

The Park Church
Adult Study Group
“Understanding Holy Week”
Rev. Wayne E. Gustafson, D.Min.
March 1 – April 4, 2009

Wednesday – Mark 14: 1 – 11

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, ‘Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.’

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, ‘Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’ And they scolded her. But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.’

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

Mark’s Frame

- The need for a traitor
- The unnamed woman
- The advent of a traitor

The need for a Traitor

Why arrest Jesus in this place and in this manner?

Clearly the crowd is on Jesus’ side and the priestly authorities are against him.

The priestly authorities are in a spot: either the crowds will turn against them, and/or the Romans will destroy them. Therefore, their stealth – perhaps they hope to get him out of the way before anyone knows about it.

(It is interesting to note that gospels written later, from Matthew to Luke and later John, diminish the distinction between the supportive crowd and the judgmental priests. It is easier to use later writings as a basis for anti-semitism – but it’s definitely not there in Mark.)

The Twelve as Failed Disciples

A prominent theme in Mark is the complete failure of the disciples to understand Jesus’ message. This story is a warning gift to us.

We can relate to the disciples because we, too, would like to avoid the implications of this journey with Jesus.

Traditionally, Christians “would like [the journey’s] Holy Week conclusion to be about the interior rather than the exterior life, about heaven rather than earth, about the future rather than the present, and, above all else, about religion safely and securely quarantined from politics.”

It’s dangerous to confront the “powers.”

With all that failure to understand around, who is the first person to “get it?” The woman with the ointment.

Background: Mark gives three examples where Jesus points to future events, the disciples don’t get it and Jesus responds to them in detail what will be necessary. Three times makes a very strong case.

First Prophecy (Mark 8: 31-9: 1)

Jesus invites all to walk to the confrontation with imperial powers and collaborators – which inevitably leads to the cross – Jesus doesn’t do it so we don’t have to! (Mark 8: 34b-37)

Disciples, especially Peter, try to talk him out of it, but he tells them that any attempt to deter Jesus from his destiny is, in effect, demonic and Satanic.

‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?’

Second Prophecy

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.’

Disciples reaction and Jesus’ response Mark 9: 33-35

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.’

The disciples are bucking for “high office” in the new “domination system.”

Third Prophecy (In Detail) Mark 10: 32-34

‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.’

This shows that for Mark, Jesus knows exactly and accepts completely what will happen in Jerusalem.

Disciples reaction – Mark 10: 35-40

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

The emphasis here is not so much on being ready to die, but is a new form of leadership: service rather than domination.

... As a ransom for many

Does this mean substitutionary atonement? No, and here's why.

The problem

1. God is offended
2. We can't atone sufficiently
3. God sends Jesus to do it for us
4. Now God's forgiveness is available to all "repentant sinners."

This model is based on understanding God as "Absolute Judge."

For Mark, Jesus means "participation" not "substitution."

"Lent asks us to repent, change, and participate in that transition with Jesus.

But to do so, as we know, would be to negate the normalcy of civilization's lust for domination and to deny the legitimacy of what lords and kings have always been and what nations and empires have always done."

"Ransom" – means there is no price of admission into participation – Jesus demonstrates that it's free!

In the light of Mark's relentless criticism of the disciples' failure, he introduces the first real believer. (See Above Mark 14: 3-9)

Her conclusion from Jesus' three prophecies: "Since (not if) you are going to die and rise, I must anoint you now beforehand, because I will never have a chance to do it afterward."

"She is, for Mark, the first believer. She is for us, the first Christian. And she believed from the word of Jesus before any discovery of an empty tomb." She is the model leader!

Judas

His betrayal is simply the worst example of how those closest to Jesus failed him dismally in Jerusalem.

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem.* HarperOne. ISBN978-0-06-087260-1