

Good Friday Service, April 14, 2017
“The Crucifixion of Jesus”
John 19:13-18

Last night, worshipers gathered here for a Maundy Thursday Meal of Remembrance. Most of us went home last night not thinking a great deal about what happened next with Jesus.

But let us pick up the story with Jesus from that point on and take it through the next 19 to 20 hours. . .

After Jesus and his disciples observe the Passover meal in an upper room, they leave Jerusalem to travel to the Mount of Olives, northeast of the city. In a garden at nearby Gethsemane, Jesus, apparently knowing that his death is near, suffers great mental anguish. The Gospel of Luke says that as he prays in the garden his sweat becomes like blood.

Here is an account of what happened next:

Soon after midnight:

In the garden, Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss, thereby identifying him to temple officials. Jesus is arrested and first taken to Annas, the former high priest of the Temple, and then to Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest for that year.

Between 1:00 AM and daybreak:

Jesus is tried before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish legal council, and is found guilty of blasphemy, which is irreverently claiming to have the power of God. The guards then blindfold him, spit on him and strike him in the face with their fists.

Soon after daybreak:

In his third appearance before members of the Sanhedrin, Jesus is again found guilty of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. Since permission for an execution had to come from the governing Romans, Jesus is taken early in the morning by the temple officials to the residence and governmental seat of Pontius Pilate, the governor of the territory of Judea.

However, Jesus is presented to Pilate not as a blasphemer but rather as a self-appointed king who would undermine the Roman authority. Pilate makes no charges against Jesus and sends him to Herod Antipas, the Roman appointed king of Judea.

Pilate does not want to make the decision; and Herod, who is Jewish through his mother, has authority over Pilate. But Herod likewise makes no official charges and returns Jesus to Pilate.

In the setting of that sleepless night, Jesus has been forced to walk more than 2.5 miles to and from the sites of the various trials.

Pilate again can find no basis for a legal charge against Jesus, but the people persistently demand crucifixion. Pilate finally grants their demand and hands over Jesus to be whipped and crucified.

Although the Romans did not invent crucifixion, at this time they have perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering. It is one of the most disgraceful and cruel methods of execution, usually reserved only for slaves, foreigners, revolutionaries, and the vilest of criminals.

Scriptural references indicate that Jesus is severely whipped. The Roman soldiers, amused that this weakened man has claimed to be a king, begin to mock him by placing a robe on his shoulders, a crown of thorns on his head, and a wooden staff as a scepter in his right hand. Next, they spit on Jesus and strike him on the head with the wooden staff.

It is now about 9:00 AM:

After the beating and mocking, the Roman soldiers put Jesus' clothes back on him, and they lead him and two thieves to be crucified. It is customary for the condemned man to carry his own crossbar from the flogging post to the site of crucifixion outside the city walls. Jesus apparently is so weakened by the severe flogging that he cannot carry the crossbar to the site, which is one-third of a mile away. Simon of Cyrene is summoned to carry Christ's cross.

The procession then makes its way to Golgotha, which means "Place of the Skull," an established crucifixion site, where there are permanently located heavy upright wooden stipes or poles, on which the crossbars are secured.

The law required that at the site of the execution, the victim is given a bitter drink of wine mixed with myrrh or gall as a mild analgesic. But after tasting it, Jesus refuses the drink.

Jesus is then thrown to the ground on his back, his arms stretched along the crossbar and his hands nailed to it with tapered iron spikes. After the crossbar is raised to the upright post, the feet of Jesus are nailed to the cross.

When the nailing is completed, a sign with the person's name and crime is attached to the cross, just above the person's head. The sign for Jesus, written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, says "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

The soldiers and the civilian crowd taunt Jesus throughout the crucifixion ordeal, and the soldiers cast lots for his clothing. Christ speaks seven times from

the cross. Since speech occurs during exhaling, these short utterances are particularly difficult and painful.

At about 3:00 PM on that Friday:

Jesus cries out in a loud voice, bows his head, and dies. The Roman soldiers and all onlookers recognize his moment of death. The Roman centurion, seeing what has happened, says, “Surely, this was a righteous man.”

Last words are precious. The last words of Jesus are matchless for an understanding of suffering, of forgiveness, of love, of trust.

Let us now experience the last words of Jesus from the cross . . .