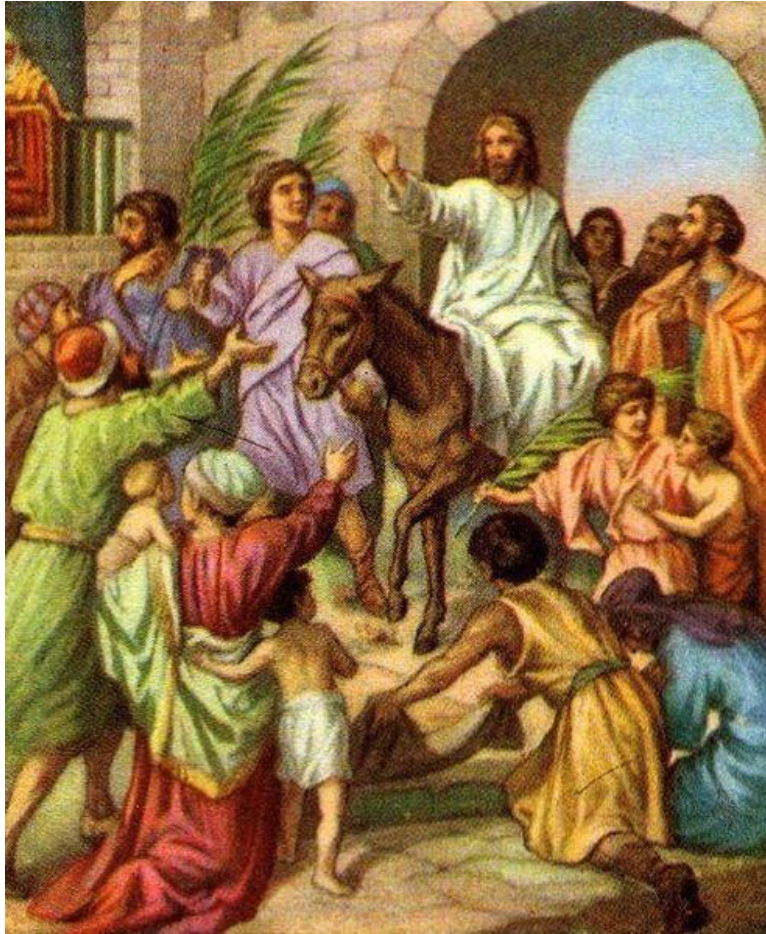


Prayer Corner 14

Holy Week, A Contemplative Journey By Angie Rebert

Part One: Contemplative Reflections: Before the Crucifixion of Jesus (Based on the gospels of Matthew Mark and Luke)

During this Lenten season, my thoughts often drift into a contemplative prayer mode. I visualize what it was like to be one of the disciples of Jesus, sharing His last days. As Holy Week is drawing near, I envision the shocking events as seen through their eyes and hearts. I would like to share my contemplative journey with you. Let us begin with John's story describing what it was like as they prepared to enter Jerusalem for the Passover.



Entry into Jerusalem

Recalled by John

As we started our preparations to travel to Jerusalem for the Passover, it seemed that in the last few days everything had changed. Jesus changed. He was not the same. Gone were his light banter, teasing, and gentle pat on the shoulder. Gone were his easy-going manner, his thought-provoking parables. He often gazed off in the distance. He seemed way beyond his footsteps. Although we were walking close together, Jesus did not seem to be with us. His countenance changed, his movements more tense and determined. He was strangely silent with a great sadness hanging over him.

Jesus finally told us this morning to pack up; it was time to head to Jerusalem. A great foreboding overshadows my heart. We tried to talk him out of celebrating the Passover in the city. We begged him to stay here in Bethany to share the Passover meal here in this peaceful and safe place. But Jesus is determined to observe Passover in the city as is the tradition.

Everything has indeed changed. The crowds that follow us are no longer eager to hear his message or to secure his healing touch. The crowds now are more militant and expectant, crying out for power to resist the Romans and even to gather up an army.

The city is filled with hundreds more Roman soldiers, ready to seize anyone who is suspicious or speaks against the Roman Empire. Punishment of treasonous behavior is swift and brutal. Crucifixion on the cross, an agonizing death, has become common place. A great fear for Jesus has gripped me.

And I hate to admit it, but I feel paralyzed with a great fear for us, his disciples! But Jesus will not listen to our pleas to stay in Bethany. Our beloved Jesus, glazes steadfastly ahead, striding forward in determined steps.

Earlier, Jesus gave us strange instructions, rather silly actually. He sent two men into the city, where they would find a donkey and its colt tied up. They were told to take the animals and if asked, to say the Master had need of them. Can you imagine? But we had learned to follow his instructions and not ask for his reasons. Later, they returned with the donkey and the colt.

What followed was even stranger. When we got close to the gates of the city, a large crowd had gathered and were surrounding us, going before us, and massing up behind us. Jesus quietly signaled to us that he was going to mount the colt and even though his size was awkward for such a small animal, Jesus appeared regal, sitting there with a sad determined countenance. I felt a suffocating fear grip my throat. I was silent, even as the crowd started shouting and chanting:

"Hosana! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,
Blessed is the kingdom of our father David
That comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!"

People were throwing their outer cloaks to the ground, and eager young men climbed up into the trees, cutting and throwing down palm branches to line the dusty path up the hill into the city. We moved slowly ahead amidst this strange raucous bedlam. I wanted to stop this madness and turn back to the welcoming peace we had at Bethany. But the crowd pushed ahead and Jesus rode into the city with a solemn dignity, seemingly apart from the exuberant mood of the crowd surrounding him. Even after we had worshipped in the temple with Jesus, and had returned to Bethany, I wanted to erase the scene from my mind, but it lingered and haunted me as I tried to sleep that night. Anxiety and fear for our future gripped me. Jesus seemed so vulnerable today, so resigned to whatever was coming, so distant. I prayed with an intensity seldom felt:

*Oh my God! Surely You will not let harm come to Jesus, your Beloved Son!
Oh my God! Protect him and send your angels to bring him safely through this
madness.
And Almighty God! Protect us too. Oh Lord, Keep us all safe. Have Mercy! Oh
Lord, Have Mercy!*



The Passover Meal

Seen through the heart and eyes of Peter

Our last meal together was very different from any Passover meal we have ever experienced. Jesus hosted the meal and led the sacred rituals. Looking back, I must say, it was a very strange evening.

Jesus changed the rituals, adding new ones. He also made new proclamations. Our master shared his knowledge of what was to come. His words were confusing and frightening. Jesus seemed very sad and troubled. He was with us, but at the same time, he seemed distant, as if he was in another world, far beyond.

While the meal was in progress, Jesus got up from his place at the table, and removed his outer garment. He took a large towel, wrapped it around his waist, and poured a pitcher of water into a basin. Then he knelt down in front of John, who was sitting next to him. John didn't move. He just sat there and let Jesus gently place his feet in the basin to wash and dry them. Everyone watched and they murmured quietly with each other. No one questioned Jesus. We just sat there watching, and almost recoiling from what we were seeing.

What is going on here? Is this really happening? Jesus has often done strange, far out things, but THIS is crazy! Why would our master stoop to wash our feet? Besides, a servant had washed our feet before we entered!

When Jesus came to me, I was the last one. I just couldn't sit there anymore, so I jumped up and blurted out, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

He looked up with his gentle sad eyes and replied, "Oh, Peter, you don't realize what I am doing now, but later you will understand."

But I couldn't let our Lord do such a lowly task, so I pulled my feet back quickly and said, "No! No! Lord! You will never wash my feet!"

Jesus looked up at me standing there. Sighing deeply, he replied, "Oh dear Peter, unless I wash your feet, you have no part of me."

No part of Jesus? I couldn't live without Jesus! I quickly thrust my feet into the basin, making a big splash! I blurted out, "Lord, not just my feet, but my hands and my head!"

Jesus patiently assured me, "If you have bathed, you are clean, you have only to wash your feet."

My Master then set about washing my feet, and I leaned forward watching his every move. After he had patted them dry with the towel, he stood up, removed the towel, put his tunic back on, and we resumed eating.

However, we had another surprise coming. Jesus announced that one of us would betray him. *What!* I thought.

Surely not any of us would do this! How could this be? Who could this be? Amidst all our loud denials, we heard above the din of our voices, Judas asking, "Is it I?" Jesus replied, "You have said it. Whatever you are about to do... do it quickly!"

Judas jumped up from his place and rushed from the room! We just sat there, frozen in disbelief. Almost at the end of the meal, Jesus had another shocking announcement. He said, "All of you will be made to stumble because of me this night for it is written,

"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

What? What could he possibly mean? I leaped from my place and said, "Lord, I would lay down my life for you!"

Jesus just sat there, calmly and sadly replying, "Peter, will you REALLY lay down your life for me? I tell you, very truly, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times."

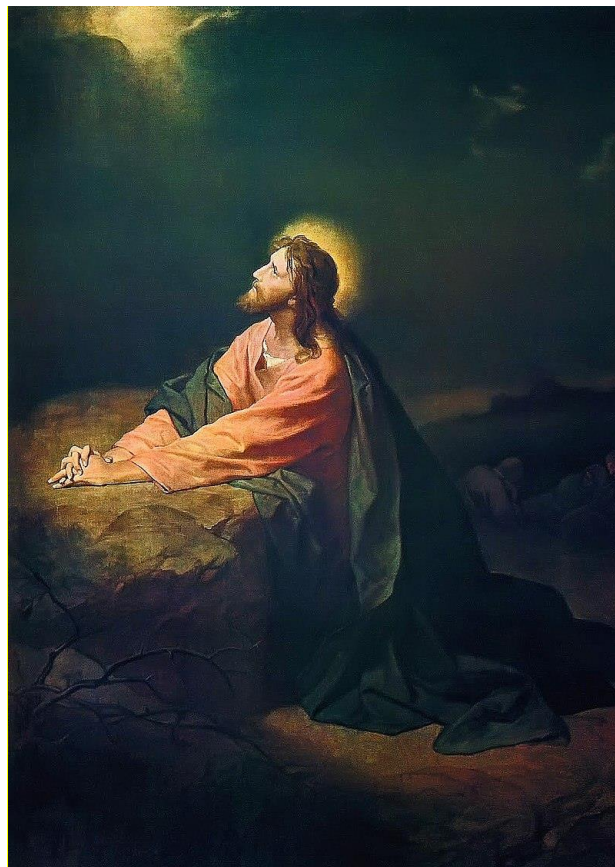
I was shocked! I stumbled backwards. I was hurt to the core! My Master didn't believe in my love, my loyalty, my courage? My Master considered me a coward? My Master doubted me? Worse, Jesus believed I would deny knowing him, deny our friendship?

I wanted to stomp from the room. I was hurt. I was furious! But I couldn't move. I just stood there in shock. The others returned to eating and talking amongst themselves. I

resumed my place on the other side of Jesus, and quietly seethed with disbelief. How could he say this to me and in front of all the others! We moved on with the rituals of the Passover meal.

But Jesus once again upset the traditional routine! In his reading of the liturgy, he started saying something different, something completely new. He told us the cup was his blood, shed for us and the bread he gave us, was his body, sacrificed for us. What's going on here? These were terrible words to say! Terrible words to hear! Strange words indeed! What did Jesus mean by these confusing, horrific statements?

A terrible foreboding came upon me. We were all speechless. We had no words, no questions, no replies. Silence snuffed out the air from the room! Something had just changed. Suddenly, it was like we were not in real time; we were suspended in a vacuum of disbelief of all that had just happened. An uncomfortable silence prevailed. Then, Jesus began to hum the tune of a familiar Passover hymn, we joined him, singing softly as we left the upper room. We followed our Master to a favorite meeting place nearby on the Mount of Olives. It was called The Garden of Gethsemane.



Part 3 Garden of Gethsemane

Peter's Account

The disciples are with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Well, after our meal together in the Upper Room, we all went out with Jesus to our favorite gathering place on the Mount of Olives, known as the Garden of Gethsemane. There were now 11 of us. Judas had left us on a mysterious errand that only he and Jesus seemed to know about. I had a bad feeling. I have never trusted that man but Jesus chose him, so who am I to judge?

Jesus seemed troubled and indicated to us that he wanted to go a distance away by himself. He told us to rest and pray for temptation not to overcome us, and then He nodded his head at James and me to come with him. Moving further on, he gestured that we stop and rest under a large tree.

“Stay here and watch. My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death,” Jesus said. He moved a stone's throw away and began to pray.

Abba Father, all things are possible for You.

Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.”

He called God "Father." Imagine! Father! And Jesus talked to God like he was His Father!

After a while, Jesus came back and found us sleeping. He spoke directly to me, “Peter, are you sleeping? Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation”

Then Jesus left us again to pray. He prayed the same words. When he returned a second time, he sadly found us dozing. He turned away without scolding us and left again.

This time I propped myself up against the tree and watched intently. Jesus sank to his knees and fell on the ground at once in deep agonizing prayer. He prayed with groans and moans of mourning. He asked God once again if he would be willing to take the "cup" from him. That did not make sense then, but it does now. He was talking about his brutal crucifixion. Oh my! Jesus knew what was going to happen! Again, I heard his prayer plea to have this cup taken from him and again I heard His words, “But not my will but Your Will be done!”

I watched his face and was shocked to see drops that looked like blood erupting through his skin! Oh, dear Jesus, how painful this foreknowledge must be! Then everything changed. Perhaps it was a dream, but it seemed very real. Suddenly there was a soft glowing light surrounding Him, and I felt this overwhelming sense of love and peace and strength all around us. I saw shimmering misty figures flowing around him. It seemed to me as if angels were comforting and ministering to Jesus. His face changed

from agonized distress to a calm peaceful countenance combined with a strong and determined set to his jaw.

I must have fallen into a deep sleep. I was awakened by Jesus standing before us saying in his firm, yet gentle voice, "Arise. Let us be going."

We hastily stumbled to our feet, embarrassed and ashamed we could not stay awake with our dear Lord.

As we walked back to the others, we heard a great number of footsteps and voices. We heard the clattering of metal in front of us, and a large group of men came upon us with more coming up behind them. They held lanterns and torches. I recognized temple guards, high priests, and elders. And Judas! Judas! He rushed forward and kissed Jesus, shouting out, "Rabbi!"

Judas! One of us! Trusted by Jesus! What was he doing? Did he bring the soldiers here?

And Jesus. Jesus stepped forward facing the soldiers and spoke. "Take me, but let my men go."

As the soldiers moved forward to arrest Jesus. I grabbed my sword and swung it, cutting off the ear of a temple guard.

Jesus turned and looked searchingly at me and quietly said, "Peter, put your sword away." Then he reached out and touched the dangling, bleeding ear and healed it like it had never been severed! Immediately the soldiers grabbed Jesus roughly, bound him, and marched him off.

I looked around for the rest of the disciples and saw John standing alone by a nearby tree. All the rest fled. I looked at him and without saying a word, I began to follow the crowd returning down the rocky path staying carefully a safe distance behind them.

After writing these last words, I pause to contemplate the disciples, especially John and Peter, sharing these intense moments with their beloved Jesus. Even centuries later, the great love and great fear these faithful disciples had for Jesus permeates my heart and I pray:

Oh Lord Jesus, My heart weeps for your great suffering.
My soul overflows with gratitude for your sacrifice.
My spirit dances for your great gift of salvation.
May I be worthy to worship and serve You
All the days of my life and come home to you in eternity.
Amen

Listen to [What Wonderful Love Is This](#) to end this session of Prayer Corner.

The final installment of this story will include Peter's Denial, The Crucifixion, and Christ Is Risen. Look for these dramatizations in Prayer Corner 15.

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