

Christ Church, New Haven
Sunday Forum: The Gospel According to St. Matthew
November 5, 2023: Matthew 26-28—Passion, Death, and Resurrection

Questions for Reflection

At the beginning of Matthew 26, a woman anoints Jesus's feet with expensive ointment. Some interpreters of this scene have read it as an analogy of how Christian communities might use their resources. For example, how do we think about allocating resources between worship (liturgy, vestments, choir, etc.) and mission (outreach, service, etc.)? Given what we have heard Jesus teach about wealth and possessions so far (Matthew 6:19-21, 19:16-26) how do you interpret this story?

Peter famously denies Christ three times in Matthew 26. In our lives today, what might it look like to deny Christ? Episcopalians are often reluctant to openly discuss faith/religion outside of church. Given this, how might we affirm Christ in our day-to-day lives?

The narrative of Christ's Passion in Matthew 27 contains several detailed images and symbols of suffering: the crown of thorns; Golgotha, the "Place of a Skull"; wine mixed with gall; the Cry of Dereliction ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"); and others. As you read this chapter, which image especially strikes you? Why?

Peter denies Christ; Judas betrays Christ. While both repent, Judas goes on to hang himself. What do you make of this outcome?

Where in these chapters does Jesus seem most human to you? Where does he seem most divine?

Notes for Matthew 26-28

- 26:26** **bread:** although the Last Supper is framed as a Passover meal, the Greek text uses ἄρτον (*arton*), the word for ordinary bread (i.e., not matzoh/unleavened bread). This is the same word used for bread in the Lord's Prayer.
- 26:31** **"become deserters":** Gk. σκανδαλισθήσεσθε (*skandalisthesesthe*). This is a future-tense, passive-voice form of σκανδαλίζω (*skandalizo*), which we have previously seen used for "stumble" or "stumbling block."
- 27:24-25** These verses are among the most visible of New Testament texts used to fuel and defend anti-Judaic discrimination and violence for centuries. While scholars find it difficult to interpret these verses in a way that diminishes their surface meaning, it is important to read them in the wider context of Matthew's Gospel: much (if not most) of his audience *was* Jewish, and he takes great pains to situate Jesus's life and ministry within Jewish tradition. Historically, verse 25 may simply reflect a feature of the Jewish prophetic tradition: that wrongdoings of one generation may be addressed in the next generation. An Old Testament precedent for this tradition is the repentance of King Ahab (1 Kings 21). In Matthew, the "punishment" handed down to the next generation would be the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.
- 28:5, 10** **"Do not be afraid":** the same words Jesus says to his disciples when they see him walking on water.
- 28:15** **"among the Jews":** in the Greek text, there is no definite article ("the"). Note also that this is the only time the narrative voice of Matthew uses the word "Jews."