



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 27

FROM THE GARDEN TO THE CROSS

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

After Jesus' last supper with his disciples, he goes out to the garden at Gethsemane to pray. After a night of prayer, he is found by Judas, who betrays him by revealing his location to the officials. Jesus is arrested, taken to trial and condemned.

Our story today, the story commemorated by our Holy Week observances, ends at the crucifixion.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Betrayal
- Crucifixion
- Redemption

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version* Bible.

Matthew 26:36–27:66

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sundays:

Year A: Palm Sunday and Holy Saturday

Year B: Holy Saturday

Year C: Holy Saturday



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

In the Old Testament, we learn that God stays with us, no matter what.

Jesus' death, is the *what*. Even in death, God stays with us at the cost of God's own life.

This is God's redeeming act of grace: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."

To the disciples, Jesus' death looked like failure. But we know that this story is "to be continued." And we know that it was his death that redeems us and reconciles us with God. Jesus died for us so that our story can once again be in line with God's story, which is the plan of God for us. By his death, he gave us life.

Here is what St. Euthemius the Great said about Jesus and his death for us:

Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today. The whole earth is silent, because the King of heaven and earth is dead.

God has died, and hell trembles with fear.

Jesus has gone to the place of the dead, to search for Adam and Eve and for all who have gone down to darkness and the shadow of death. Jesus approaches them, bearing the Cross, the weapon that has won them the victory. He takes them by the hand, and raises them up, and this is what he says:

Awake, sleepers, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light! Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Out of love for you, I, your God, became a human being, and came to earth. For your sake, I died today upon earth. You once reached out to take fruit from a tree, and to save you, I have been nailed to a tree. You were driven out of Paradise, and I have come to lead you to heaven. I did not create you to be held prisoner forever. Rise up! Let us leave this place – for I have died with you, and you shall rise with me. The Kingdom of Heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.

– Adapted from *A Triduum Sourcebook*, ed. Gabe Huck and Mary Ann Simcoe (Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1983), p. 64, (found in Gretchen Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children*).



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

From the garden to the cross – these are the final days of Holy Week, which include Good Friday and Holy Saturday to the Great Vigil of Easter or to the grand service on Easter Day.

For Episcopalians, the story of these last days is retold every Sunday in the Eucharist Prayers. "On the night he was handed over to suffering and death..." (Eucharistic Prayer A, *BCP*, p. 362); "On the night before he died for us..." (Eucharistic Prayer B, *BCP*, p. 368); "On the night he was betrayed..." (Eucharistic Prayer C, *BCP*, p. 371).

The Good Friday service is often offered both at noon, remembering that Jesus was hung on the cross at noon, and also in the evening. The Good Friday liturgy can be found in the Prayer Book on pages 276-282. Other services may also be held, such as a service of the Stations of the Cross.

Holy Saturday is a time of vigil; the liturgy can be found in the Prayer Book on page 283. Eucharist is not celebrated on that day.



WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

Where does Jesus' crucifixion belong in God's Beloved Community? It belongs at the core of our redemption by God and the proof that God's Community is still alive because committed to making it happen – with us.

But God did not desire Jesus' death; we humans made that happen. It was a flawed social system that allowed the execution of God's only Son because he came to bring good news to the poor and the oppressed, thus angering the holders of the status quo. We are reminded, by the crucifixion, that we have much work to do to ensure that unjust social systems and institutions do not belong in God's Beloved Community. And violence and intolerance do not belong in God's Beloved Community.

- Are there still examples of violence and intolerance in our social system?
- What role do we play in standing against it?
- What is a modern example of the status quo being disrupted? Are there examples at school or in our community?



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MATTHEW 26:36–27:66

Jesus knows he is going to die

Jesus doesn't have long to live. He has been sent by God to bring God's kingdom to us. He wants to change our hearts so that we can love more, bless more and help more. He wants to change our lives so we can share more and hoard less, forgive more and hate less. And he wants to change the world so it can be a world where God would live – a world of justice and peace, where every human being can live in dignity.

But it's hard to change the world. And it makes some people very angry. If I am rich, you would make me poor? If I earned my money, you would take it away? If my neighbor hates me, I should love him back? If my enemy hits me, I should turn the other cheek? This world is not my world! This world is too hard for me to live in!

Jesus prays all night

After his last supper with his friends, Jesus goes to a garden to pray. He takes with him his very best friends, Peter, James and John.

Jesus is very sad. He is also tense and nervous. He knows this will be a long and hard night, and that what is coming up will be long and hard. He tells Peter, James and John, "I'm almost dying of sadness. Please stay with me. I cannot sleep. Please stay awake with me while I am awake."

Jesus walks a little ways into the garden. Then he gets down on his knees to pray to the one he most wants to talk to – God. "Father," he says, "Whatever is supposed to happen – if you can, please don't let it happen to me. Please let it not happen! But if it is your wish, I will do what you want!" After a while, Jesus gets up and goes to his friends. They are sleeping.

"What?" He says to Peter. "I wanted your company. I asked if you could stay awake with me. Couldn't you stay awake for even an hour?" Then he says, "Please, wake up and pray that you will not face trouble."

Then Jesus goes off to pray again. Again he says, "Father, whatever is supposed to happen – if you can, please don't let it happen to me. Please let it not happen! But if it is your wish, I will do what you want!"

He prays for a long time – all night long. He needs to talk with God and to be with God.

Then he gets up and looks at his disciples. They are asleep again! This time, Jesus leaves them sleeping and goes off to pray a third time. Then he comes back. They are still asleep.

"It's time now," Jesus says, waking them up. "I am about to be taken away. See, look! Here is the one who's come to give me away to the soldiers!"

Jesus is arrested

Look: there's Judas. He is one of Jesus' disciples. Now he comes not with his friends but with a crowd of people carrying swords and clubs, and with priests and soldiers.

When he sees Jesus, he says to the soldiers, "The man I kiss is the one you want. After I kiss him, you can arrest him." He comes up to Jesus and plants a kiss on his cheek. Then the soldiers take Jesus away.

The High Priest talks to Jesus

Jesus is taken by the soldiers to the house of the high priest, the Jewish leader. He and the other priests ask Jesus, "Are you the Son of God? Are you the Messiah? People tell us that you are."

Jesus doesn't say so. But he says something that is written in the Bible: "Here's what I say. From now on, you will see the Son of Man sitting next to God in heaven."

The high priest says, "That's it! He says he is God! For that, he should be put to death!"

Peter pretends he doesn't know Jesus

Peter is sitting in the high priest's yard waiting to see what will happen to Jesus. A servant girl comes up to him.

"You were with that man Jesus!"

Peter is afraid that he will also be arrested if he says he knows Jesus. So he says, "I have no idea what you're talking about!" Then he gets up and goes to the porch. Maybe no one will see him there.

Then another servant girl sees him. There are other people around. She says to them, "Look! This man was with Jesus!"

Peter gets mad. First he swears, and then he says, "No! I don't know the man!"

He still wants to wait for Jesus. He tries to make himself invisible. He hides among the crowd. He is very quiet. He tries not to move. But somebody else notices him.

“I’m sure you are one of them! I could tell by your accent when you talk.”

Then Peter really curses! And he says, “I tell you, *I DO NOT KNOW THE MAN!*”

Then the early-morning rooster crows. Peter hears and remembers something Jesus told him yesterday: “Before the rooster crows, you will say three times that you don’t know me.”

Peter stands up and runs out. Then he cries and cries.

Jesus is taken to Pilate the governor

The priests take Jesus to Pilate the governor of the region. He’s the one who can have Jesus put to death.

Pilate says to Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews that they say you are?” Jesus does not answer.

Pilate doesn’t know what to do. But he knows that the Jewish leaders want Jesus. And now a crowd is forming – an angry crowd. They want to see someone die. They are screaming, “Crucify him!”

Pilate takes Jesus outside onto a ledge just outside his room. He sees the big crowd. He shouts to them, “What should I do with this man Jesus, who is called the Messiah?”

The crowd shouts, because they are in an angry mood: “Crucify him!”

Pilate thinks he can’t do anything more. He can’t calm down the crowd. He can’t talk to the leaders. He just has to go along. He feels weak. And now he acts weak. He says, “It’s not my fault what you do to him. Just do it yourselves.” What a weak answer!

Pilate gives Jesus a whipping on his back. Then he gives Jesus to the soldiers. The soldiers make fun of Jesus. They make a crown out of sharp thorns and slam it down on Jesus’ head. Blood runs down his forehead. They take off his regular clothes and put a pretend king’s robe on him. Then they put a stick in his hand and pretend to worship him as a pretend king: ‘Hail! King of the Jews!’ they say. They spit at him, then take off that robe and put his own clothes back on him.

Now he is ready to be killed on the cross.

Jesus is crucified

The soldiers make Jesus walk up the hill to where they will kill him. They make him carry his own cross, a giant piece of lumber that will hold his body. It is very heavy and Jesus can barely walk. So the soldiers see a man named Simon on the road and make him carry the cross.

On the hill, called Golgotha, they nail Jesus to the cross. The soldiers try to give him something to drink, but Jesus will not drink.

Then the soldiers put a sign on the cross over Jesus' head. It says, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Two men are also being crucified in this same place. Jesus is in between them. A crowd has come and now stands under the crosses with the three men dying.

Jesus dies

Noon has come. The sky becomes dark as night. For three hours, it is dark. Jesus is dying on the cross and the world is dark.

Then Jesus cries out, asking a question that he learned from the Bible: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken (left) me?"

Then Jesus cries out again, loudly, and breathes his very last breath.

Just as Jesus takes his last breath, some strange things happen. In the temple, the big curtain tears itself in two, from top to bottom. The earth shakes. Rocks split open. Tombs and graves open by themselves.

One man, a soldier, who is keeping watch over Jesus, feels the earthquake. He and the rest of the crowd are terrified. The soldier cries out, "This man is truly God's Son!"

Jesus is buried

Now it is evening. Jesus has been dead for several hours, but he is still hanging on the cross. A man named Joseph, a disciple of Jesus, wants to bury Jesus.

Joseph goes to Pilate and asks, “Can I please take Jesus’ body and bury it?”

Pilate gives Joseph the body. Joseph wraps it in a linen cloth and puts Jesus in Joseph’s own tomb. This is a tomb that Joseph has bought for himself. But now it will be for his dear friend and teacher Jesus.

Joseph carefully places Jesus’ body into the tomb, which is a cave in a giant rock. He prays and cries, then goes out of the tomb. Then he rolls a big stone over the opening of the tomb. The stone is the door, and it is very heavy. No one can roll it away to open the tomb.

Then Joseph goes away. He is crying. Jesus is dead.

