

Weekend of Sunday, February 18, 2018
1st Sunday In Lent/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B
Primary Text: Mark 14:32-64; 15:1
Sermon Title: “Gethsemane, Betrayal, Sanhedrin”

Theme

Text

³²They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." ³⁵And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." ³⁷He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?" ³⁸Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ³⁹And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴²Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

⁴³Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. ⁴⁴Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." ⁴⁵So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁴⁶Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. ⁴⁷But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ⁴⁹Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." ⁵⁰All of them deserted him and fled.

⁵¹A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, ⁵²but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

⁵³They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. ⁵⁴Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. ⁵⁶For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, ⁵⁸"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" ⁵⁹But even on this point their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" ⁶¹But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

⁶²Jesus said, "I am; and

'you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of the Power,
and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

⁶³Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death.

¹As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.

Sermon

O Lord, we are gathered together here this day as your people, as those who have been called out of darkness into your marvelous light. We are here only because you have loved us and been faithful across the generations that we might be your people. And yet we quickly confess that we are not worthy of that love.

As we contemplate the Cross and what it means, we are filled with joy and wonder at the sacrifice that Jesus has made to show us light in the darkness and offer us life in the midst of death. We confess that we have nothing to offer in return for that sacrifice, nothing that will match such love. We know that only love can respond to such a gift. Yet we know that we are not always loving or lovable. But you remain steadfastly faithful to us. You love us even when we are not lovable, and remain steadfast in your grace that calls us to follow the example of Jesus who is the Christ.

We are committed to that journey, to be followers of the One who has given so much that we might be sons and daughters of God. But sometimes the journey that we take in following Jesus who is the Christ is not all light and joy. Sometimes the Way is rough and dimly lit. Sometimes the darkness of life threatens to engulf the light.

And so we cry out to you, O Lord. Forgive us for our sometimes faltering steps. Show us more clearly the Way. Shine anew the light of your presence into our lives so strongly that a new love for You will be kindled. Light within us a love beyond emotion and sentimentality, a love that is willing to lay aside all privilege and self-centeredness. Grow within us a love that is willing to surrender all our fears and uncertainties to you, that desires nothing more than to love God with all our being and to love those around us with the same faithfulness with which you love us.

Now, as we begin this journey of the Cross, we open our hearts and minds to you. We lay aside for these moments the trivialities of our life and bring ourselves into your presence. Speak to us what we need to hear. And help us to hear, not just the words that are spoken, but your Word spoken afresh in our hearts. Amen

Have you noticed that many preachers begin their sermon with a prayer? Often times it includes words from Psalm 19:14:

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

My senior homiletics professor in seminary said about that, “It’s a little too late to pray for your sermon then isn’t it? The time for prayer was before you began your work.” And indeed, I pray before I begin the task of preparing a sermon. It is holy business that we are about, you and me, and I cherish the time that you dedicate to listening to me. And it’s a humbling thought for me that you do sit there and listen week after week, although it is the preacher’s belief that he or she is but a vessel through which God delivers a message to God’s people. And we had better hope that that is true.

Perhaps because of that professor’s admonition, it has not been my tradition to begin a sermon with a prayer. But I broke with that tradition today and maybe will the rest of Lent because this lent we are taking a sacred journey with our Lord Jesus.

The Stations of the Cross, also known as the Way of the Cross (*Via Crucis in Latin*) and the Way of Sorrows (*Via Dolorosa in Latin*) has been a Christian devotional practice going back to the time of Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. Although the stations themselves have changed over the centuries, traditionally there are 14 of them that mark the journey of our Lord Jesus during his passion.

Many people think that the Stations of the Cross are a Roman Catholic thing, but that would be incorrect – mostly. I qualify that last statement because of one big difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Roman Catholics hold tradition and scripture in equal tension. In other words, there are events that their tradition says happened but that are simply not recorded in scripture.

For example, the Roman Catholic tradition says that a woman by the name of Veronica wiped the sweaty face of Jesus as he made his way to Golgotha. That event is not included in scripture, but is the 6th station of the cross for Roman Catholics. Did it really happen? Roman Catholics argue that it did, and the story was passed down through the generations, it just didn’t make it into the canon of scripture. Could that be true? Sure.

But that is just one example of Roman Catholic tradition. There are hundreds more, and to all of that Martin Luther and the other reformers cried, “*Sola Scriptura!*”, “*Scripture Alone!*” and so Protestants tend to leave out anything that is not supported by scripture. So that is a difference you should be aware of as we journey with Jesus through the season of Lent.

I did not make up the 14 Stations we will observe, other Protestants did that work. But it is also interesting note that in a new version of this devotion that is aligned with the biblical accounts called the Scriptural Way of the Cross was introduced on Good Friday, 1991 by Pope John Paul II, and in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI approved the overlapping but distinct set of stations for meditation and public celebration. John Paul and Benedict probably think they created something new but it is the same sequence Protestants have been using for years. So even in the Stations of the Cross Roman Catholics and Protestants are becoming one. However, there are a lot of the old tradition-laden Stations of the Cross mounted on Roman Catholic sanctuary walls that will likely never be replaced. Well enough of the history.

And since we are in the lectionary year of Mark, whenever possible, I will refer to Mark’s version of the gospel. Let us now finally, enter into the first three Stations of the Cross, and since they are supposed to be a meditative spiritual exercise, I invite you to close your eyes and watch as the events unfold in the theatre of your mind.

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

According to Mark, the celebration of the Passover began in 14:17. Jesus sat at table with the disciples and that is where he instituted the Last Supper, the re-purposing of the traditional Passover Seder, to explain and ritualize what he was about to accomplish for all humankind. He predicted Judas’ betrayal; he predicted Peter’s denials; he predicted the abandonment of all of them, and then he went out to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray to his Heavenly Father.

He told the disciples to sit and keep watch, and then took with him his inner circle, Peter, James, and John, the same three who witnessed his Transfiguration, and went a little farther. Why did he do that? Perhaps so they could bear witness to this moment and later write about it so we could know of his anguish.

Mark wrote that Jesus became distressed and agitated. He told the three he was deeply grieved, even to death – to which I respectively respond, Duh!

Have you ever agreed to do something, maybe reluctantly, and then when the time came for you to do the thing, reflecting on what you were about to put yourself through, you wished you hadn't?

I was trying to think of some example to give you from my life, but honestly, I got nothing that compares to this moment for Jesus and neither do any of you. Jesus was about to be:

- betrayed by one,
- denied by another,
- abandoned by the rest,
- be put up on trial on trumped up charges by his own people,
- along the way he was going to be beat nearly to death,
- have his own countryman call for his death,
- be sentenced by an occupation ruler
- stripped naked and nailed to a cross
- while there as spectacle, others derided him
- and in front of his own mother, died and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

Distressed, agitated, deeply grieved? We can only imagine.

He prayed not once but three times to his heavenly Father saying, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."

That term, "Abba" is more familial; it is akin to our "Daddy." In other words, Jesus was not appealing to his Heavenly Father, as we would. We pray, "thy will be done" and we just have to live with it. In this case it was a son appealing to his father. And even that mortal example breaks down because none of us have known a perfect relationship between parent and child. But Jesus did, he and his Father were one in perfect communion. "Daddy" Jesus cried out, "Isn't there another way?"

If you are a parent, then maybe you can imagine how that plea might hurt to hear.

Jesus' prayer was met with stone silence – not once but three times.

We could fuss about what was behind his question:

- This is what he was sent for.
- He knew all along.
- Doesn't he know about Easter?

we might ask.

Let us not forget the two natures of Christ: He was at the same time, fully divine and yet fully human. The pain and suffering he was about to endure would be real. At the end of it all, the death he would experience would be real. The resurrection he could only hope for in faith, the same as you and me. No one had ever gone through this before.

After the third attempt to pray, hoping to hear some other word, some other instructions, from his Daddy, he resolved to go forward.

You and I, faced with the same knowledge, might have tried to escape, after all, it was not yet too late. He who runs away lives to fight another day, we might rationalize.

Jesus is Betrayed by Judas and Arrested

And then Judas showed up with an angry armed mob made up of priests, scribes, and elders of the Temple. The irony was too much for Jesus and so he said to Judas, "You betray me with a kiss?"

And then to the crowd of rabble, the spiritual and religious leaders of his people, he asked, "Really? Clubs and swords under the cover of darkness is what is called for here. ⁴⁹Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me." And then checking himself, reminding himself that this is the way it was always going to have to be, he said, "let the scriptures be fulfilled."

And then all those others who swore vehemently that they would never deny or abandon him did just that. And bound like a common criminal they led him away alone to the Temple where he would be put on trial before the “spiritual and religious leaders” of his people.

Jesus is Condemned by the Sanhedrin

Maybe you have heard the expression, “Don’t confuse me with the facts.” That might apply to this mockery of a trial. Some of the accusations they made against him were his own words twisted and taken out of context. Other accusations were just made up. Mark makes it sound like they were tripping over each other, maybe even refuting each other with the testimonies they made up against Jesus. No matter, they were determined. Their minds were made up. “Don’t confuse me with the facts.”

“Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” the high priest demanded. Mark wrote, “⁶¹But he was silent and did not answer.”

Personally, I really hate this part. It is not human to not defend oneself. Really Jesus? Not a word?

Another attempt by the high priest to provoke Jesus to talk, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus finally spoke. He said,

"I am; and
'you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of the Power,'
and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

Unwilling to hear any more the high priest interrupted, and in a display of utter disgust and anger he tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses?
⁶⁴You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?"

Nothing they heard in the last few minutes had changed their minds from hours, days, maybe weeks or months before. They condemned him to death.

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But good God-fearing spiritual and religious leaders could not be a part of something so despicable as being responsible for another man's death, so they arranged to have him sent to the civil authority, Pontius Pilate, for trial.