**Anointing**

I like starting out with the reading of the anointing because it feels appropriate. It feels appropriate first for the simple reason that Jesus says “wherever the good news is preached, this woman’s deed will be remembered and discussed.” And yet, for some reason, neither this passage nor any of the gospel parallels are included in the official lectionary. That feels like an important oversight in need of correction. But the second reason it feels appropriate is because it is here that the course of Holy Week is sealed. The Chief Priests wanted to arrest Jesus, but they needed him away from the crowds and they didn’t want to do it during the Passover. But it is this event that gave them the opportunity. Matthew just tells us that the disciples in general thought the woman’s pouring of expensive perfume on Jesus was a waste. They chime in with the phrase that is never far when the church decides to spend money on something beautiful. “It could have been sold and the money given to the poor.” John’s version tells us that this was Judas. And that he said it, not because he cared about the poor, but because he kept the collective treasury. And that he helped himself to it. When Jesus corrects him. “Why criticize this woman for doing such a good thing?” is the moment Judas decides he needs 30 pieces of silver. And that is the moment the Chief Priests can get Jesus without the crowd even if it is during the Passover.

But what it hints at for us I think is a memento mori. “She has poured this perfume on me to prepare my body for burial” is what Jesus says this is about. We can get wrapped up in the details of everyday life. Worrying about how this bill is to be paid and which network we need to massage a bit to keep it active and limber. We’d also call it virtue signaling today. Tone policing. Expressing displeasure at a deep emotional gesture or something outside of popular decorum. But the memento mori reminds us that time is not just tick tock. There are important times. There are times that call for deep emotion. There are times that need beautiful things. This woman recognized such a time. This woman was prepared to bear the reproach, to meet the time, to bring forth a necessary beautiful thing.

The good, the true and the beautiful. They have their appointed times. The question is always, are we willing to bear the cross to bring them?

**Gethsemane**

You always start from the one Christ. There are two natures, human and divine, but you can’t start with either nature, because they are together in the one Christ. And I think we can only see the totality of the struggle in Gethsemane if we ponder those two natures. The Athanasian Creed reminds us that the one Christ was “perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh…”. There are fancy doctrinal words around this. We are not miaphysite or Monophysite. Christ was not only the divine logos inhabiting human flesh. There is an old doctrinal formula, what was not assumed was not saved. And I think that we all would like our souls to be saved. Which means that in the one Christ there was a human soul of Jesus. And the Garden is the place where “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death.”

The soul, the seat of the human will. Our gut is our flesh and it drives desires and emotions. Our head is our mind and it provides what thought we might have. But the soul is what eventually steers. In the garden here we have the temptation of that one human soul. By his divine nature he knew what was ahead – the cross. By the human nature of body and mind we all run from such suffering. Unless the soul wills it. Does the sinless soul of the Son of God will this? Will he continue his course of obedience?

It's a counterfactual, was it ever possible that Jesus would fail, would disobey the Father’s will? That the two natures would be split? Just saying it should strike horror. It would take a better theologian that me to actually work through it.

But the song we are about to sing I think gets it right. The disciples were not able to watch. We all know this time when the soul is tested. We probably all remember a time when our courage failed. Those black spots we’d rather forget. Not look at. “Watch with Him one bitter hour. Turn not from His griefs away. Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.”

Our problems are rarely not knowing what it the good, the true or the beautiful path. Our problems are willing to walk it. “Father, your will be done.”

**Betrayal and Arrest**

It is a scene full of ugliness. The ugliness of betrayal, veneered with a kiss. The ugliness of injustice, veneered with an exercise of legal power. The ugliness of swords and clubs that hack off pieces of flesh. The ugliness of desertion not even covered.

It’s the ugliness of the pursuit of power and wealth and being right. We think those things are attractive. But how often are they simply that – a nice veneer a few millimeters thick? Some soft clothes and nice words that cover the desperate jockeying in the room where it happens.

Where is the beauty in the scene? If it is those three transcendents – the good, the true and the beautiful – that we are pondering, where can we see them in the midst of such ugliness?

Let me suggest in three places.

“Put away your sword, those who use the sword die by the sword.” There is something good in the symmetry and in the acknowledgement that the call of discipleship is not to such conquest. I don’t think Jesus’ words rule out the use of force, but they are a reminder of what it means to draw the sword. Once it is drawn, it does not depart from the house. The path of the cross is the one that puts away the sword. It is the path that would rather suffer violence than preclude the chance of repentance.

“I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly.” We are under the protection of those angels. There is nothing done to those who know Jesus that is not observed and reported. And one day they will be called. One day the wheat and the chaff will be separated by those reapers. One day the chariots and horsemen of Israel will spur into action.

“This all happens to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in Scripture.” This is not some fly-by-night operation. The chief priests may send a rabble by night to take Jesus, but it is all in the Father’s will. And the Father has made that will known to us. By the prophets, and at the perfect time by His Son. Jesus knows what he does. And we do too. He saved us from our ugliness.

**Trial and Denial**

Every Holy Week reading through the story again I come upon something I don’t remember seeing before. This year it is a repeated saying. “You have said it.” When Judas asks if it is he who will betray him, Jesus responds “You have said so.” When he replies to Caiphas here, “You have said it.” And when He replies to Pilate, who asks him if he is the King of the Jews, “You have said it.”

To ask the question is to know the answer. Is this one the King of the Jews? Yes. Is this one the messiah? Yes. Is it I? Yes.

The scene from last night always struck me strange. All the disciples asking if it was them who would betray? And Jesus answer is essentially, “Are you eating with me?” All the commentators and everyone who has ever put that scene on film or stage has tried to make it a stage direction. Judas dipping bread at the same time. But if you read the story. Yes, Judas betrays him, specifically in the most terrible way. But all the rest run from the garden. Peter is here swearing a blue streak that “I don’t know the man.”

Is it I? You have said so. To ask the question is to know the answer.

But even to know that it is I that would betray Him. Does not make fated our response. The gospel presents a range. Caiaphas here commits what some might call the unforgiveable sin, calling the testimony of the Spirit a liar. He has heard the truth, and still calls it a lie. Judas commits the betrayal, but does feel remorse. But he lacks faith in the mercy of God. Judas has a habit, both at the Supper and at the betrayal of calling Jesus Rabbi – teacher – instead of Lord like the other disciples. And the student didn’t pay close attention to the teacher. But Peter, Peter hears the crow and remembers the Word, and his remorse bears fruit in faith.

Can Christ forgive me? To ask the question is to know the answer.

**Pilate’s Trial and Humiliation**

When Jesus said earlier in the night that everything written about him had to be fulfilled, it is the scene of his mockery that springs to my mind. “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted” Isaiah prophesies.

And it is this scene that I think is the deepest divine irony. Not irony as Alanis Morrisette would have it, but the original definition. The words and actions of the characters mean exactly the opposite of what they think they mean. And we the audience know it. Jesus is dressed in the purple and crowned and given a scepter. He is Hailed and bowed down to. The soldiers mean it is mockery. They think the claim is ridiculous. But we know. This is the King. Not just he King of the Jews, but The King.

But we know how mockery goes. “When they were finally tired of mocking him…”. Eventually we come to the end of cruelty. Sometimes, if we are graced, our eyes become open to what we are doing and we are ashamed of our own ugliness. More often we are just like the cat with mouse. It no longer interests us. It is no longer even trying to get away. It has resigned itself to its fate. And mocking the defeated isn’t fun anymore.

Placing myself in this scene I always come away with the plea for eyes to see. Might I see the nobility underneath the frailest of flesh. Might I see honor of those stripped and spit on by the world. Might I see Christ in the least of these, before I join the mocking. For all irony reverses itself. Everything hidden will be made known. And all my taunts will be shown for the cruelty they were. Lord, spare me that shame that you carried.

**Crucifixion**

Jesus asked the question in the Garden, “Am I a dangerous revolutionary?” That is formally what his is executed for. “Two revolutionaries were crucified with him…”. I swapped the translations tonight to the New Living Translation. We are so used to hearing criminal or thieves, but what was their crime? Why were they stealing? The NLT provides a good translation. They were charged as revolutionaries. And that goes along with the sign above Jesus. If you have a crucifix – a cross with the corpus on it – you will often see INRI above him. Iesous Nazarenous Rex Iudaorem – Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Just the claim was revolutionary, even if it was true.

But Jesus is a strange revolutionary. Telling his disciples to put away the sword. Not calling on the legions of angels. Submitting to the injustice and mockery.

It is dangerous treading near that cry of dereliction – “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?” None of us have felt grief and pain like that. Yet maybe that is his true moment of revolution. Abraham would bargain with God over Sodom and God’s own name. Moses would converse with God in the tent of meeting and occasionally push back. Job would demand answers. And God’s answer out of the whirlwind wasn’t really an answer. But Job would willingly repent. “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me.” But the cry of Christ present the case directly to heaven. Have you abandoned us? You promised to be there. Are you? This is your plan. Is this where it ends? If Gethsemane could ask the question if the two natures in Christ could be split, the cry of dereliction asks if the Father and the Son can be split. And Jesus surrenders his spirit.

And the greatest answer awaits, it awaits to fulfill what the scriptures prophesied. But the Father does give an answer. The apocalypse has come – the great revealing. What was hidden in the holy of holies, is now scene before the world as the curtain rips in two from the top. The earth shakes and the dead are raised. And those who not long ago mocked until they tired testify, “This man truly was the Son of God.”

Am I a dangerous revolutionary? Yes. Because the ruler of this world has been cast down. Yes. Because the maker of all things has answered the cry. Yes. Because hard hearts are being given repentance. Yes. Because all things are being made new. Yes. Because we now have a mediator for us on high.

**Burial**

It is all done on that cross. The debt has been paid. The prophesy fulfilled. The victory won.

But how do we know? What is the sign?

Jesus in life would say the only sign we would get would be the sign of Jonah. He would say that he was glad he was not present at the death of Lazarus, so that we might believe.

That is the purpose of the tomb. Today with Joseph – already a rich man – we put the body in the tomb. Today we give to death its tribute and roll the stone.

But also today we sit with the Mary’s across from the tomb…watching.

Were we there? Yes. We’ve seen it all. Everything except the sign.

Today We wait, and watch. For we have not been forsaken. What is the sign? To ask the question is to know the answer.