

WATCHING THESE THINGS

April 19, 2019

Good Friday

[Luke 22:47-54 Arrest](#)

[Luke 23:13-25 Crucifixion](#)

[Luke 23:44-49 Death](#)

[Luke 23:50-53 Burial](#)

(prayer)

Have you seen the paper towel [commercial](#), where the family is eating a meal using chopsticks? A pot sticker slips out and travels (in slow motion) across the table as everyone says “nooooooo”. The humorous twist is a dog waiting for the falling treat saying “yeeesss”.

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Some of you may remember that for many years, my *go to* church coffee cup was a custom-pottered mug with several colourful “TB Gregg”s on it. For many years, a good friend of mine and I had given each other coffee cups as birthday presents: not so much lately.

At one point, in the late 90s, his spouse was taking up pottery, so he convinced her to make one for me.

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I remember the day that it slipped out of my hand. I watched it fall toward the floor of the church office. I tried to slow its descent with my leg.

The fact that you now see me using my Swan Hills curling mug, tells you what happened.



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I suspect that we all have had a similar experience: we watch an undesirable event unfold before our eyes.

We might try to react quickly and try to avert the worst case scenario, but we just can't stop what has already started.

We are forced to (simply) watch helplessly as the inevitable unfolds.

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When Jesus first arrived in Jerusalem that week, the mood was jubilant. The disciples sang hymns of joy. Onlookers waved palm branches in a parade-like atmosphere. For Peter and the others, it was exciting. All of the wonder and promise that they had been experiencing for three years with Jesus was on the edge of finding a national audience.

But that mood did not last.

The next day, Jesus, upset the marketplace environment at the temple.

Luke's version is shy on details: *Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, 'It is written, "My house shall be a house of prayer"; but you have made it a den of robbers.'*

It is unclear what it was that upset Jesus. Surely, it was not a new practice to offer pilgrims the convenience of obtaining the sacrificial animals in town, rather than bringing them from home.

Was it the proximity of the market to the temple that bothered Jesus?

Perhaps, the commercialism was a distraction from the seriousness of the festival.

Sometimes, we speculate - in a high demand, tight supply situation - that price gouging was happening.

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Prior to the palm Sunday narratives, Luke tells us that - based on previous visits that Jesus had made to Jerusalem - there were some in authority who were already very concerned about the things he was saying and doing.

Luke tells us that after even the *scene* Jesus caused at the temple, Jesus still *taught in the temple every day. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.*

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On the surface, Jesus seemed to be enthralling Jerusalem as he had done in other places. But behind the scenes, a plot was taking shape.

The only thing keeping Jesus safe was his popularity and the fact that he kept to crowded public places.

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The gospel writers don't give us a consistent sense as to *why* [Judas Iscariot](#) chose to betray Jesus to the temple authorities. Mark gives us no motive at all. Matthew and Luke say that Judas got paid for his information. A couple of weeks ago, I pointed out that John's gospel foreshadows Judas' betrayal by portraying him as an embezzler of the group's common purse. Luke and John imply that Judas was possessed by a malevolent force.

Judas' motives could have simply been financial. They made him an offer he couldn't refuse. Luke tells us that Judas took the money and bought a plot of land.

Perhaps he *was* out of his mind and can't really be blamed for what happened.

Or maybe he was legitimately concerned over the direction of Jesus' ministry.

Matthew's gospel shares that Judas did not expect Jesus to get in as much trouble as he did. When a death sentence was announced, Judas tried, unsuccessfully, to give the money back hoping to buy Jesus some leniency with the priests own blood money. Eventually, Judas was so overrun with guilt that he took his own life.

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Regardless, sometime after sundown on Thursday evening (so, technically, Friday on the Jewish calendar), while Jesus was praying on the Mount of Olives, Judas led a group of soldiers to the isolated garden. By some accounts, some of Jesus' followers tried to stop the arrest, but they were no match for the temple officers.

Jesus was taken into custody.

A formal process had been started.

There was little-to-nothing that his disciples could do... other than watch.

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Peter followed the officers who took Jesus to the High Priest's house. But all he could do was watch from outside. In fact, he retreated (physically and emotionally) into the shadows.

This *rock of a disciple* watched helplessly as other members of the Sanhedrin council arrived. Things were moving fast. They weren't even waiting until the morning. This was bad. Maybe Peter even thought about running and hiding, expecting that more arrests were coming. But, he couldn't *not know* what was going on. Even from the shadows, Peter had to watch.

Me? No, I'm not one of his disciples.

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As the sun rose over the horizon, the whole Council left Caiaphas' house (with Jesus in tow) and walked over to where Pontius Pilate was staying.

This was not good.

And still, all that Jesus' disciples could do was follow and watch and wonder what was going on behind closed doors.

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Luke's version is more condensed than Matthew's, but it does imply that the mood of the gathered crowd grew more bloodthirsty as the morning went on. Rumours spread that Pilate was reluctant to punish Jesus too harshly, but that the temple leaders and their supporters pushed hard for crucifixion.

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And Jesus' disciples could not do anything to slow this momentum. All they could do was watch.

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They could only watch as an obviously beaten and flogged Jesus was put on display wearing a mock crown and robe.

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They couldn't stop the parade of *the condemned* marching through the city carrying their own cross beams.

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They had to watch (helplessly) as the crews on Golgotha slammed nails through Jesus' wrists and hoisted him up on to one of the death posts before putting a final nail through his feet.

They could only watch as the guards fought over Jesus' clothes and mocked this *king of the Jews*.

At best, it was only a hollow comfort to overhear one of the other prisoners proclaim that Jesus was going into a heavenly kingdom. But that wouldn't ease their pain under the thumb of the kingdom of Rome.

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Just 24 hours earlier, these disciples were making last minute arrangements for a Passover week meal to celebrate the final supper of an enslaved people before they knew liberation. How could they have known that it would have been their *Last Supper* with Jesus?

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Now, as dark clouds descended over the early afternoon, they heard Jesus mumble a prayer and then his body went limp.

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He had given up his spirit after barely three hours.

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The watched as the zealous death watchers cheered... and then disbursed.

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All [Jesus'] acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

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All they could do was watch.

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They were affected by what was going on, but they couldn't affect the situation. They were merely witnesses to the passion.

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And that is what we - as this generation of Jesus' disciples - do today.

We simply observe Good Friday.

We re-read the stories passed on to us.

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We lament Judas' betrayal, but we can't change it.

We empathize with Peter's fear as he denies his relationship with Jesus, but we can't offer him courage.

We are forced to watch the soldiers gamble over a peasant prophet's clothes. We may want to rip it out of their hands and hand it to Mary Magdalene who might bury her nose into the fibers in hopes of catching the familiar scent of her Lord.

But we can't.

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We see the tragedy unfolding.

But we can't prevent it.

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That is the essence of good friday.

It is not about finding a deeper meaning and purpose in Jesus' death.

It is about helplessly witnessing a senseless death.

It is about watching hope and promise die.

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*He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,*

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*yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.
They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

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We saw it coming...
and we couldn't stop it.

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This is as lonely as it gets!

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#73MV "O God, Why Are You Silent?"