

Betrayal and Condemnation (Mark 14:32-72)

The scene changes from the Upper Room to the garden of Gethsemane on the western slope of the Mount of Olives. When in Jerusalem Jesus often withdraws to this garden to pray.

Jesus enters the garden with his disciples, but he chooses three of them to remain closer to him. They are Peter, James and John, who have a special bond with Jesus:

- They were among the first to be chosen,
- They were present at the transfiguration, and
- At the “resurrection” of Jairus’ daughter,
- They had difficulties with the discourse about the cross,
- Together with Andrew they listen to Jesus’ final discourse which warned: **“Be on guard”** (Mk 13:37).

In the *Gospel of Mark*, page 290, Mary Healy says:

“Up to this point Jesus has spoken of his coming passion with calm serenity. But something new happens in his prayer at Gethsemane: here Jesus’ human frailty and vulnerability are fully exposed.”

“Mark gives us a window into the heart of Jesus and his human struggle to surrender to the will of the Father. It is a crucial phase in the Passion narrative: the moment of decision in which Jesus, fully aware of the cost, embraces the Father’s will for his agonizing death.”

I. JESUS PRAYS IN GETHSEMANE (MK 14:32-42)

[32] And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I pray.”

[33] And he took with him Peter and James and John, and

began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

[34] And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch."

[35] And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

[36] And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will."

[37] And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?"

[38] Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

[39] And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.

[40] And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer him.

[41] And he came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

[42] Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

A. Jesus Began to Be Greatly Distressed

Mark, who had not been afraid to report Jesus' emotions in the course of the gospel, now describes the deepest anguish Jesus suffers – an anguish so terrible it almost kills him – an anguish that recalls the *Hallel* psalm 116:3:

***"They surrounded me, the snares of death,
with the anguish of the tomb;
they caught me, sorrow and distress.***

I called on the Lord's name.

O Lord my God, deliver me!

B. Abba! Father

“Abba, Father, all things are possible to you . . .”

Jesus prays for life as any human being would pray for life and as the psalmist prays, **“O Lord, I beseech you, save my life.”** The difference is that he addresses God as “Abba” - an intimate, familiar form never used in Jewish worship.

- Its rough equivalent in English is “Papa” or “Daddy.”

C. The Cup of God’s Wrath

Remove this cup from me . . . “This cup” is the equivalent of **“the hour,”** but it evokes a rich Old Testament theme as the cup of God’s wrath (Is 51:17-23), which even the undeserving have to drink at times (Jer 49:12).

It also evokes the reference Jesus has already made to the Passion as his cup (10:38).

There is likewise a reference, in the same *Hallel* psalm, to “the cup of salvation” (Psalm 116:13) following a reference to the unreliability of men (the apostles?).

After Jesus wrestles with the Father, he at length surrenders to the Father’s will.

Jesus had to drink the cup of God’s wrath so that we could drink the “cup of salvation.”

D. The Sleeping Disciples

In his moment of agony in the face of impending death Jesus seeks the human comfort and solace of his friends. He asks them to **keep watch**, that is, stay awake, be spiritually alert, and **be on guard**.

But they all fall asleep: **“Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?”** (Mk 26:37).

The disciples' sleep in the garden of Gethsemane indicates their lack of vigilance in the decisive moments of salvation, more than their inability to keep Jesus company.

- This is a very real risk for all humans. It is a dreadful temptation.

E. Watch and Pray

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation . . .

Jesus' command recalls the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "*Lead us not into temptation.*" The disciples are to pray that God will protect them from a trial greater than their human weakness can bear, like the trial that is about to come upon them at Jesus' arrest.

- Prayer and watchfulness are necessary to withstand the attacks of Satan.

Prayer: *O Jesus, free me from the risk of falling asleep spiritually. If I don't feel the need for prayer, if I have lost the meaning of sin, if I do not commit myself to doing good whenever possible, then this has already happened.*

Reflection:

The garden of Gethsemane reminds me to be consistent in my choices. If I have chosen to be with Jesus, I cannot fall asleep, that is, live a life free of commitment, as if I belong to no one.

- To keep Jesus company means to make his virtues my virtues – his life my life.
- Have I ever felt betrayed by someone I loved and trusted?

F. The Victory

Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.

Prayer has produced its results. Finished praying, Jesus is ready to face his Passion and death. Matthew puts it this way: "Behold, the

hour has arrived and the Son of Man will be handed over into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let us be going! See, the one who is to hand me over has come," (Mt 26:45-46)

The struggle is over; the decision has been made. Jesus does not wait passively but goes serenely forward to meet those who will unknowingly carry out the Father's plan.

Reflection:

The garden of Gethsemane is always a determining hour of human existence. It indicates the extreme situations, the key moments, the crossroads of life. We can succumb to the temptation to flee the agony (the cross), or accept the cross, ready to give our life.

It does not matter if we experience human weakness in all its forms, as happened to Jesus. It is important to pray through the situation to overcome the temptation.

It is human to look for comfort and to fear death. We must be wary of sleep. He who sleeps in the garden of Gethsemane will never be ready to carry the cross on Calvary.

II. BETRAYAL AND ARREST (MK 14:43-52)

[43] And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

[44] Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him and lead him away under guard."

[45] And when he came, he went up to him at once, and said, "Master!" And he kissed him.

[46] And they laid hands on him and seized him.

[47] But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.

[48] And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a

robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?

[49] Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled."

[50] And they all forsook him, and fled.

[51] And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him,

[52] but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

A. The Betrayer Identified

Mark's identification of Judas as **one of The Twelve** highlights Judas' role as not merely a disciple, but also one whom Jesus specially chose to be with him and exercise his authority (Mk 3:13-19; 6:7). Jesus will be handed over to death by one of his closest friends.

B. The Armed Crowd

The arresting party, **with swords and clubs**, need not have been large since Jesus was not armed. According to Mark, this group appears to have been given a warrant by the Sanhedrin (**the chief priests, scribes and elders**) itself.

They had wide ranging authority over non-Roman citizens.

C. The Kiss of Death

"He kissed him." As in our own culture, a kiss was normally a gesture of affection and respect in the Bible. Judas Iscariot turns it into a kiss of betrayal, as he identifies Jesus to the armed crowd. **And they laid hands on him and seized him.**

D. A Feeble Defense

"One of those who stood by drew his sword . . ." There is a brief scuffle in which one of the disciples, who is obviously armed, cuts off the ear of the high priest's slave.

This detail raises some interesting questions.

- Were all the disciples of Jesus in fact are armed?
- Did they, as Luke suggests, pick up some swords in anticipation of trouble, the cause of something Jesus has said?

John identifies the disciple with the sword as Peter, and the high priest's servant as Malchus.

- Jesus, of course, offers no resistance. He is expecting the arrest.

E. Jesus offers no Resistance

Why is Jesus so passive? He provides the answer: "**Let the scriptures be fulfilled.**" This is the hour of darkness; Jesus freely abandons himself to death out of love.

F. Jesus is Abandoned by the Disciples

And they all forsook him, and fled.

This is one of the shortest sentences in Mark's gospel, and one of the saddest. Mark emphasizes that all of Jesus' disciples flee.

Jesus is deserted by those whom he called to be with him. He had invested his life in instructing and forming them, but they abandon him in his hour of crisis.

Jesus is not surprised. He told them that they would scatter: '**I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered**' (14:27). And they do so, despite their promises that they would stand by him even at the cost of their lives.

G. The Naked Young Man

The account of the arrest ends with a curious incident found only in Mark.

A young man, clad only in a linen cloth, **follows** Jesus and escapes naked when the police attempt to **seize** him. Who is this **young**

man and why is he wearing only a **linen cloth** on a chilly night in April?

This young man does not seem to be one of the disciples, for they have all fled. Yet he **followed** Jesus, which indicates some sort of discipleship.

He seems to have tried to remain with Jesus after the disciples fled, but some in the arresting party **seized him** grabbing hold of his linen wrap which he left behind as he fled naked.

Some see many layers of meaning here (see *The Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy, p. 296) but tradition identifies the man as Mark himself in whose house Jesus may have celebrated the Last Supper.

III. TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (MARK 14: 53-65)

A. Overview

Following his arrest, Jesus is subjected to the judgment of two different authorities: the religious-political one of the Jewish nation and the political one of the Romans.

Before the Roman authority, a real trial takes place. Before the Jewish authority an interrogation was held, whose legal nature is questionable.

[53] And they led Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes were assembled.

[54] And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, and warming himself at the fire.

[55] Now the chief priests and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none.

[56] For many bore false witness against him, and their witness did not agree.

[57] And some stood up and bore false witness 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.'"

[59] Yet not even so did their testimony agree.

[60] And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?"

[61] But he was silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

[62] And Jesus said, "I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

[63] And the high priest tore his garments, and said, "Why do we still need witnesses?"

[64] You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death.

[65] And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards received him with blows.

A. Jesus before Caiaphas

After his arrest Jesus is led to the home of the high priest Caiaphas where the Sanhedrin is gathered. The servants/guards of the high priest have been required to stay on through the night because of the important proceedings in the house.

This meeting of the Sanhedrin in the house of the high priest at night was quite irregular. The normal thing was for it to meet during the daytime and in the temple.

B. Peter

Peter originally fled with the other disciples when Jesus was arrested but did not completely runaway. He watched as Jesus was taken to the high priests house and followed behind, but at a distance.

Reflection: *Do I follow Jesus only at a safe distance?*

Being a disciple of Jesus requires more than following him at a safe distance; it involves denying oneself, taking up one's cross, and remaining with Jesus.

C. The Trial

“The trial or interrogation is rigged from the start, since its chief priests, scribes, and elders have already decided that Jesus must die (3:6; 11:18; 14:1).

But as many a corrupt government has done before and since, they seek at least an appearance of legal propriety to justify their action.”

D. False Witnesses

The religious authorities had apparently rounded up all the witnesses they could find. Some claimed that Jesus said he would destroy and rebuild the Jerusalem temple, but their testimonies did not agree.

Jesus had used the terms “destroy” and “raise,” but with reference to his own body as the temple.

E. Confusion

The confusion of the witnesses and the silence of Jesus, who speaks not a word to clarify or to defend himself, angers the high priest.

He finally asks Jesus the crucial question, “Who are you?” ***“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One [God]?”***

This question has two components.

- First: ***Are you the Christ***, that is, the awaited Messiah, the definitive liberator of the nation?
- Second: ***Are you the Son of God?*** There was no unanimity regarding the interpretation of the relationship between the Messiah and God. It was important to the interrogators that

they hear an answer to these two questions from the lips of Jesus himself.

The question drops a bomb shell. The answer is the explosion.

F. Jesus Asserts his Identity

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

“Jesus response is the first and only time in the Gospel where he directly affirms his messianic identity and divine sonship. In fact, it is the most direct and explicit claim to divine sonship ascribed to Jesus in any of the gospels.

Moreover, Jesus is probably alluding to his own divinity; since I AM is the Greek equivalent of the divine name YHWH (Y^aHW^eH).

In revealing his identity to the high priest, Jesus uses his favorite title: ***Son of Man***. It is a mysterious term taken from the Prophet Daniel.

- On the one hand it expresses his divine identity and activity;
- On the other it veils it by placing emphasis on his human nature.

He ***comes on the clouds of heaven*** which means he's coming in judgment (see 8:38; 13:26-27), an activity specific to God.

- Jesus interprets this vision to refer to his coming in judgment at the end of the age.
- This Jesus who now stands before the high priest will be seated at the right hand of God.
- This Jesus who is now being judged by men will come as God's judge at the end of the age.

G. The High Priest Tears his Clothes

At Jesus self-revelation “. . . **the high priest tore his garments.**” The tearing of one’s garments was a violent way of manifesting utter disapproval and rejection.

H. Jesus is Condemned to death

They asked their questions; they received their answer; now they reject it. They look for the truth, but are not willing to accept it.

The death sentence is for the reason of blasphemy: “**You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision? And they all condemned him as deserving death**” (Mark 14:64).

In the eyes of the high priest, Jesus’ claim to be Messiah and Son of God, enthroned with divine authority, is a sacrilege and an insult to God.

The biblical punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning (Lev 24:16). The Sanhedrin agrees that Jesus’ “blasphemy” is a capital crime deserving of death, although only the Romans have the power of actual execution.

I. Jesus is Mocked and Abused

Jesus is then spat upon and struck. He is mockingly asked to prophesy. Ironically, one of his prophecies is going to be fulfilled at this very moment – Peter’s denial.

It is the respected and distinguished religious leaders of the Sanhedrin who stoop to this contemptuous level with their vicious insults. They laugh scornfully at Christ’s messianic title and at his qualification as prophet in their attempt to destroy his dignity.

But Jesus is already realizing his mission of redemption through the love with which he accepts and gives of himself. He is insulted with his title of “Christ” and because of it.

- With this same title he will be invoked and loved for centuries.

Jesus treatment before the Sanhedrin recalls the prophecy of Isaiah:

“I gave my back to those who beat me, / my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; / my face I did not shield / from buffets and spitting” (Isaiah 50:6).

J. Not all Jews Guilty

It is important to note that the **all** who **condemned** Jesus as **deserving to die** were not all the Jews of the time of Jesus, nor even all the Jewish religious leaders, but only a certain group who felt threatened by Jesus.

Christians have all too often held all Jews guilty for the death of Jesus. Many use the involvement of the actual Jews guilty of Jesus' death as a justification for a collective contempt for and persecution of all Jews. (See Vatican II, *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions*, #4)

- They forget that Jesus himself and his first followers were Jews.

IV. PETER DENIES JESUS

A. Overview

Peter followed Jesus at a distance and went into the courtyard of the high priest. As Jesus is being interrogated inside the house, Peter faces scrutiny outside in the courtyard below. Both are interrogated regarding their identity.

Peter does what probably a number of Mark's community have done – denied their Lord.

[66] And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the maids of the high priest came;

[67] And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him, and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus."

[68] But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the outer court.

[69] And the maid saw him, and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them."

[70] But again he denied it. And after a little while again the bystanders said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean."

[71] But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak."

[72] And immediately the cock crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

B. Peter Falls into Sin

Peter is warming himself by a fire in the courtyard when he is accused by one of the maids of the high priest as being a follower of Jesus: **"You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus."**

But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean."

The verb **"denied"** is in a form indicating repeated denials. Jesus had taught that a disciple is one who "denies himself" to follow Jesus; Peter now does the opposite.

Peter goes on to deny Jesus for a second and a third time. The last accusation is by the **bystanders** who said to Peter once more:

"Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean."

Peter's speech has given him away, since Galileans spoke with a provincial accent.

C. Escalation of Denial

In panic, he reiterates his denial in the strongest possible terms.

- To curse means to call down God's wrath on oneself if one is lying.
- More appallingly, it could even imply that Peter is invoking curses on Jesus, as Christians were pressured to do under the threat of death.
- To swear is to confirm his denial with an oath. He commits perjury – he calls upon God to witness a lie.

Peter cannot bring himself even to mention the name of Jesus: ***"I do not know this man of whom you speak."***

The escalation of the denial is tragic:

- Feigning ignorance (***"I neither know nor understand what you mean,"*** he denies Jesus;
- Swearing, he denies him;
- Swearing and cursing he denies him.

In Mark his apostasy is like a brush fire, it accelerates so fast that he has no time to think and to protect himself.

"His denial has progressed from evasion (v. 68), to outright repudiation (v. 70), to perjury (V. 71). But there is an ironic truth in his denial - he does not yet truly know Jesus" (*G of M – p.303*).

D. Peter Wept

When Peter's weakness is tested, he eventually becomes hostile to Jesus in order to save his own life. But the remembrance of Jesus' prophecy, triggered by the cockcrow, leads Peter to repentant tears. The "rock" has broken.

E. Prayer

O Jesus, if Peter acts this way, what of me in my relationship to you?

Reflection:

If even Peter's resolve could break down under pressure, so could ours. We too must heed Jesus warning: ***“Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test.”***

But if Peter could be forgiven and restored after such abject failure and go on to heroic martyrdom for the sake of Christ, there is mercy and hope for us as well.

Have I ever been ashamed or afraid to admit that I am a follower of Jesus Christ?

Preparation for Week 13 – The Crucifixion
