

## Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.  
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.



### Luke 23:1-49

*Brutal execution by stripping naked, whipping, and nailing to a cross was carefully crafted by the Romans to inflict the maximum amount of pain and degradation because they wanted to kill not only the individual but also any followers. That is to say, by demonstrating their iron-fisted authority over Jesus, the Romans hoped to kill any aspirations in any of his followers to "take up their cross and follow."*



**Year C**

**Lent 6,**

**Passion Sunday Lesson, Alternate Reading B**

**March 24, 2013**

Read the passage: [Luke 23:1-49, The Message](#) or [Luke 23:1-49, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click [here](#) for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the Rev. Dr. George Hermanson, ". "

This post refers only to the shorter text for Passion Sunday.

Click [here](#) for the longer reading, [Luke 22:14--23:56](#).

Click [here, Luke 19:28-40](#), for commentary on the Palm Sunday text.

About the only thing I like about this lesson is that I get so many others things done while avoiding the hard work of engaging this painful text.

And in the congregation I serve, where we do not have musical, drama, or other artistic resources to present the story, the sheer length of the text is itself a burden. Who could possibly take this in in a single sitting within a worship service? (And unfortunately, even this post cannot be "short," though I hope it will still be easy to use and faith-provoking.)

Nonetheless, this lesson is crucial. Unless we immerse ourselves in it, the Good News of Easter loses its impact and power.

And yet, to truly enter into the story, we must place ourselves beside Jesus in his own time, in his own place, among his own people. But to avoid repeating here what I have frequently commented on elsewhere, I've summarized 7 key interpretative points:

1. The conflict within the Gospels is **NOT** between Jesus and "the Jews." English translations of the Bible mistranslate the underlying original Greek word for **JUDEANS**. Judeans, especially those from the capital city, Jerusalem, look down on

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Galileans as uneducated, backwoods, small town, hillbillies. Jesus is a Galilean. The idea of a Galilean being presented as King of the Judeans is huge, collective insult. Of course Judeans would defend their honour and shout for the Galilean yokel to be crucified.

2. The Judean authorities - King Herod, the chief priests, the Pharisees, and the scribes - are actually puppets and collaborators. They hold their positions solely at the whim of the Roman authorities and act as agents of the Roman Empire. Their self-preservation lies in preventing social unrest. See John 11:47-48:

*What are we to do?*

*This man (Jesus) is performing many signs.*

*If we let him go on like this,*

*everyone will believe into him,*

*and the Romans will come and destroy*

*both our temple and our nation.*

3. Brutal execution by stripping naked, whipping, and nailing to a cross was carefully crafted by the Romans to inflict the maximum amount of pain and degradation because they wanted to kill not only the individual but also any followers. That is to say, by demonstrating their iron-fisted authority over Jesus, the Romans hoped to kill any aspirations in any of his followers to "take up their cross and follow."
4. God did **NOT** send Jesus to die for our sins. God **DID** send Jesus because God so loved the world, and in Luke 4:18-19, Jesus declares why God has sent him as he reads from Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*

*because he has anointed me*

*to bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent to proclaim release*

*to the captives, and recovery*

*of sight to the blind,*

*to let the oppressed go free,*

*to proclaim the year*

*of the Lord's favour.*

Abiding in God's love and remaining loyal to God by proclaiming God's Kingdom of non-violent justice would unavoidably bring Jesus into direct conflict with Rome's violent injustice.

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5. Unlike all other victims of group-sanctioned violence, **THIS** story ends forever the selecting and killing of scapegoats to carry and atone for the sins of the community. (The metaphor of Jesus as the Lamb of God ought to refer to the Passover lamb - which is **NOT** a sin offering.) If not for the first time in human history, then certainly for the final time, ritual killing for atoning of the community's sins is revealed to be a charade - the victim is innocent - "there is no basis for the accusation." (Luke 23:4) God does not now, and never did, want death in order to forgive. God begins with forgiveness, unconditionally, freely, because that is who God is - God is love.
6. We need to hear the story for inward-formation, not information. We need to hear it as a self-correcting story that confounds our accommodation of violence. Hearing this story as one that makes violence purposeful / meaningful / significant / redemptive is a form of violence if it legitimizes violence. God did **NOT** send Jesus to die as a sacrifice for our sins. God sent Jesus to proclaim that God's Kingdom of non-violent justice was at hand, and **BECAUSE** of our sin, we killed the one who taught us to call God, Daddy.
7. Even though I refer to this text as a "story," remember that it is about real people who, like us, made decisions and took actions for complex and complicated reasons. They were **NOT** actors in a play. They were, like us, freely acting within their own limitations and faults. And as we read the lesson, we'll see how at many points discussions are held, possibilities are considered, and decisions are made that could have been made differently. Jesus' death is not inevitable and unavoidable; his death is not ordained by God.

OK. Having laid out my "interpretative framework" let's take a look at a very long, "shorter" passage.

Let's begin by summarizing what the shorter passage omits from Chapter 22:

1. The Plot to kill Jesus by Judas and the Chief Priests
2. The preparation for the Passover and the institution of the Lord's Supper
3. The dispute about which of the disciples is the greatest
4. Jesus predicts Peter's denial of knowing him three times
5. Jesus prays on the Mount of Olives
6. Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested
7. Peter denies knowing Jesus
8. Jesus is mocked and beaten
9. Jesus is taken before the Council of the priests

Which brings us to Chapter 23 of Luke.

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**Verses 1 to 5.** Keep remembering that the "assembly" and "crowd" throughout this Chapter are the Jerusalem, Judean, elites and their officials, slaves, and followers.

The fact that the authorities do not have an honest charge to make against Jesus is emphasized by Luke reporting additional - and false - charges in these Verses.

And notice that the authorities specifically bring up that Jesus is from Galilee, and has been teaching **EVEN** to here. This hillbilly Galilean has dared to come **EVEN** to Jerusalem! Gasp.

It is difficult to know at this time and distance how much Pilate, as a Roman outsider, would be aware of the internal politics between Judeans and Galileans.

It is however very easy to know at this time and distance that English translators have mis-translated the Greek for "Judean" as "Jews."

And that Pilate's question in Verse 3 is:

*Are you the King of the Judeans?*

Luke does not record Pilate's tone of voice in asking this question. It could be a simple, neutral tone. It could be an accusatory tone. It could be a mocking tone.

And note that as before, Jesus makes no honour claims for himself, but instead uses the accusation as the truthful answer to the question.

Whether intended or unintended, it would certainly be heard by the Judeans as a major insult to them: A Galilean as our King! Outrageous!

Luke also gives no explanation for Pilate declaring that he finds no basis for an accusation against Jesus.

**Verses 6 to 12.** Pilate does know enough about the difference between Judea and Galilee to send Jesus to Herod.

Luke had reported Herod's curiosity about Jesus earlier, Luke 9:9.

Jesus' refusal to answer Herod's questions is challenging and insulting to Herod's status - in effect acting as one in a position above Herod. This results in Jesus being mocked to put him back in his place.

But once again, the mockers inadvertently confirm Jesus' status by placing a kingly robe on him.

**Verses 13 to 25.** As before, we find that the accusers are the ones who inadvertently are telling the truth about Jesus: "He has done nothing to deserve death."

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And so, as the story continues to unfold, we know that an innocent man is being condemned to an undeserved death.

This story will haunt and undermine and reform succeeding generations of justice within Western culture until the principle, "presumed innocent until proven guilty," is established.

**Verses 26 to 31.** It is possible that Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus' cross because Jesus himself has already lost so much blood from the beatings and whippings that he is too weak to do it himself.

Wailing and beating of breasts by women is traditional Mediterranean expression for grief. Jesus' response that the day will come when people will say, "Blessed are the barren," is a sharp reversal of normal expectations of blessing.

**Verses 26 to 43.** The mocking and testing of Jesus continues from every side. Notice that once again Jesus is challenged 3 times, "IF ...?" or "ARE YOU ...?"

Jesus responds only to the one statement, "WHEN ..." because this request presumes the truth that Jesus has a Kingdom that he will come into.

**Verses 44 to 49.** As with any good story, I recommend not commenting on the special effects here - darkness, tearing of the temple curtain. Special effects are never meant to be the story - they are always meant to help tell the story - something very special is happening now.

Jesus' final words are from Psalm 31:5

*Father, into your hands,  
I commend my spirit*

which continues:

*you have redeemed me,  
O Lord, faithful God.*

Luke began the story of Jesus' ministry as an adult with the Spirit descending on him like a dove; (Luke 3:21-22) with Jesus filled with the Spirit and led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days of fasting and testing; (Luke 4:1-13) and filled with the power of Spirit to return to Galilee where he declared his God-given mission. (Luke 4:14-21) He ends it with the Spirit leaving Jesus - "He breathed his last."

And again Luke has one of the opponents testify to the truth about Jesus,  
*Certainly this man was innocent.*

And possibly to counter later claims that the whole idea of the resurrection was a hoax, Luke reports that all of this - and his burial - were witnessed. There can be no not-really-being-dead; switching of bodies; or other deceptions.

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As this day, Friday, ends as night falls, the Sabbath day, Saturday, begins. And so the women and other followers of Jesus rest - as accorded by the commandments.

The Sabbath day ends with sunset on Saturday, but because it is dangerous, and custom forbids proper people to be out at night, our story will resume with first light on the third day, Sunday.

David Ewart,

[www.holytextures.com](http://www.holytextures.com)

Note: Historical background information is primarily from Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels (see link below), pages 318-321.

\* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, Richard Rohrbaugh, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.