



Copyright © 2018 by H. N. Wendt  
Crossways International  
Minneapolis, MN 55435 USA  
1-800-257-7308  
[www.crossways.org](http://www.crossways.org)

## **The Revised Common Lectionary Notes**

March 4, 11, 18, 25, 29, 30, and April 1  
by the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, founder of Crossways International

### **March 4, The Third Sunday in Lent: John 2:13–22**

After turning water into wine at a marriage feast in Cana (the first of seven “signs” in John), Jesus goes to the temple in Jerusalem and drives out the animal sellers and moneychangers. To unearth the implications of Jesus’ actions, it is essential to know something about:

- the temple and its leadership;
- coinage acceptable to the money changers;
- the business style of animal sellers; and
- the “salvation marketing system” practiced within the temple’s walls.

John places Jesus’ attack on the temple system at the *beginning* of Jesus’ ministry, while the synoptic writers place it at the *end* of Jesus’ ministry. Although some suggest that Jesus attacked the temple system twice, we would do well to bear in mind that John is focusing on theological themes rather than narrative sequence. Jesus could not have attacked the temple system twice. After Jesus’ first attack, the temple officials would have made it impossible for Him to attack it a second time.

Jewish teachers in Jesus’ day taught that when the Messiah came, He would go straight to the temple. Once there, He would establish His throne, reign in a political/military manner, and bring peace, prosperity, and social justice to the land and its people. The fact that Jesus’ attack on the temple system coincided with the celebration of Passover (with its central theme of “exodus” and rescue from foreign domination) adds to the implications of Jesus’ actions. However, Jesus has come to save His people from the real enemy: the powers of Satan, sin, and death.

Herod’s (The second) temple was the focal point of Judaism. The Fortress of Antonia was located on its northwest corner. Many Roman soldiers were stationed in this fortress to watch over what took place within the precincts of the temple’s huge platform; during major festivals they were posted on top of the porticos surrounding this platform. Furthermore, the Romans kept the High Priest’s vestments within this fortress—which meant that he had to “check them out” prior to each major festival and return them when it ended.

If Jesus had come as a political revolutionary, He would have called those following Him to storm the Fortress of Antonia and drive out the Roman soldiers stationed within its walls. He did not do that!

Instead, He attacked some of the corrupt practices carried out within the temple's precincts—practices designed to generate cash: *animal selling* and *money changing*. Both were activities designed to extract money from prospective worshipers.

The Sadducees, religious rulers from a few elite Jerusalem families, had the oversight of the temple's money machine. They also controlled the Sanhedrin (*Jewish Supreme Court*) and functioned as judges as well as Chief and High Priests. And they were corrupt! They embraced no belief in life after death; for them, whatever you wish to get out of life you have to get in the here and now. Their scriptures consisted solely of the Pentateuch; they did not accept the Prophets, the Writings, and the oral traditions.

In Jesus' day, there were approximately 9,000 temple priests—although only the elite Chief and High Priests resided in Jerusalem. The rest lived in towns and villages outside Jerusalem, and served at the temple twice per year for one week each shift. Furthermore, about 80% of the people living in Jerusalem obtained their income by providing accommodation, food, and sacrificial animals for pilgrims visiting the temple. Little wonder that they all wanted to perpetuate the temple system!

The leaders of the temple were as creative as they were corrupt. At that time, coins from Tyre had the highest silver content of all coins used by pilgrims throughout the Jewish Diaspora. The Sadducees decreed that Jews could use only this Tyrian half-shekel to pay the annual temple tax (for a month before, and twenty days after Passover). Any pilgrim who brought other coins, such as bronze and low-silver content coins from other parts of the world, was required to exchange them for the high silver-content Tyrian coins coveted by the temple's leaders. And naturally, the moneychangers always charged a handling fee for exchanging the unacceptable coins into Tyrian half-shekels.

The corruption did not stop there. If a pilgrim brought his or her own animal to the temple for sacrifice, the temple inspectors all too often found that the animal was "blemished." (And of course, they charged a fee for this "unbiased" inspection!) The pilgrim was then forced to buy a "non-blemished" animal from temple flocks—at an inflated price. Little wonder, then, that Jesus was enraged by the system He witnessed within the temple's precincts.

During the Passover, the people's hopes for another "exodus," another rescue, was at its peak. Little wonder, then, that the Roman soldiers were on the lookout for any kind of political disturbance. So when Jesus fashions a whip, most likely made from the cords used to control the animals (no sticks or weapons were allowed on the temple mount), and starts driving the animals and the animal sellers away, imagine what these soldiers must have been thinking. However, none of the soldiers made any attempt to intervene— even when Jesus redirected His anger toward the moneychangers and overthrew their tables.

We are not told what took place in the minds of the disciples as they watched Jesus' actions! In the observant Judaism of Jesus' day, how was righteousness achieved? It was achieved by:

- exercising scrupulously lawful behavior,
- going to the ritual purification baths when ceremonially unclean, and
- offering the prescribed sacrifices.

It was this religious system that imputed “righteousness” to the Jewish people; those who did these three things had no need to repent. They were already “right with God.”

In John 2, Jesus replaces all three legs of this “righteousness” stool. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus’ actions signaled the end of the need for *ritual purification*. By driving out the animal sellers, Jesus signaled the end of the need for *animal sacrifices*. And Jesus’ own servant life modeled what *God-pleasing righteousness* is all about. Do ponder Zechariah 14:21 and note also that the temple leaders did not assert their innocence nor contend that what Jesus did was wrong. We would do well to ask what might happen if Jesus walked into some worship services today. Would He hear His Father’s theology being proclaimed and taught? How would He react to entertainment-oriented, “What’s in it for me?” worship services? How might He respond to those “feel good,” “you-too-can-be-a-financial-success” Sunday morning messages?

### **March 11, The Fourth Sunday in Lent: John 3:14–21**

*The comments made in this introductory section highlight the need to understand the pericopes for the Fourth and Fifth Sundays in Lent in the context of John’s larger narrative.*

John’s first 12 chapters have a dramatic, overarching theme. They picture Jesus coming to God’s people to face something like a court trial. The Jewish political and religious leaders accuse Jesus of being an imposter and a blasphemer. Witnesses for the prosecution and defense are called. Jesus’ accusers seem to gain the victory until the resurrection makes the final authoritative statement concerning Jesus’ identity.

The spirit of *trial* emerges more clearly when we consider the following details. Although Jesus’ opponents make the final decision to have Him put to death *after* He raises Lazarus (chapter 11), they oppose Him *throughout His ministry*. The opposition hinted at in 1:11 reveals itself in specific situations as the narrative unfolds.

- Jesus’ opponents want to kill Him for healing on the Sabbath and making Himself equal with God (5:18).
- When Jesus refers to Himself as the “bread from heaven” (6:33–40), many do not accept what He says and desert Him (6:60, 66).
- When Jesus goes to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles), some want to arrest and kill Him (7:19, 25, 43, 44). They accuse Him of being a Samaritan and demon-possessed (8:48–49) and try to stone Him (8:59).
- Those who endorse Jesus’ ministry are thrown out of the synagogue (9:22). When Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd, the One in whom Ezekiel 34 is fulfilled, His opponents are divided, insist that He is demon-possessed, throw stones at Him, and try to arrest Him (10:19–20, 31, 39).

Chapters 13 through 17 describe events in the Upper Room where *the disciples are on trial by Jesus*. Do they really understand His message? Do they understand what claiming Jesus as Lord and Messiah implies for their daily life? The first stages of Peter’s denial are outlined in 18:15–8. The latter details of Peter’s denial are given in 18:25–27.

Jesus and the disciples proceed from the Upper Room to the garden where Jesus is captured. Those who seize and bind Jesus take Him to Annas, who served as High Priest until AD 15, when he was deposed by the Romans. Five of his sons succeeded him as High Priest, and Caiaphas (the present High Priest) was his son-in-law. The High Priest (who must still be Annas) then questions Jesus; see 18:19, 24, 28. (A High Priest retained his title throughout his life.) What transpires between Annas and Jesus is not a trial but a conversation in which Annas questions Jesus about His disciples and His teaching. Annas then has Jesus bound and sends him to Caiaphas. However, there is no reference to any conversation between Caiaphas and Jesus or to any kind of trial by the Jewish Sanhedrin (18:24).

Why did John omit any reference to a formal Jewish trial *within his passion narrative*? The answer becomes clear when the events outlined in chapters 11 and 12 are understood. When Jesus goes to the aid of Lazarus, He is met by Martha and Mary. Both profess faith in Jesus' power. Martha expresses her conviction that Lazarus will return to life in the resurrection on the Last Day, and thus she expresses the traditional hope of *some* Jewish people at that time. Jesus assures her that hopes concerning death and resurrection have been transformed and fulfilled, for He is present (11:25–27). *Jesus is the resurrection and the life!* Shortly afterwards, Jesus restores Lazarus to life (11:43–44).

The response to Jesus' action is immediate. Some rejoice, but others inform the Pharisees what Jesus has done. The Pharisees believe that the resurrection of the body will take place at the close of the Age when the Messiah comes. Jesus' actions are scandalous and cause the Pharisees much distress. Has the Messianic Age come, and is Jesus really the Messiah? Impossible! Jesus must go!

The Jewish trial follows (11:47–53). The members of the Sanhedrin determine that, rather than risk losing their nation and Temple, Jesus must be eliminated. Accordingly, Jesus is tried *in absentia* and condemned to death (11:53, 57). Furthermore, they decide to kill Lazarus as well. After all, Lazarus was Exhibit A in the recent disturbing resurrection event (12:9–11). However, John makes no reference to Lazarus being put to death.

Jesus' trial by the Romans is recorded in chapters 18 and 19. Remarkably, Pilate states three times that he finds "no case against Him" (18:38; 19:4; 19:6). The only reason Pilate succumbed to the pressures put on him by the Jewish religious leaders was their threat that, if he did not have Jesus put to death, they would see to it that he was thrown out of the "Friends of the Emperor" Club (see 19:12). (Pilate was an imperial procurator, one appointed by the Emperor himself; those so appointed belonged to the "Emperor's Club.") In other words, they would see to it that Pilate was fired!

Now **3:14–21**. Jesus' first passion prediction in John is recorded in 3:14. It draws on the events outlined in Numbers 21—a narrative that speaks of Moses fashioning a bronze serpent and setting it on a pole within the camp. Those who looked up at the bronze serpent would be healed of the snakebite that they had suffered because they had worshiped false gods. Similarly, those afflicted by the "bite" of Satan, sin, and death are healed by looking on the One who has been lifted up on a cross.

The term *Son of Man* is drawn from Daniel 7. In Daniel 7:13, the term *son of man* denotes the people of God, the righteous Jewish people, the "saints of the Most High" who will eventually be delivered from bondage to the Syrian Seleucid, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and given dominion over the nations of the world forever. The dominion the Jewish people longed for was political. The nature of Jesus' dominion was defined and bestowed by His Heavenly Father. Jesus walked the way of a Servant-without-limit and, at Calvary, conquered the powers of Satan, sin, and death.

Those who believe in and follow Jesus face no condemnation. Those who do not believe in and follow Him do face condemnation (vv. 17–18). Indeed, free grace invariably calls people to costly discipleship.

Tragically, humanity by nature chooses the darkness of sin and living for self rather than the light of God’s truth—demonstrated in the mission and ministry of Jesus (vv. 19–20). Jesus’ desire is not merely to “dry-clean” us from sin, but to disciple us so that we follow Him in compassionate servanthood on a worldwide scale. And those who walk in the ways of Jesus have no cause for boasting; their deeds have been done in God (v. 21).

### **March 18, The Fifth Sunday in Lent: John 12:20–33**

In **12:20**, we read of “some Greeks” coming to the Temple to participate in the coming Passover celebration. Most likely they were Jews who lived outside the borders of the Promised Land. They “wish to see Jesus” (v. 21).

Their attitude toward Jesus is altogether different from that of the Jewish leaders living within the Promised Land (chapters 10 and 11). After Jesus speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd (King), the Jewish leaders declare Him to be demon-possessed. A little later, some plot to stone Jesus to death (10:31) and some try to arrest Him (10:39). Jesus, however, leaves Jerusalem and goes to the region of the Transjordan, where John the Baptist had carried out his ministry (10:40). “Many believed in Him there” (10:41–42).

In the following chapter, after Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, the Sanhedrin (presided over by the High Priest Caiaphas) votes to have Jesus put to death (11:45–53). Once again, Jesus and His disciples leave Jerusalem and go north to Ephraim. Six days before Passover, Jesus returns to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at Bethany on the Mount of Olives. On the Sunday before Passover, Jesus finds a donkey and rides it into Jerusalem (12:12–15).

When Andrew and Philip tell Jesus the desire of the Greeks to meet with Him (12:22), He tells them that the hour has come when He will be glorified (12:23). In doing so, He will sow a seed that will produce much fruit. Those who come to faith in Jesus and follow Him by giving life away in the service of others will find life. The Father will honor only those who serve Jesus—by serving the world around them. Those who do not believe in and follow Jesus will lose their life.

In **12:27**, a troubled Jesus makes reference to His coming “hour,” His crucifixion. (John makes reference to the term *hour* 20 times.) However, Jesus does not ask His Father to deliver Him from that coming hour.

He has come to endure it so that He might glorify His Father’s name. The terms *glory* and *glorify* occur frequently in John’s Gospel. Jesus’ glory is to walk the way of a servant-without-limit. His ultimate glory will be to give away life on a cross! The world’s concept of glory is altogether different.

**Vv. 28-29** refer to a “voice from heaven.” Jewish religious leaders taught that God could communicate with His people in a variety of ways: through the Torah, the voice of a prophet, a holy spirit, and the “daughter of a voice” (*bat kohl*). In v. 30, Jesus states that the message the voice delivered was not meant merely for Him, but for those around Him.

The message embedded in v. 31 is of great significance. Jesus must soon go to His cross, and when He does, it will not be that the world judges Him, but that He judges the world! The world around Him does not want to hear His call to radical servant discipleship in an upside-down, back-to-front Kingdom. It will seek to remove Him from the scene. But in doing that, it brings judgment on itself!

There is more—much more! When Jesus goes to His cross, He will finally conquer “the ruler of this world”—Satan! Sad to say, we live in a world in which little reference is made to Satan. Many, including some religious leaders, deny the existence of the demonic realm. True, we are not to think of Satan merely as an angry face breathing fire and brimstone. Rather, the demonic is every spirit, power, institution, and pressure that seeks to seduce us from living to serve God and others into serving ourselves. Without a doubt, the demonic is rejoicing over the present economic storm that is sweeping across the nations of the world! After all, the demonic devised the financial practices that triggered it!

Jesus states that when He is lifted up, He will draw all people to Himself. The reference is, initially, to His vindication in the resurrection, but above all to His exaltation in the ascension. And may more and more people who live on this confused Planet Earth learn that only in Jesus’ ministry, cross, resurrection, and exaltation do we find God’s eternal truth.

As mentioned in the insights offered in relation to the Second Sunday in Lent, Mark’s Gospel contains three sets of Prediction-Confusion-Clarification. So does Matthew’s Gospel. Although Luke contains three passion predictions, these are not followed with Confusion-Clarification statements as clear as those contained in Mark and Matthew. Furthermore, in each of John’s three passion predictions, the reference is to the Son of Man being lifted up on a cross—as was the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14–15; 8:28; 12:32–33). Note also the references to Satan and the demonic (John 12:31; 13:2, 37; 14:30; 16:11; 17:15).

The profound significance of Jesus’ death on a cross becomes all the more apparent when it is understood that, in the final analysis, Jesus’ opponents did not kill Him. After uttering His last words on the cross, “It is finished,” Jesus bowed His head *and gave up His spirit*. In giving up His life, He conquered the enemy powers that sought to eliminate Him. Jesus’ greatest act of servanthood won His greatest victory!

### **March 25: Palm Sunday, Mark 11:1–11**

The setting for Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was spectacular. Standing on the Mount of Olives, Jesus could have seen the blue line from the Dead Sea and the hills of Moab to the east. But Jesus was no doubt looking west rather than east. Below Him lay the Kidron valley. Rising up from its western side were the slopes of Mt. Moriah which were topped with the huge walls of the platform for Herod’s Temple. And there stood the Temple itself, glowing white in the morning sun with its gold ornamentations reflecting the sun’s rays.

Standing on the Mount of Olives and looking at the grand spectacle to the west, Jesus wept, Luke 19-41. Significantly, although David wept when forced to *leave* Jerusalem (2 Samuel 15:30), Jesus wept when He *entered* Jerusalem.

When David commanded Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah to appoint his son, Solomon as his successor, he had them seat Solomon on his donkey for the journey to the place of anointing, 1 Kings 1:32-40. Jesus' "royal vehicle" was also a donkey. The only touches of luxury were the cloaks that the disciples threw across its back for Jesus to sit on.

The crowds were there, too, for Jesus' royal entry. They expressed their emotions with shouting, rejoicing, and singing—yet they did not really understand what was taking place. The "royal attendants," the disciples, no doubt were experiencing an emotional high—but most likely they saw the future only in terms of the pomp and power it might bring to them.

Mark 11:11-19 tells us that, after entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and looking around the Temple, Jesus left the city and went to Bethany—a mile or so to the east. Jesus returned to Jerusalem the next morning (Monday) to attack the Temple. While returning, Jesus cursed a fig tree, 11:12-14. When Jesus and the disciples passed by the tree the next morning (Tuesday), it was dead and withered, 11:20. At first Jesus' actions appear a little strange, but their meaning becomes clear when we examine Micah 7:1-6 and Jeremiah 8:13. The rituals of the Temple were superficial, and made little impact on the moral life of the nation and its people. They were like a fig tree that had an abundance of leaves but had no fruit under those leaves.

On Palm Sunday, the people welcomed Jesus with shouts of joy. Five days later, many of them shouted, "Crucify Him!" If Jesus were to enter our churches today, no doubt we too would welcome Him with shouts of joy. After all, He has forgiven us, and promised us that when life is done He will welcome us into His Eternal Home. But how might we react when He tells us that we, His brothers and sisters, own nothing, and are to devote the whole of life to glorifying Him by serving those around us in our family circle, local community, nation, and the world at large?

### **March 29, Maundy Thursday: John 13:1–17, 31b–35**

In centuries gone by, royalty and members of the "upper class" dined together in lavish style in the palaces and mansions of Europe. No doubt special banquets were held on the nights before and after a coronation.

- All four Gospels describe Jesus sharing a meal with His disciples in an upper room during the evening prior to His crucifixion. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the meal was a Passover meal; see Matthew 26:17–19; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7. According to John 19:14, the Jewish Passover meal took place on the Friday evening that followed Jesus' crucifixion. John had reasons for structuring his narrative as he did; Jesus, twice referred to as the Lamb of God (1:19, 36), was handed over for crucifixion at about the same time as people began to bring lambs to the Temple so that they might be ritually slaughtered for use in the coming Passover Meal.
- In Jesus' day, those who participated in a Passover meal recalled the events of the Exodus from Egypt. They also looked forward to the time when the Messiah would come to deliver them from foreign domination and usher in the Messianic Age.
- Table fellowship anywhere is a relatively serious matter. This was, and still is, especially true in the Middle East where, to invite someone to share a meal is to bestow a great honor. To share

table is to share life. It is an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood, and forgiveness. When Jesus shared meals with publicans, sinners, and His disciples, He expressed in action the message of His mission. He lived out the message of the welcoming, redeeming love of God.

- According to John, on the night prior to His crucifixion, Jesus did more than share a meal with His disciples. He washed their feet (John 13:1–17). In Jesus' day, when a host welcomed a guest to his home, he kissed him on both cheeks, saw to it that his feet were washed by a servant, and that his head was anointed with perfumed oil. The Gospels do not refer to the disciples doing any of these things for Jesus. However, Jesus performed the task of a slave for them! It is important to note that no Jew would ever wash another person's feet; only non-Jews, Gentile slaves, could do that. Hence, Jesus assumed the role of a Gentile slave in relation to His disciples—and commanded them to do the same for each other.
- Jesus explains to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (13:12–15). After Judas left the upper room, Jesus said to the disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:34–35).
- Those who know Jesus the Messiah as Savior and Lord do not look to Old Testament commandments, such as those set out in Exodus 20:4–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21, as their ultimate guide for life. These commandments were given only to the ancient Israelites, and contain details that applied specifically to them. After all, present-day Christians were not among those whom God "brought out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:1–3).
- The model for the godly life is Jesus' life. This means that Christians are called to serve each other in all they do—in the spirit and manner of Jesus. The only way they can serve their ever-present but invisible Lord is by serving their ever-present but visible neighbor—who is everyone but themselves. If everyone on Planet Earth were to ask, "How can I use life to glorify God by serving everyone else in community?" the world would be a very different place. It would be more as God intended it to be.

### **March 30, Good Friday: John 18:1–19:42**

**18:1–19:16:** In the first twelve chapters of John, Jesus' words and actions relate directly to Jewish beliefs and practices. The Jewish leaders listen and observe, and John reports their reactions. After Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, the Jewish Sanhedrin decides that Jesus must be put to death (11:45, 53). Jesus then goes to Ephraim, to the north of Jerusalem. He returns to Bethany on the Mount of Olives on a Saturday (12:1), enters Jerusalem on a donkey the next day (12:12–15), and celebrates a meal with His disciples on the following Thursday evening.

Although Jesus goes to a garden in the Kidron Valley after the meal, John makes no reference to Jesus praying in the garden (He prays while still in the Upper Room prior to going to the garden; see chapter 17), but refers only to His capture by a detachment of soldiers together with “police” from the chief priests and the Pharisees. Jesus’ captors bind Him and take Him to Annas, who had been High Priest until 15 A.D and was succeeded by five of his sons, and whose son-in-law, Caiaphas, is now High Priest.

John inserts two scenes that describe Peter’s three denials (18:17, 25, 27). Between the second and third denials, Annas questions Jesus about His disciples and His teaching—a brief narrative (18:19-23). He then sends Jesus to his son-in-law, Caiaphas (18:24). John makes no reference to any dialog between Jesus and Caiaphas; he simply states that Caiaphas sent Jesus to Pilate.

John’s description of Jesus’ trial by Pilate, the Roman procurator (and a Gentile), is carefully structured and comprises seven scenes.

**Scene 1** (18:28–32): The Jewish leaders bring Jesus to Pilate, state that they have already tried Him and sentenced Him to death, and ask Pilate to carry out the death sentence. Because they will not enter Pilate’s headquarters for fear of being rendered ritually unclean by yeast that might be in that building, Pilate goes out to them. Interestingly, they are concerned about being contaminated by yeast while plotting a murder!

**Scene 2** (18:33–38): Pilate returns to his quarters, has Jesus brought to him, and begins questioning Him. Pilate’s questions are pointed: “Are you the King of the Jews?” “What have you done?” “So you are a king?” When Jesus states that He is indeed a King, but the King of truth, Pilate walks away and denies that it is possible to know ultimate truth.

**Scene 3** (18:38b–40): Pilate gives Jesus’ accusers the opportunity to ask for the release of either Jesus or Barabbas (who might have been either a Zealot or a bandit). They ask for the release of Barabbas.

**Scene 4** (19:1–3): Pilate orders his soldiers to flog Jesus, and they mockingly dress Jesus in “royal robes” as they do this. Although the soldiers’ actions are designed to denigrate Jesus, the irony is that they express a divine truth about His Person. Jesus is indeed a King!

**Scene 5** (19:4–7): Pilate brings Jesus out to the crowds and twice says that he plans to release Him (18:38–40; 19:4, 6) because he can find no case against Him (18:38; 19:4, 6). The Jewish leaders shout for Jesus’ crucifixion and declare that, according to their Scriptures, Jesus must be put to death!

**Scene 6** (19:8–12): Pilate returns to his quarters, taking Jesus with him. Pilate is all too familiar with Roman beliefs about gods showing up in human form, and, with fear and trepidation, asks Jesus where He comes from. Jesus does not reply. Pilate reminds Jesus that he, Pilate, has the authority to determine whether Jesus will live or die. Jesus reminds Pilate that he can do nothing apart from what Jesus permits him to do. When Pilate again seeks to release Jesus, the crowd threatens to report him to Caesar and place his privileged status as a “Friend of the Emperor” in jeopardy. Territories controlled by Rome were classified as either *senatorial* (the governor was appointed by, and answerable to, the Roman senate) or *imperial* (the governor was appointed by, and answerable to, the emperor, and belonged to a special “club” whose members were referred to as “Friends of the Emperor”). Pilate belonged to the latter group.

**Scene 7 (19:13–16):** In the final scene, Jesus, Pilate, and the crowds are together. Pilate presents Jesus to the crowds as their King. They respond by demanding Jesus' death. When Pilate asks why, they (ironically) reply that their only loyalty is to the emperor. However, the charges they level against Jesus apply totally to themselves!

To repeat comments made in relation to the previous pericope: According to John 19:14, the Friday on which Jesus is handed over for crucifixion is the Day of *Preparation* for Passover—and not the Day of Passover itself (as in Mark, Matthew, and Luke). Furthermore, Jesus is handed over at midday—not at 9 a.m. as in Mark (and possibly also Matthew and Luke). At this hour on the Day of Preparation, people began to bring their lambs to the Temple priests so that they might be ritually slaughtered in preparation in the Passover meal that evening. Jesus, twice called the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), is handed over on the same day at the same time. John's emphasis is that Jesus is the final Passover Lamb. Through the shedding of Jesus' blood, humanity is rescued from the powers of sin, death, and the demonic—once and for all.

Like Pilate, we must ask Jesus, "Where are you from?" "What kind of a King are You?" "What have You done?" "What is truth?" But then we must also hear Jesus asking us, "Where do you think I am from?" "What kind of a King do you think I am?" "What do you think I have done?" "What is your definition of truth?" "What does all this mean for you?" The implications of Jesus' questions are huge!

#### ***John 19:17–42***

- When Jesus walks from Pilate's quarters to Golgotha, He walks alone. No reference is made to weeping women or to Simon of Cyrene.
- Jesus walks with dignity. No mention is made of Jesus collapsing under the weight of the crossbar. Jesus' hour has come. Jesus is on His way to His coronation—and coronations are always dignified events. Jesus is about to be "lifted up" on to His throne. Jesus is about to show His Father's glory! (Note John 17:1–5.)
- Although Jesus is crucified between two men, no exchange of words takes place among them.
- Pilate has an inscription nailed to the cross above Jesus' head. It reads, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Although meant to be a scathing taunt, it expresses a sublime truth.
- After Solomon's coronation, Bathsheba sat on a throne to her son's right (1 Kings 2:19). After Jesus' coronation, His mother stands on the ground beneath her Son's throne—a cross. Jesus' first words from the cross have to do with the future care of His mother (19:26–27).
- When David fled from Absalom, Barzillai the Gileadite and two others made sure that David lacked nothing (2 Samuel 17:27–29). When Jesus, David's descendant, hangs on a cross, He cries out for something to drink (John 19:28).
- Jesus' final words from the cross are, "It is finished" (19:30). Jesus does not mean, "Thank God it's all over." Rather, Jesus says, "I have completed the work that I came to do." Jesus' executioners do not take His life from Him. Instead, Jesus bows His head and gives up His spirit.

Jesus performs the ultimate act of the ultimate Servant: He gives up His life!

- There is no need to break the bones in Jesus' legs to hasten His death. But then, the bones in Passover lambs were never broken. Jesus is the ultimate Passover Lamb (19:31–33).
- After a soldier thrusts a spear into Jesus' side, blood and water flow from the wound. The blood can be linked to the ritual of slaughtering the Passover Lamb. The water may be linked to Ezekiel's vision in 47:1–12. From Jesus, the true Messianic Temple, comes the healing stream that makes all things new.
- Jesus' body is placed into a new tomb (19:41–42); the body of a king was always placed into a new tomb. His body is anointed with about one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes—the traditional amount used in royal burials (19:39–40). In attending to Jesus' burial, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus render themselves ritually unclean and ineligible to celebrate Passover during the evening that follows. Their actions would have created suspicion in the minds of the Jewish leaders.
- Jesus' anointing into office as Servant-King took place when He was baptized (Mark 1:9–11). His coronation has now taken place. Jesus' people look beyond His throne to the empty tomb to hear the cry, "The King is risen! The Kingdom is established! The King lives forever!" And they ask, "My Lord and King, what would You have me believe? How would You have me live?"

### **April 1, Easter Sunday: Matthew 28:1–10**

Matthew's final chapter contains three sections. The *first* (vv.1–10) describes events at the open tomb on Easter Sunday morning. The *second* (vv.11–15) concludes Matthews' unique report about those who were guarding the tomb; see also 27:62–66. The *third* (vv. 16–20) serves as the *grand finale* to Matthew's entire narrative. In these five closing verses, Jesus meets with the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, tells them that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him, gives them the *Great Commission* (not the *Great Suggestion*), and assures them that He will remain with them until the close of the age.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus fulfills the message embedded in His name, which is *Immanuel*, meaning "God with us" (Matt. 1:22). He will remain in their midst as forgiving Savior, servant Lord, and divine Teacher. Jesus' death and resurrection are not merely the climax of Matthew's narrative; they constitute a new beginning to world history.

**V. 1:** Although Mark 16:1 states that women went to the tomb early on Sunday morning to anoint Jesus' body, Matthew states that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to see Jesus' tomb as the day was dawning. They would not have been permitted to go close to the tomb by the soldiers who were guarding it.

**V. 2:** As they draw near to the tomb, an earthquake occurs. An angel descended from heaven has rolled back the stone that had been sealing the entrance and is sitting on it; see Exodus 3:2–6; Acts 7:30. The great earthquake denotes the presence and action of God as at the Exodus and Sinai events. Remarkable signs took place in the heavens *above* at Jesus' birth; signs in the earth *beneath* take place at Jesus' resurrection.

When Satan tempted Jesus (4:1–11), he suggested that He win a following by performing stunts, for example, by throwing Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple and expecting His Father to rescue Him before He struck the stone slabs below. However, Jesus refused to use divine power to avoid the way of the cross and righteousness and service. But now Jesus' Father uses an angel to reveal the wonder of an event in which He vindicates His Son's ministry!

**V. 3:** The appearance of the angelic being is described. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was as white as snow. The angel's appearance reflects the glowing presence of Jesus in the Transfiguration event (17:1–8).

In Mark's narrative (16:1–8), the "young man" serves primarily as a proclaimer of a profound truth, sitting on the right hand within the tomb, and making known the Good News of the First Easter. Matthew portrays the angel as an apocalyptic figure with a shattering presence who hurls the tomb's stone door aside and declares the beginning of a New Age in cosmic history!

**V. 4:** Those guarding the tomb are terrified. They collapse like dead men! Hence, the dead and defenseless One comes to life and brings new life to His people while the supposedly mighty of the earth collapse as if lifeless!

**Vv. 5 – 7:** The angel speaks to the women just as an angel of the Lord had spoken to Joseph after Mary conceived (1:20–25). They have come to see a tomb, a house of death, to pay their last respects to a dead Friend— perhaps to keep a vigil and chant a dirge. However, the angel proclaims to them a message about new life: "I know that you were looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised, as He said"; see 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19.

Jesus was crucified by powerful enemies who were shocked and frightened by His claim that He had heard His Father's voice calling Him to a radical way of life as Servant Messiah—calling Him to identify with outcasts and to share the burdens of the oppressed. He was crucified by religious and political leaders, who mocked Him when He displayed silence and seeming weakness. God did not desert His son; He delivered the ultimate divine verdict by raising Him from the dead!

The angel tells the women to share the Good News of Jesus' resurrection with His disciples and instructs them to go to Galilee where they will see Him. Indeed, the Good Shepherd is to begin gathering His flock!

**V. 8:** The women leave the vicinity of the open tomb with fear and great joy—and begin running to the disciples to tell them what they have experienced and been told.

**V. 9:** The risen Jesus meets some women near the tomb, and greets them. They come to Him, grasp His feet, and worship Him. They have experienced the presence of the Risen Lord and heard His words!

**V. 10:** Jesus tells the women not to be afraid. They are to go and tell Jesus' "brothers" (the disciples!) to go to Galilee, where they will see Jesus! Their spiritual eyes will finally be opened when they meet with the Risen Lord face to face!

In **28:11 – 15**, the "problem" of the empty tomb is reported to the Jewish leaders, who in turn try to keep the matter quiet by resorting to bribery. They concoct a false story instead of believing in Jesus'

triumph over death (28:11–15). The tomb is certainly empty! According to those guarding the tomb, Jesus' body has been stolen; according to Jesus' brothers and sisters, Jesus has risen from the dead.

In **28:16 – 20**, Jesus meets His disciples (*brothers*) in Galilee. Although some worship Him, others have doubts about Him (28:16–17). Jesus points to His kingly authority and sends His disciples forth to draw people from around the world into His community. His disciples are to teach all nations and to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are to teach His new followers to *observe* (not just *believe*) all that He has commanded them (28:16–20).

In Matthew's *opening narrative*, Jesus is referred to as *Emmanuel*, "God with us" (1:23). In Matthew's *closing narrative*, Jesus assures His disciples that *He will be with them* to the close of the age (28:20).

### **Alternative Reading: John 20:1–18**

**Vv. 1 – 2:** Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, finds the stone door rolled away, runs to the disciples, and tells them that Jesus' body has been taken from the tomb, and "we do not know where they have laid Him." It is important to note that only men could give testimony in a Jewish court of law. The witness of women was considered invalid and unreliable. Even so, every Gospel begins its Easter story with the visit of women, or a woman, to Jesus' tomb. It is unlikely that the early church would have invented this detail.

Furthermore, the disciples—far from being overjoyed at Mary's message—are non-plussed! Peter and the other disciples do not say, "So, the Lord was right! He is risen from the dead!" For the disciples, the empty tomb constitutes a mystery that has to be explained, despite the Lord's promise of His resurrection (2:19–22; 14:18–19, 28; 16:16).

**Vv. 3 – 4:** Peter and "the other disciple" run toward the tomb. Most likely, the other disciple is John, the witness of 19:35 and 21:24. According to tradition, John lived until the end of the first century. He was most likely younger than Peter—and fitter. We can well imagine the thoughts that are running through their heads as they sprint to the garden. "Where is the body? Who has taken it—and why? Will we be able to get the body back?" No, the Gospel reports no such emotions. Obviously, we are meant to concentrate on the climax of the story.

**Vv. 5-7:** Although "the other disciple" arrives first, he does not enter the tomb. He only peers in to see the burial cloths still there. Peter then arrives (panting heavily, no doubt). True to form, Peter acts quickly and goes straight in. All the body wrappings are there, including the head cloth neatly rolled up by itself. The point is clear. Jesus' body has not been snatched by grave robbers or anyone else acting in a hurry. There are no signs of a hurried break-in or a quick getaway. Only Jesus' body is missing.

**Vv. 8–10:** Now the other disciple goes in, sees for himself, and believes that Jesus is risen from the dead. It is important to note that it is said of only the second disciple that he believed. That makes good sense in that this disciple was not only a witness of the crucifixion (19:26, 35) and empty tomb (20:8), but also the witness behind the whole of the Gospel that bears his name.

**Vs. 9** is rather strange at first sight. It means the following: These two disciples had to see in order to believe. Later, they were given more perfect sight and understanding. They came to understand the Scripture that had foretold that all this had to take place. The whole of John's Easter story proclaims the same message. The first believers had to see in order to believe. But now, for us, *believing is seeing*.

**Vv. 11 – 13:** Mary Magdalene has not been with the two disciples and has not shared their faith. Now she is back at the empty tomb, still lost in her sorrow. The tomb has still not spoken its Easter message to her. Even the sudden appearance of two angels brings her no joy. She repeats the same message that she spoke to Peter and John. Only this time she speaks for herself alone: “I do not know . . .” There is no loneliness like the loneliness of grief.

**Vv. 14 – 16:** Mary is so lost in her world of sadness that she cannot see Who it is that is standing close by. We might note again how the evangelist piles up his references to the ignorance of the first Easter witnesses. Easter joy is created only after a realization of the truth demolishes lack of knowledge and understanding. Mary does not know the glorious truth that Jesus is risen (see also vv. 2, 9, and 13 for this “not knowing”) until He speaks to her.

Her questions are rather strange (v. 15). Surely the Lord knows why she is crying, and for whom she is looking! She does not recognize the voice of the Man behind her as the voice of her Lord and Master—until He speaks her name. The Good Shepherd calls His lamb by name, and immediately the clouds of sorrow disappear. Mary now knows that this is not the gardener, but Jesus! There is both love and respect in the one word, in Hebrew, with which she addresses Jesus.

He is still the same Teacher she has always known. And yet she now knows that she can never look at Him with the same eyes as before His resurrection. He is now her Lord in a new and wonderful sense.

**Vv. 17 – 18:** Even if Mary understands that there is now a change in her relationship to Jesus, she does not yet fully understand how great this change is. She has apparently fallen to her knees and begun to cling to Jesus. Jesus says to her, “Stop holding me.” But why not touch Jesus any longer? The explanation is even stranger: “I have not yet ascended to the Father.” These words make sense only if we spell out their positive meaning.

Mary will only be able to touch the Lord properly after He has ascended to His heavenly Father. Here we are reminded of what Jesus said in 12:32: “I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to Myself.” His ascension to the Father has begun with His being lifted up on the cross; see 3:14 and 8:28. Now the old human contacts that were possible between two human beings are a thing of the past. The only contact that matters now is the seeing and touching of faith. Whether Mary understands all this as yet, we do not know. But at least she now has Easter joy and certainty—and with this joy she reports again to the disciples. How different is her second message from her first report (v. 3)!