

Reflection on the Gospel-Passion (Palm) Sunday B
(Mark 11:1-10; Mark 14:1-15:47)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Mark 11:1-10

Mark's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is more restrained and less victorious in tone than the other gospel accounts. In keeping with Mark's gospel as a whole, it forms part of the relentless journey of Jesus, the suffering Messiah, towards Jerusalem the place of his death. The longed-for liberation will come about in Jerusalem, through powerlessness, suffering and death rather than through the exercise of might and power.

Mark 14:1-15:47

The gospel account of the suffering and death of Jesus opens with the story of an insightful but unnamed woman who pours out healing ointment on the head of Jesus. We might reflect on the Eucharistic character of her actions of breaking and pouring and of Jesus' assurance that what she has done will be told in memory of her. She did "what she could". The story of her support for Jesus is sandwiched between two stories of opposition: an assassination plot on the part of the religious authorities, and the foreshadowing of Jesus' betrayal at the hands of a close follower. Status does not guarantee goodness or insight.

As the story unfolds, we hear that Jesus' closest followers fall asleep when he most needs them, despite his earlier instruction to "stay awake". Worse than that, they betray, deny, and abandon him. Some Galilean women remain faithful. They have followed him and looked after him on the long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. They become witnesses to his death and burial. These women will also discover the empty tomb and take the message of the resurrection to the male disciples. A foreign passer-by, Simon, whose sons are known to the Markan community, shoulders part of the burden. An ordinary Roman soldier realises and proclaims that Jesus is of God.

The story has come full circle: the first verse of the gospel announced the beginning of the good news of Jesus, the Christ and the Son of God. Now the reader understands what it means to make such a proclamation. The final chapter is to be celebrated next weekend. The mystery is to be lived every day of every week. As we enter into the holiest week of the liturgical year, we might consider our call to bring the power of Christ's redeeming love to those who suffer crucifixion in our own times: the more-than-human Earth community that suffers the effects of climate change; the detainees on Manus Island and Nauru; the captives of Boko Haram and of the so-called Islamic State.

For some stories of hope in the face of despair, you may like to visit the Mercy Works website (mercyworks.org.au). It is all too easy to deny, betray, and abandon the suffering other. Like the woman who poured out the healing ointment on the head of Jesus, we too must do what we can.