

## Daily Meditation 04-13-22

### Some Challenges of Holy Week, Passover and Ramadan, 2022

Good morning.

We are meditating this morning on three religions' feast days, in the time of spring. We have Ramadan taking place, Islam instructing us to fast and look inside, for the good and the less than good, and to end the day together in a sacred meal celebration.

And we look at Passover, the great Jewish feast commemorating liberation of the Jewish people from Egypt, slavery from the Pharaoh. The obvious archetype that applies to all who are seeking liberation, in their own time, from their own forms of slavery, and their own versions of Pharaoh. It seems to me to relate quite directly to the current goings-on in Ukraine, which refuses to give up its fledgling democracy to a tyrant who in turn is responding with tremendous viciousness and brazen war-making.

In the Christian world, this whole week is called Holy Week, beginning with Palm Sunday; Thursday being Holy Thursday; Friday being Good Friday in the death and crucifixion of Jesus at the hands of the empire; Holy Saturday, on which Jesus descends into the land of the dead; and Easter Sunday, resurrection for all through overcoming the fear of death and the powers of death. Liberation for us all.

For Jews, historically, Good Friday especially is fraught because many Christians over the centuries turn their anti-Semitism into pogroms and attacks on Jews, because beginning early in the Christian tradition, even the Gospels, there are considerable examples of anti-Semitism.

Here's one summary...now I'm taking this from the very fine book by Rabbi David Zaslow, *Jesus, First-Century Rabbi*. I think it's significant that many Jewish thinkers today -- thanks to, I think, ecumenism, the Second Vatican Council, the post-Holocaust dialogues between Christians and Jews -- many rabbis are writing very solid books about Jesus, their brother these days.

And this is one of those very fine books: *Jesus, First-Century Rabbi* by Rabbi David Zaslow. And he has a quote here from Dr. Amy Jill Devine. She says:

*In the popular Christian imagination, Jesus still remains defined incorrectly, and unfortunately, as 'against the law' or at least against how it was understood at the time; as against the Temple as an institution, and not simply against its first-century leadership. As against the people Israel but in favor of the Gentiles. Jesus becomes a rebel, who unlike every other Jew, practices social justice. He's the only one to speak with women. He's the only one who teaches nonviolent responses to oppression. He's the only one who cares about the poor and marginalized (that phrase has become a litany in some Christian circles). Judaism becomes obsessed discourse, a negative foil. Whatever Jesus stands for, Judaism is against it. Whatever Jesus is against, Judaism epitomizes the category. No wonder, even today, Jesus somehow looks different from the Jews. Jesus and his followers, such as Peter and Mary Magdalene, become identified as proto Christian. Only those who chose not to follow Him*

*remain Jews. This divorcing of Jesus from Judaism does a disservice to each texturally, theologically, historically, and ethically.*

This is so true that many Christians have forgotten or denied that Jesus was a Jew. And his mindset was formed, certainly, by his Jewish heritage. And, as Rabbi David points out, the killing of Jesus by the Empire: as he says,

*Jesus, a first-century rabbi, was seen as a threat to the Roman Empire. So thousands of other Jewish religious leaders have been seen as threatening to despotic regimes throughout history.*

And indeed, thousands, literally, were crucified by the Romans. Thousands, not just Jesus. So we want to contextualize the big picture of what's going on in what Christians call the Holy Week.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.