

VOICES FROM THE PASSION WEEK

A Narrative Sermon by FBC/Boulder Congregation Members

March 29, 2009

Narrator: The ministry of Jesus was very brief, three short years. Very little is known of His life prior to his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. He wrote no books, He was never elected to public office, He pastored no church, He never taught at a university or seminary, and He never served as a missionary in a foreign land.

Jesus, therefore, depended upon a small group of followers that the New Testament calls apostles and disciples to continue his message and movement. Events during the last week of his earthly ministry initially gave no hint of a promising future for this limited band of believers. Had His followers not remained faithful and given witness to His life, ministry and teachings, there would have been no church and no New Testament.

This morning we are going to look at the last week, which we call the Passion Week, and which will culminate in the resurrection. We will view important events through the eyes and the stories of some of those who encountered this prophet from Galilee. Hopefully, we will better understand and appreciate the one we know as Jesus. We begin with events leading prior to the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the Sunday before the resurrection.

Hello, my name is Mary: **Welcome** to my home here in Bethany on the Mount of Olives. My family and I have lived here for a long time. My sister Martha and our brother, Lazarus, have called Bethany our home for many years. Martha and I as sisters are not as well known as the brothers in the New Testament, James and John, or Peter and Andrew. But in our own way we two siblings make an important contribution to the story about Jesus. We represent two different kind of people, but two who both cherish the fact that we were able to be friends with Jesus.

This week is special for we have an unusual numbers of visitors stop in. Jesus and several of his close followers have arrived for observance of the Passover. They have been here for several days, awaiting this important celebration. But there seems to be more in the air than simply this historic Jewish festival. There is **an atmosphere of anticipation, of hope, of fulfillment.** Something important is about to happen. I can sense it. And Jesus seems to be at the center of all that is going on.

Martha, my sister, is a **doer**. She spends most of her time preparing meals and making her guests comfortable, making sure that everything is in order. What she does is important; don't get me wrong. **But we are very different.** I see beyond what is on the surface. I look for meaning when others don't seem to be concerned.

Let me share with you an example of what I am trying to say. I have closely followed the life of Jesus during the past few years. **He is such a great teacher!** He has a reputation for healing the sick and the infirmed. He has restored the dead back to life.

Remember how he raised my brother Lazarus? **For many, including myself, Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah.** He is the prophet promised in our sacred writings. **I truly believe this!** And I know that many, many people are looking for Him to do something very significant, something very dramatic during the days ahead.

I say all of this to tell you a story that happened a few days ago. Following supper, I took a large quantity of precious - and expensive - anointing oil and poured it on the feet of Jesus. I wiped the oil with my hair and the fragrance of the perfume seemed to fill the entire house. **Judas**, one of his followers, and the one that we discovered later would betray him, criticized me for wasting such a precious ointment that could be sold and the money used to help the poor. We also discovered that he was a thief and probably was not really interested in alleviating the plight of the poor.

But Jesus defended me. And then he **interpreted what I had done as symbolic of preparing his body for burial.** That was **quite surprising.** But the events of the days that followed made very clear what he was saying. I didn't understand everything that was happening. But I did know, I did believe, that he was someone who was very special, someone whose life and ministry would make such a difference in the days, in the years to come. **Do you understand what I am saying? I believe that for all of us who are His followers, that we continue to learn and understand who He was, what he was doing, and how His life and ministry is so relevant for our relationship to each other and to God.**

But there are other stories to be told, so I will say no more. Except to say that the small role that I have played in this drama is so important to me and to my understanding of the role that Jesus played in history. And, to point you from Bethany to that wonderful city of Jerusalem, where this important story unfolds.

Good Morning! I must warn you, you are going to have to use your creative imagination with me. You see, all of the other characters in this story are people! But not me! I am a city.

More precisely, I am the ancient city of Jerusalem: For centuries I have been the **capital spiritually and politically for the Jewish people.** I have been assaulted numerous times by outside invaders. For example, about 900 years ago **Shishak**, the Egyptian pharaoh, invaded Judah and placed me under siege and carried off treasures from the Temple when I surrendered. About 600 years ago I was captured, my walls were destroyed, the sacred temple, which was built by Solomon, was razed to the ground by the **Babylonians under Nebuchanezzar.** Then, my leading citizens were carried off into exile. I have seen some dark days. I have endured some hard times.

Yet, like always, I have continued to rise up time and time again. And now, although under the rule of the Romans, **my people again are anticipating the intervention God**, who will free them once more, and who will reestablish my glory.

Allow me to set the scene for you. It is the time of the **Passover** for the Hebrew people. They are arriving from all over the Roman Empire to celebrate this holiday. They are flocking through my gates by the thousands, remembering God's deliverance from Egypt during the time of the Exodus some 1300 years ago, and these pilgrims are anticipating another such deliverance from the power of the Romans.

Today, on this Sunday, there seems to be a special energy present. **A young prophet from Nazareth, His name I believe is Jesus, has entered my gates.** A clamorous throng has gathered, many believing that this prophet is the long-awaited Messiah, God's anointed One, who will deliver the Hebrew people once more from foreign oppression and who will establish God's kingdom once again within my ancient walls.

This Galilean, this Jesus, has **entered riding a donkey**, a lowly beast of burden. Some think this act is a **fulfillment of a Hebrew prophecy from Zechariah**, who writes of a humble king who will enter the city riding on a lowly beast of burden. The people gathered are **throwing leafy branches and palm leaves in His path**, which will result in this day being called "**Palm Sunday**." The branches are much more than just a natural carpet to soften the path of this prophet. Rather, **the branches are a symbol of Jewish nationalism**. Look at the Jewish coins with branches of wheat upon them. These coins remind the people of better days. They raise the hopes of the people of a new Jewish kingdom free from foreign domination. Many of those who have gathered along this path believe that this prophet is a political and military leader, Who will restore the nation of Israel to her greatness, Who will overthrow oppressive foreign rule (you do know who I am talking about?), and Who will restore the glory of God's people – and **my glory as well**. But I mentioned that, didn't I?

During the upcoming week **a unique drama will work itself out within my walls**, events of monumental importance will occur that will change the world. But few could predict the outcome that will take place. I am Jerusalem and once again all eyes will be upon me and upon this prophet from Nazareth.

Good morning. I am Simeon. I am a money changer here in the Temple: Are you here for the Passover? Festivals like the Passover are **really good for business**. **Travelers** from all over the Roman Empire make their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. **They see this as a time for remembering**. I see it as an **opportunity** to cash in on the presence of these visitors.

You see, when they come to the Temple to buy sacrificial animals they have to pay for them in Jewish shekels. We can't have them using pagan coins to pay for animals to be sacrificed in the temple, **can we?** The priests make sure that these laws are enforced, and we give them **a little kickback** for their rules on such matters. Most of the visitors need to exchange currency into Jewish money, and we provide this service - for a price of course, for a very hefty fee. They are a "**captive audience,**" so to speak.

But we are not nearly as bad as the **sellers of the sacrificial animals**. These "merchants" have a deal with the priests, which is even more lucrative than that of we moneychangers. Many pilgrims bring their own animals for sacrifice, so that they don't have to buy them here. But their animals - doves, lambs, for example - have to be perfect and approved by the priests. **And the priests** usually find some flaw that makes the animals unsuitable. So the visitors are forced to buy one of the "certified animals" from the vendors, which of course have the stamp of priestly approval on them. I have heard that the priests then take some the animals that have not been accepted, channel them to the vendors, who then sell these animals to other pilgrims. Quite a lucrative - and I might add - corrupt system.

But let me tell you what happened a few days ago. This **fellow from Nazareth**, his name I think is Jesus. He's developed **quite a reputation**, and if you ask me, he is nothing more than a **troublemaker**. He created quite a stir when he came into Jerusalem a day or two ago - riding on a donkey I might add. **Not exactly the preferred transportation of a prince, that's for sure.**

Anyway, he shows up here in the courtyard, and let me tell you, **he went on an absolute rampage**. He turned over many of our tables, and used a whip in driving out many of the moneychangers and the sellers of the sacrificial animals. He quoted from Isaiah and Jeremiah. **He sounded like a prophet of old**, saying that the Temple was supposed to be a house of prayer, but which I, and my kind, have made a den of robbers and thieves. I didn't take too kindly to that. **Would you?** Look, I'm just trying to make an honest living - well at least a living.

I heard that He placed a **curse on a barren fig tree on his way into the city**. Said that it symbolized the **barrenness of our religious leaders**. **He may be on to something there?** Anyway, after His scene here in the temple, the religious and political leaders seemed to turn against Him. It appeared that they were looking for **a way to get this troublemaker out of their hair. And they did!**

I also hear that the chief priests and the elders, the scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, just about any leader who was anybody **kept asking him all kinds of theological and religious questions, hoping to entrap him**. Me, I don't care much for **theology. I can't understand it, that's for sure. Can you?** Well, this teacher was a real thorn in the flesh for all of them, and one needs to **avoid making enemies** of such people who have such authority, such power, that's for certain. But he was a real deep thinker. He answered every one of their questions, revealing a great deal of intelligence and wisdom. In fact, he even asked a question of His own about the Messiah that they could not even

come close to answering or understanding. Not that it made much sense to me either? But like I said, I'm not much of a theologian, and I never intend to be one.

Sorry, excuse me, looks like I have a customer coming that needs to exchange a few coins. It's been nice to chat with you. Have a good visit, and if you need some cash, you know where to find me. Remember my slogan, "**A shekel from me, sets all your sins free!**" (**Laugh as you depart**)

Good morning! I am John Mark: I am **not** one of the apostles. **My mother** is a follower of Jesus, and she has influenced me in a lot of ways to pay attention to all that He teaches. My uncle, Barnabas – that is a nickname that means "**son of encouragement**" - is here. His name is actually Joseph but no one calls him that. He is from the **island of Cyprus**, and he is a **very dedicated Jew**. But he is **also open to new ideas, like many of those Jews who live outside of Palestine**. He seems to have become a **follower of Jesus as well**, and that says a lot to me, since I respect him so much.

I'm much too young to be taken seriously. But I'm a rather **inquisitive** kind of guy. I like to lurk around, watch what is going on, observe what is happening, and what might happen.

Let me tell you a few things that I have noticed. Jesus has this close group of followers, called apostles. They are an interesting and diverse group of people – fishermen, tax collectors, common laborers, **not the kind of folks that you would think could change the world, that's for sure**. Don't you agree?

James and John, these are two brothers who are on the one hand **loyal** and on the other **very ambitious**. Once when Jesus was talking about His kingdom, they got him to one side and asked to be able to sit on His right hand and His left hand. They wanted to be where the power was. But I always thought that Jesus was not really talking about an earthly kingdom, but something else, kind of a spiritual kingdom, which I haven't quite been able to figure out. **Do you understand what I'm saying?** They also had a rather volatile side. I remember them wanting to bring down fire and brimstone on their enemies. That's a **sure way to win people over** to your side! But it's not exactly consistent with the teachings of Jesus on peace, and love and hope.

Let me tell you about **Simon Peter**, whose brother Andrew is also a close follower of Jesus. Peter is actually his **nickname**. **We seem to like nicknames**, they tell us a lot about who a person is. **Peter means "rock."** And in a lot of ways Peter was a rock, as solid supporter of Jesus that you could find.

Jesus during the time of the Passover had a **special fellowship meal** with his followers. It was a lot **like the Passover, but was also different**. I am sure that those who were there will **not forget soon** this very special and significant time. He used **broken bread and out-poured wine to symbolize what He said would soon take place**. He also **predicted that he would be betrayed**. Well, it was Peter who **boasted** that though all the others might betray Jesus, he never would. It's easy to boast about what you would do, **don't you agree? But, when push comes to shove, well . . .**" Jesus told him that before the

sun would come up the next day he would deny Him three times. I am certain that Peter found this to be **preposterous!** At least **until he heard that rooster crowing.** All the others joined in and pledged their support no matter what would happen. Boy, were they wrong.

I might add that **Jesus also told Peter that when he, Peter, had turned back, that he was to strengthen the others.** These words don't make a lot of sense, but I can see Peter in that role. Like I said, **I like Peter.** Maybe someday I can work with him.

After the fellowship meal, Jesus and his friends withdrew to a garden in a place called **Gethsemane.** As he went deeper into the garden some of the group stayed at the entrance to watch. Peter, James, and John went a little ways further and were also supposed to keep watch, but they fell asleep. Jesus went further into the garden to pray.

It was during this time that **chaos really took place.** And the **words of Jesus that he would be betrayed came true.** Another apostle, **Judas Iscariot,** was the betrayer. **I never really liked him.** He seemed **sneaky** and was **always raising questions that seemed inconsistent with what Jesus was saying.** I always thought that he may have wanted Jesus to lead a rebellion against Rome and that he saw Jesus as a political and military leader, not a religious leaders. Maybe that explains what would soon happen. **What do you think?**

Judas was the **treasurer** for the group, but some thought that he was a thief. He apparently cut a deal for **thirty pieces of silver** to lead this mob to Jesus. They came upon him in the garden, arrested him, and proceeded to take him before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. Peter drew a sword, and the others initially responded. But in the end, **Peter and the others fled off into the night.**

I watched the whole thing. I had sneaked out of my home **wrapping myself in my bed sheet.** When things got out of hand, **one of the guards grabbed my sheet but I escaped, *streaking,* as some say, off into the night.** Not exactly my finest hour but a rather **amusing story** to a tragic moment. Well, perhaps some time later I can **write down these and other things related to the life and ministry of Jesus.** Hopefully, the story will be "good news" for those who read it. **What do you think, would there be a need for such a book?**

My name is Caiaphas. I am the High Priest. I hold the most important office in the Jewish scheme of things these days: The office of high priest is **carefully controlled** by just a few families. For example, **Annas, my father-in-law,** not only served as High Priest, but so did six of his sons. And after he ran out of sons, he maneuvered to have **me,** his son-in-law, elected to the office.

As High Priest I have **enormous political power and I have unquestioned religious authority, more than any other person in Judea.** But I also have **a lot of responsibility, and Rome is always looking over my shoulder.** I, and my fellow members of **the Sanhedrin, the seventy member Ruling Council of the Jews,** we are not only expected to take care of the needs of the Jews, we are also given the

responsibility by Rome of **keeping the peace**, of making sure that no person or group destabilizes Judea in any way. **Rome holds us accountable** so that no revolutionary will come in here and upset the order of things. We just cannot allow this! Do you understand what I am saying?

This is the reason why **this Jesus fellow from Nazareth** is so disturbing to us. He has been stirring up trouble for a while now. And suddenly He shows up here in Jerusalem. Not only did he attack our leaders, including those of us in the Sanhedrin, **but did you hear about that scene in the Temple?** Things were getting out of hand. We just could not allow this to go on.

Annas met with Him - I did tell you that he is my father-in-law, didn't I? - he still exerts a lot of power. Then this Jesus was brought before me. I interrogated Him, as did the Sanhedrin. We concluded that he needed to be disposed of and decided a charge of blasphemy would result in what we wanted. But **Rome won't let us execute people**. Rome wants that authority for herself. So we **turned the charges into political issues, treason, sedition, insurrection, threatening to overthrow Rome**. I think that we can depend on Pilate to do what needs to be done, **don't you?**

My name is Pontius Pilate: I am the **Roman procurator**. A procurator is a tax collector. But the office has grown in power and responsibility. So actually, I am now the **governor of Judea**. I am sure that you know the events that brought this Galilean Jew before me. **I see no reason to punish him**. This is **nothing more than Jewish religious squabble**. But this is one of the **burdens of my office**, so I **must deal with it**.

I asked this Jesus **several questions**, but He was **not very cooperative**. I asked Him if He was the **"king of the Jews."** If He was, he was a **pretty pathetic figure to hold such a position!** But He simply replied that this was what I was saying. Not exactly a definitive answer.

After consulting with **Herod Antipas, not one of my favorite people but the ruler or king over Galilee, where this Jew was from,** I decided to **offer a way for His release**. There were two robbers and a revolutionary who were to be executed. **I offered the people the right to set one prisoner free, knowing it would be Jesus rather than the revolutionary**. Pretty clever on my part, don't you agree? I was more than **surprised when the crowd selected Barabbas**, not as surprised as Barabbas, I'm sure. But the crowd **demanded that Jesus be crucified**. This was not what I wanted to do **but my hands were tied**. What could I do? So I **delivered Jesus to the soldiers to be crucified**. I understand that **they mocked him, scourged him, and then took him out to be crucified with a couple of thieves**. This was done, end of the story, I think. At least Rome will not be on my back over this "King of the Jews!"

Hello. I am Mary Magdalene: I am from a **small village** on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. I first came into contact with Jesus when he was preaching and teaching in the area. He attracted

many followers, including myself. He gave his hearers hope for the first time in a long time. He was a **prophet if I ever saw one.**

I, like many of the common, hard-working people in Galilee, was accepted by Jesus as a friend, and count myself among those who **believe that He is the one promised to us in the Scriptures who will be God's agent of redemption, of salvation,** the one who fulfills the teachings of many of the Hebrew prophets.

But things have gotten **very confusing,** even disappointing in the last several days. I won't retell the stories of all of the events that have happened since Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. **But I will tell you that I was not expecting Him to be arrested and put to death. None of us were!**

Crucifixion is such a horrible punishment, even more so for one who did not deserve such a fate. But it happened and then we had to **move rapidly to prepare His body for burial before the Sabbath began at sundown.**

Although the **Sanhedrin,** the Jewish ruling council, was behind these events that led to the trial and execution of Jesus, there were **a few members who became followers of Jesus.** And, they have **responded quickly to help us.** Nicodemus is one, you may remember his story as **the one who visited Jesus at night.** We have been told that **Jesus told him that God's love of the world was so great that He was willing to give up His Son in order to give eternal life to all who would follow Him.** It is **confusing, but perhaps in all of these events of the last few days, God may be fulfilling these words of Jesus.** Anyway, what is important now is that **Nicodemus provided us with the spices and oils necessary to prepare the body of Jesus for burial.** I am certain that he will be criticized by other members of the Sanhedrin for doing this, but that does not seem to matter to him. He is **a genuinely good man.**

Another concern is where could we place the body of Jesus? Again, a member of the Sanhedrin stepped forward. **Joseph of Arimathea,** who apparently is a follower of Jesus, provided a newly cut tomb close by.

So, **I and a few friends, Mary, the mother of James, Joanna, Salome, we have worked quickly to prepare the body and He has been placed in the tomb.** A stone has been rolled over the entry.

Now, for the first time, we can pause and reflect on all that has happened. I ask you, **is this the end of the story? Why did these events take place? Was Jesus such a threat** to the religious establishment and the Roman rulers that they had to get rid of him? **Will the story conclude with memories of a man who was such a good teacher, and prophet who gave us such hope, but One who in the end simply was put to death before fulfilling His promises?**

Somehow, **I don't believe that it is over.** Somehow I still have **hope**, I still **believe**. **But now what happens** to those of us who believed in Him? **The rolling of the stone over the doorway, that seems so final.**

Well, I must go and **meet with the others.** We have a lot to talk about, **a lot to figure out.** I, and my friends, **we will be back on Sunday morning.** **The Sabbath will be over,** and there is much more to do in the final preparation of His body. We didn't have time to do everything, and perhaps we then can pay true homage to our friend. **Who knows, maybe come Sunday morning we can take time to rekindle our hopes and dreams, maybe, somehow, some way, God will turn this tragedy into a victory for those of us who have been faithful followers of Jesus.** **Maybe the story is not over.** **Maybe it is just beginning! What do you think? Is there more to come? Maybe you can join us on Sunday morning? Maybe we will all be in for a big surprise? What do you think?**

Narrator: For those of us who are believers in the 21st century, the story is not over. Defeat will end in victory. Death will result in life. Soon we will celebrate the resurrection, the event that gives meaning and understanding to all that took place during the Passion Week. The story will both end and continue with a message of rejoicing, hope, and anticipation. There is indeed good news for those of us who are the followers of Jesus.