

***Study Guide for***  
***Witness at the Cross***  
***By Amy-Jill Levine***

This year we are reading the book Witness at the Cross by Amy-Jill Levine.

**We will have an in-person gathering to discuss the book on the Wednesday of Holy Week March 27 at 6 p.m. In the Canterbury Center**

*The questions in this guide are from the Leader Guide to Witness at the Cross by Mike S. Poteet. Published by Abingdon Press.*

**Chapter One: Bystanders and Scoffers**

Read Mark 15:27-32.

Mark (and Matthew) describe passersby mocking Jesus. When, if ever, have you seen someone being publicly insulted, ridiculed, or shamed by a crowd? How did you respond?

How would you answer Amy-Jill Levine's question: "Can we recognize blasphemy when we hear it?" If we do hear it or see it, what should be our response? Are there certain words that should never be said?

In Luke's version of the story (23:35) only the people's leaders "scoff" at Jesus; the people simply "watch". Amy-Jill Levine wonders to what extent a people and its leaders should be

differentiated, especially in a participatory democracy wherein leaders are elected. How would you answer and why?

According to Amy-Jill Levine, the titulus indicates “Jesus died on the charge of sedition” and warns “all passerby ... this is what Rome does to any who challenge, or are perceived to be challenging, the empire.” Why would Rome perceive claims about Jesus as a king as challenging its authority? Do you think Jesus challenged Rome’s rule? How would you define sedition? How do – or should – governments today warn against or respond to sedition?

## **Chapter Two: The Other Victims**

Read Luke 23:39-43.

Amy-Jill Levine notes verse 39, in the original Greek, says one of the men “blasphemed” Jesus. Read Luke’s two other uses of this word in 12:10 and 22:65. (the NRSV translates it as insults). How do these three instances help us understand what blasphemy was for Luke?

“What might it mean to know,” Amy-Jill Levine asks, “that God remembers us, that we are not forgotten, that we matter?” When, if ever, have you, like the second man, asked or demanded Jesus or God to remember you? How does or how would believing God knows, take notice of, and remembers you make a difference to you?

Amy-Jill Levine suggests that when we think of paradise, “the place may be less important than the company we keep. We might shift our concern from where we shall live to with whom we shall live. If paradise is living with Jesus, how can Christians experience that life today? With whom else do Jesus’ words and actions in the Gospels suggest we will live in paradise? How can we experience that life with them in this world?

### **Chapter Three: The Soldiers**

How is the soldiers' treatment of Simon of Cyrene a display of Roman power?

In all four Gospels, the soldiers throw dice for Jesus' clothes. The detail is a reference to Psalm 22:18. Why did early Christians connect this psalm to Jesus' death? What does the soldier's gambling, in itself, reveal about their attitude toward their task?

Where today do you see the insensitivity of the powerful and privileged toward those who suffer and die, even when they are complicit in that suffering and death? When, if ever have you acted with such insensitivity yourself?

### **Chapter Four: The Beloved Disciple**

Amy-Jill Levine points out the Beloved Disciples' ultimate anonymity focuses our attention on how he is remembered, and asks, "If our names were unknown, by what titles or descriptions would we want to be remembered?" How do you answer that question.

Was there ever a time you felt particularly close to Jesus, as if you were leaning on him? Do you think of your relationship with Jesus as "intimate"? Why or why not?

Unlike the disciples in Matthew and Mark, and closer than the disciples in Luke, the Beloved Disciple, with the women, "stayed the course and remained at the cross." How do or can Jesus' Beloved Disciples today stay near Jesus's cross? Do you imagine yourself at the cross or at a distance? How does your image of Jesus change as you move from one location to another?

## **Chapter Five: The Women**

Read Luke 8:1-3.

What does Luke tell us about these women and why?

Read Mark 15:40-41.

Who are the women watching Jesus die? What does Mark tell us about them and their relationship with Jesus?

How do these three named women mirror their three male counterparts, equally named and equally having failed – Peter, James and John? How do the announcement of Jesus' resurrection and the existence of Mark's Gospel itself both witness to the fact that neither the men's nor the women's failures meant the end of Jesus' story?

## **Chapter Six: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus**

Read Mark 14:55-65.

Why does Mark's characterization of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin make his account of Joseph's request for Jesus' body surprising?

Joseph's ownership of a tomb in Jerusalem "would be a sign of reverence, but it could also be a sign of some economic security." And Matthew explicitly calls Joseph rich. What do you want your burial arrangements to show those who survive you about your status and values?

Read John 19:38-42.

As Nicodemus' misunderstanding of the comments Jesus makes regarding being born from above illustrates, "Jesus is not always clear." Why does John depict Jesus as not always speaking plainly? Do you think faith in Jesus must involve ambiguity and risk misunderstanding?