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Isaiah 50: 4 – 9a
 Philippians 2: 5 – 11

Ps. 31: 9 – 16
 Mark 14: 1 – 15:47

“The beginning of the Good News [the Gospel] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

**“Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
 ‘Truly this man was God’s Son!’”**

Two proclamations, two parentheses, two bookends that the evangelist, Mark, uses to set off the life and death of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God.

Today, we hear two whole chapters of Mark’s Gospel. So many words. So many thoughts and questions and emotions. This week, Holy Week, there will be more words, thoughts, questions and emotions than we can properly absorb. The abundance of readings, the intensity of symbolism, the poignancy of music, the power of reenactment, are all so familiar. It’s easy to let them wash over us. It’s easy to ignore them and go about life as usual. But do we dare pause and let their intensity and poignancy and power *fill our souls*? Do we dare let Mark’s words speak for themselves in our hearts?

There is nothing that can make the story we just heard palatable or acceptable. We can’t tidy it up, put a big pink bow on it and simply skip ahead to Easter. Today, and this week, is a time for just sitting with the story. In all its ambiguity. In all its multiple levels of meaning. In all the disappointment and fear and anger and dejection and betrayal and abandonment that we find in the story – and in ourselves. We need to allow the story to take hold of us and feel the visceral responses, the uncensored thoughts, the unanswered questions, the unmitigated disillusionment.

There are so many questions that I have when I hear this story. What questions do you have? What would you want to say to Judas? To Pilate? To the women who stand at the foot of the cross? To the centurion? To Joseph of Arimathea? Where do you feel a punch in the stomach? What makes your blood run cold? Where are you confused?

Imagine sitting at the table and listening to Jesus’ words. Imagine being in the garden when suddenly all hell breaks loose with the arrival of the armed guards and leaders of the Temple. Imagine being on the pavement, with Pilate and Jesus looking down at you. At YOU. Imagine being one of the ones standing near the foot of the cross. Imagine being Joseph of Arimathea, taking the body off the cross.

Where do you find yourself most truly represented in this story? Is it possible that sometimes we are the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus’ feet, or Joseph, and sometimes we are Peter or Judas or Pilate? Or one of the other disciples who are nowhere to be found at the cross? Or that sometimes, we are merely bystanders, without a word to say one way or the other? How is God speaking to you and me through this story – and through this week to come? If we allow ourselves to dwell inside this story this week, what might we discover about ourselves? About this community that is the Body of Christ? About God?

I invite you this week to ‘stay in the moment’ of this Gospel. To sit, not just at the foot of the cross, but at the anointed feet of the crucified Jesus. It’s hard to be in a place where we don’t know what to do, where we don’t know exactly what we think, and perhaps where we don’t really *want* to

think about it. Just as with Jesus hanging on the cross, only God can carry us through to the other side. To the empty tomb and all that awaits in the promise of resurrection. We're not there yet, though. But that's okay. Because God already is. May you have a richly blessed Holy Week. +