

Day 315

Holy Tuesday – Looking for a Pretext to Arrest Jesus

Matthew 21.20 – 23.39; Mark 11.20 – 12.44; Luke 20.9 - 26

Mt.21.20-22, Mk.11.20-26 As they go into Jerusalem next day, Peter notices that the fig tree Jesus shut down with His word has withered and died, from the root up. It's worth noting that Peter uses the word *cursed* of what Jesus did to the tree (Greek *κατηράσω kateeráso*), in case we get miss the fact that Jesus does speak death to the tree. Jesus employs this event as a teaching on faith, showing that what is done in expectation of God's intervention can happen. The implication of the injunction to forgive also seems to have a link to the possibility of the miraculous, our unforgiveness blocking the working of God.

Mk.11.27-33 (mirrored in Mt.21.23-27 and Lk.20.1-8) Jesus comes to Jerusalem and at the Temple is questioned by the leaders on His authority to do and teach such things. Jesus puts a question back to them, concerning John's baptism, which leaves them in a quandary, because they cannot risk popular backlash by saying John was not a messenger of God, yet if they do, they will be shown as disobeying God in not receiving him. They choose a diplomatic, non-committal response, and Jesus gives them the same back!

Mt.21.28-32 Jesus follows up the leaders' display of indecisiveness with a parable about the two sons as an example of those who promise what they don't deliver, as opposed to those who appear to resist but actually do the right thing. Those most seeming to be sinful are flocking into the acceptance of God's reign, in accepting John's baptism, while those who look most religious have refused it.

Mk.12.1-9, Lk.20.9-16 (mirrored in Mt.21.33-41) The parable of the evil tenants is clearly an allegory of the story of the people of Israel, who have continually rejected and killed God's messengers when He has sent them to urge His people to yield the fruit of their covenant with Him. Now, the Son and heir is come, and He is about to be killed by the tenants also; the people are shocked at the suggestion that this could happen, but Jesus knows the outcome is sure.

Mt.21.42-44 (mirrored in Mk.12.10,11 and Lk.20.17-18) Jesus applies to Himself the words of Psalm 118.22-23, the rejected cornerstone, which will become the foundation of the new thing God is doing. This will see the old order and structure swept away, Jesus as cornerstone becoming the demolition-ball of the corruption that has been.

Mt.21.45-46 (mirrored in Mk.12.12, Lk.20.19) The religious leaders realise Jesus' parables are directed at them, and they become even more determined to remove Him, but they fear a riot if they try to arrest the people's prophet.

Mt.22.1-14 Jesus gives a parable of the reign of God as a wedding feast to which a king invites guests who refuse to come for various reasons. The king then sends further messengers to urge the guests to come, but this time some ignore the request, while

others turn on the king's servants and kill them. The king retaliates against the killers of his messengers by putting them down with brutal measures.

Then the king invites all and sundry to the feast, regardless of their record. The only fatal mistake is not to be correctly dressed for this celebration, having on the clothing for a wedding. Those who turn up casually and slovenly will be expelled, warning that not just anything goes.

This parable clearly spells out the consequences for the people of God for rejecting their Messiah. Within forty years of this story, Jerusalem would be destroyed and they would be scattered again by the Romans. The call to the King's feast will go beyond the borders of Israel, and many will come, the only qualification being that they come in readiness for the marriage of the bride and groom of heaven.

Mt.22.15-22, Lk.20.20-26 (mirrored in Mk.12.13-17) The religious police continue to look for an opportunity to catch Jesus out; they send to Jesus people in their pay, along with collaborators of Herod's, who have an interest also in seeing Jesus dealt with, since He is a threat to the fragile stability of the Edomite puppet king.

Jesus seems to have said earlier in his ministry that His followers are not legally obliged to give tribute to the Roman authorities (Matt.17.24-27). If they can get Jesus to repeat this publicly, they will have a pretext to arrest Him. They therefore ask Him if taxes should be paid to Caesar.

Jesus, in a masterstroke of turning tables reveals the duplicity of His questioners. He asks for a coin. In producing a Roman denarius, the questioners have incriminated themselves, since orthodox Jews refused to carry coins with an image of the emperor on them, which they saw as infringing the law of Moses. If this happened in the Temple, the offence is even more obvious, since only temple coinage was allowed in the Temple courts.

Jesus gives His landmark judgement, springing the trap of His opponents – give Caesar what is Caesar's, and give God what is God's – at the same time forever marking the separation between accountability to the Lord and accountability to the state, which can never be one and the same. The questioners go away, with no case left against Jesus.

Mt.23.23-33 (mirrored in Mk.12.18-27, Lk.20.27-38) Having seen off the Pharisees, the Sadducees come to Jesus. The Sadducees (Hebrew סַדּוּקִים *Tzeduqim*, possibly from the name of the High Priest Zadok) were mostly political in nature, with religious roots. They had been linked with the High Priest in the time of the Hasmonaeans, but were held in contempt by the Pharisees as those who had allowed Antiochus Epiphanes to set up an idol in the Temple. Also, they denied the resurrection, believing in free will of man, and no human survival beyond death.

Thus, they come to Jesus to try and discredit His teaching on resurrection. They put to Jesus the case of a woman, widowed seven times, who is taken in Levirate marriage by her successive brothers-in-law, in the Mosaic tradition. At the resurrection, they ask, whose wife is she?

In His reply, Jesus gives an insight into the age to come and also dismisses the Sadducees' lax grasp of Scripture. He states that there will be no marriage in the resurrection, since the new order will have no need for genital sexual relations, just as among the angelic beings before God. All marital claims will therefore be irrelevant.

But Jesus challenges their nihilistic theology by pointing out that in God's calling Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He is establishing the survival of those men beyond their natural death, since God is God of the living, not the dead. Once again, Jesus' teaching shines as a beacon for the people around Him.

Mk.12.28- 34 (mirrored in Mt.22.34-40, Lk.20.39-40) A Mosaic teacher asks Jesus a question about the greatest commandment, and Jesus straight away points them to Deut.6.4-5, the great *Shema Yisrael*, Hear, O Israel, which enjoins love of God with heart, soul, mind and strength (although the Hebrew of Deut.6.4 does not have 'mind'), and Lev.19.18, love your neighbour. The teacher wholeheartedly agrees with Jesus, and adds that these things are more important than all the sacrifices going on in the Temple. Jesus commends the man's insight, and says of him that he is close to God's reign in his life.

Mt.22.41-46, Mk.12.35-37 (mirrored in Lk.20.41-44) Jesus asks the Pharisees a question about the Messiah and His title. The Pharisees reply that Messiah will be the Son of David, a common term used of the Messianic hope.

But Jesus points out an anomaly in David's language in Psalm 110.1, where David refers to the One to come as 'Lord'. How then can a Son be the Lord of the Father? Jesus is highlighting the priority of the Messiah over even the great King of Israel whose descendant He is. The people are again amazed at His words, and no one comes to debate with Him, in awe of His unparalleled wisdom.

Mt.23.1-12 (Mk.12.38-40, Lk.20.45-47) Religious one-upmanship is anathema to Jesus. Those who carry the tradition are to be recognised, but not imitated. The Pharisees, the party of the Law, sticklers and pedants for the Mosaic code and their own traditions as developments of it, look for status from their practice of them. They make themselves visible, seeking men's approval and titles of rank such as *Rabbi* - literally, 'my great one', my master.

Jesus forbids such titles to His followers, whether 'Rabbi' or 'Teacher' or 'Father', since there is only one Master, one Father, one Teacher, and all are brothers and sisters. It is therefore amazing that in the Christian church of today, so many titles are employed to designate status, and recognised as honours, in much the same way as the Pharisees used them. Jesus is looking for simple, humble being who we are, calling one another by the names we have, not the titles we want to be recognised and honoured by.

Mt.23.13-15 Jesus now launches into a diatribe of seven woes (in Matthew – Luke has just six of them) against the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. The word 'woe', (Greek οὐαί *ou-ai*, Hebrew אָוִי *oy*, Aramaic אָוִי *oy*, so often heard in Jewish and Yiddish expression as '*oy veh*', meaning, 'oh, pain') is an exclamation of grief. The thought of Jesus speaking out these seven *Oy's* makes Him very Jewish and expressive, as He

bemoans the enslavement of the people of God to harsh and man-made regulations which prevent their access to the Father He loves.

First, they block access to the personal encounter with the reign of God. They are *hypocrites* (Greek ὑποκριται *ypokritái*, a Greek word meaning ‘under a cover’, used to mean *actors* in Greek dramas who wore masks to depict characters.) , play actors just going through the motions, but not practising their words and preventing others from coming close.

Second, they are scouring the earth calling followers whom they just make twice as unfit for God as they are themselves.

Mt.23.16-22 Third, they are blind leaders, splitting hairs about what constitutes a legal oath. It is inadmissible to swear an oath on the Temple, but a binding vow if the oath is by the Temple treasure! The same is the case if an oath is sworn appealing to the altar of sacrifice, which has no legal force, while an oath taken on the sacrifice of the Temple is valid! There is no distinction, says Jesus, it is all both oathing and binding, by whatever it is sworn.

Mt.23.23-24 Fourth, Jesus berates the religious pedants who will pick a tenth of the tiny leaves off a mint stalk or, even more ridiculous, off a dill frond, but who fail to practice three key tenets of Jewish faith – *mishpat*, *chesed* and *emunah* (Hebrew New Testament translation), that is, *right-wising justice*, *self-sacrificial obligation* and *dependable integrity* before God. They should continue to be generous givers, Jesus says, but pay attention to the deeper issues.

Mt.23.25-28 Fifthly, Jesus exposes the fastidious outward cleanliness of the orthodox, priding themselves on their washing of everything to ritually cleanse it, while living lives full of rubbish and grime in their hearts.

This is echoed in the sixth *oy!* when Jesus calls the hypocrites *whitewashed tombs*, that is, presentable on the outside, even attractive, but on the inside, the place of death and decay.

Mt.23.29-36 The seventh *oy!* is the hypocrisy of building monuments around the tombs of prophets which were stoned by their ancestors, as though they would never have done that. Yet in the very remembrance and deprecation of their ancestors, they implicate themselves in their shame by glorifying the event in the present.

Jesus sums up His cries against the Pharisees and Scribes by calling them snakes, linking them to them to the great serpentine deceiver in the garden who led mankind astray at first. Jesus promises that further prophets will come and speak, but they will be treated as badly and violently as the prophets of old – Jesus is referring to His emissaries who will shortly proclaim His resurrection from the dead, and be beaten and killed for their message. This will be the summation of the sorry history of Israel’s persecution of God’s loudspeakers, the prophets, and they will be the brunt of the retribution for it.

Mt.23.37-39 Jesus repeats His lament over Jerusalem, and His longing to draw her to Himself, but for her resistance to His loving approach.

Mk.12.41-44 (mirrored in Lk.12.1-4) Still in the Temple area, near the treasury where offerings are put, Jesus watches as proud givers parade and drop in their large sums. But His eyes are drawn to a poor widow, whom He discerns drop in two coins, *lepta*, some of the smallest coins in the system. Yet Jesus honours her, for she has given all she has in sacrificial giving. This is not a matter of the amount, but of the heart, says the Lord.

Day 316

About the Days to Come

Matthew 24.3 – 25.46; Mark 13.1 – 37; Luke 21.8 – 36

Mk.13.1-2 (mirrored in Mt.24.1-2 and Lk.21.5-6) As Jesus and His friends leave the Temple at the end of the day, a comment is made about the magnificence of this place, the legacy of Herod the Great, still being finished off in Jesus' time. But Jesus sees what is coming, sees the horror ahead of 70AD and the destruction of the Temple by Titus, son of Vespasian.

Mt.24.3, Mk.13.3-4 (mirrored in Lk.21.7) As they walk back up the Mount of Olives, they sit and look back at the city. The two sets of brothers, Peter, Andrew, James and John are sitting near Jesus, discussing what will happen at the end of the age, when Jesus comes into His full glory at what Matthew calls the *being near* (Greek *παρουσία* *parousía*) or coming of Jesus. Jesus begins to explain the signs of His coming to them.

Mt.24.4-35, Mk.13.5-31, Lk.21.8-33 In what Jesus describes of the coming end of the age, and the ushering in of the new, there is a possibility of being deceived into thinking it has come when it hasn't. There will be many saying they are Christ, there will be natural disasters and conflicts, there will be persecution of Christ's followers, who will be supernaturally endowed with wisdom in their defence.

The intensification of evil will cause the devotion of many to the Lord to cool, and God and His people will be hated.

Jerusalem itself will be surrounded by armies, a sign that it is time to leave. Gentiles will take over the holy city, and will be in charge of it for a long time. There will then be cosmic disturbances, solar light will be obscured, and planets will be affected. At this point, the Son of Man, Jesus, will appear in glory, with a trumpet call, and His people will be gathered from everywhere to Him.

Jesus speaks of natural disasters, a change in the rhythm of the sea, and fear everywhere among people. For believers, this will not be a time of fear, but a time of hope, signalling the death and resurrection of the universe.

Mt.24.36-44 (mirrored in Mk.13.32-33) Jesus makes it clear that the date and hour of His coming again is unknown, not even Jesus. This is one thing which the Father reserves to Himself, the final curtain on all things. There is a certain unexpectedness about it all, and life will seem to be going on as before, but at the call of Christ, it seems some people will

disappear from their work in mysterious ways. Jesus calls His followers to be on the lookout for these signs.

Mt.24.45-51, Mk.13.34-37, Lk.21.34-36 Jesus urges His followers to constant watchfulness and not to join in the decadence of the cultures around them, like a servant always looking out for his master's return. We are never to take our eyes off the ball where it comes to watchfulness and alertness for Jesus' return.

Mt.25.1-13 To illustrate His point, Jesus tells a story of ten young women going to a wedding feast, perhaps as bridesmaids, perhaps to accompany the bridegroom when he arrived, and light his way to the bridal chamber. For this purpose, they have lamps lit by oil. However, the bridegroom is delayed, and being night-time, they all fall asleep. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, the bridegroom arrives, and they get their lamps ready to light his way to the bride. But the five foolish girls have not brought enough oil to replenish their lamps – they have run out of oil. They ask the five wise women for some of theirs, but they are refused, for then there would not be enough for them either. They have to go and look for more oil.

While they are gone, the bridegroom comes, and the five wise women light him to his bride. When the others return, having found oil, they are too late – the door is shut, the bridegroom is with his bride, and they are left outside, despairing.

This is a story of warning to be alert, not to be lacking in supply of the Lord's grace and His Spirit. These women's failure was not that they slept, for both the wise and foolish gave into sleep; it was that some of them were not prepared for a long haul, for a delay in the bridegroom's coming. Jesus seems to be indicating that His people need to be prepared for a possible long wait, but in that, also to be ready at all times.

Mt.25.14-30 Jesus goes on to a parable-story of a master who gives his servants money to invest and earn income from while he is away from them. While two of them double the investment of the master, the third has merely played safe and hidden the money away, fearing the master's rage if he lost any of the original sum. The master is angry at his lack of venture, and expels him from the household in shame. The servant's sin is in his self-preservation, wasting the opportunity to see the gift he has bear fruit. There is no reason, Jesus is saying, for not taking risks with what God has given us.

Mt.25.31-46 Jesus makes clear that there will be a final analysis of those claiming to be His followers. The touchstone of whether Jesus' has been honoured in their lives is not whether they have healed or praised or learned or lived good lives, rather, it is whether they have provided for the poor, the marginalised and the rejected. Each act of love to the dispossessed and hurting is an act of love for Jesus. Perhaps this parable ties in with the foregoing in terms of what kind of return Jesus is looking for on his investment in His people's lives.

This is deeply challenging in the context of the modern church and the needs of the world.

Day 317

The Darkness Closes In

Matthew 26.1 -5, 14-16; Luke 21.37 – 22. 13; John 12.37 – 50

Mt.26.1-2 This is Tuesday afternoon, and Jesus pinpoints now the day of His betrayal as two days away, the Passover feast. Jerusalem is full of pilgrims getting ready for the celebration of Israel's formation that night so long ago.

Mt.26.3-5 (mirrored in Mk.14.1,2; Lk.22.1-2) The plotting Jewish leaders meet at the house of Caiaphas the High Priest to discuss how they will take Jesus, though they will not do it during the main feast, in case they provoke a riot on the holy day.

Mt.26.14-16, Lk.22.3-6 (mirrored in Mk.14.10-11) His mind clouded by satan, Judas now goes to the leaders and suggests he can take them to Jesus at a place away from the public gaze. After all, Judas knows that Jesus has been frequently on the Mount of Olives in the evening. Being charitable to Judas, perhaps here he is seeking to force Jesus' hand, knowing how volatile the whole situation is – maybe with Jesus arrested, the people will rise up and try and free Him? He is a political animal, as well as an opportunist, and needs to see hard action. That his plan goes horribly wrong is reflected in his hurried return to the leaders when it has all fallen through, and Jesus is not acting as he has hoped. At that point, Judas will take his own life out of remorse.

Lk.21.37-38 During the week, Jesus follows this pattern of teaching in the Temple, and then retiring to the Mount of Olives – possibly to Bethany – to spend the night.

Jn.12.37 – 50 Jesus has done so many wonderful things, and yet, people do not believe. It is sobering to remember that the supernatural interventions of God, while signs of His kingship, are not sufficient alone to change the heart of man. There has to be an inward miracle to open the door to faith, to allow the miracles to be seen in the framework of God's overall story.

There are Jewish leaders (perhaps Nicodemus among them) who believe Jesus, but their fear of rejection prevents them declaring for him. Such is the power of human manipulation and fear. Jesus points out the consequences for those who do not entrust themselves to Him and His Father, whom He represents so perfectly.

Lk.22.7-13 (mirrored in Mt.26.17-19, Mk.14.12-16) There is much discussion over the timing of Jesus' last supper with His disciples, especially as to whether Passover began on the Wednesday evening or Thursday evening. The 14th Nisan, the day on which Passover was slain, started at sunset on the evening of the previous day, given the Jewish calculation of the days. In this way, the disciples spend Wednesday preparing the meal. Some would say this could not have been Passover itself, but a meal for the preparation. Others say it was Passover because Jesus says He has desired to eat Passover with them. There is room for debate here. It is the day of Unleavened Bread, certainly, and one of the jobs of the disciples preparing would be to hunt the house high and low to find any trace of yeast or yeast products – anything fermented.

Peter and John, who go and prepare for the Passover meal, ask the proprietor for a ‘guest room’ – in Greek *katályma* (Greek κατάλυμα) a room for hospitality – interestingly, the same kind of place in which there was no room for Jesus’ birth in Luke 2. It is an upstairs room, *spread*, ready – it may well be that the elements of the Passover meal are there for them waiting – the bitter herbs, the egg, the lamb, even. What is clear in Luke’s account is that it is the Passover that the two men are preparing.

Day 318

The Last Supper

Matthew 26.22 – 25, 30 – 35; Luke 22.14 – 38; John 13.1 – 14.31

Lk.22.14-16 Jesus speaks clearly in Luke that this is the Passover meal, the Seder, that they are eating together. The Passover begins when the first three stars appear in the sky at the sunset on 13th Nisan. This is the last Passover Jesus will eat until the direct rule of God breaks in.

Lk.22.17-20 (mirrored in Mt.26.26-29, Mk.14.22-25) In the Passover supper, there are many traditional elements, one of which is the breaking of the middle one of three wafers of unleavened bread held in a special pouch on the table. They seem to symbolise the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The middle wafer is taken and broken, then shared between the diners; it is this wafer, the *afikoman* that Jesus takes and declares is His body given for them, the wafer which represents the spared son, Isaac, becomes the slain Son, Jesus.

There are several cups of wine on the table, four, in all. At various points the cups are drunk in celebration of deliverance from Egypt.

The cup after supper is, traditionally, Messiah’s (or Elijah’s) cup. One usually stands undrunk on the table, awaiting the Messiah’s coming; it is this cup which Jesus takes and declares as the sign of the New Covenant in His blood, altering the significance of this part of the meal forever.

Lk.22.21,23 Jesus reveals that He is to be betrayed by one of His disciples. They are shocked and begin to ask each other who it could be.

Lk.22.24-30 It is sad that even at this stage of Jesus’ ministry among them, the disciples are still taken up with egotistical disputes about status and power. Jesus reminds them that domination over one another, such as the Roman rulers practice, is forbidden among them, rather the leader is the one who serves most, who not the one who tells others what to do. They are going to be part of this direct rule of God, and will sit with Jesus, put not as lords and tyrants.

Jn.13.1-5 Jesus demonstrates this service graphically by taking off his garment, and wrapping himself in a towel, like a common slave, to wash their feet, the lowest job in a household, equivalent to cleaning toilets today. He does this, in full knowledge of His destiny and purpose, as the Son of God, the Messiah. He even washes the feet of His betrayer, Judas.

Jn.13.6-11 Peter, insensed that the Lord is demeaning Himself in this way, refuses Jesus' service. This doesn't fit with Peter's image of the Messiah, nor of the significance they as disciples should have alongside the Lord. But Jesus says, without this sign, He will be disowned. Peter then wants to make a self-promotional point by being the 'most-washed' one at the table. Jesus says that unnecessary, he is clean enough. They are almost all clean, in fact, except one.

Jn.13.12-17 Having resumed His place at table, Jesus explains that He has implicated them all in His servant-Saviour attitude. They are to be devoted to one another's care and service, as their Master has been. This is the way of blessing.

Jn. 13.18-21 (mirrored in Mt.26.20-21, Mk.14.17-18) Jesus now says more about His betrayal, heavy hearted, but aware that this is part of the plan of His Father.

Mt.26.22-25, Jn.13.22-27a (mirrored in Mk.14.19-21, Lk.22.22) The disciples are distressed at this talk of betrayal, and want to know more. Simon Peter asks John, who is next to Jesus, to ask Him in confidence who it is; John leans close to Jesus and asks Him, and Jesus whispers back to John that it is the one to whom He is about to give a piece of bread dipped into the food. Jesus reaches out and gives it to Judas. It is of note that only John has this detail, being the one whom Jesus told.

Jn.13.27b – 30 Jesus tells Judas to do what he has arranged to do. The others think he is going to get more supplies for the celebrations, but Judas heads off into the night, intent on action.

Jn.13.31-35 Jesus now begins to speak of being glorified, and of leaving them, to go through something they cannot join Him in. His command to them is to give themselves for one another, to love one another, and by doing this, they will be recognised as Jesus' followers.

Lk.22.31-34, Jn.13.36-38 Peter quizzes Jesus about the meaning of His words, and says he will never stop following Him, even ready to die for Him. Jesus reveals to Peter that he is in a battle, and he will be tested – Peter is going to deny all knowledge of Jesus before the night is out.

Jn.14.1-4 Into the heavy heartedness of the room, Jesus speaks comfort and encouragement. Jesus may be leaving them, but it is to prepare a place for them, and they will see Him again. They know where He is going.

Jn.14.5-7 Thomas questions whether they do know where Jesus is going to, what He means. Jesus then proclaims Himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life – everything is summed up in His person and His works, and the only way to the Father is through the person of the Son. In fact, in seeing the Son, they have seen the Father in His face.

Jn.14.8-15 Philip has not grasped the weight of Jesus' words, he is still asking for a glimpse of the Father. But Jesus reiterates the fact that in looking at Jesus, one is looking into the Father's eyes. Jesus is going to be with His Father, and because of that, His people will be able to multiply His works across the planet, they will not be physically

limited to just His one body. And in Jesus' name the Father will grant the requests of Jesus' people to carry out the actions of the direct rule of God into the earth.

Jn.14.16-21 As Jesus goes to the Father, another advocate of His purposes will come. The word in Greek is παράκλητος (*parákleetos*, one who calls alongside another, a mediator, an advocate – the same word is used in 1 John 2.1 of Jesus our advocate.) This is God living in the follower of Jesus, living His life, and bringing the Father and the Son into union with the believer's life.

Jn.14.22-24 Judas (not the betrayer) asks Jesus why He is not going public with this amazing relationship He has. But Jesus points out that the basis of this life is love, not power. And love has to be choice; obedience comes out of surrendered free will, not imposition. If people follow Jesus, it is because they love Him, not because they are impressed with His power.

Jn.14.25-31a Jesus has given His teaching, which the Holy Spirit will bring to their recall. Jesus is leaving them in a state of *shalom*, of wholeness, having all they need. They need not fear or be anxious. And although Jesus is leaving, He will return; Jesus may be speaking of His resurrection and also of His *parousía*, His coming again.

Jesus confides that the 'prince of this world' (Greek ὁ τοῦ κόσμου ἄρχων *o tou kósmou archon* – this world-order's ruler) is coming, but has no hold on Him; He does what He is about to do because He wants to please the Father, not because He has any debt to the prince of darkness.

Lk.22.35-38 Jesus emphasises the danger of this moment by seemingly rescinding His earlier instruction for them to go unresourced and unarmed. Now, there is violence closing in, and they will need to fend for themselves through this time.

Yet this time is foreseen, and Jesus refers to Himself as the fulfilment of the Suffering Servant passage in Isaiah 53.12 – He is to be counted as a criminal. The disciples think He is getting ready for a physical fight, and find two swords they can use between them. Jesus says they will be enough for what is coming, for no swordsmanship will be needed in the hours ahead.

Jn.14.31b, Mt.26.30 Jesus now suggests it is time to leave Jerusalem, as they have done each night this week. The betrayer will lead the authorities to the place where they have arranged to go. They sing the closing song of the Passover feast, the 'Great Hallel' and make their way out of the city.

Mt.26.31-32 (mirrored in Mk.14.27-28) Jesus warns them that they are all about to desert Him, because they are destined to, as their shepherd is taken. Yet, Jesus mentions He will meet them in Galilee after the resurrection.

Mt.26.33-35 (mirrored in Mk.14.29-31) Peter, offended that Jesus should question his loyalty, protests his faithfulness. Jesus says that Peter will deny Him three times during the course of the night, but Peter insists he will be true, even to death, as do the others also – they will never leave Him.

Day 319

Jesus' Parting Words of Love

John 15.1 – 17.26

Jn.15.1-8 Knowing that the instruction He now gives will be His last before the cross, Jesus delivers words of weight and value. The Father desires a return on all that has been invested in the apostles. They are to continue fixed in Jesus' ways, like the branches of the vine, so that they can produce fruit, so that they can reproduce Christ in others. Without Jesus' life flowing into them, they will be fruitless and useless. The Father's glory comes in their bearing fruit.

Jn.15.9-17 All that Jesus has revealed to them is out of love (Greek ἀγάπη *aghápee*, the selfless, voluntary, disinterested love which is God's for the world, unconditional and unswerving.) and they are to show this love to each other. Jesus has not called them as slaves (Greek δοῦλος *dhouílos*) but as friends (Greek φίλος *phílos*) because He has told them what He is doing. He has chosen them, they are purposed by Him together, and are called to be together, continuing the Father's direct rule into the world.

Jn.15.18 – 16.4 When Jesus uses the term 'the world', He is meaning the *cosmos* (Greek κόσμος *kósmos*), in the sense, not of the planet or the natural world *per se*, but the *world order*, the structures of human society which are bent against God and His will. Jesus does not fit the world-order of selfishness, self-protection, greed and vengeance. When He and His followers stand out from the crowd, the crowd rejects them because they do not join in the pursuit of selfish ends.

Yet the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the *paraclete*, comes, He will empower the witness against the world-order and its evil source, for He is truth. Jesus' followers must also be witnesses to what they know and have seen, even though it will earn them the rejection of the system, even at cost of their lives. Their violence will be the hallmark of their unFathered nature.

Jn.16.5-11 If Jesus stays with them, He will limit the work of God to His physical location. By returning to be with the Father, He will usher in the age of the Holy Spirit, who is coming to confront evil and selfishness in men's lives, and to reveal the heart of God to set to rights what is upset in the world – the right-wising of justice and judgement. There is also a link between the Holy Spirit's role and the person of the Son, because the basis of the Holy Spirit's confrontation with men will be the acceptance or rejection of Jesus, His being with the Father as Lord, and the defeated nature of satan in the earth.

Jn.16.12-15 The Holy Spirit is God. He cannot fail to promote and exalt the persons of the Trinity. As with the other persons of God's threeness, He does not promote Himself, but spends all His time glorifying and pointing to the others, who are also pointing to and making space for Him ! Such is the selfless, mutually indwelling dance of the Godhead.

Jn.16.16-18 The disciples are struggling to make sense of Jesus' mystical language; they know that Jesus is saying something of great significance, but they cannot reconcile it, perhaps, with what they expect to happen.

Jn.16.19-24 Jesus perceives the disciples' incomprehension, and warns them of grief that is coming, but a grief comparable to the woman in childbirth, which ends in life and joy. They are about to be struck with huge loss, but the outcome will be reunion, joy and access to the Father which they have never known before.

Jn.16.25-28 Although Jesus seems to be speaking through a fog to them, the disciples are about to find things falling into place, and the mist clearing. All will be very obvious by Sunday morning, but for now, they are in the dark. When all becomes known, they will also have direct access to the Father, just as Jesus does, and they will not need Him to relay the Father's heart, for it will be known to them and communicated to them by the Holy Spirit.

Jn.16.29-33 The disciples now seem to grasp what Jesus is saying, they see His clear relationship with the Father and trust Him. Even so, Jesus says, this will not prevent them from fleeing in a short while at the onslaught of violence and betrayal. Jesus will be left alone, but the Father will sustain Him.

Jesus has been open with them so that they will not lose heart at what is coming; they will face the hatred of the world-system, not only today, but for the rest of their lives. But the Prince of peace will always be their peace, their *shalom*, their completion.

Jn.17.1-5 Jesus now turns to His Father and prays this immortal prayer of hope. The Son asks for the Father to make His actions glorious – that is, in the Hebrew understanding of *kabhad Adonai*, of immense import and weight, of priceless value. The Father will take the humiliation and torture of the Son, and turn it into the pivot of history. The Son will also give all to the Father, will surrender His very life's blood to make the way to His Father open to all. Jesus prays this, invoking the eternal, timeless bond between Father and Son, which goes back before creation began.

Jn.17.6-19 Jesus prays for His dear friends, His team around Him, who are going to be shaken and scattered over the next hours. He prays for their protection by the power of the Name of the Father, the name Jesus has revealed to them, that they remain in union with one another for the journey ahead. Jesus has kept them safe and together, with the exception of the one He knew would betray Him.

Jesus prays for their complete joy, and their enabling to continue in that joy in the midst of a world which will hate them and kill them. Jesus is not asking for their rescue, but for their empowering to stand fast in the battle. Jesus prays that they may be commissioned to their one, holy, single purpose, yielded wholly and unavailable to all other claimants – for this is what sanctification is. This is why Jesus is also about to yield to the Father without reserve, so that they may be the same.

Jn.17.20-26 Jesus sees also beyond this band of brothers to all those who trust in Christ through their message, that they may be one – in union, without division. As Jesus'

followers come to that oneness of heart and purpose, in spite of their human differences, the world will witness another way of being, the Father's way, the way of Love.

Jesus prays to be with His people, and for them to experience the vast import and weight, the glory of His being, the value and depth which the Father has given the Son since before time began.

Jesus closes the prayer, asking His Father to pour out His love on those Jesus has called and known, so that they may participate in the oceans-deep love that passes between the Father and His only begotten Son.

Day 320

Jesus is Taken

Mark 14.32 -34, 43- 64; Matthew 26.69 – 27.10; Luke 22.41 – 71; John 18.1 – 27

Mk.14.32-34, Jn.18.1 (mirrored in Mt.26.36-38, Lk.22.40) The small group crosses over the Kidron Valley and climbs up the steep sides of the Mount of Olives, and come to a grove of olive trees, the Garden of the *Olive Press* (Gethsemane, Hebrew גֶּתְשֶׁמַנִּי *Gatshemen*, press-oil) Here Jesus will experience His own pressure which will bring not oil, but blood from his head. Jesus takes with Him the three witnesses of His transformation on the mountain, now to witness His agony of prayer. He asks them to keep watch for Him while He prays, sensing the impending danger as Judas approaches with the henchmen.

Lk.22.41-45 (mirrored in Mt.26.39, Mk. 13.35-36) Jesus in anguish of soul calls out from His humanity to the Father for another answer; yet, if there is none, He will go the way the Father wills. As He prays, the capillaries across His temples burst, and He haemorrhages from His forehead, shedding the first drops of His blood there in the garden. When He returns to the three, they are asleep, leaving Him undefended.

Mt.26.40-42 (mirrored in Mk.14.37-39, Lk.22.46) Jesus rebukes His friends for their lassitude in the face of the threat. He goes away again to pray, again asking the Father to allow the cup to pass Him by, if it is possible.

Mt.26.43-46 This sorry scene is repeated a third time, but Jesus persists in keeping them alert, as He goes to pray once more. As He returns to them after this, He rouses them, for He knows this is the moment of the arrival of His nemesis.

Mk.14.43-45; Lk.22.47-48; Jn. 18.2-3 (mirrored in Mt.26.47-50a) Judas knows where to bring the temple guard, since this is the place Jesus has frequented with His team. The betrayer greets the Master with a kiss, the common greeting of friends in the Near East. Jesus expresses pain at Judas' treachery signalled by a sign of intimacy and trust.

Jn.18.4-9 Jesus presents Himself to the armed party and asks who they want. When He admits 'I am He' to the search for Jesus of Nazareth, they are inexplicably thrown to the ground – possibly because of the power of the statement 'I am He', which has connotations of the divine name within it. When they recover their equilibrium, Jesus

appeals for His friends to be released, as it is Him they have come for. John places this action in the stream of fulfilment of prophecy, this time of the words of Jesus own foretelling in John 6.39.

Mt.26.50b – 54; Mk.14.46-47; Lk.22.49-51; Jn.18.10-11 In an attempt to intervene in the travesty which is unfolding before them, Peter lashes out at the band of men, cutting off the right ear of Malchus, the High Priest's servant. After all, Jesus has told them to bring a sword, perhaps He means for armed resistance. But Jesus, rather, rebukes Peter for his violence and speaks the words which tell His rejection of violence as a means of resolution of any conflict – 'Those who use the sword will perish by the sword.' Jesus then reminds them of His right to call on His Father, who would send hosts of angels to His rescue if He asks. Yet this is not the way. Instead, He heals His aggressor's servant's ear.

Lk.22.52-53 (mirrored in Mt.26.55-56a, Mk.14.48-49) Jesus challenges the leaders and the temple guard over the hidden way they are taking Him, and with arms as though He were an insurrectionist. Why did they not take Him in the Temple? Jesus knows they are using the darkness as cover for their injustice.

Mt.26.56b; Mk.14.50-52; Jn.18.12a Jesus is now formally arrested and taken away. The disciples run from the scene, with one young man who has been following them – the tradition has it that this was John Mark in his youth, describing his own shameful moment in the story – tearing himself out of his clothes while an attempt was being made to arrest him, freeing him to run naked from the scene.

Jn.18.12b-14 Jesus is taken first to Annas, the father-in-law of the High Priest, Caiaphas. Although Annas Ben Seth had been deposed from the High Priesthood by the Romans in AD15, apparently for imposing death sentences on people for religious crimes, he was still held in high regard, as having the moral right to be treated with the respect of the High Priest. He could also still have great influence on His son-in-law, Caiaphas, who is also president of the council, the Sanhedrin. Thus, in taking Jesus to him, they are acknowledging Annas' continuing authority, despite the Roman deposition of him. Annas was eventually murdered in 66AD for proposing peace with Rome just at the start of the great rebellion which led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD.

Jn.18.15-18,24; Lk.22.54;(mirrored in Mt.26.57-58, Mk.14.53-54) Simon Peter and another disciple follow at a distance. The other disciple is identified with John, who is writing the gospel, and who does not name himself in many situations, to maintain his modesty. John seems to have been on good terms with the High Priest, since he manages to go with Jesus when He is brought into the courtyard in front of the high priest's house. John also then arranges with the girl keeping night-watch on the door to admit Peter as well, and they both go in to watch the proceedings, as Jesus arrives from appearing before Annas to be questioned by Caiaphas and the council. As they go in, the girl recognises Peter and asks if he is one of the disciples of Jesus. Peter, in order to protect himself and not to be ejected denies this.

Jn.18.19 – 23 The questioning of Jesus is being conducted, and Jesus protests that all He has said, He has said publicly, not seditiously, so that He could have been challenged in public. At this, an official punches Jesus in the face, accusing Him of disrespect to the

High Priestly office. Jesus objects to this brutality, calling for due process, with evidence rather than violent intimidation.

Mt.26.69-72, Lk.22.55-58 (mirrored in Mk.14.66-70a, Jn.18.25) As Peter and John huddle round a fire outside the inquisition going on in the hall of Caiaphas, a servant-girl recognises Peter by the light of the flames, and quizzes him, whether he knows Jesus, which he denies. He goes back to the gate, and another girl sees him, and still Peter will not own his knowledge of Jesus. Fear has taken over.

Mk.14.55-64 (mirrored in Mt.26.59-66) In the judgement hall, things are going badly for the authorities. They produce corrupt witnesses, whose stories do not add up with each other, and they are not able to pin anything on Jesus conclusively. Even those who perjure themselves by saying that Jesus was planning to demolish the Temple can't get their stories to agree with each other. Jesus remains silent, as these false witnesses dismiss the case against Jesus by their blatant vindictiveness.

Then Caiaphas tried another tack. He asks Jesus point blank if He is Messiah, the Christ, Son of God. Jesus cannot deny the truth in a court of law, and He opens His mouth to let fall the words 'I am', the name revealed to Moses, and the promise that Jesus will be seen one day in His glory with the Father.

This is all the proof they need of Jesus' claim to be God. The High Priest now ceremonially rips his coat, a sign of judgement for blasphemy – Jesus is condemned by them to death, even though the Jewish authorities cannot carry out such sentences under Roman law.

Lk.22.63-65 (mirrored in Mt.26.67-68, Mk.14.65) Jesus is now abused by his captors, beaten, blindfolded and laughed at as a so-called prophet who can maybe tell them who is punching Him.

Mt.26.73-74a; Lk.22.59-60a; Jn.18.26-27 In a third encounter, Peter's Galilean dialect is recognised, and he is again linked to Jesus as his follower. There happens to be a relative of Malchus in the company, who thinks he recognises Peter as the one who cut his kinsman's ear. But Peter now sinks to his lowest point, cursing and swearing blind that he has nothing to do with his Master.

Lk.22.60b-62 (mirrored in Mt.26.74b, 75; Mk.14.72) At this moment, Jesus is led away through the courtyard, and as they take him, He sees Peter, just as the cock crows. The Greek word used here for Jesus' look is ἐνέβλεψε *enébhlepse* from the source-word *embhlépein*, to look upon, or into. Jesus didn't just glimpse Peter, He looked into him, into what was going for him. But the look was not one of condemnation nor yet self-pity, but of trust and love – Jesus had foreseen this moment, and His look holds Peter in this moment of his shame.

Peter remembers Jesus' words to him, and he is melted with grief, going outside to 'weep bitterly'.

Mt.27.1; Lk.22.66-71 (mirrored in Mk.15.1a) At first light, the council reconvenes to deliver their judgement to Jesus, and He is brought before them again. They ask Jesus to

reiterate His claim to be Messiah. Jesus rebukes their lack of faith in Him, but confirms He is, and that He is destined to sit at the right hand of the Father. On the basis of this claim, they sentence him to die.

Mt.27.3-10 Judas, shattered by this outcome of a course he instigated, seeks to undo his part in it. He is filled with remorse (Greek μεταμεληθεῖς *metameleethées*, meaning to ‘care afterwards’, to regret something done when it is too late) and tries to return the money paid to him to betray Jesus, throwing down at the leaders’ feet. He is coldly rejected, and the money refused. In despair, he takes his own life, hanging himself.

The money thrown at the council’s feet now becomes blood money, and cannot be put back into the Temple coffers; thus they buy a field as a burial place for Gentiles, which is called in Aramaic חַקֵּל-דָּמָא *chaqel-dama*, field of blood, although it was originally called the potter’s field. Perhaps the red colour of the clay leads to this name, but it is linked in Matthew to the blood money of Judas. Another version of this from Luke appears in Acts 1.19.

Day 321

Before Pilate and Herod

Matthew 27.2, 11 – 32; Mark 15.6- 11, 20-22; Luke 23.1 – 31; John 18.28 – 19.15

Pontius Pilatus has been prefect of Judea since 26AD. There has been some historical doubt about his existence, until a stone engraved with his tribute to the Emperor Tiberius was discovered at Caesarea, the Roman headquarters in Judea, in 1961. His task was to ensure the collection of taxes (*procurator*) and to oversee the Jews in their administration of their religious practice, as well as to maintain order.

Passover is a notoriously dangerous time for the Roman government; it stirs up an annual frenzy of patriotism, retelling the story of God’s deliverance of Israel from an oppressive foreign power. This is the time when many Jews are seeking to overthrow the Romans (particularly the Zealots, of which there are some in Jesus’ team.) Thus, Pilate is on guard for trouble.

Mt.27.2;Lk.23.1,2; Jn.18.28-32 (mirrored in Mk.15.1b) Early in the morning, Jesus is brought to Pilate. Because of the Passover feast, the Jews do not want to disqualify themselves by contamination by Gentiles, so Pilate comes out of his base in Herod’s Palace, near the modern Jaffa Gate, to hear this case to which he has been called as a matter of urgency.

Pilate is annoyed at the underweight nature of the claimed offences. He tells the leaders to deal with it themselves, but they betray their real intention when they complain that they don’t have the right to execute anyone as Pilate has. The fulfilment of Jesus’ words concerning his approaching death is near.

Mt.27.11-14, Jn.18.33-38 (Mk.15.2-5; Lk.23.3-4) Pilate has Jesus brought into the palace. Under the traditions of the Pharisees, He is now ritually unclean. Pilate interviews Him, asking if He is the ‘rex iudaeorum’, the King of the Jews – the title which has caused so

much tension since Herod the Great adopted it, despite the fact that he was an Edomite, and not of the pure descent of Israel. Jesus answers with a question, knowing the sensitivity of this title as the label of a troublemaker in Israel. Pilate snaps back that he is not a Jew to know these things, and Jesus is there because of the claims of others.

Jesus now explains that His rule is not earthly, not of this *cosmos*. His rule is empowered by truth, by God's integrity. 'What is truth?' asks cynical Pilate, with the One who is The Truth standing in front of him.

Pilate has had enough of these conundrums. He walks out and dismisses the case against Jesus. But they shout the accusations again, and remind Pilate of the seriousness of the charges of sedition. Jesus remains silent, and Pilate is awed by this man of integrity before him, especially when compared to the hypocrisy of the braying religious experts around him.

Lk.23.5-7 In stating their grievances, they happen to mention that Jesus began His trouble-making in Galilee. Pilate sees a way out of this trap, and asks if Jesus is a Galilean. Finding that He is, Pilate orders them to take Him to Herod Antipas, who has charge of affairs for the north of the country. He happens to be in Jerusalem, and they take Jesus off to be judged by him, the one who condemned John the Baptist to death.

Lk.23.8-12 Herod is thrilled that he has the celebrity, Jesus of Nazareth before him. He is hoping for a gratuitous miracle for his entertainment by this Galilean wonder-worker. Yet Jesus will speak not a word to Herod, despite the charges brought against Him. Herod's guards abuse and mistreat Jesus, dressing Him up, perhaps in one of Herod's offcast robes, as a sign of his claimed kingship. Herod cannot do anything with Jesus, and in a gesture of acknowledgement of Rome's brilliance at these kind of judgements, Herod sends him back to Pilate. This flattering of Rome by Herod leads to friendship between the puppet King and Pilate.

Mt.27.19 Matthew records the strange dream of Pilate's wife, communicated to him by messenger, warning him to steer clear of this innocent man. Pilate is under pressure now, and must be wondering what is going on around him.

Lk.23.13-16 Pilate now has the support of Herod in this case, and he confirms his intention to acquit Jesus, since both he and the King of Galilee have found no charges to answer against Jesus that merit death. The punishment will be scourging, and then Jesus will be let go.

Mk.15.6-10 (mirrored in Mt.27.15-18, Jn.18.39) Pilate also has another way of clearing up this situation – because it is Passover, in a symbolic action recalling the release of Israel from Egypt, he can release a prisoner of their choosing. He will release Jesus to them as a gesture, knowing that this will not be what they want.

Mt.27.20-21;Mk.15.11;Lk.23.18-19;Jn.18.40 The chief priests now rabble rouse and get the crowd to shout for Barabbas to be released. Barabbas appears to be an insurrectionist Jew, whom the crowd are encouraged to shout for. The reason for this apparent fickleness of the crowd is probably due to the hatred of the Roman rulers and their imposition of

their Gentile law on the holy nation. This is now becoming a case of defending the rights of the Jewish Law over the Roman, and Jesus is a pawn in the middle of it.

Ironically, Barabbas in Aramaic is **בַּר־אַבְבָּא** *Bar-Abba*, the Son of the Father. The true Father's Son is rejected and displaced by a sinner carrying His name.

Mt.27.22-23; Lk.23.20-23 (mirrored in Mk.15.12-14) Pilate asks what they want him to do with Jesus. They cry *σταυρωθήτω stavrothéeto! Let Him be crucified!* They want the worst punishment Rome can deliver for this blasphemer, one which in itself carries a Mosaic curse, for being hung on a tree.

The scene now grows ugly, with the crowd repeating the call and the anger growing. Pilate protests Jesus innocence of all charges, confirmed by himself and Herod. But the crowd want blood – Jesus' blood.

Mt.27.27-30, Jn.19.1-3 (mirrored in Mk.15.16-19) Pilate perhaps believes that if he takes one more, drastic step, he can pacify this lynch mob. He orders Jesus to be flogged. A Roman flogging was a terrible, disgusting abuse of humanity under a whip with leaded things. Perhaps Pilate thinks that if he presents Jesus again, broken and torn, this will suffice. Once this degradation has happened, the soldiers use him as their plaything, plaiting a crown of vicious thorns, ramming it down into his scalp. They take a scrap of royally-coloured cloth and drape it over his shoulders, and put a stick in His hand for a sceptre, as they kneel down and mock Him, hailing Him as the King of the Jews, itself a title of mockery for the Romans, an empty title given to a client of the Empire, Herod Antipas. It is the title under which Jesus was sought at His birth by the Magi; it is the now the title, crowned with bloodied thorns which the brutal legionaries spit out at him, as they strike him blows on the head again and again, driving the jagged spikes deeper into his skull.

Mt.27.27-30; Jn.19.1-3 (mirrored in Mk.15.12-14) Pilate plays his last card, presenting the bleeding, broken Jesus to the mob, trusting the horror of the sight will provoke pity in them, perhaps, allowing him to heed his wife's warnings, and let an innocent man go.

Yet, as soon as He appears, the shout goes up; John has them shouting, this time, not just 'let him be crucified', (*σταυρωθήτω stavrothéeto!*), but the imperative, the command, and with an emphasis of it being done immediately – *σταύρωσον stávrosón!* Pilate derides their vindictiveness and self-righteousness – 'Alright then, go ahead and crucify an innocent man – He has done nothing worthy of death.' Jesus is not yet delivered to them, Pilate is still playing for justice.

Jn.19.7-11 The Jewish leaders claim 'we have a law!', this is not the Roman jurisdiction, this is the people of Israel who are taking action against a criminal against their tradition. There must have been a sense of triumph for these leaders that they are grasping for such a victory over the pagan governor.

Pilate is now fearing a mass uprising, and takes Jesus into the palace again. He knows something beyond his control is going on, sees the terrible drama being played out, and wonders how he has got enmeshed in this tragic story. 'Where are you from?' he says,

and when Jesus is silent, reminds the broken man that he is in charge around here, and has power to hand Jesus over or to save Him.

Jesus now floors Pilate with His reply; Pilate has no power in this, he is part of a bigger plan, he is under a greater authority. The only crumb of comfort that he has from Jesus is that his sin is less than those who are outside, shouting for Jesus' blood right not.

Jn.19.12-15 Pilate has had enough, and he is intent on setting Jesus free, and ending this charade. But the leaders have a trump card, and they play it now. If Pilate lets this man go, he will be deemed an enemy of the Emperor. This man is claimed to be a king, and there is no room for unauthorised kings around the supreme Ruler of the Empire.

Pilate realises he cannot save Jesus. But he goes on record as having attempted to do the right thing. He brings out his judgement seat from the palace, and once more presents the bleeding, crushed figure to them, sarcastically calling Him 'the king'. They are relentless, in their demands, and continue to call *crucify him now!*

'What, crucify your king?' asks Pilate; 'we have no king but Caesar!' they call back, reaching the summit of dark hypocrisy.

Mt.27.24,25 A riot is rising, and Pilate knows he cannot control it. He calls for a bowl of water, and washes his hands before them, claiming to be innocent of Jesus' blood (except that only he has the power to crucify Jesus!) In a pathetic moment of exhausted cowardice, Rome hands over the Son of God to the stone-hearted Jewish legalists, who have failed to recognise the Son of God, and now are about to offer Him as the Lamb of God on this, Passover day, 14th Nisan for which they accept fully the responsibility by their own words.

Lk.23.24-25 (mirrored in Mt.27.26, Mk.15.15, Jn.19.16) In case any should repeat the old lie about the Jews alone being responsible for killing the Messiah, Pilate is the one who releases Barabbas, and yields Jesus to the mob's will. It is a Roman cross Jesus carries, not a Jewish one. It is Roman soldiers who oversee His death, and who will guard His tomb.

Mk.15.20; Jn.19.17 (mirrored in Mt.27.31) Removing the rich cloth from him, they put his own robe back on him, and take him out to the place of death, carrying the cross, or its crossbar.

Mk.15.21-22 (mirrored in Mt.27.32, Lk.23.26) A passer-by, a Jew from a scattered community in Cyrene, Libya, North Africa, is pulled from the crowd, and made to shoulder the cross for the exhausted Jesus. In this way, they come to Golgotha – (in the Aramaic ܩܘܠܓܘܬܐ *Gulgolta*, from the round shape of the head, the skull.)

Lk.23.27-31 Having been deserted by the men, it is, at last, the women who go with him to the place of execution. They cry and wail at the terrible state He is in, but Jesus turns and warns them of the terrible cataclysm ahead for them, as their city and nation is laid waste within decades.