

Ash Wednesday - Mark 8:31-33

Sometimes we really don't want God to be God. We would prefer Him to be someone else—someone whose ideas make perfect sense to us, or who gives us what we want, or who asks only as much from us as we want to give. We would prefer He behaved on our terms and not His. Peter has this problem in the passage for today. He cannot deal with a Messiah who came to suffer and die. He does not understand or want to accept a God whose power is made perfect in weakness. Peter's idea of power is based on politics and a belief in a Messiah who will deliver the Jews from their Roman oppressors. But Jesus won't consider Peter's complaint for a moment in fact he's not even nice about it. "Get behind me, Satan," he says. He challenges Peter. If Peter is really with Jesus, he must begin to think about God and God's Son in a radically different way. This new way might even seem a bit impractical or unusual. The same is true for us. If we are truly to live as followers of Christ we need to put behind us our preconceived notions of who God should be, and learn about Him as He really is. We need to embrace a God who expresses power in weakness, a God whose commands are often impractical, and whose love is extraordinarily unusual.

Peter Wemeier

Thursday (day2) - Mark 8:34-38

Jesus said to the multitude what surely must be a message for us too, "If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself, carry his cross and follow me."

How do we forget ourselves and carry our crosses? I believe it is by making the right choices. In my youth it meant choosing to please Jesus by refusing to do many things acquaintances were doing and deciding to do what was helpful to members of my family, school, and church. When I was raising my children and there was cause for concern, as when they weren't getting home on time, following Jesus meant deciding not to be anxious but to pray instead.

In following Jesus we must forget ourselves in loving others. Sometimes we feel frustrated and sad when Christians don't seem to love one another very much. Then it's time to take the initiative ourselves in being forgiving and loving.

In verse 38 Jesus promises He will accept His followers when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. We can look forward to the fullness of joy!

Our Father, thank you for the wonder of your love and the power of your presence. Help me to be a channel of your love and a bringer of your joy. Amen.

Doris Mikelson

Friday (day3) - Mark 9:2-8

It's as though you had been working for a candidate you believed in who suddenly appeared, indescribably transformed, and joined by Washington and Lincoln.

No wonder the disciples were frightened. They believed in Jesus—but didn't yet understand who he is. When they went to a mountain top to pray and rest, they saw Jesus in heavenly glory, with Moses the law-giver and Elijah, whose return would signal the coming of the Messiah.

Peter's fears stirred him to action. He wanted to build something to mark the spot, to document the historic moment. Surely the endorsement of Elijah and Moses would prove the validity of their leader' claims.

Then God spoke...and looking again, they saw only Jesus. He was all they needed, the fulfillment of tradition and prophecy.

For us, too. Jesus only. The way to life and heaven.

Inez Schwarzkopf

Saturday (day4) - Mark 9:30-32

Promises

"I the Messiah am going to be betrayed and killed... three days later return to life" (v. 16)

Surely we all can readily admit to the time we faithfully delivered on a promise. It may have been a promise to a friend or to a member of our family. However, when Mom or Dad would be giving us direction we would often pay the price for not following them. Seldom did we fully come through with our promises.

Once I recall my youngest daughter exclaim, "You promised to take me to Valley Fair. Now we can't go." The tears began to stream. Just another broken promise.

Unlike us with our human frailties, Jesus today establishes himself as the promised - Messiah of the world. "In three days I (Jesus) will return to life again."

Our Lord has never reneged on a single promise. In this confidence we can serve him today.

Lord keep reminding us of our need to promise loving you. Amen.

Jon Ellefson

Monday (day5) - Mark 10:32-34

Jesus and His disciples are walking to Jerusalem as Jesus foretells what is going to happen to him. He had just told them the parable about the camel and the eye of the needle and had reminded them of the rewards in heaven for those who had given everything to follow Him. The disciples were bewildered, perplexed, astonished, and afraid. They did not understand the events of the time, and they noticed the stress that Jesus felt as He thought⁵ about what was to come. They were following a man who promised great rewards for sacrifice today and also pointed out (in verse 27) the inability of man to ensure these rewards. How was He going to deliver? Had they not already given up what they had? What was Jesus going to give up? He had not possessions, but He had followers and power. They wondered, pondered, and in considering how everything might turn out, they were afraid. Jesus answers them by pointing out that He is going to Jerusalem to die, to make the last sacrifice and die. But He leaves them with a promise; He will rise again from death. Should the disciples believe Him? should we believe Him when He is coming again?

Dick Olmsted

Tuesday (day6) - Mark 10:35-45

"For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve. . ." Mark 10:45

In this passage we see the contrast of the worlds' of greatness and Jesus' idea of greatness. The disciples were arguing as to which one of them was the greatest. Their idea of greatness reflected the worlds' idea of greatness: position, power, fame, wealth. But Jesus' idea of greatness was entirely different. "...whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be slave to all." (10:43-44)

Jesus is stating a principle that is true even in the business world. The company that gives the best service is the one most apt to succeed. How much more this is true in the world of relationships. The human problems of the world cannot be solved except by persons who are willing to give of themselves to the needs of others. William Barclay says, "greatness consists, not in reducing other men to one's services, but in reducing oneself to their service. The test of greatness is not, What service can I extract? But What service can I give?"

How very true this is of the ministry of Christ and his Church. His work cannot be accomplished except by persons who are willing to give of themselves - their time, energy and money for his ministry. How very true this is also of our local congregation, St. Luke's. We cannot reach out to the unchurched, help the needy, comfort the hurting unless there are many of us who are willing to give of ourselves to Christ and his ministry.

O Lord Jesus, open our hearts that we may be willing to love and serve others even as you have loved and served us.

Oletta Wald

Wednesday (day7) - Mark 11:1-11

In the past few months I've been struggling with problems I haven't faced before. Thru my withdrawal from a school that was teaching me nothing, I have been dealing with goals that have not significance towards my ultimate search for meaning and truth. Once I returned from Platteville I was greeted by members of the congregation with such warmth and without judgment towards the decisions I had made.

I've grown up in this church, but much more meaningfully with this congregation. Each and every one of you is a part of me, and I am not about to let our bonds be broken, it's too significant towards me. This congregation has been with me through the times that have made me what I am. We have a wealth of culture wrapped into us that is as old and as precious as life itself. We are all individuals and we all have values that set us apart from one another, but our tendencies to believe and judge can be destructive in places that we will never see. As Christians we must perceive this and realize what we are doing.

Bret Norman

Thursday (day8) - Mark 11:12-14,20-25

On the day after Palm Sunday, traveling from Bethany where he and his disciples had spent the night back to Jerusalem, Jesus saw a fig tree in the distance. Hoping to eat some of its fruit he approached the fig tree only to find it barren. Jesus cursed the fig tree for its barrenness and declared that it would never again yield fruit. A day later when passing the fig tree again Peter observed that it had withered away, from its roots to its crown.

We gain insight into the meaning of this incident from a reading of Isaiah 3:1-7 where in an allegory the prophet likens the people of Israel to a vineyard that had been tenderly cared for by God but nevertheless bore no fruit. As His elect people instructed in His word God expected to find in Israel justice toward others and a dynamic relationship of faith toward himself. In Isaiah's day he found neither. Nor does Jesus find those qualities in Israel in His day. In Jesus' cursing of the fig tree we hear the judgment of God on Israel for the bankruptcy of its faith.

An old Gospel song speaks of Christ's sorrow at being able to gather nothing but leaves from the fruitless trees of His vineyard. God desires to find among those who have experienced His grace the fruit of loving compassion toward others and a vital and dynamic faith toward Himself. May God find in our lives not merely leaves, but the fruit His grace toward us ought to produce.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, stir us up to become the people you would have us be so we may be spared your judgment. Amen.

Carl Jensen

Friday (day9) - Mark 11:15-19

Jesus Anger

Notice that Mark, unlike the other gospels, spells out Jesus' activities on each of the days of holy week. He has been to Jerusalem on "Palm Sunday" and now it is Monday.

Like an Old Testament prophet, Jesus conveys his message not only by words but by deeds: by "sign-acts." The cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple symbolize his identity as Son of God, which has been a mystery all through the Gospel of Mark, but now in the last days is being made evident.

The text describes Jesus' action without telling us his emotions. No doubt he was angry. In another place Mark tells us that Jesus was angry when people had no compassion on a man with a withered hand (3:5). Most of the time we have to fill in by re-imagining the scene to picture what Jesus might have been feeling, as Mark does not tell us.

This story is freeing to me because it shows that the perfect man had feelings and showed anger. Anger is a normal human response to a wide variety of situations. Learning to recognize it, express it positively, and not bottle it up is part of authentic Christian living.

A thought: Jesus is my model for bringing together a life that includes anger (and other feelings) with love and forgiveness.

Brad Holt

Saturday (day10) - Mark 11:27-33

Questions

"By what authority are you doing these things, or who have you this authority to do them?" (verse 28)

A friend tells of a time when he had a pastorate in a small town where the hardware store had a connecting door to a tavern. One day he went to the store to make a purchase and entered just as one of his parishioners came out of the tavern. Embarrassed to meet his pastor, the man blurted out, "What time is the service next Sunday, Pastor?"

All of us ask questions, usually for information. But sometimes we ask out of guilt, as did the man in the above incident, or to trap someone, as did the men in today's text.

Jesus asked questions too but not with the purpose of trapping people. One day he asked Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" The Lenten season leads us down the road to Good Friday and into the joy of Easter. Jesus' question to Peter confronts us all along the way, "Do you love me?" That was not the end of the conversation. He also asked Peter, as He does us, for evidence of that love: "Feed my sheep...Feed my lambs."

Such commitment, more than words, is what He expects of you and me.

Hazel Willand

Monday (day11) - Mark 12:1-12

Prayer for the foreign mission at our doorstep

Dear Lord: Over half a century ago, when those who organized this congregation and preceded us as its members decided to erect the second of the buildings in which they planned to worship and to work in your Kingdom, you led them by your grace to the corner of 38th street and 17th avenue south. Over the years, you have led us to this place to enjoy each others' company, hear your Gospel preached, receive your Holy Eucharist, be Baptized, Confirmed, and Married, and from this place we have buried our dead. But over the years, we have changed, the neighborhood around us has changed, and its needs have changed. Show us how to change so that we may carry out the word of your Kingdom by meeting this neighborhood's new needs.

We know that it shelters many aging people, and that in many cases, they are desperately lonely, in some cases hungry and cold, and that many of them need for more available health care here in the neighborhood where they live.

We know it shelters many single-parent families, and that they need acceptance, an opportunity to meet and discuss their needs and concerns with others who share their situation, and help in finding affordable daycare for their children.

We know that it shelters many minority people, Women, Black, White, Indian, and Oriental people. We know that they need basic education in the skills for living and work, and that they need help to find the opportunity to work.

We know that it shelters young people. We know that they at times do immature and unwise things and need help in finding comfortable and useful places in the community, and that they need our patience, our interest in their needs, and that they need ways to meet each other and enjoy each other's company in settings that lead to positive relationships. We know that most of all, they need our sincere love.

Help us to find an "open door" into the very foreign mission field that lies at our doorstep here at 38th and 17th.

Hank Dinter

Tuesday (day12) - Mark 12:18-27

Oh, happy are they
Who live in the Lord
For they are blessed with love
But we who try to struggle alone
Find that love is all we wanted.

When I read this poem, I feel a certain connection with the poet. An understanding, I feel that it is a struggle we all go through. Times where we feel lost and we look everywhere we think possible. Then we realize the stronghold we were seeking had actually been where we had begun. (Barlee)

When I read this, I could understand what the poem was saying. I felt the poet was trying to find a foothold in her love for God. Perhaps she had felt unloved, or alone, and then realized that God could give her all the love she had wished for. Or maybe the poet was trying to show others that we shouldn't try to search everywhere for love. That God is the answer to all our worries, and we should trust in his guidance. I get the feeling, though, that the poet may have been showing that everybody has times when they feel isolated and alone. And probably anybody could have written this, only she went to the trouble of putting it on paper. We can all write this and we all feel unhappiness at times, yet if we look to God for a friend, a father, and for undying love, we will be satisfied. (Karin)

Barlee Gbala and Karin Holt

Wednesday (day13) - Mark 12:28-34

As we go about our lives it is easy to lose sight of the fact that we need to center our lives around our love of God. I believe that is why it is so important in my life to establish a habit of regularly worshipping the Lord in weekly worship services. If I make that weekly worship the center of my life, all things revolve around it. I am able to consciously apply that love to the people I come in contact with in my daily life. I seem to get the inner strength to take a look at my actions and realize that a lot of times I don't treat people that I come in contact with, with the respect and courtesy I desire for myself from other people. Reflecting on these Bible passages, I am able more often to change my actions and attitudes towards other people, therefore creating a more loving atmosphere around me.

Lord, I pray for your guidance to help me renew and strengthen my love for you, not only throughout this Lenten season but throughout the year also. Help me to be more compassionate and loving towards other people, treating them as I would have them treat me. I pray also for the guidance and strength as I go about my daily life to stop and make an assessment as to whether or not I am fulfilling your "Great Commandment".

Jean Evers

Thursday (day14) - Mark 12:35-37

The Unanswerable Question

In these verses Jesus is teaching in the temple and asking His followers, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?" He went on to say that David himself, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit when he wrote Psalm 110, called the Christ his Lord. While Jesus came from the line of David, yet David recognized that God would provide a Messiah Whose Lordship would cover even him. The great King David humbled himself before the Lord Jesus making no claim to be any more than a servant. Acts 3:34 and Hebrews 1:13 echo the same promise.

We are thus convinced that Jesus, the son of David, is actually the Son of God, very God of very God. Jesus is the One spoken of by the prophets. Jesus was One with the Father as Creator of the universe. Jesus is the Word of the Father and for all time reflects His Father's glory. God has said the angels will worship His Son Jesus.

This same Jesus came to make purification for OUR sins. He is worthy of our daily worship, now and through eternity.

Char Valvik

Friday (day15) - Mark 13:1-2

Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction

Structurally, the temple in Jerusalem was constructed by Herod the Great. It was started in about 20 B.C. and completed shortly before its destruction by an invading Roman army in 70 A.D. It was intended by Herod as a replacement of Solomon's temple. It was a magnificent structure. Nothing in the landscape of Jesus' day could match it for splendor, strength and the feeling of permanence it projected. Those who heard Jesus predict its destruction, were shocked by his words.

The popular theology of the day declared that God resided in the temple. Jews from not only Judah and Galilee but from distant lands as well made their way to Jerusalem to worship God in His house. It was a pilgrimage every faithful Jew desired to make sometime in his or her life.

Despite the central place in the religious life of Israel the temple occupied, for Jesus it symbolized the resistance he encountered throughout his ministry. It was from the temple that the religious leaders came out to challenge Jesus and the ministry of preaching, teaching and healing he performed.

Jesus' prediction of the Temple's destruction was not only because the temple symbolized resistance to him, but also because Jesus had authority over the temple and in the Messianic age inaugurated with his coming he replaced the temple. God's people need no longer journey to the temple to meet God. Each of us meets God in the person of Jesus who brings us God's grace and enables us to experience God's presence in our lives not only in Jerusalem but wherever we reside.

Heavenly Father, thank you for coming to us in the person of your Son. By your grace grant that we may ever live in your presence and thus continually experience your love. Amen

Carl Jensen

Saturday (day16) - Mark 13:3-8

The world today is much like it was in Biblical times. There were wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines and sufferings. We, too, look for signs of Christ's second coming. False prophets were in abundance as they are today. Mass media now has made it easy for them to lead people away from the truth; therefore, we need to be cautious.

Some people have gone so far as to set the date of Christ's return. They have done so by devising formulas from which they make calculations, only to find themselves wrong. It is presumptuous for man to attempt to set the date since Christ has stated that He does not know the date or the hour.

We should not be so preoccupied with the date as the fact that He is coming again. It matters not whether it is today, tomorrow, or a thousand years from now. The main thing is that we live in a state of readiness.

God will take care of us now and for eternity. While waiting for Christ's return we are to be awake and to be committed followers.

Dear God, help us to live in a state of readiness at all times. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Wally Hanson

Monday (day17) - Mark 13:9-13

Have you ever suffered persecution for your faith? Has being a Christian been a severe hardship for you? Most of us would have to say no. Oh, perhaps we've been chided for holding to certain values - or for going to church regularly. But severe persecution? Really not.

But here in these verses we are told that to choose for Christ is to choose a hard way. If we are faithful to Christ we'll surely encounter challenges. The early Christians experienced these persecutions as they brought the Gospel to the Gentiles. The trials they suffered strengthened their faith.

This text calls us to trust in Jesus. If we place our trust in him we will be able to face whatever trials we meet in life and be assured of salvation.

Lord, we thank you that you are always with us. Help us to be faithful through whatever trials we face. Amen.

Bev Jensen

Tuesday (day18) - Mark 13:14-23

In this passage Jesus warns us about the end times and urges us to be watchful. The end times are to be filled with tribulation - "a time of great sorrow and depression". The pictures are very vivid and they remind me of the pictures from the holocaust.

This passage is remarkable to me because of two things. First, it strikes me that the tone is one of urgency.

"let those who are in Judea flee ..."

"let him who is on the housetop not go down ..."

"let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle"

The reason for the urgency is a mystery to me but I am sure that Christians who have experienced persecution understand these statements.

Second, I am surprised and reassured when Jesus says,

"But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand." (vs.23)

Even in the valley and shadow of death the Good Shepherd leads us.

Jane Norman

Wednesday (day19) - Mark 13:24-27,32-37

Close your eyes and imagine with us. Jesus has gathered his disciples around Him and tells them of the time and of conditions that are barely comprehensible to them—the "Last Days", the time just before his Return, a time of great sorrow and affliction and conflict and confusion. The familiar will do strange things, and the immovable will be shaken and untrustworthy. If this small band of followers had been you and me and the others of our congregation, would He have phrased his discourse in terms of international money supply, depletion of the ozone layer, famine and terrorism, or AIDS? Or are the events heralding His return still so far in the future that we, too, have not words or imagination for what will take place? He says, "Therefore, watch, for you do not know the hour...!" We don't know the hour of His coming, but we know Him. And He knows us. "And He will send out angels and gather His elect..." Peace to you who live in interesting times!

Blessed Father only you know the hour of Jesus' return and the end of all things as we know them. Keep us alert, and give us patience, and eyes to see Your Hand, even in the turmoil around us. Amen.

Sandy Olmsted

Thursday (day20) - Mark 13:28-31

Once, traveling the Autobahn in Germany I did not believe the exit sign. Of course I had to go about 20 miles before I could correct the error and then 20 miles back to make the proper turn.

The fig tree, obviously, follows its annual development: buds and leaves in spring and fruit in summer. It is a well recognized order of change in nature. In the spiritual realm we ought to be familiar with the signs and events which lead to the judgment of this generation.

Mark warns that all these previously listed negative events: wars, desolating sacrilege (probably the influence of Gentiles in the temple worship), false prophets, earthquakes, famines, indicate that disorder is increasing, peace is vanishing, disobedience to God is the norm, violence to each other becomes common and repentance seems to be impossible. With these circumstances God will reenter the scene with punishment and destruction upon such a generation. It has happened before and will again: His word will not change.

Tom Valvik

Friday (day21) - Mark 14:1-2, 10-11

Cynicism comes with age. From an objective, historical view, the actions of the chief priests and the scribes don't seem all that out-of-line. This Jesus was making trouble. And they planned to stop him. They didn't know he is God.

They didn't need to kill him, we think. But it was another age, another place. The death penalty was common. It's common now in much of the world.

The horror in these verses lies with Judas Iscariot, "who was one of the twelve." He had lived with Jesus, listened as he taught. Judas should have known.

Yet Judas made the first approach. He went to the chief priests and scribes, offering to betray Jesus, even before they promised him money.

We should know, too. Do we, too, betray Jesus when we compromise his teachings? When we accept violence and killing as a normal and necessary part of the world as it is?

Inez Schwarzkopf

Saturday (day22) - Mark 14:3-9

Burial among the Jews in Palestine was the responsibility of the family. There was no embellishment except in exceptional cases. After death the family members and servants washed the body and applied costly unguent and wrapped the body in white linen cloths. The body was then placed into a cave in a hillside, either lying fully extended or in a sitting position, and then, the opening was sealed with rocks.

The woman in the text had merely anticipated the death of the Lord and wanted to be included in the final service that she could do for him.

Although we are not in position to do anything of the same nature for our Lord, we can strive to do His will among the people about us. We would no doubt deserve the same commendation. "To do the Lord's will" among us now is to serve one another and be thankful for God's gracious Love for us all.

Heavenly Father and Jesus our brother, we pray that during this Lenten season we may become more thankful, and may be blessed by again responding to you for your gift of life by loving and serving others. Amen.

Karl Dahlen

Monday (day23) -Mark 14:12-16

In this passage of Mark it is apparent that there was much preparation before the Passover and that much of it was done by Jesus. The man carrying the water pitcher was a sign prearranged by Jesus for his disciples and unique in that carrying a water pitcher was a job usually done by women in that day. Jesus' preparations for his disciples were an extension of God's preparations for which is shown in Matthew 25:34;

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

All that God has prepared and our experience of His grace is His gift by recognizing that He gave it to us and by showing our appreciation of His gift through our praise and thanks for God and His Word.

Anne Jensen

Tuesday (day24) - Mark 14:17-21

When Jesus says "one of you will betray me," and "for the Son of man goes as it is written," it seems as if he is expressing a part of his hidden anguish at the forthcoming of his persecution. But he allows no time for the disciples to feel sorry for him and his plight because of this statement. "... but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." The feelings of shock, surprise, and worry are replaced with fear and respect in the disciples because of the powerful warning in Jesus' statement.

Most of the passages refer to God as the loving, understanding, and forgiving God; which is all true of course, but this particular scene re-introduces the judgment part of God which we are to respect and fear. For we are to not only love and obey God at all times and in all places, but we are to fear him and his magnificence also.

Becky Johnson

Wednesday (day25) - Mark 14:22-25

Mark presents us with the two main lines of teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord's life laid down sacrificially is 'a ransom for many' and 'the blood of the Covenant'. The former effects deliverance from sin and judgment, while the later provides covenant relationship and fellowship between God and men. This is one of three occasions when Jesus made deliberate attempts to initiate the disciples into his approaching passion.

Most scholars conclude, that Jesus knowing that He could not observe the Passover at the proper time, kept it a day in advance. Christ our Passover lamb was sacrificed for us at the very hour when the Passover lambs were slain in the temple. Jesus blood seals His covenant (or promise) with us, in the traditional eastern way at the time of Christ.

Finally, Jesus looks forward beyond His death to His risen life and to the perfect fellowship of the consummated Kingdom.

(Francis Davidson's commentary used as a reference.)

Jack Norman

Thursday (day26) - Mark 14:26-31

The events of Holy week are racing to a rapid conclusion. The Last Supper has been celebrated, hymns have been sung. The group leaves the upper room enroute to the Mt. of Olives.

Jesus announces then that the end is near, and that all will fall away from him. Well-meaning Peters' immediate and loud response is, 'Oh no, Lord, even if everyone else falls away. I never will.' But Jesus persists-'Before the cock crows two time, you will deny me three times.' All the other disciples, in turn insist that they, too, will remain faithful.

But we know the story. As always, Jesus was right. Peter and the others did deny Him, as He had predicted. And we think 'How awful.' How can believers deny their Lord? We would never do that!

How often do we leave the Lord's Table aware of Christ's forgiveness, aware of our unity as the family of God, only to leave the sanctuary, go about our busy lives, and perhaps inadvertently (and sometimes, perhaps, not so inadvertently) deny our Lord, just as Peter and the others had done so long ago.

We deny Him when we do not make Him center of all our life-when we'd just as soon not have everyone know we are believers, when we'd like to blend into the crowd, when we'd rather not have anything special expected of us-either in our words or in our actions.

Are we always completely honest? Are we always as kind and thoughtful as Christ would have us be? Are we willing to put others' needs ahead of our own? Are we willing always to give of ourselves to others? Christ has set the example for us, but, despite our good intentions how often we fail!

"Lord, help us to live as you would have us live-in all that we do." Amen.

Vonnie Dinter

Friday (day27) - Mark 14:32-42

How desolate and alone Jesus must have felt that day as He entered Gethsemane, even though His disciples were with Him. His words, "My soul is very sorrowful" tells us the despair and rejection He must have been experiencing. "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove the cup from me," is a pleading request. He even went back a second and third time and with increasing depth of feeling uttered the same words. And each time He added, "Yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." He was willing to submit to the Will of God in His life. He knew He would be asked to suffer.

He needed someone to be with Him during this darkest of times. And even His beloved disciples disappointed Him. His acceptance of what would happen is revealed when he says, "It is enough; the hour has come." He must have felt the power of God in Him as He spoke those words so confidently.

In His greatest hour of need Christ made use of an option that we too have - prayer. When we feel alone and forsaken, we can turn to God in prayer and know that He is there listening and able to answer our greatest needs.

Lord, help us to know your will and give us the power to do it. Amen.

Marge Moe

Saturday (day28) - Mark 14:43-52

As I read this portion of Scripture, I am reminded of a scene in a western movie of a lynching crowd going out to get their man. The crowd that came to Jesus' came at night for they dared not arrest Jesus openly for fear of being stoned by the people. Judas' part was to deliver Jesus to the crowd in the absence of the multitudes so he led them while the city slept.

I wonder if Judas realized that his betrayal kiss actually lead to Jesus' crucifixion. Perhaps he thought that Jesus would use His miraculous power to deliver Himself.

What about those disciples who were with Jesus? As soon as they saw what was happening to their teacher, they fled. All this was taking place that the scripture be fulfilled. Not Ps. 88:8.

How about us? What would we have done? Even now when we fail to witness to our Christian faith, are we not also forsaking Jesus? All around us our Lord is being attacked; are we ready to take our stand?

Lord, help us to be bold for your sake. Amen.

Coral Anderson

Monday (day29) - Mark 14:53-65

Who Am I?

During much of the time that Jesus was on trial before the high priests, the debate centered on the question, "Who are you?" People couldn't agree, and Jesus didn't answer. Finally the high priest changed the question.

Now Jesus speaks up. He seems to say, "You've been asking the wrong question. But if you ask me whose I am, then indeed you will know who I am."

Within our own lives, and within our life as a congregation, we will best be able to answer the painful question of "Who am I? Who are we?" It was because Jesus could answer such a question that he was able to face up to everything that happened to him.

That's true for us, too.

Linda Holt

Tuesday (day30) - Mark 14:66-72

In this passage we read the familiar story of Peter's denial of Jesus. But have you ever thought that this passage also reveals a very courageous Peter? He didn't abandon Jesus but followed right into the courtyard of the High Priest's house. Where were the others? They had apparently fled. Most reasonable folk would flee - but not Peter. He did deny Jesus but he stayed. Peter fell victim to a temptation that came because he courageously stayed near Jesus. We see a very human Peter, a Peter with whom we can identify because we too have denied Jesus.

In addition we should remember that only Pete could have shared this story. He must have told it and marveled that Jesus still loved him. He probably used the story to tell others that even though he had hurt and failed Jesus, Jesus forgave him and continued to love him. The message Peter wants us to hear is that Jesus loves us and forgives us as well.

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of forgiveness and the assurance of your love. Amen.

Bev Jensen

Wednesday (day31) - Mark 15:1-5

I am frustrated by Jesus' appearance before Pilate. When I read these verses, or the same scene in the other gospels, I want Jesus to answer Pilate.

It seems so obvious that Pilate wants to set Jesus free. He understands "King of the Jews" to be merely a religious title, not a political one. He doesn't really want to get involved in these church disputes.

If only Jesus would answer! Would say, "Well, of course, I'm King of the Jews, but I'm speaking figuratively. We sophisticates understand that."

Pilate would be relieved. He could dismiss this irksome case. Jesus could go back to teaching and healing. If only he'd say something!

But Jesus didn't. Because if Pilate had spared him, there would have been no death on the cross. For me. For my salvation.

Jesus knew. So he said nothing.

Inez Schwarzkopf

Thursday (day32) - Mark 15:6-15

Jesus is given his sentence-He makes no response. There is no mention of any action taken by him. He responds passively. He was the Lamb of God.

Pilate had the power of life and death for his prisoners. It appears to me that he does not want to exercise that power here. He resorts to a very poor method of giving a sentence-the worst method of taking a popular poll - that is, the loudness of the voices demand that Jesus was to be crucified. The giving the crowd this power, Pilate was also trying to relinquish the responsibility for Jesus' death and thereby washing his hands of any wrong doing.

Pilate is usually cast as the 'bad guy' without any courage to stand up for his own judgment, yet he is also an outstanding lesson for us. We cannot transfer blame to others when we have the ultimate power over an ethical situation.

Not only was Jesus sentenced to death but he also was sentenced instead of Barabbas.

Jesus died that I might live, yet in a very real sense he took the place of a murderer.

Jane Norman

Friday (day33) - Mark 15:16-20

Jesus is taken by the soldiers and mocked. These are men who hold the most visible forms of physical power of the day. They are citizens of the most powerful country of the day. These are the men that make kings or rulers powerful. They have the power of the sword and can hold whole cities or even countries in bondage. Without these physical means of gaining power - a man would have little chance of being a ruler and much less a king.

These are the guards of the pretorium. As we read this event we point to it as the place where Jesus was crowned "King of the Jews". This is the Son of David, the Royal Priest.

I am struck by the irony of this situation. The powerful are unaware of the significance of their action. The powerful are being used to adorn the humble. God's purposes are accomplished in weakness.

This is truly a drama in contrasts.

Lord, may your name be made manifest in our weakness. Amen.

Jane Norman

Saturday (day34) - Mark 15:21-32

Take a moment and think about one of your special friends, one in particular who is the most respected as well as loved. Now in each place in this passage of Mark 15, substitute that friends' name each time reference is made to the Lord: "And those who passed by kept reviling _____ and reproaching _____ abusively in harsh and insolent language..." (v.29, The Amplified Bible). Read it carefully, seeing your close respected, beloved friend in each scene. Do you feel rage? Do you feel helpless? What else are you experiencing? Now what if you knew that it really should have been you there instead; and that your friend had suddenly stepped in, and had "covered for you" at the last minute, and had quietly borne the accusations and indictment, and you knew he (or she) would now die in this ugly, public way. - What now? A flash of insight! Your friend did this willingly because of love for you.

Aren't you glad to know that Easter is coming?

"Christ, we do all adore thee, for on the Holy cross has thou the world from sin redeemed. Allelulia!"

Sandy Olmsted

Monday (day35) - Mark 15:33-36

Jesus is hanging on the cross - He has been for about 6 hours now. The nails in His hands tear at His flesh. His blood and sweat from His head run into His eyes. The flies crawl into His eyes and nose to lay their eggs in those moist environments. To take a breath, He must raise His entire body with just His diaphragm muscles - He is slowly suffocating, He is thirsty ... and around Him people are jeering, taunting, and abusing Him; He has been denied by His closest followers. Why shouldn't He feel as the Psalmist (Ps.22)? Where is the Lord whom He has trusted, now that He is surrounded by his foes? Like a pack of dogs they encompass Him! His strength is spent. He cries out: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me...,"

in fulfillment of the prophecy. He dies. Fully human, fully God - something we cannot understand - He expresses His exasperation at the same time He reminds the crowd of whom they crucified, by quoting a Psalm of David with which they are all too familiar.

Dick Olmsted

Tuesday (day36) - Mark 15:37-39

Only the centurion understands. Watching Jesus die on the cross, the Pharisees and teachers of the law only sense relief that they have completed the necessary evil and thwarted the threat posed by this troublemaker Jesus. The disciples flee and hide and deny even knowing the man. For them, the movement is over and they want to avoid being purged with their leader. No one in these religious groups can see that it is the cross that really makes Jesus a hero. But, the centurion, the Roman pagan, the man in charge of the execution, he understands. He could not have understood all the implications, but he sees in the way Jesus dies - innocently, willingly, obediently - that "surely, this man was the Son of God." Somehow, intuitively, he knows. God seeks all men and reveals Himself to all who are willing to see. Sometimes those who should see Him - the learned, his closest companions, the Church - do not. Sometimes people who by any logical reasoning should not see Him, do.

Peter Wemeier

Wednesday (day37) - Mark 15:40-41

At a time in history when women weren't thought of in high esteem, they were standing afar off observing the crucifixion of Jesus whom they'd served and ministered to in Galilee.

Although these women, including Jesus mother and aunt, stood afar off they were visible. Some of the disciples hid.

Mary Magdalene was at the crucifixion, burial and first to see Jesus after the resurrection. Why was such honor given to one out of whom Jesus had cast demons? Is it indicative of Jesus' redemptive love? He condemns not but forgives; giving us hope so we needn't stand afar off observing but come to God's merciful throne.

Do you stand afar off, distant from a loving God whose Son laid down His life that you might experience fellowship with Him?

Come now from afar off, converse with Jesus, thank Him that you; because of the blood transfusion He gave, can have eternal fellowship.

Carolyn Carlson

Thursday (day38) - Mark 15:42-47

Jesus was given his tomb by a respected member of the council, Joseph of Arimathea. His body was prepared by burial and placed in the tomb following the customs of the ruling class. The friends and relatives of Jesus were not a part of the service, with says that they .

..

'saw where he was laid.'

At that time those very people needed to grieve and care for Jesus, the man they loved. So even though the government didn't want them to be involved they made sure that they could find it later.

Jesus life could have ended with this episode but it didn't. We cannot place him in a tomb because this one did not hold him.

This tomb - once filled became empty - is simply the center piece of our faith.

Jane Norman

Friday (day39) - Mark 16:1-8

The Empty Tomb

What a shocking, emotion-packed morning. Many confused thoughts must have gone through the minds of the three women. For only a week before the shouts of "Hosanna" had brought such joy. And now those recent demands of "crucify him" must still be ringing in their ears.

But still another shock was in store for them. First, the surprise that the stone was rolled away, and then, the amazement that the body was not there. How difficult it must have been to try to comprehend what the young man dressed in white was try to tell them.

"Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here...but go, tell."

Our lives sometimes are confused and emotion-packed. It is only as we seek the crucified and resurrected Christ that we can find real peace.

With grateful joy and holy fear, your charity we learn. Let us with heart and mind and soul love you in return. Amen.

Lois (Brude) Lindberg

Saturday (day40) - Mark 16:9-20

This passage seems to be a postscript to the *Gospel of Mark*. It was written to round out the very brief resurrection account in the first 8 verses of this chapter.

The four gospels differ in the details of the happenings on Easter morning. All of them have basic unity, though, in saying that the tomb was empty and that women were the first to discover it. The men also appear to be reluctant to believe the glad news which the women have been entrusted to bring.

This passage raises the question of "signs" accompanying those who proclaim the gospel to all the world. The particular signs listed here have not been prominent in the Lutheran tradition. Perhaps we could profit by reconsidering the book of *Acts* and significance of signs there for the spread of the good news.

As we "lie low" today in between *Good Friday* and *Easter Sunday*, let us quietly prepare our hearts for joy in the morning. Jesus still lives and works with us; celebrating his resurrection can rouse us to new joy and power in proclaiming his godly rule!

Brad Holt