

A white dove is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, positioned over a realistic image of the Earth. The background is a dark, starry space. The dove's wings are illuminated from behind, creating a bright, ethereal glow.

## A VIGIL FOR HOLY WEEK

A personal retreat  
at your own pace,  
in your own space.

On Easter Saturday, March 31st, 2018  
you are invited to join us  
in the Chapel at Harcourt  
from 3 to 5 PM

'A Vigil For Holy Week'  
is available <http://www.harcourtuc.ca/>  
and printed copies will be available  
following worship on March 18 and 25.

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## **Vigil For Holy Week 2018: A Study Guide - Praying the Passion Story with the Gospel of Mark**

You are invited to use this study guide as a personal resource as you move through the week. You are also invited to join a brief vigil together in Harcourt's Chapel on Easter Saturday, March 31st, 2018, 3 to 4:30 PM. On that afternoon we will pray together and you will have an opportunity to share the highlights of your Lenten journey - as much or as little as you choose.

Holy Week is the final week of Lent, traditionally a time of repentance, fasting, and preparation for the celebration of resurrection on Easter Sunday. Lent lasts about forty days (not counting Sundays), corresponding to the time Jesus is said to have spent in the desert after his baptism, fasting and resisting temptations.

Today the old traditions are lived out in many different ways. For example:

- Repentance: some Christians begin their repentance on the first day of Lent (Ash Wednesday) in a solemn ritual in which a cross is marked on their forehead with a mixture of oil and ashes, with the blessing 'remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return'.
- Fasting: Mardi Gras carnivals are held as a last chance to party on the day before Ash Wednesday, and fasting itself is often replaced by giving up something such as chocolate or alcohol for the duration of Lent.
- Preparation: for some people, preparation may consist of getting a new 'Easter bonnet' (smart new clothes for Easter) and preparing a special meal to celebrate Easter Sunday; for others, preparation includes a daily time of prayer and meditation.

For this Holy Week in 2018, we invite you to join in a practice of daily prayer and meditation.

The theme questions for this week, rooted in the ancient traditions, are:

- What is Jesus up to?
- How am I called to follow Jesus?
- Is there anything in me that I need to allow to die, so that it may be transformed into something new to help me follow Jesus?

Please use this guide in whatever way is useful to you. We hope you will consider spending between half an hour and an hour on each day's prayer time, sitting quietly and alone. We also hope you will join us in the two-hour vigil together on Easter Saturday.

Yours in Christ,  
Spiritual Life Committee

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## **Introductory remarks:**

Over the past few years, we have been using the Gospel of John as our guide through our Holy Week meditations. This time, we are using the Gospel of Mark.

It is the earliest Gospel, written some 30 years after the death of Jesus. Some scholars call it a "war Gospel," as it was written probably very soon after the terrible events surrounding the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire. For Jewish followers of Jesus, this would have been a devastating time, and one that required making sense of this disaster in light of their belief in Jesus and his mission and vision.

Let's settle question of historicity: that Jesus lived, and died at the hands of the Roman forces is pretty much incontrovertible. The sequence of events surrounding his arrest and execution, however, is not as certain, as all four Gospels differ quite significantly in their narrative. It is probably a safe bet to suggest that all four are attempting to describe events in the life of Jesus in light of issues which they themselves were dealing with as a vulnerable community of Jewish followers of Jesus.

For the purposes of our Holy Week meditation, the factuality or not of the events is of secondary importance. What matters is to enter the story as we are and to let it speak to us today in our current circumstances – which are, by the way, remarkably similar to those of Jews and followers of Jesus under Roman occupation: we live in an industrial/consumerist culture driven by the super-wealthy which has little tolerance for disagreement about its public narrative (consumption is good; wealth is a legitimate reward for hard work and risk; the poor get what they deserve; we have little responsibility for what happens in the rest of the world provided it doesn't interfere with our lifestyle; and the world's resources are there for the taking).

Mark provides an excellent story line to get us to the climax of Good Friday: on Sunday, Jesus stages a "street theatre" procession to counter Pilate's grand entry into Jerusalem with power and might. On Tuesday, Jesus aims a blow directly at the central role of the Temple, by chasing out the money-changers. Mark packs Wednesday with a number of apocalyptic issues, as Jesus engages in serious conversation with his followers and his detractors. Thursday sees the Last Supper and Jesus' arrest. On Friday Jesus is tried and executed publicly as a threat to the Roman Empire. And there is no text for Holy Saturday, as we wait for the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

A word about the location of the action: Jesus has conducted his ministry in the countryside; in those very areas affected by the on-going land-grab by wealthy Roman owners. The disenfranchised peasants got it; they welcomed Jesus' ministry. He spoke their language. He provided them with means to survive under the harsh economic conditions of the Roman occupation. Now he was bringing his message of the Kingdom – that alternative way of being a human community – to the city, the centre of power and commerce. Jerusalem: populated with the elite, the priests and clerics serving the temple, the Roman occupation force and its military and administrative retinue. As such, Jerusalem was a locus of injustice, oppression, and violation of God's vision for humanity, not to mention Torah! And then there was the Temple, that focal point of Jewish life, destroyed by the time the Gospel writer writes his story, still the

centre of Jewish life in Mark's narrative. The Temple mediated between humanity and Yahweh. There, and only there, faithful Jews could right themselves with their God through appropriate sacrifices and rituals. Under Roman occupation, the Temple played an uncomfortable role in the delicate power-game between Rome and the Jewish people. It had, in fact, compromised itself. (We'll say more about this on Monday.)

Jerusalem, therefore, would be the place where Jesus' message would be least well heard and be most threatening. And Jesus surely knew this. He was also probably well aware of the dangers he faced. And Mark's version of the confrontation between Jesus and the powers-that-be plays this out Sunday through Wednesday.

Throughout these meditations, we will be basing our approach on The Last Week, by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan,<sup>1</sup> two of the best biblical scholars of our time.

In terms of **spiritual practice** for the week, we invite you to try this:

1. Seat yourself in a quiet place. Take a few deep breaths and with each inhale say to yourself "God is with me" and with each exhale "God loves me."
2. Pray your own prayer or this: *"Oh God, may I be open to your constant presence. May I gain insight into what Jesus was really about. May I have the courage to become a true follower of the One who showed us that humanity is called to live quite differently from the way the dominant cultures have wanted it."*
3. Read the suggested passage a few times to become familiar with it. Read the commentary.
4. Then enter the story as if you were there, and let the story unfold however it will.
5. Allow yourself to hear the sounds around you, see what is happening. Let your imagination take you where you need to go.
6. Then journal your experience – what you saw and heard, and how you felt.

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, The Last Week. A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus' Final Week in Jerusalem, 2006, HarperSanFrancisco

## **Palm Sunday**

### **Mk 11:1-11**

***When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,***

***"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"***

***Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.***

As you prepare to meditate on this text, enter it as you would approach a street theatre performance of protest. Jesus had obviously planned this ahead of time, as he knew there was a donkey colt waiting in the village. And the best way to visualize this is to remember that, at about the same time, Pontius Pilate in entering Jerusalem, as its ruler, from Caesarea Maritima, the new and splendid Roman city up the coast.

So what is going on here? Pilate's procession proclaimed the power of empire; Jesus' procession proclaimed the Kingdom of God. The two processions embody the central conflict of the week.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' staged entry looks an awful lot like a staged political demonstration.

Why would Jesus enter the City in such a manner? Surely he was aware of the risks... Why bring the issues to a head? Why remind people of their bondage at the very time of the celebration of Passover, which remembered God's deliverance from another form of bondage under the Egyptians?

What might Mark's purpose be in so describing this event? Perhaps he is reminding his vulnerable community, still reeling following the destruction of the Temple that following Jesus and working to bring about God's Kingdom of distributive justice and compassion will be risky. Are its members ready to follow Jesus into Jerusalem and right to the cross? Or will they bolt, just like the apostles did?

What's your take-away from this story? Where would you be in this story, if something like this happened in Guelph: walking alongside Jesus? A bystander cheering? An onlooker, keeping your distance? At home doing something else? Journal your reaction and your feelings.

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<sup>2</sup> See Borg and Crossan, p. 2

## Monday

### Mk 11:15-18

***Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.***

We've omitted the fig-tree story, because its meaning is complex and detracts from the main thread of the story. (Borg and Crossan do a wonderful job to unpack the literary role the story plays in Marks narrative.<sup>3</sup>)

In order to truly relate to this narrative, we must have a bit of background about the Temple and its role at that time in its dangerous compromise with the Roman authorities. We remember that in the Judaism of the time, the Temple was the only place where sins could be forgiven, through the complex ritual of blood sacrifice, performed by the priests of the Temple. The Temple had also lost the autonomy it had had for centuries, as the legitimate countervailing force to the Jewish king. Now the Temple high priest was appointed by the Roman governor. The Temple served now both as the house of God on earth, and the institutional seat of submission to Rome.<sup>4</sup> The Temple was engaged in radical compromise with secular power. (We shall see this again on Tuesday with the incident of taxation and the use by Jews of Roman coins, which was forbidden by Torah.)

We risk missing the point of Jesus' political action with the money-changers if we don't get this. Penitents needed money to buy their sacrificial offering. They could not use Roman coin because it showed graven images, forbidden by Torah. So there was a legitimate system of coin exchange set up as part of the Temple administration. Jesus' anger can therefore not be directed at the legitimate role of the money-changers (and whether they charged an exorbitant exchange rate would surely not warrant Jesus' consummate anger.) No, the problem lies elsewhere: when worship substitutes for God's justice, God abandons God's Temple. Recall the long line of prophets who challenged the Temple when it focused on worship rather than distributive justice. (Jer 7:5-7; 11 or Micah 6:6-8). By interrupting the Temple's legitimate money exchange, he literally shuts down the Temple.

With these considerations in mind, enter the story as Gospel Contemplation, and imagine how the scene would unfold. Imagine the fury of the Temple authorities. Imagine how Jesus felt about instigating a confrontation. Can you think of parallel situations in our world? Occupy Wall Street was a typical example of attempts to shut down institutions because they were not fulfilling their duty of care. How might you follow Jesus's example right here in Guelph? What would be a small first step? How might you gather the courage?

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<sup>3</sup> Borg and Crossan, p. 32-6.

<sup>4</sup> Borg and Crossan, p. 42.

## Tuesday

This was a busy day for Jesus, according to the narrative Mark sets up. Jesus engages in many controversies. It's as if Mark has Jesus sum up the most important challenges he throws against the establishment, both religious and military. In the lessons from the withered fig tree, Jesus challenges the Temple's monopoly on forgiveness of sins through blood sacrifice. To the challenge from the Temple authorities about Jesus' own authority, he catches them at their own game around the legitimacy or not of John the Baptizer's baptism. In the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, Jesus predicts how they will treat him. On taxation, Jesus gets testy: give to Caesar what is his, which is nothing! Since it all belongs to God. On the nature of Heaven, Jesus challenges a simplistic, dualistic understanding. Jesus pushes the importance of the commandment to love. He challenges the scribes, and praises the widow who gives what she has.

Then Mark uses this literary moment to speak to his own community, worried sick about the meaning of the destruction of the Temple in light of their belief in God's promised vindication at end-time. The only way to wholeness, salvation, peace, God's Kingdom, if you will, is through suffering and tribulations. (Apocalyptic literature was common at that time, as a way to maintain hope during difficult times: God will make everything right, eventually.)

For the purposes of this meditation, we are choosing one key passage: the question of taxes. (Feel free to read the rest if you feel so moved!)

### **Mk 12:13-17**

***Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it." And they brought one. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at him.***

The Gospels love to portray Jesus catching people in their own traps. Certainly, before the Gospels were written, a collection of Jesus' "bons mots" and repartees, as well as parables, would have been circulating as ways to remember what their leader was about.

Here we have a classic! The Pharisees want to trap Jesus and he catches them in a trap of his own. The moment a cleric shows the denarius, he reveals that he has broken with Torah, which forbids the possession of coins with graven images! Gotcha! But it gets better. "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar..." What belongs to Caesar according to Jewish theology? NOTHING! It all belongs to God!

In meditation, recreate the scene, against the background of the growing tension throughout the week. What can Jesus be doing, pushing his vision of the Realm of God right into the heart of the institutional world? Gandhi said that the heart of nonviolent resistance is embarrassing the oppressor into public humiliation, to instigate a backing down. Does it work? Can you think of situations where rulers and politicians need to be embarrassed by their doubletalk? Where would you be in this story if something like this happened, say at City Hall? Would you be on Jesus' side? Would you be a sympathetic participant? Would you be an onlooker, keeping your distance for fear of getting incriminated? Would you be at home doing something else?

**Wednesday**

**Mk 14:1-11**

***It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."***

***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, 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."***

***Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.***

Mark's Gospel is unique in this regard: it repeatedly emphasizes the disciples' failure to get it or to follow, and often shows Jesus' impatience with their obtuseness. Why would an author do this? Mark has Jesus prepare his disciples for the cost of their discipleship, then shows how they all fail – not irrevocably (except for Judas, of course): in the midst of these cosmic events, disciples are arguing among themselves who shall be first in the kingdom; they fall asleep when Jesus asks them to watch with him; Peter denies knowing Jesus, as he follows him at a distance in the courts of the Temple; and finally, there are no (male) disciples present at the awful execution itself. It's as if none of the disciples has the courage to acknowledge Jesus publicly for who and what he is.

Enter this touching story of an unnamed woman (other Gospels name her and repeat this same story in different guises) who does what she knows best to do to acknowledge the worth of this man: she anoints him with valuable nard. As she is criticized for her outrageous act of love, Jesus defends her, and Mark makes the point of writing that "what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." These are strong words. Borg and Crossan conclude their analysis of this passage by suggesting that she is truly the first "Christian," the first one to believe in Jesus and to declare it publicly, without either empty tomb or appearance!<sup>5</sup>

As you enter this scene, let the conversation unfold... What is your reaction? To the woman's action? To those who criticized her? To Jesus' response? Whose side would you be on? Would you get involved? Can you imagine such an exchange happening today? What would be your reaction? Would you be getting involved in the discussion? Would you be an onlooker, keeping your distance? Or would you just leave the place and move on?

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<sup>5</sup> Borg and Crossan, p. 104

## Thursday

Holy Thursday is full of drama. In the evening, Jesus eats a final meal, retires to Gethsemane to pray, is betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, and abandoned by the rest of his disciples. He is arrested, tried by the Temple authorities, condemned to death by the high priest, and transferred at dawn on Friday to the Roman authorities. Borg and Crossan note that the theme of failed discipleship occupies much of this narrative (33 of 61 verses!).<sup>6</sup> In this meditation, we will focus on the Last Supper.

### **Mk 14:12-25**

***On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.***

***When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the 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."***

***While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."***

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

The centrepiece of the Last Supper looks back at Jesus' practice and forward to the Church's central ritual. Rather than a factual account, it is a highly symbolic, ritualized and formalized description of what the early Church tried to do in memory of its leader.

Looking backward, it reminds us that table fellowship was at the heart of Jesus' ministry, knowing no boundaries and no exclusions. It was a true open commensality. The meal was also about food: "Give us the bread we need for today." The Kingdom, we are reminded, is a community where everyone has what they need (but not necessarily what they want). Food is part of God's justice. The Last Supper is also an echo of the feeding of the five thousand: there

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<sup>6</sup> Borg and Crossan, p. 110-113.

too, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to those who were there. (The point of that story being distribution, not multiplication.) And behind that, of course, as Borg and Crossan remind us<sup>7</sup>, is a whole theology of creation: God owns the world, demands that all get a fair share, and appoints humans to be stewards of that distributive justice.

It is, of course, also a Passover meal, celebrating the liberation of Israel from bondage to a dominant culture.

Thus, again following Borg and Crossan, "(t)he Last Supper is about bread for the world, God's justice against human injustice, a new Passover from bondage to liberation, and participation in the path that leads through death to new life."<sup>8</sup>

In this meditation, try to experience the Last Supper with some freshness of perspective. Perhaps the approach suggested by Borg and Crossan might be helpful to reframe the event. As you reflect on this narrative, you might want to ask yourself what role Communion plays in your life. In what ways might you take the meaning and experience of Communion into the way you relate to others? Does it evoke God's dream of bread for all? Does the breaking of the bread remind you of the need for ourselves to be "broken" and distributed to others? Are you able to see Communion as a yearning for liberation from the captivity of the dominant culture of consumption and exploitation?

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<sup>7</sup> Borg and Crossan, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Borg and Crossan, p. 120.

## Friday

Again, for the purposes of our meditation, we will focus on a single portion of this lengthy and gruesome narrative. It is important to repeat that we are not dealing here – or in any of the other Passion narratives – with a factual description, (In the first instance, none of the male disciples were even around any of these events! In the second instance, despite the names attributed to the Gospels, most scholars agree that none was written by an eyewitness or a first-generation disciple.)

What we are reading is both history remembered, and retrospective interpretation. This latter provides some of the more vivid images of the crucifixion, as Jewish biblical texts come to be seen as “fulfilled” by Jesus' death. Read Ps 22 or Isaiah's “suffering servant” song to note the many events borrowed, as if they were prophetic fulfilment. (Few mainline scholars support any notion that the Jewish scriptures were actually prophesying Jesus' coming.)

### **Mk 15:24-32**

***It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.***

***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!"***

***There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.***

Probably the most useful meditation at this point would be to simply imagine yourself as a bystander at this cruel and frightening execution. What thoughts and feelings go through your head? What would you do, once your leader is dead? Would you be hopeful or hopeless about the possibility of ever being able to be part of a community that lived by values other than greed, status and power? What sources of comfort and support would you draw on? How might you resolve to live your life in future?

## Saturday

There is no text for Saturday. Not one of the Gospel writers say anything about that painful day of loss, grief, shock, uncertainty, despair, and hopelessness.

Too often we too, in our liturgies move quickly out of the sadness of Good Friday into the joy of Easter. In its wisdom, the early Church designed a lengthy vigil to honour that uncomfortable time of waiting and not knowing. Yes, we who have learned the whole story know what happens tomorrow. But the disciples didn't.

Let us take this time to let the feelings of loss and grief and despair touch us. Was Jesus' experiment a failure? We thought he was to be the One who saved Israel. Another leader who promised us so much has failed. Were we duped? Is it all over?

What do we do now? Slither back to our homes in disgrace and try to pick up our broken lives? Will we constantly be looking over our shoulders to see if we too are being stalked by the powerful Roman apparatus? Will the same fate await us?

Where is our hope now? What about that dream of an alternative way of being human together? Was that just a Utopian pipe-dream? And where is our God in all this? How could God allow this to happen? Wasn't Jesus God's Christ, God's representative here on earth, showing us what it would be like to live as if this really were God's Kingdom? Does that mean that Caesar and the "normalcy of civilization"<sup>9</sup> win out in the end?

For this meditation, sit with your imagination: where are the disciples on this sad day? What are they doing? What are your thoughts and feelings?

An Awareness Examen for the Week: You might want to review your week's meditations to see what new insight has arisen for you. Especially, have you gained any new insight into what Jesus was really about? To what extent have you developed the courage to be a true follower of Jesus? What steps are you prepared to take to live quite differently from the way the dominant cultures have wanted it?

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<sup>9</sup> A favourite expression of Crossan: the oppressiveness of civilization is not an abnormality; it is normal; it is the norm. That's what gives it its power. There appears to be no other way to be human together except through exploitation and power.

## What's next?

So you've completed a Holy Week vigil and celebrated the resurrection, you've had some positive experiences and would like to continue some kind of prayer life. What can you do next? We suggest you adopt a discipline of praying every day. Make a commitment to pray for 10 or 20 or 30 minutes every day for a month at a time, and stick to your commitment, especially when you don't want to.

There will be times when God seems absent, and your prayer experience is dry and unfruitful. That's normal; persevere and you will regain the sense of God's presence. There are many different methods of praying. 'All methods of prayer are simply human ways of disposing oneself to be open to the mystery of God's unique communication,' writes John Veltri, sj. God longs to communicate with you and will use any means available - your reason, your imagination, your senses, for example.

Two principal methods of prayer were used in this guide: Gospel Contemplation and Lectio Divina. Both are forms of praying with scripture.

In Gospel Contemplation, we experience the scripture 'just as if I were there'. Select an action passage from one of the gospels, with movement and colourful detail. Read the passage several times - aloud if you can - pausing for a minute or so between each reading while the gospel soaks into you. Now put the bible aside and let the scene happen.

As you sink into the scene, you may lose a sense of yourself. Allow this to happen. For example, if you are reading about Jesus walking through a field of wheat, allow your imagination to let you hear the sounds of tramping feet as the disciples follow him, feel the wind on your cheek and the dust on your toes, and see the wheat waving in the breeze.

And then allow yourself to participate in the scene, as one of the characters or as an observer. Don't intellectualize the experience (how interesting that wheat fields also feature in the story of Ruth and in many other places in the bible, written for a predominantly agrarian society ...) or draw clever comparisons to people in your life (the disciples' complaints are just like my colleagues at work ...). Instead, lose yourself in the scene and simply notice what is happening. Afterwards, reflect on what happened, what stands out, and make a few notes to yourself. Perhaps there will be something you need to return to later. And close by giving thanks to God to being present with you during this time.

Lectio Divina is Latin for Divine Reading. You read the passage of scripture slowly and with pauses as you allow words or phrases to sink in. Then pause a minute or two, and read the passage again; and again. Notice what word or phrase attracts you. Then sit with it, savour it, and chew on it. Lastly, consider what significance it has for you, and make some notes to yourself.

Lection Divina can be used with passages other than scripture, such as spirit-filled prose or poetry. And the technique of slow and gentle 'drinking-in' can be used also with everyday experiences such as watching sunsets or appreciating flowers or landscape or memories of such things. All are expressions of the divine.

If you decide to pray with scripture, it can be helpful to use daily selections of bible readings. The Consultation on Common Texts is an ecumenical consultation from the United States and Canada who curate a three-year lectionary in common use by Christian churches worldwide. An easy-to-use edition of their Daily Readings can be downloaded free of charge from <http://www.macucc.org/lectionary>.

If you do not have a Bible to hand, you can access one online at <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-NRSV-Bible/>.

One popular method of praying without scripture is the Examen of Consciousness, also known as the Awareness Examen. It is intended to increase your sensitivity to Spirit working in your life, so that you can co-operate and respond to this presence. There are many versions of the Examen. Here is a summary of the version in John Veltri's book Orientations <http://orientations.jesuits.ca/bob/examen.htm>.

1. Look over the day and see what emerges. Give thanks to God for whatever it is.
  2. Ask for enlightenment about what God wants you to see.
  3. Again look over the events of the day, and ask where God has been present in your life, in you, in others or in public events. Where and when have you been drawn by God? How have you been responding?
  4. Respond to God about any area that you are being nudged to focus on, pray over or act upon.
  5. Express whatever needs to be expressed: praise, sorrow, joy, gratitude, desire for change etc.
5. Ask for help and guidance for what you need to do tomorrow.

Among many other resources on prayer, these three may be particularly helpful:

The Harcourt Library <http://www.harcourtuc.ca/space-resources/library/>

Spiritual Practices, an adjunct to the Harcourt web site <http://spiritualpractice.ca>

One-on-one conversation with one of Harcourt's Covenanted Spiritual Companions (Stan Bunston, Andre Auger, Peter Jackson, Maxine Lipinski and Kathy Magee) or a member of the Spiritual Life.

Committee (Bill Lord, Peter Jackson, Sandra Phair, Megan Ward, Marion Auger and Tammy te Winkel). Alternatively you may choose to speak with one of our paid accountable ministers, Jim Ball and Miriam Flynn.

The Spiritual Life Committee welcomes your feedback on this guide. We would also like to hear from you if you see opportunities for other resources or events that would nourish you on your spiritual journey.