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The Revised Common Lectionary Notes

November 4, 11, 18, 22, 25, and December 2
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November 4, All Saints Sunday: John 11:32–44 (or The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 12:28–34)

One might ask, “Why does this pericopal selection begin with 11:32, and not with 11:1?” Because it is important to understand the larger message of John 11, we shall survey the entire chapter.

In John 10, we read of Jesus referring to Himself as “the Good Shepherd”—not as *a* good shepherd, but as *the* Good Shepherd (*the Good King*; see Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34; Jeremiah 23:1–4). The outcome is that some of His hearers insist that Jesus is out of His mind (10:20), plot to stone Him to death (10:31), and plan to arrest Him (10:39). Jesus leaves Jerusalem for safety reasons and goes to the place where John had been baptizing (10:40–42), possibly Bethany Beyond the Jordan (1:29). The day comes when Jesus receives word from Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus is seriously ill, and Jesus returns to Bethany on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives.

11:1–4: John does not tell us the story of Mary and Martha in which Mary sits at Jesus’ feet while Martha frets in the kitchen (Luke 10:38–42). In Luke, Mary’s posture denotes that she is asking Jesus to accept her as a student! Jesus obviously answered, “Yes.”

John is the only evangelist to tell us of the sickness of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Naturally, Jesus is called when Lazarus becomes sick. The sisters send for Jesus not merely because He is their friend, but because He has the power to heal. When reacting to the call, Jesus explains to His disciples that the present sickness will not end in death; it has come about as an opportunity for God to show forth His glory so that the Son of Man may also be glorified.

11:5–10: Jesus does not rush to the bedside of His dear friend, but stays where He is for two days, after which He sets out for Bethany. The disciples remind Jesus of the opposition against Him in Jerusalem. Jesus responds by emphasizing two truths. The first is that the daylight is fleeting. Time is running out! He must go back to Jerusalem for His Father has work for Him to do. Jesus then adds a reminder in which He refers to walking by the light of day. People are safe as long as they are with Him, the Light of the World. But those who walk without His light walk in darkness—in peril.

11:11–16: Jesus takes His time to get to the scene. He also talks in riddles that make His disciples wonder what is going on. Only Jesus is in command of the situation. The disciples do not understand what Jesus means when He says that Lazarus is asleep. Jesus explains that He has purposely stayed away from Lazarus until he is dead so that the disciples might see His power and believe in Him. The disciples still do not understand. Thomas, nicknamed “The Twin,” shows admirable loyalty and affection. He is prepared to go with Jesus to Jerusalem—even if it means death. Possibly, Thomas suspects that Jesus’ death is not far away.

11:17–27: Lazarus has been buried for four days by the time Jesus reaches Bethany. (It is possible that Lazarus has been in a tomb for only a little over two days, since the Jews counted even part of a day as a full day.) While Jesus has been taking His time to get to His friends’ place, other relatives and friends have wasted no time in coming to Mary and Martha to offer comfort. Comforting the grieving was considered a work of piety among the Jews; see Job 2:11. Some might be asking, “Has Jesus no sympathy and understanding for people in sorrow?”

When Jesus promises that Lazarus will live again, Martha sees only half the truth; as a good Jewess, she knows that God will raise the dead on the Final Day of resurrection. Jesus now makes an astounding / *Am* statement. He Himself *is* true life, He *is* the resurrection—and not only because He will finally call the dead out of their graves (see 5:28, 29; 6:40, 44). Faith in Him as the Son of God means that Eternal Life begins *here and now* (see 5:24; 8:51). Although the believer still must die and be buried, that does not mean that all hope is lost. Rather, dying means entry into eternal life in the fullest and most perfect sense. Only One who has life in himself, the perfect life of God, can offer this kind of life (see 1:4; 5:26; Revelation 1:18).

Before Jesus does anything else, He asks the crucial question, “Do you believe this?” Martha is asked to believe Jesus’ words even before He performs His greatest miracle. Like the man whose son was healed (4:50), she must learn that faith in Jesus means trusting in His promises. She stands the test and becomes one of those who make a great confession to Jesus: He is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Coming One (a Jewish expression for the Messiah); see 1:9, 15; 3:31; 4:25.

11:28–32: Mary is the quiet one, sitting at home and grieving for her lost brother. Martha (as in Luke 10:38–42) is the practical, busy person. We sense a tone of reproach in her first words to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Now it’s too late! At least Martha shows some faith. She knows that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus’ death. But even now a glimmer of hope shines through her sad words. Martha’s “if” does not mean that all hope is gone and there is nothing more to be done. When Jesus is present, there is always hope. Martha knows this, and clings to every small shred of hope.

John knows how to tell a good story to keep his readers in suspense. As readers, we know how things will end. However, the tension mounts as we follow the movements of people between Bethany and the place where Jesus is staying. Martha has gone out to get Jesus (v. 20); now she rushes back home to get Mary (v. 28). It is now Mary’s turn to run out to meet Jesus. Her friends follow her, thinking that she is going to her brother’s tomb. Mary repeats her sister’s “if.”

11:33–37: Jesus does not offer cheap comfort such as, “Cheer up! You’ll soon get over it! This time next year the pain will be gone.” No! He is deeply moved by the tears of Mary and her friends. Even the shortest verse in the Bible, “Jesus wept,” (“began to weep”) contains a message of comfort. He knows and understands human sorrow as we mere mortals stand crying at a graveside. We do not have to try

to hide our feelings, or put on a brave front. The onlookers do not understand Jesus' weeping. His tears are not a sign of hopelessness in the face of death, but of compassion and sorrow over the power of death, which must be broken by the Lord of Life.

11:38–40: Humanly speaking, everything points to the terrible finality of death. Lazarus has been dead for four days. His body, wrapped in cloth (probably with some preservative ointments between the folds), will by now have begun to decompose. Again, it is the ever-practical Martha who states the obvious. Why open the grave now? What is to be gained by looking at a dead body? Jesus has to remind her of His words to her a little while earlier (vv. 25–26). Has she so quickly lost the faith that she confessed so magnificently (v. 27)?

11:41–44: Jesus talks with His Heavenly Father—not to gain some power that He does not yet possess, but for the benefit of the onlookers. They must be reminded that He is the Son doing the work that the Father sent Him to do. One of the sheep hears the Shepherd's voice (10:16). The Life calls a dead friend back to life (v. 25). The One who will raise the dead on the Last Day with the command of His voice now raises a man back to physical life in this world; see 5:28. At the command of Jesus, the grave must give up its captives. The miracle has happened: Lazarus comes out still wearing his bandages and probably squinting as his eyes adjust to the sunlight. What a sight!

Mark 12:28–34

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus leaves Galilee in 10:1 and enters Jerusalem in 11:1. After Jesus inspects and attacks the Temple system (11:1–20), He has to deal with a number of confrontations; see 11:27–33; 12:13–17; 12:18–27. In 12:28–34, Jesus is approached by a scribe who asks Him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" The ensuing dialog is anything but confrontational. Jesus answers the scribe's question (11:29–31), and the scribe seems happy with Jesus' answer (11:32). He even goes on to say that to love God and neighbor is more important than offering whole burnt offerings and sacrifices (11:33). And Jesus commends him warmly!

Some comments: The scribe poses a typical rabbinic question, asking about the "most important" in a given class. Moses' commandments were many. Which one takes precedence over all others? Jesus responds by quoting the daily prayer of Jewish people, the Great *Shema* ("Listen"); see Deuteronomy 6:4f. The biggest issue of all is the love of God alone, the love of Israel's covenant-God. This allegiance is to be total. The Great *Shema* is to be the first—absolutely!

Love of neighbor is another matter; see Leviticus 19:18. This OT precedent is referred to and counseled everywhere in the New. When it first appears in Leviticus, it is contrasted with revenge against a fellow Jew—but the significance of "neighbor" had become much wider with the passing of the centuries. Prior to 138 AD, Rabbi Akiba wrote, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"; this is the greatest general principal in the Torah" (*Sifra*, Lev. 19:18). Jesus welded these two commandments together—to make them inseparable.

Some who argue for the Jewish origins of a writing known as the *Didache* (where the two commandments occur side by side) say that it was already rabbinic practice to join them by Jesus' day. However, others—including some contemporary Jewish rabbis—assert that it is very likely that Jesus was the first to foment a spiritual revolution by joining the two together—inseparably.

The questioner echoes Jesus' response by changing but a few words and adding a familiar idea from the

OT. The Jews did not speculate about the meaning of loving one's neighbor "as yourself." For them, it simply meant promoting the well-being of a fellow Jew, just as one would be pleased to have good things done to oneself.

The speaker offered a comparison uncommon among scribes. One cannot imagine Jesus praising him so enthusiastically for a rabbinic platitude. Setting fraternal love above ritual sacrifice—rather than on a par with it—may have been the special insight. Then, because a significant agreement had been reached between rabbi and pupil, the onlookers sink into silence. They ponder what Jesus, Who sets such challenging terms for entering God's Kingdom, might understand about that Kingdom.

We would do well to remember that Jesus' teaching on God's will for His sons and daughters goes even further than the insights offered in this passage. Jewish rabbis taught that:

- God gave Adam and Eve two commandments: love God and love neighbor.
- God gave Noah and his descendants (human race, all Gentiles) seven of the Commandments.
- God gave the Jewish people 613 commandments, plus hundreds of oral traditions.
- However, Jesus finally gives His brothers and sisters only one commandment (John 13:15, 34–35; 15:12–13).

The implications of Jesus' new single commandment are profound beyond definition!

November 11, The Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 12:38–44

12:38–40: In these verses, Jesus delivers a warning in relation to the dress and behavior of the learned.

In synagogues of Jesus' day, only the learned (usually rabbis and teachers) were permitted to sit on the seat in front of the ark that housed the scrolls of the Torah. Those who sat on that seat faced the congregation. Furthermore, they alone were to be assigned the choicest of seats at a banquet. The "places of honor" were the couches around the table (U-shaped *triclinium*) where the host himself reclined.

Even so, Jesus points out that they know how to play the "extortion game"—possibly in relation to foreclosure of rents or preying on the piety of rich widows. This vice walks hand in hand with another vice: hypocrisy! This (Marcan) statement of Jesus against the scribes is almost more ominous than the extended "woes" in Luke 6:24–26.

An Anglican clergyman serving a parish near Oxford, England, once shared the following insight: "When the day comes that I want people to notice me rather than Jesus, I have invalidated my ministry."

In relation to how the Essenes of Jesus' day defined rank and pride of place in the coming Messianic Banquet, the following quote is worth pondering:

The Qumran community (Essenes), where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, believed that no Gentiles and no Samaritans would be present at this banquet. And only the Jews who kept the law in the very precise narrow fashion that these Essenes prescribed would eat at this table. The text reads: "And then the Messiah of Israel shall come and the chiefs of the clan of Israel shall sit before him, each in the order of his dignity, according to his place in their camp and marches. And no one is going to be allowed in

who is smitten in his flesh, or paralyzed in his feet or hands, or lame, or blind, or deaf, or dumb, or smitten in his flesh with a visible blemish.” (The Messianic Rule, 1QSA, 2:11–22, transl. by G. Vermes)

12:41–44: The term *treasury* denotes donation chests. There were 13 of these in the Court of the Women in the Jerusalem Temple, each one bearing a label telling the purpose for which the money placed within it would be used. These chests were shaped like an inverted trumpet to ensure protection from theft. The rich contribute large sums, using copper or brass coins. A widow contributes two lepta—a tiny sum. However, her gift gives rise to some teaching on Jesus’ part. She has given more than the others since the little that she still has (indeed, not enough to live on) is the true measure of her generosity. She gave so much of the little that she had. But naturally, the rich have plenty left over. However, the widow’s poverty is a richer spiritual source than the material abundance of the rich. She trusts God, matter what! She gives generously, no matter how little she has left over.

During the months of October and November, many churches focus on their annual stewardship campaign. We would do well to bear in mind that the focus ought not to be “During the coming year, how much are you going to give of that which is yours?” Rather, it should be, “During the coming year, how much are you going to keep for yourself of that which belongs to God?” Are God’s people prepared to live simply that others might simply live?

November 18, The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 13:1–8

In Mark’s narrative, Jesus enters Jerusalem for the first time in on Palm Sunday. He surveys what is taking place within the structure, and then, together with the Twelve, goes to Bethany (11:1–11). He returns to the Temple on the following day (Monday), attacks the system being practiced within its walls, and judges and disqualifies it (11:12–19). The next day, Jesus and the disciples return to the Temple for the third time (11:27), and a series of confrontations between Jesus and Jerusalem-based Jewish leaders takes place.

Jesus now defines and defends His own authority above and against that of the Temple and its priestly hierarchy. The ensuing confrontations do not lead to Jesus’ enthronement as the Davidic Messiah, but result in His separation from the Temple. God’s Kingdom and the Temple system are opposed to each other and their respective “systems” are irreconcilable. Only two people endorse Jesus’ Temple teaching: a scribe who embraces Jesus’ fundamental article of faith (12:28–34), and a widow who lives according to it (12:41–44). Jesus’ acceptance of male and female into His new community proclaims defiance to the all-male power structure of the chief priests, scribes, elders, Herodians, Sadducees, and Pharisees.

So, what has Jesus done?

- He discarded the Temple and those who manage its “salvation marketing system.”
- He compared the Temple system to a dead fig tree (11:12–14, 20).
- He stressed that it was not the “right time” for the Kingdom in the Temple,
- He formulated His new article of faith.
- He detached His identity from traditional Davidic expectations.
- He proclaimed His authority in opposition to that of the Temple system and its hierarchy.

Jesus now leaves the Temple, never to return to it again (13:1). Soon after He leaves the Temple, one of the disciples exults over the glory and might of its structure: “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings.” This statement must be considered one of gross misunderstanding, of misplaced admiration. The disciple has eyes only for the size of the Temple’s stones, but not for Jesus—the cornerstone of the New Temple.

Jesus responds promptly, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down” (13:2). This prediction of the coming destruction of the Temple points to the “grand finale” of Jesus’ Temple activity. The Temple, like the fig tree, will be brought to ruin. As the fig tree has withered away to its roots (11:20), so the Temple will be left with not “one stone upon another.” After predicting the coming fate of the Temple, Jesus takes His place on the Mount of Olives (13:3)—the location from which He began His visits to the Temple.

Peter, James, John, and Andrew, the first disciples called to follow Jesus (1:16–20), are alarmed by Jesus’ prediction (13:4). They ask, “When will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” Their question points to two concerns: When will the Temple be destroyed, and when will God’s true Kingdom break into history? In answering the disciples’ question, Jesus delivers a long speech while sitting on the Mount of Olives (13:5–37).

It is significant that, in what follows, Jesus refers to things that seem out of character with what Jesus has referred to prior to this point in the narrative: wars and rumors of war, uprisings and revolts, earthquakes and famines, the establishment of a desolating sacrilege, flight into the mountains, and the appearance of false prophets. Mark has not previously associated these things with expectations in relation to Jesus’ life. However, without a doubt Jesus would have talked about such things when teaching His disciples to have nothing to do with the Jewish Zealot movement—a movement, Jesus warned, that would never succeed and would bring only disaster on the Jewish nation. Hence, what surfaces in this section is Mark’s efforts to apply Jesus’ words to the futility and tragedy of the Jewish revolt of AD 66–70 that exploded about 40 years after Jesus’ ascension.

It is noteworthy fact that the Jewish historian Josephus (who wrote most extensively on the Roman-Jewish War) reports that Jewish defense strategies were motivated by religious hopes as much as by military aspirations. What gave many Jewish people the hope to fight against all odds was a deep-seated conviction of the imminent coming of the Messiah. “Prophets” predicted messianic intervention throughout the war and messianic deliverance at the peak of the final battle over the Jerusalem Temple.

In vv. 5, 6, Jesus warns against certain persons who will appear in the name of Jesus saying, “I am he!” They proclaim messianic power and announce the presence of the Kingdom. Both 13:5–6 and 13:21–22 relate to one and the same kind of messianic prophet. In 13:7–20, Jesus seems to be making reference to the Roman-Jewish War, which He knew would break out (7–13); the destruction of the Temple (13:14); and an ensuing period of great “tribulation” (15–20). Verse 14 contains a coded reference to the Roman general Titus who commanded the final attack on the Temple in AD 70 and took possession of its ruined site. So, in answering the disciples’ question, Jesus sees the coming destruction of the Temple as a non-miraculous event (13:14). It will usher in a time of flight, hardship, and tribulation, but not the Kingdom of God.

Furthermore, Jesus does not refer only to the coming Roman-Jewish war and the destruction of the Temple. He points also to events such as earthquakes and famines. All of this points to the fact that Jesus (and we today) have no abiding city” on Planet Earth, but only in the Life to Come. As we walk

through life, we are to focus on what it means to walk in step with Jesus, the forgiving, servant Messiah, and what our relationship to Him will mean when life on earth is done and life in God's Eternal Home begins!

Sadly, we have self-appointed "prophets" still today who proclaim all manner of things about national greatness and what a nation must do to perpetuate its non-negotiable manner of life. And these so-called prophets speak forth from pulpits, TV programs, and high places in political and economic systems. Thank God that Jesus got it right!

Nov. 22, Thanksgiving: Matthew 6:25–33

When celebrating Thanksgiving Day, some tend to focus on how God has lavished on them a host of tangible, material blessings so that they might enjoy the "good life"—as defined by materialism. However, Jesus never links the term *blessed* to possessing and enjoying material goods. He links it only to serving Him in His numerous "distressing disguises" (Matthew 25:31–46).

The three brief paragraphs (vv. 19–21; vv. 22, 23; v. 24) that precede this pericope focus on the issue of allegiance to God. In v. 24, Jesus does not demand the relinquishing of possessions. However, He does call His brothers and sisters to embrace a radically different view concerning Who owns all things and how life is to focus on serving that Owner by managing His possessions "the Jesus way."

V. 25: In 6:19, Jesus warns His brothers and sisters about greed for luxury. In v. 25, He offers instructions about anxiety in relation to daily needs. He points out that if His Father has provided His people with the "greater things" such as life and body, He will also provide the "lesser things" needed to sustain those greater things. To support His teaching, in the verses that follow, Jesus points to birds and their food, and to flowers and their beautiful dress.

V. 26: Since God has made the birds and us, surely we humans can learn from mere birds. Birds know nothing about methods of cultivation or crop rotation, fertilizers or irrigation, the latest equipment or threats to harvest, going to market or storing in barns. Despite their continuing search for food, birds live simply, and consume what the hand of our heavenly Father provides for them. And are not we humans of more value than birds? Indeed we are—and God lavishes great care on us.

V. 27: An afterthought interrupts the flow. A cubit is a unit of length measuring about 18 inches—from elbow to tip of fingers—but here it is used to speak of time (the NRSV uses the word *hour*, not *cubit*). Being anxious adds no inches to the length of life. Worry is a useless emotion; it produces stress and solves nothing.

V. 28–30: God pays significant attention to seemingly useless plants, to insignificant wildflowers, and to the grass of the field. And He does this even to lilies which are beautiful and alive today, but tomorrow are lifeless, tied into little bundles, and are thrown into ovens. If God is so caring and lavish with birds and flowers that are so small and possess such a short life span, how much more will He care for those whom He calls His children? Jesus concludes with a rebuke. For the first time, He addresses His own disciples with a title that He uses a number of times in Matthew's Gospel: people "of little faith" (see 8:26, 14:31; 16:8; 17:20). The disciples are not unbelievers, but persons whose faith wavers in times of crisis—rendering them incapable of fulfilling the will of God.

V. 31: The section closes with a restatement of the opening instruction in v. 25.

V. 32: Jesus exhorts His disciples to leave anxiety to the Gentiles who strive to acquire and enjoy mere earthly things. Jesus' disciples, however, can rest secure in the assurance that they have a Heavenly Father Who is the Maker and Owner of all creatures great and small, and Who provides for them.

V. 33: If Gentiles seek food and clothing (6:31–32), what are the disciples to seek? What will perfect their lives, ripen their faith, and fulfill their lives? In John's Gospel (1:38; 20:15; 17:20–24), the disciples are pictured as seeking Jesus Himself, seeking to abide with and in Him—even as He abides with and in them. The members of the Qumran community devoted themselves to seeking God with their whole heart by devoting themselves to studying and obeying every commandment of the Law of Moses (IQS 1:1, 2; 5:811). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus proclaims, "Strive first" (above all and only) "for the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Devote life to hallowing God's name, knowing His will, and doing the work of His Kingdom (6:9–10). As we focus on doing these things, God provides us with those "other things" such as food and drink to sustain the body and clothing to cover it.

After all, anxiety, worry, and grasping confine both rich and poor alike in spiritual prison cells, ever enslaved, with a multitude of neighbors, but with few sisters and brothers. To seek God's kingdom and His righteousness is to be released from that prison! As God lays His healing hands upon the universe and makes it whole again, He liberates human beings to live a new life as trusting servant children in His loved and loving family.

V. 34: The proverb expressed in this verse is the strongest evidence that *daily* in "daily bread" means nothing more extensive than a span of one day's sunshine. To try to see beyond the coming night or to forfeit sleep to anxiety and scheming is a sign of unbelief—not wisdom. It means playing God, acting as though all times are after all not in God's hands but in our own—as though we and not God are sovereign.

Nov. 25, The Last Sunday after Pentecost/Christ the King Sunday: John 18:33–37

Once again, one wonders why this selection focuses only on two of the seven scenes in John's Roman trial narrative. Hence, note the summary of all seven scenes contained in Section 49E, Unit 49, of CI's Crossways course:

In this final confrontation (John 18:28–19:16), Pontius Pilate represents the non-Jewish world. Although Pilate is supposedly trying Jesus, it is really Pilate who is on trial. The theme throughout the dialogues between Jesus and Pilate is Jesus' Kingship. Jesus informs Pilate that His own people have rejected Him because He was the wrong kind of King for them (18:35, 36). Pilate makes one last comment against the Jewish leaders with the superscription he attaches to the cross (19:19). This superscription attests to the world that Jesus is indeed King! The Jewish leaders thus finally suffer defeat.

John lists seven scenes in which Pilate moves in and out of the Praetorium—from Jesus to the Jewish leaders and back again.

Scene 1: Pilate is outside with the Jewish leaders who demand Jesus' death (18:28–32). They will not enter Pilate's quarters (a Gentile location) lest possibly they be contaminated by bread with leaven in it

(they are preparing to observe Passover). However, they ask Pilate to kill Jesus. They seek an execution, not a trial.

Scene 2: Pilate is inside with Jesus and discusses “kingship” with Him (18:33–38a). When Pilate asks Jesus why the Jewish leaders are so angry with Him, Jesus responds that He turned out to be the wrong kind of King. He is, after all, a Servant-King who washes feet—the King of Truth. This puzzles Pilate.

Scene 3: Pilate is outside with the Jewish leaders who choose Barabbas rather than Jesus as the one to be freed (18:38b–40). Pilate declares that he can find no crime in Jesus (18:38b); he repeats this in 19:4 and 19:6.

Scene 4: Pilate is inside with Jesus when the latter is scourged (19:1–3). Although the treatment given Jesus is designed to mock Him, it nevertheless declares who He is: The King of the Jews!

Scene 5: Pilate is outside with the Jewish leaders and presents Jesus to them (19:4–8). They reject Jesus, basing their position on an appeal to their sacred writings (19:7). When Pilate hears them say that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, he becomes more afraid than ever. Naturally Pilate, a Roman, was ready to believe that gods could show up in human form.

Scene 6: Pilate is inside with Jesus and asks Him where He is from. When Jesus refuses to answer Pilate, the latter discusses “power” with Him (19:9–11). Jesus reminds Pilate that, in the final analysis, Pilate is free to do only what Jesus permits him to do.

Scene 7: Pilate is outside with the Jewish leaders, tries to have Jesus released, but finally hands Jesus over to them (19:12–16a). Pilate yields to the Jewish leaders when they threaten to have him thrown out of the exclusive club known as “Friends of the Emperor.” Because Pilate is an imperial procurator—one appointed by the Emperor—he belongs to that club and does not want to lose his membership in it and the privileges that come with it.

Pilate hands Jesus over for crucifixion at midday on the Day of Preparation for Passover (19:14)—at that very hour when people began to hand over their lambs for ritual slaughter in preparation for the Passover meal. Hence, Jesus is declared to be the final, one-for-all, once-for-all Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. The Jewish leaders remain adamant in their rejection of Jesus and ironically declare that Caesar is their king.

Pilate’s pathetic, frenzied running to and fro expresses the turmoil in a person’s soul when faced with the innocent King and his having to make up his mind about Jesus’ identity and ministry. Ironically, it is Pilate, this pagan Roman ruler, who declares that Jesus is King of the Jews and insists that He be called that right to the bitter end (19:19–22). At the same time, when Pilate presents Jesus to the Jewish leaders as King, they respond with, “We have no king but the emperor” (19:15). What irony! The Jewish leaders despised the Roman emperor! Furthermore, their scriptures repeatedly insist that they are to have no king but God!

One detail referred to in the seventh scene (above) calls for special comment. According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus celebrates a Passover meal with His disciples in the Upper Room (Mark 14:12 and parallels). According to them, Jesus is crucified on Passover day itself, for the Jewish day began and ended at sunset. However, in John’s Gospel, Jesus’ last meal with His disciples in the Upper Room takes place on the day of Preparation for the Passover (13:1; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42). Both versions agree that

the events of the Upper Room took place on a Thursday night, the crucifixion on a Friday, and the resurrection on the following Sunday. The difference lies in Passover as opposed to Preparation for the Passover. Furthermore, Mark reports that Jesus was crucified at 9:00 a.m. (15:25). John 19:14 says that He was handed over for crucifixion at midday.

Regardless of which timetable is historically correct, John's emphasis is theological. In John's opening chapter, Jesus is twice referred to as "the Lamb of God" (1:29, 36). Lambs used in the annual Passover meals were handed over in the Temple beginning at midday on the Day of Preparation, to be ritually slaughtered by the priests in preparation for the Passover meal that evening. John wishes to present Jesus as the perfect, final, universal Passover Lamb who died for the sins of the world. It is with good reason that Jesus' legs were not broken (19:33). No bones in a Passover lamb were to be broken in the preparation process (Exodus 12:46). In John, chronology serves theology.

John's seven "scenes" describe Pilate going back and forth (seemingly, in a confused state) between the Jewish religious leaders and Jesus. Pilate asks Jesus a series of seven questions:

- "Are you the King of the Jews?" (18:33)
- "What have you done?" (18:35)
- "So you are a King?" (18:37)
- "What is truth?" (18:38)
- "Where are you from?" (19:9)
- "Do you refuse to speak to me?" (19:10)
- "Do you not know that I have power to release you and power to crucify you?" (19:10)

The irony throughout this section of the trial narrative is that it is really Jesus who is trying Pilate. Jesus is challenging Pilate to grapple with a series of questions:

- "What kind of a King do you think I am?"
 - "Where do you think I am from?"
 - "What do You think My ministry is all about?"
 - "Do you understand that I am 'the truth'?"
 - "Are you willing to hear the truth that I speak?"
-
- "Do you understand that I am the One who has power over you, and that you can do nothing to Me unless I permit you?" We, God's people, must remember that John challenges us today to understand that, in a very real sense, humanity continues to be on trial by Jesus, and that Jesus confronts each and every one of us with the same questions. How do we answer them in words? How do we answer them in our manner of life?

December 2, The First Sunday of Advent: Luke 21:25–36

The term "Son of Man" surfaces twice in this pericope (vv. 27, 36). It is used 82 times in the four Gospels—30 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 25 times in Luke, and 13 times in John. Its roots are in Daniel 7; see 7:13. In Daniel 7, the writer sees a series of monsters rise out of the sea—monsters that represent the series of empires under which the Jewish people had suffered: Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece, and (at the time of writing) the Syrian Seleucids. The term "son of man" in Daniel 7 is a symbol

for the “saints of the Most High,” the Jewish people, who are assured that the day is coming when they will be given dominion over the nations of the world forever. Jesus radically reinterprets the concept of “Son of Man.” He Himself is the first of a new and true people of God, and His mission is to establish a “true people of God” who will devote life to serving the nations and people of the world, not to dominating them. Without a doubt, the organized church needs to grapple with the meaning of this term and its significance for the life of God’s people.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus predicts clearly and powerfully the coming dreadful siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. Luke does not make reference to the Old Testament phrase, “abomination of desolation” (Daniel 9:27, 1 Maccabees 1:54) found in both Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14; it is a phrase that points to the Roman army’s eventual desecration of the Jerusalem Temple.

21:25–28: Luke picks up on the thought referred to in 21:11 and for a few verses looks ahead to the coming of the Son of Man “with power and great glory.” He again makes use of Old Testament figures of speech that picture the world convulsing under the impact of God’s redemptive power. Luke nowhere makes reference to the ignorance of the Son of Man concerning the final days (Mark 13:32–37). He alone includes the comforting remark that on the day of greatest struggle, redemption is at its nearest. The word *redemption* (v. 28) belongs to Paul (Roman 3:24). Here in Luke is the only place in all four Gospels where the term is used.

21:29–36: Luke points out that the generation of his day would witness the fall of Jerusalem. Even so, Jesus directs His hearers attention not to horrors, but to new life in the Kingdom of God. In v. 33, Jesus (reflecting a Jewish idiom) is saying, “Even if the sky and the earth were to pass away, (all) My words (and not just those of the final discourse) will pass away.” In getting his message across, Luke weaves Pauline themes into his text: Luke 21:34, 25 (see 1 Thess. 5:1–3); 21:34a (see 1 Thess. 5:7); v. 36 (see 1 Thess. 4:9–12, 18). Christian life is to be a prayerful preparation for the coming Final Appearing of the true Son of Man!