

Gethsemane: the collapse of the messianic community (Mark 14: 26-52)

Peter's denial foretold

26 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ²⁷And Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters; for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

²⁸But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.' ²⁹Peter said to him, 'Even though all become deserters, I will not.' ³⁰Jesus said to him, 'Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' ³¹But he said vehemently, 'Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And all of them said the same.

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

32 They 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.'

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

43 Immediately, 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.

51 A 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.

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The climax of the betrayal narrative

This is “the night on which he was betrayed”. As the group (now minus Judas) leaves the upper room to return to the safety of the countryside, Jesus knows that it is too late. They have been betrayed. Escape is impossible. Jesus must face the cross. And he will have to do so, utterly alone. He knows that the disciples, who have steadily resisted the Way of the Cross, will not see his time of testing and suffering through with him. And so he tells them unequivocally: “You will all become deserters!” (14:27).

It is significant that Jesus distinguishes between the actions of Judas (betrayal) and the disciples (desertion). There is something significant and cynical about Judas’ betrayal of Jesus and the community of disciples for personal gain that sets it apart from the disciples, who abandon Jesus to save their own skins. Jesus appears to be aware of the inner conflict within the disciples, whose intention is to face even death with Jesus (14:31) but whose weakness will mean that they flee at the crucial moment, or deny even knowing Jesus. As Jesus will say in Gethsemane, “The spirit is absolutely willing, but the flesh is weak” (14:38).

Mark is unflinching in his account of Peter’s failure to live up to his protestations of solidarity with Jesus. Jesus tells Peter baldly, “Before the night is over, you will have denied me three times!” Shortly, in Gethsemane, Peter will abandon Jesus in his struggle with God by sleeping. Significantly, Jesus reverts to calling Peter (“the rock”) by his old name, Simon (14:37). There is no one on whom Jesus can rely as “the hour” approaches. The messianic community is on the verge of total collapse as they approach Gethsemane.

We need to recognise the note of future hope in Jesus’ words in 14:27. He employs the Zechariah prophetic image of the shepherd (Zechariah 11:7). Unlike Zechariah’s shepherd of a doomed flock, however, Jesus reinterprets the parable: it is the shepherd, rather than the flock, who will be struck; Jesus himself is that shepherd. The “sheep” (the disciples) will indeed scatter, but that is not the end of

the story: after he is raised, Jesus “will go before them” (ie lead them again as a shepherd) to Galilee, where the community will be restored.

Gethsemane: torment and terror (14:32-42)

They reach Gethsemane. Typically – and unsurprisingly – Jesus chooses to spend the short time he has left in prayer. But this is a startlingly atypical “Jesus-in-prayer” scene. Mark’s account of Gethsemane is deeply shocking. Something terrible and destructive is happening between Jesus and the God whom he calls Father. Several times in the gospel we find Jesus withdrawing at key points to be alone in prayer (cf 1:35, 6:46). He draws strength and encouragement from communing alone with his Father. Here in Gethsemane, Jesus is desperate *not* to be alone in God’s presence! He asks his friends to keep watch with him – because he is terrified. The language of 14:33 is very strong: he “shudders in distress” (*ekthambeisthai*) and “anguishes” (*ademonein*). Its force is difficult to convey adequately. The scholar Lohmeyer says, “The Greek words depict the utmost degree of unbounded horror and suffering”.

This is no reassuring time spent with God! Jesus throws himself to the ground, begging God like a child (“Abba, Father, *please ...*”) to spare him what lies ahead (v36a). And he is answered with silence. Yes, Jesus could have refused to go through with it, and yes, Jesus responds by saying “Okay, if that’s the way you want to play it, I’ll do it” (v36b). Yet Mark wants us to understand that Jesus finds the silence of God appalling. God will not grant his request – and this is the reason for Jesus’ terror.

What is it that is so appalling? Clearly, there is deep dread at what lies ahead. Jesus would not be human if he didn’t fear it. Yet Jesus is no coward. There seems, in these verses, to be an altogether more terrifying prospect: the fear that he, the Son, the Beloved, who loved the Father as no one else has, could be ‘forsaken’. Jürgen Moltmann notes that he will not refer again to God as “Abba”, but only formally as “God”. Jesus did not fear for his life. He feared God. He experienced God’s silence as abandonment, and it tore his soul apart. This is Jesus “time of trial”, when Jesus’

faith and mission are on the line. It is a *kairos* – a “God-moment” – and it has the power to break Jesus. This is what Jesus means when he teaches the disciples to pray, “Save us from the time of trial” in the Lord’s Prayer tradition.

What did the cross mean for Jesus? We see it here, as he struggles in Gethsemane. But struggles with whom? It is more than his struggle with what lies ahead, more than his struggle with himself. Gethsemane is Jesus’ struggle with his experience of God – the death of the Father-Son relationship. This is his torment, and this is what he endures on the cross through his self-surrender.

The collapse of the discipleship narrative (14:43-50)

This is a dark and depressing story as Jesus’ “hour” arrives. We are watching the disintegration of all that Jesus has been about unfolding. The tragedy is as inexorable as it is inevitable. Try and imagine what it must have been like for Jesus. He is utterly alone. The disciples have slept, completely impervious to his agony. They just will not “get it”. Jesus wakes them – literally and symbolically. As they struggle into wakefulness, still rubbing the sleep from their eyes, all hell breaks loose. An armed crowd arrives. They haven’t evaded their enemies. Then Judas steps forward from among the crowd – *their* Judas! – and kisses Jesus. There is an immediate scuffle. Jesus is taken. Terrified, the disciples scatter. Mark puts it starkly: “All of them deserted him and fled” (14:50).

Resistance and state violence (14:43-49)

It is important to note the violence playing out in the scene Mark relates. The arresting party is heavily armed. They are expecting trouble –armed resistance from this “bandit group”. The term “bandit” (*hos epi lesten*) that Jesus uses in 14:48 refers, as we know from Josephus, to describe social bandits – a particular type of rural resistance group active against the Roman Occupation. Jesus ends up crucified between two “bandits”. This is Rome’s verdict on Jesus: he is a terrorist.

Here, too, is Jesus’ accusation of the collaboration between the temple authorities and the Roman Occupation. They, too, see Jesus as a terrorist, rather than any kind

of Jewish resistance fighter.

Those sent to arrest Jesus are “a crowd” – large in number. They have Judas with them; they will know that the group is small and is *not* engaged in armed resistance. This is a display of overwhelming force. Its justification is “prevention”.

Mark does not record that the person who cut off the ear of the high priest’s slave was a disciple. Even if we assume that he was, it is noteworthy that Jesus does not condemn the action, for all that he has made it clear that his revolution is not to be accomplished by means of armed force. Rather, he highlights the prior violence of the mob and, more significantly, their rulers in the temple. Jesus’ disdain for the use of force is akin to the criticism of what black South Africans referred to as the violence of “The System” (Apartheid): it was a system which, like the Roman Occupation, was achieved and maintained by brutal, overwhelming force. The violence of the freedom fighters was, they pointed out, the violence of *response*. One cannot condemn the use of force by revolutionaries against repressive regimes without first recognising and condemning the pervasiveness and use of force by those against whom they are struggling.

A sign of hope (14:51-2)

At the very point when the drama of the discipleship narrative reaches its point of utter collapse (14:50), Mark introduces a tantalising mystery in the form of “a certain young man who was following” (v51). The armed crowd try to grab him as he runs off, catching hold of his clothing (a linen cloth). He tears away and flees into the night, naked, and leaving them holding the linen cloth.

Many commentators have assumed that the young man is Mark himself. It’s an attractive prospect, but completely hypothetical. Mark is clear: the group in Gethsemane is the group that sat at table with Jesus during the Last Supper. Jesus, you will recall, has been scrupulous in maintaining the secrecy of the meal’s venue. Moreover, Mark doesn’t introduce characters into his story without reason. If this isn’t Mark, who might it then be?

It is difficult to miss the connection between this mysterious “young man” at the betrayal and abandonment, and the “young man” at the tomb on Easter Sunday. This “young man”, Ched Myers argues, is a symbol of discipleship and the community of disciples. The cloth is the symbol of the cloth in which Joseph of Arimathea will wrap Jesus’ body for burial (cf 15: 46). He symbolises the state of the community at that point; like them, he flees.

The young man then “reappears” at the resurrection, now wrapped in the white robe - this time, the robe of the saints and martyrs (16: 5). He is the symbol of the promise of a renewed community of discipleship. He flees the Garden naked (symbolising shame) and is found “restored” in the tomb (symbolising the new community that is given birth through the resurrection). I find this a compelling reading: the young man as the sign of hope that, even at the moment of the collapse of the messianic community, Mark is flagging that this is a story that has not yet ended. That is fully in keeping with the mysterious conclusion of his narrative on Easter Sunday.

Going deeper into the text (Mark 14: 26-52)

Imagine a wee boy lying in bed; we shall call him Mark and he is about 13 years old. His mum has sent him to bed with a flea in his ear because he was getting underfoot, which he felt was dreadfully unfair after all the help he had been today. He can’t sleep; his head is whirring with all the things he had seen and heard.

It had started a few days ago, when Jesus from Galilee came marching into town (if you can march sitting on a donkey) and since then he had not stopped: "Mark fetch this, Mark carry that, Mark go there and help, Mark get out of the way!"

And then this morning, to cap it all, his mum had come to him and said he had to go on a secret mission! Well, she hadn't *said* a secret mission; what she had said was, "Go to the market, find two men, (two disciples) and bring them to the house so that they can get the Passover ready for Jesus."

They didn't know him and he didn't know them and how had his mum arranged for them to spot him? Not a hat, a flower in a pigeon hole. No, he was to carry a water jar to the well and bring back water.

Yeh they would spot him all right, the only boy his age collecting water. He only hoped none of his mates spotted him too!

But he had done it and it had worked like a charm. The disciples had got here and since then he had not stopped. He had helped them get ready for Passover.

Up and down the stairs to the spare room he had run all afternoon, following orders: "Mark fetch this, Mark carry that, Mark go there and help, Mark get out of the way!"

And just as everything was ready, just as Jesus and the guests were about to arrive, just as it was about to get interesting he was ordered to bed.

Well he was not having it, he was not falling asleep, he was blooming well sure he was going to see everything there was to see.

He woke up; he had not meant to fall sleep but it had been a busy day, but as he rubbed his eyes he realised that it was a noise that had woken him, shouting, raised voices the banging of doors. And angry footsteps running down the stairs.

And as he sat in bed rubbing the sleep out of his eyes he realised that upstairs

the others, Jesus and the disciples were also getting ready to leave. Footsteps on the stairs and Mark decided that he was not going to miss this, he was going to. Well he was going to follow - in secret, because if they knew he was there would send him back to bed. He realised in horror that they were leaving now and he had no idea where they were going. He had to keep them in sight. But Mark was sleeping with no clothes and he realised he did not have time to dress. They would be well gone, disappeared into the night by the time he found his trousers and put them on.

So he did the only thing he could. "Mum I *had to!*" was the excuse he would use later. He grabbed a sheet of his bed, pulled it round him and, with only his mum's best sheet for company, he walked into the night to follow Jesus.

It felt like they had walked for miles. sometimes he could hear talking and arguing; sometimes he could tell they were just walking in silence. but they eventually stopped. He found a good spot where he could watch without being seen and sat down to see what would happen next .

Nothing! Jesus just went off on his own.

A noise woke him for a second time that night. Well, it had been a very busy day and he was really tired, but he was wide awake now. It was pandemonium

There were soldiers, torches, shouting, swords drawn.

And in the middle of it one of the disciples pointing to Jesus, a kiss and suddenly Jesus was on his front, hands tied behind his back and disciples running in all direction. Jesus was arrested, and they marched him off.

He couldn't leave him alone. "Mum, I *had to!*" was

the excuse he would use later. and so for the second time that night Mark resolved to follow Jesus. And so once again, with only his mum's best sheet for company, he walked into the night to follow Jesus.

He was quiet as he could be but he had to stay close. He obviously wasn't as quiet as he needed to be - or maybe the soldiers were on high alert, ready for an attack from the disciples. Either way they heard him, they waited for him and as he turned a corner they grabbed him.

Hard, rough soldiers with a firm grip had him! He was going to be arrested or killed, and so he did the only thing he could think of in a panic. "Mum, I *had* to!" was the excuse he would use later.

The soldiers had him by the sheet so he undid it, slipped out of it and ran home, naked into the night, leaving Jesus and his mum's best sheet behind.

Questions:

- **How naked are you prepared to get following Jesus?**
- **How do you read your bible to hear and see the bits of the story you forget or ignore.**

All age worship ideas (Mark 14: 26-52)

One of the keys to good all age worship is to keep it simple and relatively short. Ideally aim for a service of 45-50 minutes. That's not to say a service can't be longer but if you are thinking of 1hr30+ think carefully about your use of space and above all else be creative, take risks and have fun – partying is integral to the kingdom but we'll leave that for a year on Luke...

Reflection – I find Gethsemane the most excruciating part of the gospels. Jesus is a mess – consumed with fear, grief, sickening anticipation of all that will come and the resignation that he will face it alone. He is in such terror that his body is beginning to respond violently – it is just horrible! He pleads to God for another way – even at this point clinging to the glimmer of a possibility that he might yet escape the agony of the coming day. Yet, most astonishing (for me at least) is that even with that glimmer he chooses to forego it for the sake of being faithful. Though everything emotionally, spiritually and physically is screaming to be free of this ‘cup’ he still concedes that his desire to honour God’s will is somehow greater.

Jesus, at his darkest point when he could still potentially have escaped, put’s the restorative purpose of God for the world before his own life. He gives his life for the world. In that garden Jesus shows the true nature and power of sacrificial love. Jesus chooses the costliest path and he calls us to follow him.

Idea – I used to hate spiders – to the point where I couldn’t even stay in the same room as a house spider! One day I popped along to the playgroup (at the church where I ministered) to see some of the animals brought in by a local keeper. As I crept in I saw my own, then, little boy holding a tarantula. My instinct was to scream but I knew that would have ruined the whole experience for the children and staff!

Before I knew what I was doing I was sat on a chair with the same tarantula on my head after which it was then placed into my hands. Something changed. I stopped being frightened. Now I have the unenviable task of gathering them up and taking them out whenever my family see them and get scared!

Make up a PowerPoint or get people to talk about or write on card with marker pen things that frighten them – it could be Daleks, spiders, being alone or in the dark, war, terror etc.

There are many things that frighten or scare us, some more real than others. Jesus

too was scared – and what we learn is that trusting in God can give us strength to carry those fears. They may not disappear completely but with God’s help we can stop them having power over us.

Many people find it hard to talk about their faith or beliefs because of fear – God can help us with that too. He can give us the confidence to be able to tell our own story and share what difference the story and presence of Jesus in our lives makes.

Prayer – Get people into groups of 4 or 5 and ask each person to write on paper one thing they are worried about or fearful of and hold it so everyone else can see. In turn each person should go round the group and pray for one other person – it doesn’t need to be a great prayer of deliverance, just one sentence will do, such as ‘God, please help xxxx with their fear of spiders. Amen’ Once everyone is prayed for tear up the paper as a sign that we trust in the God who wants to break the power fears can have over us.

Liturgies and hymns (Mark 14: 26-52)

This is where you can find hymn suggestions and liturgies for use with this week’s text.

Prayer

Surely you felt enormous pain, sharp as a centurion’s sword, when your friends betrayed you—not just the one that Scripture foretold, with his fatal kiss, but even the one you called your rock, who swore that he didn’t know you. What human couldn’t feel hurt at that? We can identify, albeit feebly, with your anguish in the garden, asking that you not have to do what your father was asking—demanding—that you do. And then, you seemed to demonstrate that you were mortal, dying at an executioner’s hands. Just like a regular person—a criminal, at that, convicted on trumped-up charges by an indifferent judge.

We wonder if you knew how the story would end, as we do. Our knowledge of Easter is what allows us to bear observing Holy Week year after year. Easter is, maybe, the time when Jesus the human is also most fully God, capable of resurrection from the dead and somehow, mysteriously redeeming us in the process. But to get to that point, we have to go through the trials and frailties of your flesh, just as we do our own every day.

God, as we move through this painful journey, give us the gifts of concentration, of focus, and of empathy, as we seek to determine where your astonishing story, which is at once so familiar and yet so incredible, fits with our own narratives. We believe wholeheartedly that your passion and death have significance beyond our comprehension. Allow us to be touched and awestruck by the holy events of this week and to claim them once again for our own lives. **Amen.**

— written by Rebecca Sharpless, and posted on the [Lakeshore Baptist Church website](#).

Prayer of Confession

Surely not I, Lord? Surely not us? Surely not.

Surely I am not the one who will betray you.

Surely we are not the ones.

It's someone else who denies knowing you,
someone else who uses you for their own gain,
someone else who wants to control you.

Surely not us.

For the times when we protest too much...

For the times we point fingers to cover up our own wrong...

For the times we think of ourselves more highly than we ought...

Forgive us.

For the times we have betrayed you with our words—
speaking thoughtlessly,
hurting someone to get a laugh,
denying that your call extends to the parts of our lives
we would rather keep to ourselves...
Forgive us.

For the times we have betrayed you with our actions—
living as if you are confined to the sanctuary,
leaving us free when we are not here,
acting as if we have been given domination over,
rather than stewardship of, your creation,
walking away from those in need, literally and politically...
forgive us.

For the times we have lived contrary to our baptism,
dipping our hand in the bowl but keeping our whole selves out,
believing we can earn grace...and that *they* should work for it too,
Forgive us.

Surely not I, Lord?
You have said so.
The truth rings in our ears...
and it hurts, O God, to admit it: it is us.
We follow other gods,
we are a poor reflection of your glory,
we use our wealth, status, and power in ways contrary to your will,
we imprison you in our understanding of your word,
we refuse to create justice or to love mercy,
and walking humbly with you
would mean letting go of our way.
The truth hurts us, Lord,

even as we hear you say: you have said so.

And yet we believe—

we believe that you have the power to transform us
and through us to transform the world.

We believe that your grace is enough.

We believe that we have received more love than we can imagine.

We believe that you are the Way, the Life, and the Truth—
the truth that sets us free.

Amen.

~ written by Rev. Teri Peterson, the Presbyterian Church of Palatine, Illinois, and
posted on LiturgyLink. <https://www.liturgylink.net/>

Gospel Reflection: Jesus' Arrest

Holding our lives before God

Jesus arrested, judged, found guilty
and condemned to die is held captive overnight.

If I were arrested and held this night
what would I be found guilty of?

That I made friends with people
irrespective of their colour, creed or class...

That I shared my bread with the poor...

That my words... and actions... brought healing and forgiveness...

That I made justice and didn't count the cost...

That I sought the truth and then spoke of it...

That I recognised my neighbour
and loved them as my very self...

That I met God along the way
in the healing and forgiveness I received...

That I accepted hospitality at many different tables...
That I was changed by the lives of others...
...and often repented my arrogance and foolishness
in encountering their wisdom ...
That friends and strangers sometimes paid the price for me...
That I never sought out suffering...
...but journeyed with it to the best of my ability...
That the love of those about me
taught me to love myself before God...

You call us out of brokenness
to mend and remake your creation.
Grant us the courage to stay
with all those who are held captive this night.
In the name of Jesus who is good news. **Amen.**

— written by Pat Pierce, and posted on
the **CAFOD** website. <http://www.cafod.org.uk/>

Hymn Suggestion

92. A NIGHT UNLIKE ALL OTHERS[i] (Revd Dr John Campbell)

The night on which He was betrayed

tune: "As the deer pants for the water..."

EXODUS 12:21-42

1. You have made us a house of safety
which the sting of death must pass.
Once enslaved, we're now liberated
by a love that's sure to last.
You, alone, went to die in pain
to set us free, give us life again.
You, alone, drained our cup of suff'ring,

let us find our joy in You!

MARK 14:22-26

2. You have won us a feast of friendship
where we're welcome, though we fail;
You have offered Your blood & body,
that Your hurt might heal us all.

You, alone, went....

MARK 14:32-42

3. You have bought us both hope and healing
to empow'r us day by day,
for us, faced total fear and danger,
yet You chose to go God's way.

You, alone, went....