

Reading and Reflection for Holy Week

Co-missioners,

We are all of three days away from the launch of Holy Week and its deluge of texts that constitute the heart of Christian proclamation. This Sunday we'll hear St. Mark's account of Jesus' passion (Mk. 14-15). St. John's account will follow on Good Friday (Jn. 18-19). The day prior, Maundy Thursday, we'll hear from John of foot-washing and a new commandment (Jn. 13) and from St. Paul about the institution of the Eucharistic meal (1 Cor. 11). If the churches we lead or attend conclude the Maundy Thursday liturgy with a stripping of the altar, we'll hear the great Psalm 22 that Jesus quotes, per Mark and Matthew, in his dying shriek (Mk. 15:34). Again, depending on liturgical practice, Isaiah's astonishing poem about the Suffering Servant (Is. 53) will pour into our ears on Good Friday, a minute or so before the floodgates open on John's passion. And as introduction to all of the above we'll hear the Epistle appointed for the Sunday of the Passion, Philippians 2:5-11, the most exquisite precis ever penned.

So where do faithful preachers start with all this material? Which of the million possible sermons might she tug from it? And where might hearers fix their ears to catch the Gospel of God in Christ Crucified as the best news ever for 2021 that God intends it to be?

With such questions in mind, we take you today to our website. An abundance of resources for Holy Week lies buried there—though not, or at least not obviously, in the corners of the library devoted to Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder. The rest of our

treasures are something of a scrambled mess at the moment. We poked around in it briefly and found eleven items that you might find of interest—of profit too, said profit being some thoughts about the Passion of Jesus for you to ponder (again?) and pass along as God's solemnly splendid news for someone else too.

Peace and Joy,
The Crossings Community

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Here's our list—doubtless more than you manage, certainly less by far than what's hidden away in that website of ours:

1. We suggest that you start with the final section of a three-part review of Mark's Gospel that dates to 2012. The author is Paul Jaster. He walks us through the day-by-day drama of Holy Week and winds up with an essential reflection, sparked by Luther, on the inescapable interplay of Law and Gospel in our hearing and telling of the Passion. His nugget of good news is "Jesus as ransom." See the first of the final observations at the end of the piece. The essay's title: "[Mission in Mark.](#)"
2. Paul Jaster again. Some years ago he wrote an especially rich six-step text study on John 18, with a focus on the question Jesus asks of the throng in the garden that comes to arrest him. The piece is packed with details and connections that lots of us will not have seen or tumbled to. Better still, it nails the question of what Jesus, according to John, is doing on that cross. Don't skip over this one. Title: "[Whom Do You Seek?](#)"
3. For those planning to preach on John's Passion, we also recommend a quick review of Steve Turnbull's presentation at the 2016 Crossings conference. Steve used Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus to open up one of the huge promises that John's Gospel unfolds. It reaches its culmination in that great trial scene where Pilate trots Jesus out and proclaims "Behold, the [Man]." (Bad translation, as Steve will point out.) Title: "[Nicodemus and the New Humanity.](#)"



4. If the issue that grabs you this Holy Week is the trouble people have with trusting the Gospel, or more to the point, the One whose death and resurrection is at the heart of the Gospel, then check out the last part of Jerry Burce's lengthy study of Mark, published also in 2012. Title: "[A Reading of St. Mark, Crossings-style](#)." (Caveat: there are hyperlinks in this piece that need repair. Our apologies in advance when they take you nowhere.)
5. The question of "truth" is at the heart of a six-part study of Mark's passion by Lori Cornell, our text-study editor. Title: "[King of the Jews, or Messiah, Son of the Blessed One?](#)" Herein lies the brief homily you might find useful, whether as homilist or good-news-craving hearer, when the Passion read this coming Sunday.
6. Maundy Thursday features the great text of Exodus 12 in which God lays out his Passover agenda. Marcus Felde, undisputed master of the short and pithy text study, has thoughts on this that you'll want to check out, especially if you or the people you care for are slaves of the clock as most of us are. Your liberation is at hand, as Marcus will underscore. Title: "[Just Like Clockwork](#)."
7. There's another way of drawing on Exodus to think about the Passion and what God accomplishes through it. See (or

revisit) a two-year old essay by Jerry Burce entitled [“Looking at the Passion through the Wrong End of Exodus.”](#) Quirky, perhaps, but very much to the point when it comes to the One who dared to say “It is finished.”



8. Maundy Thursday calls to mind not only the washing of feet but even more (for some of us) the institution of the Lord's Supper. If that should be your focus this year, and if, in your thinking, you find yourself wondering

again what Paul means when he speaks of eating and drinking “worthily,” then check out Paul Jaster's study of the relevant passage in 1 Cor. 11. Again, packed with chew-worthy observations. Title: [“Discerning the Body.”](#)

9. Perhaps you'll want to devote some Good Friday attention for once to the great Suffering Servant poem of Isaiah 53. Cathy Lessmann has good thoughts on this in a six-step study entitled [“With Mercy and Justice for All.”](#) That's justice, as in the thing that's on everyone's mind today, though all too often without the slightest nod in mercy's direction.

10. By way of general preparation for the week, you might check out Ed Schroeder's 2004 critique of Mel Gibson's film, “The Passion of the Christ.” In telling us why Gibson's Jesus is not the Jesus we need, Ed will highlight the stupendous gift of the Jesus we have. Title: [“Gibson's “Passion” film, one more time.”](#)

11. Again, a general item: where is God's good news for would-be Passion preachers who are stymied today and still thrashing for direction as Sunday rushes at them? Jerry Burce mused on this a few years ago in "[The Agony of the Empty Preacher](#)." May it be of some help to anyone so burdened.