



Roman Image of Jesus, A.D. 530

## HOLY THURSDAY

### LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

**Thursday, March 20, 2008**

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**Lection - Luke 22:7-65** (New Revised Standard Version)

#### **The Preparation of the Passover**

(v. 7) Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. (v.8) So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.’ (v. 9) They asked him, ‘Where do you want us to make preparations for it?’ (v. 10) ‘Listen,’ he said to them, ‘when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters (v. 11) and say to the owner of the house, “The teacher asks you, ‘Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ” (v. 12) He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.’ (v. 13) So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

#### **The Institution of the Lord’s Supper**

(v. 14) When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. (v. 15) He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; (v. 16) for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' (v. 17) Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; (v. 18) for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' (v. 19) Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' (v. 20) And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. (v. 21) But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. (v. 22) For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!' (v. 23) Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

### **The Dispute about Greatness**

(v. 24) A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. (v. 25) But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. (v. 26) But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. (v. 27) For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (v. 28) 'You are those who have stood by me in my trials; (v. 29) and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, (v. 30) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

### **Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial**

(v. 31) 'Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, (v. 32) but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.' (v. 33) And he said to him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!' (v. 34) Jesus said, 'I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.'

### **Purse, Bag, and Sword**

(v. 35) He said to them, 'When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?' They said, 'No, not a thing.' (v. 36) He said to them, 'But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. (v. 37) For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, "And he was counted among the lawless"; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.' (v. 38) They said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.' He replied, 'It is enough.'

### **Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives**

(v. 39) He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. (v. 40) When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.' (v. 41) Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, (v. 42) 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' (v. 43) Then an angel from heaven appeared

to him and gave him strength. (v. 44) In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. (v. 45) When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, (v. 46) and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’

### **The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus**

(v. 47) While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; (v. 48) but Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?’ (v. 49) When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, ‘Lord, should we strike with the sword?’ (v. 50) Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. (v. 51) But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him. (v. 52) Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, ‘Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? (v. 53) When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!’

### **Peter Denies Jesus**

(v. 54) Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. (v. 55) When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. (v. 56) Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, ‘This man also was with him.’ (v. 57) But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ (v. 58) A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not!’ (v. 59) Then about an hour later yet another kept insisting, ‘Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.’ (v. 60) But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about!’ At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. (v. 61) The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.’ (v. 62) And he went out and wept bitterly.

### **The Mocking and Beating of Jesus**

(v. 63) Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; (v. 64) they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, ‘Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?’ (v. 65) They kept heaping many other insults on him.

## **I. Description of the Liturgical Moment**

Holy Thursday marks the beginning of the passion of Jesus. The Lucan narratives pertaining to this day provide insight into the origin of Holy Communion, descriptions of Christ’s betrayal and denial, and accounts of some of his concluding instructions. Though not universally observed in Christendom as is Good Friday, Palm and Easter Sundays, along with Holy Thursday provide the requisite link between the jubilation of Palm Sunday and the despair of Good Friday.

Depending on the focal theme chosen for this day's sermon, this scripture text can provide liturgy for communion, instruction for Christian life, and even a link to the pre-Christian Passover feast of the Jews. Whatever the chosen sermon theme, the end of this sermon is not yet the triumph of resurrection, but the reality of defeat. Far too often we run to the empty tomb and thereby miss the message that the way of Christ really is the way of the cross. We do not want our congregations to forget that suffering precedes Salvation. Preached correctly, this passage will set up the events of the next few days of Lent and will ground the Good News that will soon be proclaimed on Sunday morning.

## **II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Luke 22:7-65**

### **Part One: Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter**

Holy Thursday (also called Maundy Thursday) was for most of my life a bit of a mystery to me, since it was never a significant day on my church calendar when I was growing up. That is not to say the day was insignificant, rather that we never celebrated this day as we did Good Friday and Easter. However, over the years I have come to appreciate the importance of this day and the rituals that it grounds. Holy Thursday for me has come to be a critical moment to reflect on the promises and the pilgrimage of Christ and to do an assessment of my moments of fickleness and faithlessness.

### **Part Two: Biblical Commentary**

This is a fairly broad passage distinguished primarily by the focus on Jesus and his activities on the day of his betrayal. In this regard, the passage begins with the beginning of the day of Unleavened Bread (v.7) and ends before the narrative note "When day came" (v.66) which marks the beginning of the Good Friday story. Frankly, the day of the Passover feast would have ended at sundown on the Jewish calendar, but that is a detail that seems to escape this author's concern as he marks the beginning of the next day with the rising of the sun. Luke's portrayal of Jesus' penultimate day is a rich and varied composite of many smaller relevant pericopies, which can make it difficult to select themes for presentation. The following is an example of how one might introduce and focus on a theme or two from Luke's narratives.

### **God as liberator to the Oppressed and Suffering**

That the end of Jesus' earthly ministry takes place on the "day of Unleavened Bread" (v. 7) should not be overlooked. The Pesach, or Passover of the Jews, commemorates the great moment of salvation that marks the beginning of their collective walk with YHWH. Prior to this time the patriarchs and matriarchs, those in traditionally accepted roles of power, were in seemingly exclusive fellowship with God. The Pesach (Ex 12-13), however, demonstrates YHWH's concern for and rescue of the Hebrew nation in captivity and thereby serves as a festival celebrating God as the great Liberator of the oppressed. We should note the similarity between the Greek term that is used for Passover (*pascha*) and the suffering of Jesus (*pascho*), which would not have been lost on the early Christian community. That Jesus was crucified the next day also evokes the

themes of liberation and deliverance surrounding his death as well; such themes are poignant reminders to the African American community of the promise of liberation that our enslaved ancestors also found in Jesus.

### **Humility and Service**

Humility and service are additional themes that reverberate through verses 24-27. Jesus chastises the quarreling disciples not to seek their “greatness” in authority over others as do rulers of the Gentiles, but in their service to others. In this they find Jesus himself to be the ultimate exemplar, for he came not as one who sits at the head of the table, but as one who serves. Herein we find a powerful witness against our me-centric culture for Jesus shuns self aggrandizement offering instead submission. This is also a potent witness against the prosperity Gospel, for it shows a Jesus who does not call us to an exalted status but a humbled status. We can only imagine the affect that living lives of radical submission to others, living lives as *diakonon*, literally living lives as “helpers” or “servants,” would have on our witness to our world.

### **Jesus’ Prayer before his Betrayal**

The pericope in vv. 39-46 deals with Jesus’ prayer before his betrayal. Though each of the Gospels has some version of Jesus’ prayer for rescue, then submission (Matt 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; John 12:27) the terseness of Luke’s account is potent. Void of the prolegomena presented in Mark and Matthew, Luke’s brief account of Jesus’ prayer distinguishes it from the other Synoptic Gospels. The faithfulness of his entreaty is further illustrated by Luke’s choice of words; instead of Mark’s statement of possibility followed by an imperative calling for the cup to be removed (*parenegke*), or Matthew’s conditional of possibility (*ei’ dunaton ’estin*), Luke’s conditional of will (*ei’ boulei*) subtly seems to emphasize his submission to his Father’s will for his life. His final consent to God’s will, hence, follows naturally, not as a concession, but as a given. Of course he would follow God’s will; this Jesus would not do otherwise! What a powerful witness this is to the posture we should assume before the Lord as the “servants” described above. Like Christ, we are to live lives in complete submission to God’s will, our own wills fully having been subsumed to God’s plan for our lives.

### **Additional Themes**

These are just a few of the themes of this fateful day that demand our attention in this passage. Others could be Jesus’ betrayal by his trusted confidant, Judas; his prediction of Peter’s denial and its fulfillment; or even his capture as he concluded his prayer. Betrayal, denial, and the evil that transpires even as we pray are themes ripe for sermonic reflection. This day commemorates (in the other Synoptic Gospels) the scattering of the disciples; we should not ignore their sense of loss and perception of failure. Though we know how the story ends, we also need to learn as much as we can about our faith from what Christ’s first followers did not yet know! One other matter that I would emphasize is the rapid reversal of Jesus’ fortunes from the mountain top of Palm Sunday to the deep valley of Holy Thursday. In the course of four days, Jesus has gone from being the

coronated King to being a captured criminal. The fickle nature of once faithful followers should serve as a constant reminder to us not to give up when all hope seems lost; for the lesson of Easter is that what appears to be our greatest failure may actually be a precursor of God's greatest victory!

### **Challenge**

Though there is much to celebrate about this day (Passover connections, Eucharist, etc.), I would suggest that in order to appreciate the solemn nature of this day, that before we celebrate, we reflect on the agony of our Savior and recommit ourselves to be more faithful as his servants.

### **Descriptive Details**

The details of this passage are numerous from the Mediterranean tastes and sounds of the Passover meal, to the semi-arid nature of the olive gardens on the Mt. of Olives just above the wadi bed of the Kidron Valley. The descriptive details selected will be those that stem from the sections of the scripture passage that the preacher chooses to explore.