#### 3/23/25 Sunday Message

#### What do we stand for? Entering the Spirit of Lent III

#### Rev Nina Clark

For the past couple of weeks, we have been observing Lent through by gleaning one of the possible messages of Yeshua ben Yoseph’s actions and teachings during what we now call Holy Week or the Passion of Jesus.

Like you, I’ve been using this period of Lent to deepen my awareness of my God Nature, of my Oneness, and exploring what I stand for and what I’m willing to let go of in order to stand more confidently in my knowingness of myself as an expression of the Divine.

I’m going to digress for a moment and pose a question. Why do we do this spiritual work that we do? Why do we meditate? Why do we practice affirmative prayer? Why do we read and learn about spirituality?

There is likely as many answers to that question as there are those of us sitting in this room or watching online, but I think when I listen to others and read stories and through my studies, I’ve come to the conclusion (at least for now) that our why has to be connected on some level to the experience we want to have in our lives.

We meditate and/or pray and practice these teachings so that we can have more peace, experience more love, more abundance, more joy, more wisdom, guidance, connection, compassion for ourselves and for others.

When we practice and slowly embody our teachings, we begin to have more choice in how we show up in the world. Rather than being limited to knee-jerk reactions to events in the world, as we practice, we reveal a greater Love, a more expansive Wisdom and deeper joy that is already present within us.

And by simultaneously releasing the more limited view of life that we likely grew up with and inherited, we discover we can choose how to respond to life. We find ourselves with better answers and access to choices that didn’t appear to exist before.

And as we unfold, we begin to discover that what we thought we stood for changes. We may have once stood for not believing we were lovable, only to discover, as we do our work, that we are immensely lovable.

We may have once stood for not ever having enough money to get by, only to discover, as we do our work, that there is an abundance that flows to us giving us exactly what we need to do that which is ours to do. Our spiritual practice is intimately connected to our lived experience.

As we evolve, we build a strong inner foundation on which we can stand and interact with the world from a place of conscious choice, and what we stand for evolves with us. And I strongly believe that we need to be willing to let our spiritual practice change us in ways that we may have once thought impossible.

There was once a time when I believed that what I am doing today was 100% out of my reach. My first time on the platform, when I gave a two-minute announcement, my heart was pounding the whole time and both sides of my shirt were soaked with sweat when I sat down. How was I going to get from that to this?

But I was willing to be changed, because I love these teachings, and I believe with all my heart that if we let them, they set us free to express our fullest, most amazing selves.

So, when I contemplate what Yeshua may have been teaching, I strive to connect it to how I live my life so that my spiritual practice, to the best of my current ability, becomes a living practice. What I stand for then becomes a conduit for the Power of the One Presence to express in my lived experience.

One more quick aside - you’ll notice that I use the name Yeshua or Yeshua ben Yoseph. For those of you who might be unfamiliar with that name, Yeshua is what Jesus was called in Hebrew. When Yeshua was translated to Greek, his name became Lesous, and then Lesus when it was translated into Latin. When it was translated into English, the Latin L changed to a J and his name became Jesus.

And now back to our regularly scheduled programming…

Over the past two weeks I shared that one of the possible meanings to glean from these gospel stories about what happened during what we call Holy Week, or the Passion of Jesus was that his words and actions are teaching us how important it is to know what we stand for and then do so.

During his triumphal entry not only was Jesus challenging Roman authority, but so are those who are with him. In doing so, he and the crowd who walks with him are all taking a powerful stand for his vision, for each one of them is knowingly risking Roman capital punishment.

When Yeshua enters the temple and makes a statement in that 40-acre complex by turning over a few tables to grab the attention of those nearby and rebuking the use of the Court of Gentiles as a marketplace, he is taking a stand for the proper use of that space as a Holy place, as a sacred space of worship. He is taking a stand for the God of his understanding, calling people to a higher consciousness.

The next day when he returns to teach, in very clear terms he tells his audience that he stands for Love. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” John 13:34

And that with and as Love, the Love of God, the Love that is God, that Holy, wonderful, amazing Love, with and as that Love we could bring about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Yeshua so passionately saw the possibility of a world where the Love that is the Beloved I Am is expressed by all humanity, that he was willing to give his life for it. That is how firmly he stood for what he believed.

And there are others who also believed deeply in this vision of this world Love ushers in. There is the story of the woman who anoints Yeshua at the house of Simon the leper… as Mark and Matthew tell us, or perhaps it was the house of Lazarus as John reports…

“While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.” Mark 14:3-9

Jesus tells us that she knows what she is doing - she believed him when he had told his followers that he would not be with them forever. She believed him and believed in him and the vision he shared with them, and what he believes needs to happen in order to bring it about. In anointing him she is standing with him.

And there is another who stood so firmly for the vision that Yeshua held that he too, was willing to stake everything. And that is Judas.

Judas is said to have betrayed Jesus. It is written that Judas went to the Sanhedrin and offered to deliver Jesus to them in exchange for thirty silver coins, according to Matthew.

All four gospels speak of Judas as the betrayer. In Mark’s account, Judas started out as an exemplary disciple. He only became the bad guy when the unknown woman anointed Jesus, and Mark pegged him as dishonest and greedy. And with each gospel account, Judas becomes a worse and worse kind of person, to the point where he is possessed even.

It’s important to remember that the gospels were not written as events unfolded - they were written years after the fact and so each author has his own version of what took place, and who said what, just as we would if we were asked to describe an event or a conversation that took place many days, weeks, months or even years ago.

Once someone had determined that Judas betrayed Jesus, how easy it could be for other authors to look back and “find evidence” to support that supposition.

However, Jewish New Testament scholar, Dr. AJ Levine points out that there is a translation error when Paul recalls the Last Supper. The word that was translated as “betrays,” paradidomi, (para DI do me) is better translated as “handed over.” And in none of Paul’s writings does he say anything about Jesus being betrayed.

I recognize that in many if not most circles, Judas is depicted as the “betrayer,” so much so that his very name has come to be linked with the act of betrayal.

But my research has led me to believe that Judas was actually Yeshua’s most devout disciple. It is now strongly considered in some scholarly circles that Judas betrayed Jesus at the request of Jesus, and so it wasn’t a betrayal at all.

It could be said that without Judas, Jesus could not accomplish what he knew was his to do. Without Judas, the journey comes to a screeching halt. Without Judas, there would have been no crucifixion. Without Judas, there wouldn’t have been a resurrection. Without Judas, Jesus couldn’t enter into that new life.

 And Judas, loyal friend and devout believer that he was, kept this secret, even knowing that others would come to revile him. As difficult as that had to have been, he stood for Yeshua and his vision of heaven on earth and for the events that had to unfold for it to be possible.

This is the story told in the Gospel of Judas, thought to have been written in the 2nd century by Gnostic Christians. This gospel reveals Judas as Yeshua’s best friend, as part of his inner circle, literally as the only one who really got Jesus’ message.

“He’s the good guy in this portrayal,” writes New Testament scholar and author Bart Ehrman. “He’s the only apostle who understands Jesus.”

Herb Krosney, who co-wrote The Lost Gospel, says, “Judas is a different kind of character. He’s the person who is asked to make the ultimate sacrifice. And that sacrifice is to sacrifice the life of Jesus in order that Jesus may attain eternity and immortality.”

And although Jesus spoke of the one who would betray him, he never names anyone. When Jesus said to Judas, as reported in John’s gospel account, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him.”

Do we hear this differently with this new understanding of the bond between Jesus and Judas? Perhaps it was misunderstood because no one else knew of the plan. Perhaps Jesus felt he couldn’t share the plan, because it could have compromised the outcome?

And finally, Jesus shared a sweet story about a woman who puts her only two coins in the treasury. I felt that this was another way in which he was sharing with his disciples the concept of being all in.

The scripture from Mark 12:41-44 is as follows:

“He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

The Greek reads that the widow donated two lepta, the smallest coin in circulation at the time of Jesus. To put it in context, today we might think of it as her putting two pennies into the offering bag.

We might think that the story is about her two coins, or we might think that the story is talking about the widow as victim and the Temple as the greedy power that swindles the poor out of their meager savings.

But Dr Levine points out that is not what’s going on. If Jesus thought that poor widow was being exploited, he would have told her to save her money - as we have already seen, he was not above a little “good trouble,” as congressman John Lewis would say.

In this story, I hear Yeshua pointing out a woman who has embodied the teachings and holding her up as an example of what he has been teaching. She is wholeheartedly living from that place of generosity and trust. She has two coins, not one. She doesn’t hold one back but puts both coins in the treasury. She gave everything that she had.

With this final story I think he is also telling us that we don’t literally have to die, but we need to be willing to allow our small, limited self to die to allow our more expansive self to be born. The widow gave everything she had without giving up her physical life, but perhaps to arrive at this place in consciousness, she had to die to her old self of fear and limitation which allowed her to give freely and fully.

And so Yeshua is telling us that we need to be willing to die to our fears, willing to die to judgement and hate and resentment. We need to be willing to allow that self that would turn a blind eye to injustice to die, die to that self which stops us from living authentically or that stops us from having a healthy boundary.

And we need to be willing to embrace a more expansive life, a more expansive love, and because that new life means letting go of beliefs and opinions we hold near and dear, this can feel like a huge risk.

In all of his actions and teachings, Yeshua is inviting us to know ourselves truly as emanations of the Most High, as divine expressions of the One Life. Risking taking that stand can be scary, terrifying even, it can feel like we’re losing all that is familiar, but doing so can open the door to Life with a capital L, a soul satisfying life where we are all in.