

**GROW. PRAY. STUDY.**

**First United Methodist Church- Weekly Study Guide**  
*“equipping people in becoming deeply committed Christians ”*

**The Final Week: “Good Friday: The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus” (March 29-April 3)**

*Now at the festival [Pilate] used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection...the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. **Mark 15:6-7, 11-15, 22-25***

On Friday Jesus was rushed before a makeshift session of the Sanhedrin Court. The Chief Priest and the Elders had pulled the court together in the dark of night to have them indict Jesus and send him to Pilate. When they brought him before Pilate, Pilate was prepared to release him. Not only did he find no evidence of a crime himself, but the night before his wife had a dream that this innocent man would come before her husband and she warned him to avoid getting involved in the situation. But Pilate felt the immense pressure of the powerful people around him. He felt the threat that somehow word would get to Caesar that he had not protected Rome. He felt the pressure of the crowd pushing him to go against his instincts, against what he knew was right....and so Pilate had Jesus crucified.

This week we enter into Holy Week.....the week just prior to Easter. During this week we are meant to reflect on our own lives, the decisions we make, and the faith we claim in Christ. We are, however, called to reflect on these things in the context of Jesus’ crucifixion. As you go through our daily readings think about what it means that Christ was crucified for you. Think about a time when you were in the position Pilate was in.....you knew in your heart what was right, but you felt the pressure of the crowd pushing you the other way. In life, do you follow your heart or the crowd? If you were in the crowd on Friday would you be shouting, “Release Him!” or “Crucify Him!”

**Monday- READ Matthew 26:57 – 27:10**

All week the rulers tested Jesus. Each time, he refused to answer directly. Now the high priest asked, under oath, “Are you the Messiah?” Jesus (verse 64) boldly quoted Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1, words all Jews held were about the Messiah. Peter acted just as Jesus predicted, then wept when he realized what he’d done. When you are asked directly about your faith in Jesus, what do you say? If your courage fails, can you accept Jesus’ mercy in heartfelt sorrow, or do you fall into despair?

***Pray the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer***

**Tuesday- READ John 18:12 – 19:16**

John gives the most complete record of Jesus' dialogue with the priestly leaders, and with Pilate. 18:15-16 probably tells us why—the gospel writer's contacts allowed him to enter and hear the proceedings. Pilate, a politician, saw no evil or violence in Jesus. But his main job was to keep peace with the leaders in Jerusalem. How does Jesus and Pilate's dialogue in 19:7-11 show the difference between external power and inner moral strength? Pilate avoided a riot, kept local rulers happy, upheld Roman power—and all it took was crucifying one sinless peasant preacher. Rome was no doubt pleased with him. When you have to choose between pleasing a human power (even social or family pressure) and doing what's right, what choices do you make?

***Pray the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer***

**Wednesday- READ Mark 15:16-41**

The gospels record seven "last words" of Jesus on the cross. Mark and Matthew say Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The words show how cut off from God he felt as he bore our sins alone on the cross. In Psalm 22, faith prevails in the end, so Jesus may also have been affirming faith in God's triumph. In verses 29-32 and 36, we read some of the insults people threw at Jesus on the cross. Where was the flaw in "reasoning" that "If he's really God, he'll do something supernatural to save himself"? Are you ever tempted to confuse human standards of "success" with the mysterious working of God's love and power?

***Pray the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer***

**Thursday - READ Luke 23:26-49**

Luke records three of Jesus' last words from the cross. We hear him ask God to forgive those who crucified him. We see him promise paradise to the criminal as soon as he asked Jesus to remember him in his kingdom. We hear him commit himself to God in the words of Psalm 31:5. We often speak of the "thief" on the cross. More precisely, the words the Bible writers use mean "bandits," "criminals," or "violent offenders." What do you think stirred inside this violent man to lead him to ask Jesus to remember him? What does Jesus' response tell you about the Savior's heart toward you?

***Pray the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer***

**Friday - READ John 19:19-37**

John's Gospel shows Jesus on the cross tenderly giving his mother to the care of his trusted follower. He says he thirsts, and John notes that a hyssop branch (a Passover symbol) carried the red vinegar drink. At the end, perhaps in the loud shout Mark recorded, Jesus said, with spiritual as well as physical meaning, "It is finished." How has seeing Jesus on the cross spoken to your heart? The Good Friday Tenebrae (Service of Darkness) Service, in the sanctuary tonight at 7 p.m., gives you a sacred space to talk with God about your response. Plan to join us.

***Pray the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer***

**Saturday- READ John 19:41-42; 20:1,11-18**

Today you will be reading the passage we will use in worship tomorrow. Pray that God will open your heart and prepare you for a powerful worship experience as we come together tomorrow as the body of Christ.

***I invite you to pray the following prayer:***

*Dear God,*

*As I read this passage today help me do so with an open heart, sincerely listening for your voice in my life. Use this passage to prepare me for worship tomorrow. As I read it help me to set aside my own agenda and my own desires so that I may come to worship tomorrow prepared to be molded by you as I continue my journey to becoming a deeply committed disciple of yours. In Christ's name I pray, AMEN*

Here at FUMC we believe part of becoming a Deeply Committed Christians is praying daily. If you find yourself struggling with what to say, we suggest you try praying Wesley's Covenant Prayer.

***A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition***

I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low by thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. AMEN