

## THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

### I

It was now two days before the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread. The religious leaders who collaborated with the Roman occupation were conspiring against Jesus. They had gathered in the palace of Caiaphas the high priest. This man had received the high priesthood at the hands of Valerius Gratus, the former Roman governor, and remained in office under Pontius Pilate. They all were planning to arrest and execute Jesus quietly so as to avoid a popular revolt.

### II

At this time Jesus was lodging at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. While he was there, a woman approached and anointed him with an alabaster jar of pure nard. When his disciples saw the act they were outraged. "Why this waste?" they demanded. "Such expensive ointment might have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." Jesus replied, "Why do you bother the woman? The poor are always with you. I tell you truly that, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will be told in her memory."

### III

Then one of the twelve named Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and asked, "What will you give me if I deliver Jesus to you for the governor?" When they heard the offer, they were elated and promised Judas thirty pieces of silver. From that hour he sought an opportunity to betray Jesus.

### IV

At the beginning of the feast, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, the disciples of Jesus approached him and asked, "Where do you wish us to prepared the Paschal meal?" Jesus took two of his disciples and instructed them, "Go into the city, and you will see there a man carrying a water jar. He will show you a suitable place." The two did as Jesus commanded. They entered the city where they found the man with the water jar who brought them to a large upper room.

When evening had come, Jesus arrived with the twelve. While they were eating, he said, "I tell you truly that one of you is going to betray me." The disciples were stunned with grief and began to protest one after the other, "Surely not I!" Jesus replied, "The betrayer is one of you dipping his hand in the dish with me. The Son of Man is fulfilling Scripture, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed." Then Judas slipped out into the night.

## VI

As they were eating, Jesus took bread. After reciting the blessing, he broke it and gave it to his disciples as he said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then taking the cup with the traditional blessing, he gave it to his disciples as he said, "This is the blood of my covenant which is being shed for you and for many. I tell you truly that I shall not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I shall drink it fresh with you in the kingdom of God." Then after singing a hymn, they left the city for the Mount of Olives.

## VII

As they walked, Jesus said to his disciples, "You will all desert me this very night. So it is written in the prophet Zechariah: 'Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" Then Peter protested, "Though all desert, I will remain by you." Jesus replied, "I tell you truly that in this very night, before the cock crows twice you shall deny me three times." Still Peter maintained, "Even though I must die with you, I will never deny you"; and so declared all the disciples.

## VIII

Jesus halted at an olive grove called Gethsemane. Then going apart with Peter, James and John, he left them on watch and continued a little further alone. There he fell on his face in anguished prayer. Soon he returned to the three on watch and found them sleeping. Rousing them, he asked Peter, "Could you not watch with me just one hour? Watch and pray that you are not put to the test, for the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Again Jesus went apart in troubled prayer; and again he returned to find the disciples sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. A

third time Jesus withdrew to pray, and a third time he found the disciples sleeping. Then Jesus said, "Sleep on and finish your rest. Now is the time for the Son of Man to be delivered into the hands of sinners. Here comes my betrayer."

IX

Jesus had not finished speaking before Judas, one of his own disciples, arrived with a group of Roman soldiers and other armed men from the temple. Now the betrayer had arranged with the authorities for a sign and had said, "The man whom I kiss is the one you want." In accord with this arrangement Judas went directly to Jesus and cried out, "Greetings, Master." Then he gave him the kiss. Jesus responded, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Immediately the soldiers laid hands on Jesus and held him fast. Then one of the disciples with Jesus drew his sword and cut off an ear from the slave of the high priest; but Jesus said to him, "Sheathe your sword. All who take up the sword will perish by the sword. Do you not know that I can call upon my Father and that he will respond at once with more than twelve legions of angels?" Then turning to the mob, Jesus continued, "Have you come for me as against a rebel bandit with swords and clubs? Why did you not seize me in the temple where daily I sat teaching? Were you so afraid of the Jewish people that you must come for me by stealth? Nevertheless, your actions are fulfilling the words of the prophets." Then all his disciples forsook him and fled.

X

Those who had seized Jesus brought him to Caiaphas, whom the Romans had made high priest. Peter followed at a distance as far as the courtyard. There he sat with the attendants and warmed himself by the fire. The high priest had gathered his whole council, and they began to arrange the case against Jesus which they would present to Pontius Pilate the governor. They were charging Jesus with claiming to be King of the Jews; and they brought in many false witnesses, but to no avail. Finally two came forward and testified. "We heard this man say, 'I shall tear down this temple made with hands and within three days build another not made with hands.'" Such a statement assumed for Jesus an authority over temple affairs which traditionally belonged to the king alone, and in those days this authority was a privilege reserved

for the emperor at Rome. Yet even these witnesses were unable to agree on their testimony.

Finally the high priest stood up and questioned Jesus himself: "Have you no answer to these charges?" Jesus remained silent and answered nothing. Then the high priest put the question of kingship in terms of the royal titles "Anointed" and "Son of God." "Are you the Anointed One, the Son of the Blessed?" he demanded. Jesus answered, "I am, and you shall see the Son of Man seated on the right hand of Power and coming in the clouds of heaven." The high priest turned and said, "What need have we of witnesses? He has condemned himself." They all concurred that Jesus was indeed worthy of death.

Then some began to spit on him. They covered his face <sup>and</sup> were striking him as they taunted him and said, "O Anointed One, prophesy who it is that is striking you."

## XI

Now Peter was warming himself in the courtyard when a small slave girl entered. She accosted Peter and said, "You also were with this Jesus the Nazarene." Peter quickly gave a denial. "I do not know what you are talking about," he replied and went outside into the gateway. Meanwhile the cock crowed. The slave girl followed Peter out and said to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." Again Peter denied knowing Jesus. After a little while the bystanders said directly to Peter, "Surely you are one of them for you speak in a Galilean accent." Then Peter began to take an oath and swear, "I do not know this person of whom you are speaking"; but the cock interrupted him and crowed for a second time. Peter remembered at once how Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." He went out and wept bitterly.

## XII

When morning arrived, all the chief priests with the other Roman collaborators bound Jesus and delivered him over to Pilate the governor. Then Judas knew that Jesus was condemned, and he repented. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and confessed, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." "What is

that to us?" they replied. "That is your affair." Judas threw down the thirty pieces of silver in the temple. Then he went out and hanged himself. Picking up the silver pieces, the chief priests said, "It is unlawful to put this silver into the treasury for it is blood money. Whereupon they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field for the burial of strangers. Therefore that field is known to this day as the Field of Blood.

#### XIII

Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, the imperial Roman governor. The governor asked, "Are you the King of the Jews." Jesus answered, "You say so." The chief priests were accusing him of many things. Therefore Pilate again spoke to Jesus "Have you no answer to make?" he asked. "Look at how many accusations they are making!" Jesus astonished Pilate by remaining silent.

#### XIV

At that festival the governor used to release a prisoner, and some were urging Pilate to do so at this time. Now there was in prison a notable rebel who had committed murder during the insurrection. His name was Jesus Barabbas. Therefore the chief priests arranged a demonstration to demand Barabbas. Pilate asked them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus the Anointed One." The demonstrators shouted, "Barabbas!" Pilate responded: "What shall I do then with Jesus the Anointed One?" The crowd shouted "Crucify him!" Pilate continued, "Are you certain of his guilt?" The crowd took up the chant, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Again Pilate spoke: "Shall I crucify your king?" "We have no king but Caesar," replied the demonstrators. Then Pilate agreed to release Jesus Barabbas, but Jesus the Anointed King he handed over to his soldiers for scourging and crucifixion.

#### XV

The soldiers led Jesus away to the praetorium where they assembled the whole battalion. They clothed Jesus in royal purple and placed a crown of thorns upon his head. They began to mock him by kneeling before him and proclaiming, "Hail, King of the Jews." Moreover, they spat upon him and smote him on the head with a stick. Then after mocking him, they took away the purple and brought him out to

crucify him.

## XVI

On the road they met a man of Cyrene named Simon coming in from the countryside. Him they compelled to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means "skull"). There they offered him wine mingled with myrrh, but he refused it. Then at nine in the morning they crucified him. His garments they divided among themselves, casting lots for them. Over his head they inscribed the charge against him: "The King of the Jews." There were also two rebels crucified with him, one to his right and one to his left. Those who passed by would shake their heads in derision and say, "So you would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days! Save yourself. Come down from the cross." Likewise the priestly collaborators mocked him as they said to one another, "He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let the Anointed One, the King of Israel, come down from the cross that we may see and believe." Even those crucified with him reviled him.

## XVII

Now from midday there was darkness over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At this hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lamma shebaqtani?" words that mean "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Some of the bystanders said, "Look, he is calling for Elijah." One of them put a sponge full of vinegar on a stick and laid it to his lips. Others said, "Wait. Let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus, having uttered a loud cry, breathed his last breath.

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The Rev. William H. Harter  
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Dear Bill:

Enclosed is my part of the liturgical project for the Israel Study Group. It consists of a Passion Narrative to be read in place of the Gospel Passions during Holy Week. Any attempt to remove the anti-Judaism from our religion is partly undone during our Holy Week services, particularly during the Passion readings. The anti-Jewish stand is so engrained in the Gospels themselves that we cannot remove it simply by retranslating or by removing a few verses. Therefore the only answer is to replace the Gospel readings. Such a move is not unique in the history of liturgy. At various times Jewish liturgies have used versions of the Esther story or the epic of the Maccabees which follow no ancient account. Similarly in the Christian liturgy, the story of the Last Supper commonly follows no particular Biblical account.

The enclosed version of the Passion is a compromise between historical correction and what is traditional. Most changes involve the removal of the false implications that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. Otherwise I have tried to keep the familiar. Any liturgical narrative that is too-unfamiliar will not be widely accepted. The basis of the version is Matthew and Mark, Matthew because it sounds the best as liturgy and Mark because it is probably the source for the other Synoptics. Only occasionally do I draw from Luke and John. Also I have divided the version into sections. These divisions will be helpful to those who may want a shorter reading or who may want to divide the story into a series of readings.

Now what remains to be done? First a Passion narrative is not a liturgy. We must review and, where necessary, revise the Good Friday liturgies of the various denominations. In the case of nonliturgical churches, we might suggest guidelines for services. Each denominational liturgy could be the work of one person in our group. Secondly, what I have written will need editing. I should like the Passion narrative to have a poetic ring to it, and I am no poet. Thirdly, both the Passion narrative and the liturgies should have a short commentary to explain our rationale and the reasons for specific interpretations and changes.

Have a pleasant summer.  
Sincerely,

