

Passion Prayers

The musical Passions of St. Matthew and St. John by J. S. Bach interweave scripture texts with commentary and responses of prayer. In that tradition I gathered hymns and prayers as responses to the text of the Passion according to St. Mark. In addition to these breaks in the text, I invite you to pray personally and directly, within the moment to moment events of the Passion. -Suzanne

ONE

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Mark 14:1-9

*Have mercy,
my God, for my tears' sake;
Look hither,
heart and eyes
weep bitterly before Thee.
Have mercy!
my God, for my tears' sake*

*Picander (Christian Friedrich Henrici 1700-1764)
Devotional Thoughts on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday 1725
aria for alto, J.S. Bach*

Personal Response

TWO

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

Mark 14:10-21

*Man, that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to life,
and is full of misery, He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower;
he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.*

*In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek for succour,
but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?*

*Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty,
O holy and most merciful Saviour,
deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.*

*Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts;
shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer;
but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty,
O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal,
suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee.*

Burial of the Dead, Book of Common Prayer (1928)

Personal Response

THREE

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

Mark 14: 22-31

*Bread of the world, in mercy broken,
Wine of the soul, in mercy shed,
by whom the words of life were spoken,
and in whose death our sins are dead:
look on the heart by sorrow broken,
look on the tears by sinners shed;
and be thy feast to us the token
that by thy grace our souls are fed.*

*Reginald Heber 1783-1826
The Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

FOUR

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Mark 32:42

*If the tears on my cheeks can achieve nothing,
O, then take my heart! But for the streams,
when wounds do gently bleed, let it also be the sacrificial cup.*

from the Saint Matthew Passion by J.S.Bach, libretto by Picander (Christian Fredreich Henrici)

*O Jesus, how many generous souls... have kept Thee company in the Garden,
sharing Thy bitterness and Thy mortal anguish... How many hearts in the course
of the centuries have responded generously to Thy invitation...
May this multitude of souls, then, in this supreme hour, be a comfort to Thee,
who, better than the disciples, share with Thee the distress of Thy heart,
and cooperate with Thee for their own salvation and that of others.
And grant that I also may be of their number, that I also may offer Thee some relief.*

*Padre Pio
1887-1968*

Personal Response

FIVE

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." All of them deserted him and fled. A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

Mark:14:43-52

*Ah, great King, great throughout the ages,
how can I sufficiently make known this fidelity of yours?
No human heart or mind could think of a gift worthy of you.
With my poor faculties I could never experience
anything approaching the compassion you feel.
What can I do then to repay you for your goodness and mercy?*

*from the Saint John Passion,
text adapted from several sources by J.S.Bach*

Personal Response

SIX

They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'" Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophesy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

Mark 14:53-65

*O Loving Wisdom of the living God,
O everlasting Word
and Power of the Eternal One:
Grant us what you have promised;
and give us, unworthy as we are,
what you have offered to all alike;
that your passion may be our deliverance
and your death our life,
your cross our redemption
and your wound our healing;
and that, being crucified with you,
we may by your gift be exalted
to the Holy One on high,
with whom you live and reign with the Holy Spirit,
one God, blessed for evermore. Amen.*

*adapted from the Missale Gallicanum Vetus
late 7th or early 8th century*

Personal Response

SEVEN

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Mark 14:66-72

*Ah, holy Jesus, how has thou offended,
that man to judge thee hath in hate pretended?
By foes derided, by thine own rejected, O most afflicted.*

*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, that undone thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee: I crucified thee.*

*Lo, the Good Shepherd for the sheep is offered;
the slave hath sinned, and the Son hath suffered;
for our atonement, while we nothing heeded, God interceded.*

*For me, kind Jesus, was thy incarnation,
thy mortal sorrow, and the life's oblation;
thy death of anguish and thy bitter passion, for my salvation.*

*Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,
I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee,
think on thy pity and thy love unswerving, not my deserving.*

*Johann Heermann 1585-1647
The Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

EIGHT

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Mark 15:1-15

Consider, my soul, with a tortured joy, and with a bitter burden half stifling my heart, your highest good in the sufferings of Jesus: consider how for you, on the thorns that prick him blooms the flowers that opens the gates of Heaven; from his bitter wormwood you can pluck sweet fruit in abundance. Therefore never cease to contemplate him.

Through you captivity, O Son of God, comes our freedom; your prison is the throne of grace, a refuge for all pious folk; for if you had not entered into bondage our bondage would have lasted for ever.

*from the Saint John Passion,
text adapted from several sources by J.S.Bach*

Personal Response

NINE

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Mark 15:16-20

*To mock your reign, O dearest Lord, they made a crown of thorns;
set you with taunts long that road from which no one returns.
They did not know, as we do now, that glorious is your crown;
that thorns would flower upon your brow, your sorrows head our own.*

*In mock acclaim, O gracious Lord, they snatched a purple cloak,
your passion turned, for all they cared, into a soldier's joke.
They did not know, as we do now, that though we merit blem
you will your robe of mercy throw around our naked shame.*

*A sceptered reed, O patient Lord, they thrust into your hand,
and acted out their grim charade to its appointed end.
They did not know, as we do now, though empires rise and fall,
your Kingdom shall not cease to grow till love embraces all.*

*F. Pratt Green 1903-2000
The Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

TEN

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

Mark 15:21

Commend your ways, and whatever troubles your heart, to the trusties care of him, who controls the heavens; he who gives the clouds, the air and winds their paths, their course and track, he also will find ways where you can tread and walk.

from the Saint Matthew Passion by J.S.Bach, libretto by Picander (Christian Fredreich Henrici)

Personal Response

ELEVEN

Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

Mark 15:22-32

*I wish to stand beside Thee here;
do not then scorn me!
I do not wish to leave Thee
when thy heart is breaking,
when Thy heart grows pale
in the last throes of death,
then I wish to grasp Thee
in my arms and in my bosom*

from the Saint Matthew Passion by J.S.Bach, libretto by Picander (Christian Fredreich Henrici)

Personal Response

TWELVE

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Mark 15:33-39

*O sacred head, sore wounded, defiled and put to scorn;
O kingly head, surrounded with mocking crown of thorn:
what sorrow mars thy grandeur? Can death thy bloom deflower?
O countenance whose splendor the hosts of heaven adore!*

*Thy beauty, long desired, hath vanished from our sight;
thy power is all expired, and quenched the light of light.
Ah me! for whom thou diest, hide not so far thy grace:
show me, O Love most hightest, the brightness of thy face.*

*In thy most bitter passion my heart to share doth cry,
with thee for my salvation upon the cross to die.
Ah, keep my heart thus moved to stand thy cross beneath,
to mourn thee, well beloved, yet thank thee for thy death.*

*Paul Gerhardt 1607-1676
Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

THIRTEEN

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.

Mark 15:40-45

*What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend,
for this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?
Oh, make me thine forever! and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never, outlive my love for thee.*

*My days are few, O fail not, with thine immortal power;
to hold me that I quail not in death's most fearful hour;
that I may fight befriended, and see in my last strife
to me thine arms extended upon the cross of life.*

*Paul Gerhardt 1607-1676
Hymnal 1982*

Personal Response

FOURTEEN

Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

Mark 15:46-47

Rest in peace, you sacred bones: I will not weep over you any longer; rest in peace, and lead me to peace as well. The grave, like your tomb, is not a place of agony but opens Heaven to me and shuts the gates of Hell.

*from the Saint John Passion,
text adapted from several sources by J.S.Bach*

Personal Response

AMEN