

SIXTH GOSPEL READING: Mark 15:21-39

pg 54 NT

Naomi: 21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. 22 Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. 25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." 27 And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. 29 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him. 33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 35 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." 36 And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." 37 Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

FIRST GOSPEL READING: Mark 14:1,10-21

pg 51 NT

1 It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; 2 for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people." ...10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. 11 When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. 12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 13 So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, 14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." 16 So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. 17 When it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18 And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." 19 They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" 20 He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. 21 For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

SECOND GOSPEL READING: Mark 14:22-32

pg 52 NT

Mary: 22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24 He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." 26 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' 28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." 29 Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." 30 Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." 31 But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same. 32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

THIRD GOSPEL READING: Mark 14:33-46

pg 52 NT

Vicky: 33 He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. 34 And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." 35 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." 37 He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? 38 Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. 41 He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand." 43 Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." 45 So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. 46 Then they laid hands on him and arrested him

FOURTH GOSPEL READING: Mark 14:53-65

pg 52 NT

Bennie: 53 They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. 54 Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. 55 Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. 56 For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. 57 Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 58 "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" 59 But even on this point their testimony did not agree. 60 Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" 61 But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'" 63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? 64 You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. 65 Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

FIFTH GOSPEL READING: Mark 15:1-5, 11-20

pg 53 NT

Alma: 1 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. 2 Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." 3 Then the chief priests accused him of many things. 4 Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." 5 But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed....11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. 12 Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" 13 They shouted back, "Crucify him!" 14 Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. 16 Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. 18 And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. 20 After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

“Stop” & “Go”

This morning, I'd like to first ask you to imagine. Imagine you're witnessing an avalanche. You don't know what's triggered it, maybe an explosion, or a snowmobile, or animals... but whatever caused it you know it started as a small amount of snow, a snowball maybe, that began to roll or slip down the slope. It's getting bigger and bigger, engulfing a wider and wider swath on the face of the mountain, gaining speed as it travels down. The noise is deafening, a roaring, crashing cacophony. A large white cloud of snow obliterates the scene. The ground under your feet shakes. Soon everything... boulders, buildings, roads, trees are buried. It's a frightening image isn't it?

Now I want you to consider the **metaphorical** power of this image. *“On July 28, 1914, archduke Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was assassinated by a Serbian in Sarajevo. Austria-Hungary prepared for war with Serbia. Russia prepared to defend Serbia against Austria-Hungary. Germany prepared to defend Austria-Hungary against Russia. France prepared to defend Russia against Germany. Germany prepared to attack France through Belgium. Britain prepared to defend Belgium against Germany. The Turks rallied behind Germany. Japan rallied behind Britain. Within a short while, the whole world was at war. The first snowball began rolling. Four years later, 15 million people were dead.”¹*

An avalanche. Yes, an avalanche. You know, Holy Week was also an avalanche. The week started off well. It was a beautiful day on top of the mountain, Mt. Zion, when Jesus processed into the city. His entry was prophesied by Zechariah and was what the crowds recognized as being in the manner of a king. He rode on a donkey and they waved palm branches and threw cloaks on the ground, shouting, *“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”* They shouted *“Hosanna”*, Save Us. In another part of the city, the rumblings of an avalanche were already beginning to be felt. Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, was processing in as well, accompanied by large numbers of military units. His parade was intended to strike fear in the hearts of the thousands of emotionally-charged Jewish pilgrims in the city. If, in their zealous

¹ Sam Wells. *Sermon: “Saying Stop”* <https://chapel.duke.edu/sites/default/files/April1SayingStop.pdf> (accessed 3/22/18).

celebrations of Passover, of being liberated from Egypt centuries earlier, they had any ideas about rising up against Rome, they needed to know they'd be brutally put down. As the week progressed, we see the religious leaders beginning to scheme against Jesus, and then one of Jesus' own disciples, Judas, betrayed him. The snowball gathered strength as the other disciples abandoned Jesus when he was arrested, and Peter, his rock, denied him before the cock crowed three times. Then there was Sanhedrin, and Herod passing him to Pilate, and Pilate giving in to the now jeering crowds, yelling, "crucify him". They all fell down, one on another. They become part of the avalanche. And the sins of temptation, greed, lying, fear, panic, infidelity, jealousy, arrogance, violence...all provided the energy for the cascade.

Yes, Holy Week was an avalanche, a fall story. It's part of an enormous fall story which started with Adam & Eve. It's part of the huge downward slide, the fall of the human race down, down, down despite God's tenacious efforts over time to covenant and be **at-one** with us.

(pause) However, something different happened in Holy Week, something astoundingly different. A person pushed against this avalanche and said, "STOP". It was Jesus, God incarnate, the fully human/fully divine One in whom God finally became fully **at-one** with us. Jesus had always lived for freedom, always stood against injustice, eating with sinners, welcoming those who were outcast and marginalized, forgiving enemies, elevating the status of women and children, and otherwise interpreting God's Law contrary to the corrupted ideology of the day. But in Holy Week, he really resisted. He took head on the political forces and the religious forces of the time. He confronted and threatened them and, not surprisingly, he was condemned for sedition and killed on a Roman cross. His two hands, pushed against the snow, were "crushed, obliterated...nailed."²

But this was not the end. Jesus' "STOP" wasn't the last word. On Easter morning, God raised Jesus from the dead, and the downward slide of humanity was reversed! You see, not only did humanity witness Jesus' resistance and in the end, saw his going to the cross for all who cannot resist the evils and for those who commit the evils ...not only did we witness this

² Sam Wells. *Sermon: "Saying Stop"* <https://chapel.duke.edu/sites/default/files/April1SayingStop.pdf> (accessed 3/22/18).

selfless love...but humanity saw that Jesus then defeated the greatest of all those evils...death.

On Easter morning, humanity heard another divine word.... "GO"! And ever since then we have been fueled by it to "Go" out and say "STOP" to the avalanches in this world, ourselves. I love the way Elizabeth Johnson summarizes it, (slow) *"With moral indignation, concern for broken creation and a sympathy calling for justice, the power of God's compassionate love on the cross entered the pain of the world as a contagious lure to transform it from within."*³

RIGHT! On Nov 8, 1977, Gordon Wilson, a 60 yo protestant laborer from Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, attended a Veterans Day ceremony in his home town with his daughter, Marie, a nurse. During the ceremony, a large bomb planted by the Provisional IRA exploded. It killed 12 and injured 64. Wilson was one of the injured and his daughter was killed. He gave an interview with the BBC just hours after the attack describing with anguish his last conversation with his daughter, when they were both buried in the rubble, in which she expressed her love for him. But Gordon Wilson also said, "But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge.... I will pray for these men tonight and every night." He begged that no one take revenge for his daughter's death. It's been said that his words were a turning point in the "Troubles", the 25 years of violence in Northern Ireland, the 25 years of cascading avalanche. Wilson became campaigner for peace, holding many meetings with members on both sides of the conflict. On Nov 8, 1997, the Sinn Fein leader formally apologized for the bombing.⁴

Gordon Wilson was one person who said, "Stop" and acted on the divine "Go". So was MLK Jr, Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, Cesar Chavez, and Oscar Romero. So was the unknown guy in Tiananmen Square, Ronald Reagan, Mr. Rogers. So is Malala Yousafzai, Al Gore, Charles & Melissa Johnson, the women of the "Me Too" movement, the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, and the list goes on.

Friends, as you and I walk with Jesus this week up the mountain to Jerusalem and on to the cross, we will witness the avalanche. And we will recognize the characters falling, and we will

³ Elizabeth A. Johnson. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 253.

⁴[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Wilson_\(Northern_Irish_peace_campaigner\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Wilson_(Northern_Irish_peace_campaigner)). Quoted in ⁴ Sam Wells. *Sermon: "Saying Stop"* <https://chapel.duke.edu/sites/default/files/April1SayingStop.pdf> (accessed 3/22/18).

recognize the destructive power which started the ball rolling...temptation, greed, lying, infidelity, fear, panic, jealousy, arrogance, violence. We will recognize it for it is also happening in our world. *(long pause)* It also happens in our personal lives. *(pause)* It surely does. But please know that the directions for when we are caught in an avalanche are to “swim” to the top of the moving snow, stay close to the surface and then move toward the light. So, my prayer for us this week, this holy week, is that we identify, we name the avalanches cascading around us, and that we move closer to the Light, closer to the One who said “Stop”, the One who now empowers us, gives us the courage and strength, to do the same. And then I pray that we all look to Easter morning for then we WILL hear the divine word, “Go”.

Amen.

Daniel Migliore explains it. *“Christ’s suffering and death was a divine and human “necessity” –A necessity that God’s gracious and non-coercive love be fully expressed in all its vulnerability in him, and a necessity of a human world order that this One who mediated God’s forgiveness and inaugurated the reign of God, characterized by justice, freedom, and peace, should become a victim of violence and injustice because he threatened the world that wants to maintain it.”*⁵

⁵ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004), 189.