*

**Thursday, March 29 Matthew 27:1-31**

*“They bound Jesus and took him to Pilate”*

Pilate was the governor sent by Rome to keep order in Judea. The Jews did not like Pilate because of the manner in which he disregarded their religion. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, tells us that Pilate had put Roman symbols of power in the Temple. Five thousand Jewish men went to Pilate and petitioned him to remove the symbols. Calling in his militia to disperse the petitioners, Pilate was shocked to see them bow to the ground and bare their necks, saying, “You can cut off our heads, but don’t desecrate our Temple.” Pilate removed the symbols.

Considering Jesus innocent, Pilate was caught between the pressure of the Jewish leaders and the tradition of Roman justice. As a way out, Pilate proposed a trade. If they were concerned to not have their relationship with Rome threatened by Jesus, a man they claimed to be an insurrectionist, he would substitute an actual insurrectionist, Barabbas, arrested for the very crime they were attributing to Jesus. Following a Roman custom, he offered to release one of the two as a goodwill gesture. The leaders incited the crowd to demand Barabbas, and Pilate complied.

*Many will chose someone like Barabbas over you, Lord, but I chose you. Amen.*

**Friday, March 30 Matthew 27:32-66**

*“They crucified him”*

The Gospels all relate the crucifixion with a minimum of words. None go into the terrible description of a Roman crucifixion. The major question has to do with “Who is this Jesus?” and “Why did he have to die?” At Calvary something was happening to God caused by humanity, but something was also happening to humanity and for humanity caused by God. Both of these aspects need to be recognized for us to think adequately of the meaning of the cross. The historical fact is that “Christ died.” The spiritual truth is that “Christ died for our sins.”

This is the heart of the good news of the gospel. The death of Jesus wipes away our sin so that we will not have to suffer its consequence, which is what we mean by saying that in Christ’s death our sins are forgiven. The crucifixion of Jesus brought God and humanity together, for here Jesus made evident the depth of God’s love by absorbing sin’s punishment in himself. Further, the grace of God declares that forgiveness is available to all who believe in the Son.

*You died in my place, Lord, taking my sin upon yourself that I may live. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 31 Matthew 28:1-10**

*“He is not here. He has been raised from the dead”*

The story of Jesus does not end with his death; a new chapter is begun with his resurrection. Luke opens the book we call “Acts” by referring to the Gospel bearing his name as being “about all that Jesus began both to do and teach,” setting the stage for all that Jesus continues to do and to teach through the Holy Spirit. The crucified Lord is risen and back in business! His message is the same, for appearing to his followers over a forty-day period after his resurrection, he talked with them of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the community of disciples, the faithful followers of Jesus Christ, went out into the world and preached that in the resurrection God had vindicated Jesus, who had been put to death as a rejected person. By his resurrection, Jesus is declared to be the Son of God with power to save all who believe in him. The disciples were absolutely convinced that he was present with them. The preacher from Nazareth now becomes himself the content of the message of faith that they spread.

*I praise and worship you, Lord Jesus Christ, for you are the Resurrected One. Amen.*