

**INSIDE:**

+ **Easter Story  
Reflections**



A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance  
March 2024





ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to

**one@ourecma.com.**

The ECMA ONE Advisory Board will choose appropriate and timely submissions for publication. The columns in ONE represent the views of the author.

Volume 17, Issue 11 • ourecma.com • Copyright 2024 individual authors and ECMA

### Advisory Board

Kurt Beyers  
Ben Houchen  
Anna Towns

### Editor

Terri Braun  
terribraun91@gmail.com

## Editor's Note:

This month the Easter Story according to the Gospel of Mark was divided into four sections. Our writers published reflections on their chosen section of the Easter Story. We hope you and your family have a joyous Easter!

## Scripture: Mark 15:1-15 (New American Bible Revised Edition)

### Jesus Before Pilate

**1** As soon as morning came, the chief priests with the elders and the scribes, that is, the whole Sanhedrin, held a council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. **2** Pilate questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He said to him in reply, "You say so." **3** The chief priests accused him of many things. **4** Again Pilate questioned him, "Have you no answer? See how many things they accuse you of." **5** Jesus gave him no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. **6** Now on the occasion of the feast he used to release to them one prisoner whom they requested. **7** A man called Barabbas was then in prison along with the rebels who had committed murder in a rebellion. **8** The crowd came forward and began to ask him to do for them as he was accustomed. **9** Pilate answered, "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" **10** For he knew that it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed him over. **11** But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. **12** Pilate again said to them in reply, "Then what [do you want] me to do with [the man you call] the king of the Jews?" **13** They shouted again, "Crucify him." **14** Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted the louder, "Crucify him." **15** So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified.

## **Pilate Versus Jesus**

### Written by:

**Father Damian Richards**

There is a dignity to Christ in the Passion. He is the one being tortured and abused.

He is the one being condemned in a show trial where the punishment was never in doubt. He is the one unjustly killed. But because He is doing the Fathers' Will, He is

the One with dignity. Jesus knows who He is and why He is there.

Those in authority who are in a rush to condemn Jesus are just being swept along by

## ***Pilate Versus Jesus (Continued)***

events. You can see this especially with Pontius Pilate. Pilate has the power. He has Roman Soldiers at his command. The religious authorities in Jerusalem have to appease Pilate before they can do anything.

Jesus is alone and abandoned. His followers have disappeared. He has been beaten and abused before standing before Pilate. No one is there to help Him. But who is in control in this confrontation? Not Pilate...Pilate is scared. Pilate doesn't know how to respond to someone who isn't scared of the Power of Rome. Earthly power is all Pilate knew. Pilate knew force. He knew intimidation. He knew politics. But he did not know Truth.

When Jesus tells Pilate in the Gospel of John that He came into the world to testify to the Truth, Pilate famously responds, "*What is truth?*" John 18:38 (NABRE). For Pilate, truth is whatever is convenient at the time. It is not a rock to base your life on.

For Christ, Truth was the constant in His life. If He stayed close to the Truth, He would be close to the Father. Because Jesus knew the Truth of God and relied on it at all times, Jesus is the victor. Because Pilate only knew Power and only relied on it, Pilate lost the argument.

The Truth gives Jesus dignity. The Truth gives Jesus control. Even when he is beaten and bloody, he is not

disgraced because He knows he is doing the Will of God. Too many times we imitate Pilate and think that the things of this world are the most important.

The Lenten season is a time to remember that we are not the ones in charge. And if we want to regain the dignity we were given at our Baptisms, we need to turn from the world and turn to Christ.

Use this Lenten season to return to the Truth of Christ.



*Fr. Damian Richards, Pastor of St. Nicholas of Myra in Hays & St. Francis of Assisi in Munjor.*

### **Scripture Mark 15:21-32 (King James Version)**

#### **Jesus Crucified**

**21** And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross. **22** And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. **23** And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. **24** And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. **25** And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. **26** And the superscription of his accusation was written over, The King Of The Jews. **27** And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. **28** And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. **29** And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, **30** Save thyself, and come down from the cross. **31** Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. **32** Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.

## ***Blessing for the Cross Bearer***

**Written by:**

**Rev. Jonathan E. McCottry Sr.**

February is a month celebrated in this country to bring pride to African American citizens. Mark's account of the crucifixion shares a story of inspiration for people of color.

The crowd that followed the Savior to Calvary taunted and reviled Him because He could not carry the wooden cross. They all saw the weak and staggering steps of Christ, but compassion did not reveal itself in the hearts of those who had advanced from one step to another in their abuse and torture of the Son of God.

A stranger, Simon, a Cyrenian, coming to the city from the country, hears the crowd pass the taunts and racism. He hears the disrespectful repetition, "Make way for the King of the Jews." Meeting the procession that brought Jesus to Golgotha, Simon observed the commotion and stops in astonishment at the scene. As he expresses his compassion in words and deeds, they seize him and compel him to lift the cross which is too heavy for Christ to bear. That wooden cross borne by him to Calvary was the means of Simon taking upon himself the cross of

Christ from choice, to cheerfully stand beneath its burden.

Like many Black people today, Simon just happened to be in what some would say "at the wrong place at the wrong time" but he was in the right place at the right time. So, they grabbed him. The Roman soldiers were puzzled to find anyone who would bear the humiliating load.

The Jews themselves could not do this, because the defilement would prevent them from keeping the Passover. The Roman soldiers would not stoop to the humiliation of the cross. None of the mob that followed Him would stoop to bear the cross. Simon of Cyrene, a passer-by was chosen just because he was different.

Simon was easy to identify because he was a Black person at a Passover crucifixion party. There were people from over fourteen countries gathered for the Passover and none of them figured out that there was a blessing in carrying the cross of Jesus. While they were willing to single out Simon because he was different, they were actually extending to him a blessing.

Many Jews from Cyrene had returned to their native Israel and were part of a

community in Jerusalem called the Synagogue of the Freedmen. This was comprised of Jews from many other provinces including Alexandria (Egypt), Cilicia and Asia, Acts 6:9 (KJV). Luke records men from Cyrene being among those converted at Pentecost, Acts 2:10 (KJV). After the martyrdom of Stephen, Acts 7 (KJV), believers from Cyrene were among the first to be scattered by the persecution in Jerusalem; arriving in Antioch, they preached to the Gentiles there, Acts 11:20 (KJV). These believers were instrumental in the formation of the church at Antioch, where, for the first time, "the disciples were called Christians," Acts 11:26 (KJV).

What distinguished Simon was that he was not like anybody else in the crowd. He was Simon of Cyrene and is mentioned in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew only records his name and place of origin, but Mark and Luke say that he was "on his way in from the country," Luke 23:26 (KJV). Mark, uncharacteristically, provides the most information about Simon, adding that he was "the father of Alexander and Rufus," Mark 15:21 (KJV), men obviously well known to Mark's readers. It is speculated that the Rufus



## ***Blessing for the Cross Bearer (Continued)***

mentioned here may be the same man Paul greets in his letter to Rome, whom he calls “chosen in the Lord” and whose mother “has been a mother to me, too,” Romans 16:13 (KJV).

Simon was selected because he was not a Jew,

not a Roman, and not a part of the mob. He was unconverted, distinguished as a person who was different, and did not look like anybody there. He was a foreigner, a passer-by, a Cyrenian who sympathized with the crucifixion of Jesus. But when you bear the cross of Jesus and assume His cross,

Heavenly blessings are in store.



Rev. Jonathan E. McCottry, Sr., of Hays is Pastor Emeritus of the Southwest Region Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists.

### **Scripture: Mark 15:33-41 (New American Bible Revised Edition)**

#### **The Death of Jesus**

**33** At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. **34** And at three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” **35** Some of the bystanders who heard it said, “Look, he is calling Elijah.” **36** One of them ran, soaked a sponge with wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to take him down.” **37** Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. **38** The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. **39** When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” **40** There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome. **41** These women had followed him when he was in Galilee and ministered to him. There were also many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

## ***Will We Answer the Call to Heroic Virtue?***

**Written by:**

**Cody Marintzer**

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” To any faithful Jew, this would have immediately brought to mind Psalm 22. They would have known this by heart as they would memorize and sing the Psalms as they traveled to the Temple to make the Passover sacrifice

every year. In it, the Psalmist proclaims: 8 All who see me mock me; they curl their lips and jeer; they shake their heads at me: 9 “He relied on the LORD—let him deliver him; if he loves him, let him rescue him...” 17 Dogs surround me; a pack of evildoers closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and my feet 18 I can count all my bones. They stare at me and gloat; 19 they

divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots,” (NABRE). Jesus was making it clear that this Psalm applied to Him at that very moment.

The thing is, the Psalmist doesn't stop there. He goes on to say, “You who fear the LORD, give praise! For he has not spurned or disdained the misery of this poor wretch, did

## ***Will We Answer the Call to Heroic Virtue? (Continued)***

*not turn away from me, but heard me when I cried out,"* Psalm 22:24-25 (NABRE). So, Jesus isn't giving in to despair, but is proclaiming the goodness of God through His suffering. He is letting them know God will take care of things.

As Christ is bringing this Psalm to the minds of His followers that are standing at the foot of the cross, it would have taken heroic virtue for them to trust that God could bring something good out of this horrible Roman execution. Think first of Mary, his Mother. Every parent knows that watching your child suffer is worse than any other pain you might endure. But Mary knew this was a moment of heroic virtue. This was the moment where she had to trust in the Father that He would make all things new.

Next, let's look at the other followers of Jesus standing at the foot of the cross. Although Peter ran away when heroic virtue was needed, the disciples standing there followed the words he once proclaimed: *"Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God,"* John 6:68-69 (NABRE). They may not have been able to comprehend how it was going

to work out, but they knew Christ is Lord. The Truth is the Truth, no matter how hard it may be. They were not going to abandon him, even if it meant ridicule or harm to themselves.

Finally, I want to center on the centurion. Here is a Roman soldier tasked with making sure the execution is carried out and Jesus is killed. As a faithful Roman, he was required to give allegiance to the Emperor, who took upon himself the title "son of god." In proclaiming *"Truly this man was the Son of God!"* Mark 15:39 (NABRE), he disavowed the deified view of the Emperor and proclaimed Christ as the true Son of God.

A proclamation like this was not a simple act. This means he just put his own head on the line. Many people believe that the Roman soldier who pierced Jesus' side and this man are one and the same. It has also been passed down through Christian tradition that this man (who the name Longinus has been given) became a convert to Christianity and was later martyred for being a witness to the faith.

With these examples, we see several things. God never promises that our path to Heaven is going to be a red carpet laid out in front of us. We don't know what

tomorrow may bring, but we know for sure that God has not abandoned us and He can redeem any hardship, whether we see it in this life, or the next. Mary lived heroic virtue throughout all of her life. Remember, she was told by the prophet Simeon when Jesus was an infant, *"and you yourself a sword will pierce,"* Luke 2:35 (NABRE). If we are going to be able to stand for the Truth when it gets very difficult, we must live it every day.

Finally, we don't know how many lives we may touch by our living witness to Christ and the Gospel. Just as Christ's sacrifice on the cross changed the heart of the Roman soldier and that soldier brought others to Christ through his martyrdom, so too our witness in times of trial, can touch the lives of those who may seem the hardest to reach. The ripple effect our witness can make to those on this earth may carry for generations to come.

By the grace of God, may we all live lives of heroic virtue.



*Cody Marintzer is the parish life coordinator at St. Nicholas of Myra Church.*

## **Scripture: Mark 16:1-8 (New Revised Standard Version)**

### **The Women Find the Empty Tomb**

**1** When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. **2** And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. **3** They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" **4** When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. **5** As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. **6** But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. **7** But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." **8** So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

## **He is Risen Indeed!**

**Written by:**

**Rev. Christine Wagner**

Like so much about the gospel of Mark, his resurrection story is short and stark. It packs a punch. If you have your Bibles opened to chapter 16 you will notice two further bracketed endings following verses 1-8. One is the "shorter" or "intermediate" ending and the other the "longer" ending. Both of these additional conclusions show up in early manuscripts.

Like us, the early scribes and followers of Jesus Messiah were uncomfortable with Mark's blunt ending. Most likely, they embellished it later with other accounts such as those found in Matthew, Luke and John's gospels. It's not that these added endings in Mark are untrue. It's just that they probably aren't "Mark's" good news. That is why they are bracketed.

One consistent element spans all the gospel writers' accounts. Each of them

designates Mary Magdalene or her and other women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb. She or they are the ones to whom the resurrection of the Lord is first revealed. Mary Magdalene and the others are commanded to go to the disciples and tell them what has happened. In Mark's account they are initially too overwhelmed and frightened to do anything but run.

Mark's gospel is always immediate and raw. He is not inclined to soften the good news with poetry or theological speculation. Some years ago, a famed British actor, Alec McCowen, memorized the Gospel of Mark and performed it with great power both in London and on Broadway. In 1990, he told a reporter for "The Times", "The style had a blunt, astringent quality which suited me. And it was a Gospel of action, not teaching, one which had plenty of episodes and dwelt on nothing for too long." He later said that Mark had "constructed his Gospel with the skill of a great dramatist."

And what a dramatic and decidedly "postmodern" ending. Everything is not neatly tied up, all loose ends accounted for. Mark's ending reminds me of a cartoon I came across not too long ago when I was looking for an Easter bulletin cover. It was intended as an irreverent joke. Yet, it seemed to me to be perfectly fitting to Mark's gospel ending. In it a silhouetted Jesus is rising, arms lifted above his head in triumph and praise. Above him the words are written, "He is risen." Below in large, dark shivering letters it reads, "RUN!" The rest of the story is dependent upon how we respond—once we stop running—to the astounding good news that "He is risen, indeed!"



*Rev. Christine Wagner is the Transitional Minister at First Presbyterian Church of Hays where she first*

*became a member more than 33 years ago.*