

### **FIRST READING - John 18:1-11**

John, who loved Jesus so much, must have been so shocked, and amazed, at what he was seeing. At his last supper, Jesus had warned his followers that he would be betrayed. But so soon? And in the beautiful and peaceful olive garden that they loved to visit. But like the olives pressed there, into oil, Jesus knew that the time was ripe for the story of who he was, and how he was, to change.

Why did Judas bring Roman soldiers, and guards from the Temple in Jerusalem? What did they expect to happen? Jesus was peaceful. But fear does things to people's hearts. Fear shuts us off from the power of God. When Jesus told the guards that he was the one who they were seeking, they were startled, and fell back. Did they expect someone other than this loving, gentle person? Didn't Judas see who Jesus was, someone more than a person to bring political power back to his people? The power of Jesus was so clear, and yet, no one really saw who he was. Why do we, especially people who thirst for their own power, miss who Jesus really is, so often?

### **SECOND READING - John 18:12-14**

"It was better to have one person die for the temple." The priests of the Temple came up with a wicked excuse to justify killing Jesus. It wasn't about saving the Temple. It was about the power that they had, through the Temple. They would rather sacrifice Jesus, than confront how their corrupt hearts had sold out the Temple to the Romans, and their corrupt puppet rulers of Israel. They would sacrifice Jesus like they would an animal on their altar, like Abraham was ready to do with his son, Isaac. John knew that God spared Isaac. But God, in Jesus, would go farther, all the way, for the sake of love.

### **THIRD READING - John 18:15-18**

Poor Peter. So loyal. So passionate about Jesus. And yet, like us, so able to fail Jesus. John helped Peter to get into the gate of the priest's courtyard. And then he watched Peter deny that he knew Jesus. First, the soldiers and guards, the people who didn't know Jesus, hadn't recognized him. Now, even Peter, the one who Jesus knew so well, for so long, pretended not to recognize him.

Yet, he could change his mind. He could find the courage to stand up for Jesus; but with his life at stake, would Peter dare to do that? Would we dare to do that? When the chips are down, when everything and everyone pushes us to deny Jesus, what do we do? What will we do?

### **FOURTH READING - John 18:19-24**

The priests of the Temple questioned Jesus, like they would a criminal. From their point of view, Jesus was a criminal. Jesus had broken useless religious laws, again, and again, to uphold the law of love that comes from God. Criminals hide their sins. Jesus had nothing to hide, because he had not sinned. All he did was provide God's healing and hope to everyday people in love, in plain sight of everyone. Like Judas, like the Soldiers, the guards, and even Peter, the priests did not see who Jesus was - or denied

what they feared he might be: he might really be who he said he was. We question Jesus, too, when things don't go our way. We get frightened by the power of God's love in Jesus. How simple, and how hard, it can be, to love the truth, and to live the truth, like Jesus.

#### **FIFTH READING - John 18:25-27**

It's the moment we dread: the moment when we can no longer hide behind our lies, our denial, our unwillingness to be who we are, in relation to Jesus. John was there with Peter, as he denied Jesus, one time, then another, and then, another. And then, as Jesus had foretold Peter, at their last meal together, the last supper, a cock crowed. Light was coming. Peter could no longer hide in darkness. And in that early light, Jesus, without even being there, let Peter know how his denial was so wrong, and so true.

#### **SIXTH READING - John 18:28-40**

The leaders from the priests and the Sanhedrin tell Pilate that Jesus is a criminal, yet a criminal who they are afraid to kill under their religious law. They want Pilate to do their dirty work for them. This didn't disturb Pilate very much. He didn't care much for religion, or philosophy. "What is truth?" he says. Pilate didn't care about what truth is. Pilate didn't care who Jesus is. As long as things were quiet, and he could retire someday with a bit of money, and a bit of land, he was happy. A kingdom not of this world? This won't rock Pilate's boat. But the angry mob might. So he offered the mob a choice: free Barabbas, a criminal who had rebelled against Rome, or free Jesus. Which one did he think make a bigger fuss? Barabbas, he thought. And so, he was easily dealt with, once he was fed. It would be easy to find him. People caught up in their own will always are. But this Jesus, who knew what he was capable of - a someone who actually cared about the truth, who claimed to be the truth, God's will itself? That was dangerous. Best to give the mob what they always want - power, and passion - and then cut them off at the knees. It wouldn't take long. He was sure.

#### **SEVENTH READING - John 19:1-16(a)**

Jesus was tortured horribly. The crown of thorns and the purple robe that his guards put on him humiliated and mocked the power of God in Jesus. John doesn't say anything about how Jesus felt about it. Maybe John doesn't say anything, because of what happened next.

#### **EIGHTH READING - John 19:16(b)-18**

We don't see the pain and the suffering of Jesus in John's story. We know that it was there. John knew that Jesus suffered horribly; he was there. John also knew, though, that the love of God in Jesus was greater than any and all human suffering, any and all human sins that cause people to suffer. The cross was real, as real as the railroad spikes that form our cross tonight, twisted, tortured metal, like the spikes that pierced straight through the hands and feet of Jesus on the cross. Jesus on the cross was just as

real. But the reason Jesus was on the cross was not just real, but the source of all reality, all truth, all love, that we have from God as followers of Jesus.

**NINTH READING - John 19:19-25(a)**

John saw how the suffering of Jesus fulfilled God's promises to us for God's salvation. The most wicked people were used to fulfill God's promises of salvation. The most wicked and humiliating deeds were used by God to fulfill God's promises. Pilate thought that putting a sign up on the cross of Jesus, calling him the king of the Jews in every language that people would understand, would send a message to the world. He was right in a way that he could not see. The sign sent a message, all right - the message that Jesus was the king for all heaven and earth, born a Jew. The soldiers gambling for the clothes of Jesus while he was still alive was humiliating, and evil. But God used it to fulfill God's promises that a suffering servant of God would save God's world. Nothing is beyond the saving power of God in Jesus Christ - even our best efforts to stop God's salvation. Where we claim defeat, God claims victory; even, and especially, in our own lives.

**TENTH READING - John 19:25(b)-30**

"It is finished." Jesus gave final instructions to John to take care of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Jesus, the bread of life, took a last cup of wine, the final cup of the Passover meal, the cup that he did not drink at the last supper with his followers. The lamb of the Passover, Jesus, was finished. Revealing the love of God from heaven, on earth, in living flesh, living as we live, suffering as we suffer, dying as we die, was finished. There was nothing left to do but to leave the Egypt of this world, the world that sins, the world that destroys, and to lead the world into God's eternal promised land. Life is very good. Eternal life is perfect. We find it through the cross, and only through the cross. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you.

**ELEVENTH READING - John 19:31-37**

Even the dead body of Jesus fulfilled God's promises. There is nothing that God cannot use for God's redeeming work in Jesus. Perhaps you have been with someone when they have just died. It is a sad and awkward time, as a living person becomes an object, a thing, something to be dealt with, lovingly, we hope, but still, an object. And yet, water and blood from the body of Jesus, from the one who saves us with his water, and his blood. Even from the first moment of his death, Jesus is pouring out the life of salvation on us, for us. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you.

**TWELFTH READING - John 19:38-42**

The horrible time on the cross is over. People who loved Jesus are moved. They will never forget this man. They will never forget his life. They will never forget how he died, and why he died. A kind friend comes forward. When Nicodemus first met Jesus, it was night. Jesus told him the secrets of eternal life that night. Now, with night approaching, and the cross behind him, here is that man, Jesus, dead, looking as dead to Nicodemus as a seed looks, just a husk, with flesh in it. Nicodemus anoints the body

generously, taking care of this seed, called Jesus. He covers Jesus lovingly, with soothing aloe, and healing myrrh, as much as he can manage. He tucks the seed, called Jesus, into the earth, buried safely in a nearby tomb. Like a gardener planting a new kind of seed, he has no idea what will come of it. But he knows one thing. Whatever might come from it, it came through the cross. Through. Through. It is our journey. It is our hope.