Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan
The Last Week
What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus’s Final Days in Jerusalem
ISBN 9780 2810 5983 6
SPCK, 2008, £8.99

'The First Christmas' and 'The First Paul' are other titles from the Borg and Crossan duo - both American New Testament scholars, one Lutheran, the other Catholic - friends who live, one on the east coast (Florida), the other on the west coast (Oregon) and yet spend enough time together to give us in digestible form the benefits of up to date New Testament research in areas which attract the attention of all thoughtful Christian people during the church's year.

The last week of Jesus' life is observed annually as Holy Week, and in the gospel of Mark we find a timetable of events - there are eight chapters named for the days of the week, including Easter Sunday, and beginning with Palm Sunday. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem from the east and on a donkey is contrasted with Pilate's entry from the west, mounted on a cavalry charger. Pilate's escort were legionaries, Jesus' were peasants - and this contrast illuminates the unfolding story of the week. On Monday Jesus gives a fig tree and the temple similar treatment. Tuesday is a day of debate and warning. On Wednesday we are told of another contrast - between the unknown woman who anoints the feet of Jesus, and the failing twelve apostles leading to the treachery of Judas. Thursday is dominated by the Passover meal in the upper room - followed by Gethsemane, arrest, and condemnation by the religious authorities. Friday dawns and Jesus is before Pilate, then crucified at third hour (9 a.m.). At noon darkness descends, at 3 p.m. Jesus dies, and in the evening he is buried. 'Mark's story of Jesus's final week is a sequence of public demonstrations against and confrontations with the domination system. And, as all know, it killed him.'

Two lasting impressions:- 1 'The passion of Jesus' has two meanings, one active, one passive. The active passion of Jesus was for the kingdom of his heavenly Father. This active and uncompromising passion led inexorably to his passive passion, the sufferings described in the account of Good Friday. 2 For Mark, the male disciples never get the message repeated so often by Jesus and they fail the test of Holy Week, not just Judas - all of them. That leaves the women, who remain faithful.

There is so much more here about Jerusalem, about the temple, about Jewish belief in an after life, about the other witnesses than Mark - which you can only gain by reading the book. Please do.

Anselm SSF