

# **Jesus**

# **The Risen Prisoner I**

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**Jesuit Restorative Justice Initiative**

**Culver City, California**

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# Introduction

## What is the "Jesus the Risen Prisoner" Workbook?

Here is what Edward in prison wrote about his experience filling out one of the workbooks:

*"Every time I read a meditation and answer a question, I feel more at peace. The discipline to meditate every day makes me understand myself more and what brought me to prison.*

*Every day I go deep within my soul and search for the missing pieces of my life and try to put the puzzle together that has been my life...To go deep down to both the dark and sunny parts of my life, and explore my life, helps make me grow. When I write the answers to the questions I have found in the workbook, I find myself a little freer and lighter."*

## What should I do each day with the Workbook?

1. Read the Gospel and then the meditation slowly.
2. Sit ten minutes in silence reflecting on what struck you.
3. Write down the word or sentence that the Spirit moved you while meditating on it.
4. Then write the answer to the question that corresponds to the meditation.

## An example:

After reading one of the meditations from the workbook, and sitting ten minutes in silence, Edward wrote one sentence that struck him and then after answering the question:

## THE SENTENCE THAT STRUCK ME WAS:

"I looked up at Jesus as this soldier pulled out the lance."

DAY 1: *I remember the first time I saw someone hurt or dead. I remember how this felt. I remember..I remember..*

*"I remember as a kid my mother, my siblings and I would make our daily routine to the supermarket. On one particular night I remember walking by the alley in the neighborhood. Something caught my eye. I looked over and saw two men from a distance with their backs against the wall, sitting up with blood surrounding them.*

*I was shocked. As a kid I had seen movies where people were killed. I didn't know in those days how much my mom hid us from us that kind of trouble.*

*That night I did not say anything because at nine years old I was trying to comprehend what I had just seen. On our way back from Albertsons, I remember seeing the alley and a good part of the street closed. I wasn't stupid. Death was the case.*

*All of my life I have encountered some pretty disturbing scenes, but as I got older this became normal. When my best friend was killed, I knew that life was short. I have always had dreams of blood and chaos, but thanks to being faithful to my relationship with God, meditation and my daily routine of working with this workbook, I feel God has healed me.*

*I now dream of good things and my future as a doctor."*

## I COMMIT MYSELF TO FINISHING THIS WORKBOOK AND MAKING TIME FOR THESE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES EVERY DAY:

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Name

Date





# A meal of freedom

Luke 22:14-23

*“When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover\* with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, \* gave thanks, and said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you [that] from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you. The Betrayal Foretold. “And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me on the table; for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed.” And they began to debate among themselves who among them would do such a deed”*

*From the eyes of John*

As I walked up the stairs, it was as if I could hear the cries of our people, like slaves in Egypt crying out to God to be freed. Their oppression was great. They had suffered through much cruelty, but we had much to look forward to, because soon we would be celebrating the Passover meal.

The cries of the people combined with the cries of the memories of those in Egypt in my heart. I opened the door to the prepared room. I recalled the cries of many from the provinces working like slaves, who had to pay burdensome taxes. They were being stepped on by our religious leaders and the Romans. I heard the cries of so many locked up in the Roman prisons, crying out for freedom just like our people chained in slavery in Egypt.

This year their cries were especially loud, waiting for God to hear them.

I opened the door and saw everything ready for the meal. I pulled open the door, I heard one last cry from my cousin Ezekiel and I felt a pain shoot through me. He was eighteen and his crying out to God entered into me. He had been imprisoned by the Romans for subversive activity.

I knew he was innocent and that made it more painful listening to his cry. I prayed for Ezekiel as I entered the room. I prayed for all in our country who are oppressed, imprisoned and stepped on by the powerful. I prayed that God would hear their cries now.

As I greeted my friends and sat down at my place, I wondered what it was that I was feeling. Looking at the faces of my friends looking into the face of Jesus I was feeling a tension building up.

During this whole week the conflicts with the religious leaders were becoming more intense.

I looked at Jesus with a feeling of seriousness and vulnerability. I wanted to be near him. I went and sat next to Jesus and I asked him what he was feeling. We talked a few moments and I told him about my cousin Ezekiel. I looked into the eyes of Jesus as I told him about this. I could tell he was moved. I could sense that the cry for freedom entered Jesus' heart.

We spoke together about many oppressed people – more than ever before. We spoke about the poor and how they were getting poorer and poorer.

Jesus seemed at peace to be in the company of his good friends and to celebrate a meal of liberation.

As he began the prayers for freedom it seemed that there was something on Jesus' mind. He started to say that someone present was going to betray him during this Passover meal of intimacy, this meal of freedom with friends.

As Jesus was talking about betrayal, sadness took over him. Even to mention the word betrayal created coldness in this room.

Peter signaled to me to ask Jesus who was going to betray him.

I entered this room exalting in cries of liberation, and now Jesus was talking about the worst possible decision – to turn against your own.

I looked around this table and began thinking of my cousin Ezekiel's friend who had betrayed him. What would lead someone to do this? How could Jesus be talking of something so dark when we were supposed to be celebrating? A chill went through me; I was going to ask Jesus, "Who is it?"

I leaned my head back on the chest of Jesus. The candles were burning brightly and the wine was being generously poured. Everyone was involved in conversation. I asked him who around this table is going to go against us. How could this be possible? Jesus' heart was pounding strongly.

A strong plea connected to the loud cry of my cousin, Ezekiel. I knew Ezekiel was in a dark cell with no light, crying out to God. I sensed Ezekiel's heart also beating loudly with passion to be free.

I could hear cries of uncertainty leaning against Jesus' chest and hearing his heart beat. But I was feeling a love that was greater than all the darkness surrounding us. I didn't know if anyone else could hear this music within his heart.

Jesus, I was told to ask you who was going to betray you, and here, close to you, all I feel is love coming from your heart. All the cries of your people are echoing in this room. All the pleading for freedom are entering your heart.

Your heart is so wide and so deep that you desire to respond to these cries. Closeness, an intimacy with Jesus. Not wanting to enter back into the conversations of my friends, something deep was happening within Jesus.

What was I feeling with my head against Jesus' chest?

With the sound of the beating of Jesus' heart, I asked myself, what does it mean to love? What is going to happen to Jesus' heart in the days to come? I could feel as if Jesus' heart was exploding with love.

I was glad Peter had asked me to find out who was going to betray Jesus. So much had happened during these months, but at this moment, resting here, everything was making sense. Everything was about giving your life for others. Jesus, there is power in this room. I feel you want us to love you as I feel your love flowing in me. I feel that it is important to tell you this:

“No matter what happens, there is a connection with you. You are not afraid of conflict, but Jesus I am afraid for you.”

I know that you are strong, but your enemies are growing. Jesus, as I rest against your heart I ask you, “what do you feel when I tell you that I love you?”

I sat up, looked around and saw so many conversing. Judas dipped his bread in the oil then stood up. I looked at Jesus. His eyes were filled with sadness. I felt a chill as Judas closed the door.

At the sound of the door closing, I was thinking that something was happening that would change our lives forever. Even Jesus grew more solemn.

Jesus took the bread in front of him. The candles were casting shadows across the walls. Looking about the table, Jesus held up the bread once again. The cries of those oppressed were crying out in this room. I could clearly hear the voice of my cousin. His pain and the cries of all those yearning for freedom sounded loudly.

Jesus took this bread. All eyes were on him breaking the bread. Jesus then came to each of us and handed this blessed bread saying, “This is my body given for you as my gift.”

An intimacy began to grow stronger around the table. I knew the strong, life-giving food would be part of me whenever it would be dark and difficult to follow. This life-giving food would strengthen my body.

Jesus handed me the blessed bread. I received it in my hands, becoming one with the one whose heart is so full of love.

I delved deeper and deeper into this mystery, being nourished by this food, becoming food for others, breaking my life for others. My heart was burning stronger than the flames from the candles surrounding

the table.

Jesus then took the cup full of wine and blessed it. As Jesus blessed this cup, the cries of God's people filled this room. This red wine became a sign of our covenant that he would be faithful to us.

Jesus handed me the cup saying, "My blood given up for many." I took the cup to my lips. Liquid flowed down, burning inside. This is the cost of doing his work. Jesus' heart was beating powerfully. As I felt his presence I knew Jesus was inviting me to be with him in moments of shedding blood.

### **A meal of freedom: Reflection Questions**

Day 1: I remember the last time I had a good meal with friends and family. I remember these were the people that were there. This is how I felt. I remember... I remember...

Day 2: Jesus invites all of his friends to this meal of freedom. I remember the faces of the people who I would like to invite to a celebration of freedom. Who are these people? I remember... I remember...

Day 3: Jesus was betrayed by someone in his closest circle and he was able to forgive him. I remember a time I felt betrayed by a friend or family member. I remember... I remember...

Day 4: Jesus knew his friends and family would suffer when he went to prison. Who suffers as a result of your imprisonment? I remember seeing the faces of their suffering. I remember... I remember...

Day 5: Jesus is betrayed like so many young people are betrayed by a system of violence and gangs. I remember how this system of violence and gangs has affected my life. I remember... I remember...

Day 6: Jesus feeds his friends a simple meal of bread and wine to give them strength for the difficult road ahead. I remember a difficult time in my life. I remember this is what gave me the strength to get through it. I remember... I remember...

Day 7: How do you express your love to true friends? I remember a time I truly loved a group of friends. I remember... I remember...

Day 8: Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.



# Vulnerable

Luke 22: 39-46

*“Then going out he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. When he arrived at the place he said to them, “Pray that you may not undergo the test.” After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.” And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground. When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. He said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test.”*

*From the eyes of Peter*

It was dark outside and in the distance the fires fluttered. Thinking back to our meal together, there was a solemnity to it all. In fact, I don't remember ever seeing Jesus as vulnerable as he was tonight. By asking us to stay awake with him in the garden, it was as if he was terrified about the menacing situation.

I saw Jesus, with eyes full of sadness, prostrating himself to pray to his Abba. I wondered what was going on within Jesus. I felt as if he was asking us to help him. He needed our support as it was too hard to face the darkness alone.

I was glad Jesus had invited us to be here and pray with him. After the meal together, there was a special closeness between us.

The three of us began to talk about how we were worried about Jesus. Just looking at him lying on the ground and praying so intensely moved us to want to help him. When I looked up, Jesus was asking, "Could you not stay awake for a few hours so that I don't have to go through this all alone?"

I sat up and looked at Jesus. He looked as if he was very worried about something. Seemingly, sweat turned to small drops of blood on his forehead. I said, "Jesus, I don't know what happened, we began to talk about things and suddenly we were all asleep."

Jesus sat down again. I had never seen him so vulnerable, even weak. He was really reaching out for help. Usually, Jesus was the strong one. He had all the answers. He would help people in all sorts of situations, yet here he was, next to me, in just the opposite manner. I was glad he could be like this with us.

We all sat there in the darkness. I felt badly that I had fallen asleep because I knew that Jesus needed us. There was a strong sadness and heaviness flowing out of him. I wanted to do something to help him, especially since he had made himself so weak and vulnerable. Jesus always seemed to be the one encouraging us, and here he was asking for help. I knew it was hard for him to be so raw.

Feeling this pain, Jesus moved me to come closer to him. I put my arm around his shoulder. I could feel that he needed our help. I could sense deep anguish passing through him.

Feeling this made me reflect on myself. I realized how I was always guarded and would not ask others for help because I always needed to be strong. I wondered what this was doing to me - always having to be so strong.

Jesus was teaching me something in the garden on this dark night. Jesus was quiet, not saying anything and just remaining still and suffering inside.

He slowly made his way back to his prayer spot and knelt down. Then he prostrated himself and called out to his Abba as the whole garden shook. I wanted to do something for Jesus and felt helpless again. Once more the three of us began to speak of Jesus' fear before I fell back asleep.

Jesus' voice woke us. How could I fall asleep again with Jesus in such agony? I jumped up, startled, and heard distant voices coming closer.

One more time, when Jesus was so vulnerable, I had let him down. I am sorry for not staying awake, I wanted to, but sleep won again. I know you needed our support and we were not there for you. Let's move away from this darkened place.

### **Vulnerable: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - Everyone can feel alone and in a dark place, even Jesus. Remember a time when you felt all alone or in the dark. Remember everything that was happening in your life at that time. I remember...I remember...

Day 2 - Jesus hears voices of good and evil. In your life can you recall both good and evil inviting you to act? What does the good voice say? What does the evil voice say?

Day 3 - Jesus needs help from his friends during this dark time. I remember a time I helped someone else who was struggling in life. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - Great drops of blood formed like sweat on Jesus. I remember the blood I have shed or that of a friend. I remember this is what happened. I remember... I remember...

Day 5 - Jesus invites his friends to be vulnerable with him. Recall a time when you allowed yourself to be vulnerable. How did it feel? What happened? I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - Jesus' friends fall asleep when he needed them. Who do you need to “wake up” and help you in your time of need?

Day 7 - Jesus needs your support in order for his mission of healing to succeed. Write about your desire to help Jesus. What can you do?

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.



# Betrayal

Luke 22: 47-48

*“While he was still speaking, a crowd approached and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas. He went up to Jesus to kiss him. Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”*

*From the eyes of Peter*

Judas was leading the crowd. I looked at him, the one who was always worried about how things would turn out.

It was only hours before that Judas was sharing a meal with us. He had been with us in difficult times, and now he could not look at us.

A dark spirit spread over the garden. Never did I think that Judas would do this. With this betrayal, there was a bitter taste in my soul.

We trusted Judas. He was in charge of the money. I thought of him as a brother. Now, the pain cut through me like a knife piercing the sacrificed animals in the temple.

Many times we had all sworn that no matter what happened, we would always be together ‘til the very end.

I looked at Jesus’ face and I saw in his eyes the pain contained within them. What was Jesus feeling when he saw Judas come closer? To be betrayed, to break all levels of trust.

Judas was surrounded by the high priests and the guards. How did he manage to sell his soul, to betray our whole group? How much money did he receive? Was he worried about his own safety? What made him do this?

One of our group turned against us. I wanted to do something. I wanted to ask him why he was going to destroy everything we had worked for. I wanted to shout “Judas don’t do it, don’t,” but it was too late.

Judas stepped closer to Jesus. His nervousness was clear. Jesus was still not moving. Judas embraced him and kissed him on the cheek.

It was done.

How many others who have bonded in groups have sworn to death there would only be faithfulness, and instead received a kiss of betrayal on the cheek due to someone’s greed?

The self-interest, the desire for survival wins over everything else.

Suddenly, these others, like Jesus, find themselves with their closest friends receiving a Judas kiss on the cheek. Never did they think they would be betrayed by someone so intimate. This betrayal, this kiss, would burn into their cheek. How can trusted ones suddenly turn against their friends?

The taste of betrayal is bitter.

### **Betrayal: Reflection Questions**

- Day 1 - I remember a time when I felt betrayed by someone close to me. I remember... I remember...  
Day 2 - I remember a time when I betrayed someone I hated. I remember... I remember...  
Day 3 - I remember a time I felt abandoned by those close to me. I remember... I remember...  
Day 4 - I remember a time when I was forced to betray someone I love. I remember... I remember...  
Day 5 - I remember a time when I betrayed myself. I remember... I remember...  
Day 6 - I remember a time when I felt my parents had betrayed me. I remember... I remember...  
Day 7 - I remember a time when God's love kept me from hurting someone who had betrayed me. I remember... I remember...  
Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.

# Prisoner

Luke 22: 54

*“After arresting him they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest; Peter was following at a distance.”*

*From the eyes of Peter*

I woke up just in time to see the large group approaching. Then I knew why Jesus was so terrified, why he wanted us to be with him. I ran over to where the more powerful religious elders were joined by guards with swords and sticks. These leaders had been trying for so long to seize Jesus.

Now it had come the time for this to happen. I looked over at Jesus. He was asking the leader of the elders why they had not arrested him before. Everything he had spoken was always done so that all could see and hear. As I looked at Jesus I realized that he was still free. His clothes, his very being, were in such contrast to the high priests' bearing.

Jesus had chosen to walk with the poorest. At this moment in the garden I could feel the confronting of two worlds. One was a world of privilege. The other world excluded from power all the many people Jesus had healed and helped in their suffering. His being was about compassion. Now, the Pharisees wanted to make Jesus a criminal for empowering those who were without power.

How many times during these years had Jesus visited those who had been arrested unjustly? Now these powerful and wealthy leaders wanted to treat him in the same way. They did not want things to change. They wanted to silence Jesus and his message. He was a threat to their authority as his popularity was growing.

I will never forget the images of those arrogant religious leaders who wanted to pounce on their captured prey. The flames from their torches revealed the satisfaction on their faces. I could not contain my anger any longer.

This same anger took hold of me and I grabbed my sword and cut off the right ear of the soldier who was ready to seize Jesus. I could not contain my anger any longer. His ear fell to the ground, bloodying the earth. I looked at Jesus' face and remembered what he had said to me so many times: “Nothing would be accomplished if we used violence.”

Jesus reached down, picked up the bloodied ear, and put it back on the servant, just as he had healed so many during these years.

There was a silence that settled over this group. Healing, even in this dark moment, was always a

matter of stretching others' smallness. Then the two who guarded the high priests came over to Jesus. They took a strong cord and bound him by grabbing his two hands and tying them tightly behind his back. Suddenly, Jesus was no longer free.

Still free, I looked into his eyes wondering what he was feeling. Jesus was now a prisoner --- what was it like for Jesus to experience losing his freedom? In one quick movement Jesus was no longer externally free to do what he wanted. He was no longer able to return to where he was sleeping, embrace his mother, or have time alone. Now he was a prisoner, no longer in control of what happened.

As I watched Jesus' painful face, I thought of so many others who, for the first time would find themselves like Jesus, prisoners bound with their hands behind the back. Their wrists were cut by cords, ropes, or chains and they were not able to move their hands because of being bound. What was it like to feel captive for the very first time?

I felt powerless and wanted to do something for Jesus. I felt helpless before these powerful groups. How could this be happening?

Jesus, who came to make others free, was no longer free. Something was ending; something was beginning.

The light from the torches could not do anything to change the darkness or cold wind coming from this group. The two guards tied another cord around Jesus' waist, leading him in the direction they came from.

I started walking with the group and wondered what was Jesus feeling now that he had become a prisoner and enemy of the state?

After Jesus was arrested, rather than a great commotion there was a profound stillness that settled over the group. It was as if everyone somehow knew on the same level that what was happening was wrong and unjust.

Slowly, as we made our way up the incline and neared the high priest's house we saw that it was all lit up. Many people were coming and going. I was thinking that we had never been close to this home and now Jesus, hands bound, thought to be a dangerous criminal, was being led into this stately institution.

Everyone was tense. Many people knew that the high priests had wanted to eliminate Jesus and his influence on the poor. Many people knew his words moved the hearts of those who had been excluded from the temple. As I wished I could do something for Jesus, even more guards were placed around this large house.

How many times had the high priests wanted to silence Jesus? The public arguments, constant questioning and disdain they showed him during these years showed their motives.

Jesus was in front of the door that led to the religious leaders. He looked around and saw me. Our eyes met. I could see through an opening in the house the guards were leading Jesus to his cell, a small room at the bottom floor. Now, Jesus was not only bound by the hands, but by four walls as well. He was not free to leave, to drink water or even to stand up. I watched as two guards unbound Jesus' hands from behind and tied them in front.

I wondered how many more would go through the same experience for the first time. How many more would be locked in a room, in their cell? How many more, like Jesus, would have their wrists bloodied by the chords or chains of detainment?

I could not leave this courtyard. I needed to stay and protect Jesus.

### **Prisoner: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - I remember the moment I was arrested. I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - I remember my first night in jail. I remember... I remember...

Day 3 - I remember when I got sentenced. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - I remember the hardest day for me locked up. I remember... I remember...

Day 5 - I remember the best day for me locked up. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - I remember when I felt all hope was lost. I remember... I remember...

Day 7 - I remember when I regained a sense of self. I remember... I remember...

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.



# Denial

Mark 14: 66-72

*“While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the high priest’s maids came along. Seeing Peter warming himself, she looked intently at him and said, “You too were with the Nazarene, Jesus.” But he denied it saying, “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.” So he went out into the outer court. [Then the cock crowed.] The maid saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” Once again he denied it. A little later the bystanders said to Peter once more, “Surely you are one of them; for you too are a Galilean.” He began to curse and to swear, “I do not know this man about whom you are talking.” And immediately a cock crowed a second time. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times.” He broke down and wept.”*

*From the eyes of Peter*

I found myself getting near the fire to warm myself. There were many others also warming themselves there. One of the women suspiciously stared at me. I was feeling uncomfortable. Why was she looking at me like this? She came closer and looked me in the eyes with recognition, “I know this man! He was one who followed the prisoner!”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I already had enough for one night. It was late and a shiver of fear shot through me. Was I going to be treated like Jesus? Was I going to be bound and become a prisoner like him? I was shaking with fear saying, “I don’t know who this man is! I was just passing by and I’ve never met this Nazarene!”

More and more terror was growing within me. I wanted to run away. The fire couldn’t have warmed me. I was shaking with the fear that I would be discovered. I was startled again when the man to the right looked intensely at me and said, “I have seen you walking with the Nazarene! I am sure of it! In fact, I remember seeing you yesterday walking near the entrance of the city!”

Again, I panicked. Everyone was staring at me. I was afraid of what would happen if they saw me as one of his disciples. Again I said, “I don’t know what you are talking about. I just arrived in Jerusalem. You must be confusing me with someone else.”

He gave me a glaring look and turned away. I do not know why I was so terrified to say I was a disciple. What good would it do? I was only here to be sure of what happened to Jesus. Why would I want to make myself vulnerable at such an important moment? As I was thinking this, the woman behind me said loudly to the group, “I have been listening to the accent of this man. He is a Galilean and he has to be a disciple!”

“I don’t know what you are talking about, I don’t know who this prisoner is, I swear!”

Just at that moment I looked over where Jesus was being held prisoner. I caught his eyes and then the

cock crowed. Feeling sick inside, I realized that I had just denied I knew Jesus and was his disciple.

Jesus was also aware of this. I could see this in his eyes. I hurried away from the fire, from the group. I went over behind the tree and the tears poured out harder and harder as I recalled Jesus telling me that I was going to deny knowing him before the cock crowed.

I thought I was so strong. I thought I could do anything for Jesus and I had just denied even knowing him. I couldn't figure out what was happening.

Confusion poured over me. I felt like running and running, but I couldn't run from myself. No matter how far I would run, it would not erase what I had just done. How could I deny him then justify that I knew him? Amidst the outpour of tears, I said to myself, "I don't even know who I am."

### **Denial: Reflection Questions**

*Everything is happening so fast for Peter when Jesus is arrested. His life seems to be falling apart. With all this confusion, he denies even knowing Jesus. Think about the part denial has played in your life when answering the following questions.*

Day 1 - I remember a time when I was in denial about my time. I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - I remember a time when I was in denial about my weaknesses. I remember... I remember...

Day 3 - I remember a time when I was in denial about my strengths. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - I remember a time when I was in denial about how much hurt I've caused. I remember... I remember...

Day 5 - I remember a time when I was in denial that I had the power to change. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - I remember a time when I was in denial about being able to forgive myself. I remember... I remember...

Day 7 - I remember a time when I was in denial about being a victim of loneliness and hurt. I remember... I remember...

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.



# **A King**

Luke 22: 63

*“When day came the council of elders of the people met, both chief priests and scribes, and they brought him before their Sanhedrin.”*

*From the eyes of Peter*

I peered into the front of the house. The guards had surrounded Jesus. I could hear their voices. The house shook with cruelty and disdain, disturbing the high priests as they lavishly dined upstairs. They did not want to be bothered with any problems.

Through the opening, Jesus looked so powerless. He was sitting there facing the opening with his hands tied. What did he do to deserve such treatment? The soldiers then blindfolded Jesus. The light coming from his eyes was too bright for them. The guards were about darkness and wanted the room without light.

As I watched them blindfold Jesus, I could not help but think of how many have been, and will be, blindfolded and tortured just like what was now happening to Jesus. I was afraid this was just the beginning of their cruelty toward him.

One guard pushed Jesus hard and asked him who he thought he was, trying to influence so many ignorant people. Jesus, who never hurt anyone, received a slap across the face from another guard. The guard mocked him and asked, "Now tell us who hit you?"

None of us were there to help Jesus. He was left alone. After all the healing and helping out others, Jesus was now by himself. I wondered what he was feeling as another guard pushed him and asked what he was trying to do with the people he helped. Rome did not like this. He had become a problem to this city, to the high priests, and to the Roman governors. As a result, Jesus was being treated as a dangerous enemy. Still, I did not understand why these guards were using their power in such an abusive way.

This reminded me of so many real life stories I have heard with Jesus when he and I would visit prisons. Stories of so many youth who were seized by the Romans. In tears, they expressed how they felt when the soldiers beat them, like animals, without any witnesses.

I remember especially one young man who had been imprisoned for ten years. He rarely saw the outside because he was isolated from human contact and lived in the darkness of a lower cell. Despite these conditions, he would never surrender his spirit to this brutal hand of torture. He swore he would keep the heart of his dignity. No one could take this from him. The tears flowed from his swollen eyes,

expressing his humanity stolen by the soldiers. He never knew human beings to be so cruel.

He had not seen his family for ten years. In fact, they did not even know if he was alive. We were his first human contact during his solitary confinement. Jesus was moved during that time by the painful story of this young man.

Now, Jesus was experiencing humiliation like that young man. The guards were making fun of Jesus and using their power over him. In reality, these brutal soldiers were not winning. Something else was happening. Such death-like darkness can never ultimately win.

What good would it have done if that youth had fought back, and with what? How can one's dignity be saved when the soldiers want to take it away? Jesus was not fighting back now. He was still experiencing the pain. His body was shaking and his wrists were bleeding. He was keeping within him a freedom and dignity that these soldiers could not destroy.

I wanted to run into that cell and try to help Jesus. To use my sword against these heartless guards who were treating Jesus as if he were not human. I was getting angrier and angrier. It was hard to contain this rage.

The guards would not stop taunting Jesus. They hit him and laughed at how powerless he was. When would they get tired of abusing him?

Finally, they took a break from this mocking and handed Jesus something to drink. They knew that he would not make it through any kind of trial if they did not give him some nourishment. They handed him some bread yet he had to try to eat with his hands tied.

### **A king: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - I remember a time when I felt less than human. I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - Jesus does not respond to the guard's hate with hate of his own. I remember a time when I felt proud of myself for not allowing hate to run my life. I remember... I remember...

Day 3 - I remember a time when I contributed to someone else feeling powerless. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - No one is there to help Jesus. I remember a time when I felt helpless. I remember... I remember...

Day 5 - I remember a time when someone reached out to me for help. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - I remember a time when I felt pushed to my breaking point. I remember... I remember...

Day 7 - I remember a time when I freed my own way of negative thinking. I remember... I remember...

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.

## **Before the high priests**

Mark 15: 1

*“As soon as morning came, the chief priests with the elders and the scribes, that is, the whole Sanhedrin, held a council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.”*

*From the eyes of Peter*

They were now bringing Jesus to another place where all these religious leaders would meet for some kind of trial. Once again, Jesus was handled by the two most violent guards. As I watched them lead Jesus so roughly to the place of trial, so many memories flowed through me at seeing others being led to their sentencing, pushed and shoved like animals by the Romans.

Once again, I was thinking about what Jesus was feeling as he was being led to meet the elders so they could decide what they would do with him. Many of the powerful religious leaders were entering and leaving. It was clear by this where the trial would take place, even at this late hour. Their enemy was now in their possession.

As I watched these arrogant leaders prance through the palatial doors, I asked myself how it is possible that someone could be so cruelly treated. Someone who never hurt anyone. Someone who only walked with those most in need. They were treating him as if he were a murderous subversive, as if he were the commander of a huge army.

These elders did not care if Jesus was innocent. Their only concern was that Jesus be stopped. He was growing too popular. Jesus was such a contrast to their way of living. It was clear why the people identified with him. Jesus was now in front of the whole religious body.

There was total silence when Jesus was led into the trial room. His wrists were bleeding. He had cuts on his face. The eldest stood up and asked guards to bring Jesus close before the group.

How many like Jesus will be brought to be tried and condemned even before anything is said? What chance was there that Jesus would be given a fair trial? What is justice in this system?

It was as if Jesus was being tried by the deadly system. These religious leaders were only the figureheads of a system that demands more and more innocent blood to be offered to their idols. How can this be? How will this system be changed when all the power is held by a few? How many of the poor of this country will ever receive a fair trial? Like Jesus they are guilty before the trial.

I was thinking these high priests should be the ones on trial for how they have constantly robbed from the poor. But no one can touch them. They continue with their greedy taxing while the poor

suffer so intensely.

I was becoming angrier and angrier seeing the unjust gathering. The sun was just coming up. These religious leaders were so concerned about following the letter of the law while they had no intention of acting faithfully through God.

The whole council was present. A tension was felt. The aggressiveness of the chief priests was strong. The leader stepped in front, walked over to where Jesus was bound and he addressed the whole council.

You all know the harm this Jesus of Nazareth has done. We are having problems with the Romans. They are accusing us of planning a riot.

But everyone in that room knew he was hand-picked as high priest. He was just using this as an excuse to hold on to his power. As you all know, our people are very docile and can easily be misled. Jesus has taken advantage of this. His teaching is very wrong and it must be stopped.

I looked over to where Jesus was held. What was he feeling being in front of these supposedly holy people?

How many like Jesus will be forced to listen to condemnations of their very humanity? The powerful will do anything to find those being tried guilty.

Watching this mock trial, I realized it is not about truth. The truth does not make any difference. Only the outcome of condemning the accused. How many families will have to listen to inhumane descriptions of the one being tried?

### **Before the high priests: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - When did I first learn of the justice system? Who has helped me to navigate through court? I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - I remember the journey during my first time to court. How early I had to wake. The ride over. I remember... I remember...

Day 3 - I remember the faces of the people in the courtroom the day I was sentenced. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - Jesus is only put on trial for the laws he broke. All the good he had done was forgotten. What good things about yourself would you like to be included in your trial?

Day 5 - I remember those who supported me when I went to trial. I remember what they said to support me. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - Jesus' humanity is condemned. I remember this is how I felt when they read my charges. I remember... I remember...

Day 7 - Our justice system can be dehumanizing. I remember a time at my trial when I felt less than

human. I remember... I remember...

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.



# Money returned

Matthew 27: 3-8

*“Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, deeply regretted what he had done. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? Look to it yourself.” Flinging the money into the temple, he departed and went off and hanged himself. The chief priests gathered up the money, but said, “It is not lawful to deposit this in the temple treasury, for it is the price of blood.” After consultation, they used it to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why that field even today is called the Field of Blood.”*

*From the eyes of Judas*

Judas walked into the temple before Caiaphas. As he carried the money he had been given, the coins jingled in the bag. He questioned himself about what he had done by betraying his own group. Just because Jesus did not turn out to be the type of leader he was expecting did not mean that he should have betrayed him.

His lips still stung from the kiss of betrayal. Everything that had happened since then seemed like a nightmare.

He recalled the following:

I never thought it would come to this. I saw what they did to Jesus. I was promised that Jesus would be punished and released. These religious leaders lied. They never mentioned anything about crucifixion.

As I walked through those palatial doors I felt like I had been used. Used by those people who were supposed to be holy. In truth, there is no honesty in what they say. Why had I ever come here in the first place? What pushed me into participating in their lie?

I felt the weight of this bag of coins. I can't believe that I was willing to accept it and carry it . What kind of person had I become?

On the way, I saw one of the disciples. He looked at me with such disdain. I became so afraid that I began to run, despite carrying this heavy bag of coins.

As I looked on these indulgent religious leaders, I knew that I had sold myself to the powers of darkness. Perhaps it was the light from the torches or maybe it was my exhaustion, but when I looked at what was in front of me, I could see all the harm that they were causing the people. Their greed was consuming the blood of the poor. Their power continued to grow larger and larger, needing more and more blood to survive. Jesus would then be one more victim to appease their insatiable appetite.

Why had I not seen this when I first came here to talk with them about arresting Jesus? I knew that I



had been so easily brought into their lie. How could I have done this after I had visited, with Jesus, many prisoners who were victims of the elders' greed?

Standing in front of the pious religious leaders, I could see so clearly how my hand burned from their bloody money. How I had fallen into their trap rather than seeing how these powerful leaders were the true enemy. I was blinded and turned against my group, the very people with whom I had walked and struggled with against the powerful. Here, I was standing before the powerful that had convinced me that our group was the source of the problem of our country.

Looking at these grinning hypocrites made me think of many who had fallen and will fall into this trap. Rather than seeing who the real enemy is, they will be led to believe that the problem lies within the group. They may end up like me, having blood on their hands after killing their own. That is exactly what I did. Rather than understand who was really the cause of so much suffering, I had a feeling against my own group.

As I realized what had happened, I felt a despair take over me. Brothers fighting brothers, brothers killing brothers, rather than seeing who was really stepping on us.

I felt a deep and wide wave of shame sweep over me. I was condemned by my own blindness of who the real enemy was and how we are all brothers and sisters.

I wanted to run away, but I wanted and needed to tell these leaders that I had been mistaken. I shouted out, "Oh holy ones, here is your money back! I did not know what I was doing when I went against my group! I am sorry I did that! I never wanted to have Jesus treated like a dangerous criminal. You hypocrites! You are thieves who should be crucified. You are the ones destroying our people! With your power and your money, you convince us that you are helping us by buying our souls to betray our own people. Here is your money back!"

I threw the bag, which flew open across the temple. The coins sounded against the floor. "Hypocrites!" I cried. "You lied to me. You led me to believe that you were our friends and that you wanted to bring us to real power. Lies! You only care about yourselves! What would happen if we turned our anger against you rather than killing one of our own people?"

I began to feel badly for others who, down the centuries, would not see themselves in their brother's eyes, who would call their brothers "enemies" and, as a result, spend a lifetime in prison for hurting their own race. Meanwhile, it was the powerful that, content that we fought each other, controlled the wealth.

"Brother killing brother—so much useless bloodshed. Blinded, we have fallen into this lie that we are the enemy. In truth, you are the enemy of the people! So take your money bag! May others not fall into

thinking that things would be better by coming to you."

Then, I fled into the night.

### **Money returned: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - Judas asks himself, "What kind of person had I become?" What are the choices that led me to where I am now? I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - The 30 silver pieces only remind Judas of the pain he caused. What reminders do I have of the pain I have caused myself and others? I remember ... I remember...

Day 3 - Judas was wrapped up in a power struggle. I remember when I hurt someone I loved in order to gain power. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - I remember when I realized I needed to ask forgiveness from the people I hurt. I remember... I remember...

Day 5 - I remember a time I didn't speak up for an innocent person. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - I remember a time I was ashamed of something I did. I remember... I remember...

Day 7 - Judas was used by the leaders of the time in order to harm Jesus. I remember a time when someone used me as a tool to hurt someone I love. I remember... I remember...

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.

# Pilate

Luke 23: 1-7

*“Then the whole assembly of them arose and brought him before Pilate. They brought charges against him, saying, “We found this man misleading our people; he opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar and maintains that he is the Messiah, a king.” Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He said to him in reply, “You say so.” Pilate then addressed the chief priests and the crowds, “I find this man not guilty.” But they were adamant and said, “He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here.” Jesus before Herod. On hearing this Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean; and upon learning that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod who was in Jerusalem at that time.”*

*From the eyes of Peter*

Pilate’s residence was palatial. The huge pillars, the fine art expressed the power of the empire.

Watching Jesus climb the steps to Pilate’s chamber, I noticed soldiers everywhere showing the strength of their military equipment. Jesus unarmed and with no army, was powerless in comparison to this military arrogance.

Pilate was seated on his royal seat as Jesus was shoved before him. All the council stood behind Jesus.

Pilate stood up. His whole being spoke of privilege. Clearly, he had been advised about this meeting. How could he ever be fair if his only concern was to keep this institution powerful and in control? Jesus was only a distraction in the life of Pilate.

Pilate, standing before the council, questioned, “Why have you brought this one before me?”

The eldest began by saying, “Honorable Pilate we would not bother you we did not think a serious crime has been committed. During this past year, this one Jesus has been causing problems to us and to the country. The people are organizing and are planning on rebelling against our heavy taxation.”

The collective affirmation of the religious leaders was deafening. Echoing off the white walls was the strong condemnations of Jesus by these powerful leaders. Pilate went over to where Jesus was standing, alone, unprotected, powerless.

“So, these wise leaders here say that you claim to be their king. What do you have to say about yourself? Are you their king?”

Silence settled over the room as Jesus looked at Pilate.

“What you say is true.”

The condemning cries of the council were intensely ugly. Speaking together they said, “This one will

never be our king. He is misleading the people, he is no one. He has no power, no resources.”

As I watched this mockery of justice, I was thinking of many, like Jesus, who, in the hands of the powerful, are also considered worthless. Watching this scene, I was seeing two different kinds of power. Our God was redefining who the truly powerful are.

This opulent society was dismissing Jesus as a common criminal.

But something else was taking place as if another veil was draped over this scene. This was inversion, just like what happened when we turned over the tables in the temple. It was a total reversal of systems.

So this early morning, as all the attention was being paid to this Roman leader, to these elite religious leaders, Jesus was being viewed as worthless, a person without any kind of power. Reflecting on others that society has considered as worthless, of no value, but with great wealth within.

How many times during these years had we visited outcasts, those seen as nobodies and excluded from the temple?

I looked at the bloody face of Jesus. I saw the faces of those still imprisoned near where we were standing and the scraps they received. Now seeing the well-prepared delicacies surrounding Pilate, his obesity was a symbol of the great amount of rich food he consumed. I noticed the fine linen Pilate was wearing, the golden hem of his robe. He was a person of influence, a person of value, and a person who was important.

In contrast, Jesus’ face reflected the poor whose clothes spoke of their apparent uselessness. It also reflected those who refused to believe in what truly defines someone’s worth.

This comfortable scene of rich food and fine clothes can never be the final answer to who is important.

Jesus was reversing all of this forever by his presence. He could have chosen a lavish lifestyle but, instead, walked with those who were considered worthless. Jesus stood firm, clear he would never back down from his choice.

Finally, the religious leaders mentioned that Jesus started these problems in Galilee, his hometown. Pilate stopped them.

You say Jesus is from Galilee? I know that Herod is here in Jerusalem. He is responsible for decisions over Jesus. I will send word to Herod that Jesus will be led to him immediately.

### **Pilate: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - Pilate's court can remind us of the big walls and signs of power in a prison. I remember the first time I saw the prison that would be home. I remember these were the signs of power. I remember

this is how I felt. I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - Everyone was condemning Jesus as a criminal. I remember the voices of those in my courtroom. I remember this is what they said about me. I remember... I remember...

Day 3 - Jesus only speaks one sentence during this court date. I imagine what it would be like to only say one thing to my accusers. What would I say?

Day 4 - Pilate and the other elite members of society thought they were the most important, but Jesus refuses to believe that wealth makes someone important. Who are the most important people in my life? What makes them important?

Day 5 - Jesus is treated as a criminal, a nobody. I recall a time I felt worthless like a nobody. I remember these were the events happening in my life at the time. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - Jesus chooses to stand with "the nobodies" instead of with the powerful. Can I commit to stand with the "nobodies"? Tell Jesus about your desires or struggles to stand with "the nobodies" instead of the powerful.

Day 7 - Peter recognizes the great wealth and gifts within the people who are locked up. What great gifts do you have within that you want to share with the world?

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.

# Herod

Luke 23: 8-12

*“Herod was very glad to see Jesus; he had been wanting to see him for a long time, for he had heard about him and had been hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at length, but he gave him no answer. The chief priests and scribes, meanwhile, stood by accusing him harshly. [Even] Herod and his soldiers treated him contemptuously and mocked him, and after clothing him in resplendent garb, he sent him back to Pilate. Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, even though they had been enemies formerly.”*

*From the eyes of Peter*

I, Peter, once again witnessed how Jesus was powerless in the web of this evil system. He was shoved from hand to hand. It was all so arbitrary, as if Jesus were himself expendable or worthless to those who were in power.

The council was getting restless. They were under pressure to have this death sentencing settled because of the upcoming holy days. As a result, the whole group was again moving to yet another part of the city where there was an even more splendid institution than Pilate's court. Even the word, "Herod," caused disgust among our people who knew that his cruelty and corruption were totally revolting.

I watched as they were handling Jesus like a Roman marble statue being changed from one room to another. Seemingly, he had no power.

As I saw Jesus being led like captured prey, he looked like a war victim. Reflecting back, not too long ago, we had seen Jesus on the mountaintop. He was transformed by the light in the presence of Heaven. Now, seeing Jesus in such humiliation, it seemed like that powerful moment had never happened. Now, here in Jerusalem, all I saw were darkness, fear, and powerlessness. Yet, having seen Jesus on that mountaintop. I also knew that something else was happening.

There was terror all around as they pushed Jesus into Herod's palace. Loud music floated from the opening of the gates while soldiers, servants, and merchants, entered and left in confusion.

Yet, in front of Herod's palace, there was a single action taking place, as two different powers met. It was a struggle for survival, a struggle for life, as they pulled Jesus forcefully to Herod. I was reminded of the many times in the past that I have seen other victims of abusive power. Victims who were all alone standing before the authority, only to be condemned and then brought back to their cell.

They find themselves alone, desiring to be with others, and to speak about the humiliation they experienced, of being unjustly condemned before the powers that be. They desire to speak of what it is like to be alone again. Seeing the four walls and trying to imagine what was possibly happening outside

those walls. They were alone, day after day and night after night, speaking into the silent darkness, with no voice responding to them. Alone with a great yearning for the presence and embrace of another, to be in communion with.

Jesus was standing by himself before Herod. Now, more than any time since his arrest in the garden, the battle between two powers was evident. The injustice of the scene was difficult for me to accept. I wanted to jump in with Jesus so that he would feel some support and not be so alone. I stood back, watching the drama unfold between the two different powers.

Herod was so gleeful to be entertained. He was pleased that Jesus was in his palace after having heard so much about him.

He addressed Jesus, "I have heard many things about you. I have many questions for you." Herod began asking Jesus about the power he seemed to have had, about the healing he had performed for others, and why people were following him.

Jesus stood there in front of those present and was silent. He did not say a word. If Jesus had spoken, his words could somehow affirm the darkness he faced. Jesus was choosing to be silent in protest to this lie, a false power sitting before him.

Faced with Jesus' silence, Herod, finally tired of asking questions, called his guards. He wanted to be entertained so he started to make fun of Jesus. When it was clear that his plan had failed, in desperation, Herod put on Jesus a cloak woven of bright thread. Herod said to the religious leaders present, "I have wasted enough time. I am sending this one, who refuses to speak, back to Pilate."

I looked on at Jesus, who was surrounded by Herod's guards, as Herod arrogantly spoke on and on. Behind him, the agitated council wanted results. Jesus remained silent.

As I watched this scene, I, once again, wondered what Jesus was feeling. Surrounded by such an arrogant power, he chooses to be silent. I remembered the visits with Jesus to the Roman prisons, where I had seen guards yelling at chained youth, who, in protest, did not make any response. The more the guards screamed, the longer they remained silent, forgoing the lure to play the game. Sometimes, it is stronger to remain silent. This lets the silence speak to the injustice of abusing power.

Jesus could have defended himself, but it would have been at the expense of acknowledging Herod and who he represented, as well as forgetting about the tremendous harm Herod had caused to many innocent people. Jesus allowed his presence to speak more strongly by remaining silent in the face of lies.

As a result, Herod became more and more uncomfortable. He started to entertain everyone by putting a rich cloak around Jesus. Herod was attempting to make fun of Jesus and show how he appeared

compared to the elegance of Roman life.

But Jesus? Spoke the truth. In silence...

### **Herod: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - I remember a time when I felt powerless to help someone being mistreated. I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - Jesus and Herod represent the battle between two powers. I remember a time I was involved in a battle. I remember this is what I was fighting for. I remember this is how I felt. I remember... I remember...

Day 3 - I remember a time I made someone suffer for my own entertainment. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - Jesus fights the powerful with silence. I remember a time I was silent in the face of someone in power. I remember... I remember...

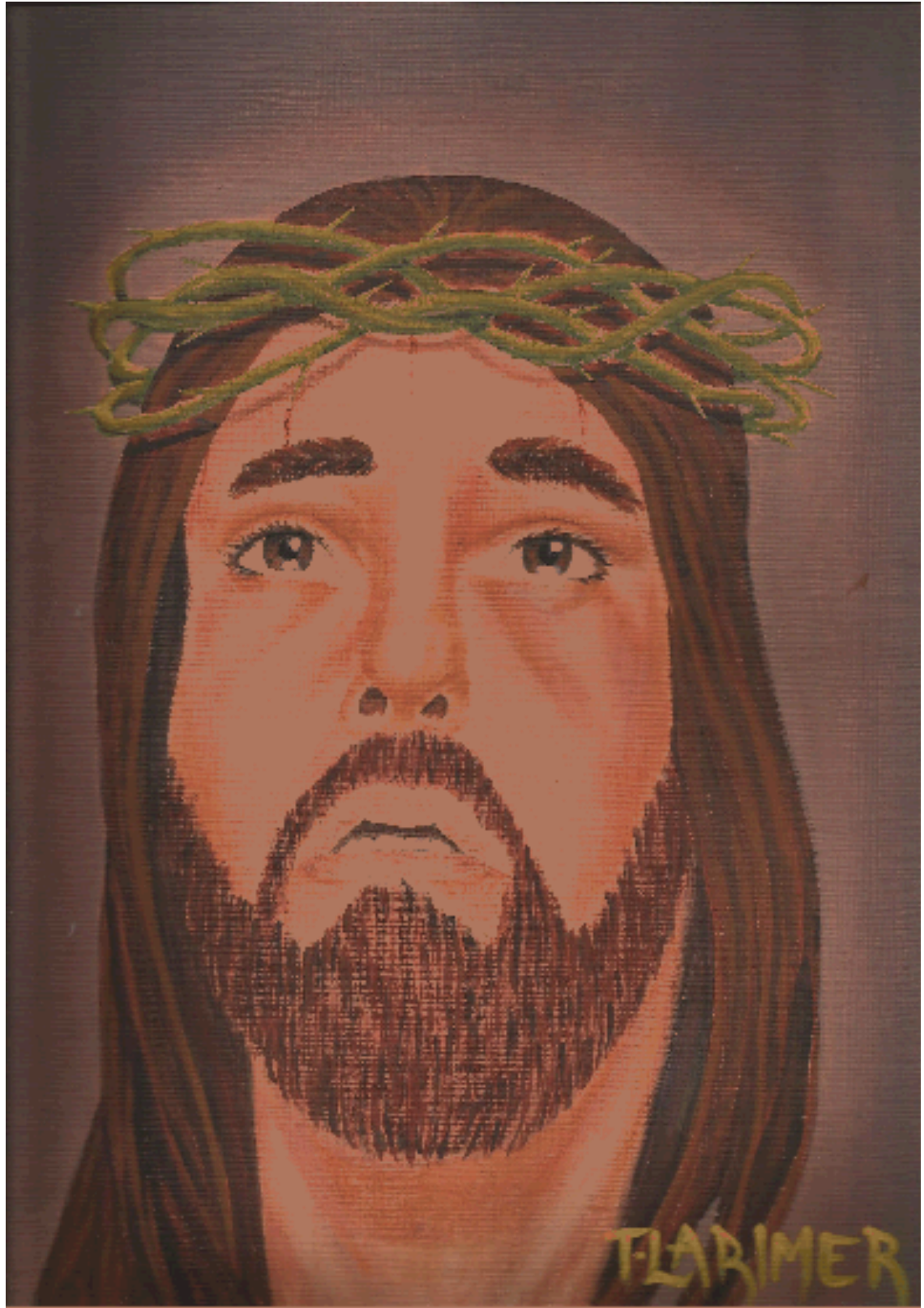
Day 5 - I remember a time when I was unfairly treated or abused. I remember this is what happened. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - Jesus' power lies in his silence and resistance of Herod. I remember a time I resisted a fight. I remember... I remember...

Day 7 - I remember the last time when I sat outside in silence. I remember... I remember...

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.





# Crown of thorns

Mark 15: 16-19

*“The soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort. They clothed him in purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him. They began to salute him with, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him in homage.”*

*From the eyes of Peter*

The soldiers were ready to use some of the passion from the crowds that they witnessed. The crowd chose Barabbas rather than Jesus. They grabbed Jesus, bringing him into the large courtyard. I wondered what Jesus was feeling as he was being led into these places of torture after the crowds chose to free Barabbas.

It was clear how the high priests had manipulated the crowd so they would pick Barabbas. Their desire to destroy Jesus was so intense. How could Jesus be that dangerous to them? Did Jesus threaten their world that they would do anything to silence him? They wanted Jesus killed.

The high priests were now dining lavishly while Jesus was being mishandled. How could such a contrast be taking place?

Jesus felt the hard pressure of the guards pressing into his arms. How many other prisoners would have this experience? How many other prisoners would feel the force of the guards' hands pressing hard into their arms?

This was a painful reminder of how they have lost their freedom and it was a reminder of how far they would like to run far from the pressure of hands that would lead them to another dark cell, but they cannot run. Running was impossible having been caught, surrounded, having lost the freedom to go where they want.

Many, like Jesus, would never surrender the more important freedom within that no one could take. Jesus could not move except by being led by the guards, but within him there was a freedom greater than the high priests ever took away from Jesus. These high priests felt so victorious and seemingly free as they enjoyed themselves and dined.

How can one be free while everyone tries to destroy one's freedom? Jesus felt this as they led him into the courtyard. No matter what they would do to him they would never destroy his spirit.

The guards were excited that they would be able to use their strength on this victim whom they were drawing to the courtyard. Most of the time these soldiers were bored but this day there was going to be

action and they were ready for it. They were there earlier when they referred to Jesus as this one from Nazareth as a king of the Jews. They were laughing about this.

Look at this one who is bloodied. He is a nobody. How could he be a king? Where is his power? Where is his army?

What was Jesus feeling as he heard this mocking? Thinking back to when he first left Nazareth, he remembered looking back at his mother in front of his home; he walked, looked out at the hills, and thought of what was going to happen? Then he thought back about going to the desert, listening closely to the voice of his Abba, listening to learn what the project of his Abba would be, and now he was being tortured.

It was odd—the very ones trying to destroy him were saying they were representatives of God. But just whom were they worshipping?

It was hard not to feel the sting from these insults, from being mocked. The soldiers' cruelty was put into practice. The evil of the empire needed to be forgiven; they do not know what they are doing. Having been dutifully trained to torture, they were just part of a system whose very nature is corrupt and violent.

Arriving at the spot, they pushed Jesus down on a stool.

“Jesus, all I have heard about is how you are the king of the Jews. If this is true then we need to honor your highness. Firstly, you need a crown; there is no king without a royal symbol.”

They laughed loudly and two soldiers broke off large branches with thorns from the tree, quickly putting together a crown. “Here is your crown, now you are a real king! Now you need a royal purple cape.”

Soldiers then knelt down giving him the praise they would give any king. They enjoyed making fun of Jesus, trying to destroy his spirit, trying to ridicule him. Jesus, in tattered clothes, was made so powerless.

How many other prisoners, like Jesus, would feel themselves at the very center of ridicule? How many others, were mocked because they were captives, laughed at because they stumbled blindly beneath such powerlessness? How many others would be unable to respond to those who taunt them?

They are captive victims to be sacrificed, what does this mocking do to the spirit? How far does it go in? There is danger in striking back and then giving a reason to completely destroy the body. These guards were worked up, bowing on their knees.

“Oh, great king, you truly are a powerful person, you must be a very important king to have such a valuable crown!”

One guard pressed down hard on the thorns that pierced deep into Jesus' head. Blood poured out from the wounds. Pain shot through his body. Feeling it in every part of his body he truly is like all those he had walked with during these years. He was a prisoner like them and, yet, they could not destroy Jesus' deepest dignity.

As the guard pressed down hard on this crown he felt the pain of so many who would also be tortured so inhumanely, without reason.

Another guard began beating Jesus with a stick, laughing at his powerlessness. He tried so hard to destroy Jesus' humanity. Yet, this soldier sensed he had not been able to. He looked at Jesus with disdain.

*Jesus, you call yourself a king, but this is what I think of that.* He spat in Jesus' face. This act, so vulgar, only created more laughter among the soldiers, who were trying so hard to step on Jesus' dignity. Others also spat.

To spit in another's face? How many after Jesus would experience this same humiliation? What was Jesus experiencing when these soldiers spat with disgust into his face?

Why was this happening to Jesus? Bleeding, tortured. During his years he had only blessed, healed, and cared for others. Now this was his treatment, a prisoner, all alone, without any support. Why?

### **Crown of thorns: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - I remember the day I lost my freedom. I remember this is what it felt like. I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - I remember a time when I was humiliated, mocked and laughed at. I remember... I remember...

Day 3 - I remember a time when I humiliated, mocked, and laughed at another person. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - The crown of thorns constantly caused Jesus pain. I remember the pain in my life. How does that pain continue to pierce me? How am I reminded of my own pain?

Day 5 - I remember a time when I let my hatred cause pain to others. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - I remember the worst physical pain I felt. I remember the day. I remember this is what happened... I remember... I remember...

Day 7 - I remember a time when I didn't let others take away my dignity. I remember... I remember...

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.

# Scourging

Matthew 27: 26

*“Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.”*

*Mockery by the Soldiers.*

*From the eyes of Sixtus*

The soldiers were restless and tired of moving Jesus back and forth. They wanted to do the work for which they were trained. As Jesus sat, looking out into the courtyard, the soldiers grabbed him, took him to the torture post and tied his hands. They were trained for this to break down the enemy and force him to confess. They were going to scourge this man and crown him like a mock king. He had nothing to confess, only the strength to be punished.

The senior soldier Sixtus found the whip. How many times had he used this instrument of torture on other victims? He did not know why he found such pleasure in being so cruel for so many years. Sometimes, when he held his children at home, he wondered who he was and where had he become heartless. How did he learn to cut off his feelings and ignore the pain he was causing others? Who was he when he entered the compound and put on his military equipment? Who had he become after torturing so many people? Why was he asking these questions of himself today of all days?

Maybe there was too much blood on his hands. Perhaps, he had used this whip too many times. Who was he? Was he the same person who left the courtyard to return to his family life? What had all this torturing of victims done to his spirit? Why was he even thinking like this? What was this person who sat in front of him, bleeding and crowned with thorns, doing to him? Did this man have something to do with why he was asking himself questions about his own life?

He decided that he would hand the whip to the next person in charge. He thought about other guards he knew who stopped killing others. He had judged them as weak people who were not worth any respect.

Now he wondered what was changing him, causing him to question everything. Is it the presence of this man, this tortured king? Is this king's blood on his hands, doing something within him?

This king's blood burned deep within him and he knew that this was why he could not keep the whip in his hands any longer.

He did not know what was going to happen, but he decided that he was not going to destroy this Nazarene as he had done so craftily to others for so long.

As he reached and gave the whip to the next soldier in command, all the violence he had caused over the years exploded in the courtyard. Cruel violence, Roman style, designed to inflict such terrible pain on people so as to completely destroy their spirit. The violence he had been using to punish others was a way of keeping the cruel Roman system alive.

The loud screams and cries of past victims of violence now made it clear to him that he was only providing blood for those in power.

This man Jesus sat in front of him, crowned with thorns, with no weapons, military equipment or power. This king's peace and lack of hate pushed Sixtus to examine his ways of violence. As he thought back of the violence that he had inflicted on others in this courtyard, screams of pain echoed within his heart and mind. Again, he asked himself what had happened in his own life that allowed him to feel so comfortable in destroying another human being.

Sixtus' hands were still burning with this crowned king's blood as he was free of the whip that the other soldier gleefully took from him. His substitute raised the whip and brought it down on Jesus' back. Sixtus felt sick and stepped back, looking into Jesus' face. This forced him to re-examine his life as onlookers laughed and jeered at the scourging of Jesus. He could hear the sound of flesh being torn apart and blood spilling onto the courtyard floor. Looking into Jesus' eyes, Sixtus thought of his own children and friends and asked himself what if this were one of them before him? He asked himself, "Why had I not seen this before? Why had I not realized what violence does to the spirit of the one doing the violence?"

It seemed like this torture lasted for days. Jesus' back was an open wound, flowing with blood onto the ground, connecting with all the other blood that had been previously shed in the courtyard. Jesus' blood connected to so many like him who were innocent. Justice for them was to endure torture. Sixtus wondered now, how many people had died because of this insane brutality?

He wondered what this crowned king was thinking as the lashes tore his flesh. What was Jesus feeling as he felt his blood freely flowing into a pool on the ground.

Sixtus realized that somehow Jesus blood was life-giving in dark times, connecting to all who would be tortured in the future for their commitment to make this a better world.

The lashes coming down on his back sounded louder and louder, as if screaming out at the unjust punishments of this world. It was the costly price demanded in order to change injustice.

There were only two more lashes remaining, but Jesus looked very weak and the whipping stopped. As he struggled to stand up, the soldiers threw water on his face to see if he had enough strength left for two more lashes. As they finished with two more lashes, I, Sixtus, needed to leave the courtyard. I knew,

looking at what they had done to Jesus that I would never again participate in this kind of torture.

In the past, I would have been pleased by the skill of inflicting such pain on another. But now it was different.

This Jesus, who was left bloodied, had changed me. He opened my eyes to see what violence was really all about. This man had let me see the consequences that cruelty inflicts on the victim as well as what it does to the one inflicting the pain.

### **Scourging: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - I remember a time when I did not think about the pain I was causing others. I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - I remember a time when I was judged and was seen as weak or not worthy of any respect. I remember... I remember...

Day 3 - I remember a time when I stayed silent when another person was getting hurt. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - I remember an event in my life that allowed me to open my eyes to the injustices of our world. I remember... I remember...

Day 5 - I remember when I realized how destructive the consequences of my actions were. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - I remember an event that opened my eyes to see what violence was really about. I remember... I remember...

Day 7 - I remember witnessing a violent act that changed me forever. I remember... I remember...

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.

# A mother

Mark 15: 6-15

*“Now on the occasion of the feast he used to release to them one prisoner whom they requested. A man called Barabbas was then in prison along with the rebels who had committed murder in a rebellion. The crowd came forward and began to ask him to do for them as he was accustomed. Pilate answered, “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” For he knew that it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate again said to them in reply, “Then what [do you want] me to do with [the man you call] the king of the Jews?” They shouted again, “Crucify him.” Pilate said to them, “Why? What evil has he done?” They only shouted the louder, “Crucify him.” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified.”*

*Mockery by the Soldiers.*

Mary needed to be there when they judged her son. She had heard from some others in her group that Pilate was going to sentence Jesus. She had not yet seen him since he had been taken as a prisoner in the early morning hours.

As she waited, Mary recalls, “all my life I have never known so much uncertainty as with my son imprisoned. There was the uncertainty of not knowing what they were going to do to him while he was in the cell where he was being held.”

The crowd grew restless and called for Pilate to bring out the prisoners. Mary recalls, “It was a long wait that seemed like forever.” Pilate brought out the prisoner Barabbas, who was a known criminal, and led him to one side.

Mary describes, “Just then the door opened and I was caught off guard as two soldiers pulled my son in front of the crowd. I could hardly recognize him because of what they had done to him. Blood was soaking through the purple cloak he wore, a crown of thorns pierced his head, blood was dripping down his face, and his hands were tied as if he were a dangerous offender.”

Mary, stunned and speechless, was unable to react. “I was so overwhelmed that I could not feel anything. It was just too much to take in that the person in front of me was my child.”

Hot tears rolled down Mary's cheeks as she wondered what kind of torture had been inflicted on Jesus, who hardly looked human anymore. Jesus caught Mary's eyes as he passed and she wondered, “What was he feeling? How much pain was he in?”

This was the flesh of her flesh, “Look at what they have done to him,” she said to herself. She could not take her eyes away from Jesus, seeing him for the first time as a prisoner, bound like an animal. Mary reflected that looking at her son in a state of torture caused her heart to race back to when he was young.



She thought about how she had bathed him and held him, how he would laugh and smile.

Now she was staring into her son's eyes, which contained deep caverns of sorrow. These two images were pulling her apart from the inside. Mary wanted to go in front of Pilate and ask, "What kind of trial is this? Tell me the crime my son has committed! Who has he hurt? Who did he rob?"

Mary continued, "Despite the torture, they were not able to erase that part of Jesus who is my son."

Then, it was as if time stood still, as if the spot where Mary was standing became full of mothers gazing upon their sons and daughters for the first time as prisoners. They were standing there with Mary, their silent groans exploding with memories of their sons and daughters, of their own flesh, growing up and then suddenly in front of them in chains, ridiculed and laughed at.

"Never had I felt so powerless," says Mary, "As a mother, I wanted to do something for my son."

How many mothers will also feel the same piercing pain in their hearts that Mary felt, as they see the shame spread across their children's faces as if they have let them down and never wanted to put their mother in that position. Who would want for their mothers to see their own flesh chained and slaughtered by the powerful? Never do mothers think or imagine while holding their babies that one day they would witness such brutality.

Mary, with her eyes fixed on Jesus, could not move from her spot. Finally, Pilate's voice broke their connection as he addressed the crowd asking, "Who do you want me to release? Shall I release this murderer Barabbas or this beaten Nazarean named Jesus?"

Mary looked on with hope thinking that after all that Jesus had done for others, surely the crowd would choose to release Jesus over Barabbas. Despite her wishes, those people at her side yelled out that her son was a dangerous criminal. "He deserves to die!" they shouted. Mary could hear the mockery as the Pharisees shouted out to condemn Jesus. As a mother, Mary was deeply hurt and wanted to defend Jesus, to explain that what was happening was an offense to God.

"Release Barabbas, crucify Jesus! He deserves to be crucified!" the people chanted.

How many mothers have felt like Mary felt at that moment, saddened by the tearing apart of their sons or daughters?

Mary stood there, with all the future mothers who would see their sons and daughters on trial, called a monster or murderer. She stood with all the mothers who would see their beloved under the judgment of Pilate mocking the dignity of their own flesh.

### **A mother: Reflection Questions**

Day 1 - I remember the last time I saw my mother. I remember... I remember...

Day 2 - I remember a time I saw someone close to me in pain by the consequences of my actions. I remember... I remember...

Day 3 - I remember a time when my mother's love comforted me during a difficult time in my life. I remember... I remember...

Day 4 - I remember a time I was mocked, disrespected, and laughed at in front of my mother or someone close to me. I remember... I remember...

Day 5 - I remember a time I felt I let my mother or someone close to me down. I remember... I remember...

Day 6 - I remember a time I was strengthened by the love and support of my mother or someone close to me. I remember... I remember...

Day 7 - I remember a time I asked God to help me see the light despite the darkness around me. I remember... I remember...

Day 8 - Go back over all your reflections and write about what moved you the most during the week.