

It had been the worst week ever. Oh, it had started out all right, better than all right. Even though they had known it was risky to go to Jerusalem, where the scribes and Pharisees were, the ones who hated him, Jesus had insisted.

He must have been right—well, of course, Jesus was always right . . . Anyway, it had been a beautiful, wonderful, joyful day.

Everyone had greeted and welcomed Jesus like a hero, or a long-lost brother. There had been shouting and cheering—folks had waved him in with palm branches as he rode that little donkey on the path they’d lined with their wraps.

That day had been wonderful!

They had stayed nights in Bethany, the little village on the outskirts, and gone into Jerusalem, during the daytime.

Maybe it wasn’t so bad to go to Jerusalem after all. But then, there was that thing at the Temple, when Jesus lost his temper.

That’s right, Jesus lost his temper! That was so out of the ordinary. Jesus was usually so calm and good-natured.

What happened was that he noticed and realized what was being done at the holy Temple. The place where good Jewish people were to worship God was being turned into a marketplace—worse than that, a den of robbers.

Jesus got mad at that—really mad. He was right—as he always was. The Temple was for worship and prayer, not buying and selling. Certainly not cheating!

This spurt of temper—no, really righteous indignation—made the chief priests and scribes want to kill Jesus all the more.

That wasn’t reasonable of them—it was just rotten human nature. That’s how it is—there’s nothing like being in the wrong to make someone angry.

And Jesus had a way of pointing out that they, the religious leaders, the chief priests and scribes were in the wrong. They were making religion a burden for the people. They had gone from the Ten Commandments, given by God to Moses, to more than 600 religious rules. It just wasn’t possible for an average person of average income, to keep these rules, or even remember them.

Only the chief priests and scribes could, because they devoted their entire lives to it. So the religious leaders poured out the guilt. And they lorded it over the regular folks. “We’re good—you’re not.” “God loves us—you’re doomed.”

Somehow these religious leaders hated it that Jesus told the truth . . . about God . . . about life . . . about everything. They hated it that the people hung on Jesus’ every word.

Still, Jesus kept teaching in the Temple. He wouldn’t lay low. He kept saying things that hinted at the fact that this was his last week of earthly life—but rather than hide or go some place safe

for a while, till things blew over, Jesus kept on—using every moment to teach and instruct the disciples, the traveling group, the people.

The mood of the religious leaders got worse. It got murderous. And they seemed to have no clue. No clue that they were being unfaithful to God, disobedient to God's laws.

“Thou shalt not kill” is a big one. But that's what they intended—just not during the religious holiday of Passover . . . because the people might riot.

How hypocritical—how evil! That's the way folks are though—once set on the wrong path, they can keep going on to a world of hurt.

Despite all this, there had been a really nice evening, that evening they ate the Passover supper. It's always good to have a meal with friends, especially a holiday meal.

That's when Jesus had said he would somehow be with the group at every meal—in the bread and wine no less, if they would just remember him, he'd be there.

Well, good, but why were his words sounding so final, so sad?

They found out soon enough. Judas. Judas had done it—betrayed Jesus!

What happened was that after supper, they went to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus wanted to pray, which he did. He wanted Peter and James and John to keep him company, which they didn't. They kept falling asleep.

Then Judas brought in a crowd—chief priests, scribes and a bunch with swords and clubs. Judas identified him, and Jesus was arrested.

Oh, it was awful. Peter cut off one man's ear. The crowd dragged Jesus to the chief priests. The group kept trailing along, scared, and even lying if it seemed safer, the way Peter did. And you know, cowardly friends are not much better than enemies, not much use anyway.

Then on to Pilate, the governor. Some governor, some justice there! I know I have said it before but, if only Pilate had listened to his wife! All you men here, listen to your wives! You don't want to go down in history the way Pontius Pilate did!

The upshot was that Jesus was put to death, nailed to a cross, the cruelest execution. That was Friday.

And now, at the time of the Scripture read from Mark, it was Sunday. All of them were heart-broken.

The only thing the women could do was the proper laying out of the dead body. Pay final respects, and that's all they could do.

What a terrible week it had been. Their hearts were broken.

The women were in for a surprise though. All of Jesus' friends and disciples and followers were in for a surprise—the biggest, best, most wonderful surprise ever in all the world!

Jesus' body was not in the tomb that morning. There was no need for final respects, no need for final anything!

Jesus had come to life again! Risen from the dead—Resurrected.

The crucifixion and death had not lasted—death had not won. Evil and jealousy and lies and cruelty had not won. God had won.

God, with all the love and grace and mysterious power had won—and with all of that, the Christian faith began, with Jesus, our risen Lord, as our Savior!

Praise God. Amen.

(by Rev. Sally J. DeMasters)