

GOSPEL: Matthew 26:14--27:66

14One of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

17On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 18He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" 19So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

20When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; 21and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." 22And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" 23He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." 25Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

26While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "**Take, eat; this is my body.**" 27Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "**Drink from it, all of you; 28for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.**" 29I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

30When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

31Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written,

'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

32But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." 33Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." 34Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." 35Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

36Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. 38Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." 39And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." 40Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." 43Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. 45Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

47While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." 49At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. 50Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. 51Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"

55At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

57Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. 58But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. 59Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, 60but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' " 62The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" 63But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." 64Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

65Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death." 67Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, 68saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?"

69Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." 70But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." 71When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." 73After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." 74Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. 75Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

27:1When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. 2They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

3When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." 5Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. 6But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." 7After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. 8For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, 10and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

11Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." 12But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. 13Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" 14But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

15Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. 16At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. 17So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. 19While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." 20Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." 22Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" 23Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

24So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the

crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."  
25Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" 26So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

27Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. 28They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

32As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. 33And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; 36then they sat down there and kept watch over him. 37Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

38Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42" He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.' " 44The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

45From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." 48At once one of them ran and got a sponge,

filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.  
49But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.  
51At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

55Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. 56Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

57When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

62The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." 65Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." 66So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

We are coming to the hardest part  
of our Lenten desert journey this Palm and Passion Sunday,  
as we come face to face with Jesus' last moments on earth,  
his last moments with his disciples,  
his last moments under scrutiny and experiencing cruelty,  
his last moments before his suffering and death.

On this Sunday that depicts the highs  
and the many lows in Jesus' journey,  
the adoration of the crowds, the last meal with his disciples,  
the time of prayer in the garden, the betrayal and arrest,  
the trial and punishment, the hardship of the cross,  
and the loneliness when loved ones are found only at a distance,  
we also come face to face  
with the highs and lows of our own life experiences,  
with our own desert journey to the cross.

In our journey through this Lenten wilderness,  
we have come face to face with the highs and lows here for us in this life,  
the aches found in the desert, the hard truths there are for us to see,  
as well as the solace of God's presence with us through it all.

Yet the reality of God's presence is not always something that we see  
at first, especially when there are so many other things to take in.  
But that's how our life's crosses are—the God hidden deep within  
those life moments may be missed from our first glance.

For when we experience suffering,  
when we find ourselves carrying our crosses,  
or even when we are stuck upon our crosses in agony,  
we can feel as though God has abandoned us,  
as though we have been forsaken in some way,  
as though we are beyond the scope of God's mercy,  
beyond the touch of God's grace.

It is normal to feel this ache.  
It's normal to question where God is or what God is up to.

Even on his own journey to the cross,  
and his own suffering upon his cross,  
Jesus ached, crying out to God the Father, asking for a different way.  
The cross included for Jesus all the angst and pain that comes to all  
human beings who come face to face with their crosses.  
Jesus was not immune to suffering.

Yet even there, on the cross, in the depth of his aches,  
Jesus, our companion, our friend, our Savior, our Teacher,  
shows us that even in the worst of the desert,  
even in the worst of the cross,  
when another way cannot be found,  
the mercy and grace of God remains to find for us a new way.  
For this is the grace and mercy we experience in all seasons of our lives,  
including the cross.

In this Lenten desert season throughout these past 40 days,  
we have come face to face  
with our welcoming and forgiving God who softens our hearts,  
and leads us to change our posture in this life.  
We have come face to face with our liberating God who frees us  
from the emptiness we experience when we worship idols  
and put our trust in the things that are temporal instead of eternal.

And in this Lenten desert, we have also experienced  
the life that grace and mercy gives us when we need it most.  
We have received the living water Jesus gives to us while we are there  
to refresh us from the inside out, and remind us that we are always  
worthy of receiving God's gifts of love no matter how unworthy  
we may think we are or others may think we may be.  
We have been inspired by the breath of God that restores us deep within  
and brings life to our dry bones and raise us up on our feet again,  
even when the very core of who we are feels dead and beyond repair.

And so on this day, when we come face to face with the cross,  
we can also trust the wisdom of God, the love of God, the grace of God,  
given to us through the cross. This is what we see in the face of Jesus  
as he brings to us something beyond the cross in our desert.



For the purpose of Jesus' cross is to give us life  
so that when we face our own crosses,  
we are promised there is an end to suffering, there is an end to death,  
there is an end to the violence we experience in this life,  
there is an end to the time that injustice seems to reign.  
But before that end, we are called to let God be God.

We are asked to trust that the foolish way of the cross  
is the way of life and redemption for us.  
To trust in the way that calls us to surrender to God  
and to surrender our desire to make things right  
when everything seems so very wrong.  
To trust that God can make things right in a better way  
than we could have possibly dreamed.

To trust God even when we are suffering,  
even when we may doubt in God's love for us,  
that God would never abandon us or forsake us,  
and that God is not through with us yet.

For we can trust in the paradoxical way of the cross,  
the way of rising that first includes the way of letting go,  
the way of dying to the worst of our humanity,  
to the worst of what we experience in this life.  
We can trust in the way that knows there is only one way to live this life:  
by letting God be God.

But it's not to say the crosses we face either individually or collectively  
is the same cross that Jesus faced.

It's not to say that we are redeemed by our own suffering  
when we face our own crosses, or that we need to experience  
the crushing weight of our own sin and brokenness to be changed by it.

Instead, this day we take in everything  
that Jesus' own journey to the cross includes for us.  
The journey that we were not asked to make,  
the journey that we were not forced to make,  
the journey that we are not invited to do  
but that God has done for us so that we could know

that grace is enough for us no matter what ugliness we face,  
no matter what cruelty or injustice we face,  
even if what we face are the horrors within our own hearts.

Even though we all face the crosses of our own pain and suffering,  
even though we all journey through wilderness seasons  
where we come face to face with how things really are,  
we are never called to repeat what Jesus did. Nor are we ever asked to.

None of us are asked to take on Jesus' journey to the cross.  
Instead, we are called to come into the desert,  
to come face to face with the cross that is already there,  
and to see that the work of God that has already been done for us.  
The grace and mercy that liberates us when we face our own crosses.  
The work of God that comes to us when our hope is gone,  
and we can do nothing more for ourselves,  
but rely only on what God does for us.

While the insecurity of this life, and the frailty of humans  
may disappoint us time and time again,  
Jesus does not disappoint us. He is the stability found in our instability.  
The security dwelling deep within our crosses,  
and the freedom promised to us after the cross and through the cross.

For Jesus never deserts us, denies us, or flees from us.  
Even though we may not have eyes to see the frailty of our hearts,  
Jesus sees our human frailty, takes on our grief, enters into our despair,  
and stays awake for us in the most anxious times in our lives.

And even though we may be stuck in our own life situations  
that feel as though they have no way out, stuck on our own life crosses  
and suffering from the foolish injustices of this world,  
the mistakes made by the unwise who are in power,  
the cross of Jesus releases us from these places, to live again,  
to dream again, to be saved from the disappointments of this world.

For freedom is found within the cross.  
The cross releases us into a new way of living through  
the realities of this world that lets God be God.

For the cross of Christ is the way of salvation  
that God has chosen to be known.  
It is the hope for us that proclaims that the worst of this life  
does not have the last say in our lives: God does.  
And God will act in the final hour,  
even when we think our hope has gone,  
and God's timing is too late.  
For the hour is never too late for God to turn everything around,  
and to open up the tombs of the living dead to live once again.

On this Palm and Passion Sunday,  
we go through these final moments with Jesus,  
to glimpse the extent that God acts, that God suffers, that God takes on,  
in order for us to understand that we are deeply loved, and God's grace  
will always take on for us what we are unable to take on all on our own.  
On this day, knowing our human frailty, knowing our capacity to fail,  
knowing we will not want to face our own crosses in this life  
let alone the cross of Jesus,  
knowing we will not always want to do God's will,  
knowing that we will always be in need of God's grace  
and love to meet us exactly where we are at,  
we can trust Jesus has the power to save us at the hour we truly need.

And he always will.