

MONDAY, 11/25

Read Luke 22:7-30.

⁷Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." ⁹ "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

¹⁰ He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there." ¹³ They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. ²¹ But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. ²² The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" ²³ They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. ²⁵ Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. ²⁸ You are those who have stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

This week we will cover the stories surrounding Jesus' death. I'm going to give more space for the scriptures than my reflection.

Following the Last Supper, as the disciples wonder which one of them would betray Jesus, the conversation evolves into which of them is the greatest. This is a picture of the human condition. In our broken nature, we seek to elevate ourselves above others. We desire and often think we deserve the seat at the table. Jesus shows His disciples--and us--a different way.

“You are not called to be like that,” He said. Jesus continued, “I am among you as One who serves.” Those words should pierce our hearts. Jesus came to serve and to give Himself for the glory of God. This is the life we, as disciples, have chosen to take up for ourselves.

If we want to be more like Christ, we must become the kind of people who seek to serve rather than elevate ourselves. I wonder what you can do today to serve someone.

Praying Together:

“Jesus, You came to serve and not be served. May it be so with us as well. Amen.”

TUESDAY, 11/26

Read Luke 22:39-53.

³⁹ Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” ⁴⁹ When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

⁵¹ But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? ⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

Notice the intensity out of which Jesus prayed. Luke says Jesus was in anguish. Luke describes His sweat as “drops of blood falling onto the ground.” If you remember back to Jesus’ temptation in the desert, the devil left Jesus to wait for a more opportune moment. Jesus knew that moment was coming, and it was now upon Him.

We also must note what Jesus prays. He said, “Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but Yours be done.” This is a model prayer for us as we face temptation and

hardships. It doesn't shy from asking what we want, but ultimately yields to God's will. If you are facing such times, follow Jesus' example in praying as He did.

I wonder what temptations or hardships you are facing right now. I wonder how you can utilize Jesus' prayer to help you.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we want Your will more than our own. Be with us and strengthen us as we face temptation. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 11/27

Read Luke 22:54-62.

⁵⁴ Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶ A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

⁵⁷ But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

⁵⁸ A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

⁵⁹ About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

⁶⁰ Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." ⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly.

As soon as Peter heard the sound of the rooster's crow, he knew he had done the thing he had sworn he would never do. Peter had promised Jesus that he would follow Him to the grave. He rejected the notion that he would deny Jesus, and yet standing over the fire that night, he denied knowing Jesus.

Peter must grapple with his failure. That can be a tough thing for us to deal with. We often deal with a sense of failure in our walk with Jesus. The fear and feeling of failure loom over us. Like Peter, we feel guilt and shame for something we have done or something we did not do.

We must remember that Jesus died for that shame. John's gospel tells us that after His resurrection, Jesus sought out Peter and restored him. He gave Peter new life and new purpose. Jesus doesn't want us to carry guilt and shame. We are invited to confess and leave that to Him. We then are healed and forgiven. We must be able to trust that He provides such healing and renewal if we are to be freed for a vibrant life with Him moving forward.

Praying Together:

"Son of the Living God, You offer us life beyond our failures. You came to give us new life beyond our sin and shortcomings. We trust that You indeed do forgive us and free us for a new life. Amen."

THURSDAY, 11/28

Read Luke 22:63-23:5.

⁶³The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. ⁶⁴They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" ⁶⁵And they said many other insulting things to him.

⁶⁶At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. ⁶⁷"If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us."

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, ⁶⁸and if I asked you, you would not answer. ⁶⁹But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

⁷⁰They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"

He replied, "You say that I am."

⁷¹Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips." Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. ²And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king."

³So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You have said so," Jesus replied.

⁴Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." ⁵But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

This scene with the soldiers adds insult to injury. While they had orders to see that Jesus was crucified, they did not receive instruction to disparage Him. They were to see to His death; they did not have to add to His shame.

I remember reading this passage when visiting the Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem. We had descended the stairs that led us to what was the street level of Jerusalem in Jesus' day. The old city had been built over several times throughout the centuries. Our guide explained that the room could have been where the soldiers took Jesus. I went to a corner and sat down. I opened my Bible to this passage and read it. It was as if I could hear the shouts of their insults echoing off the walls. I could feel their disdain for Jesus who was to them a spectacle to be jeered at. In that space you got a sense of their spite. It made for an intense experience.

There is a tragedy in this scene. Jesus was a King. He deserved praises from His subjects, yet it was not to be, not now at least. For now, Jesus was in the midst of being utterly rejected. The world He had come to save was throwing its worst at Him. The ugliness of what sin has done to

the human soul was evidenced in that room. Jesus was innocent. He had come to bless the world, and yet we tried to break Him for it. Jesus had come to save the very men who went out of their way to shame Him.

The writer of Hebrews captures the focus of Jesus in these moments. Seeking to encourage the church amidst their own persecution, Hebrews 12:2 reads that Jesus, “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame.” Jesus was not deterred by the shame to which He was subjected by the soldiers or any other.

In this scene, the wonders of Jesus' grace are on full display. He endures the worst of humanity to redeem the worst in humanity. What He did for the soldiers, He does for you and me.

Praying Together:

“Jesus, You are worthy of our praise. We are in awe of Your mercy and grace. Thank You for enduring the worst in us that You might redeem the worst in us. Amen.”

FRIDAY, 11/29

Read Luke 23:6-25.

⁶On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

⁸When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. ⁹He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. ¹²That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

¹³Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people ¹⁴and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. ¹⁵Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”

¹⁸But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” ¹⁹(Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city and for murder.) ²⁰Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

²²For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him punished and then release him.”

²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

Barabbas was a murderer and an insurrectionist. He rebelled against Rome, spilling blood in the process. He was also the first person for whom Jesus died. When given the choice, the crowd chose to release Barabbas, sending Jesus to the cross. We see an innocent Christ taking the place of a guilty man.

The truth is we are Barabbas. Like him, we are guilty in sin, and Jesus paid our penalty. He paid the price He did not owe so that we might be given a grace we did not deserve.

I wonder what it means to you to know that Jesus took the death you deserved upon Himself. I wonder what our response to grace should look like.

Praying Together:

"Lord, You died our death so that we could share in Your life. We do not deserve the love You have bestowed upon us, yet You have loved us freely and sacrificially. Amen."

SATURDAY, 11/30

Read Luke 23:26-43.

²⁶ As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸ Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' ³⁰ Then "'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ³¹ For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." ³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: *THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

In this passage, Jesus hangs between two criminals. These criminals represent the two responses to Jesus: rejection or reception.

Following the lead of the others, one criminal heaps even more ridicule on Him. Just like enemy when Jesus was tempted in the desert, he cries out for Jesus to save Himself "if He is the Messiah".

The only person who comes to Jesus' aid is the other criminal. He knows nothing of Jesus, only what he sees on the cross. It is enough, however, for him to take up for Jesus. He sees One who is innocent and good. With what feels like the whole world turning against Jesus, this criminal defends Him.

The criminal doesn't ask to be saved, but Jesus promises that he will be with Him in paradise. The word "paradise" is the same word used to speak of the Garden of Eden.

So how could this guy who appears to have done everything wrong get into paradise in the waning moments of his life? Grace. Mercy. He genuinely turns to Jesus, placing his hopes upon Him. That is what faith is, and it's all it takes to be saved.

Now many people have a hard time with this passage. I suppose it offends our sense of fairness given the criminal does nothing to warrant eternal life. However, this attitude represents a gross misunderstanding of grace. Like the criminal, we can do nothing to deserve salvation. No amount of giving, church attendance, or service can save us or make us worthy of life with Christ. We are completely dependent on His mercy and grace.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, like the criminal hanging next to You, we do not deserve Your grace, and yet You give it freely and abundantly. Rid our hearts of any pride that might keep us from resting in Your grace. Amen."

SUNDAY, 12/1

Read Luke 23:44-56.

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun had stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in

two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."^[e] When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." ⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

⁵⁰ Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. ⁵² Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. ⁵³ Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. ⁵⁴ It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

⁵⁵ The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. ⁵⁶ Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

The in-between. It's one of the most difficult places to be. The in-between is the season where we find ourselves waiting for hope to be realized. It is often lonely and plagued with doubts because what we want to see seems to be so far away. For these reasons, we don't like the in-between.

That fateful Saturday was bookended by the despair of Good Friday and joy of Easter Sunday. We find ourselves there sometimes. In such moments, let us be reminded that the in-between is a place of hope in and of itself. It is a time where faith is forged and maturity is gained. The in-between is a time to lean into God in ways that evade us in times of ease. It is in the in-between that God in His grace transforms us.

I wonder how you might be in the in-between. I wonder what it looks like to trust the Lord as you walk in the in-between.

Praying Together:

"Father, we need Your mercies when we are in the in-between. Help us to trust You when we are waiting for our hopes to come to fruition. Remind us that Easter hope is not far away. Amen."