

*Crossways International Handout for Gospel Readings—  
March 7, 14, 17, 21, and 28 (Palm Sunday), 2010*

**March 7, Lent 3: Luke 13:1-9**

**13:1-5:** The death of the Galileans at the hands of Pilate (v. 1) and the accidental death of those on whom the Tower of Siloam fell are presented by the Lucan Jesus as timely reminders of the need for all to repent. The victims of these tragedies should not be looked on as outstanding sinners who were singled out for punishment.

**13:1:** The slaughter of the Galileans by Pilate is unknown outside of Luke's reference to the event. However, what the Jewish historian Josephus reports about Pilate indicates that such a slaughter would have been in keeping with Pilate's character. Josephus reports that Pilate once disrupted a religious gathering of the Samaritans on Mt. Gerizim by slaughtering the participants. He also reports that on another occasion Pilate killed many Jews who had opposed him when he appropriated money from the Temple treasury to build an aqueduct to Jerusalem.

**13:2:** Physical suffering was widely viewed as a consequence of sin; see John 9:2,3.

**13:3:** John the Baptist called his hearers to repent—passionately; see 3:1-17.

**13:4:** Nothing of this accident in Jerusalem is known outside of Luke and the New Testament. It is possible that the tower was part of Jerusalem's defense system.

**13:5:** Jesus points out the “cause and effect” relationship between the way we live and the life that we experience. The implications relate not only to life in the here and now, but also to life in the hereafter.

*Some general comments:* Jesus denied that individual sinners are punished in this life by specific tragedies. However, He reaffirmed the teaching of the prophets that organizations and communities can and do bring God's discipline on themselves—a discipline that works its way out in history. However, we should not attribute accidents and misfortunes to *divine punishment*.

A pastor who was suffering great distress dreamed that he was to be granted a personal interview with Jesus. “Now I shall get answers to all my problems,” he thought—and prepared a questionnaire for His Lord. However, while standing in the Divine Presence he forgot all his questions, and was content to learn and embrace all the answers in Jesus' face and heart. Jesus is the only Answer in relation to dealing with personal difficulties.

Nations, communities, and even churches can and do bring God's discipline on themselves in this life. Of the fourteen great civilizations that have already disintegrated, Professor Arnold Toynbee (in his ten-volume historical survey) suggests that they were instruments “that God could no longer use.”

**13:6-9:** The term “fig tree” is used frequently as a metaphor for Israel and Judah, Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1; Jeremiah 8:13. For other references to “looking for fruit,” see Matthew 21:19, Mark 11:13.

In Palestine, fruit trees were often planted in vineyards, turning them into a kind of orchard—but in this instance to no good purpose. In the parable, the fig tree is eating up the goodness of the ground at the expense of the surrounding vines—but still bearing no fruit. So the owner decides to have it cut down. It is no more than a glorified weed! However, the gardener pleads for a year's respite. He says he will loosen the earth around the roots and manure it—trouble not taken with fig trees. The owner agrees. He will wait until the next harvest. But this could be the fig tree's last chance.

Although this parable related to the situation of Jesus' day, its message is timeless. In His mercy, God continues to give us—His people—many more “second chances.” However, this should not lead us to presume upon God’s goodness. There will be a last chance. The owner’s patience was eventually strained to breaking point with the barren fig tree. Sir Winston Churchill once mused, “I wonder what would happen if God lost patience with the world.”

Following on the call to repentance in vv. 1-5, the parable of the barren fig tree presents a story about the continuing patience of God with those who have not yet given evidence of their repentance. The parable may also be alluding to the delay of the end time when judgment will be meted out, and the importance of preparing for the end of the age *because the delay will not be permanent*, vv. 8,9. A Final Day is coming when humanity at large must appear before the throne of the Lord of eternity—and “give account,” Matthew 25:31-46.

### **March 14, Lent 4: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

A Jewish commentary on the Law said: “There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world.” In Luke 15:7, Jesus says: “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

*The context:* Jesus had stirred up much opposition in Galilee, and He is now on His way to Jerusalem, Luke 9:51. Although tax collectors and sinners gather around Jesus to hear what He has to say to them, the scribes and Pharisees murmur saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Jesus knows full well that, when He finally enters Jerusalem, all hell will break loose.

**15:1:** *Tax-collectors:* It is difficult for us in the Western world to understand the level of hatred Jewish people felt towards those who collaborated with an occupying power to collect taxes for them. A “tax farmer” bought, from the ruling power, the right to collect taxes in a certain area. He then hired local people to do the actual collecting. Graft and corruption were the order of the day.

*Sinners:* The scribes and Pharisees lumped together sinners, adulterers, the unclean, and the breakers of the law, and rejected them as being “beyond the pale.” Luke tells us that Jesus “received” these sinners, 15:2. The word he uses states that Jesus accepted them as His brothers. More, Jesus ate with them. In the Middle East, friendship is one thing. But to eat with a person is a sacramental act in which participants declare total acceptance of each other.

**15:2:** When Luke says that the scribes and Pharisees were “grumbling” because Jesus was welcoming tax collectors and sinners into full fellowship with Himself, the word Luke uses for “grumbling” is the word the Greek Old Testament uses for the Israelites’ repeated murmurings against Moses in the wilderness.

**15:3:** In Luke 15, Jesus tells three parables. This verse can be seen as an introduction to each of the three.

**15:11-32:** The passage records what is perhaps Jesus’ best-known parable. It has been called the “parable of the prodigal son,” and the “parable of the waiting father.” However, Jesus begins, “There was a man who had two sons.” The parable is about *three* people: *a man and his two sons*. It tells of a son who was lost *at a distance* and of a son who was lost although he stayed *at home*. In what follows, we shall refer to the parable as the “parable of the two lost sons.” In many ways, the older son is the key figure—and the one most truly lost.

**15:12:** First, the younger son says: “Father, give me the share of property that will belong to me.” The request can mean only one thing. The younger son is impatient for his father's death. The

practice was that a father's wealth would be divided only *after* his death. On very rare occasions, a father *could*, on his own initiative, divide his property while he was still living. Although he handed his property over to a son, the father still retained control over it. In short, a son was given the right of *possession* but not the right of *disposition* (to use it as he pleases). However, what the younger son demands is not merely *the right of possession* but also *the right of disposition*.

When people in the Middle East hear this parable today, from Algeria to Iran, from the Sudan to Syria, the response is the same: "Impossible! This father should beat his son! His son wants him to die!" Even so, the father divides the property. He makes two-thirds over to the older son, and one-third over to the younger son.

Note that the younger son does not break a specific law in requesting the division. Deuteronomy 21:17 states that a younger son should receive a third. However, he breaks his father's heart, for he wants his share *now*—and *in cash*!

The son's request hurts not only his father, but the entire family clan. The wealth of a village family is not held in a savings account. It is held in the family's house and buildings, and in animals and land. In our story, the land and animals would have had to be sold quickly at a low price. In the Middle East, people can haggle for days over the smallest transaction. Those who sell in a hurry sell cheaply. For a family to lose one-third of its assets would be a staggering loss.

Note also that the son does not state: "I want my *inheritance*." He states: "Give me the share of the property that will belong to me." He avoids using the word *inheritance*. To accept one's *inheritance* is to accept a leadership responsibility in the clan. The recipient is duty bound to administer the property on behalf of the family, to settle quarrels, to defend the honor of the family against all comers (even with his life), to increase the family's wealth, to represent the family nobly at village weddings, feasts, and funerals. However, this boy wants no *responsibility*. He wants only the *money*.

Through his actions, the younger son cuts himself off from his roots. In cutting himself off from his father, he cuts himself off from his *real* inheritance. A man's security in a village is his family. His family is his insurance, his old-age pension, his assurance of marriage, and his physical and emotional well-being. These things are as precious as life itself. Still today in the Middle East, when you ask a person where he is from, he does not give you his address. He replies: "I am from such and such a village." He may never have been there, but his roots are there. If he is out of work or in need of friends, he will be welcomed, even if the villagers have never seen him. All will open their doors to him, and will accept him totally. So, when the younger son makes his request, he breaks his father's heart and all relationships with his family.

The older son knows the entire story. In a Middle East village community, everything that happens is known almost immediately by everyone. Perhaps the conversation between the father and the younger son is overheard by the servants or other members of the family. Perhaps the older son is present. Whatever the case might have been, the older son refuses to honor his obligations and duty.

In a village quarrel, people involved in a dispute never make up directly. To do so is to require someone to lose face. The reconciliation process takes place through a third party. The "go-between" moves back and forth between the disputing parties until a solution is reached that both can accept. The mediator then arranges a meeting in which those involved in a conflict meet, shake hands, embrace, and perhaps kiss each other. The mediator is always chosen on the basis of the strength of his relationship with the quarreling parties. In our story, the older son would have been the natural choice for mediator. And he must begin immediately. He must do so even if he hates his brother. He must act for the sake of his father. He must say things such as: "O my

brother, your father is an old man. You may not see him again—do not leave us! O my brother, your mother will go blind weeping. We cannot bear the thought of you leaving us!” But he does not do so. Apparently things are bad between him and his brother, and between him and his father. And so, the father grants his younger son permission to turn away from him. However, he does not sever his relationship with the son. Had he disowned him, there would have been no possibility of reconciliation. Because he does not disown him, the possibility of reconciliation remains.

**15:13:** Perhaps during the days immediately prior to his departure, the younger son exchanges his inheritance for a sack of coins. After all, he must be able to carry his inheritance with him. As he leaves, the villagers scorn him. The only thing that goes with him is the love of a broken-hearted father. The word Luke uses to describe his departure is: “He *traveled away* from his own people.” He leaves—and loses—his village!

In the unnamed “far country” to which the son goes, he squanders his property. We are not told how. The tradition that he spent it on immoral living is based on the older brother’s later slanderous remarks, 15:30. In leaving the village, the younger son cut himself off from his original community. He now needs a new circle of friends—a new family. Hence, it is possible that he spends the money foolishly to establish a reputation for generosity among his new associates. Perhaps he throws lavish parties. Perhaps he tries to buy new friendships by giving expensive gifts. Naturally, while he has money, he has friends. When he has no money, he has no friends. He is now in real trouble. What is he to do?

**15:14,15:** First, he tries to get a job. Jesus says he literally “glued” himself to a local “citizen” in the hope that the man (most certainly a *Gentile*) might employ him. If the man is a citizen, he is a man of some standing in the community. Most likely he knows the would-be employee is a Jew and that he once had access to money. He also possibly hopes that by offering him a job feeding pigs (Jews cannot handle pigs or eat pork!), the Jewish job-seeker will turn the offer down and leave him alone.

The situation is complicated by the fact that, in the world of Jesus’ day, pigs were not housed in pens or sties. They wandered along public roads and paths. They served as the community’s garbage disposal units. Therefore, in caring for them, the son would be very much on public display. Surely he would never accept such a position!

But, because he is desperate, he does. That makes him a slave, an outcast, in Jewish eyes. And while he cares for the pigs, he holds out his hands to passers-by in the hope that they will give him something. But no one gives him anything. What is he to do? He needs money to buy food to stay alive. At stake is his very survival.

**15:16-19:** There is only one course open to him: He must return home. And he must do so while he still has enough strength to walk the distance. But he has to devise a strategy that will deal with what might transpire when he arrives at his home village. *First*, he remembers that his father did not discipline him when he made his initial request, and suspects that his father will not reject him. *Second*, he must face his brother’s scorn and “eat his brother’s bread,” and so be indebted to his brother as well as his father. If his brother has treated him badly before, he will treat him worse now! *Third*, he must face the village community. He has broken all relationships with them, and is despised by them. When he gets to the edge of the village, he simply cannot march through it to his father’s house, and say, “Here I am, father!” He must stop at the edge of the village, send a message to his father, and wait for hours and even days to see if his father will respond and agree to meet with him.

So, he works out a plan. He will return to his father and tell him that, although he has sinned against God and his father and is no longer worthy to be called his father’s son, he asks only that his

father will help him by letting him become an apprentice and learn a trade. And here he reveals his strategy for survival. By working at a trade, he can support himself, possibly even pay back some of the family money that he squandered, and perhaps regain even a little dignity in the eyes of his community. And because he will not have to live in or near the family home, but in the village, he will not have to come into constant contact with his brother.

**15:20:** So, the long walk back to his father, brother, and village begins. But note! He has not yet repented! The issue at stake is his *physical survival!*

While all this is going on, what is the father doing? Has he forgotten his son? Impossible! We can well imagine that he thinks about him daily and anxiously. We can well imagine that he thinks about him each night prior to going to sleep, and asks: “Where is my boy? Does he have food? Does he have friends? Is he well? Is he alive?” And we might well imagine that, from time to time, he looks down the road on which his son has walked away from him, and asks. “Will my boy ever come back to me?”

Eventually there comes a day when, while looking down that road, he sees someone on the horizon—walking towards the village. He wonders who it might be. If only it were his son! But he must not let his imagination run away with him. Many people have walked along that road. But the more he looks, the more he suspects something. Is it...? Could it really be...? Surely not! But finally he knows! “*My boy! It is my boy! My boy is coming back to me!*” And he runs to meet his son.

We westerners think little about the fact that he runs. People in many other cultures react differently. They smile! In many parts of the world still today, as in Jesus’ day, old men never run. Little boys run. Teenagers run. Old men never run. They walk slowly, with great dignity. But this father runs! He must get to the boy first. Why? The villagers, the villagers! When the son asked his father to give him the share of the property that was due to him, he did not sin merely against his father. He sinned against the village! He has no right to return to it. More, if the villagers see him returning and get to him first, most likely they will carry out a *qetsatsah* ceremony.

*Qetsatsah* is an Aramaic word meaning “cutting off.” The ceremony is described in several non-biblical Jewish writings, including the Jerusalem Talmud (e.g., Kidd. 1:5). These writings state that if a man sold his field to a Gentile (non-Jew), the relatives would bring parched corn and nuts, place them in a jar, and break the jar in front of the people as they proclaimed, “So-and-so is cut off from his inheritance.” Ketuboth 2:10 does not mention the Gentile. It states that if a man sold to *anyone*, the ceremony would be enacted. Only restoration of the land could revoke the “cutting off” of the offending person. If we accept the earlier Jerusalem Talmud text as more likely to represent the first century, the threat is even stronger. The prodigal has sold the land. Now he goes into a far country with the proceeds of the sale in his pocket. If he returns and re-buys, all will be forgiven. But how will the village react if he loses all the money and adds insult to injury by doing so *among the Gentiles*? If the *qetsatsah* ceremony was not enacted when the son left, it will surely be performed if he dare return under these latter unthinkable circumstances. Little wonder, then, that the father must get to his boy first! How the father receives the son will determine how the villagers must receive him.

In running, literally “racing” to his son, the father demeans himself. To run, he must hold up his outer garment that he might move swiftly. He exposes his undershirt—if you like, his underwear! And, without doubt, the boys and teenagers of the village run alongside him, laughing loudly, pointing at his exposed legs and knees, and saying, “Look! His underwear! His underwear! Ha, ha, ha!” But the father is prepared to demean himself to get to that boy first! Finally, the two meet. An *obedient* son has the right to kiss his father’s hands. This *wayward* son has only the right to fall to the ground and kiss his father’s feet. But the father will not let him fall to the ground. Although the father says nothing, he takes his son in his arms, holds him up, and kisses him.

**15:21:** The boy tries to deliver his little speech—but succeeds in getting out only the first part of it: “Father, I have sinned against God and you, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But he does not get out the bit about becoming an apprentice and learning a trade. Why?

**15:22:** The father takes over and does the talking! “Place the best robe in the house around him. Place a ring on his finger. Put shoes on his feet. Kill the fatted calf and prepare a feast!” Note the implications! The father accepts the boy back as his son, and reinstates him in the household. The best robe?—most likely the best robe from the father’s own wardrobe. A ring?—that was a symbol of authority in the household. Shoes?—only slaves go barefoot; sons wear shoes. Son? Yes! Hired servant? Apprentice? Never! He orders the servants to serve his *son*! Everyone in the village must now treat the son in keeping with the father’s wishes. The father’s actions have established the way things are to be.

**15:23, 24:** The father calls for a feast! There must be a feast to celebrate! He instructs that the family’s fatted calf (an expensive item that now belongs to the older brother!) be part of the menu. In that part of the world still today, a village feast is a truly special event. In the situation described in the parable, the father is the focus of attention. He has decided the nature of the son’s reception, and decreed the future relationship. He sits in the center of the house, and all the guests come in to him and thank him for inviting them. He, in turn, thanks them for honoring him with their presence. On this particular occasion, the guest of honor is the younger son. No person in the village dare say anything unkind to him. They may not like what he has done, and may not feel well disposed towards him. But they must accept and welcome him. The father’s actions have determined what theirs must be.

**15:25-27:** But now comes a tough question. Who is to be the “head waiter?” The older brother! Although the other servants would do the bulk of the work, the older son must be present to set the tone of the hospitality offered by assuring the guests that they are most welcome, and that they honor the family by coming!

But the older son is not home when the banquet begins. He is out in the fields. No—he is not working. He is the older son in a household of some wealth. The family has a home, servants, fields, and cattle. He does not work, but he supervises. Most likely he is lying under the shade of a tree, nibbling away at some fruit, watching over the hired servants, and paying them their wages at the end of the day.

Within half an hour of the son’s return, everyone in the village knows what is happening. The older son asks one of those serving the banquet, “What’s going on around here?” The servant replies, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf.”

**15:28:** The older brother is furious. He will not go in. And within a manner of moments, all in the house sense the tension. The atmosphere is electric. The eating, music, and dancing stop. All eyes turn toward the father. The situation must be resolved. But how? The father should not leave his place of honor. He should stay inside among his guests! To go outside would be again demeaning. Even so, out he goes—to face the older son’s fury and insults!

**15:29-30:** The older son explodes with, “Father, you’ve never done anything like this for me! You have not even given me a kid goat from the flock to share with my friends. And I’ve worked all these years for you. Yet, when this son of yours (note: *your son*, not *my brother*) comes back, this son who has been wasting our assets on harlots (*a false charge!*), you kill the fatted calf!” Let’s give some thought to the older son’s thinking patterns. He has never left his father. He has stayed home and carried out his duties. His father should be impressed with his track record, and see himself as indebted to his older son. However, he says the father has never shown him any special favor. He has never even given him so much as a kid goat to share with his friends at a feast! (His

“friends” are people “out there,” not members of the family or the immediate community.) He feels he has done so much, but received so little. More, as he sees it, the father has demeaned the family reputation by welcoming back this womanizing vagabond!

**15:31,32:** The father replies with great concern and kindness, “My son, (and he uses a very tender word here) all that I have is yours! You see, we thought *your brother* (note that term!) was dead—but he is alive. We thought he was lost—but he has been found!”

What does the older son do to his father? We are not told. Possibly, in his rage he beats him—or even kills him. These suggestions are not far-fetched if we bear in mind that those to whom Jesus told this parable eventually screamed, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

The father in the parable does not impose laws and constraints on his sons. He does not force them to do things against their will. He lets them do their worst to him so that he might do his best for them. And if the older son did indeed choose to beat his father, perhaps the father’s hope was that he would eventually come to his senses and ask: “What am I doing? How can I possibly do this to my father? What kind of a father do I have, who lets me do this to him? Why does he act this way toward me?” And if the older son does get around to asking these questions, his whole relationship with his father and brother will change.

Let’s say that, as the weeks go by and things settle down, the younger boy goes back to work in the family circle. Can you imagine the spirit in which he does that? Can you imagine the difference the villagers see in him? Can you imagine how he relates to the servants in the household? And perhaps some, who do not know the family story, ask him, “Why are you like this—so kind, concerned, and compassionate?” To such questions, the younger son might well reply, “Have you never heard my story? Let me tell it to you!”

What changed the younger son? When he “came to his senses” in the far country, he did not repent. He simply realized that he was in a dangerous situation. There was a drought in the land, and a severe shortage of food. His own survival was at stake. His concern was to save his own life and regain some of the security that he had enjoyed prior to his departure. The thing that changed him was the look he saw on his father’s face and the welcome he received. He was “found.”

Luke does not tell us what the older son finally did to his father. This points to the challenge that Jesus was presenting to the scribes and Pharisees. He was saying, “Yes, I do welcome sinners and eat with them. That is at the heart of My ministry. That is what the Kingdom of God is all about. What will you do about it? What will you do with Me?” Their murmurings will eventually give rise to “Crucify Him!”

*Concluding Thoughts:* In many parts of Africa, when a dispute takes place in a village, this is what happens: In the center of the village is a round hut. (In Liberia it is called a *Palaver Hut*. In South Africa it is called a *Ndaba Hut*). The village elders, and the parties to the controversy, meet in the hut and sit on the floor in a circle, facing each other. After some initial small talk, they face up to the problem head-on. They talk things out and settle the problem. When the talk is over, there is a village feast which all attend. And when the feast is over, no person in the village may ever again refer to the problem or controversy. It is past, finished, and forgotten! Perhaps we westerners would do well to refer to our places of worship as *Palaver huts*!

Briefly, what does this parable mean for us? We are the ones who have wandered away from God. We are the ones who have claimed ownership of creation and life, and want to use them to enjoy ourselves rather than use them to glorify God and serve others in our earthly village. But when we come to our senses and return to our Heavenly Father, what do we have to bring? The younger son had only pig-stink to bring with him. We have only sin-stink to bring with us. But when we come,

the heavenly Father rushes out to meet us, welcomes us passionately, and reinstates us in His family circle. God “finds” us.

When God restores us to His family circle, we are to serve Him by serving each other, and do so in the spirit of the Servant Jesus, His cross, and with the image of His empty tomb fixed in our minds. Within that family circle, we are to invite others to return to the family fold, and welcome them warmly when they come, so that God might “find” them. And we are to go on telling *God's* story, not *our* story, so that God's family might continue to grow and the heavenly village might be more densely populated.

### **March 21, Lent 5: John 12:1-8**

In John 11, we read of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead—a deed that results in the scribes and Pharisees calling a meeting of the Sanhedrin. Those who attend the meeting vote to have Jesus put to death. Jesus now leaves Jerusalem and goes north to Ephraim—no doubt for security reasons.

**12:1-3:** Jesus eventually returns to Jerusalem six days before the annual Passover celebration. In John, the Passover observance begins on a Friday evening—not on a Thursday evening as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The Lazarus miracle, which provoked hatred on the Pharisees' part, now inspires love from Mary. When Jesus returns to the vicinity of Jerusalem, He—and apparently His disciples—call on Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at their home in Bethany. They invite Him to share a meal with them. Martha busies herself with the practical details of looking after the dinner guests. Lazarus is with Jesus and other guests around the meal table. The table is low to the floor, and the guests do not sit on chairs. They lie on their sides on a U-shaped sofa-like *triclinium* around three sides of the table—with their legs stretched out away from the table. Suddenly, Mary does something remarkable. She anoints Jesus' feet with precious ointment, and then wipes them with her hair.

Naturally, Mary loves Jesus dearly, both as a friend and as the One who brought her brother back to life. But there is a deeper meaning behind her act of devotion. Kings of Israel were anointed with oil by a prophet at the direction of God. The term “Messiah” means “the anointed one.”

A rabbinic maxim says, “Good ointment spreads from the bedroom into the dining room, but a good name spreads from one end of the world to the other.”

**12:4-6:** Had we witnessed what Mary did, we might have said, “What a beautiful act of love!” However, Judas says, “What a waste!” He is the disciple who “managed” the funds that Jesus and the other disciples needed to buy food and other basic supplies as they moved around the countryside. Like any greedy person, he quickly works out the price of what is obviously valuable ointment. Three hundred *denarii*! The *denarius* was a Roman silver coin equal to about a day's pay for a laborer. Treasurer Judas is not only a thief but also a pious fraud. His objection that the money used to buy this precious fluid should have been given to the poor is nothing but a mask. He uses pious words to cover his disappointment at not being able to get his own hands on that tidy sum of money!

**12:7,8:** Jesus does not reprimand Judas as we might expect him to do. However, Jesus will eventually expose his greed; see 13:21-30. All Jesus says is, “What Mary has done is right and proper. She is serving Me while she still can.” Jesus was physically present with His friends for but a short time, whereas they always had plenty of opportunities to serve the poor. (The sad truth is that the poor are still very much a part of our world, despite all the advances in technology.) The surprising thing—and Mary probably does not realize the full meaning of her action—is that the King here has been anointed for His death and burial. Jesus is marked as the Messiah who must die. John pictures the cross as Jesus' throne, and His crucifixion as His coronation.

**12:9-11:** Lazarus is only just out of the grave, and the Jewish authorities want to see him dead again! His “great crime” is that he is the cause of many more people flocking to Jesus and believing in Him. Blind, fanatical opposition does not care about rights and wrongs, about truth and justice. Little fish like Lazarus must also be removed to get rid of the big fish, Jesus of Nazareth! However, John makes no reference to Lazarus being put to death by the Jerusalem political and religious elite.

**March 28, Palm Sunday: Luke 22:14–23:56**

Each of the four passion narratives is unique—and profound. Although they share many common details, each contains unique elements. Luke includes the following specific details in his passion narrative:

1. Satan enters Judas (22:3), who confers with the chief priests and captains about how he might betray Jesus “in the absence of the multitude,” 22:4,6. They agree to give him money for his services, 22:5. Jesus does not permit Judas to kiss Him, 22:48.
2. The Jewish leaders themselves go out to capture Jesus, 22:52. Jesus heals the servant whose ear Peter has cut off (22:51), and is led away to the High Priest’s house, 22:54.
3. No night trial or discussion is mentioned (22:54), but Jesus is subjected to abuse, 22:63-65. The Sanhedrin meets in daylight and charges Jesus with claiming to be the Messiah, 22:66-71. The only body in Palestine that can determine whether or not a person is the Messiah is the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, which met in the Royal Porch of the Jerusalem Temple. Little wonder, then, that the disciples are keen to have Jesus go to Jerusalem. They are sure that the Sanhedrin will proclaim Jesus to be the Messiah and that they will benefit as a result.
4. The authorities take Jesus to Pilate and level charges of political insurrection, 23:1-5. When Pilate hears that Jesus is from Galilee, he sends Jesus to his political enemy, Herod Antipas, 23:6-12. Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee and Perea, was a son of Herod the Great.
5. When Jesus appears before Herod, the scene represents the climax of earlier accounts of Herod’s reaction to Jesus, which shifts from fascination to opposition, 9:9; 13:31-33. Herod wants to see a miracle, but all that he sees is a silent prisoner who is the object of violent accusations and mockery. Ironically, the incident creates peace between Herod and Pilate, 23:12.
6. Pilate feels convinced that Jesus is innocent, and declares that he will chastise and release Him, 23:13-17. However, when the Jews demand the release of Barabbas, Pilate yields, 23:18-25.
7. Jesus speaks three Words from the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (23:34); “Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise,” (23:43); “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,” 23:46.
8. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, buries Jesus as an act of piety. Joseph represents the righteous of Israel, who were seeking the kingdom of God, 23:50-53. In doing this, Joseph renders himself ritually unclean and endangers his own life; the Jewish leaders would have been angry with him for providing Jesus with a decent burial.
9. Some women prepare to anoint Jesus’ body, but they are interrupted by the Sabbath. Jesus is buried, not like a criminal, but with honor, and His followers know the place. When the women return to the tomb to complete the anointing, there is no possibility that they have mistaken the place of burial, 23:55-24:3.

10. None of the Gospels suggests that the disciples or anyone else expected the events that were to follow the crucifixion. Even though Jesus pointed to His coming resurrection in the passion predictions (Luke 9:18-24, 9:43b-48; 18:31-34; see also Mark 8:31; 9:30,31; 10:32-34), none of the disciples understood what Jesus was saying. When on one occasion they heard Jesus predict His resurrection, they were too afraid to ask what He meant by it, Luke 9:45; see also Mark 9:9,10. In all four Gospels, the resurrection event explodes upon the lives of the disciples in a most unexpected manner.

It is important that God's people understand Jesus' crucifixion to have been His coronation. When humanity did its worst to Him, He did His best for them. Although at the cross Jesus got crucified, Satan got nailed; here note John 12:31, 14:30,31; 16:4b-11 (especially v. 11); 16:33.

In Luke's narrative, Jesus' words from the cross are profound beyond definition; see 23:34, 43, 46. How different is the Kingdom He established from those that earthly powers continue to seek to establish!

*The following two quotes challenge us to ask, "Why are things so different in the life of today's church?"*

#### **HOW THE FIRST CHRISTIANS LIVED TOGETHER (Acts 4:32-34)**

"Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what they sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

#### **LIVING THE STORY (R. Paul Stevens & Michael Green [Eerdmans]; pp. 134,135)**

"Most early Communion did not take place in a church at all, but in a home. People began to appear in the early evening with materials for a potluck supper. They are happy and relaxed; work is over. All are on a level here, men and women. Roman citizens and commoners, slaves and free. Oil lamps are lit. Couches are set. Feet are washed. They have a meal, reclining around a courtyard, or squashed into a room. They share news. Someone produces a musical instrument and they begin to sing. Indeed, they create new songs, snatches of which are to be found in the New Testament, like 'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead: Christ shall give you life,' or 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, who was and is and is to come.' Meanwhile, someone has brought out the church box that contains their most Christian belongings: some sayings of Jesus, perhaps a letter from an apostle, or communion vessels. Praise is heartfelt. Speaking in tongues might well follow. There could be a prayer for a healing or a specific need of one of the members. Certainly prayer, the reading of an Old Testament scripture, the recitation of a story about Jesus, and some words of encouragement from members of the community, along with joyful singing, would all feature. And as the evening comes to an end, they would tell again the story of Jesus' passion, and break bread and drink wine in remembrance of Him. Every scrap is finished. The prayer that Jesus taught them is recited. They move around and embrace one another with a holy kiss, and then go home. All very simple. No service books. No priests. No altars. Every eye is on the unseen Lord, the bread, the wine, and each other. And then—out into the night, spiritually refueled for the journey of the coming week."