

The background is a soft watercolor illustration of a street scene with buildings and a large egg containing three crosses. The text is overlaid on this scene.

*The
Week
that changed
the world*

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Nana Ellen's stories 'n stuff

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Prologue



...How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the

celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth. *Ephesians 1:3-10 The Message*

From the night I cried out to God for HELP, thirty plus years ago, the Holy Spirit has continually guided me in gaining an understanding of God's Word. And as I continue to grow in understanding He moves me into areas where I can grasp higher and higher levels of meaning in what I read. A simple trust in the Word of God paves the way for obedience and confidence in life.

This little study, aimed at personalizing the seven days of Holy Week, is offered as a stepping stone toward understanding of how the world was forever changed in seven short days!

The Week That Changed The World

Picture it. The place — Jerusalem. The time — close to the turn of the millennium. The cultural and political climate is chaotic. The collapse of the world's greatest social power is eminent.

Corruption and greed are everywhere. Various religious sects are in a power struggle for supremacy and the ripple effects are shaking the very foundations of the population's belief systems.

Into this scene comes a force such as the world has never known. A single man riding on a donkey, destined to change the course of human history, enters the stage.



***Six days before the Passover,
Jesus came to Bethany,
where Laz'arus was, whom
Jesus had raised from the
dead. ...***

John 12:1

Monday

Business As Usual

Scripture tells us when he came into town, the first place he went was the Temple; a place he had visited often and knew well.

(Matthew 21:12-17)

Luke says at the age of twelve he spent several days there, listening to and asking questions of the teachers. *(Luke 2:41-52)* Even as a boy, Jesus felt the pull of God's call on his life, telling his panic stricken mother, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

I can only assume his visits to the temple were frequent during the silent years as he grew and matured to manhood; after all his

family went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. The boy Jesus would have gone along, and presumably spent a great deal more time listening to the teachers, sitting at their feet and learning the fine points of the law.

We have other recorded trips to the temple in Jerusalem during the three years Jesus worked and taught throughout the region known to us today as the Holy Land. But on this night, the night of his Triumphal Entry, he went straight to the Temple, looked around at everything and then went out to Bethany with the twelve. (*Mark 11:11*)

No one can presume to know the mind of Christ, but I think he must have experienced the nostalgia any man might feel when looking at a beloved place remembered from childhood, mixed with the anguish brought about by twenty years of deterioration and not-for-the-better change. I've felt it – probably you have too. What 'they' say is true. "You can't go home again." And so Jesus went straight to his Father's house, looked around at everything, then took his closest followers and went out to Bethany - probably to the home of his dear friend Lazarus, where Mary and Martha would have prepared a meal and attended to their needs, as was often the case when they were in the area.

On the following day (Monday by traditional calculations), as they were coming from Bethany he was hungry, and seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf he went to see if he could find anything on it. (*Mark 11:12-14, 20-25*) Now right here is where we begin to see a glimmer of what's going on in his soul!

When he came to the tree he found "nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs." And he cursed the fig tree! And his disciples heard it!

Think about it...his Father's house, where he was taught as a boy, has gone from a place of worship and prayer, to a street market filled with money changers and livestock dealers. The city he loves is in chaos...think New Orleans at Mardi Gras... and his closest friends and brothers don't have a clue why he's really here. Everything around him is business as usual, and business as usual is taking everyone further away from God's plan for their lives by the second. And, consider this—Jesus knows, KNOWS—in less

than 72 hours he is going to carry the sins, sickness, disease, heartbreak, worry...everything...for each and everyone of them before God in order to set them free forever. He knows he must act as the one and only sacrificial Lamb acceptable to God for everyone crowding the streets, everyone selling livestock and changing money in the Temple courtyard, every Pharisee, every Sadducee, every Roman soldier, every man, woman and child he sees. And he sees thousands.

But there are more....millions and millions more. There's you, and me, and all our friends and family members. There's every human being on planet earth - then and NOW and those to come. Jesus knows he is going to be accused, mocked, spit on, beaten, crucified...all for them. These clueless people, who think they know and understand him...but truly do not get it. At all.

Writing this, I am slammed hard up against the fact that I probably don't really get it either!

Do you?

I've been a follower of Christ for the past thirty plus years. I've experienced miraculous things he has done. We have been healed, set free, guarded, protected, provided for and loved - every day of every year. I should get it!!!

I thought I got it!

But did I? Really?

I wonder if Jesus righteous anger was only over the condition of his Father's house; only because of the robbers and thieves whose disrespect was totally apparent on that Monday morning so long ago. Or was some of his justifiable anger because he knew that two millennium later, we would still be taking his sacrifice for granted?

The sermon we heard on Palm Sunday told us Jesus fury when he entered the Temple courtyard that morning turned him into 'a one-man riot' because of their lukewarm attitude toward the things of God. The pastor said, "The un-Godly behavior of the people revealed a side of Jesus that few had ever seen." He also said, "There are people in religious positions today who could make him just as angry."

Am I one of those?

Are you?

As I said -- I've been a follower of Jesus Christ for the past thirty plus years. That's much longer than some of your are old. But this Monday morning, I've seen something in the Scriptures I've never seen before. After Jesus tore, like a whirlwind, through the religious community selling their wares in the courtyard of the Church, demanding they acknowledge the true meaning of the purpose of the church..."It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have turned it into a den of robbers.'"...the blind and the lame, the weak and the sick, the broken and bruised (those with needs and issues in today's vernacular) came to him there - in the church yard - and he healed them all. (*Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48*)

Now, for the first time, I'm thinking Jesus was about 'business as usual' on that last Monday morning of his human life on earth, too. And since we are told he is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (*Hebrews 13:8*) we can expect him to be furious about the excesses and stupidities in the religious community, just as many of us have been. But I think we can also expect him to clean out the church courtyard, send the pretenders running, and gather those with needs and issues, sickness and disease, the blind and the lame, the weak and broken to himself and heal them. All!

Here's something else I noticed....Jesus didn't ask the weak and broken in the crowd to "get it together' before he healed them. He didn't tell them they "should" do anything to make themselves worthy of his attention. He just gave them what they needed. That got their attention.... Then they followed him.

I'm thinking, in today's church courtyards there are entirely too many "shoulds" - too many rules and regulations telling us what is going to be required before Jesus can do anything to help us out.

That's not the way it works! Not with Jesus.

The real reason he ran the livestock dealers and money-changers out of the Temple courtyard was to clear the way for those in need to approach his Father unencumbered by the religious stupidity of the day.

Read the gospels with this idea in mind: Jesus was followed by huge crowds as he moved about in Judea and Palestine for almost three years. Nowhere do we see him saying, “You should do this, or do that, before I can help you out.”

They were blind; they came to him and went away with their sight. They were deaf, came to him and went away hearing. They came to him hungry, and he fed them. They came to him broken in spirit, possessed by demons; chronically ill...he healed them all! And he told them, “follow me.”

Now get this...Jesus knew where he was going! He knew that the great multitudes that followed him would be going up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover just as he and his disciples would. He knew what they were going to see, and hear. He knew he was ordained to die a horrific death on a Roman cross. And he knew his followers were going to watch it happen. Still he said, “Follow me.” Because he knew...at the end of the week that was to change the world, they could follow him eternally!

So...on that Monday before Passover, it was ‘business as usual’.

IT still IS.



Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

Mark 11:23

Tuesday

And Finally – In Closing

In the morning... I'm going to take the liberty of assuming it was Tuesday morning, since Luke and Mark both record these events as taking place on the day after Jesus cleared the Temple...

In the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its root. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Master, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered."

As they continued on toward the city Jesus answered them.

"Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.'" (*Mark 11:20-24*) "But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in Heaven will forgive you your sins also." (*Mark 11:25 LB*)

Within a short time they were back in Jerusalem where the Jewish leaders swarmed around Jesus demanding to know by what authority he had driven the merchants out of their Temple.

To me it seems unlikely that the Lord spoke to the barren fig tree out of anger or frustration. But every commentary I picked up offered a slightly different "reason" why he would do such a thing. While I agree his action probably had a much deeper meaning, and that the Lord did nothing without good reason. Christ never once gave an interpretation of what he did. He did not leave us believing that any part of it needed interpretation. His application of what is written about certain events was sufficient as to their meaning.

I wonder if his disciples caught the significance of the timing?

Have faith in God! Forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against. Don't let what you are about to see and hear rob you of your faith and God's forgiveness. I wonder how many times, as we walk through the hard places in our lives Jesus would give us the same advise? "Believe. Believe that what you have prayed for and trusted God for will come to pass. Don't allow the bruises on your soul tempt you to carry a grudge. Things are not as they appear. Have faith."

The Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees and the Sadducees dogged his steps all day Tuesday, trying to catch him in some infraction that would allow them to condemn him. They questioned him about his faith, about his choice of friends, about his political point of view. Everything! Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners? Should we pay our taxes? Do you pay your taxes? What is your position on marriage? What commandment is first of all?

Throughout the day crowds gathered around him as they had done for months. He taught them in parables, knowing they would hear, but not understand his words; knowing that by Tuesday of next week they would remember his words and finally they would understand. He was the bridegroom of the marriage feast. He was the son killed by the wicked tenants. He was the willing son sent to work in his Father's vineyard. *(Matthew 21:28 - 22:14, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-18)*

He was the love of God, come to earth to atone for the wickedness of man.

Distilled down to a single sentence, Jesus' message to the crowds on Tuesday was "Whatever you do, don't miss heaven, and make sure you have something to show for the time you spend on earth." Use your talents. Don't be a fruitless fig tree. And, perhaps most importantly, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.

And, as is so often the case when there is a move of God in the making, the religious leaders never backed off. They pushed and pushed and pushed; working to discredit him and cast doubt on his teaching. Try as they might, they couldn't trap him into saying anything incriminating. His answers caught them off guard and left them speechless.

Finally, toward the end of the day he'd had enough, and in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, "Beware of these experts in religion, for they love to parade in dignified robes and to be bowed to by the people as they walk along the street. And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and at religious festivals. But even while they are praying long prayers with great outward piety, they are planting schemes to cheat widows out of their property. Therefore God's heaviest sentence awaits these men. *Luke 20:46-47 LB*

The Message Bible...puts it like this....

"Watch out for these religious scholars. They love to walk around in academic gowns, preen in the radiance of public flattery, bask in prominent positions, sit at the head table at every church function. And all the time they are exploiting the weak and the helpless. The longer their prayers, the worse they get. But they'll pay for it in the end."

Phillips translations says.... "These men are only heading for deeper damnation."

I think Jesus spent his final Tuesday on earth working to mop up the mess made by religion; working to bring healing and unity to a people oppressed not only by the Roman government of the day but also by the church leaders, elders, deacons, bishops, etc, etc., etc. I think his intention was to give these simple people - the farmers, the fishermen, the vintners

and craftsmen - who followed him hope. He knew they were going to be tested dramatically within the coming few days. He knew some would falter and some would fall. He knew all would question; question him, question God, question their faith and their love and even their very reasons for living.

John, the beloved disciple tells us, “And Jesus cried out and said, “He who believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who receives me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.” *(John 12:44-50)*

My prayer for each of us - you, me, those we love - is that we will see and hear, and understand this final teaching of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Religion does not save.

Jesus saves!

His entire life, his death and his resurrection was for the single and sole purpose of saving us! His purpose was saving us from the world that is going to hell at an ever increasing pace, saving us from ourselves and our grudges, unforgiveness and folly, saving us and setting us free to be his followers, both now and in eternity. Remember, he is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is the light sent so we do not have to remain in darkness.

In Jesus' darkest hour, he gave me light, and hope; peace and joy unspeakable.

No wonder the world offers our young people “spring break”
An orgy rather than Easter.

Oh that we could impress upon these simple little ones who
follow us the healing and peace available to them through the
sacrificial Lamb of God. If only we could give them eyes to see
the enormity of the week that changed the world.



And as they were at table eating, Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.”

Mark 14:18

Wednesday

Betrayal

What a week! After deciding to study Biblical accounts of the final week in Christ's life on earth for myself - I've got to tell you - my understanding is being re-shaped. And I've barely scratched the surface!

In Western Christianity, the Wednesday before Easter is sometimes known as “Spy Wednesday” indicating it is the day Judas Iscariot first conspired with the Sanhedrin to betray Jesus for thirty silver coins. *Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-12, Luke 22:3-6.*

The Sanhedrin was made up of all the Jewish religious leaders — the chief priests and the elders. It was the supreme court of the nation of Israel which heard appeals from lower courts and tried cases of greater importance than the lower courts. It consisted of 71 members headed by a president, vice-president and a sage or referee whose duty was to put into proper shape the subjects for discussion. The vice-president led and controlled the discussions and the president represented the nation before the Romans.

So on Wednesday these religious leaders gathered together in the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest. During their meeting they decided to kill Jesus. Before Passover if possible. But, because they were afraid of a riot among His followers they said, "Not on the feast day."

In the meantime, Jesus was in Bethany, at the house of Simon, the leper. During the meal Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, no doubt prompted by the Spirit, poured a quantity of very expensive ointment made of spikenard over his hair and beard. Some of the disciples were indignant about this, calling it wasteful, since the oil could have been sold to support the poor. But Jesus told them, "Leave her alone. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has prepared me for my burial." *Matthew 26:6-13*

Judas, the one scripture tells us Christ knew would betray Him even before he was chosen as a disciple, left the others and went to the Sanhedrin. He offered them his support in exchange for money. From that moment on Judas was looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

For years I have complained about the numerous betrayals in my life, once telling a friend I trusted and loved "You betrayed me!"

Her response, "I know you feel betrayed, but it was the only thing I could do."

To which I replied, "Oh, that makes it alright then! (sarcasm) Everyone I've ever loved, except Dick, has eventually betrayed me. There's no reason to think you would be different!"

Betrayal!!! Small dis-loyalties that can be interpreted as unfaithfulness, treachery, infidelity, and ultimately betrayals. There are small betrayals, huge betrayals, deliberate betrayals, and unintentional betrayals! Only someone you love and trust can betray you. Today I understand this! Strangers cannot betray you. Because they don't have the power to hurt you. Loyalty can only be expected from someone whose loyalty 'should' lie with you. We don't expect loyalty from strangers!

Spy Wednesday?

I don't think so. From today forward, in my simple understanding, this will be known as

Betrayal Wednesday

Jesus was betrayed! By those he loved and trusted. Repeatedly!

A small, although not insignificant, disloyalty among the disciples cropped up over Mary's loving gesture during supper on Wednesday.

Imagine it if you can... They are all gathered at the home of Simon, the leper. Jesus being who Jesus is, makes it likely their host indeed had leprosy when he met Christ, but was healed. So Simon became a follower and benefactor of the ministry. Some scholars think this may be Simon the Pharisee who Dr. Luke wrote of in *Luke 7:36-50*. (possibly Shimon Ben Gamliel, a sage and leader among the Jewish people and a direct descendant of King David). But in any case, during the meal, Mary of Bethany approached Jesus carrying a tiny marble flask of perfumed oil, and in keeping with the traditions of the time, broke the seal and poured the oil over his hair and beard. Now understand—this was no small thing. It was a great act of love. Jesus saw it for what it was, and said she would be remembered forever, whenever the gospel was preached.

For several reasons the people in the ancient world devoted great attention to the use of fragrances, perfumes and anointing oils. Perfumed oils were used for religious purposes, in funeral rites, for cosmetics, as aphrodisiacs, and prior to the invention of soap and shampoo, oils were used to anoint the scalp to prevent head lice. It was customary to offer guests water to clean the dust from their feet and oil to rub on their faces as protection against damage from the scorching Middle Eastern sun. The spices and fragrances used for these oils were not indigenous to the region of the Holy Land. They had to be imported from Arabia, Persia (modern day Iran), India and elsewhere, making them extravagantly expensive, and highly valued.

Apparently Jesus disciples were more concerned over the cost of the perfume than their leaders impending death. They became furious. "That's criminal! A sheer waste! This perfume could have been sold for well over a years wages and handed over to the poor." They swelled up in anger, nearly bursting with indignation over her action. *Mark 14:3-18 The Message**

Jesus patiently explained the significance of Mary's act. And I think I can see a mild rebuke for their disloyalty in his words. I would have probably said, "what part of 'I am going to die! don't you get?'" *Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, John 12:1-8*

"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." As always, he practiced what he preached even in the face of such disloyalty; such betrayal.

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, one of his hand-picked disciples, went to the Jewish high priests and offered to betray him!

These religious leaders, who had been scheming for months to find a way to get rid of Jesus, couldn't believe their ears. Here was one of his own men, offering him up for a few coins! Reading the words of Judas Iscariot, "What will you give me if I deliver him to you?" makes me angry and sick at heart. Yet, it was the only thing he could do. Like my long-ago-friend he had to do what he had to do in order for God's plan to succeed.

It was a huge betrayal! It was a huge betrayal with eternal implications! *Matthew 26:14-16* And, it meant the end of the road for the traitor! Judas, that infamous disciple, whose kiss of death will forever sound through the annals of history, hanged himself, but not before trying desperately to recant what he had done. *Matthew 27:3-10, Acts 1:16-20*

I found copious footnotes speculating about Judas during my study. There are scholarly theories on who he was (not a Galilean, like the other disciples), why he was chosen last of the Twelve, whether there was always some alienation between him and the other eleven...and so on and so on.

I think Luke probably hit the nail on the head when he wrote, "Then satan entered into the mind of Judas Iscariot...." *Luke 22:1-6, Phillips* Please note, that is satan; the big gun in hell. Not one of his lieutenants, or corporals; not a prince of power or the governor of a principality, not a demon or an imp out of the fire...the CEO himself. I think probably Jesus understood, when he recruited Judas, exactly how susceptible the man would be to the suggestions of the enemy. It looks to me like there were telltale signs all along. Judas was greedy, pilfering

coins out of the money box. He was full of pride, had a sanctimonious attitude and showed little or no respect for his teacher. In short, Judas was a rebel!

Know anybody like that? I could take a side path here and write about the pitfalls of rebellion for a day or two, but this isn't the time. I'll just suffice it to say, rebellion, in God's estimation, ranks right up there with witchcraft. *1 Samuel 15:23* And anytime a follower of Christ gets off into rebellion they open the door to their mind and invite the powers and principalities of hell to walk in and throw a party. The outcome is, always, disastrous.

So...Judas snuck off to find the Jewish executive board, betrayed his boss for pocket change and then began looking for an opportunity to hand him over to them when no crowd was present to object.

Now get this... Judas went back, maybe even back to the dinner at Simon's place, to keep company with Jesus and the others. We know he was still with them on Thursday, as they ate the Passover meal in the upper room. Talk about giving the enemy party space in your mind!

I've known for years Christ's followers are dogged by the enemy's troops. We all have opportunities, every single day to chose between what is faithful and unfaithful; what is loyal and disloyal, what is rebellious and what is obedient. Peters says the enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some unsuspecting Christian to devour!

What I'm not sure I clearly understood before is the significance of my choices.

Jesus loved and healed and blessed his followers. Jesus loves and heals and blesses me.

Mary gave him an extravagant expression of her love, an act those around her saw as wicked indulgence. Jesus saw it for what it was, an act of love.

I wonder. When I withhold my best expression of pure love for him... does that put me in the same boat with the ones who complained, swelled up with anger and nearly burst with

indignation? Does that make me disloyal to the one who gave me a beautiful new life out of the devastation of my past?

I wonder. When we are sick, but doubt his willingness to heal us until we 'get it together' or make amends for our mistakes, is that betrayal? When we stubbornly refuse to accept his sacrifice on our behalf is that betrayal?

If, after knowing what he knew, seeing what he'd seen, hearing what he'd heard, Judas could open up his mind to the forces of hell and do what he did...?

Yes...betrayal Wednesday about covers it.

It was one day, in the week that changed the world, but it is a day I won't soon forget. Because it has given me a crystal clear picture of what betrayal is really all about. And with God's help, I will forever be more aware that my actions and choices can betray Christ's love for me in small ways and huge ways; in deliberate ways and in unintentional ways. I choose not to betray him. I choose instead to spend my resources in acts of love. With His help, I can.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!



But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5

Thursday

All For Love

Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. *John 13:1*

The time was the Jewish feast of Passover, but the Hebrew calendar does not correspond with the Gregorian dates we are accustomed to. I was interested in the comparison, and so I Googled 'Jewish calendar' - getting 3,100,000 results! I found that the Gregorian calendar we now adhere to is an adaptation of the Roman or Julian calendar, established by Julius Caesar in 46 BC. Out of all the information I read, this much seems important at the moment—the Hebrew calendar begins at Passover! “The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 'This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb...'” *Exodus 12:1 28*

The Jewish people have celebrated the Passover for thousand of years. Historians place the exodus from Egypt somewhere between 1445 B.C. and 1260 B.C. Either way, thousands of years ago. Yet even today, most of the Jewish community still awaits the arrival of Messiah (the incarnation of God's Passover Lamb)!

Someday I may take the time to work out the differences and similarities in the various dating systems, but not today. There isn't time. It's not important!

Christ was working on God's timetable. And God's timetable said...it is time!

The feast of Unleavened Bread was to begin within hours. Chaos continued throughout the city. The religious leaders rested comfortably in the assurance they had purchased His capture and could proceed with their plans to kill this "lunatic prophet" who was disrupting their religious traditions and making them so terribly uncomfortable. These learned and wise men, teachers of the law, priests and leaders, had no idea they were simply following along on God's timetable. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, "None of the rulers of this age understood...for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory." *1 Corinthians 2:8*

The Apostle Matthew, also called Levi, a former tax-gatherer, writes briefly, and with what seems to be the analytical mind of an accountant, of the 'last supper'. Apparently the thing that stood out during that evening for him was the Lord's announcement that one of them was a traitor. He says, "and they (not I - they) were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, 'Is it I, Lord?'" Then this former financier gives his version of Christ's amazing statements: "This is my body. This is my blood..." *Matthew 26:17-35*

I wonder as I read Matthew the tax-gatherer's rather cold, factual account of this great miracle - did he get it? As a Jewish author, writing for Jewish readers, and writing some 30 or 40 years after the death of Christ...I'd guess, not really. Not totally.

I found a similar account of Thursday night in the gospel of Mark. John Mark, who was not one of the Twelve, but traveled with Paul during the first missionary journey writes with the authority of an eyewitness. Many scholars believe he was simply recording the teachings of Simon Peter, gathered first-hand over time and as they traveled together to Rome, years after the resurrection. *Acts 12:12-13 & 1 Peter 5:13.*

I personally wonder if Mark wrote his account of the ‘last supper’ based on other historical documents? Maybe. Right up to the point where Jesus foretold Peter’s reaction to the events to come, that is. At that point the narrative becomes personal! In my imagination I think I can hear the profound regret over Peter’s denial and betrayal of his Lord in the writing. Even transcribing the story, Mark portrayed the old man’s grief as he spoke of it. *Mark 14:12-73*

Again, the question comes to my mind. Did he get it? Did this writer understand the enormous significance of Jesus ratification of a “new Covenant”? Paul certainly did, but then Paul had a face to face with Jesus, after the resurrection. That would tend to open anyone’s eyes! *Acts 9:1-31*

Luke’s gospel contains an equally straightforward record of Thursday night; the last supper. The body - broken for them. The blood - poured out for a new covenant. Luke, beloved physician, was writing an orderly history of the life of Christ and the origin of the church for someone named Theophilus (*Acts 1:1*) possibly a non-Christian official, but definitely a person of high position and wealth.

Did Luke get it? Hard to say. But with his second book covering the arrival of the comforter and counselor, the Holy Spirit, I’m thinking he understood better than the average historian.

John? Now John got it! He speaks of ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’. He carefully and lovingly records the words of his Lord on that final night with an insight only Love could inspire. He writes of Jesus troubled spirit. He writes of their teacher and Lord performing the very intimate act that was to bind them to him forever in love - the washing of their feet. John writes of the promises Jesus made to them as he reassured them concerning tomorrow.

I believe it is here, in the prayers for his disciples and for his church - “for those who believe in me through your word” - that we find the deepest meaning of the Lord’s last supper. He said, “I pray that they may all be one; even as you and I, Father, are one. That they may be in us, so that the world may

believe that you sent me. I gave them your glory Father. I am in them. (this is my blood, drink all of it). I made known to them your name Father. and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”
John 17:20-36

Then Jesus went out across the Kidron valley, to a garden where he had been spending his nights in prayer. *Luke 21:37*

We are told, while his faithful followers slept, he prayed that amazing prayer every true believer aspires to “nevertheless... not my will, but yours, be done.”

Judas knew about this favorite place, too. It was here that Jesus told a band of Roman soldiers and Jewish officials with lanterns and torches and weapons, “I am He.” In the original language, simply "I AM."

Now get this. It's important! When He spoke those words the whole lot of them, priests, soldiers, followers, and hangers-on, “drew back and fell to the ground.”

Peter, brave, rambunctious Peter, drew his sword and lopped off the the right ear of the high priest's slave.

I wonder if Christ, always patient and understanding, stopped the whole process long enough to put the ear back in place? I think it would have been just like him to do that.

Luke says he did! *Luke 22:51*

Matthew, he was there remember, with his cool analytical memory, records Jesus saying, “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled?” *Matthew 26:47-56*

Do what you came to do.

And they did!

Arrested.

Accused.

Hauled before the Jewish High Priest.

Spat on. Struck in the face. Denied by one of his best friends - not once, but three times. And thrown into a rat infested prison cell to await the day that was to change the world.

And all for love!



He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

Isaiah 53:7

Friday

Good And Black

Christian tradition says Christ spent Friday on a Roman cross, juxtaposed between two thieves, completing God's plan for reconciling his fallen creation (man) to himself.

Hollywood and the History Channel take great pleasure in depicting the horror of the crucifixion of Christ. With the special effects possible in today's world of technology it's not difficult to produce the blood soaked images. And you can see them all. At any time. Right in your living room!

During Holy week we watched video documentary after documentary. Some on Christian TV, some on the History Channel, and even one during the Good Friday communion service at church.

We watched as they drove the nails into his wrists. We watched as a replica of a Roman cat of nine-tails was graphically demonstrated flogging a "life-like" silicon dummy. We saw the shredded skin. We saw the crown of thorns. The producers seemed to be screaming, "Look! Look! Look, what was done to this man who claimed to be the Son of God!" He died an unspeakable death.

And, with the exception of the Christian films, that's where they left it.

Yes, crucifixion is a horrible way to die!

History tells us it was practiced for centuries as a form of public humiliation and torture. The Romans flogged their prisoners using no more than thirty-nine lashes. Thirty-nine lashes was the maximum number they determined a human being could endure and still live.

His crown of thorns was made using a plant with pliable stems that could be twisted into a circle. *Euphorbia Millii* bears thorns that are from one to two inches long, thorns sharp as nails and toxic. (Google it! any of it!) Yes the facts are available.

Jesus Christ was tortured, humiliated and killed by the religious leaders of the time. And, if you'd care to watch it happen in graphic, brutal detail, Hollywood can help you out.

I have a beloved friend, who resents religion and everything it stands for. To quote her, "I have read the Bible. I have discussed it with experts! I don't believe it. I believe that when I die I will get six feet of dirt in my face, and that will be the end of life. Besides, why would I want to spend an eternity rubbing shoulders with a bunch of people I can barely tolerate for a few hours now?"

I wonder if Hollywood and the History Channel enjoy slamming their bloody, violent, depictions of Christ's death down the throats of people like my friend? I wonder if they understand that by showing all the gore and leaving the story unfinished someone who believes what she does is even more put off by the whole thing?

Truthfully, I expect the goal of the main stream media is to discredit the Biblical account and leave anyone watching their productions with more questions than answers. That's probably because I tend to believe today's main stream media is dominated by Godless producers who only choose the topic for the gore. And the profit.

Okay...personal opinions aside....climbing down off my soapbox here.

The brutal death of Jesus Christ on a Roman cross gave rise to the centuries old title “Black Friday” - a title that would continued for centuries - a title used by ‘the church’ to commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus.

Only after the Bible was translated from Greek to English in about 1490 was the term “Good” Friday introduced into the culture. So....what’s good about the brutal and humiliating torture of another Roman prisoner? History records thousands were crucified for minor infractions of Roman rules. What makes this one better than another? What makes this death on a cross good? Non-Christians (like my atheistic friend) are still asking the 2000 year old question today.

To find to an answer it is necessary to skip over the morning of Good Friday, and look closely at the afternoon. *Matthew 27:45-50, Mark 15:33-41, Luke 23: 44-49, John 19:28-37*

Picture it, if you can...

Jesus has been hanging on the cross since about nine in the morning. He’s barely alive. Close to noon the sky begins to darken. By this time most of the crowd who followed as he made his way along the Via Dolorosa (the road of suffering) had dispersed. A few of his followers and a few Roman soldiers were still standing at the foot of the hill looking up at three crosses silhouetted against the roiling clouds... watching...waiting. The sky is getting darker and darker. Luke writes “the sun’s light failed.” This is more than just a few storm clouds folks! Matthew and Mark both speak of a “darkness over the whole land.” The light of the world went out!

God turned off the lights and all of creation was in darkness for the final three hours of Christ’s life. It had to be dark. And not only were the lights off in the created realm, the spiritual realm was in total darkness as well. God could not bear to look upon the this death ordained to heal and restore mankind to himself. Neither could he allow heaven or hell to look upon his death. This all man, all God, Son of God who cried out, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” understood in that moment, God (the Heavenly Father) had turned away, turned

off the lights, and for a moment in eternity, closed his eyes.

All of heaven and all of hell had been watching and waiting for Jesus to either save himself, thus proving once and for all his Godly parentage, or simply give up and die. Only the Father and the Son understood completely what was required to finish the work of the cross.

So...while his body, hardly recognizable as human any longer, hung on the cross, alone in the darkness, on that Friday afternoon, Jesus carried the sins, sickness, disease, and misery of mankind into the presence of God the Father. His spirit entered the Holy of Holies, and announced, "It is finished!"

God the Father opened his eyes, turned his face toward God the Son, and the lights came back on. At that exact moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Split forever was the dividing wall between God and mankind. From that exact moment forward, we - you and I - could walk boldly into God's presence and say, "I come before you in Jesus holy name, can you help me out here?"

Then Jesus, the man, cried out from the cross, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" and he breathed his last breath as a man.

Now when a Roman centurion, standing at the foot of the hill, saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, "Certainly this man was innocent! Truly this man was the Son of God!"

The lightening flashed across the sky, the earth shook and the rocks were split. Matthew, the tax gatherer (he was the disciple with the analytical mind, remember?) saw the tombs opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep coming out of them. Wonder why Hollywood missed the opportunity to portray that one with all their special effects lights and magic? Zombies have always been a Hollywood B movie favorite!

Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath, the Jews asked Pilate to break their legs and that the bodies be taken away. Those Jewish leaders wanted to make absolutely sure

Jesus was dead, and buried...that they were finished with him once and for all. If they only knew!

Afterward, a rich disciple of Christ's, Joseph of Arimathea, asked Pilate for permission to take away his body. At that point Pilate could have cared less. I can see him in my imagination waving them away, brushing them off with a bored gesture. "Take him. Get him out of my sight. What a day this has been....I'm going to retire to my place...eat, drink and be merry. I'm sick of all this drama!"

So they took the body of Jesus, prepared it for burial, probably wondering, "What next?" and placed it in the garden in Joseph's new tomb and closed it up, rolling a huge rock across the entrance.

Thinking this new movement they had been a part of was over and they would get up on Saturday to face another day of 'business as usual' without hope and without Him, they went to their homes thinking..."It's all over."

They thought it was the end for the followers of Christ.

It was only the beginning!



***The righteous man perishes,
and no one takes it to heart;
devout men are taken away,
and no one understands.***

Isaiah 57.1

Saturday

Popular World View

Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath) begins at nightfall on the day our calendar designates as Friday. But that's not really as simple as it sounds. The twilight period, from sunset ("*shkiah*") until three stars are visible in the sky ("*tzeit hakochavim*"), is an "iffy" time period, known as "*bein hashmashot*." Shabbat and all the holidays begin at sunset, the earliest possible definition of nightfall, and end when three stars appear in the sky the next evening, the latest definition of nightfall.

As you'll recall from reading the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry on earth the Sabbath is a time when NO work whatsoever may be done without invoking the wrath of the Pharisees.

There's not much information preserved in Biblical records concerning the hours and days Jesus' tomb was sealed.

We know from Luke's account that on the Sabbath the women who had come with him from Galilee "rested according to the commandments." *Luke 23:56*

And that tells me it's probably safe to assume the disciples also spent Shabbat as they customarily had, "according to the commandments." We can draw the conclusion from Resurrection Day accounts by Mark and John that they were staying together, consoling each other, weeping and mourning the loss of their teacher and friend; not to mention their hopes for a revolution that would overthrow the Roman government.

What I found most interesting in my study of that long ago Saturday was the actions of the religious leaders who had Jesus arrested and ultimately crucified. Apparently they weren't "resting according to the commandments." There are a few verses tucked away in the Gospel of Matthew that give me a pretty graphic picture of their actions.

"The next day, that is, the day after the day of Preparation for the Sabbath, the chief priests and the Pharisees assembled before Pilate and said, Sir, we have just remembered how that vagabond Imposter said while He was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore give an order to have the tomb made secure and safeguarded until the third day, for fear that His disciples will come and steal Him away and tell the people that He has risen from the dead, and the last deception and fraud will be worse than the first.

Pilate said to them, You have a guard of soldiers; take them and go, make it as secure as you can. So they went off and made the tomb secure by sealing the boulder, a guard of soldiers being with them and remaining to watch." *Matthew 27:62-66 Amplified Bible*

Thank God the grave couldn't hold Him. The guard of soldiers couldn't keep Him.

He wasn't there!!

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, quoting Psalm 68, "This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people."

(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the depths of the earth? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) *Ephesians 4:8-10 NIV*

In the Revelation John quotes Jesus, "Do not be afraid! I am the First and the Last, And the Ever-living One I am living in the eternity of the eternities. I died, but see, I am alive

forevermore; and I possess the keys of death and Hades (the realm of the dead).” *Revelation 1:17-18 Amplified Bible*

While Christ's followers wept and mourned, he descended to the realm of the dead and took the keys Satan stole from Adam in the garden. Jesus reclaimed EVERYTHING Satan took from man, including dominion over death, hell and the grave.

It would take the disciples a few days to recognize what the Lord had done while they were grieving, even though his teaching had been preparing them for months. Without the “power from on high,” the gift of God the Holy Spirit, their Comforter and Counselor, the disciples were still working in the natural, physical realm.

The enemy apparently figured it out more quickly. In the spiritual realm he was defeated, dethroned and de-fanged. But he wasn't completely stupid. And he knew who his strongest allies in the natural realm were – the religious leaders. So he paid them a little visit, similar to his visit with Eve in the garden and whispered a plan in their ears.

Matthew recorded the outcome of that little satanic visit...just four verses tucked in toward the end of The Gospel, after the Resurrection account and before the Great Commission. They're easy to overlook...most of the world has missed their significance for two thousand years.

“While the women went on their way, some of the soldiers guarding the tomb went back to the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. The chief priests met with the elders and made their plan; they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers and said, “You are to say that his disciples came during the night and stole his body while you were asleep. And if the Governor should hear of this, we will convince him that you are innocent, and you will have nothing to worry about.” The guards took the money and did what they were told to do. And so that is the report spread around by the Jews to this very day. *Matthew 28:11-15 (GNT)*

I have a precious Jewish friend who firmly believes this lie, despite every recorded eye-witness account refuting it. Her's is the popular world view of Jesus.

“He was a good man and a prophet.”

No!

Jesus IS the Son of God. Jesus is the First and the Last, and the Ever-living One. He is alive in the eternity of the eternities. He died, but see, He is alive forevermore; and HE holds the keys of death, hell and the grave.

Like the disciples...it is time to turn mourning into gladness.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

***Christianity rises or falls
on two words:
He Lives!***



Sunday

Remember His Words

On the first day of the week, Sunday – **Resurrection Sunday** – at early dawn while it was still mostly dark, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who had all come with Jesus from Galilee, went back to the tomb where his body had been laid on Friday evening. They took spices and ointments, presumably to finish the burial preparations. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?”

God would help them! We know from Matthew's Gospel the earth shook as an angle rolled back the huge stone.

“His (the angle's) appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.” *Matthew 28:3-4*

Men had placed that stone, even though it may have weighed between one and three tons. Men had sealed it in place, most likely with a cord attached both to the stone and to the tomb, with wax imprinted with the Roman seal anchoring both ends so that tampering could be detected. Men stood guard over the entrance to make certain Jesus' body remained in the tomb. But God sent an angle who came and rolled the stone away!

The women were probably as terrified by the angle and the earthquake as the guards had been...

“But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. **He is not here; for he has risen**, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the

dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you." . *Matthew 28:5-8*

And they went into the tomb, but they did not find the Lord's body.

“While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. **Remember** how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." And **they remembered his words**, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; **but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.** *Luke 24:4-11; Mark 16:1-11*

There it is!

The friends and followers of Jesus' did not believe them. He had worked side by side with these men for three years. He told them what to expect. “The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise.”

It was the third day. An angel of God told the women in their group, “He is not here. He has risen!” and they thought it was all a lie!

How many people do you know who think it is all an idle tale?

Do you?

What does Resurrection Sunday mean to us in 2012? Cute bunnies and chicks? Colorfully decorated eggs and chocolate rabbits? One of the two days in the calendar year we wouldn't dream of missing church?

I want to know what happened to these men who did not believe.

Mary Magdalene made a mad dash to tell Peter and John. “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have laid him.” *John 20:2*

Peter, always the first to jump right in no matter what the situation, followed by John, ran for the tomb. But John outran Peter and stooping to look inside, saw the linen burial cloths lying there, but he did not enter the tomb. *John 20:3-4*

Peter actually went inside the tomb. He saw the burial cloths.

I've heard teaching that says these strips of linen, stiff with over a hundred pounds of aloes, spices and ointments were still in the shape of a body; a cocoon rather than a pile of unwrapped rags. Possibly. I'm no Greek scholar, so if there are clues to this in the original text I wouldn't find them. I can believe it might be true. I wish I could prove it true, but I couldn't see it in my text.

What I did see was a brief note in the text...

“he (Peter) saw the cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.” *John 20:6-7*

If someone had stolen Jesus' body, the strips of linen and the burial cloth or napkin (a handkerchief used in swathing the head of a corpse) would have most likely been missing or at least strewn across the floor. But the napkin was neatly rolled up and laid aside, separate from the linen strips. There is no natural explanation for a folded “napkin” inside an empty, sealed and guarded tomb. This was super-natural. Jesus was alive when he exited the tomb and he rolled up the burial napkin and laid it apart from the rest so they would know...
HE IS ALIVE!

All four Gospels are clear in their records of Jesus arising bodily from the dead. They differ slightly in their accounts of the appearances of the risen Christ. But while the specific times may be somewhat murky, the fact remains; He appeared to Mary Magdalene, near the empty tomb, then to the eleven disciples in Galilee. There are eye-witness accounts of conversations with Thomas, Peter, James, John and two

travelers on the road to Emmaus. Sometime later He prepared breakfast for the fishermen, Peter and John.

Remember His words?

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Matthew 26:16-20

But some doubted!

Remember His Words?

“After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen.” *Mark 16:12-20*

But they did not believe...and He upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart.

I think every human being on the planet is accompanied by the signs of what they believe!

Remember His WORDS?

“While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. *Luke 24:36-51 NIV*

He has finished the work of the Father, sent the Holy Spirit as Comforter, Counselor and Friend, and now lives to make intercession for each of us.

He Lives!

Nothing more need be said.

Believe His Words!

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