

Jesus before the Sanhedrin: "YOU are the Messiah?" (Mark 14:53-15:1)

Jesus before the Council

53 They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. ⁵⁴Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. ⁵⁶For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, ⁵⁸'We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands."' ⁵⁹But even on this point their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' ⁶¹But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' ⁶²Jesus said, 'I am; and "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power", and "coming with the clouds of heaven."' ⁶³Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?' All of them condemned him as deserving death. ⁶⁵Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophecy!' The guards also took him over and beat him.

Peter Denies Jesus

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.' ⁶⁸But he denied it, saying, 'I do not know or understand what you are talking about.' And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. ⁶⁹And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, 'This man is one of them.' ⁷⁰But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, 'Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.' ⁷¹But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know this man you are talking about.' ⁷²At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' And he broke down and wept.

Jesus before Pilate

15As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.

(Translation © Lawrence Moore, *Mark for Missional Disciples*, Walking the Walk Publications, 2018)

Commentary

Mark's double trial narrative

Jesus is tried twice. The accounts follow an identical structure: Jesus is questioned about the main charge against him; he doesn't reply; he is pressed further and responds: "I am!" / "So you say!" Both hearings are then followed by some sort of consultation (between the high priest and the Sanhedrin, and between Pilate and the crowds). Each ends with a verdict, followed by mockery and torture. The force of this narrative construct is difficult to miss: both the Sanhedrin and Rome collaborate and are equally culpable in securing the death sentence on Jesus in a double trial that has nothing to do with justice and everything to do with the political need to secure his conviction at whatever cost.

A popular theory among scholars (the most prominent of whom is probably SGF Brandon) who believe that Mark is writing for a church in Rome, have suggested that Mark's intention is to exonerate the Romans as far as possible, and to blame the Jewish authorities for the death of Jesus. The Sanhedrin, they point out, tries fair means and foul to obtain a conviction; Pilate, by contrast, tries to *avoid* condemning Jesus. He is well aware of the Sanhedrin's determination to secure a conviction at any cost (15: 4), and tells the mob baying for Jesus' blood that he has not done any evil to deserve crucifixion (15: 13). This is significant: it would mean that Jesus died as someone *falsely accused* of wishing to bring about the end of the Roman Empire.

However, the whole of Mark's narrative has been structured to show the *collusion* between Rome and the temple. Jesus' ministry has been a constant challenge to both. His trial is the moment of confrontation with the very powers he has come to destroy – Imperial Rome and the temple purity cult. In his trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus is accused of *blasphemy*; standing before Pilate, he is accused, condemned and crucified on the charge of *sedition*. Jesus is crucified as a messianic pretender and blasphemer: the truth is that he *is* the Messiah. He is crucified as a self-styled King of the Jews and political revolutionary: the truth is that Jesus *is* Lord

and king.

The double trial of Jesus: historicity and plausibility

To recognise Mark's narrative strategy is to beg the question of whether or not it is a fiction he creates, or has a basis in the historical events of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. You will recall that the history of Markan critical scholarship has been the attempt to prise loose the reminiscences of Jesus out of their narrative framework in order to reconstruct "what actually happened". As can be seen from the work of the Jesus Seminar scholars in particular, the so-called "historical Jesus" that apparently emerges from this work can be wildly different from the story that Mark tells. Far from being the revolutionary who challenges the colluding power bases of Rome and the temple, Jesus is alleged to be anything from a teacher of wisdom to a Stoic philosopher, a Jewish mystic or a proto-gnostic.

There are almost as many different and contradictory reconstructions of the "historical Jesus" as there are scholars. This fact alone should alert us to a central flaw in the historical critical enterprise (the attempt to reconstruct the "historical Jesus" from the "clues" that have to be excavated from the narrative like archaeological finds dug from the soil). After all, if it *is* possible to separate the "real Jesus" from the fictional character of Mark's gospel using "scientific" (historiographical) methods, we would surely expect huge areas of fundamental agreement among scholars about "what actually happened" (as opposed to the story Mark gives us). We might expect several different "schools" of interpretation, whose proponents argue about the significance and interpretation of core events; what we do not expect from the "science" is a bewildering array of wildly competing reconstructions. The so-called "historical Jesus" each scholar claims to have reconstructed is, more accurately, a "newly-constructed Jesus" – a competing story.

Our exploration of Mark to date has concentrated on the story of Jesus that Mark tells us, in the conviction that his purpose is to call us to follow Jesus and to indicate what sort of shape that following takes. It is a call to follow the Way of the Cross. Mark presents Jesus' mission as a confrontation with Rome: the

announcement of the breaking in of the Kingdom of God. It is the announcement of regime change. Jesus, the *real* Son of God, is God's Messiah-Liberator (1:1). The goal is the new world of the Kingdom in place of the world shaped and ruled by Empire. His is a prophetic role that leads him to confront the powers of Empire – Rome and its client temple authorities. That is why he ends up crucified as a “bandit”.

Yet if Brandon et al are right, the cross is a *mistake*: Jesus was not calling his disciples to confront Empire, but simply to become “properly religious”. His mission, then, was not to change the world, but to call Israel to what he believed was “the true faith”. Pilate's weakness in the face of Jewish manipulation results in Rome *mistakenly* crucifying Jesus as a revolutionary, when he was not in fact one. The events of the double trial are therefore key: what actually happened?

The attempt to verify the events independently of Mark's narrative is futile. We know only that it resulted in his crucifixion on a cross as a rebel against Rome. We have no access to the events of the trial themselves. By Mark's own account, there were no eyewitnesses to either trial. If tradition is right, and Mark's source is Peter, Peter is not present when Jesus is arraigned before the Sanhedrin. The double trial that Mark recounts cannot be verified.

We must therefore employ a different test – the test of *plausibility*. How plausible is Mark's narrative? How likely is it? Does the narrative hang together – make sense of what he has told us of Jesus' ministry and mission, and of the events that follow? These are the questions we will need to ask as we examine the narrative of the double trial.

The trial by night: Jesus before the Sanhedrin

Let's look at the elements of Mark's narrative of Jesus' trial by the Council:

1. The motive of the Council

2. The false testimony
3. The question of the temple
4. Jesus' silence
5. "Are you the Messiah?"
6. Jesus' response
7. Condemned as a heretic
8. Mockery and torture
9. The decision to send Jesus to Pilate

The motive of the Council

Mark presents Jesus' trial as a travesty of justice. It takes place during the night, which is forbidden under Jewish law. Mark emphasises two factors which we have seen at many different points in his narrative up until now: (1) the determination to secure Jesus' death (14:55) and (2) the fear of the crowds, which has been behind their preparations for arresting Jesus secretly, courtesy of Judas. Trying Jesus openly runs the risk of a popular uprising in support of him; putting him to death will make him a martyr. The Council opts for the strategy of trying Jesus secretly and handing him over to Pilate to try him openly and have him put to death. This is Mark's account of "the wicked tenants" at work, plotting the death of the son.

The false testimony

As with political show trials, the trappings of legality are important. The Council calls witnesses. There is no need to assume that they are in the pay of the Council; had they been so, their testimony would presumably have been prepared beforehand. Nor is it necessary to assume that the witnesses were trying to ensure that Jesus was condemned (though they might well have been). It is more likely that they simply told the Council what they had seen, remembered or been told. What is "false" about their testimony is that it is contradictory and unreliable. Whatever the detail of their testimony, Mark opts only to record the frustration of the Council: they could find no reliable evidence on which to convict Jesus (14:55).

The question of the temple

Given the dramatic events of the past few days, it is only to be expected that Jesus' opposition to the temple will feature in his trial before the temple authorities. The accusation of threatening personally to destroy and replace the temple is, of course, false. We might assume that this is one of the stories about what Jesus had said that has already got about. Ironically, Jesus *has* prophesied the destruction of the temple, and the New Covenant replaces the temple with Jesus' body. Mark is wonderfully and deliberately ironic here: the "false testimony" about what Jesus actually said is "true proclamation" of what is about to transpire!

Jesus' silence

Jesus' silence is the refusal to recognise the authority of the Sanhedrin. Mark has told us in close detail of the clash over Jesus' authority. Whatever real desire to seek truth has been played out in the series of encounters between Jesus and the temple authorities. Jesus had emerged from each of these victorious: the question of truth has therefore already been settled. For him, therefore, the trial has nothing to do with the pursuit of truth. As with John the Baptist, the temple authorities are unable to recognise the person standing before them, because they are determined to resist Jesus mission and message of the Kingdom. His silence is his rejection of the jurisdiction of the court.

"Are you the Messiah?"

For NT Wright, this question follows logically: if Jesus has indeed set himself against the temple, he must surely be claiming to be the Messiah. If he is correct, then the sense of the High Priest's question is, "You're surely not claiming to be the Messiah, are you?" Again, this is laden with irony in terms of Mark's narrative. He has announced that Jesus *is* the Messiah at the outset of the narrative (1:1). Yet at each point where that is recognised (by demons, people he has healed or delivered), Jesus' response has been to command them in the strongest terms to shut up about it. He has reacted in this same way to Peter's confession of him as Messiah at Caesarea Philippi (8:30). The reason for this has become clear at the so-called "Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem" and Jesus' own question to the temple authorities

about the Messiah being David's son (12:35ff): Jesus refuses the messianic mantle of the Davidic King-Liberator. He has not come to lead an uprising. His mission of the Kingdom is about to result in his death, not in a military victory.

Jesus' response

Mark has announced that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of God" (1:1). The High Priest now asks, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One (ie God)?" Only here, in the trial room, does Jesus unequivocally declare, unambiguously and for the first time in Mark's narrative, "I Am!"

Ched Myers argues that Jesus probably responded more ambiguously: "Those are your words" (as he does in Matthew and Luke). Yet apart from the fact that the best attested Greek text is *ego eimi* ("I am!"), Everything in Mark's narrative has led us inexorably to this climactic moment of acknowledgement, when Jesus speaks for the first time.

Jesus immediately goes on to invoke the Danielic Son of Man image (Daniel 7:13): "and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven!" This is hugely significant. While Jesus has resisted the title of Messiah, his chosen self-description has been "son of man". Colloquially, this means simply, "I as a bloke" – a person, or human being. However, by invoking the Daniel vision of the Son of Man (literally, the "Human One"), Jesus is proclaiming that his role *as this particular human being, with this particular mission*, has eschatological significance. That significance will be played out on the cross, which has every appearance of his defeat. However, God will vindicate him; the cross will turn out to have been an act of power by God, but the defeat of God's Kingdom. This is Easter: cross and resurrection.

Mockery and torture

Jesus is condemned for blasphemy. His confession of being the Messiah, the Son of God is taken by the Council as a crime of untruth against God. Jesus is now assumed to have been "unmasked". This messianic pretender is nothing but a blasphemer,

for all his powerful acts and preaching. He is condemned to death, and, in a scene paralleling the mockery of the soldiers after Pilate condemns Jesus, is mocked and beaten.

The decision to send Jesus to Pilate

It has long been assumed that the Council hands Jesus over to Pilate because, as an occupied state, they were not permitted to carry out death sentences but were required to refer all capital cases – or maybe only religious capital cases - to Rome. There is no evidence for this. It is perfectly reasonable to assume that the incidents in the gospels recording threatened stonings and lynching were a part of life under the Occupation. If this is so, why send Jesus to Pilate, to be tried and executed as a political revolutionary, rather than carry out their death sentence themselves?

Mark's narrative gives three perfectly plausible reasons. The first is the wish to distance themselves from Jesus' execution, because of their fear of the crowds. If Rome executes Jesus, then the matter is out of the Council's hands, and they cannot be held responsible for killing a prophet sent by God. Secondly, Jesus is wanted by the Roman authorities for advocating a revolution. Jesus has, as we have seen, challenged both the power of Rome and that of their client authorities. It therefore follows, thirdly, that they are carrying out their duty to their Roman overlords in return for their power and privilege. We are witnessing the playing out of Jesus' response to the question of the Poll Tax: "Pay Caesar what you owe Caesar, and pay God what you owe God!" The Council owes Caesar Jesus's life, because they have sold out to Rome.

Peter's denial (14:66-72)

The switch to Peter makes perfect narrative sense. He alone has followed Jesus, and has been nearby throughout the trial (14:54). He has kept true to his word: "Even though all the others become deserters, I will not!" (14:29). Sentence has just been passed on Jesus; as readers, we want to know whether Peter will do as he promised: "Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you!" (14:31).

Peter's three-fold denial is an incident that has been in the making ever since he confessed Jesus as Messiah at Caesarea Philippi (8:29). Jesus had immediately gone on to make the first of his passion predictions, for which Peter had rebuked him and which provoked the extraordinarily vehement response from Jesus: "Get behind me, Satan!" (8:31-33). The journey to Jerusalem – the Way of the Cross – has been the story of Peter's resistance to Jesus' version of messiahship. Of course, it has been the story of the community of disciples as a whole, but Peter has been not only the spokesperson for the group (particularly in identifying Jesus as Messiah) but has also set himself up as the one who will see the night and following day through with Jesus – even if that means dying with him.

The point here is that Peter cannot accept Jesus' version of messiahship. Were Jesus to call for an armed revolt, we can assume that Peter would be the first to answer the call to arms. In John's gospel, for example, he is identified as the companion of Jesus who cut off the ear of the servant. But if being the Messiah means keeping silent, refusing to defend himself, allowing himself to be taken and executed, Peter cannot go through with his commitment to follow Jesus.

This is the ultimate irony of his third denial: "I do not know this man you are taking about!" Peter is speaking the truth. He only *appeared* to know who Jesus was (ie the Messiah) at Caesarea Philippi. But the Messiah he thought he was following was not the Messiah that Jesus is. Mark is telling us that Peter has not "followed" Jesus, in the sense of being a disciple; rather, he has "hung around" with Jesus – kept him company, but not allowed Jesus to shape and form him as a fellow traveller on the Way of the Cross. Jesus was right: all the disciples have become deserters when faced with the cross – even Peter. As he faces the cross, Jesus is utterly alone. And, as we shall see in the trial before Pilate, the chief priests will succeed in their machinations to turn the supportive crowds against him, too.

The trial by night: how plausible is it?

Is Mark's narrative of Jesus' trial before the Council plausible? Does it flow from the

story he has told us – particularly the story of Jesus’ challenge to the Council’s authority and vested privilege? Does the Council behave in ways that are consistent with what we know about power elites? Particularly, given the history of the Christian church, does it behave in ways in which entrenched privilege is defended and maintained by the officers of religious power structures?

Does Jesus’ own conduct and statement make sense? Would his declaration of messiahship realistically provoke the response that it does?

And what of Peter? Mark makes no attempt to let him off any hooks. This is no hagiography, celebrating Peter, the founder of the Christian Church. Yet if Peter *is* somehow “the church” – the would-be follower of Jesus – does Mark’s portrayal of him make sense if we assume that Mark’s own church members find themselves similarly caught in the crosshairs of following or denying Jesus?

It seems clear to me that the answer to all these questions is “yes!” And the significance is this: the double trial narrative faithfully portrays the events that led to Jesus execution on a Roman cross. Jesus died because he was faithful to his message and mission of the Kingdom of God. That is why he calls us to “deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him”.

Going deeper into the text (Mark 14:53-15:1)

Brian Wren has written a hymn:

*“The voice of god goes out to all the world,
With power and justice he will rule his way.”*

In Scripture, the voice of God is an oft-repeated image. God says it and it will be done. The voice of God and the authority and power of God go hand in hand.

In the creation story God says, God speaks and it is done.

“And God said let there be light, and there was light.”

The psalmist writes, *“The voice of God breaks enormous trees, the voice of God heweth out flames, shakes wildernesses, strips forest bare.”*

It is worth exploring what Jesus’ experience of the voice of God was. A good starting point is Mark’s first record of Jesus hearing the voice of God. Jesus goes to the river Jordan and is baptised by John, and we are told a voice from heaven says,

“You are my own dear son, with whom I am well pleased/delighted!”

The voice of the Lord is powerful and full of majesty; we see that in the observation that heaven opens. Actually, it is more violent than that: Mark writes that Jesus saw the heavens torn apart. It’s clear that God willed it, the Lord is responsible for rendering the division between heaven and earth null and void. And the voice of the Lord speaks to Jesus.

Now I need you to take a leap of imagination and ask yourself about the voice of the Lord that Jesus heard. What quality did it have?

Did the Lord speak with a voice of majesty and power, booming? I suspect that our psalmist would think that the voice was powerful terrifying, a voice strict, militarily clipped, a voice that expects to be heard and listened to and obeyed. Shock and awe

Or did the Lord speak with a gentleness and lightness that maybe the psalmist would find surprising>

We don’t know if Jesus was overcome with the Father’s power and majesty, or heard in it familial love and a gentleness, but we do know that Jesus’ experience of hearing the voice of God was not one of awe and fear, but one of hearing encouragement and praise. Of hearing Gods delight. For Jesus.

The voice of God not only breaks the cedars but lifts the heart.

The voice of God not only heweth flame but soothes the soul.

The voice of God shakes the desert but also rocks our assumptions.

Whether shouted or whispered, sighed or giggled, the voice of God telling Jesus that he was loved, that he was beloved, did become for Jesus a creative force. The voice of God sustained him in his ministry, in the easy and hard times.

In our text from Mark we see a confrontation between Jesus and the Sanhedrin, but it's a confrontation about two different ways of hearing the voice of God.

The psalmist believed that the voice of the lord strips forests bare of leaf and bark, the Romans and the Jerusalem elite believed you stripped people bare with taxes and subjugation. But the voice of God nurtured Jesus to strip bare this injustice.

The psalmist wrote that the voice of the Lord heweth flame; the Romans and the Jerusalem elite also believed in acts of power so brutal that they cowed any resistance and any hope of change. But the voice of God nurtured Jesus to treat people with utmost soul enriching respect.

The voice of God shakes the desert; the Romans cowed people but the voice of God nurtured in Jesus the ability to bring hope and longing for a better world.

The voice of God that sighed to the beloved empowered Jesus to engage in a radical campaign to transform his world into heaven-on-earth. Knowing that he was the beloved Son, hearing the voice of God propelled Jesus, sustained Jesus, shaped Jesus in all that he did and said, in all that he didn't say and do. Jesus' experience of the voice God was different from the psalmist and propelled him to see power and strength in completely different ways. This different way inexorably led to the confrontation that reached its conclusion in front of the Sanhedrin, when finally Caiaphas and Jesus, after years of manoeuvrings, end up in the same room. It was

never going to be a fair exchange of voices.

They heard the voice of God differently.

Ultimately Caiaphas' worldview was so entwined with empire that the voice of God he heard was nigh near inseparable to the Roman voice of power and might.

Jesus focussed not on Empire but on the forgotten of his world and spoke in tones of gentleness and love.

Whether what Jesus said in front of Caiaphas was blasphemy is up for debate, and why Jesus decided, after enduring so much, to finally speak we will never know. But maybe it was the realisation that the voice of God was saying something different to him.

Question: What words describe the God you hear?

Question: How life-changing is it to be thought of as beloved of God?

All age worship ideas (Mark 15:53-15:1)

One of the keys to good all age worship is to keep it simple and relatively short.

Ideally aim for a service of 45-50 minutes. That's not to say a service can't be longer but if you are thinking of 1hr30+ think carefully about your use of space and above all else be creative, take risks and have fun – partying is integral to the kingdom but we'll leave that for a year on Luke...

Reflections - Jesus finally reveals himself. So far he has kept his identity a loose secret but now as he stands before the highest council in Jerusalem he does not hold back. The leaders are incensed and condemn him for blasphemy. This in many ways was Jesus last invitation – many of the Sanhedrin would have held to the hope of the coming Messiah but none here claim to see this fulfilled in Jesus.

In revealing himself Jesus secures his fate and is now to be handed over to the

Romans. As he is led out he is mocked with 'Prophecy'.

The irony of the mockery was that close at hand another story unfolded – Peter's denial. The prophecy of Jesus that Peter would deny him 3 times is fulfilled – what the guards mocked him for was happening right by them and they didn't even see it. The author of Mark is stating very clearly that if prophecy is the test of true identity then Jesus passed with flying colours. The one they have condemned to death was the hope of Israel, and the world.

This a dark passage but even here there is the glimpse of hope as Jesus points to the long term vision of God's purpose and his own identity. Death will not end what God has started in Jesus.

Life will find a way in the shock of the empty tomb and Peter will be offered a way back to fulfill the call on his own life as the foundation stone of the new movement.

There is a temptation to look at this and other similar passages and immediately consider what lies over the horizon but we shouldn't rush on.

There is a challenge to consider the Jesus we follow. Do we believe the claims he makes of himself? Does he fulfill our vision and/or understanding of Messiah/Christ or does he throw the definition out of the window? I have met many people whose faith has struggled because God did not do what they demanded of him or answer their prayers in the way they expected. We forget that Jesus and the mission of his kingdom is not shaped and moulded by our ideals but by the purposes of God who seeks to reconcile the whole world to himself. So many think that being a Christ-follower is ultimately about being a nice person, that somehow Jesus was this genteel, ineffective do-gooder who just went round being nice. They don't connect him with the challenge of Isaiah 58 and other prophets who cry out for true justice.

The cause isn't helped by the reality of the way in which we deny Jesus as much by the things we do not do or say than those we do. We remain silent, too nervous to

challenge injustice or hold unjust systems to account. My previous church advertised a forum event organized by Christians in Politics. Immediately there was an attack from a Christian who worshipped elsewhere saying that churches should not be engaged in or endorsing this kind of activity.

Peter will be given an opportunity to repent, to come home to God and embrace the way of the kingdom, and that same opportunity is offered to us.

Idea – at the original Mission and Discipleship Roadshows we did an activity where people were two people held the ends of a long rope and potentially conflicting statements were read out. People were invited to stand along the rope according to which statement they felt was closer to their understanding of Jesus...

e.g. (use the Gospels to create your own statements):

Jesus was a friendly person v. Jesus was an argumentative person

Jesus engaged in politics v. Jesus avoided political conversations

Jesus thought money was a good thing v. Jesus thought money was evil

Jesus put religious people first v. Jesus prioritized the poor and marginalized

This is a good exercise for all ages because it encourages people to reflect on how close the Jesus they have been following matches up to the Jesus of the Gospels. It helps young people to get a rounded understanding of who Jesus was and the kind of discipleship process he was forming to prepare his friends for when he would be gone.

Prayer – Using *Rejoice & Sing* 654 (We turn to you O God of every nation), invite people into 5 groups and give each group a verse of the hymn as the basis of a prayer for the issues that concern. Give 5-10 minutes for this as necessary then when complete invite 2 from each group to read first the appointed verse then the prayer the group has composed.

You could end with singing the hymn through if appropriate.

Liturgies and hymns (Mark 14:53-15:1)

This is where you can find hymn suggestions and liturgies for use with this week's text.

Affirmation of Faith : You are the Messiah

We believe in the God of Good Friday,
who sent us Jesus of Nazareth
to be wounded for our transgressions
and bruised for our iniquities.

While some seek more knowledge,
and others look for signs and omens,
we place our trust in Christ crucified.

We believe that those who hoard their life will lose it,
yet those who lose life for Christ's sake will find it.

We believe that Christ crucified is the power of God
and the saving wisdom of God.

We believe this foolishness of God is wiser than earthly knowledge,
and the weakness of God is stronger than human arrogance.

This we dare to believe because we have seen the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ.

— written by Bruce Prewer, and posted on [Bruce Prewer's Homepage](#). Visit his website for many other excellent worship resources.

Litany: Son of God, Son of Man

He was the Son of God.

He was the Son of Man.

He came down from heaven.

He was born in a stable.

Kings came to his cradle.

His first home was a cave.

He was born to be a king.

He was a child of Mary.

He was the greatest among rulers.

He was the least among servants.

He was loved and honored.

He was despised and rejected.

He was gentle and loving.

He made many enemies.

He counselled perfection.

He was a friend of sinners.

He was a joyful companion.

He was a man of sorrows.

He said, "Rejoice."

He said, "Repent."

"Love God with all your heart."

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

"Don't be anxious."

"Count the cost."

"Deny yourself."

"Ask and receive."

In him was life.

He died on a cross.

He was a historic person.

He lives today.

He was Jesus of Nazareth.

He is Christ the Lord.

~ written by Kenneth I. Morse, copyright © 1979 Brethren Press. Posted on the **Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren** website. <http://rockhay.tripod.com/>

Prayer of Intercession

God of life, God of beginnings and endings,
today we pause to remember the power of death.

Today we tell the story of what happens
when someone angers those in power.

Today we tell a story of betrayal by a friend,
trial by empire, execution as a way of silencing the one who names injustice.

Today we tell a story that happened long ago in a land far away.

Today we tell a story that continues to happen today in places close at hand.

As we remember the story today help us to see its truth.

As we tell of Jesus' trial and execution,
remind us of those who are found legally guilty
for doing and saying the right things.

As we tell of the friends who are conspicuously absent from the cross,
remind us how easily we slip away
when the struggle for justice becomes dangerous or challenging.

As we look at the cross,
remind us of the power of empire in any age,
and remind us of our duty as people of faith to proclaim a different empire,
a different kingdom, a new way of living together.

God of life and death, beginnings and endings,
today we pause to remember the power of those in charge to run the world.

Today we remember the many people near and far who are broken by that power:
those who live in places where peace is just a word,

not a reality, not even a dream;
those who are pushed to the margins
because of their race, their gender, their bank balance,
their marital status, their orientation,
or any of the countless other ways we find to set people apart;
those who live with nothing so that others may live with abundance
those who choose to challenge the injustices in their world
and are crushed beneath the feet of those in charge
...time of silent prayer..

Hymn suggestion

4. PASSOVER PEOPLE

Rev. Dr John Campbell

tune: We plough the fields (R&S124)

1. A people packed and ready,
with sandals on their feet,
(prepared for liberation,
not knowing what they'll meet)
sit down and eat together
God's feast for slaves set free;
committing to a journey
whatever it may be.
**All who need releasing,
must feast with God today,
but, as we eat, keep sandaled feet,
to travel on God's way!**
2. Disciples with their Teacher
the night He was betrayed;
a covenant renewal
in bread and wine displayed.

Though they desert and fail Him
and think that all is lost;
Christ sets them free to journey
for He has paid the cost.

3. A Christian congregation,
a church with table spread,
we come to meet with Jesus
and at His feast be fed.
We come to be replenished,
moved on, revived, made new
to follow where God leads us
each day, our whole life through.