

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Holy Week, 2025



Sunday, April 13: *"Simon, Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers." "Lord, I am prepared to go to prison and to die with you." "I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows this day, you will deny three times that you know me." ... An hour later, another insisted, "Assuredly, this man too was with him..." Peter said, "My friend, I do not know what you are talking about." Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord... He went out and began to weep bitterly (Lk 22:14-23:56).*

There are many intimate scenes in the Passion/Easter narratives, and these moments between Jesus and Peter are some of the most touching. Peter is so committed and so willing. He loves Jesus, and I am sure he means what he says that he is willing to die with him. I don't think it is Peter's faith that fails him, but instead his fragile humanity. Mortal fear makes all but the most courageous of human beings falter.

Jesus predicts Peter will fail the test—three times, in fact—but he also knows Peter will turn back to him. Peter, as he has done many times before, will hold tenaciously to his faith, and return, wiser and humbler, to strengthen not only Jesus' followers present with him, but all of us!

Provision: PRAY for a strong faith. The word "turned" is used twice in this passage: Once when Peter "turns back" to strengthen others, and then, when Jesus turns to look at Peter when the cock crows. *A strong faith does not mean we will never turn away. A strong faith means we know the Lord will never turn away.* Jesus is always there for us. Pray today for faith to always turn back to the unconditional love and mercy of God.

Monday, April 14: *The chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus too, because many of the Jews were turning away and believing in Jesus because of him (Jn 11:1-11).*

Here's that word "turn" again: *"Many of the Jews were turning away."* From what? Jesus never says a word about people abandoning their faith or religious practice, so what are the chief priests worried about? We know the elders are singularly focused on maintaining the tenuous peace with Rome. We heard the reasoning from Caiaphas last Saturday: *"it is better that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish"* (Jn 11:50). I used to think this was just an excuse, and the real reason is that they are jealous and angry. Jesus has been calling them out, using tough language, but it's true: if they lose power over the people, all hell could break loose. So, they kill him.

Provision: ACT on true faith. Being part of an organization, church, or country means following the rules of that entity, but it's easy to get lazy and miss the forest for the trees. It's important, in following rules, we don't betray our hearts by doing things that contradict what we know to be God's will. Being a faithful member of any group means having the courage to stand up and say when the means contradict the ends or when the ends conflict with our beliefs. That's what Jesus does time and time again. *"Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble"* (John Lewis). Take nonviolent action that supports the common good that recognizes the dignity of every person.

Tuesday, April 15: *Simon Peter said, "Master, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, though you will follow later." Peter said, "Master, why can I not follow you now?" (Jn 13:21-33, 36-38).*

Nobody likes being told they can't do something. From the toddler eager to be like the big kids, to those my age being told by their bodies they can't do what they did a few years ago! Peter sounds like a whiney child: "I wanna follow you NOWW!" He seems to ignore what Jesus says about how he will follow him later. It's not his time yet. I wonder if he remembers these words the next day when he sees Jesus go to his death. Yes, he too will follow Jesus, but he knows he must maintain hope and faith in the plans God has for him and for the world.

Provision: Have HOPE in God's plans. We've been talking a lot about taking action, and I do believe now is the time to act. But as we work to bring about a more just society, we also remember to maintain our hope and faith that God's got this. God works *"for our welfare, not for woe, to give us a future full of hope"* (Jer 29:11). Each time you take a stand for justice, do so with a prayer of praise for God's providence on your lips. Remember who's really in charge.

Wednesday, April 16: *"Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, "Surely it is not I, Lord?" (Mt 26:14-25).*

The word betrayal is heard a lot these days in the media and on the lips of ordinary people. Many in the US are realizing they have been betrayed by the very leadership they voted into power, military veterans in particular...people who came to this country to learn and thrive and add to the economy have been betrayed...those dedicated to serving the poor and

oppressed...scientists who strive to improve our lives...have been betrayed, their lifetimes of work swept away. And, of course, our country's allies have been betrayed, alliances of 80 years dismantled in a matter of weeks...billions of people all over the world have had the rug pulled out from beneath them with no warning. Betrayal on this global scale is unfathomable, but still, I cannot use it as an excuse to ignore how I betray Jesus. Do I, like Jesus' closest friends, run away in fear by not speaking out and standing up for all those impacted by these reckless actions? Do I allow apathy to keep me in my comfort zone? I am deeply distressed by what I see happening. Surely, I do not want to betray Jesus by turning my back on those in need and ignoring his command to love.

Provision: FAST from fear and apathy. I mentioned several weeks ago the Spirit is calling me to speak out against what I see happening in our world, to help "make the Kingdom of God matter again." It's all well and good to talk about reasons for Judas' betrayal or to muse on our own personal salvation, but if we fail to look at the gospel message in the context of the Scripture of our lives, then we've missed the boat entirely. If you find yourself shrugging your shoulders, thinking there is nothing you can do (or that nothing is wrong), think again. Organizations are springing up to address a host of issues. Try to find one that is not overly partisan and dedicated to common sense. Do your research: charlatans come out of the woodwork during a crisis. *"Apathy is the glove into which evil slips its hand"* (Bodie Thoene).

Holy Thursday, April 17: *[Jesus] said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you?"* (Jn 13:1-15).

I take a lot for granted. In his wonderful TED talk on gratitude, Br. David Stendl-Rast relates this story: He had spent some time in rural Africa, and when he returned to America, he was, for several days, fascinated by the light switch and the faucet—how you could just turn it on and there was light and there was water. The upheaval in the US has made me realize how much I take democracy for granted. I sometimes take Jesus for granted, too. He is always there for me. I hear him asking me this question: *"Do you realize what I have done for you?"*

Provision: PRAY with Jesus' question. This is not a rhetorical question Jesus asks the disciples, nor is he questioning their appreciation of him. He wants them to clearly understand the mission that lies ahead of them. He wants to make sure they know they are to be servant-leaders, caring intimately as they serve everyone: their friends and family as well as the oppressed and broken—even those who would sin against them (Jesus washed Judas' feet.) Praying with this question can be an amazing prayer experience. Find a place to be in silence and imagine Jesus gently asking you this question. Look back over your life. See if you can be specific in your answers to him. See if you can understand what he wants you to do for others. If it's not clear, ask him: "What can I do for you?" "Whose feet should I be washing?"

Good Friday, April 18: *The guards seized Jesus and bound him... Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas... Joseph of Arimathea... took his body and Nicodemus came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes... They took the body and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices....and laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day* (Jn 18:1-19:42).

We talked last week about being bound: *"Unbind him and set him free,"* Jesus says to the bystanders after the raising of Lazarus to new life. Today, Jesus, *"fully aware the Father had put everything into his power,"* allows himself to be bound, first by his oppressors, and then by the compassionate hands of two Jewish elders when most of his friends had run away. (In John's Gospel, this happens on the preparation day for Passover, so Joseph and Nicodemus forgo the purity rules strictly followed by those who brought Jesus to Pilate. A backstory worth noting: often, to do the work of God, one must act through love, not through the law.)

Provision: GIVE your love to unbind Jesus today. Jesus does not need the community to "unbind" him. He is always free and through the power of his Spirit will rise to new life. But that doesn't let the community off the hook. As Teresa of Avila tells us, we are his compassionate hands and feet and eyes and body alive in the world. We may be wounded like him, we may be frightened like the disciples, but his death binds us to him and to his mission. And it is only our binding to the love of God that will set us free. Look for Jesus today in your community and show love and compassion to someone who is bound by fear, hatred, poverty, or pain.

Holy Saturday, April 19: Several years ago, I shared these lyrics from the song, "For Good," from the musical, *Wicked*. I've not seen the new movie, but I understand this song won't show up until the sequel later this year. Regardless, I imagine the words would ring true for the disciples on this solemn Holy Saturday:

"I've heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason, bringing something we must learn. And we are led to those who help us most to grow if we let them.... I know I'm who I am today because I knew you...I have been changed for good...It will may be that we will never meet again in this lifetime. So let me say before we part so much of me is made of what I learned from you. You'll be with me like a handprint on my heart...And now whatever way our stories end, I know you have re-written mine by being my friend... Because I knew you...I have been changed for the better...I have been changed for good." (Stephen Schwartz, 2003)

Whatever is to become of them, the disciples know they've been changed for "good"—they cannot turn away for long. Allow Jesus to change you for good this Easter. Let him teach you what you need most to grow. Don't turn away.